

Deuteronomy 18-20 • Rejecting Spiritism

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We're in Deuteronomy chapter 18, so I'll have you open your Bible there. Deuteronomy chapter 18.

Whenever we go through and study through the Old Testament, it's really important that we come at this with a proper attitude. I mean, Old Testament study can really be challenging. You might not be surprised to know that there are a good number of Christians who frankly stay clear of the Old Testament because they find it very challenging to understand.

They find God difficult sometimes to figure out as it relates to the severity of the judgments, which came upon various people. And I think for a lot of people, it creates a bit of an ethical conundrum when they read things about wiping out whole cities and even civilizations.

And they struggle, which is probably normal. I mean, I don't think it's abnormal at all to struggle. I would be a little bit challenged if somebody never struggled, I suppose, because it does impact us in some of those ways. We have to remember that what God is doing through the Old Testament—well, He's doing a lot of things—but not the least of which is communicating His holiness to a nation who He has called out of all other nations and called them to live separately from all the other nations of the earth in the sense of how they live, how they worship, how they react to other people.

We're going to see tonight that even in the matters of warfare, God had very explicit instructions for the nation of Israel. They were to live separately. Very differently. And this is one of the things that we've made mention of in the past. And we've said that this translates into the New Testament—not in some of the literal ways, but in the more general sense of God calling us to a different lifestyle, a different means of living. And I think we're going to see the various shades of what the Lord is saying to Israel. I trust the Lord's going to help us to make application there to our lives today.

What I'm going to do as I go into each of these chapters is give you an outline on the screen of what we're going to be dealing with in the verses of that outline. So the first one I'm going to put up on the screen for you is from this

Chapter 18, and we're going to look at the things that Moses will remind them of this evening.

Chapter 18 —

- Obligations to the Levites: 1-8
- Warnings about paganism: 9-14
- Christ prophesied: 15-19
- True and false prophets: 20-22

First of all, something he's repeated several times through the course of Deuteronomy already and will repeat again is the Obligations that the Israelites had to the Levites. And we'll talk a little bit more tonight about why the emphasis was there so strongly.

Next, in verses 9 through 14, Moses is going to give the people of Israel warnings about adopting the methods and the ways of the people who lived in the land. And they were pagans, and that means they had pagan worship practices, which God considered abhorrent. And so the Lord is going to warn them through Moses about adopting any of those things.

Then we're going to see a fascinating passage in verses 15 through 19. We're going to see a prophecy of Jesus Christ, and I'll show you how that plays out. I'm going to show you how the Jews misunderstood it as applying to Messiah, and then I'm going to show you how Messiah met all of the markers of that particular prophecy.

And then finally, in the latter part—the last two verses of the chapter, actually three—we're going to see how the Lord is going to then give some notes on true, and he's going to focus mostly on false prophets.

So let's get into the chapter. First of all, we deal with the obligations to the Levites.

He repeats something for them that they should know by heart by now, and that is verse 1: *“The Levitical priests (in fact, that means) all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel...”* (ESV)

In other words, when they took the land and divided it up among the people, you never see the Levites getting any land. They never received an allotment in the Promised Land.

And that is why God says through Moses here in the middle of verse 1, *“They shall eat the LORD’s food offerings as their inheritance. (He says) ² They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the LORD is their inheritance, as he promised them. ³ And this shall be the priests’ due from the people, from those*

offering a sacrifice, whether an ox or a sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and (yuck) the stomach.” And He goes on to say, “⁴ The firstfruits of your grain, of your wine and of your oil, and the first fleece of your sheep, you shall give him. ⁵ For the LORD your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand and minister in the name of the LORD, him and his sons for all time.

⁶ “And if a Levite (He says) comes from any of your towns out of all Israel, where he lives—and he may come when he desires—to the place that the LORD will choose, ⁷ and ministers in the name of the LORD his God, like all his fellow Levites who stand to minister there before the LORD, ⁸ then he may have equal portions to eat, besides what he receives from the sale of his patrimony.”

