

# Deuteronomy 12 • It Begins with Right Worship

## Introduction

Chapters 12-26 provide the stipulations involved in a covenant relationship with God, but it is most important to note that it begins with right worship. Because of the redefinition of “worship” in the Western Church to mostly refer to a time of music and singing on Sunday mornings, it takes a recommitment to God’s Word for today’s Christian to rediscover the true meaning of biblical worship. In fact, many of the musical practices employed today are specifically prohibited in this chapter because such have been adapted from the world in direct contradiction to His Word. The key concept which will be highlighted in this teaching on right worship is the fact that such can never be separated from God’s Word and, in turn, our own behavior in this regard. God’s true followers do not behave toward Him the way false cults and religions approach their deity, and this is further reflected in His true followers’ behavior towards others.

<sup>1</sup>“These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall carefully observe in the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess as long as you live on the earth. <sup>2</sup>You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess serve their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. <sup>3</sup>You shall tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and burn their Asherim with fire, and you shall cut down the engraved images of their gods and obliterate their name from that place. <sup>4</sup>You shall not act like this toward the LORD your God. <sup>5</sup>But you shall seek the LORD at the place which the LORD your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come. <sup>6</sup>There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. <sup>7</sup>There also you and your households shall eat before the LORD your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you.

## [Read v.1-7]

### Q: What is the difference between a “statute” and a “judgment”?

A: A “statute” (Heb. “choq”) is a prescribed boundary of a permanent nature, such as rules for sacrifices and holy days or limits on marriage. A “judgment” (Heb. “mishpat”), sometimes also translated as “ordinance”, is what we might call “case law”. It is the application of God’s Word.

### Q: What are these terms therefore describing when it comes to a covenantal relationship with God?

A: It involves not just following the letter of the Law as represented by “statutes”, but the spirit of the Law as represented by “judgments”.

**Application:** There are no loopholes when it comes to God’s Word. Everything is either directly specified in His Word or can be applied for anything which is not word-for-word covered verbatim.

### Q: List the actions which are commanded where the places and things of false worship are concerned:

1. “...tear down their altars...” (v.3)
2. “...smash their sacred pillars...” (v.3)
3. “...burn their Asherim with fire...” (v.3)
4. “...cut down the engraved images of their gods...” (v.3)
5. “...obliterate their name from that place.” (v.3)

### Q: What is the specified purpose of destroying all false influences? Why can’t they be used to worship the One True God?

A: “You shall not act like this toward the LORD your God”. (v.4)

**Application:** Something developed to worship a false god can never be adapted to worship the One True God because such do not simply involve a place or thing, but accompanying behaviors and attitudes contrary to a right relationship with Him. What are some of the things of the world which have been adapted into the Church?

### Q: List those things which are commanded to be brought to the right place of worship:

1. “...your burnt offerings...” (v.6) (aka, sin offerings)
2. “...your sacrifices...” (v.6) (aka, peace offerings)
3. “...your tithes...” (v.6) (aka, financial offerings)
4. “...the contribution of your hand...” (v.6) (aka, the “heave” offering presented to the priests and Levites and their families)
5. “...your votive offerings...” (v.6) (aka, something provided specifically for a religious purpose or use as a result of a vow)

6. ...*“your freewill offerings...”* (v.6) (aka, a voluntary contribution made in addition to what may be required by a vow, pledge or legal stipulation.)
7. *“...the firstborn of your herd and your flock.”* (v.6)

**Q: What do all these things have in common? How are they a stark contrast to the things used for false worship?**

A: They are all provided by God in His Word to show the right ways to worship Him, but they cannot be transacted wherever one chooses. Each must be performed at the Tabernacle or Temple, the earthly representation of the house of God.

**Q: How is this accomplished in the New Testament model of worship?**

A: The Body of Christ is the temple in which all of these things take place spiritually.

*<sup>4</sup>And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, <sup>5</sup>you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. — 1 Peter 2:4–5*

**Q: Why is it significant that it is stipulated “you and your households” are bound by these requirements?**

A: The definition of a “household” in ancient times included everyone in your family and business. This would include children, extended family, servants and employees—all those in a close, daily relationship with you.

**Point:** *Those for whom we have a responsibility when it comes to physical needs are also our responsibility when it comes to their spiritual needs.*

**Application:** *The practices of other cults and religions cannot be adapted for right worship of God. He must be worshiped according to His Word and ways alone.*

<sup>8</sup>You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; <sup>9</sup>for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you. <sup>10</sup>When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security, <sup>11</sup>then it shall come about that the place in which the LORD your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the LORD. <sup>12</sup>And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is

**[Read v.8-14]**

**Q: What is the spiritual difference for Israel before and after what God provided through Moses?**

A: Before, when they did not have His Word, each person was “*doing whatever is right in his own eyes*”—that is, operating according to their own standard; now that God has given them the Word, characterized at the opening of this chapter as “*the statutes and the judgments*” (v.1), practitioners are on the path to both God’s literal and spiritual rest.

