

DEUTERONOMY

Lesson 16 - Chapter 12 Conclusion

Last week we concluded with the section of Deuteronomy 12 in which the Lord has just made a very popular decision: the Israelites can now eat all the meat they want and it does not have to be a limited portion left over from the sacrifices they offer at the Tabernacle. This would take effect upon their entering the Land of Canaan.

This is a long lesson today, and we're not going to take the time to again re-read Deuteronomy chapter 12 so keep your bibles open and follow along.

Beginning in verse 15 we get an easing of the restrictions on the slaughtering and eating of animals. Out in the Wilderness the domestic animals (sheep, goats, cattle, etc.) had to be slaughtered only at the Tabernacle as part of an official sacrificial rite. However at the same time the Israelites were permitted to eat and slaughter wild game and no part of it had to be involved in a sacrificial procedure. Of course the game they chose had to adhere to the rules of ritual cleanliness for purposes of consumption. The only real restriction in eating meat, now, is based on one's ability to raise an animal or afford to buy it from a herder.

How much this actually added to the availability of meat for the average Israelite is hard to assess. In practice meat was usually only eaten by the common Hebrew citizen on special occasions such as the required sacrifices, the 7 authorized Biblical Feasts, to honor a special guest in one's home, a wedding, and things of that nature. Animals were more generally used for their sustainable products and their labor: milk from cows and goats that could be used for butter, cheese, and fresh milk; Oxen for pulling plows and wagons; sheep for wool used to make clothing, bedding, floor rugs, even tents. If one was fortunate enough to own an Ox or a cow or a couple of sheep the last thing you would do is kill one to have a day or two of meat to eat. So generally only the well-to-do or more fortunate who possessed larger herds and flocks could afford to have meat on a fairly regular basis.

But one major restriction on the slaughter and consumption of meat remained unchanged: the blood in the animal could not be consumed it had to be disposed of. The prescribed way to dispose of it was to pour it on the ground. Let's talk about this new regulation as a whole.

First we must understand that although every one of the Biblical Feasts involved feasting and eating meat as a corporate group activity; as of now only the 3 so-called Pilgrimage Festivals required that the meat eaten during the festival had to come from sacrificial slaughter at central sanctuary (currently the Tabernacle and later the Temple). Therefore on the other 4 feast occasions the celebrations were to be local (whatever town or village one belonged to) and the slaughter of the meat would therefore be what the Rabbis called **shehitat hullin**, secular slaughter (slaughter that was not part of a sacrificial ritual).

However even in the secular slaughter process the animal was to be killed as humanely as possible, with its throat cut at the main artery so as unconsciousness and death occurred quickly.

Second, the required ritual state of purity of the person that wishes to consume the meat no longer matters. In other words it was only a person who was ritually clean that could offer a sacrifice and it follows that only a person who was ritually clean was permitted to eat the meat of an animal that had been offered for sacrifice. It was a rather severe Catch 22 situation; in the end it meant that ONLY a person who was ritually clean could EVER eat meat (except if that meat was the kinds of permitted wild game like quail and deer).

With the new regulation that took effect once Israel entered Canaan, since there was no longer a requirement that the commonly eaten meats (beef and mutton) be part of a sacrifice, the ritual state of purity for the consumer of meat no longer played a role. A person could be ritually impure having Tzara'at (a skin disease), or a woman could be impure from her monthly cycle or having just given birth, or someone could have recently come in contact with a dead body (a circumstance which renders that person ritually unclean), and unlike before now they could still eat meat. The only meat an unclean person was prohibited from eating was that which had indeed been offered as a sacrifice on the Brazen Altar.

Third was the critical matter of the blood. The law of not eating blood went back to the time of Adam and Eve. It is even one of the so-called 7 Noachide Laws that Rabbis (and some Christian denominations) say God enjoined upon all human beings. So when secular slaughter occurs (that is, the non-sacrificial butchering of animals for food) the blood is to be poured out onto the ground and not used for any purpose. This is as opposed to sacred slaughter for animal sacrifices to the Lord whereby some of the blood is to be splashed onto the altar and the remainder disposed of.

