

Government and Kingdom Officials

¹⁵ Moses continued, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet (Prophet) like me (Moses) from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. ¹⁶ For this is what you yourselves requested of the LORD your God when you were assembled at Mount Sinai (Horeb). You said, ‘Do not let us hear the voice of the LORD our God anymore or see this blazing fire, for we will die.’ ¹⁷ Then the LORD said to me (Moses), ‘What they have said is right. ¹⁸ I will raise up a prophet (Prophet) like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put My words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I (God) command him. ¹⁹ I will personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on My behalf. ²⁰ But any prophet who falsely claims to speak in My Name or who speaks in the name of another god must die.’ ²¹ But you may wonder (hearts and minds), ‘How will we know whether or not a prophecy is from the LORD?’ ²² If the prophet speaks in the LORD’s Name but his prediction does not happen or come true, you will know that the LORD did not give that message. That prophet has spoken without My authority and need not be feared.” Deuteronomy 18:15-22 (NLT)

In Deuteronomy chapters 16:18 through Deuteronomy 18:22, the living God through His faithful servant Moses gives Israel and believers of Jesus Christ instructions on His government and kingdom officials in His land. These government and kingdom officials are judges, officers, priests, kings, and prophets. Notably, in these chapters, the living God saw no separation of church and state as the state and church were to work together to maintain justices and fairness in the land. Furthermore, many biblical scholars see Deuteronomy chapters 16:18 through Deuteronomy 18:22 as linked to God’s fifth commandment with obedience to our mothers and fathers (see Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). Truly, disorder and anarchy in the home breed disorder and anarchy in society.

The living God appoints government and kingdom officials to govern His people on earth and maintain order (see also Romans 13:1-7; 1 Corinthians 14:40). There is no authority except from God (e.g., see Daniel 2:21; Daniel 4:17; John 19:11; Romans 13:1-2, 4). Without government and kingdom officials, even with all its shortcomings, there would be lawlessness, disorder, and chaos throughout the land. Therefore, the Holy Scriptures instructs God’s people to pray for all

these officials in authority and not just criticize them (see Ezra 6:10; 1 Timothy 2:1-2). Besides, those who serve in appointed government and kingdom officials are fully accountable to the living God.

Ultimately, the living God and His Son Jesus Christ are the Judge, supreme Legislator, and King of all the heavens and earth (e.g., see Psalms 75:7; Psalm 82:8; Ecclesiastes 12:13; John 8:16, 50; 1 Timothy 6:15; 1 Peter 4:5; Jude 1:15; Revelation 19:16).

First, the LORD God through His servant Moses instructed Israel and now believers of Jesus Christ to appoint local judges and officers from among their people in all the towns the LORD God gives Israel (see Deuteronomy 16:18). These appointed judges and officers are to be trustworthy, wise, and faithful men and women that judges all people equally, honestly, and fairly – whether rich, poor, foreigners, orphans, widows, prisoners, etc. and not follow the crowd by doing wrong and evil (Deuteronomy 16:18; see also Exodus 18:21; Exodus 23:2, 6-9; Deuteronomy 1:16-17; Deuteronomy 27:19; Proverbs 18:5; Isaiah 10:1-2; James 2:1-4). Moreover, these appointed judges and officers are never to twist and pervert justice nor show prejudice, favoritism, and preference (Deuteronomy 16:19; see also Exodus 23:3, 6-9; Leviticus 19:15). Even more, these appointed judges and officials are not to accept a bribe or seek dishonest gain, for such bribes and enticements blind the eyes of the wise and corrupt the decisions of the godly (Deuteronomy 16:19; see also Exodus 23:8; Samuel 8:1-3). Instead, Moses instructed Israel and now the church to appoint judges and officers that will seek only true justice and fairness for all people, so the people may live and occupy the land that the LORD God is giving the people (Deuteronomy 16:20; see also Amos 5:12-14; Micah 6:6-8).

Then, Moses once again commanded Israel and now the church to always **exclusively worship** and **trust** the LORD God and give our best sacrifice and offerings to Him (Deuteronomy 17:1; see also Exodus 20:3, 5; Exodus 34:13-14; Exodus 23:24-26; Deuteronomy 5:7-10; Deuteronomy 6:4-6). The LORD God is a consuming fire and a jealous God who demands our wholehearted allegiance, worship, and love to Him first (e.g., see Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24; Deuteronomy 5:9; Joshua 24:19-20; Nahum 1:2-3; Matthew 6:33). In their offering unto to LORD God, Israel and also the church are never to offer unto God our mediocre offerings, worship, and sacrifices to the LORD God for the living God detests such second-rate and shortchanged gifts (Deuteronomy 17:1; see also Leviticus 22:20-22; Ephesians 5:19-20; Hebrews 13:15). We are always to give our first

and our best to the living God – time, money, worship, and talents
(see Malachi 1:6-14).

