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Beware of Idolatry

12:29 to 13:19

Beware if idolatry DIG: What child sacrifice continues on to this day? What three sources of danger were the Israelites to be wary? How was Isra'el to know if a prophet was from YHVH? What were the consequences for being a false prophet? How could idolatry be a test for the Israelites? How could family and friends be a source of temptation? How was a person to respond, and why? What threat does a city turning to idolatry pose? What were the consequences for the city and for Isra'el? What are the limits of Ha'Shem's tolerance?

REFLECT: How does the idolatry among religious teachers, family members, or whole cities apply today? Is one a source of danger to you right now? How so? What can you do about it? How can you know if a person (or teaching) is from God? How do you go about seeking discernment? What do you think should be the "limits of tolerance" for committed believers today? Should these limits be expanded or relaxed, in relation to unbelievers? Why do you think so? How are you going to protect your children in an increasingly secular society?

Beware of idolatry and avoid the path of curses.

After reminding **the nation** of **YHVH's** part in conquering **the Land** of promise, **Moshe** again looks to a future day when **the Israelites** will have driven out the Canaanites, and settled down. At that time, they must be careful not to become enticed by the Canaanite ways and worship **their gods**.³²² **When ADONAI your God cuts off before you the nations that you are going into, when you have dispossessed them and settled in their land, be careful not to be trapped into imitating them after they have been destroyed before you. Do not inquire about their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods? I will do the same." You are not to act like this toward ADONAI your God (12:29-31a)!**



The example given is that of child sacrifice. **For every abomination of ADONAI, which He hates, they have done to their gods - they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods (12:31b).** The Torah described child sacrifice as a capital offense (**Leviticus 18:21 and 20:2-5**), for it was the same as murder in spite of the supposedly religious reason behind it. In spite of the horrible nature of the offense, there are cases of child sacrifice during the later apostate periods of **Israelite** history. Both **Ahaz (Second Chronicles 28:3)** and **Manasseh (Second Kings 21:6)** were guilty of child sacrifice. Just as here in **Deuteronomy**, the crime is described as one that could lead to expulsion from **the Land**, as in fact it happened with the northern Kingdom (**Second Kings 17:17-18**). To assume the right to sacrifice a child was to assume a prerogative that was **God's** alone, the prerogative over human life. In the fullness of time, **ADONAI** exercised that prerogative in the offering of **His one and only Son (John 3:16)**, as a complete sacrifice for the **sins** of mankind.³²³

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for showing us how precious human life is, for you willingly took the punishment for our sins - that all who choose to love and to follow **You** would have the joy of eternal life. **For if you confess with your mouth that Yeshua is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart it is believed for righteousness, and with the mouth it is confessed for salvation (Romans 10:9-10).** Praise **You** that **You** give **Your children (John 1:12)** life for all eternity with **You** in complete peace and joy in heaven.*

*Praise **You** that **You** are the "**King of kings, and Lord of lords,**" much more powerful than all the armies on earth. When **You** come back from heaven, riding on a white horse with the armies of heaven following **You**, **You** will destroy the beast and the false prophet with the **sharp sword** coming out of **Your mouth (Revelation 19:11-20)**. After your thousand-year Millennial reign is over, Satan will be released from his prison to deceive the people and to gather them for battle. **Yeshua** will be victorious and Satan will be thrown into the burning lake. **And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of***

fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are too, and they shall be tortured day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20:10). Praise Your Mighty power! We choose to wisely live our lives here on earth, by loving and following You in the short time we have on earth. In Yeshua's holy name and power of His resurrection. Amen

The emphasis of **Chapter 12** is on protection from outside of **Isra'el**. They were to utterly destroy all the idolatrous nations around them (**12:2**). **They** were to have only one place to worship (**12:5**). **But Chapter 13 addresses various scenarios that could lure Yisra'el into idolatry and shifts to warnings about different three groups of people.**

First, Beware of False Prophets (13:1-6): Whatever I command you, you must take care to do - you are not to add to it or take away from it (**Deuteronomy 13:1**; also see **Revelation 22:18-19**). The line between clarifying Scripture and adding to it is indeed a thin line. But Scripture need not be clarified by listening to someone who thinks they have the gift of prophecy. Scripture is clarified as it is carefully and diligently studied (see the commentary on **Acts**, to see [link click Bb - An Ethiopian Asks about Isaiah 53](#)). There are no shortcuts to interpreting **God's Word** accurately (**Acts 17:11**; **Second Timothy 2:15**).

