

August 5, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Deuteronomy 12:1-28.

1. In practical terms, what is a promised result of keeping God's rules according to v.1?
2. How do we explain God's harsh requirement to completely obliterate the pagans and everything about their worship?
3. Why did God pick one special place for the people to worship Him?
4. Comment on Daniel Block's statement, "Worship must be designed to please the object of worship, not the worshippers." How is this an important issue in our day?
5. According to verse twelve, what is a key element of true worship?
6. Why does God require His people to have a sanctified view of the blood, and how does that impact us?

RULES OF WORSHIP Deuteronomy 12:1-28

If you purchased a new house and didn't pay cash for it like most of us didn't, you are familiar with covenants and agreements. You spent a good bit of time in an attorney's office signing page after

page of official documents which the attorney probably explained with words like, "According to this document, the seller guarantees the house is free from termites." Or maybe, "When you sign this document, you promise to pay 'x' amount of dollars per month until the mortgage is satisfied." And it is quite doubtful that you read each page thoroughly before you signed it. You assumed that all this stuff is pretty typical and the attorney just has to give a brief explanation in order to make the sale valid and legal.

That is probably about how familiar the average Israelite was with the covenant God made with him. When God brought His chosen people out of slavery in Egypt, He stopped them at Mt. Sinai where He did a most remarkable thing. With much evidence to demonstrate His power, majesty, and authority, God came down on the mountain, met with Moses and established His covenant with His people. It was a unilateral covenant, meaning that it was God's idea. He brought the people into the covenant. They did not bring anything to the table. It was all about the ever-existing, self-existing, unchanging God, stating how He would be their God.

Deuteronomy is about that covenant. It is similar to "covenant texts" discovered from the ancient Middle East. A covenant text spells out the specifics about what is required from the parties engaged in the covenant. Deuteronomy, like those other texts, spelled out covenant requirements in general terms in the first half of the text (Deuteronomy 1-11). Now we come to the second half of the covenant text where more details of the requirements are given.

Because God chose to be Israel's God, He required a unique and special relationship with His people. Worship of God is the central element of that relationship. That people worship their god was nothing new to that generation of humans. It seems that everyone pledged allegiance to some kind of god and everyone worshiped their chosen god according to their preferences. This part of the covenant spells out in clear terms that God requires specific actions and attitudes from His people as they worship. There are important lessons here for us as we remember that God is the one true and unchanging God. The principles He established for worship from His people are principles that must still be applied in our worship.

A Specific Way of Worship (vv.1-4).

Moses related God's rules about worship to the people who were going in to possess the Promised Land. *These are the statutes and rules that you shall be careful to do in the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth (v.1).* The obvious reason for giving the rules is that God expected His people to do God's rules.

These opening words in chapter twelve sound a lot like a continuation of chapter eleven with its appeal to the LORD'S charge, statutes, rules, and commandments. (11:1). Again the emphasis for the people is that they would be very careful to do what God requires.

In particular, the point is to do God's rules in the land you possess. Yahweh is the God who made the promise of the land to the people's forefathers, and He is the God who is in the process of fulfilling His promises. Oh! That should be encouraging because this is the same God who promised and produces salvation in us! He promised redemption from the slave market of sin. Through faith in Christ's finished work, we are as free of slavery to sin as the Israelites were from Egypt. God has given us new life, abundant life, eternal life in Christ. Salvation, God's gift, is a wonderful land in which to live.

"According to the University of California study, which analyzed a series of surveys across 16 countries, those with liberal beliefs are more likely to be in a perpetual state of searching for meaning than their right-wing counterparts. Finding meaning in life is related to the sense or feeling that things are the way they should be, and that there is a sense of order," commented co-author David Newman. . . "A question that still needs to be addressed is why conservatives find more meaning in life than liberals," he added. "Our results showed that it can't be completely explained by the fact that conservatives are more religious than liberals and religious people find more meaning in life than non-religious people." (Olivia Petter, Independent. Co. UK., July 18, 2018)

Actually, they might have missed the most obvious link. People who are truly born again tend to be more conservative politically because that ideology is more in line with the character of the abundant life. Living in the Promised Land of salvation, we are quite sure that we are doing what God would have us do. Life really does have purpose and meaning.

The "not-so-positive" command was for the people to go into the land and destroy false worship (vv.2-4). Moses told them to destroy what the "nations" do. That would require the people to destroy the *places* where they worship. *You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree (v.2).*

We must remember that **all** false gods are the creation of created beings intended to replace the Creator. Ultimately, what happens in false religion is that the created being replaces focusing on the Creator God with focus on themselves. This is why I refer to it as creature worship. Creature worship is so subtle that the focus is centered on the creature even while talking about how much God loves ME. It is important for us to step back occasionally and ask if our worship says, "This is all about God," or does it say, "This is all about me or us?"

