

### DEUTERONOMY

#### Lesson 15 - Chapter 12 Continued

In order that a platform was established for understanding Deuteronomy chapter 12 and the next several chapters as well, we spent some time examining a handful of the basic God-principles contained within chapter 12. The first principle is the one of the established Covenant pattern; and the principle is that when the Lord offers a covenant to a nation or an individual the acceptance of it is voluntary. One is NOT obligated to enter into that covenant that the Lord offers. Certainly the benefits that come from being part of that covenant will **not** be available to you if you reject His offer, but neither are you now subject to some special type of curse or wrath that the rest of the world is not (at least not in the short term, and not while you are still alive).

This covenant principle also has a flip-side: it is that if you DO accept God's covenant then you have obligated yourself to all the terms and conditions set down in that covenant. We saw when we studied Jeremiah 31 that what we today call the New Covenant is better and more accurate in modern vocabulary to be called the Renewed Covenant. As a side note: the name that is emblematic of the Christian Scripture (New Testament) was taken directly from Jeremiah 31. But we can readily see what happens when a translation is a just few degrees off its mark, or disregards the culture, setting, and plain meaning it originally held, because the wall of separation between Christians and Jews, and the anti-Semitism that is characteristic of the Church in general, can be traced to one sloppily translated word: New.

If the translation had been more accurate we would today have a Bible consisting of the same documents, but going under a different title: the Old and the Renewed Testaments. Think about that; think about what an enormous difference that one (seemingly small) change would make. Imagine how that would completely alter the mindset of gentile Christians towards Jews, Israel, redemption, the nature of our Messiah, and our attitude towards the bible in general. So we ought not to be so shocked that when Torah Class members and other groups of Believers who have recognized this fundamental doctrinal error (that arose from a simple mistranslation) try to explain it to the church at large, it reaches deaf ears and closed minds. Why is that? If the institutional church were to accept and correct this error, and to recognize the self-evident reality that the Church cannot possibly be the replacement Israel if the original Israel (as prophesied) has returned lock, stock and barrel, it would fundamentally change the nature of the church and force many pastors and denominational leaders to admit that much of the basis of their theology and traditions is not accurate and needs to be amended.

Jeremiah makes it clear that the fundamental difference between the original Mosaic Covenant and its future renewal (by Messiah) is the Covenant's Mediator. Further, that the LORD HIMSELF will put the Torah's laws and regulations into one's heart (meaning mind, thoughts) whereas it was a command upon the individual in the original giving of the Covenant that each person should put it into their OWN heart (mind) by means of self-discipline and an intent towards scrupulously following those divine regulations.

So for the modern Believer here's the rub: what is the difference between the Mosaic Covenant found in Torah and what we typically call the New Covenant in Christ? Very little, which is why Jesus said so loud and clear in Matthew 5:17-19 that the Law and the Prophets hadn't passed away and won't until heaven and earth pass away. The essential difference lay only in a) who the Mediator was (Moses vs. Yeshua) and b) HOW one agreed to be part of that covenant. The way to accept the covenant in Moses' day was to become physically part of the nation of Israel. For males that meant submitting to a B'rit Milah, a circumcision ceremony. For females they either had to be born into Israel, or declare their allegiance to Israel, or to marry a Hebrew male.

Today the way to join God's redeeming covenant with Israel is by means of faith in the works and person of Messiah Yeshua. And the nature of that covenant and being a party to it (though grounded in the terms of the Mosaic Covenant) is spiritual. But the spiritual covenant of course continues the terms and conditions that are basically those of the Covenant of Moses. **How** those terms and conditions precisely manifest themselves may be a bit different (because they become culturally neutral and are taken to a higher spiritual level in Messiah) but every last God-ordained principle of Torah remains the same. In fact Paul spends a lot of time speaking of the do's and don'ts of the covenant in his letters in culturally neutral terms.

