

# Deuteronomy 13:1-11; 14:1-3

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, a few years ago, I had the great privilege of preaching a friend's wedding. Thomas is, I think, my closest unbelieving friend in the world. He's the most single males in this country. That is completely counterintuitive. He just signed his life away to this room. He just said, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, I will cling to you.

How could he say he was now freer than ever? Well, of course, what Thomas had discovered was the truth. That true freedom isn't doing what we want to do.

True freedom comes in knowing we're totally loved, in knowing we're unconditionally loved, and that we're committed to that ourselves. It's not just Thomas who discovered that. One of Nick Hornby's books, High Fidelity.

Now, I can't remember reading this particular quote in the book, but in the film it comes. If you don't know the story, it's not a very edifying one in many ways. The hero of the story, if he is a hero, is a record shop owner called Rob, who, having just broken up with his latest girlfriend through his own infidelity, is now tracking back through his five top break-ups.

He's a man, so he keeps lists. He's going back to his five worst break-ups. And at the end of his journey through the five of them, as he is at Laura's father's funeral, Laura being his latest girlfriend, he says this.

[ 1 : 41 ] John Cusack plays a role in the movie. He looks at the camera and says, I can see now that I never really committed to Laura. That prevented me doing a lot of things. I guess it made more sense to commit to nothing.

And that's suicide by tiny, tiny increments. To not commit is suicide by tiny, tiny increments. To be committed, to know that someone is committed to you and loves you, that's where freedom comes. That's Nick Hornby's story. That's how John Cusack delivers the lines, what my friend Thomas discovered. Now what has that got to do with stoning prophets and not eating pork?

I know the connection isn't obvious, but actually, we won't understand what this passage is about unless we understand what my friend Thomas understood. That to know you are loved and that someone is committed to you, and therefore to be committed to them, is where true freedom comes.

And that is what the Lord God is saying to his people here. They are his redeemed people, his holy people, the people who he's shown his great love for, by rescuing them out of slavery in Egypt, by bringing them through the wilderness, by promising them this land.

[ 2 : 53 ] He was utterly committed to them. And these laws that we read here don't come so that they can become God's people, they're given to those who are God's people. They're to help them, they're a gift of grace, a gift of love, to show them what it means to be his holy people, to be the ones he has loved and rescued.

So if you want what this passage is about in one line, it's this. Because the Lord has redeemed us to be his holy people, we must delight to walk in his ways.

That's the kind of people we should be. We should be the people who delight in what he says, delight in the ways he has for us. And these chapters, it outlines that in two ways.

In chapter 13, it's about delighting in God's word. Delighting in what God has said and revealed of himself. And so cling to that, and not going away with the world around.

In chapter 14, it's about delighting in God's ways. Delighting to be his. And so not living the way the world lives. Not believing what the world believes, not living the way the world lives.

[ 3 : 57 ] Let's look at those in those two sections. So first of all, chapter 13. What could tempt Israel to depart from God's word? What could tempt them from departing from what God had revealed to them?

What can tempt us to depart from what God has revealed to us in the scriptures? Well, in this chapter, we see three particular temptations. So verses 1 to 5 deal with the temptation of exciting signs leading them away.

And verses 6 to 11 are about secret suggestions from family and friends that could divert them.

Then verses 12 to 18 are about influential groups who could lead them astray.

Now all these things, the exciting signs, the suggestions of friends and family, the influential groups, they all have one thing in common.

They all come from inside the covenant people. These aren't temptations that come from outside in the world. They're temptations that come from inside God's people. And that danger is still with us today.

[ 5 : 01 ] It's the danger the Apostle Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders about as he addressed them for the last time. Acts chapter 20. It says, pay a careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

To care for the church of God which he obtained by his own blood. Redeemed holy people. Why? Paul goes on. Acts 20.39. I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things. So danger is still there.

From within the covenant people, these things can come to lead us astray.

