

Bible Study – Deuteronomy Chapter 13 – The Second Law

In the last study, we were introduced to the idea of fidelity and its relationship to the first law of the Mosaic covenant. It was important that the Lord God, Yahweh, be the only object of worship for the Israelites. As the Israelites conquered the inhabitants of the Promised Land, they were to destroy all the foreign objects and places of worship. This was not only meant to show that these were wrong objects of worship, but it was also meant to protect Israel from any temptation to follow these false gods. In today's study, we will see the threats that come from within the nation of Israel that will prevent its people from worshipping the one true God and how apostasy relates to the second commandment (Deuteronomy 5:8-10).

Read Deuteronomy 12:32 – 13:18

Moses starts off with a reminder to obey everything that has been said, while stating nothing is to be added or taken away from his preaching. He then goes on to warn Israel about individuals who may try to lead Israel astray in their worship of the true Lord God. He warns of the prophet or dreamer of dreams (v.1-5), who will openly entice them; the family member or individuals who are close to the Israelite (v.6-11) who will secretly entice them; and certain individuals from a city who openly incite rebellion against the Lord God (v.12-18). The punishment is death for those who try to lead Israel astray in their worship.

Q. Why do you think the penalty for idolatry or apostasy (the abandonment or renunciation of a religious belief) was so severe?

- “In the ancient suzerainty treaties, it was required of the vassal that he must not connive at evil words spoken against the suzerain, whether they amounted to an affront or to a conspiracy. The vassal must report the insult or the fomenting of revolt. In case of active rebellion, he must undertake military measures against the offenders. Moreover, he must manifest fidelity to his lord in such cases no matter who the rebel might be, whether prince or nearest relative” Kline, “Deuteronomy”, pg. 172
- If the suzerain did not address the rebellion that was occurring, they would a) lose the authority over their captured people or b) would be overthrown themselves and could become a conquered people instead.
- Death was to be a deterrent or warning to others regarding the punishment for doing participating in such acts
- If/when Israel turned their back to the Lord God, they would be treated the same way as the Canaanite nation, which was annihilation.
- This would be God exacting justice based on his covenant with Israel

Q. In verses 1-5, it talks about the prophet or dreamer of dreams who does miraculous signs and wonders. Why should signs and wonders not be the only evidence of truth or God's hand (2 Thessalonians 2:9)? What else needs to accompany the signs and wonders as evidence they are from God (Isaiah 8:19-20)? The allowance of false prophets was to test Israel (v. 3b-4). What are some practical ways we can pass this test (2 Timothy 2:15)? How do we discern if prophets (or pastors) are from God (1 John 4:1-3; Deuteronomy 18:22; 2 Peter 1:20-21)?

- The passage warns of a prophet who performs signs and wonders AND tells their followers to go after other gods, that Israel was not to listen to these individuals
- Definition of a prophet to follow:
- A prophet was called by God to be a prophet (see Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1)
 - Source of the message is that “the word of the Lord came” to the prophet (Jeremiah 1:2; Ezekiel 1:3; Hosea 1:1) or an “oracle” (Isaiah 13:1; Habakkuk 1:1; Numbers 24:16)

- Isaiah 8:19-20 – The only source of truth should be from the word of God. In this context, Israel is seeking advice and wisdom from the dead concerning the living, which doesn't make sense. Instead, they were to consult the word of God (which is what a prophet should teach from)
 - Point of this verse is that the word of God should be the only source of truth and nothing else. If others preach from anywhere else concerning God, then it has no value
- Jesus warns about false prophets (Mark 13:14-22; 1 Peter 2:1-3)
- 2 Timothy 2:15 – correctly handles the word of truth
- In order to spot a counterfeit, you need to study the real thing
 - One step is to study the bible and judge all teaching by what the Scripture says
- Therefore, we need to be grounded in the word in order to test what is right and wrong when teaching comes
- Also, know God's truth as He has revealed
- Similar to the Bereans (Acts 17:11), testing the word that was spoken against the Scriptures they knew in order to validate what was being preached
- Tests to apply to teachers of the word:
 - What does this teacher say about Jesus?
 - 1 John 2:22 – Must teach that Jesus is equal with God, upholds the importance Jesus' sacrificial death, and accepts Jesus' humanity – See 2 John 9
 - Does this teacher preach the Gospel?
 - Must be the whole Gospel – (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Galatians 1:7,9)
 - Does this teacher exhibit character qualities that glorify the Lord?
 - Jude 11 – False teachers known for their pride, greed, and rebellion
 - Matthew 7:15-20 – Known by their (bad) fruits
- The test was originally given to see whether the Israelites loved God with all their heart and soul (v.3), if we are likewise being tested, a pre-emptive defense is to seek to grow in our sanctification and love for God in addition to our knowledge of His word so that we will not only know right from wrong but we will also have no appetite for anyone else other than Him, nothing else should hold any appeal for us.
- Though we may have these tools, it takes vigilance as Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) and his ministers masquerade as servants of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:15)
- 1 John 4:1-3 – Testing the spirits to see if they testify that Christ has come in the flesh and is God
- Deuteronomy 18:22 – If words are spoken in the name of the Lord does not come to pass, then they are not from God. God is truth and if he says something, it will surely come to pass
- 2 Peter 1:20-21 – No prophecy comes from man, but God only through the Holy Spirit

