

Deuteronomy 13:4

You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.

Read the context: Deuteronomy 12:1-13:18

These are strong context verses! God is quite serious about this. These two chapters contain some very clear, polarized contrasts. What is the primary positive command in these 2 chapters, and what is the primary negative or counter command? (12:1-4, 28-32, 13:18) Leviticus 18:1-5 states this contrast of commands very succinctly. In Leviticus 18:2, 4, and 5, what is the foundational reason given for why these should be obeyed? And what is the promise given in verse 5? This reveals God's heart toward us: He wants us to LIVE! We see a similar theme in the context verses. What is God's desire for us in 12:25 and 28? This is the kind of God we serve: He wants us to live and for life to go well for us.

The context verses explain what God means by life going well for us, and they help us to see the heart of God toward us. The words used show us the kind of life He wants to give us. Notice these words in 12:7-12: rejoice, blessed, rest, safety, rejoice. Don't our hearts long for those very things? Those words so fully describe the kind of life we all truly desire.

To have that kind of life and to remain in it is going to take diligent effort, constant vigilance, keen discernment, and total reliance on the grace of God. Sigh. Our souls shy away from such mental and spiritual strain. We are a sluggish, lazy lot. We want a life of ease, sloth, and self-reliance. It's interesting, isn't it, that joy and blessing, rest and safety are not synonymous with ease or lack of effort; these benefits come through the journey, the hard work of the Christian life. God is calling us to a life that is bracingly vigorous, mentally challenging, fully engaged. We are called to remain focused on God and moving toward Him in holiness. The title of a book by Eugene Peterson states this well: "A Long Obedience in the Same Direction." Underline these repeated words in chapter 12: *be careful* and *take heed*. When the people entered the Promised Land, what was to be their first priority according to 12:2-4? Write out the specific instructions given in verses 2 & 3. From these we see that it was to be complete and thorough: utterly.

In 12:30 there are 2 things they were warned about: "Take heed to yourselves that . . ." Write out the 2 things. We are so easily drawn into false philosophies and the worship of other gods; God knows our propensities to deception (*ensnared*) and curiosity (*inquire*). He also knows the subtle and insidious nature of false religions, which demand more and more in our vain attempts to find peace and happiness and to get our own needs met. According to 12:31, how demanding were the false gods of the land? How does God view the allowable practices of false religions according to this same verse?

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False religions are not based on the God of mercy and love, relationship and wholesome living; but on self-efficacy, attempts to measure up and gain approval on our own merit, gods that allow us the “freedom” and even encourage us to give full vent to our lusts (self-actualization; self-affirmation; independence; “have it your way”; if it feels good, do it; you’re #1; look out for yourself: self...self...self). As Christians we have freedom – freedom from self, but never freedom to violate God’s laws or even to take them lightly. We are freed FROM sin not FOR sin. This is the essence of the Gospel: dependence upon and application of God’s grace given to us through Christ in order to live as He wants us to. False religions lead down the path to death as we see in 12:31, while obedience to God leads to the kind of Life described in 12:7-12.

This is echoed in Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:13-14 and John 10:7-10. In Matthew 7:13-14, what are the only 2 choices in life and where does each one lead? According to John 10:10, what do false religions (“the thief”) do to us and what does Jesus want to do for us?

In Deuteronomy 12:32 we are given another warning that reveals another of our propensities. Write the 2 things we are not to do. We are warned more than once in God’s Word not to do this: read Deuteronomy 4:2, Proverbs 30:6, and Revelation 22:18-19. These are subtleties of the enemy of our souls, little additions that become pharisaical burdens taking us far afield from the heart of God or minor compromises that lead to the casting off of all restraint. Let us be careful to obey ALL He has commanded, not more, not less. How is this same warning stated in Joshua 1:7?

Deuteronomy 13 gives strong, specific instructions for dealing with one of their own people who might try to lead them into the worship of other gods or encourage them to follow or try out the practices of other nations. According to 13:1-3, what kind of person are they being warned about? Oh, this is insidious, isn’t it? The enticement comes from someone who seems to have authority from God and even some supernatural proofs to back it up! What do we learn from this about supernatural experiences and signs? Remember how Pharaoh’s magicians duplicated some of the miraculous signs Moses gave to Pharaoh? See Exodus 7:11-12, 22; 8:7. It has always seemed comical to me and quite stupid that Pharaoh’s magicians would bring more of the plagues upon their own people just to prove that they were as capable as Moses. But, interestingly, they were not able to undo what God had done; only He could do that. Read Job 42:2, Isaiah 14:27 & 43:13. Write out what you learn about God from those verses.

We may think that we would not be taken in by that kind of falsehood, but look at II Thessalonians 2:9-10, Revelation 13:13-14 and 12:9, and the warnings of Jesus in Matthew 24:5, 11, and 24. The common word running through each of those verses is *deceive*. The very nature and meaning of deception is such that one doesn’t know when he/she is being deceived; it looks like the real deal. And because these deceptions are supernatural events or signs, things that couldn’t happen by normal, natural means, the deception is even stronger. Take some time right now to stop and pray for yourself and your loved ones that God would protect you from this kind of deception, that He would give you discernment and keep you alert spiritually. These are

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serious times we live in and many who claim the name of Christ are being led astray. Pray! Earnestly, continually.

