

Deuteronomy 12:32—13:5

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³² “Whatever I command you [חָצַו *tsavah* – *to lay a charge upon, command, order*], you shall be careful to do [God is their King and issues commands; see [Isa 33:22](#)]; you shall not add to nor take away from it [i.e., don’t modify God’s Law]. ¹ “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams [i.e., one who claims to have divine revelation] arises among you [as a public figure] and gives you a sign or a wonder, ² and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them [a violation of the first commandment; [Deut 5:7](#)],’ ³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams [i.e., ignore that false representative of the Lord]; for the LORD your God is testing you [which He will do on occasion, cf., [Ex 16:4](#); [20:20](#); [Deut 13:3](#); [Judg 3:1-4](#); [Isa 48:10](#)] to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul [love = commitment loyalty; cf. [Deut 6:5](#)]. ⁴ “You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him [an example of commitment love]. ⁵ “But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion [סָרָה *sarah* – *turning aside, defection, rebellion*] against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery [counseled treason against Israel’s good Liberator and King], to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk [which would result in God’s judgment; see [Deut 11:26-28](#)]. So you shall purge the evil [person] from among you [each Israelite was responsible to deal with false prophets].

Observations:

In the Hebrew Bible, Deuteronomy 12:32 appears as the first verse of chapter thirteen. In the previous lesson (Deut 12:29-31), Moses warned against being ensnared by idolatry and pagan practices after the Canaanites had been destroyed and their places of worship demolished (Deut 12:29-31). In that passage, Israel would prove to be their own worst enemy if they did not guard themselves against the enticements of the pagan practices of the Canaanites. In this pericope, God warns His people to be on guard against false prophets that will arise among them and seek to lead them away from the Lord.

This section opens with the statement, “Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it” (Deut 12:32). God was giving His people clear directives about how to live as He expects, and these commands were being codified, and were not to be modified in any way. Contracts and law codes rely on the integrity of language in which words and phrases retain authorial intent, and this is especially true when it comes to God’s Word. To add or remove words from God’s commandments

speaks of a shift in authority from God to the receiver, as the Author's infused meaning is ignored and the reader's response becomes enthroned. Israel was a theocracy and God was their Ruler, Lawgiver, and Judge (see Isa 33:22). The Lord had liberated His people from Egyptian slavery and entered into a binding covenant relationship which they accepted (Ex 19:1-9). As their good King, God had every right to issue commands and direct their lives; not because He was a brutal tyrant who sought to subjugate and oppress them, but rather, that they might walk with Him and be blessed. All of this assumes the integrity of language, in which the author's original meaning is permanently infused in the words and phrases he writes, and that language itself serves as a reliable vehicle for communication. The end result is that the hearer/reader is responsible to know what has been communicated and will be blessed or judged based on whether they respond to it positively or negatively. Here, the integrity of the written commands must be honored. The contract must not be modified. But there would be subversives among God's people, as he warns them that false prophets would arise and seek to lead them contrary to God's directives. Moses wrote:

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, ² and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom 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 find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deut 13:1-3)

The word prophet translates the Hebrew noun נָבִי *nabi* and refers to one who claims to be summoned by God and serves as His communicator or spokesman. God sometimes spoke to His prophets in their dreams (Num 12:6). Like the prophet, the *dreamer of dreams* (Oneiromancy) refers to one who claims to have divine revelation directly from God. Moses warns his people about the reality of false communicators that would arise among God's people and seek to mislead them (Deut 13:1). Furthermore, these false prophets would be backed by Satan and be able to perform signs and wonders which actually come to pass (Deut 13:2a). Here, the sign or wonder functions as a means of persuading the ignorant and rebellious. The ability to perform a sign or wonder by itself proves nothing. When Moses was executing God's plagues upon Egypt, it is recorded three times “the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts” (Ex 7:10-11; cf., 7:21-22; 8:6-7). Jesus warned that “false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect” (Matt 24:24). And Paul spoke of the coming Antichrist, “whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” (2 Th 2:9-10). Only those who know God's Word and live by it will guard themselves against the deceiving power of false miracle workers.

