



Leaves From the Tree

Studies from God's Word

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



DEUTERONOMY 7 - 13

Deuteronomy 7

7:1-6 - "When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you. But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire. For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."

Entrenched in the land ahead of them, Israel faced seven nations. The Lord's purpose was for Israel to enter the land, encounter these seven nations one by one, defeat each of them in turn, and take possession of their land for the Lord. The challenge was great because these nations were described as "greater and stronger than you." This description was not based upon the unreasonable fears of Israel, like the report of the 10 unbelieving spies forty years before. This evaluation of the relative numbers and strength of the Canaanite nations compared to Israel was accurate because it was the Lord's evaluation. The Lord had called His people to face a challenge greater than themselves. We can expect the Lord to present us with similar challenges in our own lives. The pattern of the Lord's plan for His people throughout history has a repeating theme of the Lord bringing His people into challenges that they cannot be expected to conquer in their own strength. David faced Goliath by the purpose of God. Gideon and his 300 men faced an overwhelming number of Midianites. Why does the Lord seem to delight in giving us such great challenges to face? He does so in order to train our hearts in the full dependence of faith in Him alone, and to provide Himself with opportunities to display His great power and faithfulness on behalf of His people in the eyes of the watching world.

As Israel moved forward into the Promised Land to face the challenge of these seven nations, the Lord warned Israel of the significant danger represented by these nations. Interestingly, the greatest danger was not found in the numbers or strength of the armies of the Canaanite nations. The Lord did not warn Israel of the physical danger of the battles ahead. He mentioned the battles to come, but did so with an assured description of certain victory because He would clear away these nations before Israel. The Lord promised victory to Israel because He

would be present with them and He would be fighting for them. The real danger for Israel was not in the military battle, but in a far more subtle spiritual battle that would follow the conquest of the land. Once Israel settled in the land the danger would come when they let down their guard by lowering their spiritual standards. Any remaining Canaanites would pose a threat to Israel in the future through spiritual influence more than through physical attack. This spiritual influence would take place in Israel forming unsanctioned covenant alliances with them, intermarrying with them, and blending elements from the Canaanite religions.

This warning of the Lord proved prophetic as Israel eventually fell prey to all three of these real dangers in the years to come. Because Israel was identified by the Lord as His holy people, any element that influenced them to compromise their holiness before the Lord effectively defeated the Lord's purpose for them. This danger continues for the people of God in every generation. In the earliest days of Christianity, the attacks of Satan upon the church were direct attacks as political powers were stirred to persecute and eliminate as many Christians as possible. However, the Lord worked in the midst of the persecution of the church and in spite of all natural expectations, the church actually grew in numbers during the great persecutions of the first century. Satan's most effective attacks are often not physical and life threatening. If he can influence believers into spiritually compromising decisions that undermine their own holiness, then the enemy's desire to oppose the fulfillment of God's purpose in us is served. Whenever believers tie their lives to unbelievers through unwise alliances, when believers marry unbelievers, when various elements of false religion and spirituality are blended together, then the result is more pleasing to the enemy of our souls than it is to God.

7:7-8 - "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

Moses calls Israel to consider their true spiritual origin as a nation. He directs their perspective beyond the physical circumstances of where their journey began in Egypt and leads them to consider why they became a nation at all. Israel was formed into a nation out of an association of tribes with a common ancestor in Abraham. Moses challenges Israel to consider why the Lord chose to make Israel a nation, and why it was Israel He chose out of all the options available to Him in the world. If it were you or me that was choosing one nation from the world at that time to conquer Canaan and designate as a holy nation, the choice would probably have been Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon. Those were the truly great nations in the world at that time when comparing numbers or strength. Israel was a slave nation. There was nothing about them as a nation that made sense to choose above the other nations of the world. Yet, God did just that. He

chose the least likely among the nations. It pleases the Lord to choose contrary to natural wisdom. "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God." (I Corinthians 1:26-29).

So, why did the Lord choose Israel above Egypt and Babylon and the other nations? The Lord chose Israel because He loved Israel. If that is all the Lord had communicated in this Deuteronomy passage we would be blessed to understand that the core motive in God's heart for choosing us to be His people is His love. However, there is one more layer of what God revealed to Israel through Moses about His choice of them to be His holy people. The Lord emphasizes that they were not chosen because of their great numbers. If we remove the phrase telling them His choice was not based upon their numbers, then what is left is a declaration of the mystery of God's choice. "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you (because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples), but because the LORD loved you..." In other words, the Lord declared that He loved Israel because He loved them. The point Israel was to learn and we too must understand is that there was nothing in Israel that caused God to choose them. In the same way, when we consider how God has chosen us for salvation we must not conclude that there must have been something in us or about us that made us a better choice for salvation. There wasn't. His choice was based entirely in His love.

In human relationships the beginning point is usually based upon attraction. One person sees some quality in the other that makes them special in their eyes. It might be a certain physical quality, or personality trait, or an emotional or intellectual attribute, but in any case it is something seen in the other person that attracts the love of the person that initiates the relationship. In this case, it was not any beauty in Israel, but a sovereign choice of the Lord to love them among the nations. For us, it remains a mystery why God chose us rather than another. This understanding is not meant to frustrate us, but to create in us a deeper appreciation for the sovereign love of God. He saved me because He loved me. He loved me because He chose to do so. I did not deserve His love. Nothing in me was so attractive that He could not help but love me. He loved me... because He loved me!

7:22 - "The LORD your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to put an end to them quickly, for the wild beasts would grow too numerous for you."

