DEUTERONOMY

Chapter 13

*Worshiping Other Gods*

**If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, 2 and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he 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. 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, because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you. 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 fathers 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 him or listen to him. Show him no pity. Do not spare him or shield him. 9 You must certainly put him to death. Your hand must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people. 10 Stone him to death, because he 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. 12 If you hear it said about one of the towns the Lord your God is giving you to live in 13 that wicked men 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. 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. Destroy it completely, both its people and its livestock. 16 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. It is to remain a ruin forever, never to be rebuilt. 17 None of those condemned things shall be found in your hands, so that the Lord will turn from his fierce anger; he will show you mercy, have compassion on you, and increase your numbers, as he promised on oath to your forefathers, 18 because you obey the Lord your God, keeping all his commands that I am giving you today and doing what is right in his eyes.**

**13:1–5** Eventual fulfillment is one test of true prophecy (18:21–22), but the people were not to be misled even if the sign or wonder of a prophet who advocates going after other gods comes to pass. A teacher of false doctrine is to be shunned although he may claim to perform miracles (cf. Mt 24:24; Rev 19:20). (CSB)

**13:1** *a prophet or a dreamer of dreams*. Someone claiming to have received a word or vision from God. Luther: “One must rest wholly on the Word alone and shut out everything from eyes and senses, because when the Word is lost, God is lost. It is better to lose friends, brothers, saints, mighty ones, and everything than to lose God” (AE 9:129). (TLSB)

*gives you a sign*. Chemnitz: “No miracles can prevail against the doctrine which has been revealed by God” (*LTh* 2:700). (TLSB)

**13:3** *testing.* See note on Ge 22:1. (CSB)

Cypr: “Unless the battle has preceded, there cannot be a victory: … the crown is given to the victors. For the helmsman is recognized in the tempest; in the warfare the soldier is proved” (*ANF* 5:472). (TLSB)

*to know whether you love*. The Lord wanted people to trust His Word and to grow in their love for Him, and so warned them against placing their trust in signs or wonders. Similar warnings are given by Jesus (Mt 7:15–20) and by St Paul (Gal 1:6–9). (TLSB)

*all your heart.* See note on 4:29. (CSB)

**13:4** *hold fast.* See note on 10:20. (CSB)

**13:5** *prophet … must be put to death.* See 18:20; Jer 28:15–17. (CSB)

*You must purge the evil from among you.* Repeated in 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 24; 24:7, and quoted in 1Co 5:13. The purpose was to eliminate the evildoers as well as the evil itself. (CSB)

God called His people to be intolerant toward those whose teaching would destroy their community and threaten their future (cf 12:31). Cypr: “Let no one, beloved brethren, make you to err from the ways of the Lord; let no one snatch you, Christians, from the Gospel of Christ” (*ANF* 5:318). (TLSB)

**13:6** *wife you embrace*. The person who is closest to you, who can speak to you in a whisper. (TLSB)

**13:9** *Your hand shall be first*. The person who made the accusation was responsible to effect the punishment. This shows the seriousness with which the temptation of idolatry was treated; it also served to protect the innocent against false accusation by forcing the accuser to take personal and public responsibility for the denunciation. (TLSB)

*afterward* … *all*. By taking part in the punishment, the whole community was to confirm the rightness of the law and of the verdict against the guilty. It was illegal to put a person to death without a public hearing or on the evidence of one witness. Cf 17:5–6. (TLSB)

**13:13** *wicked.* See 1Sa 1:16; 2:12; 25:17. The same Hebrew word is also used, e.g., in 1Sa 10:27; 30:22 (“troublemakers”); 1Ki 21:10, 13 (“scoundrels”); Pr 6:12 (“scoundrel”). Later, this word (*Belial* in Hebrew) was used as a name for Satan (2Co 6:15), who is the personification of wickedness and lawlessness. (CSB)

Traditionally rendered “children of Belial”; lit, “sons of worthlessness.” I.e., troublemakers, people who maliciously incite chaos and murder by false report and false teaching. Cf 1Sm 10:27; 2Co 6:15. (TLSB)

**13:14** *abomination*. Describes a thing or action that is opposed to right worship of God or something at odds with right living as God’s people. Cf 7:25, 26; 17:1; 27:15; 32:16. (TLSB)

**13:15** *Destroy it completely.* See note on 2:34. (CSB)

**13:16** *It shall not be built again*. The city would be a tell—a heap of ruins that would witness to the Lord’s just wrath. (TLSB)

**12:29–13:18** The Lord warns His people to fear Him, especially when they are tempted to worship the gods and follow the abominable customs of the people whose land they are to possess. Those who oppose God can draw many followers through their displays of power and spectacle. God’s Word gives us His solemn and binding promises. God means what He says: In Christ, your sins are forgiven. In Christ, you will find life to the full. In Christ, you will be free to love others as you love yourself. • Father, by the leading of Your Holy Spirit, let me always trust in Your Son, my Lord Jesus Christ. Only in Him can I find the light, the truth, and the peace that I need. Amen. (TLSB)