The point is that the requirement of the New (or better Renewed) Covenant is not only to demonstrate love (as seems to be the sum total of the requirements for the Believer in modern Church doctrine), but also we are required to obey and observe all the underlying principles of the Mosaic Covenant. We have obligations to God as a result of our accepting Jesus. The trick, of course, is how we apply those principles in modern culture and times, how the lack of a physical temple and priesthood in Jerusalem affects matters, and how we take into account that Yeshua has atoned for our sins as the once-and-for-all sacrifice.

Another principle established in Deuteronomy is that God is knowable. We've discussed that principle in depth because most of us have grown up in a Western Judeo-Christian culture where the idea that God is knowable isn't particularly surprising to us; but in Moses' day such a thought was almost laughable and it flew in the face of everything universally understood about the world of the gods. God has revealed Himself to us; He has given us His laws and regulations (which explains His justice system and His character), and made it clear that He cares about us, is available to those who love Him, and that He does not change or evolve. He

is not a distant God nor is He inherently ambiguous; He is present and precise. Therefore, by definition, He is entirely different than the false pagan gods of the Babylon Mystery Religions that the rest of the world (other than Israel) worships.

These God-principles led us to the next one: since Yehoveh is entirely different from all the gods of the myriad of Babylon Mystery Religions then He is not to be worshipped in the same manner they are worshipped. Israel is not merely to convert a pagan altar or shrine by rededicating it to Yehoveh (as was the common practice of that era). Israel is not to mix the pure Torah instructions with familiar but impure pagan traditions in their worship of God Almighty. They are to destroy whatever pagan altars and places of worship that exist **WITHIN THE LAND** (the land of Canaan) that God has given to them.

And finally we ended with a God-principle that while so essential to understanding mankind's current condition and future destiny, is terribly misunderstood within most of Christianity. It is that the terms and conditions of the covenants God has offered to men are heavenly ideals; the terms and conditions are stated as expressions of perfection. Notwithstanding their ideal nature, physically speaking every law and command can and should be followed and obeyed. There is nothing inherently impossible or too difficult for humans about eating certain foods and not others; with making a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem (when it existed); with refraining from telling a lie or committing adultery or killing a man unjustly; or observing a 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath. We are all capable of giving offerings (even if it might give us a bit less to live on), celebrating the Biblical Feasts, etc. The problem has never been that man wasn't created as able to fully obey God; it has been that our sinful natures and our evil inclinations (along with the resultant nature of corroded cultures we live in) today make the full performance of all these ideals a **practical** impossibility. In fact the ideal result that God has in mind can no longer even happen without Messiah Yeshua making it happen, so fallen and spiritually deformed is mankind. That, of course, does not mean that (as the Savior's Disciples) we abandon trying to live up to those written ideals; we are to strive for them at all times. In the New Testament Paul refers to the attempt to do so as "perfecting the Saints" and "running the good race".

Since we only got as far as verse 4 of Deuteronomy 12 last time let's re-read the entire chapter.

### **RE-READ DEUTERONOMY 12 all**

Big changes are afoot: Israel is about to abandon the ways of Bedouin desert wanderer that they have experienced for the past 40 years and assume the life of a settled society based around agriculture and herding in the Land of Canaan. Therefore these changing societal conditions mean that the ways they can carry out God's principles will also have to change.

Duane L. Christensen, the author of the World Biblical Commentary on Deuteronomy, says this about the Israelites changing circumstances and how it relates to ours: ***“A true (theologically) conservative position, one that preserves the values of our heritage, is a position that stands between the extremes and preserves the tension between them. It is not enough to maintain that religion itself has changed constantly since the time of the wilderness experience of ancient Israel. Older practices may be outdated; but the values that produced those practices in times past remain valid in the present. The pressing task is to find new forms that preserve those timeless values.”***

Moses is about to order new forms that preserve those same timeless values that God gave to Israel on Mt. Sinai. And the first order of business has to do with just where God's sanctuary will be located, and whether or not it is to remain as the SOLE place where sacrificing is to occur. And it is this place where Yehoveh's "name" will dwell. Now this is an important concept to understand because where ever His name dwells, there He is accessible. It's also important because this drives home the point that God Himself (meaning the sum of all that He is) will NOT be dwelling in the Tabernacle; He never has and He never will. The sum of all of who God is dwells in heaven, not on earth, and He certainly does not restrict Himself to some building made by men.