The Lord adds a critical detail to the revelation of His plan for Israel's conquest of Canaan. They would not conquer all seven nations at once. They would face

them one at a time and conquer them one by one. The reality is that the Lord was well able to defeat all seven nations on Israel's behalf in a single day. Since their victory was based upon the Lord clearing the nations away before Israel, He could have swept them all away with a single plague for instance. However, the Lord was displaying His wisdom in Israel's conquest of Canaan along with His power. The wisdom of the Lord was revealed in clearing the nations away before Israel "little by little." If the Lord had cleared all seven nations away in a single day, then their lands would have gone unoccupied for a period of time as the tribes of Israel moved toward the territories distributed to them for settlement. By leaving the lands unoccupied, the wild beasts in the region would have been unrestrained and this would have created an additional problem for Israel to face.

The point is that the Lord intended Israel to possess the land, and not just conquer it. The purpose of the Lord was that He wanted His people to effectively maintain the territory they conquered. This principle applies in the life of every Christian today. The Lord has called us to conquer areas of our lives that were previously dominated by sin and worldliness. He calls us to settle every area of our lives and maintain holiness and righteousness in every aspect of our lives. Believers, especially newer believers, struggle with the question of why God does not instantly clear out every aspect of sin and worldliness from their lives at the moment they first experience salvation. The answer is found in the wisdom of the way God leads us to conquer our own territory. He will lead us to address every area of sin and conquer it, but He wants us to maintain the victory gained. The Lord does not simply empty our lives of sin and worldliness, while leaving those areas vulnerable to be taken over by other spiritual problems. The Lord wants each area of our lives to be filled with His holiness. When the Lord leads us to fight against a specific area of sin, He wants us to defeat it, but immediately replace it with a new pattern of righteousness that when maintained safeguards us from the old sinful patterns redeveloping.

Deuteronomy 8

8:2-5 - "You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son."

The forty-year journey through the wilderness meant one thing to Israel, but another thing to the Lord. Israel saw those years as an unavoidable bad experience that they would prefer to forget as quickly as possible and move on to their new, pleasant life in Canaan. The Lord did not want them to forget the forty years in the wilderness however. The Lord tells them here that the wilderness years were spiritually purposeful years. We know from an earlier chapter that the forty years were a judgment upon the unbelief and disobedience of the original generation that came out of Egypt. The Lord kept Israel in the wilderness until the last of that original generation died with the exceptions of Joshua and Caleb. This passage informs us that there was an additional purpose beyond judgment for the original generation. The Lord also designed the forty years as a means to prepare the hearts and build the character of the new generation that would enter into the Promised Land at the end of those years.

The lesson here for us is that what Israel saw as bad for them, the Lord intended for a greater good. Had Israel trusted that God was at work in their worst experiences for their benefit, their perspective about those wilderness years would have been much different. The Lord is heard calling Israel, and us, to grow past the immature perspective that hard experiences equal bad experiences, and that easy experiences equal good experiences. The difficulty of the forty years was for Israel's good because those difficulties functioned as a test for their hearts and character. The Lord designed those years in order to humble Israel and test them. That He had to humble them implies that they did not start the wilderness journey as humble as they needed to be. The spiritual opposite of being humbled is being proud. In spite of their previous humble circumstance as slaves in Egypt, Israel was actually proud in their hearts. It would take the many hard experiences of the wilderness to train them not to trust in themselves but the Lord. As the wilderness journey began Israel was full of themselves and convinced that they knew what was best for themselves and even that they knew better than the Lord what was best for them. All of that had to be burned out of their hearts in the desert.

The Lord tested them in order to know what was in the hearts of Israel to determine whether they would keep His commandments in every circumstance. This passage has troubled some readers because the wording seems to imply that the Lord did not know before the wilderness what was really in the hearts of Israel. This is a case of the wording describing the testing process of the wilderness years from a human perspective. We put things and people to the test because we just don't know until we see the results of the test what is really there. The Lord is not and was not in any degree in the dark regarding the hearts of Israel entering the wilderness. The Lord knows the hearts of every person and knows them to a depth beyond our knowledge of ourselves. "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His

sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Hebrews 4:12-13).

So what does this test to know what was in their hearts mean? The Lord knew the hearts of Israel; that they were a mixture of motives, desires, perspectives and attitudes that if unchanged were not suitable for God's holy nation. The Lord appointed the wilderness years and its testing experiences to expose the depths of their hearts. He knew what was in their hearts before the test but they did not know. The tests were designed to reveal the full ugliness of their own hearts to them. The heart is like a sponge holding whatever it has previously soaked up. The testing circumstances of the Lord squeeze the heart to reveal what was in there all along. The purpose of the Lord in exposing our hearts in this way is to motivate us to cry out for Him to change our hearts through the experience so that we can grow in the ways He intends.

The ongoing test of the manna is mentioned again here. The manna served a special purpose as a forty year long test for Israel. The Lord intended them to learn one great lesson from this daily experience. What we should see from this is that the Lord considered this test to be so important that He continued it for forty years to make sure they learned the lesson. I have many times counseled believers that have struggled with a recurring testing circumstance that has lasted years. The key question to ask in a situation like this is "Why do you think the Lord still has you in this situation?" The point is that there are lessons to be learned from the test. The Lord never tests His people simply to trouble them, but always to teach them. The test of the manna had one great lesson to teach them. The Lord fed them manna to make them understand "that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD." Every Israelite that learned this lesson from eating manna every day for forty years had gained the full benefit of the test. Every Israelite that failed to learn the lesson ultimately wasted the experience of the test. The Lord was after a people that knew, going into the Promised Land that the true foundation of their lives was not the natural food of the land around them, but the spiritual food of the Word of God.

How many believers today have fully learned this lesson? Many Christians are careful not to miss a single meal, but think nothing of not feeding their souls on the Word of God for days or weeks. Jesus emphasized the importance of this principle in His own response at the end of His forty days of fasting all food in the wilderness of Judea. When Satan came and tempted Him to turn the stones into bread for Himself to prove that He was the Son of God, the Lord Jesus responded by quoting this passage from Deuteronomy. His own priorities were clearly established in this test. God's Word is more important to our lives than even the food we eat to live. His test proved that man can live for forty days without bread, but we are not intended to live without regular feeding from God's Word to nourish, teach, convict, correct and train our hearts.

