

THE PRACTICE AND PLACE OF TRUE WORSHIP

BIBLE TEXT : Deuteronomy 12:1-32; John 4:19-24

LESSON 137 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Deuteronomy 12:1-32

¹ These *are* the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth.

² Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree:

³ And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place.

⁴ Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God.

⁵ But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, *even* unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come:

⁶ And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks:

⁷ And there ye shall eat before the LORD your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee.

⁸ Ye shall not do after all *the things* that we do here this day, every man whatsoever *is* right in his own eyes.

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

High Places

Mountains and high places were of great importance to the ancient people. Many of the cities were built on hills, surrounded by great walls, to discourage invaders who might come against them.

If we had wandered through the Land of Canaan before the Israelites possessed it we might have been pleased to see the beautiful parks on many of the high places. But do you know what was hidden among those trees? Idols. All kinds of idols! Those heathen people did not worship the true God, nor only one false god. They had many gods; and in each different grove we might have found a different kind of idol. The people offered sacrifices to those images, gods that could not see nor hear nor know anything that the people did.

God did not want His people to be fooled into thinking that those gods of wood and stone on the high places could answer their prayers. The Prophet said, "Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel" (Jeremiah 3:23). The hills will be no help to people when judgment comes. We are told that the sinners will cry for the rocks and mountains to fall on them when they come to stand before the Judge of all the earth.

Nahum the prophet tells us how much greater God is than the strength of the hills: "The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein" (Nahum 1:5).

The Holy City

God was going to set up the beautiful City of Jerusalem as the place for His people to gather and worship. A Temple was going to be built there that would be grander than anything that had been built until that time. There in the Holy of Holies would rest the Ark of the Covenant that had been carried on the shoulders of the Levites all the way to Canaan. And to this Temple all the Israelites would go to worship God.

During the forty years in the wilderness, the Ark had moved with them, and they had worshiped wherever the Tabernacle was pitched. It had been impossible to hold rigid rules for so great a body of people who did not remain in one place. But when the Israelites were established in Canaan, God was going to expect more of them.

Meat for Food

Animals for meat had been very scarce during the wilderness wanderings, and the Israelites had killed their cattle and sheep only for sacrifices, some of which were eaten at the Tabernacle as part of their worship. The young people who had grown up during those forty years did not know of any other occasion for eating meat. God told them that in Canaan animals would become plentiful, and if the Israelites were hungry for meat they were free to eat all they wanted, just as we eat meat

⁹ For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you.

¹⁰ But *when* ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and *when* he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety;

¹¹ Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD:

¹² And ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God, ye, and your sons, and your daughters, and your menservants, and your maidservants, and the Levite that *is* within your gates; forasmuch as he hath no part nor inheritance with you.

¹³ Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest:

¹⁴ But in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee.

¹⁵ Notwithstanding thou mayest kill and eat flesh in all thy gates, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee: the unclean and the clean may eat thereof, as of the roebuck, and as of the hart.

¹⁶ Only ye shall not eat the blood; ye shall pour it upon the earth as water.

¹⁷ Thou mayest not eat within thy gates the tithe of thy corn, or of thy wine, or of thy oil, or the firstlings of thy herds or of thy flock, nor any of thy vows which

with our meals. However, the firstlings of the flock, and those especially set aside for the Lord's sacrifice must be taken to the house of God and offered there.

Destruction of Groves

After all the great things God had done for His people, one would think they would never even consider worshiping some of those cheap gods of wood and stone, but God knew they would. For that reason He warned them again and again to be careful not even to enjoy the parks where the idols were kept. "Thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire" (Deuteronomy 7:5). God even told the Children of Israel that they should never plant trees near an altar of God to make it resemble a heathen altar in any way (**Deuteronomy 16:21** ²¹ Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD thy God, which thou shalt make thee).

