

The Choice of a New Generation | Deuteronomy

The Prophet

Deuteronomy 18.9ff and 29.29

12.3.17

When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. ¹⁰ "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, ¹¹ or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. ¹² "For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you. ¹³ "You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.

¹⁴ *"For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do so. ¹⁵ "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. ¹⁶ "This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.' ¹⁷ "The LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well. ¹⁸ 'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. ¹⁹ 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. ²⁰ 'But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' ²¹ "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' ²² "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.*

^{29.29} *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.*

The Book of Deuteronomy is the book of instructions given by God, through Moses, for the Israelites, as they are about to enter the Promised Land.

Moses...as we've seen...will NOT enter the Land with this second generation...and the people are EVIDENTLY uncomfortable about facing a future without this leader...he's been the mediator between THEM and GOD...and it was Moses who went up to the flaming mountain ("Sinai/Horeb") to bring down the words of YHWH for the people.

But NOW what? No Moses – no direction.

The reader can sense their unease as they consider the prospect of being a “non-prophet” organization.

And Moses is now addressing the insecurities of the people... they feel like they're out on a limb as the leader who for many years has been directing them toward the land...will no longer be with them. Who will tell them what God wants them to do...who will speak for God? You FEEL their insecurity.

People are insecure today...we lack information (even IN “this AGE of information”); we wonder what’s true/reliable... Media outlets used to be deliberately NON-partisan but today they seem baldly partisan (people ask, “is that news source conservative or progressive/liberal?”) And even though we have a lot of things figured out scientifically, we’re realizing the limits of science – can’t tell us things like purpose and meaning... and WE too may be anxious about the future...and insecure about things we can’t control.

Let’s look at these ancient/modern anxieties today under two headings: 1) “I need to know” and 2) “one step closer to knowing”

Moses has said repeatedly that he would die before the Israelites enter the land: “I’m NOT going with you.” And the Land was promised to be a bountiful land but also...there were people living there. It was unfamiliar at best, hostile at worst and WHO KNOWS what awaits them... They’re trusting God but STILL there’s the whole thing about “the unknown.”

And we...in the modern world...with all our scientific answers...we too, facing the unknown, we too are insecure. Our insecurity with surroundings and with relationships...with “forces” beyond our control...our insecurities begin very early with the fear of loud noises and fear of falling...then separation anxiety.

Around second grade...we start feeling insecure in our relationships. We devise this ingenious a way to test the strength of our ties to others: we write a note that says, “Do you like me? Check yes or no”

And now as we’re older and so much more secure and sophisticated...we still look for people to like us on social media (“Hit ‘LIKE’” – just another form of our early insecurities – “Do You Like Me? Yes/No”)

That dumb joke: she says, “Honey, when we were dating you used to tell me you love me but you don’t say it anymore.” And he says, “We’ve been married 50 years – I told you I loved you when we got married and if it ever changes, I’ll let you know!”

We’re insecure about relationships and about almost everything. Movies depict our fear of big things like asteroids or nuclear war with North Korea...or terrorist shootings or the new tax-

plan...and then smaller things like cancer...or being attacked by a dog or even smaller threats that are so small but still beyond our ability to control – parasites, bacteria and viruses. The ancients were ignorant of these scientific explanations.

Truth is: with all of our empirical data and scientific understanding and our security systems and safety measures – still life is kind'a scary...lots we can't control and it's easy to feel insecure and helpless.

And as I try to remind us from time to time: you're going to die... can't control that: it's a big unknown.

This short text makes three points: 1) total prohibition of all occult practices 2) the office of the prophet (following Moses) 3) those who reject it.

God is saying, "I know you will feel insecure when the familiar is taken away...when Moses My spokesman is gone, you'll be so desperate to KNOW (need to know) that you may turn to the practices you see in the Canaanites in order to stave off the existential dread of the unknown and uncertain."

Ten occult practices are mentioned in vv. 10-11. I won't look at each word but note the first: "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire." That's one of many references to child-sacrifice... where pagan worshipers were so desperate to know the future and control the terrifying forces that they would slaughter their own children...to get control.

And THAT lead prohibition demonstrates the level of desperation in people facing stuff they can't control. Fear and insecurity can drive/twist people to do all sorts of bizarre and destructive schemes.

AND because God is showing His people: #1 – I AM in control of ALL the forces and #2 – I myself cannot BE CONTROLLED by you or by any one or any thing.

Rolling bones...consulting the dead...making potions reading tea-leaves... using charms... interpreting signs in the clouds or in the intestines of animals...reading a daily horoscope...wearing a gold horn around your neck...or a cross (if you think there's power in the jewelry itself – a good luck charm)...visiting a psychic, – "ALL THESE ARE DIRECT INSULTS TO ME", says the Lord, "because they flatly deny that I am IN control of all the forces (enormous asteroids and microscopic viruses) AND they falsely portray that I can be manipulated."

That's why these occult practices are called "detestable" – God takes them very seriously. They DO communicate – they communicate lies about God and communicate destruction to self/relationships.

“But LORD... we still need to know. We feel insecure. We need to hear from You...to be directed and led... and we have seen that YOU are NOT like us...You’re holy and we cannot approach You...we need a Mediator...but You're taking him from us...