8:11-14 - "Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

Moses warns Israel of a future danger here. Once they entered Canaan, conquered the nations of the land, and settled in the land they would begin to enjoy the greatest prosperity they had ever known. That prosperity would be the blessing of the Lord upon their lives. There was a spiritual danger that came with the prosperity though. Israel would be inclined to forget the Lord once their life circumstances became so prosperous and comfortable. The activities, responsibilities and comforts of their new life would become a breeding ground for a growing spiritual complacency. Eventually, Israel would reach the point where they would forget how they got here. They would forget the hardship of the slavery years in Egypt. They would forget the hardship of the wilderness journey. They would begin to become proud once again and credit themselves with their prosperity. They would forget that they deserved none of this and that it was only by the amazing grace and mercy of the Lord that their lives were so blessed. This is a pattern for every believer, every family, every church, and every nation to recognize. For instance we can consider the present circumstances of the USA as a nation. The USA has been blessed above every nation on the face of the earth at this time in history. This nation has not been so blessed because of how great we are, but for the Lord's purpose and only by His grace. As the nation progressively forgets where this great blessing came from and ignores and disregards the Lord more and more, can we realistically expect the Lord to continue to heap such blessings on the nation?

8:16-17 - "In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.'"

There is one more principle revealed in this passage about the tests of the Lord. He tested Israel for forty years with the intention of doing good for them "in the end." The idea is that the Lord withheld the greatest blessing during the test and reserved it for the end of the test. Now if you are anything like me, this is a challenging concept. I naturally tend to be an enjoy it now kind of person. If the Lord has a greater blessing for me, then I would prefer to have it now and enjoy it now. The Lord knows what is best for me though. He gives the greater blessing when the person is ready to handle that blessing in the right attitude and right way. In the big picture of the Lord's plan we see Him following this pattern. The greatest blessing of the Lord will be experienced at the end of our life in this

world. But, the Lord also follows this same pattern with how He deals with us in this world as well. He teaches us spiritual responsibility so that when He blesses us we will not quickly lose the blessing but be able to walk in it.

Deuteronomy 9

9:1-3 - "Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, great cities fortified to heaven, a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you know and of whom you have heard it said, 'Who can stand before the sons of Anak?' Know therefore today that it is the LORD your God who is crossing over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you, so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the LORD has spoken to you."

The predominant theme of Deuteronomy is covenant renewal. Israel remains in the region of Moab, poised just across the Jordan River from the Promised Land. They are at that very end of their forty year journey through the wilderness. Now that the Lord has brought them this close to the Promised Land for a second time, He wants them to clearly understand why their fathers came this close to the fulfillment of their dream and yet died in the wilderness. The Lord had brought the nation to this same spot forty years before and had commanded the nation to move forward into the Promised Land. When they sent the twelve spies ahead to scout out the land, the report ten of the twelve brought back was fearful and discouraging for the entire nation. Those ten spies reported that the land was truly as beautiful as the Lord had described to them, but that the inhabitants of the land were greater and stronger than they had imagined. In spite of the Lord's assurance that He would fight for them and that they would successfully drive out all the Canaanite nations if they would only trust and obey Him, Israel chose to turn back to Egypt. They placed more weight on the bad report of the ten than on the confident report of Joshua and Caleb, who had urged the people to follow the Lord into the land He had promised to them.

Now, forty years later, here they were again. This generation must face and pass the same test that the previous generation faced and failed. The Lord does not make this test any easier for this second generation than He did for the first. In this passage, the Lord has Moses remind Israel of exactly why their fathers turned from following the Lord and turned back toward Egypt. Notice the descriptions of the challenges facing them in Canaan. Moses does not soften or minimize the fearsome aspects of what is ahead at all. They will have to face multiple nations that remain greater and mightier than themselves. The forty year delay has not weakened the Canaanite nations as a military power and it has not strengthened Israel. They will have to conquer cities that remain fortified to heaven. This is wording taken from the evil report of the ten spies forty years

before as they exaggerated the strength of the Canaanite cities to the extent that they appeared like insurmountable fortresses. They must still face the daunting task of defeating the gigantic Anakim. Their greatest foes have not shrunk at all in the last forty years and Israel has not grown in stature during that time.

Moses could have smoothed over their fears by attempting to minimize the challenges ahead, but he did not do so on purpose. There is one great reason why he did not attempt to do so. The success or failure that Israel would experience as they moved forward into Canaan was ultimately not about the relative strength of Israel in relationship to the Anakim, the fortified cities, or the nations of Canaan. Israel's success or failure hinged only on their relationship to the Lord. Moses gives them all the encouragement they would need when he declares that the Lord will cross over Jordan ahead of them as a consuming fire. The Lord had led them for the last forty years with a visible demonstration of His presence in a pillar of smoke by day (to shield them from the burning desert sun) and a pillar of fire by night to light their camp. Now, His fiery presence will do more than light their way. He promises to go before them as a destroying fire and burn up all their enemies. This is not a literal description, but a symbolic description of how powerful His influence will be on the battles to come. The image of a consuming fire preceding them describes a power the Canaanites cannot possibly resist. As I write this today, regions of Southern California are being consumed by wildfires that are burning out of control. 250,000 people are being evacuated in one area where the fire is overwhelming all efforts by firefighters to contain it. That is the kind of power that the Lord would bring to bear upon the inhabitants of Canaan.

9:4-8 - "Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you. It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people. Remember, do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you arrived at this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD. Even at Horeb you provoked the LORD to wrath, and the LORD was so angry with you that He would have destroyed you."

