

# LAWS THAT PROTECT A PERSON FROM IDOLATRY: THE DANGERS OF BEING SEDUCED INTO FALSE WORSHIP DEUTERONOMY 13:01–18

## *Introduction*

Deceiving, seducing, enticing people to do wrong is a terrible evil. Seduction and enticement mislead people to break the commandments of God and, in many cases, doom them to a life of suffering. One of the most severe judgments of God is reserved for the person who deceives and seduces another person. This is especially true when the seduction leads to false worship. The enticement to disobey God's holy commandments — to turn away from God — to commit sin will be severely judged by God. *Laws That Protect a Person from Idolatry: The Dangers of Being Seduced into False Worship*, Deuteronomy 13:1-18.

- I. The danger of a false prophet or an interpreter of dreams seducing you into false worship (vv. 1-5).
- II. The danger of a loved one or close friend seducing you into false worship (vv. 6-11).
- III. The danger of an entire city or community seducing you into false worship (vv. 12-18).

## **I. *Deuteronomy 13:01–05 The Danger of False Prophets***

There is the danger of a false prophet, or an interpreter of dreams, seducing you into false worship. Prophets or interpreters of dreams have always impressed or intrigued people, aroused their curiosity. Sometimes a person who proclaims to tell the future has been able to secure a large following, deceiving and misleading people. This was a very real danger with the Israelites just as it is with any generation of people. False prophets and the leaders of the occult are everywhere, and their deceptions pose a real threat to the masses who are seduced. For this reason, Moses warned the Israelites: you must guard against the false prophet and the interpreter of dreams, guard against their seducing you into false worship.

1. Moses warned that the person will prove that he is a prophet: he will actually perform miraculous works (v. 1).
2. After performing the miraculous works, the prophet will suggest that you follow other gods and participate in their worship (v. 2). Down through the centuries, the suggestion has often been that all people worship the same God; they just call Him by different names.

The false prophet suggests that no matter what name is used to address God, He is still the same God. We all worship the same God; we just call Him by different names.

3. Moses issued a strong warning: you must not listen to the words of this prophet (v. 3). His words betray him: no true prophet could ever speak such words. This is a direct violation of the first commandment:
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**Deut 5:7** “*You shall have no other gods before me.*”

This is also a direct violation of the greatest of all commandments, that you love the LORD wholeheartedly — with all your heart, soul and strength:

**Deut 6:5** *Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

The standard of truth is not miraculous works, not spectacular signs or wonders, not the prediction of future events. The standard of truth is God’s Holy Word, not the words of a prophet or psychic or fortune-teller or palm-reader or astrologer or any other person who delves into the world of the occult and the prediction of future events.

The test of a prophet is this one thing: does he lead people to follow the LORD by obeying His Holy Word. No true prophet would ever encourage people to violate God’s Holy Word or commandments. Neither would a true prophet ever suggest that people turn to other gods. There is no other God than the LORD God Himself (Jehovah, Yahweh). And there is no other true worship than the worship dictated by the Holy Word of God. He and He alone stands as the only living and true God, as the great Creator and Sovereign Owner of the universe. Therefore, He and He alone knows how He is to be worshipped. This is the very reason God revealed the truth of Himself and of true worship to man. Therefore, man is to worship Him and Him alone exactly as He has revealed. Any other worship of another god is a false worship. No matter what the prophet or the leader of the occult might claim: the true worship is the worship of God as revealed in His Holy Word and commandments.

4. Note the purpose of this particular seduction, why the LORD allowed the temptation of the false prophet to entice you (v. 3). The purpose was to test you, to find out if you truly love God with all your heart and soul. The temptation to participate in false worship is allowed by God for this one reason: to strengthen you, to make you stronger in your faith. By standing upon God’s Word against the temptation, you defeat the seduction. You overcome the enticement, and by overcoming it, you become stronger. You stand forth as a strong testimony for God, bearing witness to the unbelievers who surround you. This is the reason God allows the seduction of false worship and idolatry, to strengthen you and to make you a stronger testimony and witness for Him. By testing you, God gives you the opportunity to prove your love for Him, that you love Him with all your heart and with all your soul.
5. Note the charge given by Moses (v. 4). You must do three things to conquer the seduction of false prophets and the occult leaders who predict the future. If you do these three things, you will overcome and triumph over the seduction to false worship and idolatry.
  - a. You must follow the LORD God and fear Him. The LORD is the only true and living God, the Creator and Sovereign Majesty of the universe. There is no other; therefore,

you must follow Him and Him alone. Moreover, you must fear Him, revere and stand in awe of Him, acknowledging His justice and judgment, and doing all you can to escape His judgment.