To stop us delighting in God's word, in God's revelation to us. And to lead us astray to believe what the world believes. Well let's look at these three temptations. First of all there's the exciting signs in verses 1 to 5.

We get this description of a prophet, don't we? So verse 1. If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says let's go after other gods which you have not known and let's serve them, you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams.

[ 6 : 15 ] For the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. How do we tell if someone is really from God and speaking God's truth?

So in this day and age people are, there's a common idea isn't it? That truth isn't absolute, rather truth is a matter of experience. That if there's something exciting to look at, then it's got to be true. If it feels good, it's got to be true. But that is not what truth is. Truth is what God has revealed. So this was a test for Israel, it's a test for us.

Are we delighting in what God has said? Are we satisfied with what God has given us? What he's revealed in the scriptures? Or do we want something more exciting? Something with more razzmatazz?

Something with more gimmicks? Something which makes us feel a bit more buzzy and alert? This is the test that God has given them. It's a test for us.

[ 7 : 16 ] What does Moses say in verse 4? You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice. You delight in what he's said to you.

Delight in what he's revealed. Delight in what he's revealed. Don't look for something extra, something different. Don't fall for experiences. Don't fall for apparent miracles. Don't fall for the preachers who stand up in front of thousands claiming they've healed people.

Don't be surprised if amongst that there are some genuine miracles. Some genuine things which we can't explain. Because Satan has always been in the business of trying to deceive.

That's how he started out in the garden, wasn't it? Deceiving Eve. To lead her astray from God's word. From what God had revealed. And he still does it today. He wants to deceive.

We should not be surprised. That African witch doctors or pagan witches in this country can somehow exert supernatural power. Because the devil longs to deceive.

[ 8 : 21 ] And Jesus warned the same thing, didn't he? Matthew 24. He warns his disciples. False Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders. So as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

So here's the issue. Will we stick to what God has revealed in his word? Or will we want something more? Do you not listen?

Moses says. The words of that prophet or the dreamer of dreams. Do we love the Lord? Do we delight in his word? Or are we looking for the next experience? The next thing?

Well that's the first temptation. Exciting signs. The second. Verses 6 to 11. Are the secret suggestions from family and friends. These are quite hard words, aren't they? Verse 6. If your brother, the son of your mother. Or your son. Or your daughter. Or the wife you embrace. Or your friend who is as your own soul. Entices you secretly.

[9:21] There's the key word. The prophet was public. This is secret. Saying let us go and serve other gods. Which neither you nor your fathers have known. Don't do it. That's how it goes on. See family and friends exert a huge influence over us.

Don't they? And rightly so. That is the way God has constructed the world. That family is of great importance. And yet. Between family and friends.

Can come the secret pressures. Secret temptations. That no one else sees. No one else knows. They can be so subtle. And the temptation for us. In this day and age. Is probably not to go and serve.

Gods from. From Hinduism. Or go to the mosque. The temptation is subtle. Is to. Worship the gods of. The world around us. I have a friend. Who was very good at sport.

Went to school. She still is actually. But she. She played lacrosse for England. Under 18s. But she was a very sporty girl. And. She became a Christian. Through going to a Christian camp.

[10:19] In I think. A couple of years. Before the end of her school career. And she desperately wanted to go back to that camp. In her. Sort of final summer. And her mother.

Desperately wanted to go. To the international lacrosse tournament. In Canada. That she was supposed to be going to. Huge pressure. Placed by family. To ditch that boring Christian camp. Why do you want to go there? This is your opportunity. To represent your country. To. To do what we've been paying for you to do. For so long. To. To go and do your sporting thing. Huge pressure. Isn't that the sort of pressure we face? From friends and family? If not from our family. Then. Perhaps from friends at school. Why don't you go out with that guy? Okay. He's not a Christian. But don't take it so seriously. Lighten up. It would be nice to be in a relationship. Wouldn't it? That would be good. Do that. That would be fine. Surely God wants you to be happy.

[11:18] It's the temptation to go and follow another God. Isn't it? The God of this age. The God that says. Relationships are all important. We're defined by who we're with. And we're worthless if we're not with someone. Do you see how decisively.