When (not if) Israel experiences success in driving out the Canaanite nations from the land, they will face a more subtle danger. Israel will be tempted to draw the wrong conclusion from their conquest of the Promised Land. There are two contrasting perspectives of how Israel could interpret the meaning of their future

success. The right way to understand their victory would be for them to conclude that they succeeded in spite of their many failings in trusting the Lord throughout their journey, only because of the faithfulness of the Lord to His covenant promise to Abraham, only because of His great mercy toward them, and only because of His unswerving commitment to fulfill His own sovereign purpose by graciously naming Israel as His holy nation. This perspective would only arise out of a humble heart. True humility would enable them to see the circumstance as it actually was, or in other words to see it from the Lord's perspective. Israel was not that humble.

Israel would be tempted to view their conquest of Canaan from a much different, much more proud and self-inflated perspective. They would tend to interpret their march through the Canaanite lands as evidence of their own spiritual superiority and righteousness. The Lord wanted Israel safeguarded against this temptation by this early warning from Moses. It was critical to their future that they not just conquer the land, but that they do so with the right spiritual understanding of why they were driving out the Canaanites and settling in their place. The key point for Israel to grasp is that their success had nothing to do with their own righteousness. It was not because they were so much better than the Canaanites, or more deserving. Three times in this short passage Moses states it is not about their righteousness to make sure that they do not miss this critical foundation for understanding why they will win. The Lord reveals again that the reason He is going to use Israel to dispossess the Canaanites is due to the great wickedness of those nations. The point is not that Israel deserves to be blessed, but that the Canaanites deserve to be judged. In this way, the Lord reveals two sides of the mystery of His purpose. He will at the same time display His justice and righteous judgment upon the Canaanites, while also displaying His sovereign mercy and grace upon Israel.

9:26-29 - "I prayed to the LORD and said, 'O Lord GOD, do not destroy Your people, even Your inheritance, whom You have redeemed through Your greatness, whom You have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; do not look at the stubbornness of this people or at their wickedness or their sin. Otherwise the land from which You brought us may say, "Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land which He had promised them and because He hated them He has brought them out to slay them in the wilderness." Yet they are Your people, even Your inheritance, whom You have brought out by Your great power and Your outstretched arm.'"

In the preceding verses, Moses has rehearsed the sordid history of Israel's wilderness journey. It was a record of one serious spiritual failure after another. In the case of each failure Israel violated the Law of God and tested the Lord's patience with them to the point of deserving to be destroyed as the Canaanites were about to experience. There were two reasons why the Lord did not destroy them in the wilderness even though they deserved it. The first reason was the

promise of God, and His faithfulness to His own promise. Over 400 years before, the Lord had made a promise to Abraham, based upon a covenant, that He would establish Abraham's descendants in this land. The Lord has never once in all of history made a promise that He failed to keep.

The second reason why the Lord withheld the judgment upon Israel that they deserved time after time in the wilderness was the intercession of Moses. Whenever Israel reached the point where the Lord would ordinarily cause His judgment to fall in destruction, Moses was stirred in his heart to cry out to the Lord on their behalf. Moses repeatedly appealed to the greater purpose and glory of God. Because Moses interceded, the Lord relented from utterly destroying Israel. In this intercession, Moses was not praying against God's will and desire, but was actually being stirred by the Lord to represent an aspect of His own nature and plan. Moses symbolically represented the Lord Jesus in this role as the lone intercessor who brings undeserved mercy rather than deserved judgment. It is the presence of Jesus at the throne of God on our behalf that transforms the throne from a throne of judgment for us to a throne of mercy and grace. "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7:25).

Deuteronomy 10

10:12-13 - "Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the LORD'S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?"

Following the rebellion of Israel in the Golden Calf incident, Moses had descended Sinai with the two stone tablets of the law written by God. When Moses saw with his own eyes how completely Israel had turned away from the Lord while he was on the mountain, Moses threw down the tablets of the Law, smashing them upon the ground. The broken tablets of the Law represented the condition of the covenant relationship with the Lord as Israel had broken the covenant before Moses could even make it down the mountain to announce it to them. Because of the Lord's faithfulness to His promise, after disciplining Israel for their rebellion, He called Moses back up the mountain to receive a new set of the tablets of the Law. In doing so, the Lord was demonstrating that while the Law would inevitably be broken by fallen, sin inclined people, the Law itself endures as God's holy standard. Once the Law was restored and the covenant renewed, the Lord commanded Moses and Israel to move forward toward the Promised Land.

In this section, Moses rehearses for Israel the basic requirements of the Law. The key concept here is that of requirement, or obligation in covenant relationship. When the Lord calls people into relationship with Himself, He calls them into the covenant. Covenant is a special kind of relationship of binding mutual obligation. A covenant with the Lord is a relationship in which He binds Himself to us and obligates Himself to us according to the promises of the covenant. All of our confidence in the covenant is based upon the faithfulness of God to fulfill His own obligations toward us and keep His promises. This is the side of the covenant that is always 100% sure and certain. There is another side to the covenant that is not as certain, but is critical to the health of the relationship we enjoy in the covenant. The other side is our side. The Lord obligates Himself in the covenant to the promises He has made, but He also obligates us to the requirements He places upon us.

This concept of requirement for the believer is not a common and popular Bible study topic these days. Many Christians prefer to think of their relationship with the Lord as a one way relationship with only blessings flowing toward them from the Lord, with zero obligations required of them by the Lord. That is a spiritual fantasy, not a true covenant relationship with the Lord. The Lord expects and requires a certain kind of response from His people. In these two verses Moses identifies five aspects of what the Lord requires of us in the covenant. The Lord requires His people to 1) fear 2) walk 3) love 4) serve and 5) keep. Since these are requirements we are not free to pick and choose which of these five we will follow in our lives. All five are required for us to enjoy the fullness of a healthy relationship with the Lord.