- b. You must obey the LORD God and keep all His commandments. You must seek to please Him and Him alone, not some false prophet or occult leader who predicts future events. The false prophet and predictor of future events are not to be obeyed, not to be followed or feared. The LORD God Himself is the One who is to be obeyed, followed and feared.
  - c. You must serve and cling to the LORD God, hold fast to Him. It is He who gives you life, and the strength and ability to work and carry on activity upon this earth. Therefore, it is He who deserves the energy and service of your life, the focus of your strength, not some false prophet or predictor of future events. You owe the LORD God your life and service.
6. Now note the judicial judgment or penalty pronounced upon the false prophets or occult leaders who seduce God's people. The penalty was to be death (v. 5). Capital punishment was the verdict because of the seriousness of the crime. The false prophet or occult leader was to be executed...
- because he encouraged rebellion against the LORD
  - because it was God who had delivered and redeemed His people out of Egypt, not the false prophet
  - because the false prophet tried to turn the people away from the LORD, leading them to disobey His Holy Word and commandments.
7. Note that Moses stressed the judgment once again: remove, put away the evil from you (v. 5). Purge the evil from among you. Reject the seduction to idolatry and false worship. Remove it! Get rid of it!

**Thought 1.** One of the greatest dangers faced by believers is that of false prophets and occult leaders who predict the future. They seduce us into false worship, the worship of other gods. False prophets will suggest that we all worship the same God; we just call Him by different names. They use the name of God as though it possesses magic: that is, if a person professes the name of God and attends worship services, he is automatically accepted by God. But this is not the teaching of Holy Scripture. Scripture declares that God has revealed Himself and revealed the way to become acceptable to Him. God has revealed that He is the Sovereign Creator of the universe, the Creator of all that is in heaven and earth, including man. As the Creator of man, He alone knows how man can become acceptable to Him.

God knew that man could never penetrate the spiritual world and dimension of being, never be able to reach into the spiritual world and find God or see God face to face. If man was ever to meet God, God had to reveal Himself to man, enter into the

physical, material dimension of being. God had to come to earth in order for man to meet God. This God did in the person of His Son, the LORD Jesus Christ. It is God who has revealed to man how to become acceptable to Him, revealed what life has to be in order to live a full and victorious life upon this earth. If any prophet preaches any other gospel other than the gospel of the LORD Jesus Christ, he is a false prophet. Moreover, if he teaches anything that contradicts the Holy Word of God and His commandments, he is a false prophet (Gal 1:6-9).

Another danger that combats the believer is the world of the occult: the person who dreams and predicts future events — psychic, palm-reader, fortune-teller, astrologer, stargazer, sorcerer, diviner and any other person who contradicts the Holy Word and commandments of God. The tragic error of the occult leaders is this: they teach people...

- to trust them and their predictions
- to put their faith in them and their ability to predict the future
- to entrust their lives into their hands and their predictions

The error is clearly seen and tragic: the occult leaders turn people away from God, seducing people to trust them instead of God. Even more dangerous is the insidious suggestion that a person may follow God and also trust the occult leaders' predictions. But Holy Scripture is clear: anything — anything whatsoever that turns a person away from God and His Holy Word is false.

(1) God warns us, there is the danger of a false prophet seducing us into false worship.

*Gal 1:6-9 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!*

(2) There is the danger of the occult leaders seducing us to turn away from God and to place our trust in them and their predictions.

