

# CHAPTER 12

Moses at this chapter comes to the particular statues which he had to give in charge to Israel, and he begins with those which relate to the worship of God, and particularly those which explain the second commandment, about which God is in a special manner jealous.

**I.** They must utterly destroy all relics and remains of idolatry (v. 1-3).

**II.** They must keep close to the tabernacle (v. 4, 5). The former precept was intended to prevent all false worship, the latter to preserve the worship God had instituted. By this latter law,

**1.** They are commanded to bring all their offerings to the altar of God, and all their holy things to the place which he should choose (v. 6, 7, 11, 12, 14, 18, 26-28).

**2.** They are forbidden, in general, to do as they now did in the wilderness (v. 8-11), and as the Canaanites had done (v. 29-32), and, in particular, to eat the hallowed things at their own houses (v. 13, 17, 18), or to forsake the instituted ministry (v. 19).

**3.** They are permitted to eat flesh as common food at their own houses, provided they do not eat the blood (v. 15, 16, and again, v. 20-26).

## DEUTERONOMY 12:1-4

### RELICS OF IDOLATRY TO BE DESTROYED

From those great original truths, That there is a God, and that there is but one God, arise those great fundamental laws, That that God is to be worshipped, and he only, and that therefore we are to have no other God before him: this is the first commandment, and the second is a guard upon it, or a hedge about it. To prevent a revolt to false gods, we are forbidden to worship the true God in such a way and manner as the false gods were worshipped in, and are commanded to observe the instituted ordinances of worship that we may adhere to the proper object of worship. For this reason Moses is very large in his exposition of the second commandment.

What is contained in this and the four following chapters mostly refers to that. *These are statutes and judgments* which they must *observe to do* (v. 1),

**1.** In the days of their rest and prosperity, when they should be masters of Canaan. We must not think that our religion is instituted only to be our work in the years of our servitude, our entertainment in the places of our solitude, and our consolation in affliction; no, when we come to possess a good land, still we must keep up the worship of God in Canaan as well as in a wilderness, when we have grown up as well as when we are children, when we are full of business as well as when we have nothing else to do.

**2.** *All the days*, as long as you *live upon the earth*. While we are here in our state of trial, we must continue in our obedience, even to the end, and never leave our duty, nor grow weary of well-doing. Now,

**I.** They are here charged to abolish and extirpate all those things that the Canaanites had served their idol-gods with, v. 2, 3. Here is no mention of idol-temples, which countenances the opinion some have, that the tabernacle Moses reared in the wilderness was the first habitation that ever was made for religious uses, and that from it temples took their rise. But the places that had been used, and were now to be levelled, were enclosures for their worship on *mountains and hills* (as if the height of the ground would give advantage to the ascent of their devotions), and under green trees, either because pleasant or because awful: whatever makes the mind easy and reverent, contracts and composes it, was thought to befriend devotion. The solemn shade and silence of a grove are still admired by those that are disposed to contemplation. But the advantage which these retirements gave to the Gentiles in the worship of their idols was that they concealed those works of darkness which could not bear the light; and therefore they must all be destroyed, with the altars, pillars, and images, that had been used by the natives in the worship of their gods, so as that the very names of them might be buried in oblivion, and not only not be remembered with respect, but not remembered at all. They must thus consult,

**1.** The reputation of their land; let it never be said of this holy land that it had been thus polluted, but let all these dunghills be carried away, as things they were ashamed of.

2. The safety of their religion; let none be left remaining, lest profane unthinking people, especially in degenerate ages, should make use of them in the service of the God of Israel. Let these pest-houses be demolished, as things they were afraid of. He begins the statutes that relate to divine worship with this, because there must first be an abhorrence of that which is evil before there can be a steady adherence to that which is good, ~~(511)~~ Romans 12:9. The kingdom of God must be set up, both in persons and places, upon the ruins of the devil's kingdom; for they cannot stand together, nor can there be any communion between Christ and Belial.

II. They are charged not to transfer the rites and usages of idolaters into the worship of God; no, not under colour of beautifying and improving it (v. 4): *You shall not do so to the Lord your god*, that is, “you must not think to do honour to him by offering sacrifices on mountains and hills, erecting pillars, planting groves, and setting up images; no, you must not indulge a luxurious fancy in your worship, nor think that whatever pleases that will please God: *he is above all gods*, and will not be worshipped as other gods are.”

