

**January 12, 2020 - Deut. 13:2–19 - False Prophets, Idolatrous Cities**  
**Torah Reading: Deuteronomy 13:2–19 - False Prophets, Idolatrous Cities**  
**Psalm 119:73-104 (repeat)**  
**Haftarah: Isaiah 54:2-9, 17 (repeat)**

### **Dealing with False Prophets and Idolatrous Cities**

If a prediction that a self-proclaimed prophet makes fails to come to pass, that's a pretty easy decision:

See **Deuteronomy 18:22**- "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him."

But the Torah here presents a more difficult situation:

**Deuteronomy 13:1-3** - "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

Targum of Jonathan - "A lying prophet, a dreamer of a dream of pride"

Or as **Jeremiah 23:16-21** says, they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. ...I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. ...I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed."

The contrast is that the true prophet's word is powerful and effective, besides being true and faithful to Yahweh:

**Jeremiah 23:29** - "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"

The Sages expounded on this idea of a false prophet: "even if they halt the sun, moon, stars and constellations in their courses, hearken not to them!"

Rashi - And the sign or the wonder come to pass - "a sign": in the heavens, as is written, "and they [i.e., the sun, the moon, and the stars] shall be for signs (לְאִתּוֹת) and for seasons" [Gen. 1: 14]. "a wonder": Heb. מוֹפֵת, [meaning a sign] on the earth, as is written, "If there will be dew on the fleece only, and upon all the ground, dry" [Jud. 6:39])

But if you say, "Why then does the Holy One, blessed is He, give him the power to perform a sign? [Scripture replies,] "for the Lord, your God, is testing you [... whether

you really love the Lord your God]" (verse 3). - [Sifrei; San. 90a]

- **Numbers 12:6-8** - "And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

Joseph and Daniel are prime examples of God speaking through dreams; the later prophets usually received visions.

To Moses, however, as a type of Christ the mediator, God spoke "mouth to mouth."

### The Prophet 'like unto Moses'

- **Deuteronomy 18:14-15** - "For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the LORD thy God hath not suffered thee so to do. The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken"

Jesus was that Prophet. At the Transfiguration, appearing with Moses and Elijah, God speaks out of a cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (**Matthew 17:2-5**), echoing the "unto him ye shall hearken" of **Deuteronomy 18:15**. Peter later affirmed this in his speech at Pentecost (**Acts 3:22-23**).

Jesus was "like" Moses as the Prophet, but greater than Moses as the Son:

- **Hebrews 3:5-6** - "Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son."

One of the chief reasons for signs and miracles in the New Testament was to "confirm" and bear witness to us of His word of salvation in Christ. Miracles, signs and wonders can still occur today, but they served their purpose of confirmation and bearing witness by being recorded by the New Testament writers. Prophecy in the church today is mainly concerned with "forth-telling" rather than "fore-telling" - speaking the gospel and "targuming" that word to be meaningful in our lives now, contrasting society's values with God's and confronting the deceptions, heresy and divisions caused by the spirit of antichrist.

- **Hebrews 2:3-4** - "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?"

- **2 Peter 2:1** - "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there

shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

False prophets speaking in the spirit of anti-christ (the "instead of" Christ) will either blatantly or subtly point us away from Christ and the Cross to worship some other god or gods. Sometimes the false god is our "belly" or appetites or some other "earthly thing." Sometimes it can be some grand idea, or perhaps a "mission" or an obsession we elevate above the Gospel.

But, "unto him (Christ) ye shall hearken" and not listen to anything else.

- **Romans 15:18-19** - "I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obedience by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, and by the power of the Spirit of God."

False prophets are "enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things." (**Philippians 3:17-21**)

Paul never even used his ecstatic spiritual experiences to validate his apostleship.

- **Galatians 1:8** - "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

Signs and wonders are in themselves to be rejected if not in the context of truth. "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (**2 Corinthians 11:14**).

- **2 Thessalonians 2:9** (NIV) - "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie"

- **Revelation 13:13** - "And the second beast performed great signs to cause even fire from heaven to come down to earth in the presence of the people."

Like the magicians of Egypt:

**Exodus 7:11** - "Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments."

Jesus also had a lot to say about this:

- **Matthew 7:22-23** - "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." ("iniquity" = Hebrew "*aver*" - "self-exertion" - quoting **Psalm 6:8**)

- **Matthew 24:24** - "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

### **Idolatry as Treason**

At this stage in Israel's history the false prophet is not treated as simply as an alternative religious voice or opinion that is tolerated in the community, but as a traitor trying to destroy the nation, and the penalty is death.

**Deuteronomy 13:5** - "And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee."

The commands of God take precedence even over ties of blood and affection:

**Deuteronomy 13:6-8** - "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him:"

Rashi - Since it is said, "You shall love your fellow man as yourself" (Lev. 19:18), [therefore it is necessary to tell us that] this person, [however,] you shall not love. [It is necessary to state this] because it says, "[If you see the donkey of your enemy] you shall surely help him" (Exod. 23:5); this person, [however,] you shall not help. Do not search for merits in his favor. If you are aware of something that will condemn him, you are not permitted to remain silent. — [Sifrei] Scripture enumerates those [persons] who are dear to you; how much more so [must you apply this] to others [and not spare them]!

