

Bible Study – Deuteronomy Chapter 12 – The First Law

In the last study, we saw the blessings that come with obedience and the judgement that follows with disobedience. Israel must decide how they were going to follow the Lord God. In today's study, we will look at the first commandment of the Ten Commandments ("You shall have no other gods before me" Exodus 20:3).

The specific laws in this section were given to help the people surrender every area of their lives to the Lord, and to help them eradicate whatever might threaten that pure devotion. This is instruction preached, rather than codified as comprehensive instruction. Its purpose was to explain to the generation entering the land, all the laws that needed clarification, emphasis, and application, in view of Israel's imminent entrance into Canaan.

Read Deuteronomy 12:1 – 14

Moses is giving the Israelites 'battle' instructions for when they take the land. They were to destroy every place of worship that the Canaanites used for their gods. This was to be a complete and utter obliteration of all places and instruments of worship (e.g. altars, poles, idols, and memorials). When they were to worship the Lord God, they were to do it in a place as prescribed by God and to bring their offerings and sacrifices there, as they were to do this in the presence of the Lord God.

Q. When Moses says "But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose to put his name and make his habitation there" (v.5), why is this important and what does the statement imply? How does the worship of God compare to the way the Canaanites worshipped their gods? In verses 29-31, Moses warns not to inquire about the Canaanite religion. Why was this warning important for Israel?

- **Objective – That the worship of God is different and better than the Canaanite worship of their gods**
- The place that God chooses means that he knows the best place that Israel is to properly worship him and to hold his name in high esteem
- Israel could not determine the best place where God was to be worshipped as they may not properly honour and worship God if they did
- Think of the King's protocol – when you meet royalty, there is a specific protocol that must be followed in order to give them the proper honour they are worthy of
 - One cannot just meet royalty based on what they think is best, but is based on set protocols that are set by the royalty themselves
- The central activity of Israel's life, the worship of the Lord, is fully shaped and determined by the Lord God
- God cannot be associated with the other places of worship that the Canaanite gods were worshipped as this would falsely indicate they are the same
- Whenever the Israelites came to the tabernacle (or temple), they were coming to God
- The worship of the Lord God was done in a way that honours him and his character
 - It is God that determines how he is to be worshipped, not by the worshippers
- The worship of the Canaanite gods was determined by the Canaanites, which meant that awful things were done in the names of these gods (e.g. child sacrifice) – Leviticus 18:21 – to avoid any worship to Molech
- These things were opposite of who the Lord God was and against what God had intended for his creation
 - Worship of Molech involved aspects of sexual rituals and human sacrifice
 - Perhaps the example of Abraham and Isaac was to show the difference between the two
- The warning of verses 29-31 is important as there was no value or good that could come out of inquiring about the worship of Canaanite gods

- This is why the Canaanite places of worship needed to be destroyed, as a statement of saying this type of worship was unacceptable to Israel as it detracts from proper worship of the Lord God
- The fact that they inquired would put them in harm's way
- If they were to fall into this temptation, they will surely turn away
 - We see examples (e.g. King Solomon) where Israel does indeed worship Molech
- The particular temptations which Israel would face in Canaan must be resisted at any price (cf. Deuteronomy 6:18; 7:1-11)
- Failure to do so will result in the death of the nation, as compromise in this area denies the very nature of Israel as God's people
- **Jeremiah 2:13** – Forsaking God, the fountain of living waters, and making cisterns that hold no water – Giving up the best for something inferior with no benefit or profit
 - This is what would happen if they went after things that are not of God
- For Israel to inquire about the Canaanite religion may show a dissatisfaction with the Lord God and thinking there is something better

Q. The sacrifices and offerings mentioned in v. 6 and 11 are to be done before the Lord God. What is the purpose of these sacrifices and offerings? Why do you think they needed to be made at the place of God's choosing?

- **Objective – Sacrifices and offerings are part of the worship of the Lord God and had to be done properly in order to be accepted by God**
- ****Note to leader – No need to explore each sacrifice or offering, but a general overview is sufficient for this question. Cross reference is for further studies.**
- The various offerings had different purposes and can be broken up into five major sacrifices or offerings
- **Burnt offerings** were made for the atonement for unintentional sin or as a voluntary act of worship to express devotion or commitment to God (Leviticus 1; 6:8-13)
 - Could be given at any time
 - It was a sacrifice of general atonement – an acknowledgement of the sin nature and a request for renewed relationship with God
 - This is a voluntary sacrifice
- **Grain offerings** were done to express thanksgiving in recognition of God's provision and unmerited goodwill toward the person making the sacrifice
- **Peace offerings** were a sacrifice of thanksgiving and fellowship followed by a shared meal
 - The vow offering, thanksgiving offering, and freewill offerings are examples of peace offerings
 - Vow offerings – Leviticus 7
 - Was given to repay a vow or in consecration or fulfillment of a vow
 - Freewill offerings – Leviticus 23:38
 - Completely voluntary
 - To be made in a place of God's choosing, not in an area formerly used by other religions
- **Sin offerings** were made to atone for sin and for cleansing from defilement
- **Trespass offerings** was given as atonement for unintentional sins that required reimbursement to an offended party, and also as a cleansing from defiling sins or physical maladies
- Tithes – Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:26; Deuteronomy 14:24; 2 Chronicles 31:5
 - A requirement of the Law which all Israelites were to give 10% of everything they earned and grew to the tabernacle/temple
- This had to be done in a prescribed manner because that was God's intention for proper worship from his people
- It was also meant to share with everyone, including the Levites
- Also, this is where God would be and the sacrifices and offering for him