**Q: How might v.8 reflect the issue of worship?**

A: Whereas up until the Tabernacle, worship and sacrifices took place wherever each individual deemed it personally appropriate; now worship and sacrifices will take place corporately at God’s designated place and according to His given instructions.

**Q: How does the promised rest represent more than just earthly peace?**

A: It is a peace of the heart, mind and soul when they are one people who have not only come together in one land, but in unified worship at a single designated place.

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within your gates, since he has no portion or inheritance with you.

<sup>13</sup>“Be careful that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every cultic place 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.

**Q: What does God specifically warn against?**

A: Using cultic places where similar activities for burnt offerings are provided to false gods. God is providing a single, sanctified place so there will be no need to re-use such desecrated facilities.

**Q: Why did God provide a single place for their collective worship?**

A: Instead of being one ethnic nation whose main identity is their lineage from Abraham, their chief quality could now be one nation under God. They would become bound together as one people spiritually under God’s calling and covenant.

**Q: How is the concept of this rest addressed where New Testament believers are concerned?**

A: In His fulfillment of all things, Christ has become our rest according to Hebrews 4.

*<sup>8</sup>For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. <sup>9</sup>So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. <sup>10</sup>For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. <sup>11</sup>Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. <sup>12</sup>For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup>And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. — Hebrews 4:8–13*

**Q: Why is this most famous of verses describing the working of the Word of God found in the context of “a Sabbath rest for the people of God”?**

A: Because just like Old Testament Israel, New Testament believers are included or excluded based on their obedience/disobedience to God’s Word. Hebrews 4 actually begins with a reminder of what happened historically because of a lack of faith and accompanying obedience.

*<sup>1</sup>Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. <sup>2</sup>For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. — Hebrews 4:1–2*

*<sup>6</sup>Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, — Hebrews 4:6*

**Application:** Biblical worship must always be followed up with biblical faith and obedience to God’s Word. It is the singular path to God’s rest literally and spiritually.

<sup>15</sup>However, you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your gates, whatever you desire, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it, as of the gazelle and the deer. <sup>16</sup>Only you shall not eat the blood; you are to pour it out on the ground like water. <sup>17</sup>You are not allowed to eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or new wine or oil, or the firstborn of your herd or flock, or any of your votive offerings which you vow, or your freewill offerings, or the contribution of your hand. <sup>18</sup>But you shall eat them before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God will choose, you and your son and daughter, and your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in all your undertakings. <sup>19</sup>Be careful that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land.

**[Read v.15-19]**

**Q: Why would it be necessary for God to specify it was permissible for His people to eat in the course of normal life?**

A: God is making the distinction between what takes place in the course of daily life where the ritual rules do not apply, versus acts of worship where they do.

**Q: What might be significant about the specific mention of “the gazelle and the deer”?**

A: These were considered “clean” animals acceptable for eating, but they were not used in sacrifices. This is simply making a distinction between game which is hunted and livestock which is domesticated, and what is for ritual use vs. daily.

**Q: Although the people were permitted to eat “whatever you desire”, what were the stipulations where others were concerned?**

A: First was to share with others, “the unclean and the clean”, which referred to one’s condition of ritual purity. Although the ritually unclean were not permitted access to the Tabernacle this would not disqualify them from local fellowship. Second, they were to take care of the Levites living among them. It was impossible for all the priests and Levites to live and serve in the Tabernacle where they would share in the sacrifices, so those locally co-located needed to be taken care of.

**Application:** *The standard where others are concerned is not limited to when we are in God’s House proper, but extends to daily life.*

**Q: Why does God repeatedly make stipulations to not eat blood?**

A: As stated, the blood represents life. But God also previously explained the connection of the blood of sacrifices to atonement.

*<sup>11</sup>For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.’ <sup>12</sup>Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, ‘No person among you may eat blood, nor may any alien who sojourns among you eat blood.’ — Leviticus 17:11–12*

**Point:** *Adam and Eve witnessed the need for the blood of atonement when God fashioned their garments from the animal skins which were sacrificed, and has been a repeated feature of all sacrifices since. This foreshadows the ultimate blood of atonement shed on our behalf by Christ.*

**Q: What is important about v.17 in relations to the overall teaching of this passage?**

A: Although God’s people are to behave consistently in all things, whether in the course of daily life or when engaged in worship, they are to make a distinction between that which is dedicated to God and that which is for their own use.

**Q: Why is v.18 particularly important to this overall chapter?**

A: This is the third time in which right worship is to be characterized by rejoicing not just individually, but for every member of the household.