Believers must not play fast and loose with the issues of inspiration and revelation. An accurate understanding of those doctrines is essential for distinguishing between the voice of **God** and the human voice. **Suppose a prophet or a dreamer of dreams rises up among you and gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder he spoke to you comes true, while saying, "Let's follow other gods" that you have not known, and - "Let's serve them!" (Deuteronomy 13:2-3; also see Second Peter 2:1-2).** That is the way you would know it's a false **prophet**, because a true **prophet** would never try to turn you against **ADONAI**. And a true **prophet** would know **the Word of God** and live by **the Word of God (Matthew 7:18)**. Anyone who claims to be a **prophet** should have their life scrutinized, just like the qualifications for an elder (**First Timothy 3**). They are public persons. Their houses are open for you to come in and see how they live.

A **prophet** speaks for the gods. And what a false **prophet** is doing, is playing **God**! This was the underlying complaint of **Yeshua** to the Pharisees (see the commentary **The Life of Christ HJ - Then Came Hanukkah at Jerusalem and It Was Winter**). Those religious leaders took the place of **God**.

Those false **prophets** have plagued **Isra'el** throughout **her** history as **Jeremiah** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Et - The False Prophet Hananiah**) and **Ezeki'el** have testified. **They** lead the people into believing things that contradict what **the true prophets of God**

were saying. **Ezeki'el** said, **"Precisely because they have led My people astray saying, 'Shalom' when there is no shalom, they build a weak wall, behold, they plaster it over with whitewash" (Ezekiel 13:10).** This will also happen in the future. Paul tells us, **"When they are saying, 'Shalom and safety,' sudden destruction will come upon them like a woman having birth pains in the womb - there is no way they will escape" (First Thessalonians 5:3).** All of this could be put under the heading of the third commandment, **"You must not take the Name of ADONAI your God in vain, for ADONAI will not leave unpunished anyone who takes His Name in vain" (5:11). "For rebellion is like the sin of divination and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry" (First Samuel 15:23).**³²⁴

You must not listen to the words of that false prophet or that dreamer of dreams - for ADONAI your God is testing you, to find out whether you love ADONAI your God with all your heart and with all your soul. The temptation would test the true character of the hearts of **the Israelites**, and while the temptation was genuinely dangerous, the overcoming of that temptation would strengthen **the people** in **their** love of **YHVH** and obedience to **His** mitzvot. This did not mean that the false prophet had any real power, but only that the true **God** would permit certain things to happen in order to **test**, and thereby strengthen **His people**. **You will follow and fear ADONAI your God. His mitzvot you will keep, to His voice you will listen, you will serve and cling to Him (13:4-5).**³²⁵

But what was **Isra'el** to do if one who possessed those gifts invited **the people** to rebel against **YHVH**? The answer was simple: **That prophet or dreamer of dreams must be put to death! For he has spoken falsehood against ADONAI your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to entice you from the way ADONAI your God commanded you to walk. So, you will purge the evil from your midst (13:6).** There is a phrase that we hear many times in the study of **the Torah**. One that is repeated seven times from **Chapters 13 to 24**, **"You will purge the evil from your midst" (13:6, 17:7, 19:19, 21:21, 22:21, 22:24, 24:7).** Paul quoted it in **First Corinthians 5:13** with reference to discipline in the local congregation. We don't stone guilty people in our churches, but we should expel from the congregation any who openly live in **sin** and refuse to repent and obey **the Word of God**. Why? For the same reason the idolater was removed (by death) from the nation of **Isra'el**. **Sin** takes us further than we want to go and costs us more than we want to pay. It is like **hametz**, and when **it's** not purged, **it** will spread and infect the whole body (**First Corinthians 5:6-8; Galatians 5:9**). Just as a surgeon removes cancerous tissue from a patient's body to keep it from spreading, so the local congregation of believers must exercise surgery, no matter how painful, to maintain the spiritual health of the body.

It's remarkable how many otherwise intelligent people study their horoscopes and consult professional "psychics" who claim to have the power to see into the future. If people really had that ability, they would make a great deal of money on the stock market or at the racetrack and wouldn't have to earn a living reading palms, gazing at the stars, or consulting crystal balls. Later in **his** speech, **Moshe** will name specific occult practices that were forbidden to **God's people**, and one of them is consulting Satan in order to know the future (see **Dj - God Hates Sorcery**). **Yeshua** warned about false **prophets**, and Paul and Timothy warned about false **teachers** (**Matthew 7:15-20; Second Corinthians 11:3-4, 11-13; First Timothy 1:6-7; Second Peter 2**).³²⁶

Believers in the Dispensation of Grace (see the commentary on **Hebrews Bp - The Dispensation of Grace**), are also urged to **test the spirits** and judge all supposed prophecies, shunning false **prophets** and heretics (**Acts 17:11; First John 4:1; First Corinthians 14:29**). Once the last book in the Bible was written at the end of the first century, the canon of Scripture was closed and there was no need for any further revelation. **The Ruach ha-Kodesh** had equipped believers with everything they would need to live a victorious life, and the spiritual gift of **prophecy** passed away. There is no continuous revelation.