- Need to be before God
- Need to fulfill the intent of the sacrifice or offering

Q. How does this section reveal the heart, mind, and will of God?

- **Objective – That God shows that only He is worthy to be worshipped and praised in this world**
- **Note to Leaders – Use the following as a guide**
 - **Heart** – Refers to the central part of a person – It is the essence of who He is, what he desires, His will, and His purposes
 - **Mind** – Refers to what He is thinking
 - **Will** – Refers to his intentions that he wants his creation to follow
- God wants pure worship and devotion from his chosen people
- God is a jealous God, that he wants to be exclusive to his chosen people
- To show that he (God) is different from the Canaanite gods and that his way was better than theirs
 - There is an aspect of respect for human life and dignity
- For all people to come worship Him as Lord of the universe and the creator of all things
- That he is orderly, and that he wants to make himself known, to be easily found for anyone who was seeking him
- God is also joyful, looking for his people to rejoice when worshipping him (v. 7)

Read Deuteronomy 12:15-32

Moses talks about the consumption of meat, by both the ceremonially unclean and clean alike. However, the blood was never to be consumed and it was to be poured out on the ground (when not being consumed as part of a sacrifice). Moses expands on how sacrifices and offerings were to be made and done, adding in the consecrated things and things that were vowed to the Lord God. He finishes off with a warning that Israel was not to inquire about the conquered people's gods and method of worship as they may be tempted to do the same with the Lord God, whose worship is different from the worship of the Canaanite gods. Interwoven in this passage is the command to obey all the regulations given to them, so that it may go well with them and their children and they would be doing what is right in the eyes of the Lord God.

Q. When Moses approves the slaughter of animals for daily consumption outside of sacrifice (v.15) and outside of the place of worship (v. 21), why is this significant (cf. Leviticus 17:3-6)? Also, regarding the blood, why do you think it was forbidden to drink the blood (cf. Leviticus 17:11; Acts 15:29)? Why does it not apply to Christians today (Romans 14:14; 1 Timothy 4:4)?

- **Objective – To understand the change of the law regarding sacrifices and the use of animals**
- The slaughter of animals was generally associated with sacrifice and offering to the Lord God at the tabernacle
- With this new rule, it meant that animals were now available for general consumption
- This was applicable for when Israel enters the Promised Land (not before that)
- This appears to be a modification of the law of sacrifice, as a practical way of protecting the Israelites from the temptation to use other sacred places or to misuse the blood
- It is forbidden as the blood is thought to be the life of an animal (or human)
- It is also reserved for making atonement (Leviticus 17:11)
- Then it is very interesting when Christ, at the last supper, indicates the eating of his body and drink of his blood, which would be part of the communion celebration done by Christians, would be in stark contrast to this law

- It no longer applies to Christians today as the death of Christ, the ultimate fulfillment of the sacrificial rituals, brings an end to this law
- As well, nothing is deemed unclean unless it is in their conscious

Q. We have a glimpse of what the religion of the Canaanites were like (v.31, cf. Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-4). Their acts of worship were detestable and contrary to the worship of the Lord God and what he stood for. What are some ways that we can worship God improperly? How do we guard against those things?

- **Objective – To show that even Christians can worship God improperly, even though we may not do egregious acts like the Canaanites**
- Conflict and disunity in Christ – still worshipping when we have something against a brother/sister (Matthew 5:23-24)
- Empty singing and worship – e.g. going through the motions with no connection to God
- Not taking communion in a worthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:27)
- Incorporating other foreign religious practices in our daily lives (e.g. yoga poses and breathing exercises)
- “Interfaith” worship services
- Worshipping ‘God’ as female or using female priests/pastors
- Things we can do to guard ourselves:
 - Remember the sacredness of the worship of God by reading the Old Testament examples
 - Have a time of prayer and reflection before coming into communal worship with fellow believers
 - To treasure the word of God in our hearts
 - Regular devotional and prayer time with God
- Hebrews 12:28-29 - ***“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”***

These instructions for Israel are meant to give them a proper view of God and the expected conduct in their worship of him in the Promised Land. The specific instructions for the destruction and removal of all the Canaanite gods and places of worship was necessary in order to help the Israelites maintain their fidelity to the Lord God. This was God’s way of protecting their relationship as he knew they were prone to wander. The specific sacrifices and offerings at the intended places of worship was God’s way of showing Israel the best way to obey and please God so “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). How great is it to know that God does not leave his children to figure out how to properly worship him, but for him to show them the right way to worship the Lord God.