Worship that Listens

Deuteronomy: Choose Life | Week Twenty | Deuteronomy 18:9–22

THE BIG IDEA

The nations around Israel tried to get hold of the future through omens, spells, and messages from the dead. God gave his people something better: his own word, spoken through a prophet he would raise up from among them. Jesus is that Prophet and more. He is the Word of God who stood between us and the fire, so we can stop chasing guarantees about tomorrow and listen to the one who already holds it.

01 SHARE LIFE

Take a few minutes to catch up before you open the passage. Everyone gets a turn.

1. What was a high point and a low point from your week?
2. Where have you seen God at work this week, and where has it been hard?
3. When we last met, we each named one step to take. How did it go, and what got in the way?

02 SETTING THE SCENE

We are near the end of Deuteronomy's section on the leaders God would give his people in the land. Moses has already talked about judges, kings, and last week the priests. Now he turns to prophets, and the timing matters. Moses is about to die, and Israel is about to move in among nations that had their own ways of hearing from the gods: reading the stars, cutting open animals to study their livers, casting spells, and calling up the dead. The people would have been asking a real question. When Moses is gone, who will tell us what God is saying? This passage is God's answer.

03 READ THE WORD TOGETHER

Have one person read the passage aloud, slowly. If you can, read it a second time with a different person reading.

DEUTERONOMY 18:9-22 CSB

9 When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not imitate the detestable customs of those nations. 10 No one among you is to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire, practice divination, tell fortunes, interpret omens, practice sorcery, 11 cast spells, consult a medium or a spiritist, or inquire of the dead. 12 Everyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and the LORD your God is driving out the nations

before you because of these detestable things. 13 You must be blameless before the LORD your God. 14 Though these nations you are about to drive out listen to fortune-tellers and diviners, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do this. 15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. 16 This is what you requested from the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not continue to hear the voice of the LORD our God or see this great fire any longer, so that we will not die!" 17 Then the LORD said to me, "They have spoken well. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. 19 I will hold accountable whoever does not listen to my words that he speaks in my name. 20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a message in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet must die." 21 You may say to yourself, "How can we recognize a message the LORD has not spoken?" 22 When a prophet speaks in the LORD's name, and the message does not come true or is not fulfilled, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

First impressions

4. What word, phrase, or image stood out to you as the passage was read?
5. What did you notice, or what surprised you, about the way God promises to speak to his people?

04 STUDY THE SCRIPTURE

The sermon walked through this passage in three movements: resisting the voices that split our commitment, receiving the word God graciously gives, and testing the voices that claim his authority. Reread the verses for each part as you go.

RESIST THE VOICES THAT SPLIT US

Read verses 9–14 again.

> **9** When you enter the land the LORD your God
> is giving you, do not imitate the detestable
> customs of those nations. **10** No one among
> you is to sacrifice his son or daughter in the
> fire, practice divination, tell fortunes, interpret
> omens, practice sorcery, **11** cast spells,
> consult a medium or a spiritist, or inquire of
> the dead. **12** Everyone who does these things
> is detestable to the LORD, and the LORD your
> God is driving out the nations before you
> because of these detestable things. **13** You
> must be blameless before the LORD your God.
> **14** Though these nations you are about to
> drive out listen to fortune-tellers and diviners,
> the LORD your God has not permitted you to
> do this.

Every practice on this list was a way of reaching behind the curtain to find out what was coming, or to bend it in your favor. Child sacrifice sits at the top of the list, and that is not an accident. It was the most extreme version of the same idea: if I pay a high enough price to the unseen powers, I can secure my future. When people grab for control, someone vulnerable usually ends up paying for it.

Verse 13 gives the alternative. The word translated blameless means whole or undivided. God is not asking for perfect people. He is asking for wholehearted ones. These practices are a hedge, one foot with the LORD and one foot with whatever else might help, just in case. Many of us know modern versions from the inside, from horoscopes and auspicious dates to the endless checking and researching we do when tomorrow feels out of our hands. Underneath most of them is fear.

6. Verse 13 calls God's people to be whole and undivided before him. Why would looking to these other voices divide a person's heart, even if they still worship God?

7. When the future feels uncertain, where do you or your family tend to look for reassurance? What fear do you think sits underneath that?

RECEIVE THE WORD GOD GIVES *Read verses 15-19 again.*

> **15** The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. **16** This is what you requested from the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not continue to hear the voice of the LORD our God or see this great fire any longer, so that we will not die!" **17** Then the LORD said to me, "They have spoken well. **18** I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. **19** I will hold accountable whoever does not listen to my words that he speaks in my name.

