

Condemnation of False Teachers

Deuteronomy 13

Deuteronomy 13 - *"If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, ² and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'—which you have not known—and let us serve them,' ³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. ⁴ You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. ⁵ But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.*

⁶ *"If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, ⁷ of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, ⁸ you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; ⁹ but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. ¹⁰ And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. ¹¹ So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.*

¹² *"If you hear someone in one of your cities, which the Lord your God gives you to dwell in, saying, ¹³ 'Corrupt men have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods"'—which you have not known— ¹⁴ then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you, ¹⁵ you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock—with the edge of the sword. ¹⁶ And you shall gather all its plunder into the middle of the street, and completely burn with fire the city and all its plunder, for the Lord your God. It shall be a heap forever; it shall not be built again. ¹⁷ So none of the accursed things shall remain in your hand, that the Lord may turn from the fierceness of His anger and show you mercy, have compassion on you and multiply you, just as He swore to your fathers, ¹⁸ because you have listened to the voice of the Lord your God, to keep all His commandments which I command you today, to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord your God."*

Background Notes

The Ten Commandments are listed in Exodus 20, and repeated in Deuteronomy 5. The first commandment is, “*You shall have no other gods before Me*” (Deuteronomy 5:7). The second commandment is, “*You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me*” (Deuteronomy 5:8-9).

God emphasized the importance of these first two commandments in Deuteronomy 13. In this chapter, He demanded the death penalty for false prophets and those who promoted the worship of any “god” besides the one true God. The death penalty was also demanded for anyone who followed such false teaching. This could even include the elimination of an entire town, if the citizens were seduced into departing from the Lord to follow false gods.

At first glance, this drastic discipline may seem to us to be too harsh, especially applying the death penalty for close relatives. But think it through in the light of the rest of biblical teaching. If families began to follow a false god they would all end up in hell forever. That is far worse than removing a close relative who might lead the whole family to a lost eternity.

The person who brought the charge had to throw the first stone (v9). This law would certainly tend to keep false charges to a minimum. In the case of a town that had reportedly been seduced by a gang of false teachers (v13), a thorough investigation had to be carried out before any disciplinary action was taken. If and when that action was taken, **nothing was to be saved** from that city! Everything was to be burned, and that city was not to be rebuilt. These laws prevented anyone from being tempted to make false accusations, because there would be no profit.

Doctrinal Points

1. The success of false teachers is a test of the believer’s faith.

“*You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul*” (v3). Verses 1-2 revealed that God would allow a false prophet to do signs and wonders, and verse 3 revealed that this would be a test of the people of Israel’s faith in the one true God. “*If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—and let us serve them...*” (v1-2).

When God allowed false prophets to speak lying words, He wasn’t running a “sting operation” to try to entrap people! No! This was a test of the hearts of His people. Would they believe God? Would they obey Him? Would they stay true to

Him? God had clearly communicated to them that He was the one true God. He had commanded them not to even inquire about other gods and foreign religions. Signs and wonders were not (and are not) proof that a “prophet” is a true prophet. A true prophet follows the one true God, and faithfully proclaims the word of the Lord.

The success of miraculous signs done by the false so-called “prophets” was a test of the faith of the people of Israel. In the same way, the faith of believers today is tested by the success of false teachers who draw big crowds, preach great-sounding (but twisted) messages, and even perform miraculous signs. Why is it that when someone does miraculous signs and wonders, many Christians assume that person was sent by God and is preaching the truth? That preacher may very well be a false prophet, and the signs and wonders may not be from God at all.

Remember what the Lord said about false prophets? *“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”* (Matthew 7:22-23). Notice that the Lord will not deny that these people did signs and wonders, or that they prophesied using His name - but in spite of that, He will say to them: **“I never knew you!”** They were **false** teachers and **false** prophets. So the Lord warned us that there will be false teachers and prophets, and they will have very successful “ministries” that even include signs and wonders as part of their “ministry package” - and God will allow their apparent success as a test of true believers.

Will we be taken in by the false messages - or will we carefully follow the clear teaching of the Word of God? The success of false teachers is a test of the believer’s faith.

2. The judgment of false teachers is a test of the believer’s faithfulness.

This chapter delineated three situations in which the death penalty for false teaching was to be carried out – when false teaching led people to turn away from the Lord to follow false gods. First, the false prophets who led people into idolatry (v1-5); second, a near relative or close family friend who led the extended family away from the Lord to idolatry (v6-11); and third, a whole town given over to idolatry. In all of these cases the death penalty would accomplish three important things, and these are the reasons why God commanded it:

1. It would purge evil from among God’s people. *“So you shall put away the evil from your midst”* (v5).
2. It would be a severe warning to all of Israel. *“So all Israel shall hear and fear and not again do such wickedness as this among you”* (v11).
3. It would be a test of the faithfulness of God’s people. *“... the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul”* (v3).

Would they follow the Lord’s command in this important matter? Read the history of Israel in the rest of the Old Testament. False prophets did indeed arise in Israel, and idolatry swept through the nation, both in the northern kingdom

of Israel and in the southern kingdom of Judah - even to the point of sacrificing children to the foreign gods. The nation did not deal with false prophets except during times of revival, but many times the revivals were "too little - too late." Over the years, God's people Israel were unfaithful to the commands of Deuteronomy 13.

What about us? The Mosaic Law ended with the coming of Christ, so there is no death penalty within the Church. The Church is not a theocracy, as Israel was. However, the Church is called to deal with false teachers and eliminate false teaching. False teaching that twists and distorts God's Word cannot be tolerated! False teachers within the local church must be silenced and, if need be, excommunicated. (Read 1 Timothy 1 and Titus 1 in this connection.)

The judgment and discipline of false teachers is serious business. It is a real test of a church's faithfulness to the Word of God. The local church cannot "play games" or "play favorites" here. The judgment of false teachers is a test of the believer's faithfulness.

Practical Application

Don't tolerate any vestiges of idolatry!

Any town in Israel that turned away from the Lord to other gods was to be completely destroyed, and was never to be rebuilt again (v6-18). No vestiges of idolatry were to remain!

Do you see the spiritual picture and application for us? Are there any vestiges of idolatry still present in our lives? What about the music we like, for example? Are the lyrics in line with biblical values and a Christian worldview - or are we tolerating vestiges of idolatry from the days before we knew the Lord? What about the movies or books we enjoy? Are there any false and unbiblical gods being worshiped and even exalted - with our approval?

2 Corinthians 10:5 indicates that we should bring *"every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ and that we should not tolerate anything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God."* Don't tolerate **any** vestiges of idolatry! How many of us would be willing to admit that we need to examine our lives in this area?

Deuteronomy 13 is very practical for us today. The people of Israel were to burn everything that was even remotely related with idolatry. **Nothing** was to remain.

Don't tolerate vestiges of idolatry!