Moses instructs the people to deal. With this kind of secret suggestion. Look at verse 8. You shall not yield to him. Or listen to him. Nor shall your eye pity him.

Nor shall you spare him. Nor shall you conceal him. You can't say. Oh no. Don't worry about it. Just ignore him. It's serious. It needs to be dealt with. Says Moses. But you shall kill him. Your hand shall be first against him.

To put him to death. And afterward the hand of your people. Of all the people. Now don't worry. You don't have to stone your friend. You don't have to stone your mother. If she suggests you should go to an international sports tournament.

Rather than a Christian camp. God's people are no longer a political entity. A discreet nation. But what we do need to do is act seriously.

[12:15] To remove ourselves from these temptations. That's the point. We can't just ignore someone. We can't just conceal it. We can't just say it doesn't matter. Of course it doesn't matter to the world around us.

They think this is fundamentalist nonsense. But it does matter because it's so important. Here to the world. This sounds like intolerant. Barbaric. Idiocy.

Doesn't it? Let's think for a moment. Think about that church. Those churches of Pakistan today. There were people gathering for worship. When a bomber.

Bombers come to the gates. And blow the places up. And kill people. Now we rightly are horrified by that. Rightly. Almost everyone in this nation. Will be horrified by that.

Won't they? And yet what has happened? To those who truly trusted in Jesus. Yes. It's a terrible thing. Don't get me wrong. Terrible grief for those left behind. But for those who died.

[13:10] What's happened? They trusted in Jesus. They've woken up in paradise. They've woken up in heaven. It's a wonderful thing. We're all going to die one day.

But think about this. If I stand here tonight. And preach heresy to you. And you believe. What could be the consequence? Is in 2,000 years time. Or 2 million years time. If we believed the heresy.

We could end up in hell. Couldn't we? What is more serious? Danger to physical life now. Or danger to spiritual life forever.

C.S. Lewis once said in a completely different context. But it's the same point. If we find this kind of teaching offensive.

It's not because we're more enlightened. Not because we're more Christian. It's because we don't realise how serious God is. We don't see how morally offensive false teaching is.

[14:10] To a holy God. Who sent his son to win us for himself. We can see that seriousness in verse 10. You shall stone him to death with stones.

Because he sought to draw you away. From the Lord your God. Who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Out of the house of slavery. The same God.

Who sent his own son from heaven. To seek us and win us. And bring us out from slavery to sin. And to the devil. And bring us into his kingdom. Now of course rejecting the suggestions of family and friends.

When they go against God's word is hard. But the great news is. We belong to an even better family. An even more secure family. When Jesus was told his mother and his brothers had come to get him.

Because they thought he was a bit of a. He was going mad. He said no they're not. Who are my mother? Who are my brothers? Those who hear God's word obey it. They're my family. That's why later on in Luke's gospel.

[15:06] Luke 14.26. He said if anyone comes to me. And does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children. And brothers and sisters. Yes and even his own life. He cannot be my disciple.

Of course Jesus is pro family. He's saying family is only relatively important. My words. My ways. Are more important. Because if you're listening to me.

You're part of my family. You have a home. You're mine. Well we need to resist the temptation of the exciting signs. Of the friends and others making secret suggestions.

But also there's the influential groups. Look down at verse 12. Would you? If you hear in one of your cities. Which the Lord your God is giving you to dwell there. That certain worthless fellows have gone out among you.

And have drawn away the inhabitants of the city. Saying. Let us go and serve other gods. Then you shall inquire. And make search. And ask diligently. See the.

[16:04] The scenario that's being foreseen here. Is a town where some influential leaders. Whip the people up. To turn away from the living God. It's an influential group. Causing trouble.

And Moses says. You've got to act seriously against it. But you can't just have a witch hunt here. Do you notice. They need to find evidence. Verse 14. You shall inquire. And make search. And ask diligently. And only then.

