

Deuteronomy Chapter 13

Verses 1-18

After the general prohibition of involvement in Canaanite worship (12:29-31), Moses discussed 3 ways in which the temptation to idolatry was likely to come to Israel:

- (1) Through a false prophet (verses 1-5);
- (2) Through a family member (verses 6-11); or
- (3) Through apostates in some Canaanite city (verses 12-18).

Verses 1-13

Burnt in the fire: This practice was forbidden in Israel's law (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5), since it was tantamount to murder regardless of the supposedly religious reason for it.

Both Ahaz (2 Chron. 28:3), and Manasseh (2 Kings 21:6), were guilty of child sacrifice.

As verse 30 depicts, this could lead to expulsion from the land, and in fact it did in the case of the northern kingdom (2 Kings 17:17-18; see further, the note on 2 Kings 16:3-4).

Deuteronomy 13:1 – 14:27 are expansions of the injunction not to take the name of the LORD God in vain, which is the third commandment.

Chapter 13 teaches the sanctity of God's name by warning Israel against three types of persons (as noted above).

Verses 1-5

Here is a strong warning concerning a false "prophet" or a "dreamer".

The usual mark of a prophet would be the fulfillment of what was predicted (18:22).

However, if the message was one of apostasy, then any accompanying "sign" or "wonder" should be dismissed.

Under Torah, anyone deceiving God's people was to "be put to death".

Moses had cautioned against the peril that might arise from the Canaanites.

Here he cautions against the rise of idolatry among themselves.

It is needful for us to be well acquainted with the truths and precepts of the Bible.

For we may expect to be proved by temptations of evil under the appearance of good, of error in the guise of truth.

Nor can anything rightly oppose such temptations, but the plain, express testimony of God's word to the contrary.

And it would be a proof of sincere affection for God, that, notwithstanding misleading pretenses, they should not be made upon the forsaking of God, and follow other gods to serve them.

Deuteronomy 13:1 "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,"

A false prophet, a lying prophet, as the Targum of Jonathan.

One that pretends to be a true prophet, and to be sent of God, and to come from him with a message from him.

With a new revelation or doctrine, or in his name, to foretell of things to come; the former is chiefly meant.

Such prophets did arise in Israel before the time of Christ, and have since arose under the Christian name (see 2 Peter 2:1).

"Or a dreamer of dreams":

The same with the prophet, only to be distinguished by the different manner of their having the mind and will of God revealed to them, pretended to.

Either by vision or by dream, which were the two usual ways in which the LORD spake to the true prophets (Num. 12:6).

So that the prophet is one who pretended he had a vision from the LORD, and the dreamer one that had a dream from him, or something revealed to him in a dream.

And dreams are sometimes used for false doctrines, vain, deceitful, and illusory (see Jer. 23:25).

"And giving thee a sign or a wonder":

For the confirmation of his mission and doctrine.

Such as Moses wrought before the children of Israel and before Pharaoh.

Signs are expressions or representations of things to come to pass; wonders, such as either do.

Or seem to exceed the common course of nature, or be contrary to it.

A true prophet brings messages from God to God's people.

He also explains the meaning for them.

There are false prophets who proclaim to the world that they are prophets.

Sometimes, signs follow them.

It is interesting to me, that Pharaoh's magicians could turn their staffs into serpents, the same as Moses' staff turned to a serpent.

The difference was that Moses' serpent swallowed their serpents.

We must beware.

Just signs are not enough to let us know for sure they are not false prophets.

Deuteronomy 13:2 "And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them;"

“Sign or the wonder come to pass”:

Miraculous signs alone were never meant to be a test of truth (compare Pharaoh’s magicians in Exodus 7-10).

A prophet or a dreamer’s prediction may come true, but if his message contradicted God’s commands, the people were to trust God and His Word rather than such experience.

“Let us go after other gods”:

The explicit temptation was to renounce allegiance to the LORD and go after other gods.

