

## Deuteronomy 12:8-19

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“You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man *doing* whatever is right in his own eyes [seems to refer to the practice of worshipping at various locations; see vs. 13];<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 [a reminder that God owns the world and controls who occupies territories; cf. Deut 10:14; 2 Ch 20:5-7; Psa 24:1; 89:11; Acts 17:24-26], and He gives you rest from all your enemies around *you* so that you live in security [God who provides also protects],<sup>11</sup> then it shall come about that the place in which the LORD your God will choose for His name to dwell [a prescribed place of worship], 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 [adults who enter the land by obedience] and your sons and daughters [immediate family], your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates [who directs worship], since he has no portion or inheritance with you [because priests and Levites did not own land].<sup>13</sup> “Be careful that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every *cultic* place you see [like the Canaanites did],<sup>14</sup> but in the place which the LORD chooses in one of your tribes [a prescribed place of worship], there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.<sup>15</sup> “However, you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your gates, whatever you desire [freedom to eat meat not assigned for worship at the tabernacle], according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you [every meal was regarded as God’s blessing]; the unclean and the clean [person] may eat of it, as of the gazelle and the deer.<sup>16</sup> “Only you shall not eat the blood [as the Canaanites did. The blood represents the life of the animal; See Deut 12:23 and Lev 17:10-14]; you are to pour it out on the ground like water [drain as much as possible].<sup>17</sup> “You are not allowed to eat within your gates the tithes 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 [all of which have been devoted to the Lord].<sup>18</sup> “But you shall eat them before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God will choose [a prescribed place of worship], you and your son and daughter [immediate family], and your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates [who directs worship]; 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.

## Observations:

Moses continued his address to Israelites who were poised to enter the land of Canaan, saying, “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” (Deut 12:8-9). He instructed them that the paradigm for wilderness worship they were familiar with would be different when they entered the land. This was because their nomadic condition was about to change and they would find themselves living in settled places. Moses continued to say:

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. (Deut 12:10-11)

In verse 10 Moses implies the crossing of the Jordan would certainly happen, they would take possession of the land God promised to give them. Here was another reminder that God owns the world and controls who occupies territories (cf., Deut 10:14; 2 Ch 20:5-7; Psa 24:1; 89:11; Acts 17:24-26). Not only would God give the land, but would also provide security. And once there, God would set apart a specific place where His people could meet Him for worship. There, they would bring their burnt offerings which were sacrifices wholly devoted to the Lord, their sacrifices of which they could eat a portion along with the Levite, their tithe of produce, as well as the offerings they’d vowed to the Lord. This first occurred at Shiloh under the leadership of Joshua (Josh 18:1). Later, during the time of Samuel, the tabernacle and ark was at Mizpah (1 Sam 7:6), and then Nob (1 Sam 21:1-6). The place of worship finally rested in Jerusalem under the leadership of David and Solomon. Concerning this, Eugene Merrill writes:

As is well known, the first permanent location of the tabernacle was Shiloh (Josh 18:1), a site chosen only after the land had been brought under control. How long after the conquest Shiloh was chosen cannot be known precisely, but it seems to have been a minimum of seven years (cf. Josh 14:7–10). In the meantime, it is clear that altars of the kind authorized by the Lord in Exodus 20 were built in Canaan both before (Josh 8:30) and after the selection of Shiloh as the place of

national convocation (Josh 22:10–11; Judg 6:24–26; 13:20; 21:4; 1 Sam 7:17; 2 Sam 24:18–25).<sup>1</sup>

Concerning this place and time of worship, Moses said, “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” (Deut 12:12). The adult parents are here addressed as those who should rejoice before the Lord (lit. *before the face of Yahweh your God*), and this was to include their children and servants who were part of the household unit. And Moses instructs them to include the Levite who lives in their town, since he possessed no land to cultivate, and relied on the goodness and obedience of other townsfolk.