*<sup>7</sup>There also you and your households shall eat before the LORD your God, and **rejoice** in all your undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you. — Deuteronomy 12:7*

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<sup>12</sup>“And you shall **rejoice** before the LORD your God, you and your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion or inheritance with you. — Deuteronomy 12:12

<sup>18</sup>“But you shall eat them before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God will choose, you and your son and daughter, and your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall **rejoice** before the LORD your God in all your undertakings. — Deuteronomy 12:18

**Application:** While we are to make a distinction between that which we devote exclusively to God and that which daily supports and sustains us, we must maintain a similar balance in all things when it comes to our relationships with others.

<sup>20</sup>“When the LORD your God extends your border as He has promised you, and you say, ‘I will eat meat,’ because you desire to eat meat, then you may eat meat, whatever you desire. <sup>21</sup>If the place which the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, then you may slaughter of your herd and flock which the LORD has given you, as I have commanded you; and you may eat within your gates whatever you desire. <sup>22</sup>Just as a gazelle or a deer is eaten, so you will eat it; the unclean and the clean alike may eat of it. <sup>23</sup>Only be sure not to eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh. <sup>24</sup>You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out on the ground like water. <sup>25</sup>You shall not eat it, so that it may be well with you and your sons after you, for you will be doing what is right in the sight of the LORD. <sup>26</sup>Only your holy things which you may have and your votive offerings, you shall take and go to the place which the LORD chooses. <sup>27</sup>And you shall offer your burnt offerings, the flesh 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 flesh.

<sup>28</sup>“Be careful to listen to all these words which I command you, so that it may be well with you and your sons after you forever, for you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God.

### [Read v.20-28]

**Q: Although very similar to the previous section, how is the overall context different?**

A: Previously these instructions were qualified, “according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you” (v.15), and here it is, “When the LORD your God extends your border as He has promised you”. (v.20) This is being repeated to cover both the present and the subsequent future when the land of Israel will have grown much larger than occupied by the initial conquest.

**Q: However, which particular item of instruction is provided with even more detail?**

A: The commandment “not to eat the blood”.

**Q: What is the overall distinction which is being affirmed yet again?**

A: The handling of things devoted to God vs. everyday life.

**Q: How is v.25 contrasted to previous statements in this chapter?**

A: Whereas Moses began with an admonition that everyone should cease doing whatever was right in their own eyes (v.8), following God’s Word where this is concerned is contrasted as, “for you will be doing what is right in the sight of the LORD”. (v.25)

**Q: What is the additional conditional promise provided in this instance?**

A: In v.28 it is specified that God’s blessings are connected to obedience to His Word not just for each individual, but their families as well.

**Q: What is affirmed a second time regarding obedience to God’s Word and ways?**

A: That which was stated in v.25 is repeated again in v.28, “...for you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God”.

**Application:** A right relationship with God involves both the blood of atonement and obedience to His Word, both of which are ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

<sup>29</sup>“When the LORD your God cuts off before you the nations which you are going in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, <sup>30</sup>beware that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?’ <sup>31</sup>You shall not behave thus toward the LORD your God, for every abominable act which the Lord hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.

<sup>32</sup>“Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.

### **[Read v.29-32]**

**Q: What is similar about the opening and closing of this chapter?**

A: It begins and ends with the warning not to employ false things in the pursuit and worship of the One True God.

**Q: How are both the opening and closing sections characterized? What are we actually doing when we employ the false things of the world in the course of our life and worship of God?**

A: in v.4 is stated, “You shall not act like this toward the LORD your God”, and again here in v.31, “You shall not behave thus toward the Lord your God”.

**Q: While the opening section largely addressed the need to destroy all false influences, what is the emphasis provided here?**

A: It is embodied in the command, “do not inquire”. (v.30) Whereas in the previous instance the issue was the things and places, here it is the accompanying beliefs and practices. One can “inquire” even after a thing or place is destroyed.

**Q: What stands out in God’s explanation of His hatred for these practices?**

A: Whereas these false practices of worship lead to the destruction of one’s children, God had just promised in v.28 that right worship and obedience bring blessing and life to one’s children.

**Application:** *The false always works contrary to the biblically true.*

**Q: How does v.32 not only summarize this section on right worship, but as a transition to all that will be stipulated by the Lord from this point on in Deuteronomy?**

A: “Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do”. It is always about our personal behavior in conformance to His Word and ways.

**Q: What is the powerful warning accompanying this final admonition?**

A: “...you shall not add to nor take away from it”.

<sup>2</sup>“**You shall not add to the word** which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. — Deuteronomy 4:2

<sup>6</sup>**Do not add to His words** Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar. — Proverbs 30:6

<sup>6</sup>Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may **learn not to exceed what is written**, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. — 1 Corinthians 4:6

<sup>18</sup>I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: **if anyone adds to them**, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; <sup>19</sup>and **if anyone takes away from the words of the book** of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. — Revelation 22:18–19

**Application:** *There is no right worship of God without strict adherence to His Word as it stands, never needing additional alterations.*

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