This idea of His "name" dwelling there, then, deserves some discussion. For us modern Western Culture folks the meaning of a person's name is simply a means to identify that person from millions of other people. It's not much different than a street address or a social security number. But in Eastern culture, and particularly in Bible times, a name had a much broader and more significant sense to it. In Hebrew the word we translate as "name" is ***shem*** and it means reputation, and it denotes a set of attributes and characteristics of a person. So when the Lord's name is established in a place it means that His essence and nature is attached in that some or all of His unique attributes are present or represented there.

While the idea of His establishing His name somewhere is a mysterious thing no matter how we try to explain it or define it, one way to think of it is in the same vein as His Holy Spirit living in us. Is the Holy Spirit, the ***Ruach HaKodesh***, actually the totality of all the Lord is? Apparently it is not or we who have the ***Ruach*** within us would certainly not be instructed in the Bible to pray to Our Father who lives in a place called Heaven; rather there is some essence or attribute of Him that dwells within the fleshly tents that are His Believers. I think it is fair to say that in Moses' era just as the Lord will establish His name at a location of His choosing (somewhere in the Land of Canaan) for all Israel to sacrifice, He has also established His name within the Believer. And that the Holy Spirit dwelling in the human disciple of Jesus is roughly equivalent in days of old to Yehoveh dwelling with His Israelite worshippers by appearing above the Mercy Seat in the Wilderness Tabernacle (or later on, the Temple).

And verse 6 says that it is at the one location where Yehoveh has established His name that all

of the tribes of Israel are to go and worship and sacrifice. For us the words worship and sacrifice seem of themselves exacting enough to define their meaning because somewhere along the way we have determined that we have almost unlimited choice in determining what worship and sacrifice amounts to. The problem is that while we do have some freedom in that regard, we also have boundaries; and the one general boundary that this chapter puts forth first and foremost is that we must NOT employ ways and forms that pagans commonly used to worship their false gods.

Several years ago I gave a rather extensive teaching on the word “praise”. And what we find is that there are more than a dozen different words in Hebrew used to describe various acts and aspects of honoring the Lord, ALL of which are typically reduced and translated into just one single English term: praise. And so we run around saying to one another, “well, just what is a good and acceptable way to praise God?” Can we raise our hands or must we stand with our arms motionless at our sides? Can we shout with joy, or dance, or must we be somber and quiet? Ironically each one of the dozen or so Hebrew words that bible scholars rather flippantly lump together and translate to “praise” is in the original a description of a precise form of acceptable praise. So the Bible actually gives us many different forms of praising God, each of which is fairly specific in nature and appropriate under various circumstances. I won’t get into all of those today; I’m simply illustrating a point. And the point is that in verse 6 of Deuteronomy 12 we get a list of things that are almost always bundled together using the general terms “sacrifices” and “offerings”. Yet each one of these things has a precise and different meaning, so the Scriptures gives us a fairly detailed range of just what is to be transported to the central sanctuary and presented to Yehoveh and under what circumstance.

Let’s look at that list. Understand that there is great disagreement as to the meaning of each of these words as they have no direct word for word translation into any other language. So every attempted translation is essentially an educated guess at what the PURPOSE of that particular sacrifice was. First is the burnt offering; in Hebrew **‘olah**. **‘Olah** is usually thought to mean “near offering” or “that which goes up” and refers (at least partially) to the smoke emitted from the burning sacrifice. It is referring to the animals that are killed and placed on the altar to be burned up. With this type of sacrificial offering NONE of the animal is to be left for either the worshipper or the attending priest to consume for himself or herself.

Second is what is often rather sloppily translated as “other sacrifices”. The actual Hebrew word used here is **Zevah**, which is a specialized kind of sacrifice that belongs to the **Shelamim** category. Sometimes this is called a peace offering. Whatever the exact nature and purpose of the **Zevah**, with this kind of sacrifice only some of it is burned up on the altar and the remainder is shared between the worshipper and the priests.