Devil Worship

Do you know what the people worshiped instead of God? They worshiped the sun, the moon, the stars; they bowed down before images of Ashtaroth, Baal, Dagon, Diana; they paid homage to golden calves; and even worshiped devils. They not only offered sacrifices of animals to these strange gods, but sometimes offered their own children. And because the Israelites copied the heathen and did these things, too, God let ten tribes of them be carried away captive into the land of Assyria (**2 Kings 17:1-41** ¹ In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years. ² And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him. ³ Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents. ⁴ And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria, as *he had done* year by year: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison. ⁵ Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. ⁶ In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor *by* the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. ⁷ For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, ⁸ And walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. ⁹ And the children of Israel did secretly *those things that were* not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city. ¹⁰ And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree: ¹¹ And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as *did* the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger: ¹² For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing. ¹³ Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, *and by* all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments *and* my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. ¹⁴ Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God. ¹⁵ And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that *were* round about them, *concerning* whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like

thou vowest, nor thy freewill offerings, or heave offering of thine hand:

¹⁸ But thou must eat them before the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD thy God shall choose, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that *is* within thy gates: and thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God in all that thou putteth thine hands unto.

¹⁹ Take heed to thyself that thou forsake not the Levite as long as thou livest upon the earth.

²⁰ When the LORD thy God shall enlarge thy border, as he hath promised thee, and thou shalt say, I will eat flesh, because thy soul longeth to eat flesh; thou mayest eat flesh, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after.

²¹ If the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to put his name there be too far from thee, then thou shalt kill of thy herd and of thy flock, which the LORD hath given thee, as I have commanded thee, and thou shalt eat in thy gates whatsoever thy soul lusteth after.

²² Even as the roebuck and the hart is eaten, so thou shalt eat them: the unclean and the clean shall eat *of* them alike.

²³ Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood *is* the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh.

²⁴ Thou shalt not eat it; thou shalt pour it upon the earth as water.

²⁵ Thou shalt not eat it; that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, when thou shalt do *that which is* right in the sight of the LORD.

²⁶ Only thy holy things which thou hast, and thy vows, thou shalt take, and go unto the place which the LORD shall choose:

them. ¹⁶ And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, *even* two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. ¹⁷ And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. ¹⁸ Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only. ¹⁹ Also Judah kept not the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. ²⁰ And the LORD rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight. ²¹ For he rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king: and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the LORD, and made them sin a great sin. ²² For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; ²³ Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day. ²⁴ And the king of Assyria brought *men* from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed *them* in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof. ²⁵ And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, *that* they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew *some* of them. ²⁶ Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land. ²⁷ Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land. ²⁸ Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD. ²⁹ Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put *them* in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt. ³⁰ And the men of Babylon made Succothbenoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, ³¹ And the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. ³² So they feared the LORD, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. ³³ They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence. ³⁴ Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the LORD, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel; ³⁵ With whom the LORD had made a covenant, and charged them, saying, Ye shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them: ³⁶ But the LORD, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice. ³⁷ And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the law, and the commandment, which he wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for evermore; and ye shall not fear other gods. ³⁸ And the covenant that I have made with you ye shall not forget; neither shall ye fear other gods. ³⁹ But the LORD your God ye shall fear; and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies. ⁴⁰ Howbeit they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner. ⁴¹ So these nations feared the LORD, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day).

Later the remaining tribes of Judah and Benjamin were taken captive and were forced to live in Babylon for 70 years. We do not hear that they ever again worshipped strange gods.

²⁷ And thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, upon the altar of the LORD thy God: and the blood of thy sacrifices shall be poured out upon the altar of the LORD thy God, and thou shalt eat the flesh.

²⁸ Observe and hear all these words which I command thee, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee for ever, when thou doest *that which is* good and right in the sight of the LORD thy God.

²⁹ When the LORD thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land;

³⁰ Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise.

³¹ Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods.

³² What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

John 4:19-24

¹⁹ The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.

²⁰ Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

²¹ Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.

