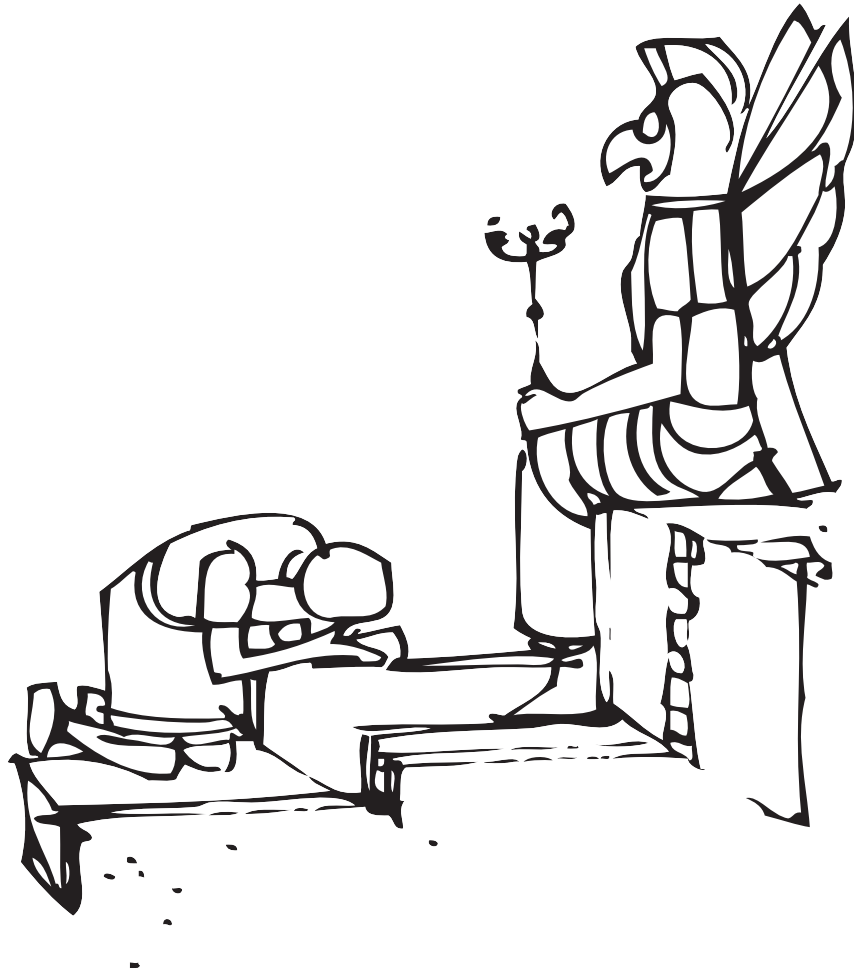


The Abominations Of The Canaanites



“When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations ... For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you.” (Deuteronomy 18:9, 12)

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Introduction

- I. Deuteronomy 18:9–22 is a remarkable passage that explains the origin of the prophetic institution.
 - A. It also stands as a warning to the Israelites who were about to enter Canaan.
 - B. There is a long list of the *abominations* (“detestable ways,” NIV) of the Canaanites described here—the list is longer than in other passages.
 - C. “The need to know the will of God on specific occasions (*e.g.* in time of war) was keenly felt in ancient times, and the nations around Israel had devised various magical procedures for finding it out. These included examining the entrails of birds and animals for omens, consulting the dead and apparently even the sacrifice of children. Magic could be used to try to affect the course of events as well as simply to gain information.” (D. A. Carson et al., eds, *New Bible Commentary*, 217)
 - D. “These evil practices were the reason the Lord was going to drive the Canaanites out of the land. Not only adherence to the false gods of Canaan was proscribed, but also the means by which the Canaanites attempted to communicate with them. Both the objects and the methods of Canaanite religious life were to be abhorred totally and rejected completely.” (Kalland, *Deuteronomy*, comments on Deut 18:9–13)
- II. The destruction of the Canaanites is not an attack on an innocent people—it is God’s judgment against abominable sin (cf. Gen 15:15–16; Deut 7:2–5).
 - A. God’s comment in Genesis 15:16 implies that the Amorites will be dispossessed of their land as an act of divine punishment.
 - B. At that time, their accumulated iniquity will be so great that God will no longer tolerate their presence in the land.
 - C. “Here *the Amorites* covers all the inhabitants of Canaan. Israel’s conquest could not take place until the Amorites’ sins warranted judgment. To have given the land to Abram would have involved an injustice. The promise could only be fulfilled when it coincided with perfect justice (cf. Lv. 18:24–27; Dt. 9:4–5).” (D. A. Carson et al., eds, *New Bible Commentary*, 72)
 - D. “There is no indication that Canaanite gods handed down a moral code for their people to follow. Indeed, the Canaanites were apparently much more moral than were their gods, an observation that is not especially flattering to the gods. To the Canaanite, fertility was of major importance in worship, and both male and female temple prostitution was prevalent ... God had had enough. The people of Canaan were wicked in Abraham’s day, but God showed mercy. The Canaanites had the witness of Abraham and his altars, and they recognized the power of the patriarch’s god, but they did not forsake their own imitations. There were other opportunities and signs of the truth, but the Canaanites ignored them as well. Finally, God’s mercy turned to judgment. Punishment was meted out to the Canaanites for their sins and to prevent them from leading Israel astray. In later centuries the prophets would entreat their hearers to ‘repent today lest tomorrow be too late.’ At the end of the fifteenth century many Canaanites ran out of tomorrows.” (Hoerth, *Archaeology & The Old Testament*, 221–222)

