

November 9, 2025

UNDIVIDED WORSHIP: DEUT 12:1-11,29-32

Introductory Activity Option 1 (Adapted from ETB LG, 113)

Read: Invite a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 91 of the PSG. [Or share the content in your own words] [See Notes Box]
Encourage adults to create a list of reasons why people don't come to church. Record their responses on the board and discuss which excuses might be the easiest to use and why.

Ask: Do you think God cares about where and how people worship Him? If so, why? (PSG, p. 91)

Explain: Share that a significant issue that God led Moses to address with His people was how and where they worshiped Him, especially compared to how other people in Canaan worshiped their deities.

Transition: As the Israelites prepared to enter the promised land, God provided specific instructions about their worship practices. He had high expectations for them to follow those instructions. As we dig into those expectations in this passage, reflect on your own worship and any adjustments God might be leading you to make in that area."

1. REMOVE IDOLOTRY (DEUT. 12:1-7)

Read (or have someone read) Deuteronomy 12:1-7.

Explain: The book of Deuteronomy is a series of messages delivered by Moses to prepare the people to enter the promised land. It is a time of covenant renewal for the people of Israel. As part of their covenant with the Lord, they are to worship Him alone. In this passage, Moses (and God) is instructing the people on their worship of the Lord. As we look at these passages, we will apply them to our modern context and see what they can tell us about our worship. In verses 1-7, we can see three important factors related to the worship of the Israelites and glean three application points for believers today.

- **Prepare the Foundation for Worship:** The first important factor in worship is preparing the foundation for worship. In verse 1, the people are instructed to keep God's commands. That includes all of God's commands, but this chapter, as a whole, is focused on two specific commands. "This chapter on worship is an expansion of the first two commandments found in Deuteronomy 5:7-9." (ETBC, 101)
 - **Read:** Deuteronomy 5:7-9b (See Notes Box)The first step, revealed in verse 1, of preparing the foundation for worship is to recognize who God is and make the choice to worship Him alone. This is a decision of the heart and the will. In verses 2-6, God is going to instruct the people to do the physical work of laying the foundation for worship. He tells them to completely wipe out every aspect of pagan worship from the land. As Merrill explains, "It

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Deuteronomy* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Deuteronomy* (NAC)

"We've all heard the statements. "I don't need to go to church to worship. I can worship just as well while walking on the beach, working in my garden, or hiking in the mountains." Well, those statements may contain a kernel of truth, but the experiences aren't the same, are they? To worship with God's people in a place set aside for that distinct purpose centers our focus. Corporate worship draws our hearts to Him like nothing else can." (ETB PSG, 91)

Deuteronomy 5:7-9b

⁷ Do not have other gods besides me. ⁸ Do not make an idol for yourself in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. ⁹ Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them, because I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God,

obviously would be difficult if not impossible for the Lord alone to be worshiped in Canaan as long as there were pagan centers of worship.” (NAC, 220) If these pagan sites remained, they would be a constant temptation for the people. They would be tempted to worship the false gods. Moreover, the people might also be tempted to “repurpose” them as unapproved locations for worship of the Lord. As we will see, God wanted the people to worship Him together in one location of his choosing.