The third kind mentioned in this passage is the **tithe**; literally, “the tenth”. The primary function of the tithe was as support for the Tabernacle, and later the Temple; included in that support was support of the Levite workers who performed the various needed functions of the

Tabernacle. Most of that support was in the form of farm produce and animals (again, not as sacrifices per se but simply as means of direct support for the Tabernacle workers). Over time as the Hebrew culture evolved and a smaller part of the society was agricultural based with a growing demographic of traders, merchants, craftsmen and so on then money was given in lieu of animals and produce.

Fourth is **terumah** which means contributions. The Hebrew indicates giving something that is taken from a larger amount. It refers more to the firstfruits offerings and usually is presented as that kind of offering with the strange name of “heave offering”. It’s an offering that is presented by lifting it above your shoulders and waving it around. And if you’re thinking ‘my gosh there’s lots of different kinds of giving expected’, you’re right; the tithe was ONLY one form of giving, the contribution (equivalent to the firstfruits offering) was yet another and a person was to give both.

Next were the votive and freewill offerings, in Hebrew **neder**. These were sacrifices and gifts that were the results of vows that if God would do something for the person making the vow (or even prevent something bad from happening) then this person would give some agreed to amount or thing to God in return. Understand that this **neder** was NOT the promised gift to God; rather it was what accompanied the vow ritual itself. On the other hand there was a kind of **neder** in which a worshipper simply give something as an expression of gratitude or thanksgiving where nothing was vowed or promised; it was just spontaneous giving.

And finally we have the designation of firstlings, or **bekorah** in Hebrew. Another way of saying this is the firstborn. The idea is to give of the firstborn of your flocks and herds to the Lord. So while firstfruits (**terumah**) involves produce, firstlings (**bekorah**) involves living creatures.

As you can see there is quite a range of offerings and sacrifices for several different purposes; to lump them altogether not only misses the point but fails to teach us much about what is expected of us as regards giving and sacrifices. We saw the same thing back in Leviticus when attached to a range of different atoning sacrifices where the specific KINDS of sins were each designed to atone for something specific. It starts to make apparent the very complex and multifaceted nature of sin and atonement that is otherwise obscured in the typical Christian doctrine that a sin is a sin is a sin (no matter what the sin is).

Verse 7 makes it clear that the entire household is to be involved with the giving of these various sacrifices and offerings WHEN it includes feasting. One has to reach between the lines a bit to get the overall understanding that is being spoken here; this is referring to the 3 annual pilgrimage festivals whereby each family is to come to the Tabernacle (later the Temple) to celebrate and sacrifice. And Deuteronomy makes it quite clear that indeed the whole family is to come, not just the male head of house. These are feasts of joy; they are God’s appointed times, and so the family is to join in.



Let me remind you that between Exodus and Leviticus, 7 Biblical Feasts were established; of them 3 are called **chag**, or pilgrimage, festivals meaning that the family makes a required pilgrimage to the central sanctuary (most of the time that indicated Jerusalem). By definition the other 4 feasts are NOT pilgrimage festivals and therefore the family is to celebrate those locally, wherever they live, although if they chose to go to the Tabernacle or Temple they certainly could.

Let me also make note that in very short order one certain NON-pilgrimage Biblical feast became combined with one of the required Pilgrimage feasts so the effect was that 4 Bible feasts were celebrated at the Temple and 3 were not. Passover, Pesach, is NOT a pilgrimage feast, but the feast that starts the day after Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, is. Because those two feasts were held on consecutive days, and because just like church folks today who prefer to have celebrations held at a church building on certain meaningful days like Christmas and New Year, it was logical that the Israelite families would prefer to have Passover at the awesome Temple complex in Jerusalem. Therefore they would just go ahead and celebrate Passover in Jerusalem by arriving one day early before the start of the required pilgrimage festival, the Feast of Matzah; they kind of killed two birds with one stone.

