

LESSON TEN 12:29—13:18; 17:2-13

2. ONE GOD: DEATH PENALTIES FOR APOSTASY (12:29—13:18; 17:2-13)

29 When Jehovah thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest in to dispossess them, and thou dispossesest them, and dwellest in their land; 30 take heed to thyself that thou be not ensnared to follow them, after that they are destroyed from before thee; and that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, How do these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. 31 Thou shalt not do so unto Jehovah thy God: for every abomination to Jehovah, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters do they burn in the fire to their gods.

32 What thing soever I command you, that shall ye observe to do: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

If there arise in the midst of thee a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and he give thee a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; 3 thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or unto that dreamer of dreams: for Jehovah your God proveth you, to know whether ye love Jehovah your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 Ye shall walk after Jehovah your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him and cleave unto him. 5 And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death, because he hath spoken rebellion against Jehovah your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of bondage, to draw thee aside out of the way which Jehovah thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put away the evil from the midst of thee.

6 If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, that is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; 7 of the gods of the peoples that are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; 8 thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: 9 but thou shalt surely kill him; thy hand shall be first upon him to

put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. 10 And thou shalt stone him to death with stones, because he hath sought to draw thee away from Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 11 And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is in the midst of thee.

12 If thou shalt hear tell concerning one of thy cities, which Jehovah thy God giveth thee to dwell there, saying, 13 Certain base fellows are gone out from the midst of thee, and have drawn away the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known; 14 then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in the midst of thee, 15 thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword. 16 And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, unto Jehovah thy God: and it shall be a heap for ever; it shall not be built again. 17 And there shall cleave nought of the devoted thing to thy hand; that Jehovah may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and show thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers; 18 when thou shalt hearken to the voice of Jehovah thy God, to keep all his commandments which I command thee this day, to do that which is right in the eyes of Jehovah thy God.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 12:29—13:18

236. After destroying idol worship why would anyone be ensnared in it?
237. Are we to infer that these idolators had had opportunity to know the one true God and had steadfastly refused to worship Him? or that they were being slain in their ignorance?
238. Are we to understand from verse 2 that certain false prophets can perform a sign of wonder?
239. Explain in your own words just how God "tested" some persons. Cf. verses 3 and 4.
240. Why not preach to some of these idolators?
241. Specify what was so attractive in the worship of these "other gods" that some would be willing to risk their very lives for the worship of them.

242. What lesson for love, hatred, right, wrong, are in the example of killing your own loved ones because of idolatry?
243. If such stringent measures were taken by Israel, how often would they be repeated? As to the use of a preventive measure how could the fewest lives be lost and still preserve the worship of Jehovah?
244. Please do enough research to discover the total procedure involved before passing the death penalty upon an individual or a city. Cf. 17:2-7; 19:15-19; Leviticus 24:10-14; Josua 8:4-7.
245. Are there lessons here for present-day church discipline? Cf. Matthew 18:15-20; Luke 17:3, 4; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19, 20.

AMPLIFIED TRANSLATION 12:29—13:18

29 When the Lord your God cuts off before you the nations whom you go to dispossess, and you dispossess them and live in their land,
 30 Be watchful that you are not ensnared into following them after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? I will do likewise.

31 You shall not do so to the Lord your God; for every abominable thing which the Lord hates they have done for their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burned in the fire of their gods.

32 Whatever I command you, be watchful to do it; you shall not add to it or diminish it.

If a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder,

2 And the sign or the wonder he foretells to 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 to that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your [mind and] heart and with your entire being.

4 You shall walk after the Lord your God and (reverently) fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and cling to Him.

5 But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has talked rebellion and turning away from the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you

out of the house of bondage; that man has tried to draw you aside from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So shall you put the evil away from your midst.

6 If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your friend, who is as your own life, entice you secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which you have not known, you nor your fathers;

7 Of the gods of the peoples who are round about you, near you or far away from you, from one end of the earth to the other,

8 You shall not consent to him, or listen to him; nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him;

9 But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.

10 And you shall stone him to death with stones, because he has tried to draw you away from the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

11 And all Israel shall hear, (and reverently) fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this among you.

12 If you hear it said in one of your cities, which the Lord your God has given you in which to dwell,

13 That certain base fellows have gone out from your midst, and have enticed away the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye 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 abominable thing has been done among you,

15 You shall surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all who are in it, and its beasts, with the edge of the sword.

16 And you shall collect all its spoil into the midst of its open square, and shall burn the city with fire, with every bit of its spoil [as a whole burnt offering] to the Lord your God; it shall be a heap [of ruins] for ever; it shall not be built again.