This is interesting I think. The reason that the blood from secular slaughter is to be poured out on the ground and never consumed or used for any purpose is the Biblical axiom that the life of any living creature is in the blood. It is this axiom that, when carried out to its logical conclusion, is part and parcel of the reason that only blood can be the acceptable price to

atone for mankind's sins. Since life is in the blood a common every day Israelite has no business or divine authorization to use blood in any manner for anything. Since a priesthood had been established for religious ritual on behalf of the entire congregation of Israel, only members of a single tribe (the Levites) could use the blood for any purpose whatsoever; so his only choice is to return that "life" that is in the blood to the soil (in essence returning it to God) when he butchers an animal for food.

At the Tabernacle however, blood takes on a different characteristic because there it is used in the process of atonement for the sins of God's people. So the blood of the sacrificed animal (some of it, not all) is splashed onto the Brazen Altar. The reason for splashing the blood on the Altar is basic to the understanding we must all eventually come to realize about how holiness operates and it is this: holiness can be transmitted. Holiness is infectious.

We examined the mysterious and profound nature of holiness in our study of Leviticus but since it's been a while it is certainly not a waste of time to review it. And the first principle of holiness that forms the nucleus of all the attributes of holiness is that only God is inherently holy. And part of the reason this is so is because everything else but God is a created thing. Absolutely nothing else in existence (seen or unseen) is holy in and of itself. The Lord **declares and bestows** holiness upon His created things (seen and unseen) as He sees fit, and even then it is in accordance with His immutable laws and principles. The Brazen Altar of sacrifice was declared holy by the Lord, as were all other instruments and furnishings that were part of the Tabernacle because they were to be used very near to Him.

Holiness is so powerful and important that it must be carefully guarded because contact between the holy and the common can cause the holiness effect to be inadvertently transmitted from a holy thing to a common thing. Now a common thing or person does not mean an unclean or impure thing or person; it simply indicates that something has not been divinely endowed with holiness; it is not set apart (sanctified) for God although if God chose to do so the person or thing could be declared holy. Therefore what we find is that in the process of Yehoveh establishing holiness in this world He has declared that PEOPLE are to be divided into two general but distinct groups: those who are holy and those who are common. The people He has selected as set apart for Himself, Israel, He has declared to be holy; and thus all other people on planet earth are therefore common (not ritually unclean, just NOT holy). So there are generally 4 SPIRITUAL states that a human being or any created thing can assume: holy, common, clean and unclean.

Orthodox Judaism has, I think, made a sad mistake here by tending to reduce human beings to only 3 possible Spiritual states: holy, clean, and unclean (leaving out the ritually neutral "common" category). Judaism implies that all humans who are not Hebrews (meaning gentiles) are inherently unclean rather than common. Thus since Hebrews (correctly) understand that impurity can be transmitted, the assumption is that a gentile automatically brings impurity upon any Hebrew who contacts him or perhaps even is merely present in a

gentile's home. Now let me be clear that this belief varies greatly in degree among today's Jewish people. I have seen some of the strictest Orthodox move to the other side of the street to avoid gentiles, and yet some of the most religious have shaken my hand and even eaten in my home.

Something that *is* ritually unclean, however, indeed can transmit its uncleanness to something that is holy. That means that the holy thing (or person) becomes defiled and must be cleansed, purified, in order to have the contamination of defilement removed. This is why God demands that holy things are to be carefully guarded: because holiness must never be allowed to become defiled by coming into contact with the unclean and the common must never be allowed to inherit holiness by merely coming into the contact with the holy. The one outstanding exception to that rule is that if God ordains a common person or thing to contract holiness then it is divinely authorized and it should happen.