The instruction concerning sacrifices continued, as Moses said, “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” (Deut 12:13-14). Here, God called His people to be set apart from the Canaanite culture that surrounded them, specifically concerning the location where sacrifices were to be offered. Warren Wiersbe provides the following insight:

Canaanite worship permitted the people to offer whatever sacrifices they pleased at whatever place they chose, but for Israel there was to be but one altar. The Jews were allowed to kill and eat livestock and wild game at any place (Deut 12:15, 21-22), but these animals were not to be offered as sacrifices when they were killed. The only place where sacrifices were accepted was at the altar of God’s sanctuary, and the only people who could offer them were the Lord’s appointed priests. The Lord didn’t want His people inventing their own religious system by imitating the practices of the pagan nations. During the decadent days of the Judges, that’s exactly what some of the people did (Judg 17-18).<sup>2</sup>

For those animals not offered to God in worship, the Lord extended freedom to His people to eat whatever they wanted, saying, “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” (Deut 12:15). In this passage, there was the option to eat whatever

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 224.

<sup>2</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Equipped*, “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Pub., 1999), 83.

meat they wanted within the city gates, whether wild animals or those God declared acceptable for sacrifice. And it did not matter if the Israelite was ceremonially clean or unclean, since the animal was not going to be used for worship, but only consumption (cf., Deut 12:20-22). Eugene Merrill states:

Life in the land would bring widespread settlement, so much so that it would be impossible from a practical standpoint for all acts of worship, including sacrifice, to be carried out at any one central place, to say nothing of the slaughter of animals for food. Thus, animals could be slain in local villages—even those normally reserved for sacrifice—to provide a food supply (vv. 15, 20–22). Such animals could be considered as wild game in such circumstances, that is, they could be used for noncultic purposes. This is why both the ceremonially clean and unclean could partake of it (v. 15b).<sup>3</sup>

However, whether the animal was to be used for religious worship or secular consumption, the Lord placed a prohibition on all Israel, saying, “Only you shall not eat the blood; you are to pour it out on the ground like water” (Deut 12:16). Israel was to understand that “the life of the flesh is in the blood” (Lev 17:11a) and was to treat it with respect in all situations. The blood symbolized life, which God has given to all creatures. If the animal was killed at home, the blood was to be drained before eating. If the animal was brought to the tabernacle or temple, the blood was to be drained beside the altar. In those ritual offerings the priests would catch some of the blood and sprinkle it on the altar, or on the mercy seat atop the ark of the covenant on the Day of Atonement. In this way they treated the blood of the animal as special.

But there were some sacrifices that could only be eaten at the tabernacle or temple, as Moses wrote, “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” (Deut 12:18). Those animals dedicated to the Lord were off limits for consumption, and could only be consumed at the centralized place of worship which the Lord prescribed (cf. Deut 12:6, 11). The Lord’s instruction continued, saying, “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” (Deut 12:18). In typical fashion, Moses repeats himself to his audience in order to drive a point. Moses’ emphasis is that animals devoted to the Lord could be eaten only at the place God prescribed, and meal participants were to include sons and

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<sup>3</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary, 226.

daughters, male and female servants, and the Levite who resided within the town. And this worship was to be a time of rejoicing before the Lord, a celebration that included the family and others. And then, in order to drive his point even further, Moses states, “Be careful that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land” (Deut 12:19). Because the Levites did not own land, they were dependent on the obedience and good will of their fellow Israelites to watch out for them and care for them for their daily needs.

As we covered in a previous lesson, there is no specialized priesthood in the dispensation of the Church Age. Rather, every Christian, at the moment of salvation, becomes a priest to God (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6). Furthermore, we do not worship at a prescribed centralized location as Israel did; rather, “we are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor 6:16; cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17). And we do not bring grain or animal sacrifices, but “offer up spiritual sacrifices” to God (1 Pet 2:5). The basic functions of the Christian priesthood include:

1. The continual giving of the body for service to the Lord (Rom 12:1-2).
2. Confessing our sins directly to God (1 John 1:6-9).
3. Sharing the gospel with others (Rom 15:15-16).
4. Offering praise to God (Heb 13:15).
5. Doing good works and sharing with others (Heb 13:16; cf. Phil 4:18).
6. Giving our lives for the benefit of others (Phil 2:17; cf. Phil 1:21-26; 2:3-4).
7. Walking in love (Eph 5:1-2; cf. 1 Pet 1:22).

Lastly, Pastor-Teachers are not a special class of priests, nor is tithing to the church obligatory for Christians. However, the NT makes it clear that it is valid for “those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel” (1 Cor 9:14), and “The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him” (Gal 6:6). In this way, believers support their Pastor-Teachers for the work they do.