By the way, you might have a different word there at the end of that verse, but patrimony is essentially the property that he's inherited from his father. But as you can see, the Levites were to be cared for by the people, by the rest of the tribes of Israel. And the reason was they'd been called by God into full-time service.

And God basically said, I want these guys doing this full-time. They're not going to have time to work the land. They're not going to have time to go out and be farmers. They're not going to have time to—because they're going to be taking care of the things related to the worship of Israel. So God says to the nation of Israel, I want you guys to take care of them. All right.

Now, this is really interesting because this is one of those ideas that made its way into the New Testament. And Paul even cites some of the passages—and there are many throughout the Old Testament—and brings them into our understanding of supporting those in the ministry. And this is a little awkward for me to talk about because I'm obviously a recipient of those of you who give tithes and offerings to Calvary Chapel Ontario. And essentially that is the support that my family has lived on for a long time.

I want to share with you that this is a biblical idea—not just in the Old Testament, but God has brought it over in the New. Let me show you a passage on the screen from 1 Timothy, where Paul writes and says this. He says,

1 Timothy 5:17-18 (ESV)

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, (And you'll remember that elder, pastor, and overseer are interchangeable terms. And he says) especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

So in two different instances, Paul cites two different Old Testament passages where it speaks of caring for those who are laboring in this way. So, he's borrowing an Old Testament principle, bringing it into the New Covenant, and saying that this is God's continued means of support for those who are called to lead in the body of Christ. So, I just wanted you to know it wasn't our idea. It was God's idea. And we're being directed by the Word in that respect.

Alright, verses 9 through 14 are the warnings that we dealt with. We talked about earlier concerning the pagan practices. And here's what Moses says:

"When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. ¹⁰ There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer ¹¹ or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, ¹² for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you. ¹³ You shall be blameless before the LORD your God, ¹⁴ for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this."

Now, in this section, you'll notice that there are no fewer than eight different means that are listed here of communicating with spirits. And when I say spirits, it could be demonic spirits. It could be the spirits of the dead, which, by the way, is communicating, I believe, with demonic spirits.

You'll notice that there's eight ways that are mentioned here of connecting with spirits. And the first one is offering one's children as a burnt offering. Horrific, but they actually did that in these pagan countries. I'm sorry to say that there were times in Israel's history where they so adopted pagan practices that they did. Some of the Jews actually offered their children as a burnt offering. You can't even imagine, but this was a means of connecting with these deities and so forth.

Notice He talks about divination—to divine a truth through spiritual means. And yeah, ouija boards would come under that same category. Telling of fortunes. You go to the fair, you might see a fortune teller booth or something, and you think, oh, that's fun. They're telling fortunes, and somebody's made up

in some kind of funny costume or whatever. But these are things that God calls an abomination.

He talks about interpreting omens. Oh, that's a bad omen when that happens. I tell you, Christians, we can do that. And it doesn't come out in Christian circles necessarily as interpreting omens, or we wouldn't necessarily call it that. But we can get just as weird looking at an event that happens in somebody's life and saying, oh yeah, I know what's going on there. And we assume that we know—that's the Lord. That gets into some of the error that Job's friends got into.

Sorcery is the fifth one. The sixth one is a charmer. Normally, today when we use the word charmer, we're usually talking about somebody who has a very engaging personality. But the Old Testament idea of a charmer basically referred to a dealer in spells and someone who would supposedly have the ability to bind or curse someone, or bless through certain things—maybe through an object. Using an object to put a curse or a blessing on someone else. That's this charmer idea here.

Seven: you've got a medium, which is very similar to the last one. Number eight: a necromancer. Essentially the same thing. They act as a medium. They act as an intermediary for someone who wants to communicate with a departed spirit, a dead individual. I want to talk to my Uncle Al because he always gave me such great advice, but he died. And so I want to go to someone—a medium—who's going to consult Uncle Al for me so I can get the advice that I once received.

It's just a real invitation to open one's heart and life to spiritual dynamics that are very dangerous. And God calls it what He does because it is essentially a rejection of the Lord God.