Second, family members who tempt us to worship idols (13: 7-12): **Moses** turns from false prophets to family members as a potential source for treachery. Now, in ancient Israelite society, ties of kinship were the strongest of all human loyalties. As we see in the fifth commandment (see **Bp - Honor Your Parents**), the family stood at the center of the triangular pattern of the relationships between **God, Isra'el and the Land**. Therefore, moral and legal responsibility to the family was greater than individual freedoms or rights. But, although the family had priority over the individual, covenant loyalty to **ADONAI** had priority over both. Ties to family and friendship must not override covenant justice, and the protection of the whole nation.³²⁷

That being said . . . **suppose your brother - your mother's son - or your son or daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your best friend of your own soul misleads you secretly, saying, 'Let's go and serve other gods' - that you and your fathers have not known, from among the gods of the peoples around you, near you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other. You are not to give in or listen to him, your eye is not to pity him, and you are not to spare or conceal him. Instead, you will surely put him to death.** Surely the family seeking to be loyal to the living God would agonize over one rebellious member living in idolatry. Nevertheless, the person reporting the crime took responsibility for the execution. **Your hand should be the first**

against him to put him to death. Since the accuser was to throw **the first stone**, it would encourage **him** to give serious consideration to the facts and not hastily accuse an innocent person (**First Kings 21**). The method of execution was stoning so that **all the people** could participate and cast **their** votes against the worship of idols. Either one person's **sin** affects the whole nation (**Joshua 7**), or the whole nation must deal with that one person's **sin**.³²⁸ **You are to stone him with stones to death because he tried to entice you away from ADONAI your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery.** This would serve in a preventive role. **Then all Isra'el will hear and be afraid, and never again will they do such an evil thing as this in your midst (13:7-12).**

Yeshua endured this tension and temptation. **He** faced pressure from **His** own family (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Ey - Jesus' Mother and Brothers](#)), and from a close friend (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Ey - Jesus Predicts His Death](#)), who tried to derail **Him** from **His** obedience to **the Father**. And **He** warned **His** apostles that **they** also would face such opposition (**Matthew 10:34-36**). But it is important to stress that neither **Yeshua**, nor **Moses** were, by any stretch of the imagination, *antifamily*. **They** were both passionately *anti-idolatry* and recognized that the family posed one of the toughest and most subtle sources of hidden idolatry, on which many a profession of loyalty to the Kingdom has come to grief.³²⁹

Crimes Allowing the Death Penalty:

1. Premeditated Murder (**Exodus 21:12-14, 22-23**)
2. Kidnapping (**Exodus 21:16; Deuteronomy 24:7**)
3. Striking or Cursing Parents (**Exodus 21:15; Leviticus 20:9; Proverbs 20:20; Matthew 15:4; Mark 7:10**)
4. Sorcery and Divination (**Exodus 22:18**)
5. Bestiality (**Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 20:15-16**)
6. Sacrificing to False Gods (**Exodus 22:20**)
7. Profaning the Sabbath (**Exodus 35:2; Numbers 15:32-36**)
8. Offering a Human Sacrifice (**Leviticus 20:2**)
9. Adultery (**Leviticus 20:2**)
10. Incest (**Leviticus 20:11-12 and 14**)
11. Homosexuality (**Leviticus 20:13**)
12. Blasphemy (**Leviticus 24:11-14, 16 and 23**)
13. False Prophecy (**Deuteronomy 13:1-6**)
14. Enticing others to serve false gods (**Deuteronomy 13:7-10**)

15. Incorrigible Rebelliousness (**Deuteronomy 17:12, 21:18-21**)
16. Sex Outside of Marriage (**Deuteronomy 22:20-21**)
17. Rape of a Virgin Who is Engaged (**Deuteronomy 22:23-27**)

With eternity at stake, it is no wonder the Bible reserves its harshest words of condemnation for those who put lies in the mouth of **YHVH**, usurping **His** Word with dangerous experience that is insignificant in comparison. In the Dispensation of Torah (see the commentary on **Exodus Da - The Dispensation of Torah**), false prophecy was a capital offense, a point vividly illustrated by **Elijah's** slaughter of the 450 prophets of Ba'al following the showdown on **Mount Carmel (First Kings 18:19 and 40)**. But **the Israelites** often failed to expel false **prophets**, and by welcoming error into **their** midst, **they** also invited the judgment of **Ha'Shem (Jeremiah 5:29-31)**. Consider **the LORD's** attitude toward those who would exchange **His** true Word for a counterfeit (**Isaiah 30:9-13; Jeremiah 5:29-31, 14:14-16; Ezekiel 13:3-9**).

