

What God Thinks of Halloween
Deuteronomy 18:9-13
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Every year at this time we are tempted by friends and family to participate in Halloween. With the yearly increase of television commercials and decorations, it is clear that the practice of Halloween is more than a holiday. But not everyone sees anything wrong with this holiday. I received an email last week from someone who stumbled onto one of my sermons on Halloween off the Internet and he believes that this day “is not a celebration of evil but just an old Celtic holiday that in fact has fairly deep Christian roots.” I disagree about the Christian roots but agree that this day was “a day of reverence for the dead” and a day that the Celts believed spirits roamed the earth. During this time of year movies about murder and the occult are promoted. Television shows promote witches, witchcraft, demons, the devil, sorcery. And we’re to think that this is just an innocent holiday where our children go door-to-door dressed up in a costume collecting candy? I did some research this week and found in Scripture what God thinks about this kind of activity and I want to share my conclusions. Our study this morning takes us to the book of Deuteronomy chapter 18:9-13.

In the book of Deuteronomy Moses is giving a series of addresses, three to be exact, to Israel. The first address covered 1:1-4:43 and was a reminder of the wilderness wanderings. The second address covered 4:44-28:68 and was a review of God’s Laws and what they are to remember. It covered subjects such as the 10 commandments (4:44-11:32), ceremonial, civil and social laws (12:1-26:19), and further instructions for entering the land (27:1-28:68). The third address covered 29:1-30:20 and described the importance of obedience for entering the Promised Land. Chapter 29:1-29 is an appeal to be faithful to the covenant and 30:1-20 is a call to decision. Chapters 31:1-34:12 gives concluding remarks which includes Moses giving charge to Joshua before all Israel (31:7-8) prior to his death in 33:1-34:12. It is in the second address where we find Moses speaking concerning ceremonial, civil and social laws. It begins in chapter 12:1-26:19. As part of that address, Moses, in chapter 18:9-13, tells the children of Israel not “follow the abominations of those nations.” Listen to what he says as we read Deuteronomy 18:9-13.

“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. 10 There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 11 or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. 12 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. 13 You shall be blameless before the Lord your God.”

I. The Abominations of the Nations (vv.9-11)

The word “abominations” refers to “detestable acts,” that is, “something morally disgusting that is an abhorrence, especially idolatry” (Strongs Dictionary).

A. Sacrificing Children in the Fire (v.10a)

“There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or daughter pass through the fire.”

1. This prohibition is found elsewhere

- a) Lev.18:21 - “And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.”
- b) Deut.12:31 - “You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.”

2. The penalty for this practice was death

Lev.20:2-5 says, “Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given some of his descendants to Molech, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name. And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendants to Molech, and they do not kill him, then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech.’”

3. The practice itself came from the Ammonites

Moloch, which means “King,” was the god of the Ammonites to whom children were sacrificed by fire (Easton’s Bible Dictionary).

Fausset’s Bible Dictionary says he was also called the “‘fire god,’ worshiped with human sacrifices, purifications, and ordeals by fire...also with mutilation, vows of celibacy and virginity, and devotion of the first born.”

John Gill says, “To Moloch, which was a sort of lustration by fire, two fires being made, and the child led by a priest between them, and which was an initiation of him into the religion of that deity, and devoting him to it; so Jarchi says, this is the service of Moloch, making piles of fire here and there (on this side and on that), and causing (the children) to pass between them both. Besides this they used to burn them with fire to this deity, perhaps after the performance of this ceremony” (John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible).

“According to Jewish tradition, the image of Molech was of brass, hollow within, and was situated without Jerusalem. "His face was (that) of a calf, and his hands stretched forth like a man who opens his hands to receive (something) of his neighbor. And they kindled it with fire, and the priests took the babe and put it into the hands of Molech, and the babe gave up the ghost”” (Smith’s Bible Dictionary).

4. Ahaz was condemned for this participating in this abomination

2 Chron.28:3 says that “He burned incense in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.”

5. Manasseh also committed these abominations

2 Kings 21:1-6 - “Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Hephzibah. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he raised up altars for Baal, and made a wooden image, as Ahab king of Israel had done; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. He also built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, “In Jerusalem I will put My name.” And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. Also he made his son pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger.”

B. Practicing Witchcraft or Divination (v.10b)

“Or one who practices witchcraft.”

This “refers generically to the whole complex of means of gaining insight from the gods regardless of any particular technique” (The New American Commentary: Deuteronomy). In other words it is a “general term covering the types of magic that follow” (Charles Ryrie, The Ryrie Study Bible).

1. “A soothsayer” (v.10c)

Lit. “Those who cause to appear” (The New American Commentary: Deuteronomy).

This was “a false prophet” (Believer’s Bible Commentary) who was literally “an observer of the clouds or heavens, one that divined by the motions of the clouds, by the stars, or by the flying or chattering of birds” (John Wesley).

They had the ability to create apparitions (ghosts).

2. “One who interprets omens” (v.10d)

The interpreter of omens divined through the use of certain revelatory objects or devices such as a cup (cf. Gen 44:5) or through the actions or words of others (1 Kgs 20:32-33).

So the “one who interprets omens” are your “palm readers, fortune tellers, astrologers” (Believer’s Bible Commentary).

Paul denounced this and called for the demon to come out of a “certain slave girl” who Luke says was “possessed with a spirit of divination” (Acts 16:16-18).

3. “A sorcerer” (v.10e)

The AV translates this “witch”

One who engaged in witchcraft was adept at performing signs (cf. Exod 7:11) to ward off evil (Isa 47:9, 12) or to mislead God's people (Mal 3:5).