And the God of Abraham responds to His people before they even ask (He anticipates their insecurities and addresses them). “I will raise up from you, My people, a Prophet like Moses...the office of the prophet will be perpetual... and when I do raise up prophets – LISTEN TO THEM!”

I WILL give you the LAND...but I WON'T allow you to use these practices for getting secret knowledge. “The secret things belong to the Lord but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may observe all the words of this instruction” (29.29).

“I won't tell you EVERYTHING...but every day you live by faith brings you one step closer to knowing!”

And not only is God promising the whole office of the Prophet (“My servants the Prophets” Jer 7.25 et al) but He seems to indicate that among the long line of Prophets... the spokesmen for God that would arise from Israel...that there would be One who would excel the rest...

See all the Prophets, like Moses, they would all tell us God's instruction and always for our good. They would TELL US how God's directions would lead to flourishing. They would define the life that's good, true and beautiful. They would speak to our insecurities and tell us how to live...take the guess-work out of living.

If I am a train the Prophets tell me how to be free – it's not by leaving the tracks and setting out for the Everglades convinced that, “THEN I'll be happy/free” No, the Prophets would tell us, “A train was built for the tracks and THAT'S the situation where a train can truly be TRAIN-ish...”

The Prophets over and over again define the environment where we can become fully human so the Prophets are great...except...we never obey them (we constantly leave the tracks!). And we know we fall short of the standard and it creates IN US...the deepest insecurity of ALL: we wonder how God feels about us...disobedient as we are.

And somehow we wish we could send God a note: Do You like me: Yes? or No?” And when we don't hear back we invent our own tests...like “I applied to that graduate program but wasn't accepted – God must not like me...”

We planned an outdoor wedding and it rained – God must not like me...

I got a promotion...a clean bill of health...invited to the party... I had daily Bible reading 5 days in a row : I think God just put a big check in the "Like"-box!

But of course...none of these attempts at low-level divination REALLY shows us anything about God and they do nothing to relieve our deepest insecurities, our deepest fears...the fear of all fears, that when I stand before God, I will be rejected...by the One voice that really matters...the ultimate fear!

And yet... once there was born a Prophet... born and laid in a feeding trough ...and HE, like Moses, a Mediator...but unlike Moses or any of the long line of Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea and Daniel) THIS PROPHET, Jesus of Nazareth, not only TOLD US ABOUT THE FULLY HUMAN LIFE (that NONE of us have lived) – THIS ONE GREAT and FINAL PROPHET lived that life IN MY PLACE.

THEY delivered the Word of God but He IS the Word of God, "His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many crowns; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God." (Rev 19.12-13; Acts 3.22, 7.37)

He is God's answer to our insecurities. He lived the Life I failed to live and died the Death I deserved to die. He answers my childish question once and for all: "Lord, do you like me? Yes or No?"

He comes tenderly and says, "LISTEN only to Me - I am the only sign you'll ever need – I lived for you (so you could have a new record) I died for you to take away the guilt and shame of your old record...and I rose to show you what awaits us... Every day you trust Me brings you one step closer to knowing."

In the meantime, you must hear Me...when the roar of the forces is overwhelming...when you fear cancer or divorce or memory-loss...or losing your friends or failing an important exam...when your own sin and failings are screaming at you saying, "See?! God doesn't even know who you are...!"

But the Better Moses says, "No! I signed it with My own blood...I communicated with My whole self... the box is indelibly checked...I like you...I love you and I have made you beautiful in the sight of God and all these forces will NOT destroy you...I control them...and I will FORCE THE FORCES to work together for your ultimate good and salvation.

The Communion

12.3.17

He comes as a Man and does Man's part of the agreement...and He comes as God and does God's part... He alone has clean hands to be able to ascend the Mountain of the Lord (Ps 24) the Perfect Mediator.

Jesus Christ is the Prophet like Moses...but as Moses was the House, Jesus Christ is the Builder...He's the infinitely better Moses...who not only gives the instructions...but then obeys them in my place.

The baby Moses was laid in a basket...the Baby Jesus was laid in a manger...a feeding trough...it's the bowl out of which cattle eat. Jesus Christ was placed in a feeder because HE IS OUR FOOD.

He is the Prophet and everything about Him communicates... Moses said, "Do this and live." And that led to a growing, haunting insecurity in us.

Jesus Christ said, "It is finished" and that is the answer to our deepest fears and insecurities. Everything NOW depends on what HE HAS ACCOMPLISHED...and He is the Word I must have...I have only to hear Him, to receive Him and be nourished. All His words come true...He will determine the destiny of every man, woman and child who ever lived.

"Take and Eat", He says. "This is My Body and this is the Blood of the New Covenant spoken of in My Servants the Prophets... and I have fulfilled what they promised. Take and Eat the living Word, the Bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. I am the indelible check mark, 'Yes! I like you...My Father delights in you...you no longer need to read the signs ("OH, I got a parking space – God must like me!") NO! I am the only sign you'll ever need – I lived for you (so you could have a new record) I died for you to take away the guilt and shame of your old record...and I rose to show you what awaits you...LIFE, LIFE, ETERNAL LIFE...take and eat!"

PRAY