

CHAPTER 13

INTRODUCTION TO DEUTERONOMY 13

In this chapter the Israelites are taught how to discern a false prophet, shun and punish him, (⁶¹³¹Deuteronomy 13:1-5), what to do with enticers to idolatry, not only not to consent to them, but, without favour and affection to them, endeavour to bring them to just punishment, and be the first that should inflict it on them, (⁶¹³⁶Deuteronomy 13:6-11) and how to behave towards a city drawn into idolatry, as to inquire the truth of it; then make war against it; destroy all in it, men, women, children, and cattle; and burn the spoil of it, and suffer not anything at all belonging to it to cleave unto them, (⁶¹³²Deuteronomy 13:12-18).

Ver. 1. *If there arise among you a prophet*, etc.] A false prophet, a lying prophet, as the Targum of Jonathan; one that pretends to be a true prophet, and to be sent of God, and to come from him with a message from him, a new revelation or doctrine, or in his name, to foretell things to come; the former is chiefly meant. Such prophets did arise in Israel before the time of Christ, and have since arose under the Christian name; (see ⁶¹¹¹2 Peter 2:1),

or a dreamer of dreams; the same with the prophet, only to be distinguished by the different manner of their having the mind and will of God revealed to them, pretended to; either by vision or by dream, which were the two usual ways in which the Lord spake to the true prophets, (⁶¹¹⁶Numbers 12:6) so that the prophet is one who pretended he had a vision from the Lord, and the dreamer one that had a dream from him, or something revealed to him in a dream; and dreams are sometimes used for false doctrines, vain, deceitful, and illusory; (see ²⁴²⁵Jeremiah 23:25-28). The Targum of Jonathan calls him

“a dreamer of a dream of pride:”

such persons are generally prompted by the pride of their own hearts to take such a method to make themselves famous and respected among men; and usually bring such doctrines with them which are agreeable to the pride and vanity of human nature:

and giving thee a sign or a wonder; for the confirmation of his mission and doctrine; such as Moses wrought before the children of Israel and before Pharaoh. Signs are expressions or representations of things to come to pass; wonders, such as either do, or seem to exceed the common course of nature, or be contrary to it.

Ver. 2. *And the sign and wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee,* etc.] The sign he promised to give, or the miracle he proposed to do, to show the reality of his mission, and the truth of his doctrine, which is performed, or seemingly performed, by legerdemain, by magic art, or by the help of the devil; which the Lord sometimes suffered for the trial of the faith and obedience of his people, and for the hardening of others in their unbelief, and which issues in their destruction; (see ^{<STR>}2 Thessalonians 2:9-12),

saying, let us go after other gods (which thou hast not known), and let us serve them; other gods besides the one living and true God, the Creator of all things; strange gods, the idols of the people, as the Targum of Jonathan; such as they had never heard of, nor had any knowledge of, nor any benefit from, as they had of the Lord their God. Now the doctrines of these, and of their worship, are what the false prophet or dreamer is supposed to come with, and inculcate into the minds of the people; and for the confirmation of which, and in order to draw them into the reception of them, and act according to them, he proposed to give a sign or wonder.

Ver. 3. *Thou shall not hearken to the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams,* etc.] Even though he does give the sign, and work the wonder; for it might be reasonably concluded there must be fallacy in him, and that neither he nor his miraculous sign could come from God, who would never send a person to enable him to do signs and wonders, to persuade men to believe and act contrary to a former declaration of his mind and will; to break a plain law of his, as in (^{<STR>}Deuteronomy 5:7-9), this would be to contradict and deny himself; whatever therefore is contrary to a known law or established doctrine, either of law or Gospel, let it come from whom it will, or pretend to be confirmed by miracles, is not to be received; (see ^{<STR>}Galatians 1:8,9),

for the Lord your God proveth you, whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul; for should they be prevailed upon by such a prophet to hearken to his doctrine, and embrace it, and act according to it, it would be a plain case that they did not cordially love the

Lord, since they could so easily, and by such pretences, be drawn aside from the true worship of him, and serve other gods; on the other hand, it would be a proof of their sincere affection for God, and of their close and strict attachment to him, that notwithstanding such specious pretences made, and such miracles wrought, yet abode by him and his worship, and could not be wrought upon to forsake him and follow other gods and serve them; (see ^{<4119>}1 Corinthians 11:19).