Instead of omens and spells, God promises a person: a prophet like Moses, raised up from among their own brothers. Verse 16 takes us back to Mount Horeb, where the people heard God's voice out of the fire and were terrified. They begged Moses to go near and listen for them (Deuteronomy 5:23-27). God did not scold them. He said, "They have spoken well." The nations reached up to pull secrets out of the heavens. God reached down and gave his people his word in a way they could bear.

That changes how we think about guidance. Much of the time when we say we need to hear from God, we really want a guarantee that things will turn out fine. God rarely gives us the

whole map. He gives us enough light for the next faithful step (Psalm 119:105). And often that next step is not a new word at all. It is obeying a word we have already heard, like making an apology, having an honest conversation, or being generous with someone.

8. God said the people at Horeb had spoken well when they asked for someone to stand between them and his voice. What does that tell you about the way God speaks to people who are afraid?

9. Is there a word from God you already know but have not yet obeyed? What makes that step hard to take?

TEST THE VOICES THAT CLAIM HIS NAME

Read verses 20–22 again.

> **20** But the prophet who presumes to speak a message in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet must die." **21** You may say to yourself, "How can we recognize a message the LORD has not spoken?" **22** When a prophet speaks in the LORD's name, and the message does not come true or is not fulfilled, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

Not everyone who says "thus says the LORD" is speaking for him. Verse 20 names two failures: speaking in God's name what he never said, and

speaking in the name of other gods. The first is the more subtle one. It means using God's name to give our own opinions an authority they do not have. Verse 22 gives a simple test: if it does not come true, God did not say it. Deuteronomy 13 adds a deeper one. Even a sign that comes true should be rejected if it leads people away from the LORD. And then this gift: "Do not be afraid of him." God's people do not have to live under the fear of anyone who claims to speak for him.

The New Testament keeps this practice alive in the church. We are told not to despise prophecies but to test everything and hold on to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21), and to let others weigh what is said (1 Corinthians 14:29). That includes whoever is standing behind the pulpit. No one's opinion becomes a word from God because of a title or a microphone. In a world full of voices claiming authority, a church that speaks of God carefully and humbly is part of how our neighbors learn that his word can be trusted.

10. Have you ever been hurt or confused when someone used God's name to back up their own opinion? How does "Do not be afraid of him" speak to that?

11. What would it look like for our group to test what we hear, from leaders and from one another, without becoming cynical? Where might you need to use God's name more carefully?

05 BACK TO JESUS

How does this passage point us back to Jesus?

Deuteronomy ends by saying that no prophet like Moses had arisen yet (Deuteronomy 34:10), so Israel kept waiting. When Jesus came, people kept asking whether he was the Prophet (John 6:14), and Peter answered plainly that he was (Acts 3:22). On the mountain of transfiguration, with Moses standing right there, the Father spoke from the cloud: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him!" (Mark 9:7). But Jesus is more than a messenger. He is the Word made flesh, the one who has made the Father known (John 1:14, 18). At Horeb the people could not bear the fire. At the cross Jesus walked into it for us. The nations in this passage gave up their children to try to secure the future. Our Father gave his own Son so that our future could be given to us as a gift (Romans 8:32).

12. Jesus is the Word God speaks to us, and the one who stood in the fire for us. How does knowing that change the way you approach the decisions and uncertainties in front of you right now?

APPLICATION

What is God telling me to do today? Write down one specific step you will take this week.

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06 PRAY TOGETHER

Share one request with the group and pray for one another, naming the step each person wrote down.

Prayer requests

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A PRAYER TO CARRY WITH YOU

Father, I want to know what is coming, and I go looking for answers in places that cannot give them. Forgive me for wanting a guarantee more than I want you. Jesus, you are the Word the Father told me to listen to. Help me take the next faithful step you have already shown me, even when I cannot see the whole road. Holy Spirit, give me ears to hear, wisdom to test every voice, and a whole heart that belongs to you, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Before we gather again

Before we gather again, take these three steps on your own.

- Read Deuteronomy 18:9–22 and Mark 9:2–8 again on your own and ask God what he is saying to you. Then pray 1 Samuel 3:10, Speak, for your servant is listening.
- Take the one step you named and tell someone in the group you have done it.
- Reach out to the person God brought to mind this week. We will talk about how it went next time.

07 NOTES AND REFLECTIONS