There's a wonderful passage—I'm almost positive it's Isaiah—that just came to my mind. But it says, when a people mutter and encourage you to talk to a medium or a spiritist or something like that, there's a statement there that says, *“Should not a people inquire of their God?”* I've always loved that passage. *“Should not a people inquire of their God?”* (Isaiah 8:19)

Today we have to be careful. We may not get into spiritism like we're dealing with here when it comes to trying to figure things out, but we can try to circumvent going to the Lord in other ways, in terms of just trying to find out insight. And *“should not a people inquire of their God?”*

I'll be honest with you. In our culture, we've made an idol out of a lot of things related to trying to figure things out. And I don't want to offend anybody, but I'll tell you right now, I really believe we've made an idol out of counseling. And I don't think there's anything wrong with counseling from the standpoint of good,

godly counsel. In fact, the Bible talks about how there's safety even in a multitude of obviously good counselors. Getting good counseling—solid biblical counsel—is a good thing.

But we've gone a little bit weird. We've actually circumvented God. I recognize that there are times when people come to talk to me, and they're bypassing God. And that's wrong. It's like, don't shortchange yourself. *“Should not a people inquire of their God?”* (Isaiah 8:19)

I'm not saying that it's wrong to go to the servants of the Lord or talk to somebody and to get some counsel in certain respects. But I'll tell you something: a good counselor ought to point you back to the Lord. A good counselor ought to point you back to the Lord, His Word, the truth that is laid up in His Word.

A good counselor should not be making decisions for you or saying, well, here's what I would do, because that makes someone dependent upon the counselor. A good counselor should be saying, hey, let's pray. Let's talk. Let's talk to the Lord. Let's go to God. Let's pray about this. Let's see what the Lord directs you to do. And let's just trust that God's going to lead you in the way that you're to go.

We've got to be really careful. Like I said, the things He's confronting here related to the nations that are about to be dispossessed. These are spiritual abominations in the eyes of the Lord. But let's be careful as Christians that we don't whitewash some of these things and Christianize them but do the exact same thing, and that is circumvent coming to the Lord and seeking His face.

And guys, there's no substitute. There's no shortcut for seeking God's face. That's one of the reasons why I think we've gotten so drawn into counselors. We want to take a shortcut—the shortcut to getting on our face, fasting and praying, saying, God, what is going on? Speak to me. Minister. Open my heart. Open my eyes, and waiting on the Lord, even for a protracted period of time.

That's hard. And I don't know of anybody who wants to do that, frankly. It's rather distasteful. And we understand—we live in the drive-up lane of life in America here. We're used to going through the drive-up lane. I want to get my burger in two minutes or under, right? So, I want to get my answers from God in the same fashion.

Well, sometimes God wants you to wait on Him. And is it wrong if He makes you wait for days? How about weeks? How about months? How about years? I know that's distasteful. It's distasteful to me. And that's why people—but you can tell that people are impatient, because they'll say, when you encourage them to pray, they'll say, well, I prayed, and God didn't say anything.

And so, what you're saying is, oh, so you prayed as long as God wanted you to pray. That's right. Well, no. See, what happened is I prayed as long as I wanted to pray, right? I had an internal kind of marker in place: I'm going to pray, and God is going to answer—at least He better—by this period right here. And if He doesn't, there's a problem.

And then, and if He doesn't—see, then I'm free to go ask other people their opinion now, because God bagged out of the whole thing. He didn't respond. I gave Him His 24 hours, or whatever the length of time was. I gave Him that period of time, and He didn't respond.

It always amazes me when people say that to me—when they say, I prayed and nothing happened. And that's my first question: how long did you pray? Maybe God wanted you to keep praying. Maybe God wanted you to keep pressing in.

Don't circumvent going to the Lord. Don't find other ways of trying to figure things out, because then we start making some of the same fundamental mistakes that these Canaanites did by practicing divination and all these different kinds of spiritism. And I'm not saying that it's on the same level of evil. I'm saying that there is the same error that is behind it all, right? That's the point. And we have to be careful of that error—that fundamental error.