## ~~(511)~~ DEUTERONOMY 12:5-32

### WHERE SACRIFICES MUST BE OFFERED

There is not any one particular precept (as I remember) in all the law of Moses so largely pressed and inculcated as this, by which they are all tied to bring their sacrifices to that one altar which was set up in the court of the tabernacle, and there to perform all the rituals of their religion; for, as to moral services, then, no doubt, as now, men might pray every where, as they did in their synagogues. The command to do this, and the prohibition of the contrary, are here repeated again and again, as we teach children: and yet we are sure that there is in scripture no vain repetition; but all this stress is laid upon it,

1. Because of the strange proneness there was in the hearts of the people to idolatry and superstition, and the danger of their being seduced by the many temptations which they would be surrounded with.
2. Because of the great use which the observance of this appointment would be of to them, both to prevent the introducing of corrupt customs

into their worship and to preserve among them unity and brotherly love, that, meeting all in one place, they might continue both of one way and of one heart.

**3.** Because of the significancy of this appointment. They must keep to one place, in token of their belief of those two great truths, which we find together (<sup>(5115)</sup>1 Timothy 2:5), That *there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man*. It not only served to keep up the notion of the unity of the Godhead, but was an intimation to them (though they could not stedfastly discern it) of the one only way of approach to God and communion with him, in and by the Messiah.

Let us now reduce this long charge to its proper heads.

**I.** It is here promised that when they were settled in Canaan, when they had *rest from their enemies, and dwelt in safety*, God would choose a certain place, which he would appoint to be the centre of their unity, to which they should bring all their offerings, v. 10, 11. Observe,

**1.** If they just be tied to one place, they should not be left in doubt concerning it, but should certainly know what place it was. Had Christ intended, under the gospel, to make any one place such a seat of power as Rome pretends to be, we should not have been left so destitute of instruction as we are concerning the appointed place.

**2.** God does not leave it to them to choose the place, lest the tribes should have quarrelled about it, each striving, for their secular advantage, to have it among them; but he reserves the choice to himself, as he does the designation of the Redeemer and the institution of holy ordinances.

**3.** He does not appoint the place now, as he had appointed mounts Gerizim and Ebal, for the pronouncing of the blessings and curses (<sup>(4912)</sup>Deuteronomy 11:29), but reserves the doing of it till hereafter, that hereby they might be made to expect further directions from heaven, and a divine conduct, after Moses should be removed. The place which God would choose is said to be the place where he would put his name, that is, which he would have to be called his, where his honour should dwell, where he would manifest himself to his people, and make himself known, as men do by their names, and where he would receive addresses, by which his name is both praised and called upon. It was to be his habitation, where, as King of Israel, he would keep court, and be found by

all those that reverently sought him. The ark was the token of God's presence, and where that was put there God put his name, and that was his habitation. It contained the tables of the law; for none must expect to receive favours from God's hand but those that are willing to *receive the law from his mouth*. The place which God first chose for the ark to reside in was Shiloh; and, after that place had sinned away its honours, we find the ark at Kirjath-jearim and other places; but at length, in David's time, it was fixed at Jerusalem, and God said concerning Solomon's temple, more expressly than ever he had said concerning any other place, *This I have chosen for a house of sacrifice*, <sup><447></sup>2 Chronicles 7:12. Compare <sup><406></sup>2 Chronicles 6:5. Now, under the gospel, we have no temple that sanctifies the gold, no altar that sanctifies the gift, but Christ only; and, as to the places of worship, the prophets foretold that *in every place the spiritual incense should be offered*, <sup><301></sup>Malachi 1:11. And our Saviour has declared that those are accepted as true worshippers who worship God in sincerity and truth, without regard either to this mountain or Jerusalem, <sup><402></sup>John 4:23.

**II.** They are commanded to bring all their burnt-offerings and sacrifices to this place that God would choose (v. 6 and again v. 11): *Thither shall you bring all that I command you*; and (v. 14), *There thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings*; and (v. 27), *The flesh and the blood must be offered upon the altar of the Lord thy God*. And of their peace-offerings, here called their *sacrifices*, though they were to *eat the flesh*, yet *the blood* was to be *poured out upon the altar*. By this they were taught that sacrifices and offerings God did not desire, nor accept, for their own sake, nor for any intrinsic worth in them, as natural expressions of homage and adoration; but that they received their virtue purely from that altar on which they were offered, as it typified Christ; whereas prayers and praises, as much more necessary and valuable, were to be offered every day by the people of God wherever they were. A devout Israelite might honour God, and keep up communion with him, and obtain mercy from him, though he had not an opportunity, perhaps, for many months together, of bringing a sacrifice to his altar. But this signified the obligation we Christians are under to offer up all our spiritual sacrifices to God in the name of Jesus Christ, hoping for acceptance only upon the score of his mediation, <sup><015></sup>1 Peter 2:5.

