

December 9:
Deut. 13:1-18

Sections:

- I. Chapter 13:1-5: false prophets
- II. Chapter 13:6-11: family leading you astray
- III. Chapter 13:12-18: a city going into idolatry

To bridge the chapters, one commentary shares:

*The admonition to observe the whole law, without adding to it or taking from it (cf. Deut. 4:2), is regarded by many commentators as the conclusion of the previous chapter. But it is more correct to understand it as an **intermediate link, closing what goes before, and introductory to what follows**. Strictly speaking, the warning against inclining to the idolatry of the Canaanites (Deut. 12:29–31) forms a transition from the enforcement of the true mode of worshipping Jehovah to the laws relating to tempters to idolatry and worshippers of idols (Deut. 13). The Israelites were to cut off not only the tempters to idolatry, but those who had been led astray to idolatry also. Three different cases are mentioned.¹*

Detailed analysis:

- I. Chapter 13:1-5: false prophets

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder,² and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom 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 find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.⁴ You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.⁵ But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.

a. We see in this section the first of three examples of idolatry.

b. The Moody Bible Commentary points out:

The focus of placing these instructions here would be to expand on the second commandment (have no other gods before me, Dt 5:7) since that is certainly what these false prophets would be calling the people to do. A prophet here is one who speaks on behalf of another. One can be a “prophet” for another person (as Aaron was for Moses, Ex 7:1) or for a deity. Moses does not stipulate that these particular prophets are “false prophets,” but that is what he intends by the term in this passage.²

¹ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, [*Commentary on the Old Testament*](#), vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 913.

² The Moody Bible Commentary (Kindle Locations 11012-11015). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

- c. Each of these sections begins with “if”
- d. Verse 1, we see a prophet or a dreamer of dreams.

The NET Bible shares:

Heb “or a dreamer of dreams” (so KJV, ASV, NASB). The difference between a prophet (נָבִיא, *navi*) and one who foretells by dreams (חֹלֵם אֹן, *’o kholem*) was not so much one of office—for both received revelation by dreams (cf. Num 12:6)—as it was of function or emphasis. *The prophet was more a proclaimer and interpreter of revelation whereas the one who foretold by dreams was a receiver of revelation. In later times the role of the one who foretold by dreams was abused and thus denigrated as compared to that of the prophet (cf. Jer 23:28).*³

- e. This person gives them a sign or wonder.
 - a. We would think this would be a good thing.
 - b. Further, the sign or wonder comes true (verse 2).
 - c. But then, verse 2 informs us that this prophet or dreamer of dreams was wanting them to go after other gods.
 - d. These are other gods whom they have not known.
 - e. I find it interesting that it is in parenthesis, “whom you have not known.” But it does not matter, whether we know of them or not, we do not go after other gods.

The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary:

13:1–3. prophet urging worship of other gods. *In its effort to delineate a Yahweh-only religion, Deuteronomy had to discredit and disavow the teachings and pronouncements of all other gods and their prophets. Prophets, diviners and priests for these other gods were present among the Canaanites and other neighboring groups (mentioned in Mari texts, the account of Balaam in Numbers 22–24 and the Deir ‘Alla inscriptions). However, what seems most heinous here are Israelites who speak in the name of other gods. This type of internal proselytizing was particularly frightening since it had a stronger degree of credibility and could therefore be most effective (see Num 25:5–11). Should the words or the predictions of prophets come true (a sign of their validity as prophets, Deut 18:22), the Israelites were to be alert to whether they attributed the signs to Yahweh. If not, it was a test of their faithfulness, and they must reject the prophet and condemn him to death as a corrupting influence.*

13:1–5. foretelling by dreams in ancient Near East. *Dreams were one of the standard means for receiving messages from a god in the ancient Near East (see Jacob in Gen 28:12; Joseph in Gen 37:5–11; Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 2, 4). They appear in Old Babylonian omen texts, along with reports of the examination of sheep livers, anomalies in the weather and birth of animals, and other presumed signs of divine will. Among the most famous is the dream of Gudea of Lagash (c. 2150 B.C.), who was commanded in a dream to build a temple by a figure reminiscent of the apocalyptic figures in Daniel’s dreams and Ezekiel’s call narrative (Dan 7; Ezek 1:25–28). The royal cor-respondence from Mari (c. 1750 B.C.) contains around twenty prophetic utterances involving dreams, always from nonprofessional personnel. These portents were taken quite seriously and studied. The professional priesthood in both Mesopotamia and Egypt included*

KJV The King James Version, known in Britain as the Authorized Version (1611)

ASV American Standard Version (1901)

NASB New American Standard Bible

³ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 13:1.

*instruction in the interpretation of dreams and other omens (see the appearance of wise men, mediums and astrologers in Gen 41:8 and Dan 2:4–11).*⁴

- f. Verse 3:
- g. Don't listen.
- h. The Lord is testing you.
- i. The Lord is trying to see if they love the Lord with all their heart and soul.
- j. Verse 4 is about what they should do: *You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.*
- k. Follow Him...
- l. Fear Him...
- m. Keep His...
- n. Listen to Him...
- o. Serve Him...
- p. Cling to Him...

