

I Will Choose One Place to Worship (Deuteronomy 12)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Deuteronomy

I. Background / Review

- a. The **Book of Deuteronomy** consists of a few speeches that Moses gave to the Israelites near the end of their 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness.
- b. The second of those begins in **Deuteronomy 5**, with Moses recounting the Lord giving the 10 Commandments at Mount Sinai. Thus far, in **chapters 5-11**, Moses has issued a number of warnings, admonitions and reminders, including:
 - i. Don't forget God's commandments.
 - ii. Don't let future generations forget them either. Each generation will be responsible for passing this on to their children.
 - iii. When they enter Canaan, make no treaties with the Canaanites. Do not intermarry with them and thereby pick up their wicked ways and become corrupted and worthless.
 - iv. God had tested the people during their time in the Wilderness. God tests people through affliction, suffering and difficult times. So expect it, don't get discouraged or surprised when it happens, and stay faithful to the Lord. Persevere.
 - v. The lesson of being fed by manna for 40 years was to teach the people that "man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God".
 1. The importance of the Scriptures as our spiritual food to sustain us in this Wilderness of life. We should be meditating on them every day.
 - vi. When prosperity comes in the future, do not fall into the temptation to pridefully take all the credit for it, and thereby forget the Lord and turn away from Him.
 - vii. Don't become fearful and faithless when facing the giants in the land of Canaan; and when you defeat them, don't become arrogant.
 1. Have a sober estimate of yourselves, and of all the wickedness and rebellion against the Lord over the past 40 years in the Wilderness.

- viii. Circumcise your hard hearts. God is not just looking for outward observances in the flesh.
- ix. Be kind and considerate of the resident aliens among you; remember that you were aliens in Egypt.
- c. One of the benefits of reading and understanding **Deuteronomy** is that it prepares us for everything that follows (good and bad) in the Old Testament.
 - i. We will see the promises and warnings Moses gave here heeded or ignored throughout the rest of the Old Testament. What happens after this is exactly as foretold by Moses.
- d. In **Deuteronomy 12** this speech by Moses to the Israelites continues, with additional important warnings and admonitions regarding challenges they will be faced with after they enter Canaan.

II. Must Destroy all the Pagan Idols, Altars, etc. in Canaan

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 12:1-3**.
 - i. From this passage, it certainly sounds as if the land of Canaan was full of places where pagan idolatry and worship of other 'gods' was practiced.
 - ii. The Canaanite places of worship were scattered throughout the land: on the mountains and hills, under the trees, etc.
 - iii. Their pillars, altars, sacred groves idols, images, etc. were to be "utterly destroyed". No provision for them being moved into a museum, or kept in a UNESCO-type cultural preservation!

III. There Would Be (Only) One Place of Worship for the Lord

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 12:4-14**.
 - i. The Lord wanted to make sure His people did not get ensnared by the idols and gods of the native inhabitants.
 - ii. The Lord did NOT want His people to merely *replace* the pagan altars, etc. with multiple *replicas* of the tabernacle, or something like that.
 - iii. Keep in mind that for almost 40 years the entire nation (all 12 tribes) had traveled together through the Wilderness, regularly encamped by tribe around the one tabernacle.
 - 1. Now they would be divided, geographically separated by tribe, days of travel apart.