**III.** They are commanded to feast upon their hallowed things before the Lord, with holy joy. They must not only bring to the altar the sacrifices which were to be offered to God, but they must bring to the place of the altar all those things which they were appointed by the law to eat and drink, to the honour of God, in token of their communion with him, v. 6. Their, *tithes, and heave-offerings of their hand*, that is, their first-fruits, their vows, and *free-will-offerings*, and firstlings, all those things which were to be religiously made use of either by themselves or by the priests and Levites, must be brought to the place which God would choose; as all the revenues of the crown, from all parts of the kingdom, are brought into the exchequer. And (v. 7): *There you shall eat before the Lord, and rejoice in all that you put your hands unto*; and again (v. 12), *You shall rejoice before the Lord, you, and your sons, and your daughters*. Observe here,

**1.** That what we do in the service of God and to his glory redounds to our benefit, if it be not our own fault. Those that sacrifice to God are welcome to eat before him, and to feast upon their sacrifices: he *sups with us, and we with him*, <sup>(418)</sup> Revelation 3:20. If we glorify God, we edify ourselves, and cultivate our own minds, through the grace of God, by the increase of our knowledge and faith, the enlivening of devout affections, and the confirming of gracious habits and resolutions: thus is the soul nourished.

**2.** That work for God should be done with holy joy and cheerfulness. You shall *eat and rejoice*, v. 7, and again, v. 12 and 5:18.

**(1.)** Now while they were before the Lord they must rejoice, v. 12. It is the will of God that we should serve him with gladness; none displeased him more than those that *covered his altar with tears*. <sup>(313)</sup> Malachi 2:13. See what a good Master we serve, who has made it our duty to sing at our work. Even the children and servants must rejoice with them before God, that the services of religion might be a pleasure to them, and not a task or drudgery.

**(2.)** They must *carry away with them* the grateful relish of that delight which they found in communion with God; they must rejoice in all that they *put their hands unto*, v. 7. Some of the comfort which they must take with them into their common employments; and, being thus strengthened in soul, whatever they did they must do it heartily and cheerfully. And this holy pious joy in God and his goodness, with which we are to rejoice

evermore, would be the best preservative against the sin and snare of *vain and carnal mirth* and a relief against the *sorrows of the world*.

**IV.** They are commanded to be kind to the Levites. Did they feast with joy? The Levites must feast with them, and rejoice with them, v. 12, and again, v. 18; and a general caution (v. 19), *Take heed that thou forsake not the Levite as long as thou livest*. There were Levites that attended the altar as assistants to the priests, and these must not be forsaken, that is, the service they performed must be constantly adhered to; no other altar must be set up than that which God appointed; for that would be to forsake the Levites. But this seems to be spoken of the Levites that were dispersed in the country to instruct the people in the law of God, and to assist them in their devotions; for it is *the Levite within their gates* that they are here commanded to make much of. It is a great mercy to have Levites near us, within our gates, that we may ask the law at their mouth, and at our feasts to be a check upon us, to restrain excesses. And it is the duty of people to be kind to their ministers that give them good instructions and set them good examples. As long as we live we shall need their assistance, till we come to that world where ordinances will be superseded; and therefore *as long as we live* we must not forsake the Levites. The reason given (v. 12) is because *the Levite has no part nor inheritance with you*, so that he cannot grow rich by husbandry or trade; let him therefore share with you in the comfort of your riches. They must give the Levites their tithes and offerings, settled on them by the law, because they had no other maintenance.

**V.** They are allowed to eat common flesh, but not the flesh of their offerings, in their own houses, wherever they dwelt. What was any way devoted to God they must not eat at home, v. 13, 17. But what was not so devoted they might kill and eat of at their pleasure, v. 15. And this permission is again repeated, v. 20-22. It should seem that while they were in the wilderness they did not eat the flesh of any of those kinds of beasts that were used in sacrifice, but what was killed at the door of the tabernacle, and part of it presented to God as a peace-offering, <sup><877></sup>Leviticus 17:3, 4. But when they came to Canaan, where they must live at a great distance from the tabernacle, they might kill what they pleased for their own use of their flocks and herds, without bringing part to the altar. This allowance is very express, and repeated, lest Satan should take occasion from that law which forbade the eating of their sacrifices at their

own houses to suggest to them, as he did to our first parents, hard thoughts of God, as if he grudged them: *Thou mayest eat whatsoever thy soul lusteth after*. There is a natural regular appetite, which it is lawful to gratify with temperance and sobriety, not taking too great a pleasure in the gratification, nor being uneasy if it be crossed. The unclean, who might not eat of the holy things, yet might eat of the same sort of flesh when it was only used as common food. The distinction between clean persons and unclean was sacred, and designed for the preserving of the honour of their holy feasts, and therefore must not be brought into their ordinary meals. This permission has a double restriction: —

**1.** They must eat according to the blessing which God had given them, v. 15. Note, It is not only our wisdom, but our duty, to live according to our estates, and not to spend above what we have. As it is unjust on the one hand to hoard what should be laid out, so it is much more unjust to lay out more than we have; for what is not our own must needs be another's, who is thereby robbed and defrauded. And this, I say, is much more unjust, because it is easier afterwards to distribute what has been unduly spared, and so to make a sort of restitution for the wrong, than it is to repay to wife, and children, and creditors, what has been unduly spent. Between these two extremes let wisdom find the mean, and then let watchfulness and resolution keep it.