- **Application:** We might wonder how this applies to the modern Christian. First, when we come to faith in Christ, we are making a decision to follow the Lord’s instruction. This includes worshipping Him alone. This is a decision of the heart and the will. It is also a decision that we must make repeatedly throughout our lives. Second, we must be diligent to remove things from our lives that will tempt us to follow Him wrongly or worship things besides Him. These things will be different for each of us. We must ask the Lord to reveal those things to us and do the hard work of removing them.
- **Worship according to God’s plan:** The second factor related to worship in this passage is God’s plan for worship. We must worship according to His plan. Of the nations of the world, God chose to have a special relationship with Israel. As part of the special relationship, the omnipresent God of the universe chose to manifest His presence in their midst. At the time of Deuteronomy, that place was the Tabernacle. Later, after they had settled the land, He would choose a place from among the tribes for the Tabernacle to rest. This place was initially at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1; 1 Sam. 1:3). Later, King David would set aside land in Jerusalem for the Temple, and Solomon would build a permanent structure there. God wanted His people to worship Him at these special places only.
 - **Application:** Things are a little different for God’s people today. However, we should realize that, like the Israelites, “God decides the best way for them [and us] to worship.” (Preaching, 367) It is true that we do not have to go to a specific place to worship the Lord because the individual believer is the temple of God (2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:14-22). “We are the temple of God, all of our life is one act of worship.” (Preaching, 368) If you act differently in a ‘holy’ place, you should remember *that you are the holy place*. We will talk more about God’s plan for worship alluded to in the passage by a reference to the sacrifices. But before we even talk about the hows of worship, we should remember that God dictates the plan for worship in our private lives, in our public lives, and in our congregations. One aspect of God’s plan is corporate worship.
 - **Reread:** Deuteronomy 12:7 (See Notes Box)
- **Rejoice in worship together:** God knew there was something special about worshipping Him as a group. He has designed us for community, and He wanted Israel to worship Him as a community. Moreover, the Lord tells us that our

worship should be a time of rejoicing and celebration. As part of the Israelites' customs, they would eat together as part of their worship. In verse 7, we see that these meals were not times of contemplation. Instead, they were to "rejoice" because God has blessed them.

- **Application:** Some of us enjoy being alone at times, and some of us find large groups a little overwhelming. However, as regenerated, saved people, there is something special about worshiping the Lord with a group of other regenerated, saved people. The Lord wants us to worship Him as a community of faith. Moreover, He wants our worship to be celebratory. Some of us can celebrate the Lord with music accompanied by a pipe organ. Others can celebrate Him with music accompanied by a fiddle or an electric guitar. In the next passage, we will see there is more to worship than singing, but since this is the most common form of worship for groups, we need to consider our heart posture during worship. It should be celebratory since "the Lord your God has blessed you" with a great salvation.

Summarize Transition: Moses instructs the people on the foundational issues related to worship of God. First, we must decide to worship Him alone. Second, we must remove any temptations to do otherwise. Third, we are to worship Him in celebration together. In the next passage, we will explore some other aspects of worship.

2. WORSHIP GOD (DEUT. 12:8-11)

Read (or have someone read) Deuteronomy 12:8-11.

Explain: In verses 8-11a, Moses again reiterates that God will establish a centralized place for the people to come and worship Him. In the second half of verse 11, he basically repeats what he said in verse 6. In those two verses, Moses reveals what the people are to do when they come to worship the Lord. In essence, when they come to worship, they are coming to give. Fernando tells a story that helps us see this in the modern context. "A clergyman wrote a wealthy and influential businessman, requesting a [donation] to a worthy charity. He promptly received a curt refusal that ended by saying, 'As far as I can see, this Christian business is just one continuous give, give, give.' After a brief interval, the clergyman answered, 'I wish to thank you for the best definition of the Christian life that I have yet heard.'" (Preaching, 397) Every time the Israelites came to worship, they came to give to the Lord. They brought burnt offerings to atone for their sin. They also brought their tithes and offerings. The reasons and motivations for the offerings vary. Some were freewill gifts given to the priests, others were related to a vow made by the worshipper, and others were related to the giving of the firstborn of the herd. "Tithe" is an old English word that means "tenth." The word has come to mean giving a tenth of one's income to the Lord. The basic instructions regarding the tithe are given in Leviticus and Numbers.

Read: Leviticus 27:30 and Numbers 18:21 (See Notes Box)

Notes:

Deuteronomy 12:7

⁷ You will eat there in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice with your household in everything you do, because the Lord your God has blessed you.