*Acts 16-19 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her. When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.*

**Gal 5:19-21** *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

**Rev 21:8** *But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.*

**Deut 18:9-13** *When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD; because of these same detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God.*

**2 Kng 17:17** *They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sought omens and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger.*

**2 Kng 21:6** *He [king Manasseh] sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced divination, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger.*

**Isa 47:9** *Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells.*

**Micah 5:12** *I will destroy your witchcraft and you will no longer cast spells.*

**Zec 10:2** *The idols speak deceitfully, diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams that are false, they give comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd.*

## **II. Deuteronomy 13:06–11 The Danger of Seduction into False Worship**

There is the danger of a loved one or close friend seducing you into false worship. The intimacy of family and the bond of friends can be used to seduce a believer into false worship. In fact, the strongest influence to false worship is often suggested by a loved one. Family members and close friends influence one another: therefore, if a person turned to false worship, he would most likely lead other family members and friends to join him in various functions of worship. There would be the invitation to join in social functions, study classes, recreational activities and worship services. This was a very real danger among the Israelites. A little participation would eventually lead to apostasy, the turning away from God. Above all other dangers, Moses knew that this was the most threatening danger of all: the danger of a loved one or close friend seducing a person into false worship.

1. The seduction of a family member or close friend into false worship is a secret enticement (v. 6). It is a simple, off-the-cuff suggestion such as...
  - worshipping other gods is acceptable
  - engaging in other worship is acceptable
  - a person does not have to approach God through the substitute sacrifice: there are other ways to approach Him.
2. Note the strong, forceful warning given by Moses to the Israelites.
  - a. All other gods are false gods. They were not worshipped by the forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v. 6). They are the gods of the people who surround you, the gods of your neighbours and the gods of the other peoples of the world.
  - b. You must not yield to the seduction of your family member or friend. You must not even listen to him (v. 8).
  - c. You must not pity him nor spare him. But you must turn him over to the authorities to keep his seduction from spreading and causing others to turn away from God (v. 8).

Of course, this was most difficult to do. It would be far easier for a person to rationalize the behaviour of his loved one or at least to overlook and minimize the dangerous threat of the seduction to false worship. But not to God: the greatest danger that faces a human being is to turn away from Him. Turning away from God dooms a person to eternal separation from God, to eternal judgment and condemnation.
3. Moses declared the judicial judgment or penalty: the verdict was death (vv. 9-10). Note that the seduced person was to take the lead in executing justice. By law, he was to cast the first stone. As painful as this was, it was his responsibility. His relative or friend had done a terrible evil against him. The loved one had tried to turn him away from the LORD. Moreover, the LORD had saved him; therefore, he was to show his allegiance, his loyalty to the LORD. This was demonstrated by taking the lead in purging the evil from among God's people. The execution of justice would be a deterrent to evil; all Israel would hear about the execution and fear. The seduction to false worship would be stopped.

**Thought 1.** The influence of family members and friends is strong, very strong. If we are close, we greatly influence each other. For this reason, we must watch for the suggestions of our loved ones, the suggestions that are contrary to the Word of God. If a family member or friend offers a quiet suggestion that seduces us to break one of God's commandments, we must reject the seduction. We must never allow ourselves to be enticed to turn away from God, to disobey His Holy Word and commandments.

=> Any suggestion that any other worship is acceptable is false.

=> Any suggestion that we can approach God through some way other than the atoning sacrifice of Christ is false.

=> Any suggestion that we all worship the same God — no matter what we call Him — is false.

=> Any suggestion that we put our trust in any other person other than the LORD Himself is false.

Even if the suggestion comes from a family member or friend, the suggestion is a seduction into false worship and idolatry. It is a suggestion that leads to the trust of something else other than God Himself. And to trust something else is false, a lie. It will doom us, cause the judgment of God to fall upon our heads. A family member or loved one who has been deceived into false worship can seduce us. Their influence is tremendous, ever so strong. Therefore, we must be vigilant, on guard against the seduction of loved ones, against even the slightest suggestion that we not obey God's Holy Word and commandments. We must reject all seductions to false worship even if the suggestion comes quietly from our family members and close friends.

**Rom 14:13** *Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.*

**Rom 14:15** *If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.*

**Gal 5:9** *A little [evil] yeast works through the whole batch of dough.*

**1 Cor 5:11** *But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.*

**1 Cor 8:10** *For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols?*

**2 Cor 6:14** *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?*

**1 John 2:5** *But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him.*

**Exo 23:2** *Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd.*

**Psa 1:1** *Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers.*

**Prov 4:14** *Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men.*

### **III. Deuteronomy 13:12–18 The danger of Seduction by the Community**

There is the danger of an entire city or community seducing you into false worship. What happened if an entire city or town committed apostasy against God? Nothing is any more horrible than for an entire community or body of people to be engrossed in false worship.