2. Plus, two and a half tribes would be east of the Jordan.
 3. Notice that the Lord does not call for twelve places (one for each tribe) for the tabernacle, nor multiple locations for geographic distribution. No franchises, no branding here!
 - iv. Also note that the Lord insists the *He would be the One* to choose the location for this future place of worship; not the priests nor the leaders of the people.
 - v. “His Name would abide” in this one, single location (for all twelve tribes).
 - vi. The prayers, as well as the offerings and sacrifices described in **Leviticus 1-7**, were to be made at this location.
- b. Summarize **Deuteronomy 12:15-19**.
- i. This passage includes more rules and specifics concerning what must be done at the ‘one chosen location’ versus elsewhere, especially regarding meat to be sacrificed to the Lord (where the offerer could eat a portion).
 - ii. The prohibition on eating/drinking blood is repeated.
1. Read **Deuteronomy 12:23-25**.
 - a. “The blood is the *life* (or *soul*)” (**Deuteronomy 12:23**)
 - b. This statement is consistent with what Moses had recorded from earlier interactions:
 - i. in **Genesis 9:4** (what the Lord told Noah, after the Flood), and
 - ii. in **Leviticus 17:11-12** (a commandment given at Mount Sinai).
 - c. This prohibition from ingesting the blood of animals was repeated later by the apostles, at the Council of Jerusalem, in **Acts 15:18-21** and **15:28-29**.
 - d. Early Christian writers held that this prohibition by the apostles applies to all Christians. They would not eat blood or things made from blood (such as ‘blood sausage’).
 - i. Two reasons were given:

1. The *soul* is somehow contained in the blood.
 2. Drinking blood was associated with the activity of the *demons*. Clearly, we should have nothing to do with that!
 - ii. For more on this, see Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, edited by David Bercot, entry on '*Blood (as Food)*'
 2. **Bottom Line:** this prohibition on eating blood still applies to Christians today.
- c. Read **Deuteronomy 12:29-31**.
- i. Warning from Moses: Don't ask how to serve the gods of this new land. Don't imitate the practices of the Canaanites.
 - ii. They are wicked people, and if you worship their gods you will pick up their wicked ways.
 - iii. It mentions that they even burned their own sons and daughters in the fire to worship their gods (human child sacrifice).
1. Recall what Abraham had been told in the beginning.
 - a. Read **Genesis 15:12-21**.
 - i. The delay in Abraham's people inheriting the Promised Land of Canaan for hundreds of years was because "The sin of the Amorites is *not yet* filled up."
2. Read **Wisdom of Solomon 12:1-12**.
- a. The Canaanites had been involved in sorcery, occult, child sacrifice, cannibalism, etc. These wicked practices came out of their idolatry and their worship of other gods.
 - b. God is merciful to all. He gave *even the Canaanites* an opportunity to repent. However, they were too hard-hearted to leave their evil ways.
 - c. Follow-up: Read **Wisdom of Solomon 12:20-21**.
 - i. Sober reminder of both God's judgment on the wicked and mercy on those who repent.

- ii. If He did that to the Canaanites, the enemies of His children, even more so to God's own children.

IV. About That One Place God Would Choose for His Name

- a. **Question:** What happened to the ark of the covenant after the Israelites crossed the Jordan and entered Canaan?
 - i. In **Joshua 3**, the ark of the covenant enters and crosses the Jordan River, carried by priests.
 - ii. In **Joshua 6**, the ark is carried around Jericho by the priests, prior to the destruction of that city.
 - iii. Near the end of the period of the judges, in **Judges 20:27** it says that the men of Israel went to Bethel to fast and offer sacrifices to the Lord at Bethel, because "the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days".
 - iv. At the very end of the period of the judges, in **1 Samuel 1-4** (designated **1 Kingdoms** in the LXX), the ark is now in Shiloh. This is during the time of Eli, his two wicked sons, and Samuel.
 - v. In **1 Samuel 5-7** the following happens to the ark:
 - 1. It is captured by the Philistines.
 - 2. Then it goes to Beth-Shemish, to the field of Joshua.
 - 3. After that, it ends up being transferred to Kiriath Jearim, to "the house of Abinadab on the hill" (**1 Samuel 7:1**).
 - vi. Finally, David has it brought to Jerusalem. This is a two-step process, due to the unfortunate accident with Uzzah, who touches the ark to prevent it from falling. He is struck dead as a result. Then the ark spends three months at the house of Obed-Edom before finally being transported to Jerusalem. (**2 Samuel 6**).
 - 1. Note that important additional details regarding the second leg of this trip to Jerusalem are provided in **1 Chronicles 15-16**.
- b. **Question:** What about this "one place chosen by God" Moses referred to? It has been about 400 years since Moses died, and the ark keeps moving from place to place!
- c. The Lord chooses the place, finally.