All right, let's get onto verses 15 through 19. Here's where I told you that Jesus is actually prophesied here. It says: *“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—¹⁶ just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’¹⁷ And the LORD said to me (and He's referring back at that time), ‘They are right in what they have spoken.¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.¹⁹ And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.”*

Now, what Moses is reminding them of is the time when God echoed the Ten Commandments from Mount Horeb—from Sinai—and the people were just completely beside themselves in fear. And they came to Moses and they begged him, please, don't let God talk again. We will die. And what they said to him was, you go and talk to God, and then come and you tell us what He said.

And what God said now to Moses—and what Moses is relating to them—is: God heard you on that day. And that principle of having that one who would be given you to speak the words of the Lord, that's going to happen. And He said it's going to happen in the form of a prophet. Now, He only calls Him a prophet here, but He says God's going to raise up a prophet.

And I want you to know, though, that the Jews ignored this as being part of—the role of the Messiah. They didn't see this. They didn't see this as the... they saw the... they called Him the Prophet after this very passage. And then they referred to the Messiah, and they called them separate things.

Let me show you an example of this from John chapter 1. Look at this. It says,

John 1:19-21 (ESV)

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

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Now, John—I don't know if John even understood at that time that the Messiah and the Prophet were one. You can see here plainly that the Jews asked John if he was the Messiah, and they asked him if he was the Prophet. And again, the Prophet is from right here in Deuteronomy. This is the prophecy made of the coming of the Prophet.

And you say, well, who is that? It's interesting. In Islam, this is one of the passages they point to, interestingly enough, to say that Moses was prophesying of the coming of Muhammad. But there's several problems with that interpretation.

The first of all is, you'll notice in the passage that we're looking at here, God says through Moses, God is going to raise up from among the brothers—or from among the brethren. In other words, from among you, one who will come as a prophet. In other words, He's going to be a Jew. Okay? Alright? That's the first thing.

And then you'll notice the other element of what God said about this coming prophet. He said He's going to speak everything that the Lord commands Him to speak. What did Jesus say during His earthly ministry? Didn't He say that very thing? I only speak what the Father tells me to say. Didn't He say that? He says, I only... what I hear from the Father, I give to you. And I speak just His words. So, Jesus even said that He fulfilled that element. (John 12:49)

And then obviously, Moses referred to Him as a prophet. The Lord said to Moses, I'm going to raise up a prophet like you. Was Jesus a prophet? Well,

obviously. The people considered Him a prophet, even if they didn't consider Him Messiah. They called Him the prophet from Nazareth.

So Jesus meets all of the markers of this individual. And so, He is the Prophet who was to come and to speak for God to the people. And then Moses gives them some other information—just some reminders—about false prophets.

Verse 20, he says, *“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.”*²¹ And if you say in your heart, *‘How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?’*—²² *when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.”*

But by the same token, you need to be careful never to listen to him. So, some important reminders. Excuse me.

Alright, Deuteronomy chapter 19. Let me put the outline for this chapter up on the screen.

Chapter 19 —

- Cities of Refuge: 1-10
- Dealing with Murder: 11-13
- Property Boundaries: 14
- Guidelines for Witnesses: 15-21

We're going to see in verses 1 through 10, God's going to remind them about the cities of refuge when they come into the land. He's going to talk to them about dealing with murder. He's going to talk to them about property boundaries and how to respect those. And then He's going to give some guidelines for witnesses in a court case.

First, the cities of refuge. In verses 1 through 10, it says: *“When the LORD your God cuts off the nations whose land the LORD your God is giving you, and you dispossess them and dwell in their cities and in their houses,² you shall set apart three cities for yourselves in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess.³ You shall measure the distances and divide into three parts the area of the land that the LORD your God gives you as a possession, so that any manslayer can flee to them.”*

Now, the term manslayer is someone who has killed someone unintentionally. We call it manslaughter, and it is the term to describe a death that was not premeditated.

Now, obviously this was an important issue, and we'll talk about it here in just a moment. But let's finish reading through verse 10.