Moreover, Moses instructed Israel and now the church to never comingle and synchronize our worship of the living God with other gods and idols (Deuteronomy 16:21-22; see also Deuteronomy 4:25-26; Joshua 23:16). The Old and New Testament prohibits syncretistic practices – cannot serve two gods (e.g., see 2 Kings 21:7; Matthew 6:24). Idolatry violates the very first commandments and the heart of the covenant (see Exodus 20:3-7; Matthew 22:37). The LORD God demands our wholehearted and exclusive worship and allegiance to Him first and exclusively (Deuteronomy 16:22; see also Matthew 6:33; Matthew 22:37; 1 John 5:21). Moses warned Israel and now the church that mixing and synchronizing the worship of the living God with other gods, idols, and the forces of heaven (e.g., the sun, the moon, or any of the stars) is evil and violates the very heart of the covenant (Deuteronomy 17:2-3; see also Deuteronomy 4:15-19; Deuteronomy 6:4-6; Deuteronomy 13:6-14). If such evil and forbidden worship occurs in the land, Moses commanded Israel to investigate the matter thoroughly and interview multiple witnesses to confirm such wickedness and evil (see Deuteronomy 17:4-6). One witness is not enough to convict a person accused of such an evil crime or offense (e.g., see Numbers 35:30; Matthew 18:15-17). Instead, a matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses with a thorough investigation (see also Deuteronomy 19:15-21). If it is true that such forbidden and detestable worship have been done in Israel, Israel was to immediately remove such idolatry from their land (Deuteronomy 17:5, 7; see also Exodus 22:20; Leviticus 24:15-16).

If the case arises for the local judges and officers that are too hard to decide, such as a murder or manslaughter charges, cases involving difficult assaults and lawsuits, then Moses instructed Israel and also the church to take these difficult cases to the judges and the Levitical priests the LORD God will choose – a central court (see Deuteronomy 17:8-9). Then, the God-appointed Levitical priests and the judges will hear these difficult cases, interpret the law, and declare the verdict (see Deuteronomy 17:9, 11). The living God appointed His Levitical priests, who ministered (served) before Him and pronounced blessings in His Name, to decide all legal and criminal cases (see Deuteronomy 21:5). God's people were to strictly carry out the verdict the God-appointed Levitical priests and the judges announced and the sentence they prescribed (see Deuteronomy 17:10-11). Anyone arrogant and presumptuous enough to reject and not obey the

verdict of the God-appointed judges and priests must be removed from the land and be subject to judgment to purge the evil from Israel (Deuteronomy 17:12-13; see also Romans 13:1-2).

Next, Moses gives Israel and also believers of Jesus guidelines for selecting a king in God's land (see Deuteronomy 17:14). Moses instructed the people to select a leader the LORD God chooses (see Deuteronomy 17:15). Also, the king must be a one of God's people and a fellow Israelite and not a foreigner (see Deuteronomy 17:15). Unfortunately, Moses was fearful that foreign rulers would lead Israel to worship other gods and idols and not the living God exclusively. Also, Israel's history revealed that whenever God wanted to punish His people, He would set a foreign ruler over them and let the people experience the contrast between the goodness of God and the oppressiveness of the idolatrous Gentiles (e.g., see 2 Kings 17; 2 Kings 25). Moreover, the king must not build up a large stable of horses for himself or send the people to Egypt to buy horses, for the LORD has told you, "You must never return to Egypt" (see Deuteronomy 17:16). God's king must always put his full trust in the LORD God and not depend on horses and armies, foreign alliances, or material wealth (e.g., see 1 Samuel 17:15; Psalm 33:16-20; Psalm 147:10-11; Proverbs 21:31; Isaiah 31:1). Furthermore, the king must not take many wives for himself, because these many wives will turn his heart away from the LORD God (see Deuteronomy 17:1). Also, the king must not accumulate large amounts of wealth in silver and gold for himself (see Deuteronomy 17:17).

