

Sunday School Lesson for November 9, 2025
Deuteronomy 12:1-11 and 29-32

Welcome to Sunday School on the go from the First Baptist Church in Tallassee. I'm Jim Glass, one of the teachers in the Pairs and Spares Class, and, on this second Sunday of November, we've been tracing the steps of the Israelites as they make their way to the Promised Land after their miraculous deliverance from Egypt. For the last couple of weeks, we've been reviewing portions of Moses' last three messages to the children of Israel as they prepare to cross over the Jordan River to begin their conquest of the Promised Land. Our focal texts for today are found in the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter twelve, verses one through eleven and 29 through 32.

Last week, we heard Moses explain to the people the importance of the greatest commandment found in chapter six, verses four and five: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." After explaining how they were to live out that commandment in their daily lives and ensure that every generation following conformed their lives to that standard, Moses continued in chapter seven to explain why all the Canaanites were to be eliminated from the land they were about to enter and all their religious symbols and idols destroyed, and, in chapter eight, the blessings that would come to them if they were to carry out those instructions faithfully.

In chapter nine, Moses reminded them that it would not have been for any righteousness of their own that would grant them success in inhabiting the land, for their failures to follow the Lord were obvious, but that it would be the Lord's judgment on the sin of the Canaanites that God would use the people of Israel to destroy them. Moses then recalls the events at Mount Sinai when he received the Ten Commandments from the Lord along with a few other details of their travels, concluding in verse 22 with, "Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven."

Because of all that the Lord had done for them, often in spite of their unfaithfulness to Him, chapter eleven opens with the words, “You shall therefore love the LORD your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always.” Moses urges them to remember all that the Lord has done for them, echoing the words we heard last week about keeping the Law of the Lord with promises of blessing and warnings of curses if they fail to obey the Word of the Lord; the chapter closing in verses 31 and 32 with, “For you are to cross over the Jordan to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving you. And when you possess it and live in it, you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the rules that I am setting before you today.”

Throughout this message, you can hear the urgency of Moses’ words as he tries to prepare God’s chosen people for the blessings as well as the perils that lie before them, reminding them often to “love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.” And that same message carries over into chapter twelve to the conclusion of his second message in chapter 26. Chapter twelve through chapter sixteen, verse seventeen deal with the religious and ecclesiastical life of the people, chapter sixteen verse eighteen through chapter eighteen verse 22 address the rights and duties of the civil and spiritual leaders of the nation, and chapters nineteen through 22 give us various regulations concerning the civil and domestic well-being of the whole congregation and its individual members.

In the first nine verses of chapter twelve, our first focal text for today, Moses begins to apply the leading principles of the Ten Commandments to the religious, civil, and social life of the nation of Israel in harmony with their calling to be the holy nation of the Lord. Here’s what he told the people, beginning in the first verse: “These are the statutes and rules that you shall be careful to do in the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on

the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire. You shall chop down the carved images of their gods and destroy their name out of that place. You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way. But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go, and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, your vow offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. And there you shall eat before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the Lord your God has blessed you. You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes, for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the Lord your God is giving you.”

As Moses now begins to delineate the requirements of the statutes and rules that he introduced us to back in chapter six, the general outline is not what we would have expected. When we look at our modern laws, we find a series of statutes, carefully arranged in distinct categories, explaining individual duties and punishments for failing to conform to the law.

But we don't find that here. There's no orderly sequence, logical arrangement, naming of penalties for disobedience, or means of enforcement. In a way, it appears to be more of a prescription for leading a good life than what we would consider a “law.” For example, in chapter fifteen, verse seven, we read, “If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.” If you don't do this, there's no punishment prescribed for disobedience. If a person does harden his heart against his poor brother, the

only penalty seems to be the sting of conscience that helps him understand that he's not living according to the will of God.

In spite of this difference between our conception of law and what we find here in the second reading of the Law--“Second Law” being the meaning of the name, “Deuteronomy,” as a renewal of the covenant between God and His chosen people--what we’re dealing with here is Divine law may since its Author is God. As the inspiration of scripture makes use of forms of expression that were common at the time and place at which the human scribe wrote it, we shouldn’t be surprised that these laws would appear in a form suited for its audience in accordance with God’s plan for His people.

You’ll remember that, in the preamble to the Law Moses received on Mount Sinai found in Exodus, chapter twenty, the Lord said, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Because of Who He is and what He did for them in redeeming them from bondage in Egypt in fulfillment of the covenant obligations He made to them, they have certain covenant obligations toward Him as well. This covenant is the foundation upon which God’s relationship with the Israelites was built.

The first covenant obligation of the people of Israel was “You shall have no other gods before me,” and the second quickly followed: “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” As these laws are applied to the religious life of the people as they enter “the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth,” we find, first, a command to destroy and eliminate all places and memorials of Canaanite worship, followed by the established rule that the Israelites were to worship the Lord their God with sacrifices and gifts only in the place which He Himself should choose.