- E. “Canaanite worship was socially destructive. Its religious acts were pornographic and sick, seriously damaging to children, creating early impressions of deities with no interest in moral behavior. It tried to dignify, by the use of religious labels, depraved acts of bestiality and corruption. It had a low estimate of human life. It suggested that anything was permissible, promiscuity, murder or anything else, in order to guarantee a good crop at harvest. It ignored the highest values both in the family and in the wider community—love, loyalty, purity, peace and security—and encouraged the view that all these things were inferior to material prosperity, physical satisfaction and human pleasure. A society where those things matter most is self-destructive.” (Brown, *The Message Of Deuteronomy*, 146)
- F. Instead of following the “detestable ways” of the Canaanites, God was going to raise up a body of men and put His word in their mouth.
- III. The Levites were the appointed guardians of the law—they were to promote fellowship with God by the means of sacrifices at the altar.
 - A. However, in the Promised Land there would be new circumstances requiring further revelation from God.
 - B. Canaan was filled with superstition—they claimed detailed knowledge of the future, but God declared their sources abominations.
 - C. “Sorcery and potions used in the practice of magic were also banned in the Code of Hammurabi and the Middle Assyrian laws, suggesting that the prohibition and fear of these practices were not unique to Israel.” (Walton et al, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, comments on Lev 19:31)
 - D. God promised to raise up prophets to make known the future.
- IV. In this lesson we want to notice the abominations of the Canaanites, and then see how Moses promised “the prophet” who would be like him.

Discussion

I. **Canaanite Abominations**

- A. Making their own children “pass through the fire” (Deut 18:10).
 1. The purpose of making children “pass through the fire” was to obtain an oracle, or to avert national disaster (cf. Deut 12:29–31).
 2. This practice was common among the worshipers of Moloch, the national deity of Ammonites (Lev 18:21).
 3. This abomination caused God to root out the Canaanites (Lev 18:24–30).
- B. The next three terms describe various methods of divination: “one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens.”
 1. “For there is no sorcery against Jacob, nor is there any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob and of Israel, ‘Oh, what God has done!’” (Num 23:23).
 2. No soothsayer has any power against Israel, for Israel receives her information from the Lord.
- C. The next two: “a sorcerer, or one who conjures spell.”

