

Date : 14 January 2024
Topic : Combating danger of falling away
Key Passage: Deuteronomy 13
Key Verse : Deuteronomy 13:3-4

³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, 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. 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.

Introduction

Just before the second-generation Israelites were about to enter the promised land, Moses foresaw the dangers of settling in a new territory, with the risk of being influenced by surrounding nations and their idolatrous practices. He warned against falling away from the Lord.

Today, scams, cheats and tricksters abound globally. Deception is prevalent. In these last days, there will be an escalating wave of deceptions through digital platforms, and the abundance of online information which omit information, deny the truth and exaggerate the false. We are in the last days. How do we prepare ourselves to avoid ship-wrecking our faith?

1. Deception through authority figures

Church leaders who hold official church positions are recognised worldwide to speak on behalf of God for the good of the Church. However, they operate outside their legitimate sphere of authority when ...

- They question whether God really meant what He said in His Word.
 - Purpose: to confuse, twist and contradict God's Word.
- Deceive with signs to follow / worship other gods *Deuteronomy 13:2*
 - Purpose: to break our covenant relationship with God.
- Entice with misleading messages to lead people astray by appealing to curious hearers who seek entertainment, and the anxious who need constant affirmation.
 - Purpose: to break our covenant relationship with God's people.

2. Traps that put us at risk of falling away

Any distraction that leads the disciple away from the exclusive devotion to the Lord.

Deuteronomy 13:2, 6, 13

... of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth. Deuteronomy 13:7

a) Keeping idolatrous souvenirs

Trinkets, jewellery in the form of objects, images, creatures of other gods.

b) Merging religious practices (syncretism)

Syncretism is the combination of different beliefs and practices, teachings and traditions in a hybrid belief system. For example, in some cultures, religious zealots whip their backs and bodies to endure being nailed to the cross on Easter.

In our culture, what about eating food offered to idols?

In King Solomon's reign, he was influenced by his foreign wives to allow foreign gods in Israel.

King Manasseh of Judah also led the people into pagan rituals. When he later repented and returned to the worship of the Lord, the people continued the worship to Yahweh with elements of idolatrous practices that Manasseh had introduced to the nation previously.

c) Agreeing with worldly values

Secular worldviews that are incompatible with biblical teachings seep into our mindsets, through...

- **Relativism**

God's Word is not accepted as the absolute truth but relative to prevailing world views due to selective application and personal interpretation which condone behaviours and lifestyle that contradict the Bible. For example, we accept that LGBT is a personal matter without much thought what God's word says.

- **Consumerism**

Here, church members treat church membership for personal reasons and church hop to meet individual needs instead of committing to the local congregation, as fellow travellers.

- **Individualism**

When church members prioritize personal rights over collective responsibility and sense of belonging to the church family, they tend to be critical of the church and make negative comparisons. This will result in conflicts and walk-out without seeking reconciliation and restoration within the church family.

d) Being enticed through close relationships *Deuteronomy 13: 6 - 11*

Those closest to us, such as family members and childhood friends, may say things to influence us to abandon faith in God and break covenant with God's people. Apostasy is breaking away from faith in God and rejecting His commands. This process can come through...

- Subtle one-to-one persuasion
- Social media
- Shameless influences from questionable concerts, virtual games, gambling, self-discovery programs, meditation retreats, etc.

Such enticements and emotional manipulation can pressure individuals to comply with the desires of those closest to them.

e) Being offended by significant adults

Offences are perceived resentments or insults by significant adults, like pastors or fellow workers. This result in negative emotions, like

- bitterness and unforgiveness towards those with whom we have effective relationships.
- isolation from the church family and then changing church (instead of reconciliation).

3. How to safeguard against falling away

a) Recognise that God allows these negative people to TEST our faith

- Test of our love for Him *Deuteronomy 13:3*
- Test our knowledge of God's commands
- Reveal our obedience to His commands *Deuteronomy 13:4*

b) Be rooted in the Word *Deuteronomy 13:4*

- Discern the truth from deception (test every spirit and teaching against God's Word).

c) Do right in God's eyes *Deuteronomy 13:18*

- Do not lead others astray by promoting teachings foreign to the bible.
(God's judgment is severe for those who entice believers away from their faith)
- Renew your relationship with God and recommit to His people.

Application

I. Among the traps of deception, which ones do you find yourself most vulnerable?

1) Deception through authority figures

- I tend to be emotionally attached to charismatic leaders who are entertaining in their preaching than my own church leaders.
- I feel good when I hear messages that affirm what I want to hear.

2) Traps that put us at risk of falling away.

a) Souvenirs

- I have some questionable souvenirs / objects from my travels which I want my leaders to look through and advice.

b) Syncretism

- I think I may be practicing syncretism because I enjoy food offered to idols.

c) Relativism

- I tend to agree with worldly values on abortion, cross-dressing etc instead of finding out what God's Word says.

d) Individualism

- I tend to treat the church as a place to serve my need rather as a family to belong to.
- I have not thought of church hopping as walking away from my church family.

II. How would you safeguard yourself against falling away from the Lord?