The result of this apostasy would be the serving of these false gods by worshiping them, which would be in direct contradiction to the first commandment (5:7).

The fact that the predicted sign or wonder came to pass would normally be one indication of the validity of the prophet (18:22).

However, false prophets also had these powers (Exodus 7:10-12; Matt. 7:22; 24:24; Rev. 19:20).

This sign the false prophets gave that came true, was to prove their message was true.

We must remember that the Antichrist will show the sign of calling down fire from heaven.

We must check everything out by the Word of God.

If the Word does not bear witness, we must not believe it.

Anyone who tries to cause you to worship anything, or anyone other than the LORD God, is a false prophet.

Deuteronomy 13:3 "Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

"The LORD your God proveth you":

God, in His sovereignty, allowed the false prophets to entice the people to apostasy to test the true disposition of the hearts of the Israelites.

And while the temptation was dangerous, the overcoming of that temptation would strengthen the people in their love for God and obedience to His commandments (compare 6:5).

Do not sit under the teaching of anyone who teaches any other doctrine.

Matthew 24:24 "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if [it were] possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

There is only One Truth.

Matthew 22:37 "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."

Deuteronomy 13:4 "Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him."

As he has directed, according to the laws and rules which he has given.

Both with respect to their moral and civil conduct, and their religious worship of him.

And so the Targum of Jonathan, "ye shall walk after the worship of the LORD your God."

"And fear him, and keep his commandments":

Fear to offend him, and keep his commandments; or keep his commandments from or through fear.

Not a servile but a filial one, a reverential affection for him; this is the whole duty of man (Eccl. 12:13).

"And obey his voice":

In his word, or by his prophets and ministers.

It may very well be understood of the voice of Christ, the Angel that went before them, whose voice they were continually to hearken to and obey (Exodus 23:21).

"And you shall serve him, and cleave unto him":

It may respect all religious worship, both private and public.

The Targum of Jonathan restrains it to prayer, but it not only includes that, but all other acts of piety and devotion, and which are to be constantly performed and not departed from.

For so to do is to cleave to the LORD as a man to his wife, or a woman to her husband, in which conjugal relation God and his people Israel were.

He was a husband unto them, and to do otherwise is to go a whoring from him after other gods.

Micah 6:8 "He hath showed thee, O man, what [is] good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

1 Thessalonians 4:1-2 "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort [you] by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, [so] ye would abound more and more." "For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus."

The Christians, as well as these Israelites, must continue to walk in the salvation they have received from God.

Deuteronomy 13:5 "And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn [you] away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee."

"Put the evil away from the midst of thee":

The object of the severe penalty was not only the punishment of the evildoer, but also the preservation of the community.

Paul must have had this text in mind when he gave a similar command to the Corinthian church (compare 1 Cor. 5:13; also Deut. 17:17; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21; 24:7).

The evil among them must be stopped.

The way to do that was to kill the one who is leading the evil.

They were commanded to kill the false prophets, so the people would continue to follow God.

Verses 6-18

The seduction to worship “other gods” would come from many sources; the most distressing would be from beloved family members, even one’s “wife”.

Strict punishments were given to those who advocated idolatry.

A person who influence others to “serve other gods” was to be stoned, and that person’s death should cause people to “fear” and follow God.

Similarly, if a city sent people out to other cities advocating other gods, the whole “city” was to be destroyed (Joshua 6:24).

Verses 6-12

Any close relative who might entice one secretly to go after other gods is to be stoned “with stones” (verse 10).

It is a capital offense.

Verses 6-11

It is the policy of Satan to try to lead us to evil by those with who we love, who we least suspect of any ill design, and who we are desirous to please, and apt to conform to.

The enticement here is supposed to come from a brother or child, who are near by nature.

Or from a wife or friend, who are near by choice, and are to us as our souls.

But it is our duty to prefer God and religion, before the nearest and dearest friends we have in the world.

We must not, to please our friends, break God's law.