Are you following me? Let me interject that what I'm telling you is not my speculation or a contrived doctrine or an opinion; this is directly from the Torah, the Word of God. In fact where today we have most of Christianity that would object to my teaching on this subject is because they either know nothing about it or their church leadership finds this distasteful and so has annulled it. Please understand that this reality of holiness and commonness and impurity is as real (more real actually) than the walls that surround us and the roof over our heads. The Torah principles of holiness and impurity are not a theory or a fantasy. This is precisely how holiness operates but the instruction manual about the details of holiness is not to be found in the NT, so the church hardly knows anything about holiness or impurity at all.

Here is an important principle to remember: animals that are sacrificed on the Brazen Altar have no inherent **holiness**. Animals that are not permitted for sacrifice or food (rabbits, pigs) have no inherent **uncleanness**. One animal is declared ritually clean and the other not simply by God's choice, for reasons that are mysterious and we do not fully understand them. Some scholars have postulated that the meat from select animals is healthier than the meat from other animals, or that a particular animal's function in nature is more edifying than another, and so this is what God had in mind when He categorized clean and unclean. Over time every effort to categorize animals in these human rational/logical ways has come to nothing because we'll find major exceptions or examples that just don't fit. Therefore the purity status and atoning quality of animal blood has nothing to do with any inherent physical characteristic, nor does some magical thing that happen within that chosen sacrificial animal. Rather the atoning quality of the blood occurs when holiness is transferred to that animal's blood by means of it coming into contact with the already holy Brazen Altar. This is important so listen to me carefully: the only way the sacrificial animal's blood takes on an atoning quality is by coming into contact with the Brazen Altar because the holiness of the Altar infects the blood with its holiness. This is why priests capture at least some of the blood of every sacrificed animal in a pail because it **MUST** be splashed onto the sides of the Altar; the Altar, being itself holy, transmits its holiness to the animal blood making that blood efficacious for atonement. This is a major reason that without a Brazen Altar the Hebrew people, when exiled from the land, had

no means to atone. It did no good to slaughter an animal as a sacrifice and use some altar that they built wherever they now lived because that altar was not holy and so could not infect the animal blood with holiness. This is a major reason that when the Jews were in Babylon that they turned to other means borne by their own thoughts to try to atone.

Conversely, animal blood that is but poured out onto the ground has no atoning quality (it was not imbued with holiness) because it has not come into contact with any holy thing (namely the Brazen Altar). Since there is NO holy or atoning purpose at all for simply slaughtering an animal in order to have meat to eat (as is now permissible), ALL the blood is therefore poured out onto the ground as it is useless for the one single spiritual purpose God has deemed it for: atonement of sins.

OK. Now that you are biblical holiness experts let me show you something that is even more interesting. We just established that the “life is in the blood” (an undisputed Christian doctrine) and therefore since all life belongs to God He will decide what is to be done with it. And one thing that the Lord says must never under any circumstances happen (not for an Israelite, not for a pagan, not for any human including a Believer in Messiah Yeshua) is to ingest blood for food.

Blood is special on a spiritual level. Blood is divinely set apart. Not only are we well aware that on a physical level any living creature that is drained of too much blood dies (the life that is in the blood flows out from the creature), but God has chosen to assign blood a unique spiritual quality that can be used only as He deems it to be used: for the purpose of atonement. Israelites were not even permitted to eat or drink something that symbolically represented blood. Now pay attention to this please: I’ve often heard Christians say that wine used in Jewish ritual ceremony represents blood and this absolutely not true. This is a myth that erupted due to the common biblical phrase that eventually was absorbed into the gentile world that referred to grape juice or grape wine as “the blood of the grape”. Biblically speaking wine symbolizes goodness and joy. An abundance of wine is symbolic of prosperity. Offering wine to a guest in one’s home was represented a spirit of welcome, shalom and good will. But wine did NOT represent blood. No observant Hebrew would ever contemplate drinking wine if it was symbolic of something you were NEVER to suppose to ingest: blood.

Some of you might just be seeing where I’m going with this. 1300 years after Moses and the Law of Mt. Sinai, someone came along who instructed His flock of disciplines to drink wine as symbolic of His blood and to do this as THE greatest memorial remembrance of HIM! His name is Yeshua, it happened at Passover, and the Church has made this ceremony into a separate sacrament called Communion.

