

# DEUTERONOMY

## Chapter 13

**“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘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, and 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 taught rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst<sup>6</sup> “If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife you embrace or your friend who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ which neither you nor your fathers have known, 7 some of the gods of the peoples who are around you, whether near you or far off from you, from the one end of the earth to the other, 8 you shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him. 9 But you shall kill him. Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. 10 You shall stone him to death with stones, because he sought to draw you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 11 And all Israel shall hear and fear and never again do any such wickedness as this among you. 12 “If you hear in one of your cities, which the LORD your God is giving you to dwell there, 13 that certain worthless fellows have gone out among you and have drawn away the inhabitants of their city, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ which you have not known, 14 then you shall inquire and make search and ask diligently. And behold, if it be true and certain that such an abomination has been done among you, 15 you shall surely put the inhabitants of that city to the sword, devoting it to destruction,<sup>[c]</sup> all who are in it and its cattle, with the edge of the sword. 16 You shall gather all its spoil into the midst of its open square and burn the city and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God. It shall be a heap forever. It shall not be built again. 17 None of the devoted things shall stick to your hand, that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of his anger and show you mercy and have compassion on you and multiply you, as he swore to your fathers, 18 if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, keeping all his commandments that I am commanding you today, and doing what is right in the sight of the LORD your God.**

**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*. Cyr: “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)

**13:5** *You must purge the evil in from your misdt*. 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). Cyr: “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** *other gods*. 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)

**13:16** *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)