It is significant that the first requirement is fear. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom..." (Proverbs 9:10). The fear that the Lord requires for us to hold in our heart toward Him is a reverential awe. It produces in us a deep concern to never disrespect, disregard, disobey, or displease Him. The requirement to walk in His ways calls us to more than a convenience based response to His standards and principles. We must be willing and desirous for our entire life direction to be reordered according to His ways rather than our own ways. The third requirement we have previously studied, but it is worth noting again that the Lord requires us to love Him. The Lord does not suggest we love Him, He does not recommend that we do, or even simply urge us to love Him. He requires our love. The covenant is ultimately a relationship based upon love. It is not our love for the Lord that gives life to the covenant, but His love for us.

His love for us creates in our hearts a corresponding and responsive love for Him. "We love, because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19). The fourth requirement of the Lord for every believer is covenant service. He has not saved us and drawn us into relationship with Himself in order to make us His spoiled and pampered children. He is training us to be like His Son. The Christian life properly understood is a call to a life of wholehearted service; "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve," (Matthew 20:28). The fifth

requirement is to keep the commandments of the Lord. This requires our obedience to the commandments of God. Our obedience is not optional. This requirement should not be separated from the previous four requirements or else we risk veering off into a legalistic perspective. Each requirement flows into the next. Our obedience is based in our fear of the Lord, our commitment to follow Him, our love for Him and our service to Him. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." (John 14:15).

10:14-16 - "Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day. So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer."

This declaration is meant to highlight the enormity of the Lord's love for us. The Lord is the God of all creation. His ownership of the highest heavens, all the earth, and all created things emphasize how much greater He is than us. We should not expect the One Who is so exalted above and beyond us to stoop to establish a relationship with us, and yet He has. We could never have expected it and we did not deserve it, nevertheless the Lord chose to set His affection upon us. I love the wording of that description of the Lord's love. The Lord set His affection on His people to love them. The picture drawn by these words is of a targeted love. Like the traditional drawings of Cupid shooting an arrow of love at the human heart, the Lord aimed at His people and hit His target with His affection. I think the word affection here is a helpful word to cause us to consider the love of God from a slightly different perspective. Have you ever stopped to consider that the Lord has made you an object of His heart's affection? Of course, human affection is pleasant, but not terribly consistent or enduring. The Lord's affection is not shallow, frivolous, or fleeting.

Such deep and abiding affection deserves an appropriate heart response. Moses had seen for forty years how the previous generation of Israel had responded to the covenant love of the Lord. They had undergone all of the required outer covenant obligations such as circumcision, but their hearts remained their own and far from the Lord. Moses calls this second generation to surpass their parent's generation by turning from their stubborn example and applying the spiritual principle of circumcision to their hearts and not just their flesh. This is the first mention in Scripture of circumcision as an inward principle and not simply a ritual of the flesh. This will become a recurring theme in God's communication to His people (Jeremiah 4:4, Romans 2:28-29, Colossians 2:11). The mark of circumcision was a mark of covenant ownership. When Abraham received circumcision by the commandment of God, his obedience showed that he no longer belonged to himself but to the Lord. This passage only emphasizes what that always meant. The Lord did not give Abraham the ritual of circumcision so that he could consider himself right with God while continuing to live the way he

wanted in his heart. God is not impressed when a person participates in an external religious ritual when their heart is not fully given to Him.

Deuteronomy 11

11:2-7 - "Know this day that I am not speaking with your sons who have not known and who have not seen the discipline of the LORD your God--His greatness, His mighty hand and His outstretched arm, and His signs and His works which He did in the midst of Egypt to Pharaoh the king of Egypt and to all his land; and what He did to Egypt's army, to its horses and its chariots, when He made the water of the Red Sea to engulf them while they were pursuing you, and the LORD completely destroyed them; and what He did to you in the wilderness until you came to this place; and what He did to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben, when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them, among all Israel-- but your own eyes have seen all the great work of the LORD which He did."

There are three generations of Israel in view in this section. The first generation was the original generation forty years ago that the Lord delivered from slavery in Egypt, but who all subsequently died in the wilderness because of their stubbornness of heart. The second generation is the focus of this section. They were all under twenty years old at the time of the Exodus, and have all grown up in the wilderness journey. They have replaced their parent's generation and are now fully responsible for their own response to the Lord and His Law. The third generation is present and observing, but is not directly responsible for the decisions being made by the second generation. The third generation is the children of the second generation who are themselves under twenty years of age (the age marking the transition into full adulthood). The Lord declares that He is not speaking with their sons. What is meant by this is that the third generation which is not fully adult yet is not now being held responsible by the Lord to the commands of this chapter. This does not mean that the Word of God does not apply to anyone under the age of twenty, but that each generation of adults are held responsible by the Lord for the condition of their own covenant relationship with the Lord as a nation.

Moses references several of the most significant experiences that this present generation witnessed throughout the forty years in the wilderness. He mentions events such as the Ten Plagues in Egypt, the destruction of Pharaoh's army of chariots in the Red Sea, and the judgment upon the rebels Dathan and Abiram. Moses brings up the remembrance of these events, not as a history lesson of distant events with little relationship to the present, but as critical markers to guide the progress of their own covenant relationship with the Lord. These remembered events are meant to have the same impact on our own relationship

with the Lord today. "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." (I Corinthians 10:11). This is what makes our reading of the events of Bible history more relevant than reading any other accounts of history. Bible history is what I would describe as spiritual history. The principle is that the Lord was at work in these events to provide for every generation of believers that followed a series of object lessons for our own walk with the Lord. The events of Bible history serve as examples for us; both good and bad examples of how to and how not to live. Their choices to remain faithful or rebel, to obey or disobey, to sin or to walk in righteousness are the same choices we all face in similar kinds of testing circumstances.

11:13-17 - "It shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, that He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil. He will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. Beware that your hearts are not deceived, and that you do not turn away and serve other gods and worship them. Or the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you."