Notes on verse 8:

"What is in view is the permanency of a central site, one to be chosen by the Lord at some indeterminate point in the future." (NAC, 223)

"This does not suggest that worship could be carried out in the place and manner dictated by personal whim, even in the desert, but only that no fixed and permanent site had yet been selected as the place of the Lord's dwelling." (NAC, 224)

Explain: We might ask ourselves two questions related to these passages. 1) Why did the people bring the tithe to the Levites? 2) Should Christians give a tithe today? Let's look at the first question to start with.

Ask: Does anyone know why they brought the tithe to the Levites? (Allow time for answers.)

Explain: One practical reason the Levites received the tithe is that *they did not* receive an inheritance of land (Num. 18:20). Generally, offerings to the Lord consisted of agricultural produce (meat and things grown in the ground). God gave the people the land and caused it to produce in abundance. The Levites had no land on which to produce such things. We should note that the Levites were required to tithe. The Lord instructed them to give ten percent of what was given to them (Num. 18:26). For both the people and Levites, this reminds them of the spiritual reality that God provides all they have, and the tithe was a "token of repayment." (Preaching, 398)

The second practical reason the people brought their tithes to the Levites is that the Levites did the work to maintain the Tabernacle (later the Temple). Their work also made it possible for the people to worship the Lord. (See David Payne's comments in Preaching, 398)

Should Christians Tithe?: Tithing is mandated in the OT. Morley notes that nowhere in the NT is the Christian explicitly told to give ten percent to the church. Fernando explains, though, that generally, while we do not "observe all the practices prescribed" in the OT, the principles revealed in the Law are guides for us to follow. (c.f. Preaching, 400) Morley goes on to explain that the NT does speak of giving, and we find the related principles in the OT:

- The poor should be cared for (1 Cor. 16:1; Gal. 2:10; Deut. 14:28-29)
- Those who give can trust the Lord to provide for them (2 Cor. 9:10; Mal. 3:10)
- Those who minister should receive support (1 Cor. 9:14; Num. 18:20ff)
- Giving should be done joyously (2 Cor. 9:7; Deut. 12:7)¹

In the very early days of the church, there was no formalized way to support the work of the ministry. However, Charles Feinberg notes that "In time the tithe came to be regarded generally after the pattern of the Jewish Synagogue." (Preaching, 400) By the second century Irenaeus wrote, "The Jews were constrained to a regular payment of tithes; Christians, who have liberty, assign all their possessions to the Lord, bestowing freely not the lesser portion of their property, since they have the hope of greater things."

Notes:

Leviticus 27:30

30 Every tenth of the land's produce, grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.

Number 18:21

²¹ Look, I have given the Levites every tenth in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work they do, the work of the tent of meeting.

Numbers 18:20

²⁰ The Lord told Aaron, "You will not have an inheritance in their land; there will be no portion among them for you. I am your portion and your inheritance among the Israelites." (Number 18:22-32 give more details)

¹ See Brian K. Morley, "Tithe, Tithing," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 779.

In other words, He is arguing that Christians who have been given so much are to think of the tenth as “the lower portion, the minimum standard.” Similarly, James Lewis Kraft, the founder of the food products company, said cheekily, “I don’t believe in tithing...but it’s a good place to start.” (Preaching, 400-401) In a 2023 study, LifeWay Research reported that “While more than 3 in 4 churchgoers believe giving a tithe is biblical, only half (51%) give 10% or more of their income to the church they attend.”²

Discuss: What are the positive outcomes for the individual and the church when a person determines to give the tithe?

Explain: Fernando states, “Money is certainly not the most important factor in the work of God’s kingdom. But there can be no doubt that so much more could be done if Christians gave more generously.” (Preaching, 401) It cannot be denied that it takes money to fuel the ministry of the church. Everything from staples to Bibles to evangelist material costs money. This is the practical side of things. But there are also spiritual outcomes for the individual who gives.