- i. In **2 Samuel 24** (designated **2 Kingdoms** in the LXX), David sins by numbering the people.
- ii. Read **2 Samuel 24:10-18**.
 1. David was offered three options for his punishment:
 - a. Three years of famine;
 - b. Three months of being struck down by his enemies; *OR*
 - c. Three days of the sword of the Lord.
 2. He chooses the third
 3. The Angel of the Lord appears with a raised sword above the threshing floor of Orna. The destruction ends, David is told to build an altar there.
 - a. That would become the place where Solomon would build the temple, the long-term home for the ark.
 - b. That was the site chosen by God.
- d. Solomon built and dedicated the temple.
 - i. Read **2 Chronicles 6:18-39**.
 - ii. Read **2 Chronicles 7:11-22**.
 - iii. Take-aways regarding the temple:
 1. The Lord said, "I have chosen this place for myself."
 - a. That fulfilled what Moses had foretold 400 years earlier.
 2. The temple built by men cannot contain God.
 3. It would be a focal point for prayer.
 4. Even the Gentiles could pray to the Lord there.
 5. If one who is in sin repents, God will hear and heal that person.
 6. If the people in captivity and far away later repent, and pray facing the temple, God would hear them and would respond to their requests (think of Daniel, in **Daniel 6**).
 7. Temple rituals were no 'silver bullet', no guarantee that God would hear them (if they were unrighteous).

- a. If people turned away from the Lord, He would smash their temple as well as His people!
- b. That is exactly what would happen later.
 - i. The Lord brought the Babylonians to smash the temple and to bring the people into captivity.
 - ii. The rebuilt temple was again destroyed, in AD 70 by the Romans, within 40 years after the Jews crucified Jesus.
- e. Jesus later changed what Moses had passed down, regarding the temple. We are *no longer* bound to worship the Lord at one specific location.
 - i. Read **John 4:15-26**.
 - 1. When the Samaritan woman realizes Jesus is a prophet, she asks Him the question, “Which is the *correct location* for worshiping God?”
 - a. Was in in Jerusalem (where the Jewish temple was located) or on Mount Gerazim in Samaria (where the Samartian temple had been built)?
 - 2. Jesus responds that the Jews have it right, but the time is coming where God’s people will worship “in spirit and truth”, *not limited to any location*.
- f. **Take-aways for Us, Regarding the ‘One Place of Worship’:**
 - i. Here is another example where Moses took the people *part of the way* toward what the Lord ultimately intended. Jesus would come to fulfill and complete what Moses initially handed down.
 - 1. This is similar to what we see elsewhere, regarding Moses’ teaching on murder, adultery, divorce/remarriage, hatred, etc.
 - ii. The Law of Moses helped stamp out idolatry and point the people toward worshiping the one (and only) God.
 - 1. Jesus completed that by explaining that God is spirit and is seeking worship anywhere, but “in spirit and truth”.
 - iii. God cannot be contained. Also, mechanical observance of worship rituals, with no heart of obedience behind it, will not impress nor fool the Lord.

1. If we say the “right words” from the Lord’s Prayer or the Psalms, if we have the right religious posture and garb, and do so in a closet, the Lord will ignore us if our hearts are not right.
 2. As Peter pointed out in **1 Peter 3**, pointing back to **Psalm 34**, if we are not righteous in our relations with others, our prayers will be *blocked*.
- iv. Once again, we see a reminder that God *always keeps His promises*. This one took 400 years and involved a serious sin on David’s part.
1. Also, God, in his sovereignty, will accomplish His greater plans by working through even disobedient, sinful men. His plans will not be stopped by anyone or anything!