17 And nothing of the accursed thing shall cling 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, to keep all His commandments which I command you this day, to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord your God.

COMMENT 12:29—13:18

Note that in these verses we have

- (1) Warnings against being seduced and ensnared into idolatrous practices (12:29-32)
- (2) Idolatrous prophets and dreamers to be slain (13:1-5)
- (3) Idolatrous relatives and friends to be slain (13:6-11)
- (4) Idolatrous cities to be destroyed and their inhabitants slain (13:12-18)

Thus this *entire section* is concerned with cautions and warnings about being led away into *idolatry*.

INQUIRE NOT AFTER THEIR GODS, SAYING, HOW DO THESE NATIONS SERVE THEIR GODS? EVEN SO WILL I DO LIKEWISE (v. 30)—There is always a danger in the process of *informing oneself* of something that is evil. The motives (at first) may be ever so pure—perhaps to gain information for the purpose of helping someone *in* a false religious system. But, all too often, there is a foggy and ethereal line between such a person's *information* and his own *beliefs*. What he *knows* he tends to *believe*—whether right or wrong. We would not stifle an investigating spirit and an inquisitive mind. Only let that mind be first firmly established in Christ, and the *motives* for investigation be an ever more useful service to *Christ*. These inspired—but with a sensual heart! Doubtless they wanted the "lowdown" on all the immoral and godless rites the heathen practiced—so they could try *their hand* at it!

FOR EVEN THEIR SONS AND THEIR DAUGHTERS DO THEY BURN IN THE FIRE TO THEIR GODS (v. 31)—See also 18:9-12, Ps. 106:34-37, Ezek. 16:20, 21. This was practiced in the worship of several gods in the areas surrounding Israel, especially Molech (Moloch, Milcom), Lev. 18:21, 20:1-5; II K. 23:10—the national god of the Ammonites, and Chemosh, the national god of the Moabites, I K. 11:7, Cf. II K. 3:27; and apparently Baal, II K. 17:16, 17.

AND THE SIGN OR THE WONDER COME TO PASS (v. 2)—Note that whether the prediction of this "Seer" comes to pass or not is not the *only* criterion to be used to establish his identity as a true or false prophet. He is to be judged by the law of God *per se*—claims, "proofs," and "confirmations" notwithstanding. A false prophet's predictions are not *always* wrong—if they were, *nobody* would believe them! See 18:9-22, notes. Paul certainly recognized the great influence of "*he*,

whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders . . ." (II Thes. 2:9). Other examples could be given, such as Jannes and Jambres (II Tim. 3:8, Cf. Ex. 7:8-13, 20-22; 8:6, 7). The question is not "Did they perform a miracle?" but "Are they furthering and promoting the teachings and will of *Christ*?" See II Cor. 11:10-15, Matt. 7:15-23, I Jn. 4:1. Someone might ask "Why would God allow the false prophet's prophecy to be fulfilled?" The next verse in our text provides the answer:

FOR JEHOVAH YOUR GOD PROVETH YOU (v. 3)—i.e., is testing or trying you (Heb. *nasab*, as in 8:2). How many could learn from this truth in our present age if they would take it to heart! Why quibble and forever argue with these who saw some present day Simon giving out that he is "some great one," and causing multitudes to cry out, "This man is that power of God which is called Great" (Acts 8:9, 10)? If we are to "prove the spirits, whether they are of God" because "many false prophets are gone out into the world" what *means* shall we use? "To the law and to the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them" (Isa. 8:20).

THAT PROPHET, OR THAT DREAMER OF DREAMS, SHALL BE PUT TO DEATH, BECAUSE HE HATH SPOKEN REBELLION (v. 5)—See also v. 9, 17:2-7, 18:20-22. The Heb. word *sarah* ("rebellion") is variously rendered. The A.V. has "to turn you away . . .," a rendering that Gesenius seemingly confirms by his definition, "prop. a *departing, withdrawing*; hence (1) the *violation* of a law, an offence, Deut. 19:16 [where it is rendered "wrong doing"]. (2) *departure from Jehovah*, Deut. 13:6". Baumgartner has "*rebellion . . . obstinancy*," and specifically "incite rebellion against". As a deceiver, he was to be put to death.

IF THY BROTHER . . . SON . . . DAUGHTER . . . WIFE . . . FRIEND . . . ENTICE THEE SECRETLY . . . THOU SHALT SURELY KILL HIM (vv. 6-11)—See also 17:2-7. At least two witnesses were required, and death was to be by stoning. This command is obviously stated as it is because of the great temptation to be lenient and lax about carrying out God's law with regard to transgressors close and dear to them. Read v. 8 again! Their enticement would be "secretly," (Heb. *sether*) and doubtless subtle and plausible!

