

### God Requires One Place for Worship

#### Deuteronomy 12

**Deuteronomy 12:1-3** - *“These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. <sup>2</sup> You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. <sup>3</sup> And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place.”*

#### Background Notes

Chapter 11 was a review of the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant, with an emphasis on the consequences of obedience and the consequences of disobedience. In chapter 12, and for the rest of this second major address by Moses, there are instructions about some laws of the Covenant that were revealed at Mt. Sinai, and some that were not previously revealed. In chapter 12 the emphasis is on the fact that God’s people were to be different from the surrounding pagan people, in their way of worship and in the way they lived. In verses 1-3, notice that the Land of Promise was given to the children of Israel as long as they lived on this earth. Not as long as they kept the Mosaic Covenant, but as long as they lived on this earth - because the land was given to them under God’s **unconditional** covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12).

Are there Jewish people living on this earth today? Yes! Then the promise of Deuteronomy 12:1 is still valid today. Even though the Mosaic Covenant was broken, and even though the Messiah has come, and even though the Church has been established - this unconditional covenant and promise of the Land that God gave to the descendants of Abraham is still valid. When the children of Israel came into the Land, they were to destroy all the idols, altars and shrines of the foreign religions that were practiced on the high places and under trees throughout the Land (v2-3). They were **not** to keep the idols and images as souvenirs or put them in museums. They were to obliterate them and destroy them. It’s important to remember this, because it certainly says something about how we should treat occult objects today.

#### Doctrinal Points

##### 1. The believer’s way of worship is different than the unbeliever’s.

Deuteronomy 12:4-14 - *“You shall not worship the Lord your God with such things. <sup>5</sup> “But you shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. <sup>6</sup> There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings,*

*your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. <sup>7</sup> And there you shall eat before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the Lord your God has blessed you.*

*<sup>8</sup>“You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes— <sup>9</sup>for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you.<sup>10</sup> But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, <sup>11</sup> then there will be the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you.<sup>13</sup> Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see; <sup>14</sup> but in the place which the Lord chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.”*

In these verses God directed the children of Israel that when they entered the Land, they were not only to destroy all the idols. Images, pagan altars, and shrines, but they were also to establish a central sanctuary in a place that God would choose (v5). In the wilderness the tribes had camped around the Tabernacle, but in the Land they would be spread out and live at a distance from one another. Therefore in the Land they were to have a **central** place of worship. During the time of the Conquest, the Tabernacle was located at Gilgal. During the time of the Judges, it was located at Shiloh, and then in Gibeon. But when David was king, God revealed that **Jerusalem** was to be the central place of worship. The Temple was to be built there, and there all sacrifices were to be offered. All offerings and tithes were to be brought to Jerusalem, and all celebrations with peace offerings and thank offerings were to take place there.

The requirement for a central sanctuary was mentioned seven times in this chapter, so it was very important. It emphasized that the believer’s way of worship is to be different than the unbeliever’s. *“Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see” (v13).* This was the way the pagans worshiped, because Canaanite worship was pantheistic. *“...but in the place which the Lord chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.”*

A single central sanctuary emphasized the fact that Israel had one God, and He lived in the midst of His people. This was the way of worship that God demanded. *“You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes” (v8).* This probably means that the Israelis either misunderstood the Law or were lax in obeying the requirements of the Law that had already been given.

This doctrinal point is certainly as true today as it was in Moses’ day. ***The believer’s way of worship is different than the unbeliever’s.*** The Lord Jesus said, *“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth” (John*

4:24). The true believer does not say, “There are many ways to worship God, as long as you’re sincere.” The true believer does not say “all roads lead up the same mountain.” And the true believer does not worship our Lord with images and incense, but in Spirit and truth. There is only one God, and there is one way to worship Him. The one way to come to God is through Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). The believer’s way of worship is different than the unbeliever’s.

## 2. The believer’s way of life is different than the unbeliever’s.

**Deuteronomy 12:15-32** - *“However, you may slaughter and eat meat within all your gates, whatever your heart desires, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it, of the gazelle and the deer alike. <sup>16</sup> Only you shall not eat the blood; you shall pour it on the earth like water. <sup>17</sup> You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand.<sup>18</sup> But you must eat them before the Lord your God in the place which the Lord your God chooses, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God in all to which you put your hands. <sup>19</sup> Take heed to yourself that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land.*

<sup>20</sup> *“When the Lord your God enlarges your border as He has promised you, and you say, ‘Let me eat meat,’ because you long to eat meat, you may eat as much meat as your heart desires. <sup>21</sup> If the place where the Lord your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, then you may slaughter from your herd and from your flock which the Lord has given you, just as I have commanded you, and you may eat within your gates as much as your heart desires. <sup>22</sup> Just as the gazelle and the deer are eaten, so you may eat them; the unclean and the clean alike may eat them. <sup>23</sup> Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life; you may not eat the life with the meat. <sup>24</sup> You shall not eat it; you shall pour it on the earth like water. <sup>25</sup> You shall not eat it, that it may go well with you and your children after you, when you do what is right in the sight of the Lord. <sup>26</sup> Only the holy things which you have, and your vowed offerings, you shall take and go to the place which the Lord chooses. <sup>27</sup> And you shall offer your burnt offerings, the meat and the blood, on the altar of the Lord your God; and the blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out on the altar of the Lord your God, and you shall eat the meat. <sup>28</sup> Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the Lord your God. <sup>29</sup> “When the Lord your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, <sup>30</sup> take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ <sup>31</sup> You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord that He hates, they have done to their gods, for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. <sup>32</sup> “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.”*

The pagan Canaanites were involved in all kinds of gross immoral idolatrous practices - even child sacrifice! God told Israel not to even inquire about these evil practices lest they be ensnared. How true today as well! Christians should not even check out the gross, ungodly practices of unbelievers, thinking that understanding them will make us a more effective witness. No! Romans 16:19 says, *“be wise in what is good and simple and innocent concerning evil.”* When the children of Israel came into the Land, they would be allowed to kill animals for food without bringing them to the central sanctuary (v15), as was required at the Tabernacle in the wilderness. This was because of the greater distances involved (v21). However, all **sacrifices and offerings to the Lord** were to be brought to the central sanctuary. Animals killed for food were to have the blood drained, because blood represented life, and blood would be the ransom price for sin. Leviticus 17:11: *“For the life of a flesh is in the blood and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”* Not eating or drinking the blood of an animal recognized the sacredness of blood, and reflected God’s view of blood.

These regulations meant that the lifestyle of the people of Israel was totally distinct and different from the lifestyle of the unbelieving Canaanites. Although Christians are no longer under the Law, our way of life and lifestyle should be different from the unbelievers. Ephesians 5:1-4: *“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.”* The believer’s way of life is different than the unbeliever’s.

## Practical Application

### **“What makes you different?” is really a compliment!**

If an unbeliever asks you, “What makes you so different?” - that’s a compliment! As Christians, we don’t try to be “odd” by the way we dress or talk - but if we live our lives in line with the Bible, we will differ from this world. Our priorities will be different. Our behavior will be different. Our jokes will be different. Our entertainment will be different. 1 Peter 2:9 says that Christians are a “peculiar people” (KJV). That doesn’t mean “odd” - it means “special”! We’re God’s own special people! So if we live up to our calling as His children, we’ll be different than the unbelievers of this world. So - “What makes you different?” really is a compliment!