

Deuteronomy 13:6-11

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Moses warns the people against listening to a close relative or a dear friend who may entice them secretly to serve other gods. He then commanded that the tempter must be put to death. This needed to be done to ensure that such a wicked act is not repeated among the Israelite community.

This section deals with the same subject as the previous one, in which prophets and dreamers of dreams might entice the Israelites to follow and serve other gods. Here, however, the enticement would come from a close family member or a dear friend. In either case, the penalty is equally severe. The traitor should be put to death. This should be done in order to purge the evil among the Israelite community. It does not matter whether the enticement to abandon God's covenant ways comes overtly or covertly, the evil needs to be purged.

The second scenario Moses sets forth is as follows: *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* (v. 6). The list is made up of those who are near and are greatly beloved, including immediate family and one's closest friend. They are persons in one's life that one would respect and would listen to. The immediate family includes one's brother, children, and beloved wife. The phrase *the wife you cherish* is literally "the wife of your bosom" in the Hebrew text, indicating someone who was greatly beloved. An example of someone who was a *friend who is as your own soul* would be David and Jonathan ([1 Samuel 18:1](#)).

The scenario was that one of these important people might *entice you secretly*. Literally, this reads "mislead you in secret." The idea here is that one could be turned away from worshipping the LORD in the privacy of one's own home. Moses gives an example of the enticement in the form of a quote—*Let us go and serve other gods*. Moses then described these other gods as those *whom neither you nor your fathers have known*. This was a reference to the gods and goddesses of the Canaanites. These are the gods who provide moral justification for perverse behaviors such as those listed in [Leviticus 18](#), which referred to the gods and practices in both Egypt and Canaan. These behaviors included a stunning array of incest, sexual perversions that include sex with animals, and child sacrifice. The Israelites had known the pagan

gods of Egypt and of the other peoples they encountered during the exodus (as illustrated in the episode of the golden calf). The Canaanite gods were ones they would soon experience.

Moses goes on to refer to these gods as *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*. The word translated *earth* can also be translated “land.” This probably refers to the entirety of the Promised Land. The map below (courtesy of Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on Numbers) shows the various peoples that lived in the Promised Land just prior to the Israelite conquest.

In response to enticements to serve and worship the Canaanite gods and goddesses, Moses told the people that they should *not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him* (v. 8). To *yield* literally means “to satisfy.” This might imply the idea of going along with the idolatry to keep peace in the household. To *listen* implies an active response in favor of what was said. The Israelites were also not to *pity* (or “have compassion” on) the enticers.

Even more ominous was that they were not to *spare* or *conceal* the enticer. This would be very difficult in light of the enticer being a close relative, even a beloved wife. However, all Israelites were to reject any and all pleas to go after pagan gods, even if the enticement comes from a loved one. The path of serving these pagan gods is the path to destruction of the entire community. It leads to a community culture of exploitation that will break the covenant and destroy Israel. Israel was given a divine mission to be a holy nation that displays to surrounding nations a culture of self-governance and mutual service. A culture where everyone loves their neighbor and seeks their welfare.

To *serve* other gods is to honor them and what they stand for. The other gods falsely promise power to each person to exalt themselves over other people and their surrounding circumstances. The false gods were transactional, where offerings (including burning children) were presented in order to “get what I want.” A society full of such self-seeking will of course lead to mutual exploitation, where the strong will exploit the weak. The Suzerain LORD prohibited His people from worshiping or serving other gods because those ways lead to death and loss.

For anyone to lead others astray from the Suzerain LORD was a grievous act of betrayal to the covenant. It would inevitably spread like a cancer, so it needed to be stopped immediately. Such a person was to be rejected in the

most extreme way. Their betrayal needed to be viewed as a plot to destroy the nation, like treason. Because it was. The people had agreed with God to obey the covenant, in which all the promised blessings would flow to them ([Exodus 19:8; 24:3](#)). Many of the blessings were natural consequences of obedience; any community of people who seek to love and respect one another will be a great place to live and work. The temptation to *serve other gods* was an invitation to seek an exploitive rather than a serving lifestyle. As the Bible makes clear, when we seek to exploit others, we are the biggest loser, and when we serve others, we are the biggest winner ([Matthew 16:25](#)).

Moses made it clear to the people of God, saying, *neither you nor your fathers had known these gods*. Moreover, Moses told the Israelites that these other gods belonged to the peoples *who were around them, near them or far from them, from one end of the earth to the other end*. But the Suzerain God took Israel as “His own possession among all the peoples” ([Exodus 19:4-6](#)). For this reason, Moses warned the Israelites against paying attention to anyone who would entice them to idolatry. He stated, *You shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him*.

To *yield to* someone is to agree to do what he/she requires; to be willing to follow the person’s advice. In this case, an Israelite’s consent to listen to the enticement to *serve other gods*. The Israelites were commanded not to *pity* the tempter, which means they were to show no mercy or compassion to him/her. They were commanded not to *spare or conceal him*.

To *spare* someone is to refrain from doing harm to him. To *conceal* someone is to cover up or to keep secret something which he has done. The Israelites were not to protect the life of the one who enticed them to serve other gods nor *conceal* him. It was a toxic cancer that needed to be removed.

Instead of accommodating the one who tempts others to worship pagan gods, Moses commanded the people to *surely kill him* (v. 9). The phrase is quite emphatic in the Hebrew text. It literally reads “killing you shall kill”. It was of utmost priority to kill the enticer, no matter who it was. The way that this capital punishment was to be carried out was that the one being tempted should *be first against him to put him to death*. In other words, the one that was tempted was to begin the execution process, then *afterwards the hand of all the people*. This requirement would provide a deterrence from someone using this provision improperly. So it would be a vivid warning about the consequences of tempting others to become unfaithful to their Suzerain LORD and follow the exploitive ways of pagan gods. In this decisive and severe

manner, Israel could avoid being enticed into walking in ways that would lead many people onto the path of death ([Deuteronomy 30:15-18.](#))

Specifically, they were to *stone him to death*, literally “stone him with stones” (v. 10). Stoning was a common form of capital punishment ([Leviticus 24:14](#); [Numbers 15:35](#); [Deuteronomy 21:21](#)) because it allowed the whole community of Israel to actively participate in the process of killing the condemned. In this way it required consensus.

The reason for such a harsh punishment was the tempter had *sought to seduce you from the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*. The word translated *seduce* (Heb. “nādaḥ”) is translated “drawn away” in [Deuteronomy 4:19](#), “lead astray” in [II Chron. 21:11](#), and “seduce” (sexually) in [Proverbs 7:21](#). In this case, the guilty kinsman or close friend would urge his fellow Israelites to walk away from worshipping their Suzerain LORD, the One *who brought them out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*. Such an act was a very serious offense against the LORD who delivered them from cruel slavery. This tempter desires to lead Israel back into slavery, and must be resisted.

The participation of the community of Israel in the stoning of the guilty individual was meant to be a memorable lesson. When the execution was done, *then all Israel will hear and be afraid* (v. 11). It had to be visual and it had to be brutal, because the people had to learn to *never again do such a wicked thing*. The goal was to create a sufficiently significant deterrent such that this would never occur again.

Biblical Text:

⁶If 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, ⁷of 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), ⁸you shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him. ⁹But 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. ¹⁰So 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. ¹¹Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such a wicked thing among you.