Ver. 4. *Ye shall walk after the Lord your God*, etc.] As he has directed, according to the laws and rules which he has given, both with respect to their moral and civil conduct, and their religious worship of him; and so the Targum of Jonathan,

“ye shall walk after the worship of the Lord your God:”

and fear him, and keep his commandments; fear to offend him, and so keep his commandments; or keep his commandments from or through fear; not a servile but a filial one, a reverential affection for him; this is the whole duty of man, (^{<2123>}Ecclesiastes 12:13),

and obey his voice; in his word, or by his prophets and ministers: it may very well be understood of the voice of Christ, the Angel that went before them, whose voice they were continually to hearken to and obey, (^{<1221>}Exodus 23:21,22)

and you shall serve him, and cleave unto him; it may respect all religious worship, both private and public; the Targum of Jonathan restrains it to prayer, but it not only includes that, but all other acts of piety and devotion, and which are to be constantly performed and not departed from; for so to do is to cleave to the Lord as a man to his wife, or a woman to her husband, in which conjugal relation God and his people Israel were, he was an husband unto them, and to do otherwise is to go a whoring from him after other gods.

Ver. 5. *And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death*, etc.] Which death, according to the Targum of Jonathan, was to be killed with the sword:

because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God; or “spoken revolt against the Lord”^{f126}, high treason against him, delivering out doctrine that tends to cause his subjects to rebel against him, and revolt from him; and therefore he is justly deserving of death, to draw off a

people from him he had been so good and kind unto; so that to apostasy would be added the sin of ingratitude:

which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage; and so was not only their Lord by creation whom they ought to serve, but by redemption, which laid them under double obligation to serve him:

to thrust thee out of the way which the Lord thy God commanded thee to walk in; not by external force, but by the power of persuasion, by enticing words and arguments:

so shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee; the evil man, by putting him to death, and the evil of idolatry, by not listening to the words of the false prophet.

Ver. 6. *If thy brother, the son of thy mother*, etc.] A brother by mother's side, which is generally supposed to be the nearest relation, at least most out of question, so more liable to be regarded as being beloved:

or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom; most dearly beloved by him, as indeed each of these relations are by a man, there being none nearer or dearer to him:

or thy friend, which [is] as thine own soul; as dear to him as himself, and so strictly united in friendship, as if one soul dwelt in two bodies; such close friends were Jonathan and David, (~~OR~~ 1 Samuel 18:1). Some Jewish writers think the father is not mentioned, because of the reverence of him, with which all later dealings with him obliged to would seem inconsistent; but the reverence of God is to be preferred to the reverence of parents; and besides, if such near relations that are here mentioned, than which there are none nearer, are not to be spared if guilty of the sin after warned against, then not a father, who is in the same transgression:

entice thee secretly; when alone with him, which might be judged the most proper time to work upon him, there being none to oppose the enticer, or to assist the enticed; so Satan took the opportunity of Eve being alone when he attacked her with his temptation, and the same method is taken by his children:

saying, let me go and serve other gods which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers; not even their immediate ancestors, and so the calf was not

of these gods; nor their more remote ancestors, as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who were no idolaters; nor even Terah, though he was one, yet the gods of the Canaanites and of the neighbouring nations, which seem to be here meant, at least principally, were such that he knew not. This circumstance may seem to carry in it an argument rather why they should not than why they should serve such gods; wherefore the words of the enticer seem to be only these,

let us go and serve other gods, and what follows are the words of the Lord, descriptive of those gods, and so a dissuasive from serving them.

Ver. 7. *Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you*, etc.] As of the Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, and Phoenicians:

nigh unto thee; as the above were, being on the borders of their land: the Targum of Jonathan interprets this of the idols of the seven nations, that is, of the land of Canaan: or

far off from thee; as the Babylonians, Persians, and others:

from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; which includes all the idols in the world, worshipped by whatsoever nation, and which were forbidden; and which shows the universality of idolatry in those times, and that that is an insufficient argument in its favour. Jarchi interprets this of the sun and moon, and the host of heaven, who go from one end of the world to the other; and this seems to have been the first and most common idolatry of the Gentile world, and which were worshipped in the several deities they set up.