One source shares:

*It is evident from this, "that however great the importance attached to signs and wonders, they were not to be regarded among the Israelites, either as the highest test, or as absolutely decisive, but that there was a certainty in Israel, which was so much the more certain and firm than any proof from miracles could be, that it might be most decidedly opposed to it" (Baumgarten). This certainty, however, was not "the knowledge of Jehovah," as B. supposes; but as Luther correctly observes, "the word of God, which had already been received, and confirmed by its own signs," and which the Israelites were to preserve and hold fast, without adding or subtracting anything. "In opposition to such a word, no prophets were to be received, although they rained signs and wonders; not even an angel from heaven, as Paul says in Gal. 1:8." The command to hearken to the prophets whom the Lord would send at a future time (Deut. 18:18ff.), is not at variance with this: for even their announcements were to be judged according to the standard of the fixed word of God that had been already given; and so far as they proclaimed anything new, the fact that what they announced did not occur was to be the criterion that they had not spoken in the name of the Lord, but in that of other gods (Deut. 18:21, 22), so that even there the signs and wonders of the prophets are not made the criteria of their divine mission.*⁵

- q. Verse 5, put to death that false prophet.
- r. The NET Bible shares: *The severity of the judgment here (i.e., capital punishment) is because of the severity of the sin, namely, high treason against the Great King. Idolatry is a violation of the first two commandments (Deut 5:6–10) as well as the spirit and intent of the Shema (Deut 6:4–5).*⁶
- s. Notice that the Lord is modified with the history of how He led them out of Egypt.

⁴ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 13:1–5.

⁵ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, [*Commentary on the Old Testament*](#), vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 914.

⁶ Biblical Studies Press, [*The NET Bible First Edition Notes*](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 13:4–5.

- t. Verse 5: purge the evil.
- u. This is all keeping Israel from corruption.
 - i. → 1 cor 5:13 says to purge the evil
 - ii. → 1 cor 5 is about getting rid of sin.
 - iii. In the Old Testament it was to stone someone.
 - iv. In the New Testament it was to deliver them over to the world.

II. Chapter 13:6-11: family leading you astray

“If your brother, your mother’s son, or your son or daughter, or the wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods’ (whom neither you nor your fathers have known, ⁷ of the gods of the peoples who are around you, near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end), ⁸ you shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him. ⁹ But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. ¹⁰ So you shall stone him to death because he has sought to seduce you from the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ¹¹ Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such a wicked thing among you.

- a. This is now the second example.
- b. This is:
 - a. Your brother
 - b. Your mother’s son: The NET Bible shares: *your brother, the son of your mother.* “In a polygamous society it was not rare to have half brothers and sisters by way of a common father and different mothers.”⁷
 - c. Your son
 - d. Your daughter
 - e. The wife, notice the modifier, “you cherish”
 - f. Your close friend

Cross Reference:

Dt 17:2–7 Suppose a man or woman is discovered among you—in one of your villages that the LORD your God is giving you—who sins before the Lord your God and breaks his covenant ^{17:3} by serving other gods and worshipping them—the sun, moon, or any other heavenly bodies which I have not permitted you to worship. ^{17:4} When it is reported to you and you hear about it, you must investigate carefully. If it is indeed true that such a disgraceful thing is being done in Israel, ^{17:5} you must bring to your city gates that man or woman who has done this wicked thing—that very man or woman—and you must stone that person to death. ^{17:6} At the testimony of two or three witnesses they must be executed. They cannot be put to death on the testimony of only one witness. ^{17:7} The witnesses must be first to begin the execution, and then all the people are to join in afterward. In this way you will purge evil from among you.

Dt 29:18 Beware that the heart of no man, woman, clan, or tribe among you turns away from the LORD our God today to pursue and serve the gods of those nations; beware that there is among you no root producing poisonous and bitter fruit.

Pr 1:10 My child, if sinners try to entice you, do not consent!

⁷ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 13:6.

Dt 7:2 *and he delivers them over to you and you attack them, you must utterly annihilate them. Make no treaty with them and show them no mercy!*

- c. Any of these people entice you.
- d. They do this secretly:
- e. Let us go and serve other gods.
- f. Notice again, as in verse 2, they do not know these gods.
- g. Their fathers did not know these gods either.
- h. Verse 7, these gods could be near or far, even across the globe;
- i. Don't yield
- j. Don't listen
- k. Don't pity: maybe when punishment comes. The ESV Study Bible points out: *where Israel is to show no mercy to Canaanite pagans; this treacherous Israelite is to be treated the same way*
- l. Don't spare him: from punishment
- m. Don't conceal him: from punishment
- n. Verse 9: you kill him
- o. Your hand throws the first stone.
- p. Think about this, you are throwing the first stone against a loved one: spouse, child, good friend, sibling.
- q. The NET Bible shares: *Execution by means of pelting the offender with stones afforded a mechanism whereby the whole community could share in it. In a very real sense it could be done not only in the name of the community and on its behalf but by its members (cf. Lev 24:14; Num 15:35; Deut 21:21; Josh 7:25).*⁸