Instead, they became very pious and tried hard to follow the letter of the Law. But there was no love in the hearts of most of them, and their forms and ceremonies were only mockery before the Lord. Such was the condition in Canaan (or Palestine, as it was later called) when Jesus lived among men. He repeatedly re-proved the scribes and Pharisees for their wicked hearts, while they pretended to follow the commandments of God. They were careful to worship at Jerusalem; and they thought no one would be saved unless he became a Jew and obeyed the commandments of the rabbis, the Jewish elders. Jesus told them one day: "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matthew 23:15). A proselyte is a person converted from another religion, in this case to the Jewish faith.

Pointing to Jesus

The Tabernacle worship and the Temple worship had their place in God's plan of redemption, but when Jesus came He ushered in a new dispensation. The time of animal sacrifices was past. These had pictured Jesus, and now Jesus was going to shed His Blood once and for all, that through that Blood all sinners who want to be saved might have their *sins* washed away.

On the day Jesus and His disciples walked through Samaria and met the woman at the well, He told her that the hour had come when the true worshiper would not have to go to Jerusalem nor to any other particular place, but if he had the love of God in his heart, he could worship anywhere.

Mount Gerizim

We learned in the lesson about the mountains of blessings and curses, that Mount Gerizim was chosen as the mount of blessing. Upon this mountain the Samaritans had in later years built a temple, and there they worshiped as the Jews worshiped at Jerusalem. The woman at the well was a Samaritan, and she realized that Jesus was a Prophet. So she asked Him at which temple it was right to worship. Would the people be any more righteous who went to Jerusalem to worship than those who climbed Mount Gerizim to the temple of the Samaritans?

True Worship

Jesus told her there was a difference in their worship because to the Jews had been entrusted the way of full salvation. God had called Abraham from the land of Ur, and had promised that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. It was to the Jews that the Tabernacle worship had been given, and they had been His chosen people through hundreds of years. People who wanted to be saved came to the Jews to learn of God. But the distinction between the Jew and Gentile had been broken down. Under the dispensation of grace, which Jesus ushered in, every-one has the same opportunity to be saved. *Jesus* said on the last great day of the feast: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (John 7:37). Any man could come, not just the Jew.

The time for the Temple worship was past. There was no more need for sacrifices, because Jesus had offered His life as the Lamb of God. The forms and ceremonies alone had not saved the people. The true worshiper must always worship God in spirit and in truth.

Today the sinner can come to God in repentance right in his own home, or out in the country, or even as he walks along the street, and receive forgiveness for his sins there as well as in the

²² Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.

²³ But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

²⁴ God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.

church. Jesus is looking at the heart, and when He sees repentance, and a desire to do the right thing, He forgives and makes that sinner a Christian. Many people have knelt by their bedside and been saved. We know of a boy who prayed on a chopping block in his basement until God forgave him. A soldier in the Army prayed by a stump in the woods and had his sins forgiven. They were praying to God in the spirit, and He heard their prayers.

If it were necessary to go to Jerusalem today to worship, most of us would not be able to be Christians. It would be too difficult to make the trip. But God sent the Comforter into the world when Jesus went back to Heaven, and He is leading men everywhere into the truth. Jesus said, "When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). He would reprove the world, not only the Jews. When He shows people they are sinners, He also teaches them how they can be saved.

Although we are free to worship God in any place, we must be sure that we are worshiping Him in the spirit. If there is anything permitted in a church which is contrary to God's commandments, we are told, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (II Corinthians 6:17). The true child of God wants fellowship with other clean people, and will separate himself from those who do not live to please the Lord.

There is nothing sweeter than worshiping the Lord together in the unity of the faith, for there Jesus Himself comes to commune with His people. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

QUESTIONS

- 1** Where were the Israelites to worship after they had settled in Canaan?
- 2** Where did the heathen worship?
- 3** What were the Israelites to do to the heathen places of worship?
- 4** Where did the Samaritans worship in the time of Christ?
- 5** Where have we heard of this mountain before?
- 6** What did the woman at the well ask Jesus?
- 7** What was His answer?
- 8** How are we to worship God?