Thou shalt not consent to him, nor go with him, not for company, or curiosity, or to gain his affections.

It is a general rule, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not (Prov. 1:10).

And we must not hinder the course of God's justice.

Deuteronomy 13:6 "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which [is] as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers;"

“Thy brother ... friend”:

The temptation to idolatry might also come from a member of the immediate family or from an intimate friend.

While the temptation from the false prophet would be made openly based on a sign or wonder, this temptation would be made secretly and would be based upon the intimacy of relationship.

These are relatives and friends that you love in the flesh.

Sometimes they lead us into temptation.

We must treat them as if they were strangers.

They should no longer be thought of as your brother, mother, or friend, if they do not the will of God.

Even a wife who leads you astray, should be thought of as a stranger.

Deuteronomy 13:7 "[Namely], of the gods of the people which [are] round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the [one] end of the earth even unto the [other] end of the earth;"

As of the Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, and Phoenicians.

"Nigh unto thee":

As the above were, being on the borders of their land.

The Targum of Jonathan interprets this of the idols of the seven nations, that is, of the land of Canaan.

Or far off from thee; as the Babylonians, Persians, and others.

"From the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth":

Which includes all the idols in the world, worshipped by whatsoever nation, and which were forbidden.

And which shows the universality of idolatry in those times, and that this is an insufficient argument in its favor.

Jarchi interprets this of the sun and moon, and the host of heaven, who go from one end of the world to the other.

And this seems to have been the first and most common idolatry of the Gentile world, and which were worshipped in the several deities they set up.

The people mentioned in verse 6, sometimes have more influence over us and can lead us to the wrong teaching.

This again, is warning not to let anyone influence you to worship a false God.

The Word of God is truth.

Every other teaching is false.

Deuteronomy 13:8 "Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him:"

To commit the idolatry enticed unto, or join with him in it.

"Nor hearken to him":

Not so much as patiently to hear him, but at once express an abhorrence of and indignation at what he recommends.

"Neither shall thine eye pity him":

Pitied he might be for his ignorance, stupidity, and wickedness, and on account of the miserable estate and condition he was in.

And of those dreadful consequences which would follow upon it, if not converted from it.

But no mercy was to be shown him on account of nearness of relation.

"Neither shall thou spare": To reprove him sharply and to expose him to public vengeance.

"Neither shall thou conceal him":

Neither him nor his sin, but make both public.

Acquaint others with it, and endeavor to bring him before the civil magistrate to be examined, tried, and judged.

So far should they be from hiding his offence from others, or excusing and extenuating it.

Or from harboring his person privately when sought for information.

Even family or friends that we love so much, should not be spared, if they are leading people to worship of false gods.

We would have a tendency to be more lenient on the immediate members of our family and friends.

We must treat them as false prophets.

Deuteronomy 13:9 "But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people."

Not privately, which pretense would have opened the door to innumerable murders.

But by procuring his death by the sentence of the magistrate.

And thou shalt cast the first stone at him, as the witness was to do (see Deut. 17:7; Acts 7:58).

"Thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death":

He was to throw the first stone at him.

Partly to show his indignation against the sin he had enticed him to, and that it had not at all affected him so as to incline him unto it.

And partly to show that he had borne a true testimony, of which a suspicion might have been created in the minds of some, had he been backward to the execution of him.

"And afterwards the hand of all the people":

Who then could proceed with more certainty and satisfaction.

This shows that the person enticed had not a right to kill the enticer, without a judicial process, and the order of the civil magistrate.

To show there is no partiality with you, you must throw the first stone.

They shall be killed for bringing false messages.

Deuteronomy 13:10 "And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

“Stone him with stones”:

The convicting witness cast the first stone.

Love for family and friends must not take precedence over devotion to God (compare Luke 14:26).

There should be nothing more important than your relationship with God.

The truly important reason for the killing of such a person, is to keep him from bringing someone else away from God to his false gods.

Deuteronomy 13:11 "And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you."