Finally and most important, when the king takes the throne, he must copy for himself God's laws, ordinances, and decrees on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests (see Deuteronomy 17:18). All God's laws, ordinances, and decrees are rooted in the Ten Commandments. The king must always keep God's laws, ordinances, and decrees with him and read and study it daily as long as he lived (Deuteronomy 17:19; see also Deuteronomy 4:9-10; Joshua 1:7-8). Then, the king will learn to fear, honor, and respect the LORD God – the true Great King (see Deuteronomy 17:19). Essentially, the king must be a god-fearing leader and wholeheartedly obedient to God's Word. The king's regular reading and studying of God's laws, ordinances, and decrees will prevent his heart from becoming full of pride and ruling God's people unjustly (see Deuteronomy 17:20). Even more, reading and studying God's laws, commandments, and decrees will prevent the king from turning away from faithfully following the living God and His righteous commands (Deuteronomy 17:20; see also Deuteronomy 5:32-33; Joshua 23:6). If the king

served the living God with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind and heart, he and his descendants will reign for many generations and prosper in all they do and wherever they go (Deuteronomy 17:20; see also Deuteronomy 4:40; 1 Kings 2:2-4; 1 Chronicles 28:8-10). The living God wanted to assure His leaders would always look to Him regularly for guidance about military and governmental decisions (e.g., see 2 Samuel 5:19).

Sadly, Israel's history proved that they disobeyed God's guidelines for selecting a leader and did not trust wholeheartedly in the living God as their true King (see 1 Samuel 8:7-8; 1 Samuel 10:18-19). Samuel warned Israel what would happen if they looked to a human king instead of the living God first as their true King (see 1 Samuel 8:9-18). The command to avoid the amassing many horses and wives was clearly disobeyed by all the kings of Israel and Judah, beginning with David and epitomized by Solomon (e.g., see 2 Samuel 5:13-16; 1 Kings 4:26; 1 Kings 10:14-11:8; 2 Chronicles 1:14, 16; 2 Chronicles 9:28; Nehemiah 13:26-27; Isaiah 2:7; Isaiah 31:7; Ezekiel 17:15). In particular, Solomon violated all three regulations for kingship and he led the nation into sin. Solomon married an Egyptian princess (see 1 Kings 3:1), the first of many political alliances he made by taking foreign wives (see 1 Kings 11:1-6). Also, Solomon went back to Egypt not only for a wife but also for horses for his army, and built "chariot cities" in Israel where he stabled his horses and chariots (see 1 Kings 10:26, 28-29). As for his wealth, it was fabulous and impossible to calculate (see 1 Kings 10:14-25, 27). Out of Solomon's sinful leadership came the nation's disobedience, division, and captivity (see 1 Kings 11:9-13). The living God was not against Israel appointing a king but He always wanted the people to faithfully look to Him and Him alone with obedience as the true King of heaven and earth (e.g., see Exodus 15:18; Psalm 10:16; Psalm 45:6; Psalm 146:10; Revelation 11:15). Yet, Israel's kings did not obey the living and their behavior led to their downfall.

Afterward, Moses gave Israel instructions to remember and care for the Levitical priests—that is, the whole of the tribe of Levi (see Deuteronomy 18:1). The priests and Levites received no allotment or inheritance of land with Israel (Deuteronomy 18:1-2; see also Numbers 18:20; Deuteronomy 10:8-9; Deuteronomy 12:12; Numbers 26:62). The lack of inheritance for the priests and Levites seemed inconsistent with the provision granting them 48 cities throughout the land (see Numbers 35:1-8). The LORD God did not allocate to the priests and Levites a contiguous block of land, as the other eleven tribes of Israel. The priests and Levites' towns included only a limited

agricultural perimeter (see Numbers 35:3-5), so they were dependent on the gifts of the people. Nevertheless, the LORD God Himself is the priests and Levites' special possession (Deuteronomy 18:2; see also Numbers 3:11-12). The LORD God chose the tribe of Levi out of all Israel's tribes to minister (serve) in His Name forever (Deuteronomy 18:5; see also Deuteronomy 10:8-9). The priests and Levites served much the same function as our ministers today – to care for God's sanctuary, preach His Word, and care for His people.