If you find it's true. Will you go and take action. But there's always that temptation isn't there. That are powerful leaders. Powerful speakers. Can stand up. And teach something. Popular bloggers. Can write something. Popular authors. Can put out books. You can have your best life now. Believe the true God. Follow the gods of money. Like the rest of the world around us.

You can ignore the Bible's teaching. And sexuality. We've grown past that. Now we know so much better. Just like we were. We've discovered. We were wrong about slavery in the past. So we find out. We're wrong about sexuality. We've grown up a bit.

[17:02] What are they doing? They're asking us to follow. Follow the gods of this world. The gods of sexual freedom. The gods of financial prosperity.

And so on. We know who these people are. Don't we? And again. Strong action is needed. Strong action is needed. If you read on there. You'll see that. Verse 15.

The final part of the action. Shall surely put the inhabitants of the city to the sword. Devoting it to destruction. Now that doesn't mean we go and burn down churches where we don't like the teaching.

But again. It's showing us the seriousness of the case. And if you look through this chapter. There are actually three reasons that the death penalty is given to the false prophets.

Or for the family members who suggest going astray. Or to the influential groups. Go back to verse 5 for a moment. What does Moses say? At the end of verse 5. Kill the person.

[17:58] So you shall purge the evil from your midst. See false teaching is like a cancer that needs to be cut out. Before it destroys the whole. And verse 11. Why take this drastic action against family members and friends?

Verse 11. All Israel shall hear and fear. And never again do such wickedness as this among you. So it's a defence. Cutting out the cancer. It's a deterrent.

To warn others. Not to turn others aside. But then we get down to verses 15 and 16. When whole villages are being burned. What's happening? The Lord is saying. These people who've gone astray.

Are going to be treated like Canaanites. They're going to receive my judgement. Just as the Canaanites are. In other words. They reject me. Their covenant Lord.

They're going to be treated. As utter rebels. As those who do not know me. Why? That's a foretaste of the judgement to come. As Israel marched into the promised land.

[18:57] As they engaged in the holy war God commanded them. It was the final judgement being brought forward as it were. Being physically demonstrated in those days and hours.

That people could see that everyone is ultimately accountable to the creator God. All of us will get account one day. So. Those who listen to the influential leaders.

And so break the covenant. We're going to get the same end. And yet there's also good news in the midst of that. Look at verse 17.

Would you? None of the devoted things shall stick to your hand. In other words. Don't try and take anything from this village. It's been given over to destruction. Don't try and make any personal gain out of it. It all belongs to God. So don't try and take it.

Why? That the Lord may turn from the fierceness of his anger. And show you mercy. And have compassion on you. And multiply you as he swore to your fathers. It's another reminder that you are my holy people.

[19:57] Says the Lord. I long to bless you. I long to fulfil the purposes I promised to you. So turn from the lies. Turn to the truth. Delight in my truth. And you will receive all I have promised.

Well that's chapter 13 then. Because we're the Lord's redeemed holy people. We must delight in his word. Not be led astray by exciting signs. By secret suggestions. Or by influential groups.

Let's take this on to verse chapter 14 then. The message here is we're to keep walking in the Lord's ways. Delight in the Lord's ways because we're his people. Now as we look at this.

Chapter 14 is really all about. It's all about food laws. Up to verse 21 at least. And we might think. Why bother looking at this? If we know our New Testaments.

We'll say. Why bother looking at this? Because Jesus has said we can eat all foods now. Mark 7. He does. He declares all foods are clean. And that's confirmed in Acts chapter 10. When the Lord gives peace or a revision of all sorts of unclean foods.

[21:00] Then says. Go on Peter. Get up and eat them. And when the vision happened three times. Peter finally realized. The Lord was telling him. Do what I've already said. You can eat these things. You can go and have table fellowship with the Gentiles now Peter.

These laws no longer apply. So why look at them? Well because of the main point behind them. If you look at verse 2. And verse 21. You'll see they've got something in common.