Beginning in verse 8 the rules about restricting sacrifice to only ONE place are fleshed out a little further. In doing so we are introduced to yet another fundamental God-principle: it is that Yehoveh, not men, authorizes the way the Lord is to be worshipped. And that the proper worship of God consists of His ordained ceremonies that are to proceed in His ordained ways at His appointed times. This is another of those principles that most Christians will respond to with a disinterested yawn and say, "well, of course I worship how God wants me to. But c'mon, this is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; I have complete freedom to worship when I want, where I want, how I want.....there are no rules." Folks, that is just not true. While we certainly are not obligated to worship at a Wilderness Tabernacle, nor must we recite precise words, nor have one particular order of service, nor are we restricted to praying only at certain times and places, the Lord has given us dates and times and ways He says we are to worship Him. To do otherwise is not worship of Him at all no matter how much we insist that it is. Rather it's merely religion just as the Canaanites were practicing; religion that the Lord (here in Deuteronomy) is ordering destroyed.

One of the most eminent conservative fundamental Bible Scholars of our day is Walter Kaiser, Jr., who is the academic dean at the famed Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. His works have probably affected modern church doctrines and theologies of the Evangelical movement as much as anyone currently alive. Listen to the rather surprising things he has to say about the OT and its rules and regulations as it pertains to our modern Christian worship practices and worship doctrines:

".....in order to make up for the hiatus of instruction on all sorts of practical questions about how

to deal with everyday problems such as 'youth conflicts' and the like, Evangelicals flock by the thousands in every major metropolitan area to special seminars as an open testimony to their hunger for true biblical instruction on matters that were (actually) dealt with in the OT law. To be sure, most of these seminars on youth problems, marriage enrichment, and business management techniques drew heavily on the Biblical Wisdom Books of the OT (especially Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon). But what few have realized, and what still remains as one of the best kept secrets to this very day, is that these same Wisdom Books have as their fountainhead the Law of Moses. One need only take a marginally competent reference Bible and notice how frequently the text of Proverbs, for example, directly quotes or alludes to the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy in its popularized "bumper sticker" way of theologizing. Just these few examples should be enough to warn the contemporary pastor and teacher. We must overcome our inherited prejudice against the OT, especially as concerns the Law. We must immediately move to balance the spiritual diet of God's people. Few people today would espouse a junk-food nutritional plan as a regular plan of good eating; but how many Christians prefer to eat only the 'desert' as found in the NT? In order to address this imbalance.....we (must) begin to use the OT in a more balanced and holistic teaching ministry."

I realize that Torah Class members and listeners have been drinking as if from a fire hose now for several years as we have worked our way carefully through the Torah of God. But what we must not do is think that just because these books contain a lot of detail and history that what we have here is but a collection of interesting historical facts as pertains to an ancient people because it has everything to do with us, Jew or gentile. And in no way are Believers free from obedience to the God-principles presented to us, nor from observance of God's appointed times, as stated in the Law of Moses. Certainly these are not what bring us our Redemption, nor were they ever at any time in history. But these are (and remain) the principles for worship and right living (as redeemed people) that we are fully expected to follow. Since the body of Christ has determined for some time now to abandon the laws and rules of God in favor of unfettered individual liberty, instead following our own hearts, we lament and complain that the Church seems to have lost its way if not its spiritual power. Is it any wonder? As both the OT and NT explain, obedience to God and the experience of His power are inexorably tied together as Quid Pro Quo. Therefore, as does Walter Kaiser, I ask you to re-examine your worship practices and the ways you celebrate and follow the Lord to see if perhaps they are not in harmony with God's ordinances. Because if they are not, the next question to ask is: who is it then, in reality, that I am following and trying to please?

The Lord addresses that exact question in verse 8. He says that you are NOT to act as you act now (every man as he pleases). Let me rephrase that: you have been pleasing yourselves or following the political correctness of the world or adhering to the philosophical doctrines of religion, but you are doing it in My name and I don't like it and I don't accept it. When has this "doing as every man sees as right in his own eyes" been occurring? All during the Wilderness journey. But as verse 9 says, now that you are entering the Land of Promise, stop doing this. Instead (verse 10) when they cross the Jordan and enter the place of rest and security that God has offered, obey these commands that were given to you on Mt. Sinai, and in doing so



you will rejoice in your inheritance with your family, along with your slaves, and even with the Levites before the presence of the Lord.