Ver. 8. *Thou shalt not consent unto him*, etc.] To commit the idolatry enticed unto, or join with him in it:

nor hearken to him; not so much as patiently to hear him, but at once express an abhorrence of and indignation at what he recommends:

neither shall thine eye pity him; pitied he might be for his ignorance, stupidity, and wickedness, and on account of the miserable estate and condition he was in, and of those dreadful consequences which would follow upon it, if not converted from it; but no mercy was to be shown him on account of nearness of relation:

neither shall thou spare; to reprove him sharply and to expose him to public vengeance:

neither shall thou conceal him; neither him nor his sin, but make both public, acquaint others with it, and endeavour to bring him before the civil magistrate to be examined, tried, and judged; so far should they be from hiding his offence from others, or excusing and extenuating it, or from harbouring his person privately when sought for upon information.

Ver. 9. *But thou shalt surely kill him*, etc.] Not privately and secretly, when and where he entices, nor the enticed himself by his own authority, but after being examined, judged, and condemned by the civil magistrate; and none might judge a false prophet but the sanhedrim at Jerusalem, the sanhedrim of seventy one ^{f127}; (see ^{<02033>}Luke 13:33), but the difficulty is how such an one could be convicted, since the affair was transacted secretly, (^{<02136>}Deuteronomy 13:6) and there were none present to be witnesses, none but the enticer and the enticed; so that either the enticer must be brought to a confession of his guilt, or the testimony of the enticed alone must be taken. The Jewish doctors say ^{f128}, that they laid in wait for the enticer, which they never did for any other person, and the method they took was this; the enticed brought two persons, and put them behind a hedge, so that they might see the enticer, and hear his words, and he not see them; and he said to the enticer, say what thou hast said to me privately; which said, the enticed answered to him, how shall we leave our God which is in heaven, and go and serve wood and stone? if he returned (from his evil) hereby, or was silent, he was free; but if he said unto him, so we are obliged, and thus it is comely for us; they that stood afar off, behind the hedge (or in a dark room), brought him to the sanhedrim, and stoned him, that is, after examination, trial, judgment, and condemnation:

thine hand shall be first upon him, to put him to death; he was to throw the first stone at him, partly to show his indignation against the sin he had enticed him to, and that it had not at all affected him so as to incline him unto it; and partly to show that he had bore a true testimony, of which a suspicion might have been created in the minds of some, had he been backward to the execution of him:

and afterwards the hand of all the people; who then could proceed with more certainty and satisfaction: this shows that the person enticed had not a right to kill the enticer, without a judicial process, and the order of the civil magistrate.

Ver. 10. *And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die,* etc.] It was not sufficient to answer the end of the law to cast a few stones at him, but he was to be stoned to death:

because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God; to compel by force of argument, or the dint of persuasion, to relinquish the profession of the true God, faith in him, and the worship of him:

which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; which aggravated the sin of the enticer, and would have made the sin of the enticed the more heinous had he fallen into it.

Ver. 11. *And all Israel shall hear, and fear,* etc.] Shall hear of the death the enticer was put unto, and shall fear to act such a part he did, and be upon their guard against any such person, and be cautious that they are not drawn into sin by him:

and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you; either to entice unto idolatry or commit it; which is a piece of wickedness against the first table of the law, and a very heinous one, and exceeding offensive and provoking to God, being so directly against his being, perfections, and glory.

Ver. 12. *If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities,* etc.] A report concerning them, anyone of them:

which the Lord thy God had given thee to dwell there; which he had not only given them, but had put them into the possession of, and it was become their dwelling place, or was inhabited by Israelites; otherwise they were already given unto them, but did not inherit and inhabit them, and it might be possible that there might be some city or cities, at least for a time, which, though given them, were not inhabited by them, but by the Canaanites, and such cities this law did not concern: saying; as follows.