Look at verse 2. You are a people holy to the Lord your God. And the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession. Out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Then verse 21. How does this section end? Again we get the refrain repeated at the end of the verse. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. This is all about being God's treasured possession.

Living differently from the world around us. Because he sought us and bought us and won us for himself. We ought to be holy. That's the main idea. And of course the main idea of holiness. Is not some kind of moral perfection.

[22:01] That's not the first idea. The first idea is being set apart. Being holy is to be set apart. And in the New Testament. Peter uses the same language.

The language from Exodus chapter 19. And applies it to the church. So 1 Peter 2 verse 9. He says to a church of Gentiles and Jews. You are a chosen race. A royal priesthood.

A holy nation. A people for his own possession. A treasured possession if you like. That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you. Out of darkness into his wonderful light.

So we're still God's holy people. We're still God's treasured possession. Just as Israel was in the Old Testament. We've been engrafted into Israel now. And so we're to be different from the world around us. For Israel that meant primarily being different from the Canaanite nations. They were going to take over. And that's hinted at in verse 3. The first of the food law starts like this. You shall not eat any abomination. Abomination. Now the word in the original language translated abomination.

[ 23 : 03 ] Has been used back in chapter 12 verse 31. And chapter 12 verse 16 I think it was. To deal with the Canaanite worship and the Canaanite's ways.

They were an abomination to the Lord. And so a lot of these food laws are about being different from the nations they were around. A test case of all this if you like is verse 1.

You are sons of the Lord your God. You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead. As we archaeology has shown as we read on through the Bible.

We see that cutting themselves was one of the things the Canaanites would do in worship. So in 1 Kings 18 when Elijah has the prophets of Baal up the mountain.

Praying to their God to send fire. What do they do? They cut themselves. We are really serious Baal. Do something. Jeremiah 16 verse 6 talks about making people make themselves bald.

[ 24 : 02 ] As part of their grief. See this is all pagan religion. Pagan signs of mourning. Pagan worship. Israel was to be different. They weren't to do that. Also eating dead animals verse 21.

Moses says you shall not eat anything that has died naturally. That's you Israel. You may give it to the sojourner who is with your towns. That he may eat it. Or you may sell it to a foreigner.

So you give it to the sojourner who doesn't have anything. So you can use it to exercise mercy. Or you can sell it for profit to a foreigner you are trading with. But you can't eat it. You are different.

Now that may be because an animal that died didn't have the blood drained from it.

As the Lord had required. Or it may be that they'd be unclean through touching a dead animal. The Lord is all about life not death. Death is an imposter in his world. So that may be the reason they weren't allowed to eat something that had just died naturally.

We don't know. So the point was they were to be different. It would be different because they belonged to God. Different because they belonged to God. And for those of you who are looking at the end of verse 21 saying what's all this with not boiling a young goat in the mother's milk?

[ 25 : 10 ] Frankly no one knows. Experts conjecture that this may have been a Canaanite fertility rite. Some will say well maybe it's just this grotesqueness of the life-giving substance being used to cook the poor goat, poor kid.

Well frankly who knows. But it comes three times in the Old Testament so it's clearly a serious thing for the Israelites. If you do happen to find somewhere on Oxbridge Road that is boiling goats in their mother's milk then let me know.

We can have a conversation about whether that's a good thing or not. Probably not very relevant to us. But what is key is that you have to be different. Now why go into the details about the food laws? Why does God care about what they eat?

Well think for a moment. What do the French normally call the English traditionally? Eh, your ass beef. What do the British typically in a derogatory sense refer to the French as?

Why? We're distinguished by what we eat, aren't we? So on a national level food identifies us. Just go down to Oxbridge Road. You can eat Persian, eat Chinese, eat Indian.

[ 26 : 16 ] You can have any cuisine you want because nations are identified by what they eat. And so Israel was to be separate. What they ate was to be different from the world around them. But also think about it at a personal level.

Have you ever been on a particular diet? If you're diabetic, I'm sure you know what I'm talking about. If you're on some medical diet, then it influences every choice you make.

