

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
7-13-22

Deuteronomy 13

Protecting Against Those Who Would Entice Israel To Serve Other Gods – Verses 1-3

¹ If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a sign or wonder, ² and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place, and the prophet says, “Let us follow other gods” (gods you have not known) “and let us worship them,” ³ you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.

13:1-3 Attractive leaders are not always led by God. Moses warned the Israelites against false prophets who encouraged worship of other gods. New ideas from inspiring people may sound good, but we must judge them by whether or not they are consistent with God’s Word. When people claim to speak for God today, check them in these areas: Are they telling the truth? Is their focus on God? Are their words consistent with what you already know to be true? Some people speak the truth while directing you toward God, but others speak persuasively while directing you toward themselves. It is even possible to say the right words but still lead people in the wrong direction. God is not against new ideas, but he is for discernment. When you hear a new, attractive idea, examine it carefully before getting too excited. False prophets are still around today. The wise person will carefully test ideas against the truth of God’s Word.

The Penalty For The Deceiver Who Comes With Miraculous Signs – Verses 4-5

⁴ It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. ⁵ That prophet or dreamer must be put to death for inciting rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. That prophet or dreamer tried to turn you from the way the LORD your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you.

13:4 You shall walk after the LORD: Israel was first instructed to not let a deceiver succeed in leading them astray. No matter how attractive the deception, they were to keep focused on a faithful walk with God according to His truth.

13:5 But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death: Ancient Israel was a unique situation, where the civil government was also directly appointed by God and charged with maintaining spiritual order as well as civil order. Therefore, such heresy and deception was a capital crime - punishable by execution.

For many centuries, when the church held political power, it often exercised this penalty also. Heretics were often given over to the civil government for execution. Jesus declared that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36), while the kingdom of Israel was very much of this world. Never before or since has God appointed such a kingdom as Israel to be His nation in this world as He appointed ancient Israel, so it would be wrong for us to execute heretics today.

The Penalty For A Relative Who Leads An Israelite To Worship Other Gods – Verses 6-11

6 If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, “Let us go and worship other gods” (gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known, ⁷ gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), ⁸ do not yield to them or listen to them. Show them no pity. Do not spare them or shield them. ⁹ You must certainly put them to death. Your hand must be the first in putting them to death, and then the hands of all the people. ¹⁰ Stone them to death, because they tried to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹¹ Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and no one among you will do such an evil thing again.

13:6 Brother ... your son or daughter ... the wife ... your friend: If any of these close human relationships would lead one to the worship of other gods, they were not only to be rejected (you shall not consent to him or listen to him), they were to be executed (you shall surely kill him). In fact, the relative should be one of the main witnesses against the guilty party: your hand shall be first against him to put him to death. This was the "casting of the first stone," the initiation of execution by one of the witnesses to the capital crime.

13:7-8 This also demonstrates that God never puts highest priority on family relationships; if a family member forsakes the LORD, we are never to follow them away from the LORD. Jesus always comes first, as He said in Matthew 10:37: He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

13:6-11 The Israelites were warned not to listen to false prophets or to anyone else who tried to get them to worship other gods—even if this person was a close friend or family member. The temptation to abandon God’s commands often sneaks up on us. It may come not with a loud shout but in a whispering doubt. And whispers can be very persuasive, especially if they come from loved ones. But love for relatives should not take precedence over devotion to God. We can overcome whispered temptations by pouring out our hearts to God in prayer and by diligently studying his Word.

How To Deal With Reports Of A City Given Over To Idolatry – Verses 12-14

12 If you hear it said about one of the towns the LORD your God is giving you to live in ¹³ that troublemakers have arisen among you and have led the people of their town astray, saying, “Let us go and worship other gods” (gods you have not known), ¹⁴ then you must inquire, probe and investigate it thoroughly.

13:12-14 Then you shall inquire: If reports arose regarding an Israelite city given over to idolatry, there was first to be a careful investigation. Search out, and ask diligently: This guarded against a harsh judgment; perhaps there were a few idolaters in the city whom needed to be punished, but perhaps the city was not given over to idolatry. God commanded a careful investigation.

The Penalty For A City Given Over To Idolatry – Verses 14B-18

And if it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done among you, ¹⁵ you must certainly put to the sword all who live in that town. You must destroy it completely, both its people and its livestock. ¹⁶ You are to gather all the plunder of the town

into the middle of the public square and completely burn the town and all its plunder as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God. That town is to remain a ruin forever, never to be rebuilt,¹⁷ and none of the condemned things are to be found in your hands. Then the LORD will turn from his fierce anger, will show you mercy, and will have compassion on you. He will increase your numbers, as he promised on oath to your ancestors—¹⁸ because you obey the LORD your God by keeping all his commands that I am giving you today and doing what is right in his eyes.

13:14 Such an abomination: The word abomination here refers to a gross, offensive idolatry. Later in Daniel and in the New Testament, the word is used in the phrase abomination of desolation, which refers to the ultimate idolatry of the Antichrist - the establishing of an idolatrous image of himself in the most holy place (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). "The term abominable thing is used in the Old Testament for something that is totally displeasing to God and denotes something impure, unclean, and totally devoid of holiness."

13:15-16 A city that completely rejected God was to be destroyed so as not to lead the rest of the nation astray. But Israel was not to take action against a city until the rumor about its rejecting God was proven true. This guideline saved many lives when the leaders of Israel wrongly accused three tribes of falling away from their faith (Joshua 22). If we hear of friends who have wandered from the Lord or of entire congregations that have fallen away, we should check the facts and find the truth before doing or saying anything that could prove harmful. There are times, of course, when God wants us to take action—to rebuke a wayward friend, to discipline a child, to reject false teaching—but first we must be sure we have all the facts straight.

13:18 To do what is right in the eyes of the LORD your God: This demonstrates that Israelites were never to regard ethnic or national bonds greater than the bonds that tied them to the LORD God; if their fellow countrymen were given over to idolatry, they were not to be spared.

This chapter asks an important question: What would it take to lead you away from God? Would signs and wonders do it? What if your mate forsook God, or all of your friends? What if culture, or nationalism, or ethnic ties called you away from Jesus? We must never allow such ties to come before our bond to Jesus. We must decide, as the song says, "Though none go with me, still I will follow."