Let me summarize this short section of Deuteronomy about what is being ordered here concerning worship and sacrifice: there is God's acceptable way on one end of the spectrum and then there is man's unacceptable way at the other end. There is NO middle ground. There is NO happy medium. The Hebrew people cannot serve themselves and serve the God of Israel; they cannot serve BOTH Yehoveh and the gods of the Canaanites (not even if it's primarily serving God and just secondarily serving Ba'al). This exact sentiment is put another way 1300 years into the future by Yeshua: <sup>NAS</sup> **Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.**

Verse 15 introduces a necessary, practical, and rather radical shift for the Israelites as they set up life in the Promised Land; it is that they are permitted to eat meat WITHOUT it first being given as part of a sacrifice. Let me remind you that up to this point (since the Law was given at Mt. Sinai) the ordinance was that all meat from domestic animals that the Hebrews hoped to eat would FIRST have to be part of a sacrificial ritual accomplished by the Priesthood at the Wilderness Tabernacle. I emphasize DOMESTIC animals because it was permitted for Israel to eat meat from undomesticated animals (such as deer) provided it was Kosher; that is, this undomesticated species chewed the cud and had a cloven hoof, among a couple of other requirements (there were several animals specifically prohibited as food as well).

For all practical purposes the animals that formed the typical flocks and herds that came along with Israel on their exodus from Egypt were classified as domestic animals, and therefore clean animals meaning that they were considered ritually pure and therefore acceptable for altar sacrifices to Yehoveh. But even kosher **wild** animals were not permitted to be sacrificed to the Lord. So the rule was (as concerns domestic animals) whatever was suitable for sacrifice was acceptable for food for the people. And, the people could only eat meat of their domestic animals that had first been offered as a sacrifice.

Because of where they lived (mainly the western end of the Arabian Peninsula and the Sinai desert regions) there was precious little wild game. Venison, though acceptable, would have been a rare treat and most families likely never had the privilege of even tasting it. Birds would have been more available because even though the Quail episode we read about was a miraculous event, it was usual for enormous flocks of Quail to fly over the Sinai and settle on the ground occasionally for a brief rest. None of these were required to be a sacred offering before they could be eaten.

The new rule is that a line is being drawn between the eating of meat to satisfy hunger and the offering of meat for sacred purposes. Because God operates as He does, and most everything

He ordains is not for His benefit but for mankind's (even if at times we don't yet see or understand that benefit), one of the practical benefits of the Lord ordaining only the eating of animals from their herds and flocks during their Wilderness journey and only upon their being offered as a sacrifice is that it prevented their herds and flocks from being decimated. It was a lot of trouble to take an animal to the Tabernacle to be ritually slaughtered and generally the worshipper only received a portion of it back as food. Can you imagine the long lines of people wanting to make sacrifices at the Tabernacle, but the relatively limited facilities able to accommodate them? Therefore meat, though just as desirable to them as it is to us, was not eaten very often. And since meat spoiled in a matter of hours whatever was slaughtered had to be cooked and eaten completely and immediately. There was no doling it out over a period of several days. Yes, they had learned to dry meat to preserve it and it occurred. But they had to be at place where that process could be set up and even then the animals available were relatively few.

What we understand by the beginning verse of this section of Deuteronomy 12 is that obviously the people did NOT obey this rule. They did what we tend to do: we obey some of what God says and ignore the rest to our convenience. The people positively CRAVED meat; and when we crave anything our natures take over and we'll do things we ought not to do to have what we crave. But now that Israel is about to enter into a settled life with lots of grazing land and an ability to grow their herds and flocks to a much greater number, the risk of decimating their flocks (that were necessarily limited in size due to limited grazing and water during their Wilderness journey) was ending. Obviously God had already approved eating meat (even if it was a real inconvenience to do so due to the sacrificial requirement), so the Lord is now telling Israel to help themselves to as much as they wanted.

But, there are some boundaries even to this new freedom, and we'll take those up next time.