The point of this passage is obvious: **YHVH** hates those who misrepresent **His Word** or speak lies in **His name**. The B'rit Chadashah responds to **false prophets** with equal severity (**First Timothy 6:3-5; Second Timothy 3:1-9; First John 4:1-3; Second John 7-11**). **Ha'Shem** does not tolerate those who falsify or fake divine revelation. It is an offense **He** takes personally, and **His** vengeance is swift and deadly. To sabotage biblical truth in any way - by adding to it, subtracting from it, or mixing it with error - is to invite divine wrath (**Galatians 1:9; Second John 9-11**). Any distortion of **the Word** is an affront against the Trinity, and especially against **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** because of **His** intimate relationship with **the Word**.³³⁰

Thirdly, apostate cities (13:13-19): The third potential case for religious seduction concerns a nearby **city** that is considering engaging in idolatry. **Suppose you hear it said in one of your cities, which ADONAI your God is giving you to dwell in, that worthless fellows** (Hebrew *b'nei-b'luiya'al*, meaning without value or honor) **have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, 'Let's go and serve other gods' - that you have not known (13:13-14).**

Once a report is received that a **city** has turned to idolatry, a **thorough** investigation must be conducted to learn the accuracy of the report. **Then you are to investigate, search out and inquire thoroughly. If indeed it is true and the matter certain that this abomination has been done in your midst**, as they were told to do with the Canaanites, **you will surely strike down the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying** (Hebrew: *cherem*, meaning *to be devoted to destruction or annihilate*)

it and all that is in it and its livestock with the sword (13:15-16). The sacrifice was to be like a whole **burnt offering** (see the commentary on [Exodus Fe - The Burnt Offering](#)). It was to be total, since the whole population of **the city** was jointly responsible. Theirs was a corporate guilt and, as so often in the TaNaKh, they were judged corporately.³³¹

The fact that **the city**, though **Israelite**, was to be dealt with through the *cherem* judgment also shows that **its** idolatry effectively abolished the covenant agreement with **ADONAI** and rendered **the city** virtually Canaanite. Being an **Israelite** settlement on **the Land of promise** did not guarantee immunity from **God's** wrath. If **the Israelites** chose to go the way of Canaanite gods, then **Ha'Shem** would do to **the Israelites**, individuals and communities, exactly what had been done to the Canaanites.³³² **The city** was then to be abandoned and left as a ruin (**Judges 20:42-48**). **You are to gather all its plunder into the middle of the street, and you are to burn with fire the city and all its plunder - all of it to ADONAI your God. It will be a ruin forever - it shall never be built again. Nothing from the ban should cling to your hand**, so that no individual **Israelite** could profit personally from the booty as did **Achan** after the fall of Jericho in **Joshua 7:20-21 (13:17-18a)**.

Obedience to this command would bring about a moral cleansing of the Land and a spiritual renewal. As a result, **ADONAI** would **turn from the fierceness of His anger** against the nation **and show her mercy, and have compassion on Isra'el and multiply her population**. This is **just as He swore to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - when you listen to the voice of ADONAI your God, keeping all His mitzvot that I am commanding you today, doing what is right in the eyes of ADONAI your God (13:18b-19)**.

Only through the purity of **the nation** would **she** be preserved. Unfortunately, for the most part **Isra'el** failed to apply the commands of this warning. This failure resulted in the northern kingdom of **Isra'el** being conquered by **Assyria**. As a result, many **Israelites** were **exiled from their own land to Assyria**. And the ones who remained were absorbed into the Assyrian pagan culture **when the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria, instead of the men of Isra'el. So, they possessed Samaria and settled in her cities (Second Kings 17:23b-24)**. And not only that, but later **Jerusalem** was destroyed by the Babylonians (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Gb - The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC](#)), and the southern kingdom of **Judah** was sent into **exile** (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Gu - Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule](#)).³³³