THY HAND SHALL BE FIRST UPON HIM (v. 9)—In executing the laws of Israel wherein someone was worthy of death, the accuser-witness was to be the first to lay his hands on the guilty party, and to cast

the first stone. See 17:7, 19:15-19, Lev. 24:10-14, and compare the wording of Jn. 8:4-7.

This would tend to prevent off-hand, haphazard or flippant accusations. The accuser had to have the courage and strength of conviction to "follow through" with his charges. If not, he was *not to make any charges*. The principle involved could be well-received by many today.

We do not of course have any such death-penalty law in "the Israel of God," the church of the Lord. However, the principle of the accuser-witness *instigating the corrective action*, is definitely taught by Christ: (Matt. 18:15-20; Lk. 17:3, 4; Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19, 20) not only if he realizes his *brother* has sinned, but if he realizes *he* has sinned *against his brother* (Matt. 5:23-26). The principle is, that if something is seen or realized as in need of correction or forgiveness, immediate action should be initiated toward that end.

THOU SHALT SURELY SMITE THE INHABITANTS OF THAT CITY (v. 15)—But not before a careful investigation was made (v. 14). Note how it all began. "Certain base fellows" influenced the city like leaven, and "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." (Margin, Heb. *sons of worthlessness*, and expression meaning those *totally worthless or devoted to worthless ends*. Cf. "sons of disobedience," Eph. 2:2).

— 17:2-13 —

2 If there be found in the midst of thee, within any of thy gates which Jehovah thy God giveth thee, man or woman, that doeth that which is evil in the sight of Jehovah thy God, in transgressing his covenant, 3 and hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, or the sun, or the moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded; 4 and it be told thee, and thou hast heard of it, then shalt thou inquire diligently; and, behold, if it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel, 5 then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, who hath done this evil thing, unto thy gates, even the man or the woman; and thou shalt stone them to death with stones. 6 At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is to die be put to death; at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. 7 The hand of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So thou shalt put away the evil from the midst of thee.

8 If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke,

being matters of controversy within thy gates; then shalt thou arise, and get thee up unto the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose; 9 and thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days: and thou shalt inquire; and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment. 10 And thou shalt do according to the tenor of the sentence which they shall show thee from that place which Jehovah shall choose; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they shall teach thee, 11 according to the tenor of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do; thou shalt not turn aside from the sentence which they shall show thee, to the right hand, nor to the left. 12 And the man that doeth presumptuously, in not hearkening unto the priest that standeth to minister there before Jehovah thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. 13 And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 17:2-13

246. Who is to prefer charges against the idolator?
247. Why not punish a man with only one witness? Supposing the idolator was sincere in his worship; was he yet to be put to death?
248. What is meant by the expression "blood and blood, plea and plea, stroke and stroke"?
249. What is involved in the terrible sin of presumption? Is not this a present-day problem? Discuss.

AMPLIFIED TRANSLATION 17:2-13

2 If there is found among you, within any of your towns which the Lord your God gives you, a man or woman who does what is wicked in the sight of the Lord your God, by transgressing His covenant,

3 Who has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or moon or any of the host of the heavens, which I have forbidden,

4 And it is told that you hear of it; then inquire diligently, and if it is certainly true that such an abomination has been committed in Israel,

5 Then you shall bring forth to your town's gates that man or woman who has done that wicked thing, and you shall stone that man or woman to death.

6 On the evidence of two or three witnesses, he who is worthy of death shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.

7 The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from among you.

8 If there arise a matter too hard for you in judgment, between one kind of bloodshed and another, between one legality and another, between one kind of assault and another, matters of controversy within your towns, then arise and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses,

9 And you shall come to the Levitical priests, and to the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall consult them, and they shall make clear to you the decision.

10 And you shall do according to the decision which they declare to you from that place which the Lord chooses, and you shall be watchful to do according to all that they tell you;

11 According to the decision of the law which they shall teach you, and the judgment which they shall announce to you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the verdict they give you, either to the right hand or the left.

12 The man who does presumptuously, and will not listen to the priest who stands to minister there before the Lord your God, or to the judge, that man shall die; so you shall purge the evil from Israel.