*“⁴ This is the provision for the manslayer, who by fleeing there may save his life. If anyone kills his neighbor unintentionally without (having hatred or excuse) having hated him in the past—⁵ as when someone goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down a tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies (He's just giving you an example.)—he may flee to one of these cities and live, ⁶ lest the avenger of blood in hot anger pursue the manslayer and overtake him, because the way is long, and strike him fatally, though the man did not deserve to die, since he had not hated his neighbor in the past. ⁷ Therefore I command you, You shall set apart three cities. ⁸ And if the LORD your God enlarges your territory... (and these verses, 8 through 10—he's basically telling them, and if you get more land, then make more cities. Okay, then you'll have to set more apart. He says, verse 9), *provided you are careful to keep all this commandment* (There ought to be an enlargement of your property and so forth, your land), *which I command you today, by loving the LORD your God and by walking ever in his ways* (He says,) —*then you shall add three other cities to these three* (So if the land increases, the need for these cities increases. Look at verse 10, here's the reason), ¹⁰ *lest innocent blood be shed in your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, and so the guilt of bloodshed be upon you.*”*

That is the essence of it right there. Why were these cities of refuge created? So that innocent blood would not be shed. Now, whose innocent blood are they talking about here? The person who killed somebody, but did it unintentionally. It was an accident. They had no intention; they had no desire, right?

And so God is dealing with a cultural element of society back in those days. And that cultural element was this: if someone in your family was killed, then you had the right to exact revenge against that person who killed them. And you didn't go around usually asking questions. There wasn't a trial. There wasn't any kind of investigation. It was just a hot, emotional response: you killed my family member, I'm going to kill you. And that's the slayer.

And so God says—without actually condemning that element of culture—He provides a means whereby justice can play itself out by allowing this person to have a city they can go to, which is a refuge, a sanctuary, where they can... the person who's taking revenge cannot kill them. And the whole point of this thing is that innocent blood not be shed.

Because, as we've learned elsewhere, when blood is shed, it pollutes the land. And we're told in the scripture that the life—our life—is in our blood.

Obviously, that's a powerful medical statement that we didn't get around to really acquiescing to until the last couple hundred years.

Do you guys know that, like, back in England in the 1700s, if you got sick, they would bleed you? Actually bleed you. I mean, because they thought, we've got to let some of this bad blood out. I mean, it was about the dumbest thing you could imagine. I mean, they're putting people in genuine peril by bleeding them. The Bible said all along, the life is in the blood. (Leviticus 17:11)

So it's a fascinating sort of a thing, but when that life blood is shed upon the ground, there's just some dynamic that we really don't fully understand. Remember when Cain killed his brother Abel? And the Lord said to Cain, his blood cries out to me from the ground. It speaks to me. It speaks of the injustice and the greed and the anger and the shedding of innocent blood. (Genesis 4:10) So God said to Israel, do not pollute the land with the shedding of innocent blood. It was a big deal.

But as we go on here in verse 11, just so there's no confusion regarding premeditated murder, Moses says this, *“‘But if anyone hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and attacks him and strikes him fatally so that he dies, and he flees into one of these cities, ¹² then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there, and hand him over to the avenger of blood, so that he may die. ¹³ Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, so that it may be well with you.’”*

And that's just simply a clear statement saying: if there was premeditation, that's a completely different thing. There is no sanctuary. There is no refuge for someone who has committed murder that is premeditated. All right.

Interesting here that we get to property boundaries, and it's just one verse, although it is elaborated elsewhere in the law. But it says, *“¹⁴ ‘You shall not move your neighbor's landmark, which the men of old have set, in the inheritance that you will hold in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess.’”*

You got to know that this had to have been a temptation sometimes too, because landmarks were usually rocks. I mean, there weren't fences usually between properties, so you'd have a pile of rocks that marked the end of someone's property. Well, I want to farm a little bit more land, so what do I do? I just tell my boys to go out there and move that big pile of rocks about 30 feet back. No big deal, right?

Well, it's a big deal. God said don't move a boundary stone. Look at this—it's even echoed in the Proverbs, the wisdom literature. Let me show you Proverbs chapter 23:

Proverbs 23:10-11 (ESV)

Do not move an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless, for their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you.