Because the priests and Levites could not own property or pursue outside business interests, God made special arrangements so that people would not take advantage of them. Levi's brothers – the eleven other tribes of Israel – were to care and share with the priests and Levites (e.g., see Deuteronomy 12:12, 18-19; Deuteronomy 14:27). The living God assigned His priests and Levites to eat from the tithes, offerings, and sacrifices given to the LORD by His people (Deuteronomy 18:1, 3-4, 6-8; e.g., see also Leviticus 7:28-34; Numbers 18:8-9, 12, 20-21, 23; Joshua 13:14; 1 Samuel 2:28; Nehemiah 13:10-14; 1 Corinthians 9:13-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18). Every third year, the people's tithe would be distributed to the Levites, the needy, the poor, orphans, widows, and foreigners living within the town (Deuteronomy 14:28-29). Israel was never to neglect the Levites (ministers of God), the foreigners living among them, the orphans, the widows, and the poor in the land (Deuteronomy 14:27-29; see also Numbers 18:20-32). In collecting the tithe for Levites, the foreigners, the orphans, the widows, and the poor, Moses was appealing to Israel and now the church to always help people in need (e.g. see Exodus 22:21; Psalm 146:9; Isaiah 1:17, 23; Romans 12:13; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-14; Hebrews 13:16; James 1:27). The living God accepted these gifts from Israel for these people as an offering to Himself. The reasons for such care are given: Israel and now believers of Jesus are to imitate the holy character of God (see Leviticus 19:2), who cares for the poor and we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (see Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19; Matthew 22:39; John 13:34-35).

Notably, the New Testament acknowledged that those who minister and serve before the living God and preach the Gospel message should live from the Gospel (see Luke 10:7; 1 Corinthians 9:12-14; 1 Timothy 5:18). Yet, the Apostle Paul did not take advantage of this right (1 Corinthians 9:15; see also Acts 18:3). Instead the Apostle Paul proclaimed the Gospel message voluntarily and without compensation so that he would not be a burden to others (see 1 Corinthians 9:17-18, 23; 2 Corinthians 11:9-10).

Then, Moses instructed Israel that the LORD God will raise up from them a Prophet similar to him from among their fellow Israelites (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; see also Acts 3:22-23; Acts 7:37-38). Israel was to listen to Him (see Deuteronomy 18:15). Moses was a faithful prophet of God (e.g., see Deuteronomy 34:10; Hebrews 3:1-2). Previously, Israel asked Moses at Mount Sinai (Horeb) for a prophet (messenger) when they heard the voice of the living LORD God Almighty and witnessed His power, majesty, and glory (Deuteronomy 18:16-17; see also Exodus 20:18-21; Deuteronomy 5:23-28). Moses announced to Israel that the living God would raise up a Prophet like him from among their fellow Israelites after his death (see Deuteronomy 18:18). The living God would place His Words in the His prophet's mouth, and that faithful prophet will tell the people everything He command (see Deuteronomy 18:18). Then, the LORD God promised to personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on His behalf (Deuteronomy 18:19; see also Acts 3:23).

However, Moses warned that any prophet who falsely claims to speak in God's Name or who speaks in the name of another god must die (Deuteronomy 18:20; see also Exodus 23:13; Deuteronomy 13:1-5). Many people – cult members as well as believers of Jesus Christ – claim that God has spoken to them. Then, Moses gave Israel a test to determine whether a prophet is from the living God (see Deuteronomy 18:21). If the prophet speaks in the LORD's Name but his prediction does not happen or come true, then Israel will know that the LORD did not give that message (Deuteronomy 18:22; see also Deuteronomy 13:2; Jeremiah 28:9). That false prophet has spoken arrogantly and presumptively without God's authority and need not be feared (see Deuteronomy 18:22). Not only does a prediction made in God's Name must, in fact, come true (see Deuteronomy 18:21-22) but also and equally important the prophet always point people to worship and obey the living God and His moral commands (see Deuteronomy 13:1-5, 6, 13).

Through human history starting with Abraham, God has sent His prophets (messengers, servants) to speak His Word into the world (e.g. see Genesis 20:7). Specifically, the living God denied and warned His people to never seek after such individuals as mediums, spiritists, fortunetellers, witches, and other detestable sources to seek His Word and His guidance (Deuteronomy 18:9-14; e.g., see also Leviticus 19:26, 31; Leviticus 20:6; 1 Samuel 28:3-25). For the church, the Apostle Paul specifically listed idolatry and witchcraft

among the sins of the flesh (see Galatians 5:19-21). Moreover, the book of Revelation warns that anyone engaging in these evil practices of sorcery, witchcraft, and divination is destined for the lake of fire (see Revelation 21:8; Revelation 22:14-15). Such evil messengers are masquerade as people of God but they are false and sent from the Evil One to draw people away from the living God and His moral commands (e.g., see Matthew 7:15; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1). The Holy Scriptures warn that false prophets can perform miracles (e.g., see 2 Thessalonians 2:9) and not everybody who addresses Jesus as “Lord” is a true prophet of God (see Matthew 7:21-23). Therefore, before listening and following any messenger claiming to speak a Word from God, check their words against the Holy Bible. The living God never contradicts Himself and use the Holy Bible to evaluate any prophet’s authenticity of this message. The living God has called His people to hold on to what is good and stay away from every kind of evil (e.g., see Romans 12:9; Ephesians 5:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22).