What is the repeated verb in Deuteronomy 13:5, 6, & 13 that is used to describe what these false prophets/dreamers/performers of signs will try to do? Look up that word in a couple different dictionaries or on the computer. Write out the definitions you find. Using those definitions, write in your own words why the temptation to worship other gods would be so *enticing*. It is a warning to our own hearts, isn't it? Enticement is tightly linked with desire; we all desire things that offer us some advantage or quick fix. Be on your guard.

Deuteronomy 13:8-9 succinctly reiterates (verses 3 & 5 have already stated the same) the specific actions that are to be taken toward someone who tries to entice us to disobey God and obey other false gods/ideologies. Write down the 6 commands given for how to deal with a person who is doing this. Pretty strong language. Jesus said something similar in Matthew 5:29-30; He knew the devastating effects of sin, not just for this life but also for eternity.

According to Deuteronomy 13:6, who all was to be included in this severe treatment? Again, we hear an echo of this in Jesus' teaching in Matthew 10:34-38. How do these words in Matthew relate to Deuteronomy 13? Deuteronomy 13 helps us to understand Matthew 10, doesn't it? We see from these verses how finely tuned our hearts are to be toward God. The fear of the Lord trumps every other relationship; it is the arrow that hits dead center of the bull's eye of our hearts. This is serious business. Take some time to examine your heart before the Lord. Ask yourself the question Jesus asked Peter in John 21:15: Do you love Me more than these? Open your hand and offer each precious relationship to God.

Deuteronomy 13:11 tells why they were to act so decisively and conclusively. What were the reasons? There's our key word: fear. Fear, the proper kind of fear, fearing the right things, keeps us from wickedness. As we continue to study the fear of the Lord, we will see this prevailing theme linking the fear of the Lord with obedience, which protects us from evil by causing us to turn away from it.

In Deuteronomy 13:12-18, the people are instructed about how to deal with a whole city that has been led astray, away from the worship of God. What were they to do first (vs. 14)? They couldn't go on hearsay or do something rash. There had to be "due process" and clear-headedness. But if after careful investigation the accusation was found to be true, then what were the 2 specific things they were to do? Verse 17 gives 2 reasons they were to do those 2 things. What are the 2 reasons? Notice that the second reason is a result of the first reason. What does God want to show toward us (also vs. 17)? Why can't He just do that/be like that even when we are in sin or rebellion against Him? What would that encourage us to do?

Think about it in these 2 scenarios: 1) What if a judge with a tender heart let a thief or murderer go and acted like it didn't matter because he just wanted to "love" the thief/murderer. What would happen to society? Is this justice? Is it even compassionate or merciful? What does it teach the criminal? Does it help him or hurt him? 2) What if a parent looks the other way, has

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pity on their child, or makes excuses for him when he does something he knows is wrong. What does that teach the child? Does this kind of “compassion” help the child or make him harder to get along with and make life more difficult for him? Are we teaching the child justice and the truth about the world and relationships? Is it really compassionate or merciful?

God knows that the worship of false gods, the following of false ideologies/philosophies will eventually destroy not only ourselves but also the entire culture and society. It is not merely individualistic or isolated; it is collectively deadly serious.

Why would God tell them to kill and burn everything? If they didn't, what potential would those things have (see Deuteronomy 12:2-4)? We must be ruthless with the things in our lives that have the potential of leading us away from God, the only Source of truth, joy, freedom, reality. But this command to burn all the plunder was also a safeguard to keep them from the evil propensity to greed that is within all of our hearts. It prevented them from falsely accusing a city just to carry away the loot.

Look at the words used to describe the people and things that turn us away from God: evil (13:5), wickedness (13:11), abomination (12:31 & 13:14), accursed (13:17). These are not trivial things to overlook or be passive about or toy with as if they are harmless. Take time right now to come honestly before the Lord, again with open hands, asking Him to show you if there is anything in your life or home that is leading you astray, keeping you from the pure worship of God – i.e. giving you a divided heart between God and the world, or putting false philosophies before you or your children. Then ask Him to give you the desire and courage to rid your life/home of those things.

Remember that the only reason God asks us to rid our lives of false things, of things that turn our hearts away from Him, is because He wants life to go well for us and He wants to bless us, to show mercy to us, and to have compassion on us. He cannot bless what He knows will destroy us; that would be partnering in our downfall and destruction. Oh, if we could only see sin the way He sees it! May God give us a healthy hatred for all that turns our hearts, even in the slightest, away from Him.

What is God's purpose in allowing a false prophet to arise (13:3)? Whenever we are faced with any temptation, Satan, the enemy of our souls, has an agenda, and God, the Lover of our souls, has a purpose. Satan wants us to be led astray from wholehearted devotion to God; God wants to test the reality of our love for Him. Every temptation, every false philosophy, indeed, every choice and action tests who and what we love.

Our Fear of the Lord verse for this study clearly shows us how our love for God is expressed. Write out the 6 ways from Deuteronomy 13:4 that our love for God is demonstrated. Another prevailing theme: The fear of the Lord is always and necessarily intertwined with love for the Lord. Pray over these 6 things; pray that God would work them deeply into your life and into the lives of those you love.

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Add to your Fear of the Lord list what you have learned from this verse study.