13 And all the people shall hear, and (reverently) fear, and not act presumptuously again.

COMMENT 17:2-13

We have included this passage with the section above because of its obvious similarity and because it treats the same subject. God had said to have "no other gods before (besides) me" nor to make any graven image (5:7-10). He had also strictly forbidden the worship of any creature, star, planet, etc. (4:15-19 and notes). Here it will be seen that the same method of procedure was to follow the punishment of transgressors as we have just noted in chapter 13. One witness was not enough for the death sentence, (Cf. Num. 35:30) and the witnesses had to have reputations for reliability (19:15-21). (Naboth, for example, had two "base fellows" witness against him, I K. 21:10, 13). In matters of discipline in the New Testament church, two or more witnesses are also required (Matt. 18:15-18).

IF THERE ARISE A MATTER TOO HARD FOR THEE IN JUDGMENT (v. 8)—See also 1:9-18, 19:16-19, 25:1-3, and also Ex. 18:13-26. The passages in Ex. 18 and Deut. 1 (which speak of the same instance) do not specify that the *judges themselves* had to be priests or Levites. In fact, the Exodus passage seems definitely to specify that Moses' choices for these officers were not limited to one tribe: "And Moses chose able men out of all Israel . . . and they judged the people . . ." Furthermore, Deut. 17:9 and 19:17 seem to carefully distinguish between the *priests* (who of course were always Levites) and the Judges, who might have been from *any* tribe of Israel.

AND THOU SHALT COME UNTO THE PRIESTS THE LEVITES, AND UNTO THE JUDGE (v. 9)—"In all such cases [Cf. v. 8] recourse was to be had to the court at the sanctuary—to the priests the Levites, i.e. the priests who were of the tribe of Levi, and the judge presiding there—the lay judge associated with the high priest as president . . ." (Pulpit Com.)

AND THOU SHALT DO ACCORDING TO THE TENOR OF THE SENTENCE (v. 10)—Cf. v. 12, which enacts the death penalty for THE MAN THAT DOETH PRESUMPTUOUSLY in not obeying the judge and the priest. The Hebrew word *zid* is defined by Baumgartner's *Lexicon* as "insolent, presumptuous, . . . boundless insolence" and by Gesenius, "*swelling, pride; as joined with insolence and arrogance [here], haughtiness*". It ought to be seen from all this that this judicial method was not intended as any "kangaroo court" by God! The decisions made by these appointed men were to be *listened to and obeyed*.

Much, of course, is left *unsaid* in these verses which could perhaps be profitably discussed. For example, to what *extent* did God personally and miraculously *guide* these judges and priests? Did the priests employ the Urim and Thummim in making such judgments?

In the theocracy Israel was under, there was little distinction between "ecclesiastical" and "civil" cases. The priests no doubt specialized as expounders and judges of cases involving *the law*, but the lay judges were not "added" to the court, to be judges of the facts in distinction from the law in the case.

It is debatable whether the judges to whom Israel came for judgment during that era of history known as the Period of Judges (Judges 2:16-19, 3:10, 4:4, 5, 10:2, etc.) represent "the judge that shall be in those days" (v. 9). If so, they took on far different responsibilities than anything mentioned here, for *they* were chiefly military men raised

up to deliver Israel from his enemies—a task never assigned to *these* judges.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Of false prophets and their lying signs, 1-6. Of those who endeavour to entice and seduce people to idolatry, 7, 8. The punishment of such, 9-11. Of cities perverted from the pure worship of God, 12-14. How that city is to be treated, 15. All the spoil of it to be destroyed, 16. Promises to them who obey these directions, 17, 18.

QUESTIONS, LESSON TEN (12:29—13:18; 17:2-13)

1. We should all have inquiring minds. What danger is to be avoided in cultivating such in religious matters?
2. What godless practice of the idolators is mentioned in the closing verses of chapter 12?
3. What is the one and only true criterion by which a prophet must be judged?
4. What is the context and reason for the phrase, "for Jehovah your God proveth you," as it occurs in chapter 13?
5. What was the penalty against the prophet that spoke against Jehovah?
6. What class or group of people would especially try to lead other Israelites into idolatry? How were such to be treated?
7. Let us suppose you are an Israelite and found another man practicing idolatry. Describe the legal procedure necessary to effect the death penalty.
8. Who was to throw the first rock?
9. How might a *whole city* be found practicing idolatry? What influenced it?
10. How was such a city to be punished?
11. How many years could elapse before the city could be rebuilt?
12. What penalty was in order for those who worshipped heavenly bodies?
13. In an appointed place, matters of difficult decision were to be brought before whom? How was their decision to be received?
14. Was "civil" and "ecclesiastical" law carefully distinguished in Israel?