Do not move an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless, for their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you.

It was essentially theft. It was theft of land. God said don't do it. They were taught to honor the divisions and not fudge on those border locations just to meet or to serve their own interests.

All right, in verses 15 through 21, through the end of the chapter, we deal with guidelines for witnesses. And I really like this. And I've sat on several juries over the years, and I think that there's a lot of wisdom in this.

It says, “*A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.*”¹⁶ *If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing,*¹⁷ *then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days.*¹⁸ *The judges shall inquire diligently* (in other words, an investigation shall have to go forth), *and if the witness is (found to be) a false witness and (if he) has accused his brother falsely* (look at verse 19), *then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.*²⁰ *And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you.*²¹ *Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.*”

The passage here is clear. There is to be justice in Israel. There is to be justice. Don't even... a single witness is not enough to even deal with it. There must be two or three witnesses. And by the way, this is an interesting principle that also made its way into the New Testament. I won't take you to that passage necessarily, but you'll remember that Paul wrote and said that an accusation against an elder or an overseer was not to be even entertained except that it is brought by two or three witnesses. (1 Timothy 5:19)

Now, you need to understand that a witness is different than somebody who just heard about it. A witness is somebody who saw it. A witness—in other words, if somebody came to me and said, I know Calvary Chapel... I'd have to be very careful about how I proceed from that case. And I'm not to entertain it unless it is brought by at least one other individual. But even then, it's not just somebody coming and saying, I heard this. It says, let every matter be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Did you see that person doing that? Well, no, I heard it from so and so who da, da, da... No, that's not a witness, you see. We have to really be careful about that because we're geared to taking somebody's word, almost bringing... allowing gossip to come into the whole process of accusation. And anybody can make an accusation. So there needs to be witnesses. And that's a really important thing.

All right. The last chapter we're going to deal with here tonight—chapter 20.

Chapter 20 —

- Laws regarding warfare

So here's a very simple outline: laws regarding warfare. But what's interesting about this is this really did set Israel apart. If you know anything about the way the other nations did warfare, you will see how this was so different.

Let's take a look at it. Verse 1 (first principle): *“When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”*

And this is where warfare in the Lord must begin: it must begin with faith—trusting God for the outcome. Are you facing a battle in your life? Some of us are. Some of us are facing some challenging battles. Know that the Lord's first principle of going into the battle is still: trust in the Lord. Even if you're scared, trust in the Lord with all of your heart is still forcefully laid out in the Scripture as a necessity for you and I.

And we're not given a free pass to waver on that just because we happen to be more afraid of what we're facing or what the situation might be. First principle.

Verse 2: *“And when you draw near to the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people (And I think this is like just what I'm doing here today. The pastor comes, steps forward, begins to minister from the word, speak to the people) ³ and shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint. Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them, ⁴ for the LORD your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.’”*

Oh, I love that. That's beautiful. So that's what the priest is to come out and encourage those going into battle. The Lord goes with you. The Lord goes before you. He will fight the battle. Then, check this out.

“⁵ Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying, ‘Is there any man who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? (And that could just mean he hasn't lived in it.) Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man

dedicate it. ⁶And is there any man who has planted a vineyard and has not enjoyed its fruit? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man enjoy its fruit. ⁷And is there any man who has betrothed a wife and has not taken her? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man take her.' ⁸And the officers shall speak further to the people, and say, 'Is there any man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go back to his house, lest he make the heart of his fellows melt like his own.' (That's probably not a good thing.) ⁹And when the officers have finished speaking to the people, then commanders shall be appointed at the head of the people."

Stop here just for a moment. This is really weird warfare. You're basically reducing the numbers of your army by saying, Anybody here just built a house? Yeah, go home. Go home. How about somebody here who just planted a vineyard? How about somebody just took a wife, or maybe you're just getting ready to get married? Yeah? Yeah, go home. How about you guys that are scared? Go home. Go.