Ver. 13. *Certain men, the children of Belial,* etc.] Which signify either persons without a yoke, who have thrown off the yoke of God's law, and will not submit to it, or unprofitable ones, as wicked men be, both to God, themselves, and others:

are gone out from among you; not locally, but with respect to their religious sentiments and practices, having separated themselves from the

people of God, and from the service of the sanctuary, the true worship of God, and a profession of it, and given into the worship of idols:

and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city; withdrawn them by the force of persuasion from the worship of the true God, and drawn them into idolatry:

saying, let us go and serve other gods; unite as one man in the worship of the gods of the Gentiles:

which ye have not known; this was not said by the children of Belial, but is added by the Lord by way of explanation, showing what gods they were that these men advised them to serve, and confirms the observation made on (⁴⁵¹³⁶Deuteronomy 13:6).

Ver. 14. *Then shalt thou inquire, make search, and ask diligently*, etc.] That is, of the witnesses, as the Targum of Jonathan; and this is a case that is only taken into consideration and judged of by the great sanhedrim, or that of seventy one, at Jerusalem^{f129}; and the method they took was this, when it fell under their cognizance: the great sanhedrim send and inquire and search till they know clearly that the whole city, or the greater part of it, are thrust away, and are turned to idolatry; after that they send two disciples of the wise men to admonish them and bring them back; if they return and repent, it is well, but if they continue in their folly, the sanhedrim order all Israel to go up against them to war, and they besiege them, and set themselves in battle array against them, until the city be broken up; and when it is broken up, immediately they set up many courts of judicature, and they judge them; and against whomsoever two witnesses come that he served idols, after they have admonished him they separate him; if all the worshippers be the fewest, they stone them, and the rest of the city are delivered; if they are found the greater number, they bring them to the great sanhedrim, and finish their judgment there, and they slay all those that have served with the sword:

and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain; that such wicked men have risen and have prevailed upon the inhabitants of the city where they live, to leave the worship of the true God, and go into idolatry, when there is full proof of this, and it is past all question that

such abomination is wrought among you; as idolatry is, which is an abomination to God, and ought to be so to all mankind, and especially to a people that profess his name.

Ver. 15. *Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword*, etc.] This could not be the work of a single person, nor of the whole sanhedrim, but was what the whole nation was to join in, according to the above note:

destroying it utterly; pulling down the houses, and demolishing its walls and fortifications, or burning it, as afterwards explained:

and all that is therein; men, women, and children:

and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword; this severity was used to show the Lord's indignation against the sin of idolatry, and to deter persons from it, both individuals and bodies of men.

Ver. 16. *And thou shall gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof*, etc.] All the wealth and substance of the inhabitants, their household goods, shop goods, merchandise, utensils in trade and business, and everything that can be named. The Jews say ^{f130}, if there is no street, they make one (or a marketplace); if that is without it, they bring them into the midst of it:

and shall burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit; be it what it may, or let it be whose property it will; and all this shall be done for the Lord thy God; as by his appointment and command, and in obedience to him, so for his honour and glory, and the vindication of his righteous law;

and it shall be an heap for ever, it shall not be built again; but lie a waste as Jericho, though not an entire waste; for according to the Jewish writers, though it might not be built as it was before, it might be made into gardens and orchards ^{f131}.

Ver. 17. *And there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand*, etc.] That is, they might not take anything whatever to their own use; for all being devoted to destruction, was cursed, and brought a curse upon the man that should make it his own property, as Achan did, when Jericho was destroyed:

that the Lord may turn from the fierceness of his anger; stirred up by the idolatry of the city:

and show thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee; who, seeing wrath gone forth, might dread the consequences, lest it should spread itself further:

and multiply thee, as he hath sworn to thy fathers; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; this is observed to encourage them to execute his orders punctually in the destruction of the idolatrous city; since God could and would multiply them, as he had promised their fathers, with an oath, so that they should not be the fewer by such an instance of his severity.

Ver. 18. *When thou shalt hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God*, etc.] Not only in this case, but in all others:

to keep all his commandments which I command thee this day: the repetition of which he made unto them, and enjoined the observance of them in the name of the Lord:

to do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord thy God; which they would do, if they kept the commandments of the Lord, which are holy, just, and good, and must be right in his sight because commanded by him.