Of course, for us, this is a spiritual warfare, and mainly happening within our own hearts. No matter how dear or comfortable our ideas or reasonings seem to us, if they are leading us away from the cross and into idolatry, Paul says we must be ready to "revenge the disobedience" (**2 Corinthians 10:6**). Outwardly, among the congregation this takes the form of exhortation and encouragement. If that fails, church discipline may be invoked.

**Deuteronomy 13:9-10** - "But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of

bondage."

The rabbis insisted that this would be only after a trial. The person enticed had no right to kill the enticer without a judicial process and the order of the civil magistrate. But the problem was that this would have been a private conversation, and two or three witnesses were required to convict.

- **Deuteronomy 19:15** - "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established."

### **Entrapping the Enticer**

The rabbis say (Mishna Sanhedrin, c. 7. sect. 10. Maimon. Obede Cochabim, c. 5. sect. 3.), that they laid in wait for the enticer, which they never did for any other person, and the method they took was this; the enticed brought two persons, and put them behind a hedge, so that they might see the enticer, and hear his words, and he not see them; and he said to the enticer, say what thou hast said to me privately; which said, the enticed answered to him, how shall we leave our God which is in heaven, and go and serve wood and stone? if he returned (from his evil) hereby, or was silent, he was free; but if he said unto him, so we are obliged, and thus it is comely for us; they that stood afar off, behind the hedge (or in a dark room), brought him to the sanhedrim, and stoned him, but only after after examination, trial, judgment, and condemnation - *Gill's Exposition*

The Talmud distinguishes two types of enticers to idolatry - a *mesit* (Hebrew: מסיית) is a Jew who seduces an individual to idolatry, while a *maddiah* is someone who publicly entices many into idolatry. An enticer to idolatry may be both.

The rabbis considered Jesus as both kinds.

"thine hand shall be first upon him" - The enticed witness was to throw the first stone at him, partly to show his indignation against the sin he had enticed him to, and that it had not at all affected him so as to incline him unto it; and partly to show that he had borne a true testimony, of which a suspicion might have been created in the minds of some, had he hung behind at the execution. - *Gill's Exposition*

**Deuteronomy 13:11** - "And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you."

- This is either counting on the effect to be a deterrent, or a call to hear etc.

### **The Case of Idolatrous Cities in Israel**

**Deuteronomy 13:14** - "Then shalt thou enquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you"

This outlines a timeless guide for discovering the truth in a judicial process or otherwise. A reasoned weighing of all the evidence.

The rabbis said there were actually seven expressions in Deuteronomy connected with proper legal investigations.

Rashi - All the seven expressions can be connected together to make seven investigations.] - [San. 40a; Sifrei] [The judges would ask the witnesses the following seven questions: 1) In what shemitah cycle was the crime committed? 2) In what year? 3) In what month? 4) In what day of the month? 5) On what day [of the week]? 6) In what hour? 7) In what place? (San. 5:1)]

The rabbis called such a town "*Ir hannidaha'*" meaning "the subverted city," derived from the words describing Jerusalem in **Jeremiah 30:17** - "But I will bring a healing to you and cure you of your wounds, declares YHWH. Though they called you 'Outcast, (*nadach*), that Zion whom no one seeks out."

"Outcast" = *nadach* - thrust out, banished, seduced

They modified the law so as not to make Israel vulnerable to a foreign attack by allowing only two cities at a time to be destroyed, and to refrain from destroying a city in a border area.

In fact, in the Babylonian Talmud, the rabbis list the subverted city together with the law of the disloyal and defiant son (בן סורר ומורה), who is to be executed (Deut 21:18-21), and that of a house with leprosy, which is to be knocked down (Lev 14:33-57), as "theoretical occurrences that never came about in reality" (b. Sanh. 71a; 111b- 113a).

Gibeah may be one city that was destroyed as a "subverted city" in **Judges 19-21**, although idolatry was not involved except perhaps below the surface.

The judicial process of condemning a city for idolatry according to the rabbis included first a call to repentance:

The Great Sanhedrim would send and inquire and search till they know clearly that the whole city, or the greater part of it, are thrust away, and are turned to idolatry; after that they send two disciples of the wise men to admonish them and bring them back; if they return and repent, it is well, but if they continue in their folly, the Sanhedrim order all Israel to go up against them to war, and they besiege them, and set themselves in battle array against them, until the city be broken up; and when it is broken up, immediately they set up many courts of judicature, and they judge them; and against whomsoever two witnesses come that he served idols, after they have admonished him they separate him; if all the worshippers be the fewest, they stone them, and the rest of the city are delivered; if they are found the greater number, they bring them to the great Sanhedrim, and finish their judgment there, and they slay all those that have served with the sword. - *Gill's Exposition*

**Deuteronomy 13:17** - "And there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand: that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and shew thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers"

No one should gain personally from this tragedy (as Achan tried to do at Jericho in **Joshua 6-7**)

"and multiply thee" - despite having reduced your population by destroying a city, God still will cause Israel to multiply and grow.