Not only should the places of worship be destroyed, but the people need to destroy the "things" the nations worshiped. *You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire. You shall chop down the carved images of their gods and destroy their name out of that place (v.3).* This was a reference to all the objects or physical items that the people used to facilitate worship of make-believe gods. The purpose in destroying the objects was to destroy their names – that erased all memory of those gods.

Why was God so uncaring, as the world might call it? God's people needed to destroy every vestige of false worship because they would undoubtedly be tempted to participate in it if the trappings and residue were allowed to remain. That could not be allowed because God's rule was, *You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way (v.4).*

God will not tolerate any competition at all in matters of worship. Because of the unending pressure of the flesh to demand worship, we must be careful to remove anything and everything that exalts ourselves in worship. An important reminder here is that worship takes place every waking hour, not just on Sunday at church. Every moment of every day we are bowing our hearts in submission to God, or we are bowing our hearts toward ourselves or something

or someone that exalts us. That is why we need to begin every day asking God to make us aware of the objects of our worship throughout the day.

A Special Place of Worship (vv.5-14).

Another rule for worship, a positive requirement, was that the people needed to go to worship at the place God chose for His habitation. *But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go (v.5).*

Obvious from this requirement is the fact that God will choose the place for worship. This was not a challenge for the people to seek out, to try to find, the secret place God chose. Rather this is kind of like, God gives the possession and you go in and possess it (11:8). God chose the place of worship and it was the people's responsibility to go to it. That this was not a suggestion or option is clear in that Moses mentioned this special place seven times in our text (vv.5,11,13,14,18,21,26).

The place was to be a special place because it was the place God chose for His habitation. We know from subsequent history that ultimately this place was Jerusalem, the city of David. More than that, it was a place rich in God's history. This was Mt. Moriah where Abraham promised Isaac that the Lord would provide His lamb for sacrifice. For over two thousand years, God pictured the place of the final sacrifice that would be slain for sin, Jesus Christ, who was crucified somewhere near Mt. Moriah, Zion, the city of David, the place of God's habitation.

That God stated that He would make the place of worship, the place of His habitation, is not to say that God ceased to be omnipresent. Rather, in His compassion and grace, God chose a particular place where the people could come and meet with Him. It was at the mercy seat which sat on top of the ark of the covenant on which the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice for sins on the Day of Atonement.

God certainly gave very specific rules to govern how His people should worship Him. He said that the people are to gather where God chooses. At least three times a year, God required His people to come

to His chosen place to worship Him with sacrifices and rejoicing. Many other times throughout the year the people could meet together for lesser feasts. Always the altar of sacrifice was available for individuals to come and seek God to express thanksgiving, or to repent of sin, or dedicate a first born and such.

Today, God still has a special place where His people are to gather and worship. It is called "together." Jesus taught the principle: *"Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them"* (Matthew 18:18-20). The Body of Christ, Christians meeting together, is where you will find God.

This leads to the importance of corporate worship (vv.6-14). That importance lays on the surface of the specific details of worship Moses gave. He told the people to go the place God chose, *and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, your vow offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the LORD your God has blessed you. "You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes, for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the LORD your God is giving you. But when you go over the Jordan and live in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies around, so that you live in safety, then to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, and all your finest vow offerings that you vow to the LORD (vv.6-11).*

This is a long section with a lot of information. We will consider it simply in light of the comments from Daniel Block.

"As evidenced here, true worship perceives God alone as the divine host, with redeemed human beings as His

guests. Worship must be designed to please the object of worship, not the worshipers. If Moses had to call a stop to the Israelites of his day worshiping in any way they pleased (v.8), the same is true today. In the end, the divine verdict on our worship is the only verdict that matters. True worship involves an audience with the divine King and transpires in God's place by God's invitation on God's terms. Contrary to some, ultimately acceptable forms and styles of worship are not determined by the worshipers, let alone the unregenerate or marginally spiritual. The invitation to enter the presence of God is extended to those who worship Him with their lives and is to be accepted with humility and awe." (Daniel Block, "Deuteronomy," *The NIV Application Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 2012, pp.313-314.)

God's plan requires meeting and rejoicing together. *And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male servants and your female servants, and the Levite that is within your towns, since he has no portion or inheritance with you. Take care that you do not offer your burnt offerings at any place that you see, but at the place that the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you (vv.12-14).*

Meeting together for worship matters to God. A couple of generations ago, a fair but painful assessment of typical Sunday worship was that it was the most segregated hour of the week. Churches are still working diligently on erasing those lines of segregation between races or ethnic groups, and rightly so. God's plan for the church is that ethnic and racial walls be removed since we are all one body in Christ. However, I find it a bit hypocritical that the very churches who boast the loudest about knocking down those walls, at the very same time erect walls of age and preference in worship style. Isn't it just as wrong, just as segregationist to hold three separate services that generally separate the millennials, middle-aged, and old-line traditionalists based on preference of worship

style? God does not desire for us to be separated in worship. His plan is for the stronger brother to not offend the weaker brother and the weaker brother to grant liberty to the stronger brother.