Israel would soon experience a different life circumstance for their daily provision of food than they had ever known before. During their years in Egypt, they produced their food by farming the rich Nile Delta land. During the forty years in the wilderness their provision came directly from the Lord through the miraculous supply of manna from heaven each morning. Since the nation moved regularly from location to location in the wilderness years they had not farmed during that time. Once in the Promised Land, Israel would again become an agricultural nation and farm the land for their produce. However, the circumstances of farming would be quite different in Canaan than it was in Egypt. The farming in Egypt was 100% dependant upon irrigation using water from the Nile. There would be no Nile river to draw water in Canaan to water their crops. The Lord had promised them fertile farmlands in Canaan, but they were going to learn a new dependence in their farming.

Farming in the Promised Land would depend 100% upon rains. Necessary seasonal rains would cause crops to produce abundantly when present, or to fail when absent. Moses exhorts Israel to an appropriate spiritual response in light of this dependence upon the rains. This may seem like a primitive and strange thing to some modern readers who tend to view the world around us with a hyper-scientific perspective as though the world were a giant natural terrarium with all its functions determined by natural laws. That was not the way Moses viewed something as critically important to an agricultural society as rain. Moses

identifies rain in this passage as a covenant blessing. The implications of this are huge. If rain is a covenant blessing then the presence or absence of rain, the amount and even the timing of the rains are all controlled by something more than natural weather patterns. Moses describes rain as the gift of God. Israel was meant to see the rains needed for their crops as the reward of the Lord for their covenant faithfulness, and the lack of rain during periods of drought as the discipline of the Lord for their unfaithfulness to the covenant. Many scientists and meteorologists would sneer today at such a notion, but the truth is that the Lord controls the weather on this planet for His own purposes.

11:26-29 - "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known. It shall come about, when the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, that you shall place the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal."

Every covenant has several important elements including the covenant participants, the oaths necessary to establish the covenant, the terms or stipulations of the covenant, a ratifying act that symbolizes the covenant, and the sanctions that follow covenant faithfulness and unfaithfulness by the participants in the future. This passage is concerned with the future sanctions that Israel would experience. The sanctions are divided into two basic categories; blessing and cursing. Of course, one is what we would consider a positive sanction, while the other is a negative sanction. These sanctions are not flexible or theoretical, but certain and actual. Moses was warning Israel in advance that because they were in a covenant relationship their future would be characterized by one or the other. In the generations to follow Israel would either be known as a blessed nation or as a cursed nation. The reason for those characterizations would not be the accidental whims of history, but the caused consequences controlled by the sovereign Lord of the covenant based upon their own obedience or disobedience to Him.

While the possible blessings or cursings they might experience are not detailed here, the Lord will reveal them in great detail in a later chapter of Deuteronomy. A long chapter will give them a point by point description of what they can expect to experience in the future depending entirely on the quality of their walk with the Lord. As they first enter the Promised Land the Lord has ordained a vivid lesson for their hearts so that everyone in the nation clearly understands this principle of covenant blessing and cursing. The Lord chose two mountains in the Promised Land that were situated at two ends of the same valley. The two mountains were Gerizim and Ebal. Once the people enter the land the Lord will have Joshua divide all the people of Israel into two groups. Half the people will be directed to stand on the slopes of Gerizim, while the other half of the nation will be directed

to stand on the slopes of Ebal. From these two positions the Levites will read in a loud voice the list of the blessings of the covenant from Gerazim and the list of the curses from Ebal. Then each group of the people will in unison say "Amen" in a loud voice to each list. The Amen is a declaration saying, "So be it!". In this way the nation was spiritually calling down upon their own heads the consequences of the covenant that their own actions produced.

Deuteronomy 12

PARENTAL ALERT—some of the subject matter in 12:29-31 involves mature themes. Please review the comments with discernment before sharing with your children.

12:2-4 - "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess serve their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. You shall tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and burn their Asherim with fire, and you shall cut down the engraved images of their gods and obliterate their name from that place. You shall not act like this toward the LORD your God."

We live in a time and culture in which tolerance has become the predominant theme and anything and everything is accepted, protected and celebrated. It does not matter how strange or outlandish the belief, the principles of freedom of speech and freedom of religion are commonly applied in a way that would make it unthinkable for these commands of the Lord to be carried out today. Can you imagine the outrage if the Lord commanded Christians today to tear down all the places where other religions were practiced? We have not been given such a command in the New Testament as Israel was in the Old Testament, but there are principles that we are meant to learn from this and apply today.

The first thing that every Christian should understand from this passage is that the Lord is not nearly as tolerant of other religions as our society is. The shared perspective among most today is that truth, even religious "truth" is relative. If every religion is based upon relative truth, then no religion is a greater expression of the truth than any other. The result is the concept that all religions are equally valid attempts to understand God. If so, then Buddhism is as "true" as Hinduism and Satanism is as "true" as Christianity. This is the inevitable conclusion when the starting point for understanding religious truth is that all religions are man made attempts to understand and express the unknowable. If the truth is unknowable, then all religions are ultimately only the best guesses of the various leaders that began those religions.

This viewpoint fails to recognize the one exception to this otherwise accurate description of the religions of the world. The exception is that God Himself has intervened in an otherwise ignorant religious history and has revealed the truth regarding Himself and His plan in history. That revelation from God was most fully revealed at this time to Moses in the Law of God. The revelation of the Law from that point forward established what was and was not the truth. The Lord places great value on the truth, but looks with disdain on the false religions of the world that claim to represent Him, but which distort the truth. We don't see the Lord cautioning Moses to instruct Israel in their entrance to the Promised Land to be very careful to respect the religious expressions of the Canaanites. What we do see here is that in the coming conquest of Canaan, the Lord wants Israel to make the religious centers of Canaan a priority target. Israel was to "utterly destroy all the places" where the Canaanites served their false gods. They were to seek out every location and destroy it, tear down all the altars which they used to sacrifice to Baal and Molech, burn the Asherim, cut down the images of their gods, and completely obliterate their name from those places. This was a holy war, and not just a military venture.