To be engrossed in false worship means to be separated from God. It means that a person has to live without God's presence, provision and protection from the ills and evil of this world. For an entire community or town to be completely cut off from God means the outbreak of all forms...

- of lawlessness and violence
- of brutality and savagery
- of greed and covetousness
- of immorality and sexual perversion
- of lust and passion
- of bondage and slavery

This has been demonstrated and is still being demonstrated in many of the communities, cities and towns of the world. Where the LORD and His Holy Word are honoured, that place is able to control the sins and evil of people. But the evil, greed and domination of men run rampant where the people do not obey the Holy Word and commandments of God. This was a very real danger that threatened the Israelites. The whole world of their day lay in wickedness. Their neighbours were immoral, lawless and violent. It was going to be difficult, very difficult for Israel to preserve its holiness, to escape the seduction of the surrounding world, its pleasures and bright lights. If the Israelites adopted the seductive, immoral and worldly lifestyle of their neighbours, if they allowed entire cities or communities to turn away from God, their fate would be sealed. They would be expelled from the promised land. Moses knew this; therefore, he laid out the measures that were to be taken against large-scale apostasy.

1. The scene painted is that of a few wicked men arising and beginning to seduce their friends into false worship (v. 13). As time passes, the wickedness grows rapidly: more and more people join into the seduction of false worship. Eventually the entire community or city turns away from God and His holy commandments. The only true and living God is no longer worshipped and His holy commandments are no longer obeyed. The people are following false gods and involved in false worship.
2. Moses laid down the judicial process to be followed. Before any action could be taken against the community or city, a careful investigation of the case was necessary (v. 14). The *supreme court* or *central tribunal* of the nation was to oversee the investigation (Deut 17:8-13).
3. If the charge against the community or city was confirmed, the judicial judgment or penalty was severe (vv. 15-16). The verdict was to be corporate punishment because of corporate responsibility. All the people and livestock were to be executed, and the entire city burned with all of its plunder.

Note that this judgment was to be offered to God as a Burnt Offering, that is, as a sacrifice for reconciliation with God (v. 16). No greater offense could be committed against God. A whole city or community of people had turned away, rejecting and rebelling against Him. They were not only refusing to obey His commandments, they were rejecting Him personally by turning to false worship and to other gods. They had rejected and rebelled against the only living and true God, the Giver of life

Himself. This was the most terrible, horrible evil that could be committed against the LORD God (Jehovah, Yahweh). Consequently, if a community or city committed such a dishonouring evil against God, they could expect nothing less than *utter destruction*. Note that the city was to be left in ruins forever, never to be rebuilt (v. 16). It was to stand as a warning to all other communities and cities: they must not turn away from God and His holy commandments, must not turn to false worship and idolatry.

4. Note the strong charge given by Moses to the Israelites: they were to execute the judgment and keep no plunder (vv. 17-18). If all the people within the city or community were guilty of this horrible, terrible sin, they were to be treated just like those in a Canaanite city. They were no different from the Canaanites who were engrossed in idolatry. It was because of false worship that the Canaanites were to be exterminated; therefore, the same judgment was to be executed against the apostate Israelites who had turned to false worship.

The point is this: God shows no partiality or favouritism to people. All stand equally before Him, the obedient to be blessed and the disobedient to be judged. If the Israelites obeyed this law, two results would take place. First, God would turn from His anger and have mercy upon the rest of the nation. Second, God would make the Israelites into a great nation of people. He would do these two great things for His people because they obeyed and kept all His commandments. They did what is right in His eyes (v. 18).

**Thought 1.** There are several lessons for us in this point.

- (1) Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin brings disgrace to it.

**Prov 14:34** *Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.*

- (2) The nations and the rulers of the world are to face a special judgment for the way they have governed.

**Mat 25:31-46** *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous*

*will answer him, 'LORD, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' They also will answer, 'LORD, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*

(3) God warns us against apostasy, against turning away from the living God.

**1 Tim 1:9** *We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers.*

**1 Tim 4:1** *The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.*

**2 Tim 4:4** *They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*

**Heb 3:12** *See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.*

**2 Pet 3:17** *Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.*

(4) There is one warning that a man must heed: the warning against misleading people, against deliberately misleading people. Deceiving, seducing and enticing others into sin has provoked one of the most severe warnings from God. Listen to the warnings:

**Mark 9:42-48** *"And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." ■*