- D. The next two groups are those who seek after the dead: “a medium, or a spiritist” (often found side by side in the Scriptures).
1. Manasseh reinstated many of these as King in Judah (2 Kgs 21:1–6).
 2. “Although these two words, ‘ghost’ and ‘familiar spirit’ are used side by side, there was nevertheless a distinction between them. The person who was possessed of an *ob* (ghost) was evidently a ventriloquist. Like the witch at Endor he might call up the *ob* and describe what he saw. Those about him would probably hear only a muttering or twittering which seemed to come from the ground. The ‘familiar spirit’ however, was evidently a spirit that was at the beck and call of a particular person.” (Young, *My Servants The Prophets*, 23)
 3. Saul and the witch at Endor (1 Sam 28:3–19).
- E. “One who calls up the dead” is a comprehensive term which covers all forms of spiritualism and superstition.
- F. “The context refers to sorcery, divination, spiritism, and other similar practices. Excavations at different sites have uncovered a great number of figurines, charms, amulets, and other objects connected with sorcery, fertility cults, demon exorcism, and pagan superstitions that at times propagated themselves in Israel to such an extent that legislators, prophets, and some rulers had frequently to warn the people against them.” (Baez-Camargo, *Archaeological Commentary On The Bible*, 55)
- G. “The list is indeed impressive. These superstitious practices which were so much in vogue among the Canaanites of ancient time are the reason why the Lord will dispossess these people of their land. Moses then advances a step. Not only are these practices in themselves abominations, he says, but also every one that doeth them is an abomination in the sight of the Lord. It is for this reason that God will drive out the Canaanites from their land. It is well that we should grasp this fact, for it has sometimes been maintained that the God of the Old Testament was an arbitrary despot, who drove out the Canaanites and brought Israel into Palestine, and this, it has been said, was a cruel, arbitrary act. Such a judgment, however, is unjust, and out of accord with the facts. God, in dispossessing the Canaanites, was doing a gracious and merciful thing to the remainder of the world. The Canaanites, through their abominations, had themselves become abominations. If there was to be any salvation for the world, Canaan must go. The cup of their iniquity had filled, and they could no longer be permitted to exist as heretofore. Let no one, then, charge God with lack of justice in His treatment of Canaan.” (Young, *My Servants The Prophets*, 24)

- H. "The Canaanites had an essentially pragmatic approach to worship. They wanted abundant harvests, so at their hilltop shrines they indulged in practices which they considered might encourage fertility and growth. Their worship-patterns became little else than sexual orgies with a religious scenario, but such an approach to worship is utterly offensive to a pure and holy God. His people are told that they must not allow their worship to be corrupted by Canaanite traditions. God laid down the terms on which he is to be approached by his children. Their worship will not only honor God's word; it will reflect God's nature. He is holy, so their worship can never be impure. He is consistent, so their worship can never be contradictory, worshipping in one way but behaving in another. He is loving, so their worship will never have a harmful effect on others. He is righteous, so their worship must never ignore moral values. Therefore, right at the beginning of this detailed interpretation of the covenant, God insists that there is no true religion without good morality. Double standards are totally unacceptable as far as God is concerned." (Brown, *The Message Of Deuteronomy*, 144–145)
- I. Israel would not have to resort to such means (Deut 18:15; cf. Deut 13:1–3).
1. The words, "from your midst, from your brethren," imply that there would be no necessity for Israel to turn to heathen soothsayers.
 2. God was going to do two things (a double reference):
 - a) Raise up a body of prophets, an institution, to declare God's words.
 - b) Raise up one great prophet, who alone could compare to Moses.

II. Moses And The Prophets

- A. We need to make a distinction between Moses and the rest of the Old Testament prophets (Num 12:1–8).
1. "The real complaint which Miriam and Aaron discussed between themselves had to do with the relationship of their position in Israel with respect to that of Moses. They did not wish to be the recipients of revelation which was subordinate to that received by Moses but rather of that which was equal to that given to him. There is truth, of course, in their statement. God had indeed spoken to them. Aaron had the exalted privilege, which was not even vouchsafed to Moses, of using the Urim and Thumin in bringing the people's rights before God (Exodus 28:30). Miriam was called a prophetess (Exodus 15:20), and occupied an honored position among the women of Israel." (Young, *My Servants The Prophets*, 41–42)
 2. "For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam" (Mic 6:4).