Essentially reducing the size of your army. But it's a reminder of something for us. God doesn't need more soldiers to win battles. God doesn't need numbers to win battles. I mean, the story of Gideon is all about that principle and that reality. And you guys know what that is about. (Judges 6–8)

But conventional warfare is not part of what the Lord does or is doing. Let me show you a passage from 2 Corinthians. Paul says the same thing to you and I. He says,

2 Corinthians 10:4 (NIV1984)

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

What that means is we don't go to battle like the people of the world go to battle. They fight in very specific sorts of ways. This is one of those things that we have to remember. Sometimes people will come to me and they'll be involved in a potential legal snarl with somebody, or it could be a family member or somebody. They'll say, I don't know what to do, pastor Paul. And of course, the encouragement is always to pray.

But the reminder going into that prayer is that conventional means of warfare and battle are not part of God's plan, usually. That's not to say that God can't work however He wants. But the thing we have to just remember going into it is that we're not fighting like the world fights. We're not to look like the world in the way that we fight.

Primarily, the way we fight is on our knees. And that's hard to get used to because some of us, before we knew the Lord, we were scrappers. We were fighters. And we were people who would have gotten in a fight at the drop of a pin, right? Whatever. It didn't take much for us to put up our dukes and start swinging them or whatever.

And we bring sometimes that mentality into our walk with Jesus. It's like, Lord, we got a battle going on here. I'm ready. I'm ready. And I got my... got my dukes up, ready to go.

God says, get on your knees. You're going to fight this one on your knees. The battle is going to be won in prayer.

Largely, we fight battles. We fight spiritual battles. Our battle isn't against flesh and blood. There's another great reminder, right? But against principalities and powers and rulers of this dark world. How are you going to fight those? With your fists? Good luck with that. That's going to be fought and won in prayer. So different—very different—warfare.

Now he's going to give them instructions here in verses 10 through 15 about battling nations or cities—city-states, whatever you want to call them—who were not located in the land of promise. In other words, they were not in Canaan.

He says, *“When you draw near (a fight or excuse me) to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it. ¹¹ And if it responds to you peaceably and it opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall do forced labor for you and shall serve you. ¹² But if it makes no peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. ¹³ And when the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword, ¹⁴ but the women and the little ones, the livestock, and everything else in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as plunder for yourselves. And you shall enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the LORD your God has given you. ¹⁵ Thus you shall do to all the cities (look at this) that are very far from you, which are not cities of the nations here.”*

Now Moses goes on to give instruction about those cities within Canaan.

“¹⁶ But in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, ¹⁷ but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the LORD your God has commanded, ¹⁸ that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the LORD your God.”

Now remember, again, God was bringing judgment upon these nations. We talked about in an earlier study how He had literally given them years to repent—hundreds of years to repent of their sin. They refused, and now judgment was coming, and God was using Israel to bring that judgment. That may be very distasteful to you and I, but God is able to judge. He is the righteous judge.

And this wasn't the Jews doing this on their own or of their own accord. This was at the direction of the Lord.

He says in verse 19, "*When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them. You may eat from them, but you shall not cut them down. Are the trees in the field human, that they should be besieged by you?*"²⁰ *Only the trees that you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, that you may build siege works against the city that makes war with you, until it falls.*"

And this is an interesting statement made at the end of this chapter. Here Israel is commanded to exercise restraint toward the ecology of the land by not destroying the surrounding trees when they build their siege works.

And by the way, siege works were basically platforms and towers that the besieging army would build outside the walls of a city, so that they could get up above the walls and shoot arrows and get into the city and that sort of thing.

And you'll notice that God didn't forbid the construction of these siege works. But He reminded His people that those trees that were fruit-bearing could sustain future generations. God had given them to the people. They were part of the land of inheritance. And while their removal might help win the battle a little bit faster, it could very well spoil the life that God intended to follow once the land had been cleared.

So the principle here is that Israel is not to practice what is called desolation warfare. We've actually practiced it here in the United States of America—not here in the United States, but overseas. Desolation warfare is where you drop a bomb, in our case, and just desolate the land.

And in this particular case, God said don't do it because the land had been given to the people of Israel. And they were to preserve what was useful. They were to preserve and to respect what God had given instead of engaging in the destruction of the land.