Let’s recall the actual instruction in the NT to drink wine as symbolic of Messiah’s blood as I read to you: ^{NAS} **1 Corinthians 11:25 *In the same way He (Jesus) took the cup also, after***

supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Jesus instructed His disciples to symbolically drink blood.....His blood. Why? Because as has already been established physical life is in the physical blood; but eternal life (un-ending spiritual life) is in Messiah's blood. By drinking wine that represents His blood, we acknowledge that the atoning quality of His blood is the ONLY provision that Our Father has ever made that gives a man the same kind of eternal life that He has. Understand that this wine drunk in Messiah's name is entirely symbolic; your Communion cup of grape wine does NOT magically turn into blood (although the Catholic Church says that it does). This command of Christ to make wine symbolic of His blood and so to drink it is unique in the entire Bible. For the first time in the history of mankind, ingesting something that even symbolized blood was being allowed and encourage by God. And you and I can only imagine the startled and probably worried and skeptical (if not downright disgusted) 12 disciples sitting around that Pesach table as Jesus told them to do that. Everything these Jewish men had ever been taught; every cultural and religious principle they had known told them NOT to do this. Can you also imagine how the local Jews who heard what these disciples of that carpenter's son had done at the Passover table must have thought when they learned about them drinking wine as symbolic of a man's blood? This was apostasy at an almost unimaginable level to them.

Does this help you see why a religious Jew is utterly repulsed at the Christian tradition of Communion? For them it is a combination of cannibalism, idolatry, and a violation of the universal law against blood. So be aware of this when speaking to a Jewish person and their sensitivities in this matter of Communion.

Sometime later (several years actually) after this mind-boggling (if not disgusting) instruction from Yeshua, Paul had thought long and hard about what the meaning of all this is. His conclusion was NOT that Jesus had now given man permission to drink blood; nor could man now symbolize wine AS blood and drink it at various religious ceremonies. Rather, the ONLY permissible time and purpose at which a man could drink something symbolic of blood was when it was a Believer of Messiah drinking a tiny cup of wine in solemn and sincere remembrance of His atoning act. If a man did this for any other reason, honoring any other man or for any other purpose than remembering Messiah Jesus and thus declaring our union with, and eternal life in, Him then we're right back to square one whereby a person was breaking God's command never to drink blood.

Paul expressed it this way: ^{NAS} **1 Corinthians 11:27 *Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.***

A person drinking it in an unworthy manner is a non-Believer. It would appear from later

passages that if a disciple of Yeshua has rebelled to such a degree as to be dangerously distant from God, then this person also falls into the category of unworthy. If we are not in union with Christ we are not worthy and have no authority to partake of this enormous lone exception to the rule of not drinking blood, not even symbolically. We will be sinning on the highest possible level and be declared guilty by God for doing such a thing.

But notice that this same God-principle operates in Moses' day as it does now: there is nothing inherently holy about wine. It is that the Lord DECLARES it as symbolic of holiness and eternal life giving WHEN we drink it in honor of our Savior's sacrifice. There is nothing magical about wine when drunk in honor of Yeshua; it is only meaningful for those who already redeemed because God simply declares it so.

Now let me peel this onion back one more layer. God prohibited Adam and Eve from the eating of the fruit of the Tree of life that grew in the Garden of Eden. Why? Because if they did eat from that tree they would obtain eternal life. What would have been wrong with them obtaining eternal life since it is apparent that God WANTS people to have eternal life with Him? In fact He has gone to the greatest lengths to make eternal life with Him possible. The problem is that Adam and Eve were not redeemed. God first set up the principle of redemption not with Moses and the Priesthood, but with Adam and Eve. Eternal life is something the Lord WANTS for mankind but it will ALWAYS be restricted to those who are redeemed according to the Lord's definition and method of redemption.