How should we as Christians apply the principles of this set of commands in our modern world? We must recognize that we have been commissioned by the Lord into a similar holy war. The main difference between our warfare and the ones the Israelites were to conduct is that our warfare is not physical as theirs was. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ," (II Corinthians 10:3-5). We are in a full scale spiritual war. As believers in the One true God we are to engage in battle with every false religion and every false concept of God, but we do not fight with natural weapons. Our battle is fought with spiritual words and ideas. Nevertheless, we must recognize

Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Scientology, Mormonism, Astrology, Atheism, etc. for what they are; false religions which are to be fought and conquered with the truth.

12:5-9 - "But you shall seek the LORD at the place which the LORD your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come. There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. There also you and your households shall eat before the LORD your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you. You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you."

There is a key phrase introduced for the first time in the Bible in this passage, but which will be repeated as a warning to future generations in Israel. The phrase is "every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes." This is the most accurate description of human society apart from the Lord's presence and influence. Even God's holy nation needed this warning and would tend to go this direction if left to themselves. It is a common failure of fallen human nature that people think that what seems right in their own eyes is right. However, what seems best to us is not best for us. The reason is that because of the fall and the subtle influence of sin upon our hearts and minds, all people tend to see what they would prefer as what is right. We are all born into this world selfishly inclined and that inclination colors our way of interpreting the world around us. The difficulty of discipleship in the ways of the Lord is in learning that what seemed right to us before salvation is often wrong in the eyes of the Lord. The commitment of discipleship is in choosing what the Lord says is right over what had previously seemed right to us. The acknowledgment that we cannot be trusted to set our own standard of right and wrong is one of the first steps in Christian growth. The person that lives a life that is pleasing to the Lord has learned to live according to the standard of what is right in the Lord's eyes, not their own.

12:29-31 - "When the LORD your God cuts off before you the nations which you are going in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, beware that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?' You shall not behave thus toward the LORD your God, for every abominable act which the LORD hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods."

Moses warns Israel in this passage against the danger of being ensnared in the future by the religions of the Canaanites. To be ensnared means to be caught in a trap unaware. Even after the nations of Canaan are conquered, any elements of their religions that are allowed to remain intact will become a snare for future generations of Israel. The spiritual curiosity of God's people will lead them to turn their attention in a dangerous way to the gods of Canaan. We are not told the

details of why those future generations of Israel would experiment and eventually embrace these false gods as the Canaanites had done. Perhaps their motive would be to "cover their spiritual bases" just in case another "god" could provide them with a blessing that Yahweh was not. Perhaps it would be dissatisfaction with the Lord because of some perceived failure on His part to do for them what they wanted, like Israel complained against the Lord in the wilderness when He gave manna instead of meat.

This warning given by Moses here was based upon the prophetic certainty of the future. The Lord had already revealed to Moses the future unfaithfulness of Israel once they settled in the Promised Land. Future generations of Israel would be unfaithful to their covenant vows to the Lord with multiple false gods of the Canaanites. In order for Israel to turn from the Lord and turn to these gods of Canaan, they would have to ignore the obvious. If the gods of Canaan were in any way equal to the Lord, then surely they would be capable of protecting the seven nations of Canaan that served them against the threat of invading Israel. The complete conquest of the Promised Land by a smaller, less powerful nation of Israel should have proved to Israel once again the complete superiority of the Lord in comparison with all the gods of Canaan. Yet, they would later turn to the gods of those defeated nations as though they were capable of providing some missing blessing for their lives.

Moses also chose a single example of the fruit of the false religions of Canaan to shock the perspectives of the Israelites toward these gods. This example should have served as a permanent vaccine against the disease of defecting to worship Baal or Molech. Moses reminds Israel that one of the requirements in the worship of the Canaanite god, Molech was that his worshippers were commanded to "burn their sons and daughters in the fire." Archeology has discovered in digs of ancient Canaanite religious sites large clay jars in which the burnt skeletons of small children have been preserved as a silent witness through the ages of the perverse wickedness of the religions of Canaan. As part of their fertility rites, the Canaanites offered their own children to Molech by placing them in such clay jars and burning them alive as an offering to their god. One would think that such a dark and degenerate practice could never become a fascination of Israel, let alone a practice God's people would embrace and practice. However, once a person turns from the Lord and His revealed Word, they become susceptible to things they would never have considered when they were following the Lord. Israel's future will be marked by this and other expressions of spiritual corruption.

Deuteronomy 13

13:1-5 - "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 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,' 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. 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. But that prophet or that 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."

Chapter 12 ended with a warning from Moses about the danger Israel would face in the future of being ensnared by the false gods of the Canaanites. Chapter 13 continues that theme with a three part warning. There are three specific ways that Israel might be ensnared that are addressed in this chapter and each Israelite is being forewarned about these three specific dangers. The first danger will come through the influence of false prophets. Israel's legacy as God's holy nation is based upon the influence of prophets. The prophets are the individuals God chose in each generation to make them His messengers. It was through the ministry and messages of the prophets that Israel was first established as a nation and was continually called back to the ways of the Lord. The prophets of God from Moses to Malachi were the single most important influence upon Israel to keep them faithful to the Lord as a nation.

Not all prophets in Israel would be prophets of God however. For every true prophet that God had called and sent to Israel with His message, there were a greater number that claimed to represent the Lord when the Lord had neither called or sent them. In each generation, Israel would encounter the challenge of false prophets. The first lesson to learn from this warning is that not everyone that claims to be a messenger from God actually is. Once the people of God learn that they will encounter both true and false messengers of God, then they must be prepared to evaluate and discern the difference between them. The nation would be responsible to recognize the true prophets of God, listen to their message, and obey it. They were equally responsible to identify the false prophets, reject their message and execute the Lord's severe judgment upon those that dared to attempt to lead Israel away from the Lord.