It's something you constantly live with. For a year before I had my kidney transplant, I was on a low potassium diet. Now that meant, amongst other things, that I couldn't eat too much fruit and vegetables.

I love fruit. I could eat 12 grapes a day maximum. I had to count them out. I could only have two bits of fruit and two portions of vegetables.

And something I couldn't eat at all. Oh no, I got bottom-up squash. Deadly. Spinach. I could die. I couldn't eat that stuff. Vegetables had to be boiled rather than steamed.

[ 27 : 12 ] It was kind of purgatory for Meryl. She hates boiled vegetables. They had to boil everything to oblivion to make sure all the potassium was leached out of it. See, when you have a dietary requirement, you can't get away from it.

As many of you know through personal experience, it defines you. It defines what you do. And so here is the Lord giving Israel food laws because it sets them apart as a nation.

And because every day in the kitchen, they would remember they were God's people. They remember who owned them. As one commentator puts it, a God who governs the kitchen could not easily be forgotten.

Every meal was a reminder of Yahweh's commitment to them and their special privilege. They were set apart corporately and personally. It was a reminder of their privileged status.

So what do we learn from them? Well, we learn we can eat bacon because we're in a new covenant. I had bacon at lunch. It was great. But there are even better things to be thankful for, aren't there, than the ability to eat bacon now.

[ 28 : 13 ] These things remind us that we are owned. We are a treasured possession. Our God loves us.

Loves us so much, he sent his own son from heaven to seek us and win us to be his people. To save us from the fires of hell that we naturally deserve. Throughout our lives, we do so many things to belong, don't we?

We go to a new job, we try and dress like the other people. We go to a new school, we try and start listening to the music other kids are listening to. We do so many things throughout our lives to belong.

Think what new students do when they turn up at university and spend the whole first week going to parties, getting wildly drunk. Why do they do it? Because they want to belong. And here is the creator of God saying you belong to me.

You belong to me. I love you. You're my treasured possession. Don't forget it. Don't forget it. For us, it's a reminder that there is no area in life that our Lord is not interested in.

[ 29 : 24 ] The God who cared about this little art kitchens cares about your workplace, cares about your school. He loves you where you are. He wants you to remember you are holy to Him. You've been set apart from the world for Him.

You belong to Him. He's demonstrated that in sending His own Son. Now as a church, we're not to be separate from the world the way Israel was to be separate from the world around us.

But we are to be distinct from the world. It's the point of Jesus' image, isn't it? About being salt and light. We're to be different from the world around us. Not separate, but different. See, Peter, after 1 Peter chapter 2, having quoted this kind of idea from the Old Testament about being God's holy people and treasured possession, he goes on to say this.

1 Peter 2 verse 11, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. You're exiles and sojourners.

Aliens and strangers, as other translations put it. We don't belong in this world. We're not at home in this world. We belong to our God who has brought us. We're an outsider here, but we belong to Him.

[ 30 : 34 ] So individually, our lives should be shaped by the grace we've received. Shaped by the fact we're loved by the Lord Jesus. That He is our King. He is our Captain. He directs us. As Paul reminds the Corinthians, you are not your own.

You are bought at a price. As I glorify God in your body. What is that cost that God has paid to make you and I His? In the eternal counsels of the Trinity, of the triune God, there was a commitment to rescue you and me.

The Father chose us before the foundation of the world. The Son agreed to leave the glories of heaven, to take on human flesh, to live the perfect life that we could live, to die the death we deserve to die, to be our Saviour.

The Holy Spirit, resolve to come from the holiest places and dwell in the sinful hearts of men and women, to bring us to new life, to change our hearts, to seal us for the day of redemption when Christ returns.

So how long should we live? As God's redeemed, holy people, we should delight in His Word and delight to walk in His ways knowing that all of life belongs to Him and He loves us in the midst of it and wants to show His glory to the world even through us.

[ 32 : 00 ] Let's pray.