So just as Paul explained that the unworthy could not drink of the Communion cup, the idea ties back to the Tree of Life because Jesus is the spiritual Tree of Life. Messiah IS the Tree of Life. Yeshua our Messiah IS the means, the ONLY means, to eternal life for humans. Therefore no man is permitted to eat of this new Tree of Life, Yeshua, or "to drink of His blood" as symbolized in the drinking of Paschal wine UNLESS that man is FIRST redeemed. Eating the fruit of the Tree of Life symbolized exactly the same thing as drinking the wine that is symbolic of the Covenant in Christ's blood.

Folks when we accept Christ **we have** eaten the fruit from the Tree of Life that the father and mother of all humanity could not. Oh, the inscrutable depths of the Lord's mind and provision are overwhelming, are they not?

Verse 20 – 25 of chapter 12 gives some details about this secular slaughter of animals for food, most of which we've covered. Verse 21, though, seems to add a caveat to the slaughtering and eating of animals for food; that this applies to those who live "too far" away from the central sanctuary. This instruction has been interpreted a number of ways by Hebrew scholars but is usually taken to mean that anywhere outside the Temple or Tabernacle Courtyard was "too far". Basically they say the meaning is that if one was outside the sacred precinct then this new law concerning eating meat was applicable. The Essenes of Qumran

who wrote the so-called Temple Scroll (found among the Dead Sea Scrolls) defined “too far” as 3 days journey. That was a logical and practical choice because it was slightly more than 3 days journey from Qumran to Jerusalem. So by such a ruling they were excluding themselves from requirement to journey to the Temple and submit their animals to a priesthood that they considered corrupt and illegitimate. Other Rabbis said that this really had to do more with the journeys to the Tabernacle as required by the 3 Pilgrimage Feasts, so that some Jews who were “too far” away (in the Diaspora) were not obligated to have their Passover Lambs slaughtered in the presence of Priests.

Verse 25 states what is really ALWAYS the object of God’s laws and rituals: “that it may go well with you”. That is, despite what Christians have been generally taught for centuries, the key to the victorious Christian life (that things will go well for the Believer) is total obedience to the rules and ordinances the Lord has established. Prayer is part of it, but it is not the key; going to church or synagogue is part of it but it is not the key; giving regularly in hopes of having God rewarding you with more wealth is not the key. Obedience to God’s commands is the key to shalom, divinely brought-about well being.

OK. Since the instructions we’ve just been given are the general rules on how to go about **secular** slaughter of animals for food, now we’re going to be told about the general rules for **sacred** slaughter of animals for sacrificial purposes. And it is emphasized that those vow offerings and freewill offerings MUST be taken to the central sanctuary (the Tabernacle) and must NOT be offered at any other place. God is telling us that where the matter of eating meat has been relaxed out of sheer practicality, that when it comes to matters of holiness no relaxation of standards is possible. Here’s where it becomes important to understand all the important differences among the various kinds of sacrifices. Vow and free-will offerings while connected to sacred ritual were the result of the worshipper’s own decisions and choices. Vow and free-will offerings were at the discretion of individuals. Israelites were not obligated to make vows or to give extra over and above the required tithes, and firstfruits, and Feast sacrifices. Vow and free-will offerings were purely voluntary and the Law gave the bulk of the meat from these kinds of sacred sacrifices to the worshipper and to the priesthood to use as food. Therefore, lest anyone think that since these were voluntary offerings to the Lord that they did NOT have to take them to the Tabernacle to sacrifice them there, it is being made clear that such a thing is not to happen.

Further, part of the reason that these voluntary offerings must not occur OUTSIDE of the Tabernacle goes back to our understanding of blood and holiness. Without the blood of the sacred offering being splashed upon the Brazen Altar, the blood cannot be infected with holiness; and blood that is not made holy is good only for pouring onto the ground. So the Lord does not want anyone to think that they can perform a sacred ritual (like a vow or free-will sacrifice) on their own terms or do it the way they prefer at the place they prefer (usually out of convenience) and think that it has any spiritual value whatsoever.