The responsibility to distinguish between the true and false prophets meant that Israel must be prepared to put all that claimed to be prophets to the test. The necessity of testing those who claim to represent God continues for the people of God as long as the danger of spiritual deception exists. Similar warnings are

given in the New Testament to show us that this danger was not limited to Old Testament Israel only. "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?" (Matthew 7:15-16). "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves." (II Peter 2:1).

The test Israel is commanded to apply in this passage is the test of faithfulness to what had previously been revealed through Moses. The goal of the false prophet was to "counsel rebellion against the Lord." This meant that they would influence Israel to turn from its faithfulness to the Lord by encouraging the nation to follow other gods. The Lord had already clearly revealed Who He was and what His standards were to Moses in the Law. The danger of the false prophet was in the subtle effort to "seduce" Israel from the way of the Lord. No false prophet advertises themselves as that openly. None of them would announce themselves as false prophets who had come to deceive the nation. Each false prophet would claim to be a messenger of truth. The Lord had safeguarded Israel from this subtle seduction by giving them the Law, but it would be necessary for Israel to remember the Law each time each new false prophet appeared.

Compounding the danger of some false prophets was the influence of a sign or wonder. Signs and wonders are Biblical terms for what we usually refer to as a miracle. Moses warns Israel here that some of the false prophets they would encounter in the future would seem even more believable because their message might seem to be confirmed by a sign or wonder. In such cases, the easily influenced in Israel would be convinced by the sign and follow the false prophet to their own destruction. The warning given here alerts Israel to the reality that even a sign or a wonder can occur as part of a deception, and that the supernatural element in the sign is not automatic proof that the sign is true or from God. The New Testament also warns us that not all signs and wonders are expressions of God's power. "that is, the one 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." (II Thessalonians 2:9-10). False signs and wonders are marks of the activity of Satan designed to deceive. True signs and wonders are done by God to confirm the truth of His Word and the message of the Gospel. In the Old Testament the signs and wonders the Lord did were always to validate the truth of the Law and confirm that a prophet was a true messenger of God. If the messenger performed a sign, but spoke a message that contradicted God's Law, then Israel was to know that messenger was not sent by God.

13:6-11 - "If your brother, your mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods' (whom neither you nor your fathers have known, of the gods of the peoples who are around you, near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end), you shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him. But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. So you shall stone him to death because he has sought to seduce you from the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such a wicked thing among you."

The second danger to Israel that would influence them away from the Lord to follow false gods was the danger of unfaithful close relationships. In this case, there was no false prophet involved. The danger would come through an unexpected source and one against which most people would tend to be unguarded. No one would expect to be led into spiritual destruction by their own brother, son, daughter, wife, or closest friend. These are relationships of trust in which people ordinarily let down their guard to one another. The point of this warning is not to say that we cannot trust anyone spiritually, but to warn that even our closest relationships can potentially be avenues for spiritual deception if we are unguarded. If a member of an Israelite family was to veer away from the Lord in their heart and attempt to influence the other members of their family to follow them in giving their heart to other gods, what should the other family members do in response?

What the Lord required was terribly difficult, but critical for the spiritual welfare of the family and the nation as God's holy people. The Lord did not allow the other family members to tolerate the spiritual defection of the one that turned to other gods. The family was not free to ignore or overlook such a serious transgression. The other family members were commanded to not pity, spare or conceal him. All three of those responses were natural tendencies we would all have in attempt to protect a loved family member in such a case. We have a saying that "blood is thicker than water." What is meant is that family ties are greater than any other ties. The Lord was training Israel in this law that covenant is thicker than blood. Even family ties, as strong as they are, are not as important as the obligations of our covenant with the Lord. The Lord created the family and causes us to bond with our natural family members, but here the Lord is showing us that if faithfulness to the Lord is pitted against faithfulness to a family member that we must choose the Lord over that family member. Jesus described this spiritual priority in this way, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." (Matthew 10:37).

13:12-16 - "If you hear in one of your cities, which the LORD your God is giving you to live in, anyone saying that some worthless men have gone out from among you and have seduced the inhabitants of their city, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods' (whom you have not known), then you shall investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly. If it is true and the matter established that this abomination has been done among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it and all that is in it and its cattle with the edge of the sword. Then you shall gather all its booty into the middle of its open square and burn the city and all its booty with fire as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God; and it shall be a ruin forever. It shall never be rebuilt."

The third danger of spiritual defection that Israel would have to face was the case of an entire city in Israel turning away from the Lord. If one of the cities of Israel was to fall under the influence of wicked men and turn from the Lord to serve other gods, how should the rest of the nation respond? Should the nation give the city that defects from the Lord the freedom to choose their own spiritual direction? If Israel was a spiritually pluralistic society, as our modern society is proud to be, then each city should be free to choose what gods it wants to worship and serve. However, the Lord requires of all Israel a much greater accountability than that. When any city in Israel defected to serve other gods, all other cities in Israel were required by the Lord to respond with severe judgment against that city. This response was not to be taken lightly or on hearsay. The nation was to make a thorough investigation to determine the accuracy of any report of citywide spiritual defection. But, once the investigation revealed that the city had turned from the Lord then the entire city and all its inhabitants were to be brought under judgment.

The reason the Lord imposed this standard on all the cities of Israel was that the guiding principle in Israel was not freedom of choice, but the holy Law of God. Faithfulness to the Lord and His Law were not optional in Israel. Israel was the holy nation of the Lord. They belonged to Him, not to themselves. Once they entered into the covenant with the Lord, they were not free to break that covenant without the most serious consequences. In this way, the Lord called every region in Israel to hold every other region accountable to remain faithful to the Lord.