Q. In verses 6-11, it talks about those who were part of the Israelite family, those by nature (parents and children) and those who were chosen (spouse and close friend). What are some ways that family and friends can make you worship other gods? For Christians, will you remain loyal to God in spite of how your family and friends may draw you away from God (Luke 14:26; Matthew 10:35-37)?

- Using allegiance to another identity (e.g. those of the Muslim faith and converting – told this is who they are meant to be)
- Opposition from family members and friends (e.g. those converting from Islam are threatened with isolation, along with a ceasing of any support, including financial)
- Using guilt tactics to coerce their allegiance to God (e.g. "if you love your mother, you will listen to her on this matter")
- Luke 14:26; Matthew 10:35-37 – If you don't put God ahead of your family, then you are not worthy to be a disciple of Christ
- In this passage, the point here is that even though family is held in high regard, when it comes to the allegiance to the Lord God, he should always come first.

- This is a tough passage as there is a thought to balance honouring one's parents, but also being loyal to the Lord God

Q. In verses 12-18, it talks about cities who no longer worship the Lord God. Why do you think there was a need to investigate and confirm the idolatry first? What would be the impact to the town if they were to worship other gods? How is the destruction like a burnt offering to God (Leviticus 1)?

- Since this was a serious undertaking, the people needed to be sure that apostasy has happened to the whole city, rather than just a select few, which could be dealt with in a different way
- If they did worship other gods beside Yahweh, they would be on the receiving end of God's justice
- God would need to satisfy his covenant rules by punishing them
- This type of mass apostasy was serious enough that it required a restoration of a proper standing before God through propitiation (appeasing of God)
- It was similar to a burnt offering in that the entire city was to be consumed (e.g. all its people, animals, and assets) as nothing was to be spared or to be taken away (Leviticus 1:9)
 - This was necessary for two reasons
 - One is that it was to be a sign and deterrent to others of what would happen if the city turned away from God and worshipped another
 - The other is it prevented other Israelite tribes from plundering cities under the guise of apostasy.
- Also, the city was never to be rebuilt

Q. In each instance of idolatry committed by each party, the punishment is death or utter destruction. Why is death not an option today? How are Christians to deal with those who would lead us astray into worshipping other gods (2 John 7-11; Ephesians 4:15; Romans 16:17; Matthew 15:14)? What would help you to remain loyal to God?

- Need to see it in the context of church and state being one and not separate entities
- Israel was tied to the land and so the laws governing the land, given by the Lord God, needed to be followed
- As Christians, we are not tied to a land, but rather children of God and his kingdom, which is not of this world (John 18:36)
- In further examples in history, we see that people who were deemed heretics were burned at the stake, however, church and state at that time were still one entity
- In today's context, church and state are separate, with the state given the authority to punish its citizens for crimes as defined by its laws, not the churches (though there would be some overlap)
- It is the work of the Spirit that changes people and brings us to God
- It is the Christian's responsibility to say something to those who try to entice you, and to do it in a loving way
- 2 John 7-11 – Do not receive or entreat the false teachers or else you may be thought of taking part in their false teachings
- Ephesians 4:15 – To speak the truth in love, explaining the "correct" Gospel to them in the hope that they will see the error of their ways, though usually false teachers are fairly entrenched in their ways. This is more for those who are 'misguided'.
- Romans 16:17 – Avoid these teachers if at all possible
- Matthew 15:14 – Ignore them and do not engage with them. They will meet their demise on their own.
- Reflect on his supremacy

The previous chapters focused on the Canaanites who would turn the hearts of the Israelites when they began to conquer the Promised Land. In this chapter, the focus is on those within the community. Moses warns the Israelites that these threats must be dealt with swiftly and severely, for the sake of their relationship with the Lord God. If allowed to persist and remained unchecked, the Israelites, the chosen people of God for his purposes, would no longer love or serve the Lord God, the who brought them out of Egypt and into the land promised to their forefathers. Therefore, to prevent this from happening, any instances of apostasy would result in death. This was meant to be a warning to others who would willfully try to lead others away from the worship of the Lord God. Today, Christians need to be careful that they do not follow the teachings of just anyone who proclaims to be from God, but rather, to test their words to see if it aligns to what it says in His written word. The devil is a lion on a prowl, waiting to devour us and to lead us away from God. Let us make sure that we are rooted firmly in the word so we can know what is real and what is deception.