Beginning in verse 29 we kind of come full circle; the Lord began this chapter with the admonition NOT to worship Him in the same places or ways that the Canaanites worship their phony gods. And here the point of worshipping ONLY at God's sanctuary, which is to be placed ONLY where God instructs, is that to do otherwise IS worshipping Him as the pagans worship their gods.

An interesting instruction is added to this in verse 30: it is that Hebrews are "not to inquire" about how those other nations worship their gods. That is, they are not to follow their curiosity and learn about the Ba'al cults or attend one of the Canaanites worship ceremonies even if our purpose is NOT to seriously consider accepting their beliefs. Hmmmm. That flies in the face of our modern mentality that thinks we SHOULD go find out all about other religions so that we can speak intelligently about them. That it is our obligation to know about them so that we don't accidentally demonize them or appear at all intolerant of a religion that seems to have "good values".

While I respect different views on the subject let me say just a couple of things about it: 1st) this is not the same thing as exploring different Christian denominations or even exploring Judaism because both are based on the worship of Yehoveh and both are based on the foundation of the Holy Scriptures. 2nd) The concern is not about trying to keep God's people ignorant, rather it is that many false religions can be very enticing because they appeal to our natural evil inclinations. As it says in verse 30 of many translations, "beware of being lured into their ways....." And we certainly should not do what these other belief systems do, nor should we add any element of their worship into the authorized methods that the Lord has shown us in His Word.

The sense of "being lured into their ways" is well captured in the CJB as it says, "being trapped into following them". The idea is of being caught in a snare and then not being able to extricate yourself. One example that is as prevalent now as it was then is marrying into a different faith; today, more and more, we're seeing Western women marrying Muslim men and finding that they are indeed trapped. Often the wife will be asked to go and meet the family in some Arab country and the laws of that country makes the woman a virtual slave whereby she is not permitted to come back home to a non-Muslim nation if the husband decides to stay. Or if the couple has children the woman is given permission to leave but the children must stay with their father. Certainly the woman likely never envisioned such a thing when she dated this nice man, nor even when she married him, paying little attention to his Islamic beliefs. But by ignoring God's laws about this she was deceived, ensnared and trapped. The price for being released probably will be her children or her life.

Such was the same case for Israelites. It was not simply a matter of violating this law and things "not going well for you" (that is, losing out on God's blessings by mixing worship of Yehoveh with worship of some other Canaanite gods or goddesses). It was that, often as not, your Hebrew identity would be lost as well. You would be ensnared and perhaps unwittingly

find yourself assimilated into a pagan culture. This is anything but farfetched; Israel barely set foot into Canaan before they started to do this by exploring the neighboring religions, their women marrying into the pagan tribes, or most typically adding a little of the local pagan belief system into their worship of God in order to show tolerance and friendliness.

I'm sure we have husbands and wives in this class whose spouses don't necessarily belong to a pagan religion but rather they are simply not worshippers of the God of Israel. Often this can create tremendous stress within the family and the one who does believe can be easily lured into a more secular lifestyle because they feel they have little choice if there is to be family peace.

This chapter ends by the Lord saying unequivocally that He finds these false worship practices detestable; and that many of those false religions involve offering up their own children as human sacrifices to their gods.

Let me briefly talk about the subject of child sacrifice because it comes up fairly often in the Scriptures. Child sacrifice was well known outside of the Bible stories; it is written about by the classical writers. Generally a child would be offered to a god if that family wanted something of great value from that god or if that god would protect them from some great calamity or a defeat in battle or even from an epidemic. There is a lot of archeological evidence to prove the rather widespread practice of child sacrifice because hundreds of urns containing the thoroughly charred bones of very young children have been found in the areas where pagan altars were located.

An informative relief of Egyptian origin has been uncovered that tells the story of Egypt attacking Canaanite walled cities around 1200 B.C., and it shows the people inside those walls (Canaanites) holding a religious ceremony, praying to the heavens and dropping the bodies of dead children over the walls. In other words the children had already been sacrificially killed, so throwing them over the wall was part of indicating the purpose of those sacrifices.