A Sanctified View of Blood (vv.15-28).

The closing section of our text brings up an issue connected with corporate worship, but also directed at personal application. The original rule affecting the killing of animals for food required that all meat that was intended for consumption was to be slaughtered at the altar. According to Leviticus 17, anyone who killed an animal to eat it outside the camp was to be cut off from the nation (vv.3-4). Also the law required all sacrifices, all animals killed for consumption had to take place at the tabernacle (vv.5-6). All such sacrifices had to involve the priests.

While the people were in the desert, there were multiple feasts when this would take place. Also, at any time an Israelite could bring a sacrifice to the tabernacle. And since everyone's tent was within walking distance of the tabernacle, they could fulfill that rule and worship at the tabernacle. Probably this rule was to help prevent false worship.

But things were changing logistically for God's people which required a rule change. The people were about to spread throughout the Promised Land. How could the people live with a law that prevented them from eating meat unless they traveled a three day journey to the temple? God made provision for this conundrum once the people entered the land.

Moses explained rules regarding mundane eating of meat. The new rule was that the people could eat as much meat as they wanted in their towns. (v15) *However, you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your towns, as much as you desire, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that he has given you. The unclean and the clean may eat of it, as of the gazelle and as of the deer. (v.21b) Then you may kill any of your herd or your flock, which the LORD has given you, as I have commanded you, and you may eat within your towns whenever you desire. (v.22) Just as the gazelle or the deer is eaten, so you may eat of it. The unclean and the clean alike may eat of it (vv.15,21b-22).*

Look at those verses and consider the great freedom God gave for the people to eat. *You may slaughter (v.15a). Eat as much as you desire (v.15b). Eat with God's blessing (v.15c). Ceremonially clean and unclean alike can eat because this is not corporate worship (vv.15d, 22). They could kill gazelle, deer, herd, flock (vv.15e, 21b). It is all a gift from God (v.21c).*

This was a matter of practical wisdom. Moses explained: *(v.20) When the LORD your God enlarges your territory, as he has promised you, and you say, "I will eat meat," because you crave meat, you may eat meat whenever you desire. (v.21) If the place that the LORD your God will choose to put his name there is too far from you. It is as if God said, "You desire to have steak for dinner, and you live three day's journey from Jerusalem, don't worry about it. You do not need to go to Jerusalem and engage in corporate worship. Eat your steak at home, but still worship."*

However, while God gave this lenience regarding eating, He still required the people to respect the blood. *(v.16) Only you shall not eat the blood; you shall pour it out on the earth like water. (v.23) Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh. (v.24) You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out on the earth like water. (v.25) You shall not eat it, that all may go well with you and with your children after you, when you do what is right in the sight of the LORD. (v.27) And offer your burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, on the altar of the LORD your God. The blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out on the altar of the LORD your God, but the flesh you may eat (vv.23-25,27).*

The issue is that, in God's plan, blood represents life. When the blood of an animal or person flows outside the body, it is a sign that life is passing away. This principle goes all the way back to God's stipulation to Noah. God said, *Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man (Genesis 9:3-5).* God desires for us to show respect of life in both animals and humans.

Also, while the people were not required to show up at the tabernacle or temple just to eat meat, they still needed to take care of the Levites. *Take care that you do not neglect the Levite as long as you live in your land (v.19).* The Levites (priests) were provided food through the sacrifices. God applied the "laborer is worthy of his hire" principle to Old Testament tabernacle work. In other words, people who lived close enough to the tabernacle/temple needed to take sacrifices to the "place God chose" so that the Levites could eat. *But the holy things that are due from you, and your vow offerings, you shall take, and you shall go to the place that the LORD will choose (v.26).*

Finally, God told the people that they needed to be careful to remember the times of corporate worship. There were times they needed to go to the tabernacle/temple for corporate worship. *You may not eat within your towns the tithe of your grain or of your wine or of your oil, or the firstborn of your herd or of your flock, or any of your vow offerings that you vow, or your freewill offerings or the contribution that you present, but you shall eat them before the LORD your God in the place that the LORD your God will choose, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, and the Levite who is within your towns. And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in all that you undertake (vv.17-18).*

The rules were of great importance because the result of proper worship brings God's blessing. *Be careful to obey all these words that I command you, that it may go well with you and with your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God (v.28).*

That God laid down very clear and direct stipulations for worship in the Old Testament is clear. We cannot miss the fact that these precise stipulations are connected directly to the covenant, the contract God made with His people. Do we really think that the same God is less concerned about our worship? Are we not also children of the covenant, the greater covenant, the New Covenant in which God has written His law on our hearts? For your homework I encourage you to become familiar with the "Regulative Principle of Worship." In particular, you might find an article with that title by Derek Thomas helpful. Also a study of the difference between the

“regulative principle of worship” and the “normative principle of worship.”