

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
7-6-22

Deuteronomy 12

The Command To Destroy Canaanite Places Of Worship – Verses 1-4

¹ These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given you to possess—as long as you live in the land ² Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains, on the hills and under every spreading tree, where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. ³ Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places. ⁴ You must not worship the LORD your God in their way.

12:2-3 When taking over a nation, the Israelites were supposed to destroy every pagan altar and idol in the land. God knew it would be easy for them to change their beliefs if they started using those altars, so nothing was to remain that might tempt them to worship idols. We, too, should ruthlessly find and remove any centers of false worship in our lives. These may be activities, attitudes, possessions, relationships, places, or habits—anything that tempts us to turn our hearts from God and do wrong. We should never flatter ourselves by thinking we're too strong to be tempted. Israel learned that lesson the hard way.

The Command To Worship At God's Appointed Place – Verses 5-9

⁵ But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; ⁶ there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. ⁷ There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you. ⁸ You are not to do as we do here today, everyone doing as they see fit, ⁹ since you have not yet reached the resting place and the inheritance the LORD your God is giving you.

12:5 And there you shall go: Worship was not left to the opinion or whim of the individual Israelite. They had to worship God at His prescribed place, and among other worshippers of God. Worship is not a "do as you please" or a "Lone Ranger" activity. The place of worship was to be a place of atonement, confession (which was made when hands were laid on the head of the sacrificial victim), and cleansing.

There you shall take ... your tithes: The place of worship was to be a place of giving. Of course, there were other places where an Israelite could give and be generous, but giving had to begin at the place of worship God has appointed.

12:8 Not at all as we are doing here today - every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes: Before Israel crossed over the Jordan, during the wilderness wanderings, each Israelite pretty much conducted their own worship as they pleased. But God was not really pleased with this; worship was

not a matter left up to whatever pleased the individual. Real worship is concerned with what pleases God.

The Joy Of Real Worship In God's Appointed Place – Verses 10-14

¹⁰ But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety. ¹¹ Then to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name—there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the LORD. ¹² And there rejoice before the LORD your God—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns who have no allotment or inheritance of their own. ¹³ Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you please. ¹⁴ Offer them only at the place the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, and there observe everything I command you.

12:10-12 The Hebrews placed great emphasis on family worship. Whether offering a sacrifice or attending a great festival, the family was often together. This gave the children a healthy attitude toward worship, and it put extra meaning into it for the adults. Watching a family member confess his or her sin was just as important as celebrating a great holiday together. Although there are appropriate times to separate people by ages, some of the most meaningful worship can be experienced only when shared by old and young.

12:13-14 While the pagans offered sacrifices to their gods, they offered them in many places. In contrast, the Israelites were only to offer sacrifices in the prescribed manner and in the prescribed places. This restriction was meant to ensure purity of worship for the nation of Israel. Later, they would neglect this injunction and offer sacrifices at the high places where pagan deities were worshiped. (See, for example, 2 Kings 23 where Josiah destroyed the other altars.) We should take steps to safeguard the purity of worship in our congregations. If we all individualized and customized worship to suit our own preferences, we would lose the benefit of worshiping as a body of believers.

Things Permitted And Prohibited In Regard To Butchering Animals, Sacrificing Animals, And Respecting The Sanctity Of Blood – Verses 15-19

¹⁵ Nevertheless, you may slaughter your animals in any of your towns and eat as much of the meat as you want, as if it were gazelle or deer, according to the blessing the LORD your God gives you. Both the ceremonially unclean and the clean may eat it. ¹⁶ But you must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground like water. ¹⁷ You must not eat in your own towns the tithe of your grain and new wine and olive oil, or the firstborn of your herds and flocks, or whatever you have vowed to give, or your freewill offerings or special gifts. ¹⁸ Instead, you are to eat them in the presence of the LORD your God at the place the LORD your God will choose—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns—and you are to rejoice before the LORD your God in everything you put your hand to. ¹⁹ Be careful not to neglect the Levites as long as you live in your land.

12:16 Eating blood was forbidden for several reasons: (1) It was an integral part of the pagan practices of the land the Israelites were about to enter; (2) it represented life, which is sacred to God; (3) it reminded the people that life and strength come from God, not from drinking or eating blood; (4) it was a symbol of the sacrifice that had to be made for sin. (For more on why eating blood was prohibited, see the note on Leviticus 17:14.)

Things Permitted And Prohibited In Regard To Butchering Animals, Sacrificing Animals, And Respecting The Sanctity Of Blood – Verses 20-28

20 When the LORD your God has enlarged your territory as he promised you, and you crave meat and say, “I would like some meat,” then you may eat as much of it as you want. **21** If the place where the LORD your God chooses to put his Name is too far away from you, you may slaughter animals from the herds and flocks the LORD has given you, as I have commanded you, and in your own towns you may eat as much of them as you want. **22** Eat them as you would gazelle or deer. Both the ceremonially unclean and the clean may eat. **23** But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life, and you must not eat the life with the meat. **24** You must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground like water. **25** Do not eat it, so that it may go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is right in the eyes of the LORD. **26** But take your consecrated things and whatever you have vowed to give, and go to the place the LORD will choose. **27** Present your burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD your God, both the meat and the blood. The blood of your sacrifices must be poured beside the altar of the LORD your God, but you may eat the meat. **28** Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you, so that it may always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the LORD your God.

12:20-22 You may slaughter and eat meat within all your gates: In the ancient world, almost every time an animal was butchered it was sacrificed to a god. Here, the LORD made it clear that not every slaughtered animal was considered a sacrifice to Him.

You may not eat within your gates the tithe ... the firstlings of your herd ... your freewill offerings, or of the heave offerings: This shows that animals which were offered in sacrifice, even if the offerer was to eat a portion, could only be killed at God's appointed place of worship.

12:24-28 Only be sure that you do not eat the blood: Since the blood was the picture of life in any animal or man (for the blood is the life), God would not allow Israel to eat meat that had not been properly bled. Instead, it was to be given to God by pouring it out on the earth.

The Worship Of God Must Be Pure – Verses 29-32

29 The LORD your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and dispossess. But when you have driven them out and settled in their land, **30** and after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, “How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same.” **31** You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods. **32** See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.

12:30-31 God did not want the Israelites even to ask about the pagan religions surrounding them. Idolatry completely permeated the land of Canaan. It was too easy to get drawn into the subtle temptations of seemingly harmless practices. Sometimes curiosity can cause us to stumble. Knowledge of evil is harmful if the evil becomes too tempting to resist. To resist curiosity about harmful practices shows discretion and obedience.

12:32 Taking away from God's commands is looking for an easy way around them. Adding to them sounds religious, but it can crush people with unnecessary requirements. Strangely enough, when

we add one command we often wind up subtracting another. For example, the Pharisees in Jesus' day added many restrictions to the Sabbath commandment. But by trying to keep Jesus from healing on the Sabbath (see John 9), they were breaking God's commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). God gave his laws to point people to himself. Making them simpler or more difficult than they really are gets in the way of God's purpose and makes it harder for people to see him clearly.