3. "Miriam is grand. She preserved the life of the helpless infant who later became the great Moses, servant of Yahweh (see Exod 1). She made it possible for Moses' true mother to become his nurse when he was adopted into the harem of Pharaoh in Egypt. She led the singing of the first psalm we find recorded in the Scriptures, the Song of Miriam (Exod 15)—the praise of the people of God celebrating their deliverance from the army of Egypt at the Sea of Reeds. Again, it is not because Miriam is a woman that she is presented in this chapter in an unfavorable light; it is precisely because she is such a magnificent person in the history of salvation that her act of rebellion is recorded." (Allen, *Numbers*, comments on Num 12:1)
 4. God would speak to other prophets in dreams and visions, but "not so with my servant Moses" (Num 12:7).
 5. "Through this utterance on the part of Jehovah, Moses is placed above all the prophets, in relation to God and also to the whole nation ... The prophets were consequently simply organs, through whom Jehovah made known His counsel and will at certain times, and in relation to special circumstances and features in the development of His kingdom. It was not so with Moses. Jehovah had placed him over all His house, had called him to be the founder and organizer of the kingdom established in Israel through his mediatorial service, and had found him faithful in His service. With this *servant* of His, He spake mouth to mouth, without a figure or figurative cloak, with the distinctness of a human interchange of thought; so that at any time he could inquire of God and wait for the divine reply. Hence Moses was not a prophet of Jehovah, like many others, not even merely the first and highest prophet, but stood above all the prophets, as the founder of the theocracy, and mediator of the Old Covenant." (Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 3:80)
- B. Four phrases found in Numbers 12:8 which tell of the relationship between God and His servant Moses.
1. God will speak directly and immediately to Moses, even "face to face."
 - a) "So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exo 33:11).
 - b) It was a free, personal exchange, without any mediation.
 - c) "But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face..." (Deut 34:10).
 2. God would speak "plainly" to Moses.
 3. "Not in dark sayings" or in riddles (cf. Ezek 17:2ff).
 4. "He sees the form of the Lord," not just a vision!
 5. "To other prophets God may speak in a variety of ways, some more clearly than others (see Heb 1:1; 1 Peter 1:10–11). But to Moses there is a one-on-one relationship. Only Moses could approach the holy mountain and gaze on the Divine Person. Only his face radiated following these encounters. Others might hear the words; only Moses sees God's person ... these words speak of an unprecedented level of intimacy between God and Moses." (Allen, *Numbers*, comments on Num 12:6–9)
- C. Moses was not just one of the prophets, or equal with them.
1. Rather, all of the prophets are under Moses (Deut 34:9–12).
 2. Comparison between Christ and Moses (Heb 3:1–6).

III. The Prophet Of Prophets

- A. God, through Moses, promised the Israelites that He would “raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst” (Deut 18:15).
- B. New Testament writers often speak of Christ as “the Prophet.”
 - 1. The priests from Jerusalem wanted to know of John the Baptist was “the prophet” (John 1:19–23).
 - 2. After the feeding of the 5,000, the people said, “This is truly the Prophet, who is come into the world” (John 6:14).
 - 3. On another occasion, the many people said, “Truly this is the Prophet” (John 7:40).
 - 4. When Philip found Nathaniel, he said, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote...” (John 1:45).
 - 5. Jesus claimed that Moses wrote about Him (John 5:39, 46–47).
 - 6. Jesus claimed to have fulfilled the requirements of the prophet like Moses (John 12:49–50).
 - 7. We are to hear God’s Son, not Moses (Matt 17:1–5).
 - 8. Peter, when speaking to the people at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, explicitly applied Deuteronomy 18:15 to Jesus (Acts 3:22–26).
 - 9. Stephen saw the fulfillment of the words of Moses in Christ (Acts 7:37).
- C. Christ is God’s final spokesman (Heb 1:1–4).
 - 1. “...prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21).
 - 2. The consequences of neglecting the message of Christ (Heb 2:1–4).

Conclusion

- I. Have you listened to the words of Christ, God’s final spokesman?
- II. When you reject the words of Christ, you have rejected salvation!

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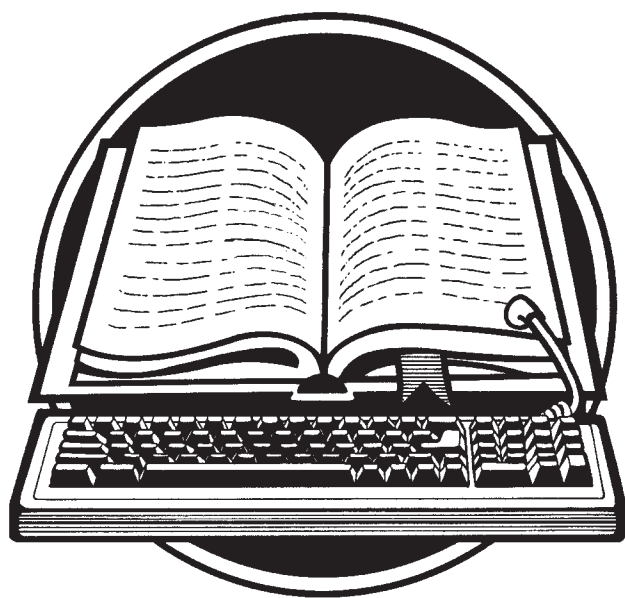
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