**2.** They must not eat blood (v. 16, and again, v. 23): *Only be sure that thou eat not the blood* (v. 24), *Thou shalt not eat it*; and (v. 25), *Thou shalt not eat it, that it may go well with thee*. When they could not bring the blood to the altar, to pour it out there before the Lord, as belonging to him, they must pour it out upon the earth, as not belonging to them, because it was the life, and therefore, as an acknowledgment, belonged to him who gives life, and, as an atonement, belonged to him to whom life is forfeited. Bishop Patrick thinks one reason why they were forbidden thus strictly the eating of blood was to prevent the superstitions of the old idolaters about the blood of their sacrifices, which they thought their demons delighted in, and by eating of which they imagined that they had communion with them.

**VI.** They are forbidden to keep up either their own corrupt usages in the wilderness or the corrupt usages of their predecessors in the land of Canaan.



**1.** They must not keep up those improper customs which they had got into in the wilderness, and which were connived at in consideration of the present unsettledness of their condition (v. 8, 9): *You shall not do after all the things that we do here this day*. Never was there a better governor than Moses, and one would think never a better opportunity of keeping up good order and discipline than now among the people of Israel, when they lay so closely encamped under the eye of their governor; and yet it seems there was much amiss and many irregularities had crept in among them. We must never expect to see any society perfectly pure and right, and as it should be till we come to the heavenly Canaan. They had sacrifices and religious worship, courts of justice and civil government, and, by the stoning of the man that *gathered sticks on the sabbath day*, it appears there was great strictness used in guarding the most weighty matters of the law; but being frequently upon the remove, and always at uncertainty,

**(1.)** They could none of them observe the solemn feasts, and the rites of cleansing, with the exactness that the law required. And,

**(2.)** Those among them that were disposed to do amiss had opportunity given them to do it unobserved by the frequent interruptions which their removals gave to the administration of justice. But (says Moses) when you come to Canaan, you *shall not do as we do here*. Note, When the people of God are in an unsettled condition, that may be tolerated and dispensed with which would by no means be allowed at another time. Cases of necessity are to be considered while the necessity continues; but that must not be done in Canaan which was done in the wilderness. While a house is in the building a great deal of dirt and rubbish are suffered to lie by it, which must all be taken away when the house is built. Moses was now about to lay down his life and government, and it was a comfort to him to foresee that Israel would be better in the next reign than they had been in his.

**2.** They must not worship the Lord by any of those rites or ceremonies which the notions of Canaan had made use of in the service of their gods, v. 29-32. They must not so much as enquire into the modes and forms of idolatrous worship. What good would it do to them to *know those depths of Satan?* <sup>(12)</sup> Revelation 2:24. It is best to be ignorant of that which there is danger of being infected by. They must not introduce the customs of idolaters,

(1.) Because it would be absurd to make those their patterns whom God had made their slaves and captives, cut off, and destroyed from before them. The Canaanites had not flourished and prospered so much in the service of their gods as that the Israelites should be invited to take up their customs. Those are wretchedly besotted indeed who will walk in the way of sinners, after they have seen their end.

(2.) Because some of their customs were most barbarous and inhuman, and such as trampled, not only upon the light and law of nature, but upon natural affection itself, as *burning their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods* (v. 31), the very mention of which is sufficient to make it odious, and possess us with a horror of it.

(3.) Because their idolatrous customs were an abomination to the Lord, and the translating of them into his worship would make even that an abomination and an affront to him by which they should give him honour, and by which they hoped to obtain his favour. The case is bad indeed when the sacrifice itself has become an abomination, <sup><118></sup>Proverbs 15:8. He therefore concludes (v. 32) with the same caution concerning the worship of God which he had before given concerning the word of God (<sup><102></sup>Deuteronomy 4:2): “*You shall not add thereto* any inventions of your own, under pretence of making the ordinance either more significant or more magnificent, *nor diminish from it*, under pretence of making it more easy and practicable, or of setting aside that which may be spared; but observe to do all that, and that only, which God has commanded.” We may then hope in our religious worship to obtain the divine acceptance when we observe the divine appointment. God will have his own work done in his own way.