Read Numbers 14:23 (See Notes Box)

Explain: Giving the tithe is a part of our spiritual growth. Moses says it helps us learn to “fear the Lord.” We often speak of fearing the Lord as having a sense of reverential awe. One scholar also equates the OT idea of fearing the Lord with the NT idea of belief. (c.f. Preaching, 402-403) When we practice giving, we demonstrate our belief that God is in control and that He can care for us. In Malachi 3:10, the Lord invites us to test Him and see that He will provide for those who are faithful in giving.

Summarize and Transition: Sam Houston, general and first president of the Republic of Texas, was led to the Lord by George W. Baines, the great-grandfather of Lyndon Baines Johnson. Houston’s salvation was rather shocking to some because the rough man was changed significantly. Houston participated in public baptism as a sign of the Lord’s work in his life. After his conversion, he offered to pay half of the salary for the local minister. When asked why he would do this, he replied, “My pocketbook was baptized too.”³ As we saw in the passage, we first worship the Lord by obeying commands. We then worship Him through our commitment to give to His Kingdom work.

3. STAND FIRM (DEUT. 12:29-32)

Read or have someone read Deuteronomy 12:29-32.

Explain: Verse 29 reveals the tension between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. It is God who “annihilates the nations before” Israel. But it is Israel who will “take

Numbers 14:23

²³ You are to eat a tenth of your grain, new wine, and fresh oil, and the firstborn of your herd and flock, in the presence of the Lord your God at the place where he chooses to have his name dwell, so that you will always learn to fear the Lord your God.

² <https://research.lifeway.com/2023/04/25/churchgoers-are-still-tithing-more-comfortable-doing-so-outside-of-church/> (accessed 11/1/2025).

³ <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2003/september/14571.html> and Preaching, 399.

possession of” the land and drive out the people. They will have to do the work, but they will do it in the power of the Lord. Moses then challenges the people to stand firm in the face of future temptation. He and the Lord know that the people will become curious about the Canaanite religion. He cautions them to avoid asking questions about the false religions and inserting pagan ways of worship into their worship of the Lord. The practices of the Canaanites were detestable to the Lord. The Israelites might be tempted to adopt a practice here and there, but God knows that this will put them on the road to the terrible actions of the pagans, like child sacrifice.

We can learn from the instructions of Moses.

Discuss: How might a believer or a church adopt the practices of other faiths? (Teacher’s Note: You might have to help your group think about this. You can use the examples below to invite conversation. You might ask: How can the practices of Eastern religions invade the church? How can the secular beliefs of the environmentalist movement invade the church? How can the worship of money or fame invade the church?)

Explain: We live in a pluralistic world. This means we are surrounded by many other faiths and ways of “worshipping.” We might adopt the practices of others in several ways. For example, a very powerful idol is money and the love of money. The “health and wealth” gospel can lead to detestable practices in the church. Another example is the worship of nature and environmentalism. While we should practice biblical stewardship of the land, we should not fall prey to beliefs that attribute souls to trees, and we should not pray to “mother nature.” One final detestable practice is called syncretism. This is the practice of folding beliefs of different faiths into one. Practices from Eastern religions, like Buddhist-style meditation or practices from indigenous American religions, should not be folded into the Christian faith. While we should know enough about these faiths to defend our own, we should not dive too deep into learning about them, and we, for sure, should not adopt their worship practices because it becomes a slippery slope away from proper worship of the Lord.

Summarize and Transition: Moses is reminding the people not to get too comfortable with other religions and to stand firm in their worship of the one true God. We can be reminded that understanding correct doctrine is important, and we should not be too curious about or too comfortable with unbiblical worship practices.

CONCLUDE

This lesson took us in several different directions today. So, let’s be reminded and challenged:

- 1) We are to worship God according to His plan. Are you committed to worshipping regularly with other believers in joy?
- 2) We are to worship God by giving to His Kingdom work. Are you stewarding your finances so that you can give to God’s Kingdom? Are you giving back to Him what He deserves?
- 3) We are to guard our worship and belief so that we worship the Lord rightly. Are you committed to learning proper doctrine (the Truth about God) and avoiding false religions?