Why sacrifice children and not adults? Because the foundational belief of the pagans was that if they wanted something of great value or importance from the gods they needed to offer what is most precious to them in order to gain the gods' favor. And most societies valued their children above all else. So we must not ever think that these religions that murdered their sons and daughters as an appeasement to their gods did so because they had plenty of kids, or didn't love them or care about them, so what is one less child in their large family to them?

Now as abhorrent as is this was to Yehoveh, and as clear as He made its prohibition to Israel, and as serious as the Hebrews generally took this command, they were not entirely above engaging in it themselves. I presented to you in an earlier lesson the sad story of Jephthah

making a vow to offer as a burnt offering the first thing that came out his house to greet him when he returned from a critical battle, IF the Lord would lead Jephthah to victory. Well Jephthah got the victory he prayed for and when he returned home his only child, a daughter, ran out the door to meet him. He followed through with his vow.

Now his intention certainly was not child sacrifice, was it? In fact the girl was probably a teenager. This whole thing was a horrible surprise to him. In the Middle East, right up to this day in the more primitive regions, the farm animals live inside the house right along with the people. In Bible times (up to and including Jesus' day) this was also the norm and people thought nothing of it. Certainly Jephthah expected one of his prized animals, at random, to have come bounding out of his house when he came home with victory in hand. Although terribly distraught about it, he still went ahead and murdered his daughter and burned her up on an altar, doing it all in the name of the Lord. Despite his intention to simply honor a very rash vow, and not sin by backing out, what he did was to commit human sacrifice (so warped was his logic that he determined he was doing a good thing that was pleasing to Yehoveh).

We know that even during Jesus' day child sacrifice occurred in the deep ravine that surrounded the southern and eastern corner of the Holy City, the Valley of Hinnom. It was used as both a waste dump and a place where altars to Molech were erected, and their children were sacrificed (presumably, of course, not by Hebrews but by gentiles).

Here's the point: scholars have always recognized that the prohibition of child sacrifice was not the purpose of the final verse of chapter 12. Rather, it simply took perhaps the most extreme example of what can happen should Israel start to adopt ways of their pagan neighbors as they honor their false gods. The idea is that for a Hebrew to but sample or inquire about even the most mundane or seemingly harmless aspect of the Canaanites' pagan religion will, with some Hebrews, be irresistible and end up with their committing the worst possible atrocities, and they'll even do it in Yehoveh's name. So they should shun these religions with every fiber of their being regardless of whether it insults, offends, angers, or merely makes relations with the Canaanites uneasy.

Let me end today with this thought: by the Church simply reducing everything the Lord expects of us to the word "love" we have various denominations endorsing homosexuality, gay marriage, abortion, and polygamy at the same time it wants to ban the execution of murderers, forgive sex crimes upon children, and declare that any god that is worshipped is really just Jesus. Why? Because the supposed "law of love" effectively invalidates all of the Lord's other commands. We cannot be against homosexuality because that is not loving. We cannot stand in the way of two males getting married to one another because they love each other and of course God loves love. We cannot execute a killer because instead we should love him and no loving god would ever take a human life as retribution. And we cannot stand with Israel, and necessarily against its enemy the Palestinians, because that is not evenhanded and thus is not loving.

How could the church have gone so far off track? How could Believers think such strange thoughts? Just as with Jephthah too much of Christianity has mixed the ways of Greek philosophy and intellectualism and various cultural traditions with the Lord's ways in hopes of getting along with the world. And as society and the church grows increasingly accepting of these things, we all just become numb to them and they become the new normal so we declare to ourselves that these things must be good because they seem so comfortable to us. To do otherwise would have us crossways with many of our friends, some of our family, and certainly at times with our own church or synagogue. After all who wants to be labeled as belonging to a cult, or as a heretic, or as a fundamentalist intolerant unintelligent hater?

Well that's the choice Yehoveh lays out to Israel: obey My every command, regardless of the social consequences, so that I can bless you; OR, commit idolatry by adopting some of the ways of the world and thus perverting the true worship of the true God in order to blend in with your neighbors and have a form of peace.

Next week we'll begin chapter 13.