Instead, the living God through His Holy Spirit sends His faithful and good prophets to help and build up His people in His moral commands and righteous ways (e.g., see Jeremiah 25:4; Jeremiah 29:19; Jeremiah 35:15; 1 Corinthians 12:7, 10, 28; Ephesians 4:11). Some of these faithful prophets were writing prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and the “minor prophets” while others prophets are named throughout the Scriptures such as Elijah and Elisha that faithfully spoke God’s Word. These faithful prophets not only scolded Israel for sin and encouraged them in holy living, but they pointed to the coming of the Messiah who would be the Savior of the world (e.g., see Luke 24:27, 45-49). In these faithful prophets, the living God has given His Word to speak to the people (e.g., see Exodus 4:12; Isaiah 6:7; Jeremiah 1:9-10). The living God continues to reveal His guidance today with prophecy to His people through the Holy Spirit (e.g., see 1 Corinthians 12:10). Sadly, many people refuse to listen and pay attention to God’s faithful prophets who speak the Word of God (e.g., see 2 Kings 17:13-14; Jeremiah 7:25-26).

Throughout the centuries, biblical scholars have interpreted Deuteronomy 18:15 to refer to a special prophet who would appear before the Messiah comes to establish His kingdom. From Malachi 4:5, the Jews knew that Elijah would return at the end of the age, and many Jews wondered if the special prophet was John the Baptist, who dressed and ministered so much like Elijah (see Luke 3:1-9; Matthew 3:4). However, John the Baptist specifically denied that he was the special prophet predicted by Moses from

Deuteronomy 18 (see John 1:19-21). In one sense, John was an “Elijah” who prepared the way for Jesus Christ (see Matthew 11:14; Matthew 17:12; Luke 1:13-17), but John did not identify himself as the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5.

The greatest of all God’s prophets was Jesus the Messiah. Not only was Jesus the Messiah, Priest, coming King, and Son of God (see Matthew 2:2; Mark 1:1; John 20:31; Hebrews 3:1-2; Revelation 19:11, 16), Jesus was the Prophet predicted by Moses who spoke God’s Word faithfully to the people (e.g., see Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; John 12:49-50; John 17:8). The early church believed that Jesus was the Prophet predicted by Moses because He faithfully proclaimed the living God – His Father – in His words, actions, and deeds by the Holy Spirit (e.g., see Matthew 21:11; Luke 24:19; John 1:44-45; John 6:14; John 7:40; Acts 3:22-23; Acts 7:37). Nevertheless, some Muslims believe Deuteronomy 18:15, 18 refer to the coming of Muhammad. However, Stephen among others unequivocally identified Jesus as the fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy (see Acts 7:37).

Sadly, in Israel and Judah’s history, God’s people did not follow God’s instructions on appointing judges, officers, priests, kings, and prophets. Because Israel and Judah did not appoint wise judges and faithful officers, rebellion and injustice plagued Israel and Judah communities. Instead, Israel and Judah’s judges, officers, priests, kings, and prophets oppressed the people, took bribes, and deprived the poor of justice in the courts (e.g., see 1 Samuel 8:3; Isaiah 1:23; Amos 2:6-7; Amos 5:12). Israel and Judah’s failure to provide justice and fairness by its judges, officers, priests, kings, and prophets aroused God’s anger and caused His people to be exiled from God’s land (see 2 Kings 17:7-23; 2 Kings 18:11-12; 2 Kings 21:2-16; 2 Kings 25:1-22; 2 Chronicles 33:1-9). Specifically, read 2 Kings 17:7-23; 2 Kings 21:2-16 for all the violations of Israel and Judah that brought God’s wrath on the land. For instance, the priests were not appointed by God but became political appointments and led God’s people away from the living God. Moreover, the courts became corrupt by allowing the rich and wealthy to rob the poor and needy, and the wealthy soon owned great estates and controlled God’s land. Also, many of the prophets in Israel and Judah had “lying” spirits, not the Spirit of God, and predicted falsehood and other deceptions. Even more, many of Israel and Judah’s kings did not follow wholehearted the ways of the LORD God and first seek God’s guidance in all matters.

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