Shall hear of the death the enticer was put unto, and shall fear to act such a part he did.

And be upon their guard against any such person, and be cautious that they are not drawn into sin by him.

"And shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you":

Either to entice unto idolatry or commit it.

Which is a piece of wickedness against the first table of the law, and a very heinous one.

And exceeding offensive and provoking to God, being so directly against his being, perfections, and glory.

When they stone a relative or friend to death for leading them to worship a false god, this should cause all of Israel to hear about it, and fear the same thing happening to them.

The consequences for this sin is so great, they would not be tempted to do this.

Verses 12-18

Here is the case of a city revolting from the God of Israel, and serving other gods.

The crime is supposed to be committed by one of the cities of Israel.

Even when they were ordered to preserve their religion by force, yet they were not allowed to bring others to it by fire and sword.

Spiritual judgments under the Christian dispensation are more terrible than the execution of criminals.

We have not less cause than the Israelites had, to fear the Divine wrath.

Let us then fear the spiritual idolatry of covetousness, and the love of worldly pleasure.

And be careful not to countenance them in our families, by our example or by the education of our children.

May the Lord write his law and truth in our hearts, there set up his throne, and shed abroad his love!

Deuteronomy 13:12 "If thou shalt hear [say] in one of thy cities, which the LORD thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying,"

“In one of thy cities”:

He has in mind an entire city of Canaan given by God to the Israelites, yet enticed to idolatry.

The cities that were taken by them had also been places of idol worship.

They were told to clean all of that influence out, before they took over the city.

Verses 13-19

“Children of Belial:

The Hebrew term means “without worth”.

It is used here of those involved in idolatry.

It is also used of drunkenness (1 Sam. 1:16), rebellion (1 Sam. 2:12), unbelief, and Sodom (Judges 19:22).

The concept of Belial became a proper name for the prince of evil, Satan, in the pseudepigraphic literature, the Zadokite document, and the War Scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Belial is virtually synonymous with Satan in the New Testament (2 Cor. 6:15; 2 Thess. 2:3).

Deuteronomy 13:13 "[Certain] men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known;"

“Certain men”:

Literally “sons of Belial (worthless)”.

“Belial”, is used of Satan in (2 Cor. 6:15).

It is a way to describe evil, worthless, or wicked men (see Judges 19:22; 1 Sam. 2:12; 1 Kings 21:10, 13).

In a city, sometimes it is easy for a large group of people to be influenced wrongly at one time.

This is what has happened here.

One evil leader can take many people with him, if the people listen to the false doctrine.

We saw this happen just a few years ago in South America.

Literally hundreds committed suicide, because they were following a false teaching.

This movement started in California, and then they all followed the false prophet to South America (James Warren "Jim" Jones was an American cult leader.

Jones was the founder and leader of the Peoples Temple, best known for the mass murder-suicide in November 1978 of 918 of its members in Jonestown).

Deuteronomy 13:14 "Then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, [if it be] truth, [and] the thing certain, [that] such abomination is wrought among you;"

That is, the magistrate, to whom it officially belonged to make the necessary investigation.

In the event of the report proving true, the most summary proceedings were to be commenced against the apostate inhabitants.

The law in this chapter has been represented as stern and bloodthirsty, but it was in accordance with the national constitution of Israel.

God being their King, idolatry was treason, and a city turned to idols put itself into a state, and incurred the punishment, of rebellion.

"And, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain":

That such wicked men have risen and have prevailed upon the inhabitants of the city where they live, to leave the worship of the true God, and go into idolatry.

When there is full proof of this, and it is past all question.

"Such abomination is wrought among you":

As idolatry is, which is an abomination to God, and ought to be so to all mankind.

And especially to a people that profess his name.

Deuteronomy 13:15 "Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that [is] therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword."

This could not be the work of a single person, nor of the whole Sanhedrim.

But was what the whole nation was to join in, according to the above note.