False prophets are self-centered and don't really care about God or others. They are motivated by pride, power, a following of people, and often a desire to gain wealth. When a pseudo miracle worker says, "Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them" (Deut 13:2b), he/she is, at that moment, in violation of the first commandment, which states, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Deut 5:7), as well as the great commandment which states, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut 6:5). The false prophet is identified because he/she violates the clear teaching of Scripture. Moses said, "you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut 13:3). Thomas Constable writes:

God permitted prophets to utter false prophecies to test His people's love (v. 3). The test of a false prophet was his or her fidelity to the Mosaic Covenant. If he led the people away from God, the civil authorities were to put him to death (v. 5). Some false prophets would foretell the future since they received information from the evil spirit world (e.g., diviners, soothsayers, etc.). Some of them could even perform signs and wonders (supernatural acts) to substantiate their claim that their power came from God. Enticement to idolatry was a very serious crime in Israel.¹

Jack Deere adds:

Miraculous signs alone were never meant to be a test of truth. Miracles happen in many religions because Satan uses false religions and false prophets to deceive the world (cf. 2 Cor. 11:13–15; Eph. 6:11; Rev. 12:9). So Moses warned the people that the standard for truth must never be **a miraculous sign or wonder** (or other areas of human experience). The standard of truth is the Word of God. A prophet's or a dreamer's prediction may come true. But if his message contradicted God's commands, the people were to trust **God** and His Word rather than their experience of a miracle. If human experience seemed to contradict God's clear teachings the Israelites were to bow in submission to God's **commands**, for His Word is truth (cf. John 17:17).²

God had revealed Himself directly and through Moses, and once that revelation became inscripturated (i.e., written down), it could not be modified by anyone. The written revelation could be understood through normal reading and applied by faith in those who

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 12:32.

² Jack S. Deere, "Deuteronomy," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 286.

received it. Once studied and understood, God's Word was to serve as the foundation for the walk of faith. Though we enjoy our experiences and feelings, these should never serve as our guide for Christian living. When there is a conflict between God's truth and our experiences or feelings, we are to live by faith and trust God at His Word.

God permits His people to be exposed to false prophets and teachers. But this exposure is didactic in nature, as the outcome reveals the heart of those who claim to love the Lord. Often, we don't like trials or tests, but it is these very things that expose what is really in our hearts and whether we are as committed as we often claim. Peter thought he was strong in himself and would never deny the Lord (Matt 26:34-35); however, his claim was untested, and his self-perception proved wrong when the test actually came. Peter denied the Lord three times (Matt 26:69-74), and then wept bitterly when the truth of his weak heart was made manifest (Matt 26:75).

Moses directs his people to faithfulness, saying, "You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him" (Deut 13:4). Moses drives his point by means of action words, telling his people they must *follow, fear, keep, listen, serve, and cling* to the Lord and His commands. The mind and will must be in agreement, as the believer seeks to know God's Word in order to live His will. But the false prophet or dreamer of dreams "shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you" (Deut 13:5). The death penalty against false prophets and dreamers of dreams was necessary, for if they continued, they would lead God's people away from Him and this would guarantee the Lord's judgment (Deut 11:26-28). The phrase, *you shall purge the evil from among you* occurs nine times throughout Deuteronomy (Deut 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21-22, 24; 24:7). By killing the false prophet who counseled treason against the Lord, it would purge the evil person from the community. It should be remembered that Israel was a theocracy, and God was their Judge, Lawgiver, and King (Isa 33:22), and He set their laws and demanded enforcement. To promote idolatry was an attempt to subvert God's ruling authority over His people and would bring judgment.

Like Israel, God will allow us to be exposed to false representatives (Matt 7:15; Acts 20:29-30; 2 Pet 2:1-3). But we are to see these moments as a test, as an opportunity to show our loyalty to God by rejecting the false teacher and their message and staying true to the Lord. In the Church Age, we are not directed to execute false prophets, teachers, or miracle workers who seek to lead us away from the Lord; rather, we are not to associate with them (Rom 16:17; 2 Th 3:14), nor welcome them into our home (2 John 1:9-11).