Le 24:14 *“Bring the one who cursed outside the camp, and all who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and the whole congregation is to stone him to death.*

Dt 17:7 *The witnesses must be first to begin the execution, and then all the people are to join in afterward. In this way you will purge evil from among you.*

Dt 19:20 *The rest of the people will hear and become afraid to keep doing such evil among you.*

- r. Verse 10, like verse 5, references God who brought them out of Egypt.
- s. Verse 11: make an example, they want Israel to know so they do not do anything like this.
 - a. → the application is that idolatry is dangerous and a little sin messes up everyone.
 - b. → we cannot compromise even a little.

III. Chapter 13:12-18: a city going into idolatry

⁸ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 13:10.

“If you hear in one of your cities, which the LORD your God is giving you to live in, anyone saying that ¹³some worthless men have gone out from among you and have seduced the inhabitants of their city, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods’ (whom you have not known), ¹⁴then you shall investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly. If it is true and the matter established that this abomination has been done among you, ¹⁵you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it and all that is in it and its cattle with the edge of the sword. ¹⁶Then you shall gather all its booty into the middle of its open square and burn the city and all its booty with fire as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God; and it shall be a ruin forever. It shall never be rebuilt. ¹⁷Nothing from that which is put under the ban shall cling to your hand, in order that the LORD may turn from His burning anger and show mercy to you, and have compassion on you and make you increase, just as He has sworn to your fathers, ¹⁸if you will listen to the voice of the LORD your God, keeping all His commandments which I am commanding you today, and doing what is right in the sight of the LORD your God.

- a. This is the third case study. It begins with “if”
- b. This continues case law
- c. This is an example of a city.
- d. It is a city that the Lord is giving them.
 - a. Notice the city comes from the Lord.
 - b. This is the promised land.
- e. It says, “worthless men...”
- f. The ESV Study Bible points out: *the first two scenarios above assume a lack of success in the attempts to lead Israelites astray. The third scenario is when certain worthless fellows have succeeded in drawing inhabitants of their city away from the Lord.*
- g. Verse 13: other “gods whom you have not known” is written for the third time.
- h. Verse 14: investigate this.
- i. Search it out thoroughly.
- j. Verse 15:
- k. If it is true, then destroy the city, inhabitants and the cattle.
- l. Verse 16:
- m. The city becomes a burnt offering.
- n. The ESV Study Bible points out: *An open square or piazza was a common feature in Israelite cities. A good example is at Beersheba (Iron Age II), where the square measured 258 sq. yards (216 sq. m) and could have held hundreds of people and tons of material. devoted things. Israel was not to keep any of the spoil for themselves. Cf. Achan’s sin ([Josh. 7:10–15](#)).*
- o. It is never to be rebuilt.
- p. Verse 17:
- q. The city is under the ban. The city becomes holy war.
- r. They want this to bring the grace of God back.
- s. *in order that the LORD may turn from His burning anger and show mercy to you, and have compassion on you and make you increase, just as He has sworn to your fathers...*
- t. notice the hope that God will:
 - a. turn from His burning anger
 - b. show mercy
 - c. have compassion
 - d. make you increase
 - e. reminder of the covenant
- u. verse 18:

- v. this is the “If”
- w. if you do this then verse 17
- x. *if you will listen to the voice of the LORD your God, keeping all His commandments which I am commanding you today, and doing what is right in the sight of the LORD your God.*

Jos 8:28 Joshua burned Ai and made it a permanently uninhabited mound (it remains that way to this very day).

Is 17:1 Here is a message about Damascus: “Look, Damascus is no longer a city, it is a heap of ruins!

Is 25:2 Indeed, you have made the city into a heap of rubble, the fortified town into a heap of ruins; the fortress of foreigners is no longer a city, it will never be rebuilt.

Je 49:2 Because you did that, I, the LORD, affirm that a time is coming when I will make Rabbah, the capital city of Ammon, hear the sound of the battle cry. It will become a mound covered with ruins. Its villages will be burned to the ground. Then Israel will take back its land from those who took their land from them. I, the Lord, affirm it!

Ex 32:12 Why should the Egyptians say, ‘For evil he led them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger, and relent of this evil against your people.

Nu 25:4 The LORD said to Moses, “Arrest all the leaders of the people, and hang them up before the LORD in broad daylight, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel.”

Dt 30:3 the LORD your God will reverse your captivity and have pity on you. He will turn and gather you from all the peoples among whom he has scattered you.

Dt 7:13 He will love and bless you, and make you numerous. He will bless you with many children, with the produce of your soil, your grain, your new wine, your oil, the offspring of your oxen, and the young of your flocks in the land which he promised your ancestors to give you.