"Destroying it utterly":

Pulling down the houses, and demolishing its walls and fortifications, or burning it, as afterwards explained.

"And all that is therein":

Men, women, and children.

"And the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword":

This severity was used to show the LORD's indignation against the sin of idolatry, and to deter persons from it.

Both individuals and bodies of men.

This city must be destroyed, as was Sodom and Gomorrah.

This type of sin cannot go unchecked.

It will spread to everyone.

The only way to stop it, is to destroy the people involved.

Deuteronomy 13:16 "And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, for the LORD thy God: and it shall be an heap for ever; it shall not be built again."

All the wealth and substance of the inhabitants, their household goods, shop goods, merchandise, utensils in trade and business, and everything that can be named.

The Jews say, if there is no street, they make one (or a marketplace); if that is without it, they bring them into the midst of it.

"And shall burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit":

Be it what it may, or let it be whose property it will.

And all this shall be done for the LORD thy God; as by his appointment and command, and in obedience to him.

So for his honor and glory, and the vindication of his righteous law.

"And it shall be an heap for ever, it shall not be built again":

But lie a waste as Jericho, though not an entire waste.

For according to the Jewish writers, though it might not be built as it was before, it might be made into gardens and orchards.

Even all the valuable things they had, must be gathered up and burned with fire beyond use.

The reason for destroying this city was not to get their wealth, but to stamp out the abomination.

Anything connected with that, would be evil.

Deuteronomy 13:17 "And there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand: that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and show thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers;"

That is, they might not take anything whatever to their own use.

For all being devoted to destruction, was cursed, and brought a curse upon the man that should make it his own property, as Achan did, when Jericho was destroyed.

"That the LORD may turn from the fierceness of his anger":

Stirred up by the idolatry of the city.

"And show thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee":

Who, seeing wrath gone forth, might dread the consequences, lest it should spread itself further.

"And multiply thee, as he hath sworn to thy fathers":

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

This is observed to encourage them to execute his orders punctually in the destruction of the idolatrous city.

Since God could and would multiply them, as he had promised their fathers.

With an oath, so that they should not be the fewer by such an instance of his severity.

Even though it is silver or gold, they must not keep anything back from the burning.

The burning of all of it will show their desire for following God in His will.

It will show total disassociation for the evil thing.

Deuteronomy 13:18 "When thou shalt hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep all his commandments which I command thee this day, to do [that which is] right in the eyes of the LORD thy God."

Not only in this case, but in all others.

"To keep all his commandments which I command thee this day":

The repetition of which he made unto them, and enjoined the observance of them in the name of the LORD.

"To do that which is right in the eyes of the LORD thy God":

Which they would do, if they kept the commandments of the LORD, which are holy, just, and good, and must be right in his sight because commanded by him.

God will bless you if you keep His commandments, and do everything of His will and not your own.

We must be willing for the will of God to totally rule our lives.

To hearken to the will of God is saying, "I will conform to your will in my life, LORD".

Total obedience to God brings blessings.

Deuteronomy Chapter 13

1. What does a true prophet do?
2. What does a false prophet do?

3. What was interesting to the author about Pharaoh's magicians?
4. What was the difference in their miracle, and Moses' miracle?
5. What must we remember about the antichrist?
6. How can we tell, if a message is true, or false?
7. Why do these trials arise?
8. There is only One _____.
9. List some of the things you should do in verse 4.
10. In Micah chapter 6 verse 8, what does the LORD require?
11. Verse 5 says, what should happen to the false prophet?
12. Why should this happen?
13. How was the only way to stop the evil among them?
14. Should we make a difference in the punishment, if it is a near relative?
15. Who shall throw the first stone?
16. What will happen to all of Israel, when they see and hear this?
17. One person can lead a whole _____ astray.
18. What should they do to that city?
19. What was a good example of whole cities being destroyed for their sins?
20. He wants them to gather all the spoil, and do what with it?
21. What will this show?
22. God will bless you, if you do what?