4. “One who conjures spells” (v.11a)

The "spell caster," literally, "the binder with a band," was thought capable of invoking powerful curses that would bring their intended targets under control.

The Psalmist describes the wicked as those who are “estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; they are like the deaf cobra that stops its ear which will not heed the voice of charmers, charming ever so skillfully” (Ps.58:3-5).

This is the one who binds “other people by magical muttering” (The MacArthur Study Bible).

5. “A medium” (v.11b)

This is “one who supposedly communicates with the dead, but actually communicates with demons” (The MacArthur Study Bible).

6. “A spiritist” (v.11c)

This is “one who has an intimate acquaintance with the demonic, spiritual world” (The MacArthur Study Bible).

7. “One who calls up the dead” (v.11d)

This is “investigating and seeking information from the dead” (The MacArthur Study Bible).

“Some of these ‘professions’ overlap” (Believer’s Bible Commentary).

Like the medium and calling up the dead.

This is literally, “asker of the pit” and is called a necromancer, “one who sought to communicate with the dead and thereby gain secret information” (The New American Commentary: Deuteronomy).

The best known such practitioner in the Old Testament was the witch of Endor (1 Sam.28).

1 Chron.10:13 says, "So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance."

II. The Abominations Denounced

A. This practice was prohibited among the children of Israel and was to be taken seriously

1. According to Exodus 22:18 those who practiced witchcraft were to be put to death!

"You shall not permit a sorceress to live."

2. This is repeated in Leviticus 19:26 - "You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying."

3. Leviticus 19:31 - "Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God."

4. Leviticus 20:6 - "And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people."

5. Leviticus 20:27 - "'A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them.'

6. In Ps.106:34-37, when recounting the history of Israel it says that "They did not destroy the peoples, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them, but they mingled with the Gentiles and learned their works; they served their idols, which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons."

B. All of These Abominations Are Demonic and Must Be Denounced Today

"Tragically, this nearly 3,400 year-old prohibition is just as much needed in "enlightened" modern times as it was long ago. Henry G. Bosch writes:

Satanism, demons, and the occult are dark, sinister realities, not tricks. One of the signs that we are nearing the close of this age is the widespread interest in witchcraft, astrology, and other forms of the occult. ... Thousands consult their horoscope each day, attend séances, or seek to communicate with deceased loved ones. There's also a great interest in Satanism and demons. The Bible repeatedly warns against such practices (Lev. 19:31; 20:27; 2 Chron. 33:6; Jer. 10:2; Gal. 5:19, 20).

How urgent and up-to-date are the warnings of Scripture! Let's not play around with something that could become a kiss of death" (Believer's Bible Commentary).

Books like Harry Potter teach these practices. Programs like Pokemon (short for pocket monster) also teach kids how to delve into the spirit world.

On the official website of Pokemon there is an invitation to dress up for Halloween:

“Halloween is the perfect time for the spookiest and creepiest of Pokémon to come out and play. But why should you let the Ghost-types have all the fun? And because it’s Halloween, not only can you join your favorite Pokémon, you can also become them by dressing up in a Pokémon costume.

1. Here are a few of the movies and shows that will be airing tonight:

- “Insider: Mistress of the Dark”
- “Exorcists: The True Story”
- “Gargoyles”
- “The Nightmare Before Christmas”
- “Charmed: Some to Witch Over Me”
- “Discovering the Real World of Harry Potter”
- “Secrets of the Dead: Witches’ Curse”
- “Buffy the Vampire Slayer”
- “Underworld”

2. There are churches that participate with their “Fall Festival” but also have a “haunted house.”

C. Israel was to Forsake The Abominations of the Other Nations (vv.12-22)

1. Verse 10 begins “There shall not be found among you”
2. God warned that “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” (v.12).
3. He required them to be “blameless” (v.13)

“You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.”
4. God required that they “listened” to Him and not what the nations listened to (vv.14-22)
5. But as we have already read they failed to do this, even Solomon, the wisest man on earth, found himself doing the very things that God hated because of his love for “many foreign women” (1 Kings 11:1-13)
6. Not everyone followed the abominations of the nations. There were those like Hezekiah who “did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden images and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days

the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any who were before him. For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses” (2 Kings 18:3-6).

7. Romans 15:4 tells us that “whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”
8. What is the lesson here? Not to follow after these abominations but walk in the commandments of the Lord.

D. This is What We See in the NT – Those Who Received Jesus Forsook These Abominations

1. They believed and stopped practicing these abominations - Acts 8:9-13
2. They burned their magic books

Acts 19:19 - “Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

3. They were able to do this because they feared the Lord
 - a) Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate.”
 - b) Prov.16:6 - “By the fear of the Lord one departs from evil.”
4. If you love the Lord you hate evil
 - a) Ps.97:10 - “You who love the Lord, hate evil!”
 - b) Amos 5:15 - “Hate evil, love good.”
 - c) Rom.12:9 - “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.”
 - d) 1 Thess.5:22 - “Abstain from every form of evil.”
 - e) 2 Tim.2:19 - “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”

CONCLUSION

What does God think of Halloween? It is an abomination. According to Revelation 9:21 it says they “did

not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.” God is bringing His wrath on those who continue to practice these things. My best advice is to leave it alone! You are treading on dangerous ground to treat this lightly. Our world has given more attention to this day each year. People are decorating their yards, dressing up at work, etc. If it’s not a dangerous day why then does the world offer cautions about sex addicts? Let’s pray.