The choice of mountains and hills for places of worship had its origin in the wide-spread belief that the higher you were in elevation, the closer you were to God, and we find Abraham, Moses, and others worshiping on a mountain. So, it wasn't the location so much as it was the purpose for which that location was used. We read about many of these places in our Old Testaments and know the purpose of their use by the names they bore that included the name of the idol worshiped there; for example, Bethshemesh, Bethbaalmeon, and Bethpeor, just to name a few.

Not only were places of worship located on mounts or other elevated places to be destroyed, "every green tree" that served as a place of worship was to be cut down. In this case, a stand of close-growing, trees offered a place of shade and seclusion for contemplating or making sacrifices to the idols Canaanite worshipers had created by their hands or in their imaginations. Not only that, to many of that day, the rustling of the leaves indicated the movement or the speech of their gods, and there were those, like Baalam whom we encountered back in Numbers, chapter 22, who supposedly could interpret the messages sent through the swishing sounds of the leaves.

To the Canaanites, groves and high places were locations where the gods or spirits that empowered their idols lived and could be found. Additionally, some gods of that day were known by the types of trees that were devoted to them as the oak to Jupiter, the laurel to Apollo, the ivy to Bacchus, the olive to Minerva, and the myrtle tree to Venus. Since there is only one God, all these places where the idols of the people who lived in the land were worshiped were to be completely eliminated, never to be used for the same purpose ever again.

Not only were the sites where idol-worship was practiced to be eliminated, but all the objects of worship and all the altars where sacrifices were made were also to be destroyed--verse three: "You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire." Altars were raised, stone platforms where human, animal, plant, or liquid sacrifices were laid out and burned, their aroma rising upward to the pleasure of the idol to

whom the sacrifice was made. These were to be demolished, lest the Israelites should attempt to make use of them either as originally intended or a place for their individualized worship of God.

The pillars would have been a statue of the idol or some arrangement of stones to mark a place of worship. And the Asherim or “Asherah poles” were to be “burned with fire.” Asherah was the goddess of fertility, and the various images erected to honor her / represented the generative power of nature in the most graphic manner. As one Bible dictionary notes, “Its symbol was the stem of a tree deprived of its boughs, and rudely shaped into an image, and planted in the ground.”

Because of their association with carved trees, the places of Asherah worship were commonly called “groves,” and the Hebrew word “asherah” and its plural form, “asherim,” could refer either to the goddess or to a grove of trees.

Phase four of this requirement was that they were to “chop down the carved images of their gods.” Once again, every image made of wood was to be destroyed. Back in chapter seven, verse 25, Moses not only said, “The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire,” he went on to instruct them not to save the precious metals that often covered these carved images: “You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them or take it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to the LORD your God.” These images and the worship that accompanied them were such a great threat to the children of Israel that he added in verse 26: “And you shall not bring an abominable thing into your house and become devoted to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest and abhor it, for it is devoted to destruction.”

The eradication of these sites, altars, and images was to be so complete that they would “destroy their name out of that place.” The name of the idol was not simply what it was called. The name represented everything that idol

was, including its supposed character, power, and influence. As we said in our study of Deuteronomy, chapter six, last week, Moses began to explain the Law by declaring, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one,” and we said that it means that the Lord is the only One Who is qualified to bear the Name of “Lord.” Therefore, every other thing that is given the title or the name, “god,” and everything associated with it, is to be purged from this land that they were about to occupy so as to cleanse the land from the blasphemy and wickedness that was currently being practiced; for the wickedness, cruelty, and obscenity of these idolatries were unspeakable.

In every way, the name of the idol and everything associated with it was to be completely erased. Not only was this an expression of God’s righteous judgment against those who chose to worship in this way, it was essential for God’s chosen people to rid the land of these impurities if they were to obey the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

We don’t worship the same kinds of idols the Canaanites did, but we should have the same attitude towards anything that we would place before God or that would hinder our worship of God today and purge it from our lives with the same fervency that Moses called for here.

As a final reminder, Moses tells them in verse four: “You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way.” God is not to be worshiped on the high places, in the groves, through sacrifices made on altars scattered throughout the land, or by the use of pillars or carved images. While the Canaanites worshiped gods they “discovered” in nature and in creation, the true God has not only revealed His eternal power and Person in the works of creation--“his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made,” as Paul writes in the first chapter of Romans, verse twenty--, but His personal Being, revealed to the world in love and holiness, in grace and righteousness, having been made known to us, created in His image, in the words and works of salvation. It is in these testimonies of His saving

presence that He has set for Himself a Name, and it is in His Name that He dwelt among His people in the cloud between the cherubim, and nowhere else.

As a result, it would be God Who would choose where He was to be worshiped, and not any individual, as the Canaanites had done with their gods--verse five: “But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go.” And the place the Lord had chosen was the Tabernacle then and, later, Solomon’s Temple. It was there alone that the Lord made Himself known to His chosen people--the place where He “put His Name,” manifesting His own Presence as He chose to do so.

As God of the whole earth, He didn’t confine Himself to the Tabernacle or the Temple. He could make His presence known wherever He chose and He could accept the sacrifices of His people in other places, independent of the Tabernacle or Temple; and there were times when this was done, because--all along--it was mercy and not sacrifice that the Lord required--Hosea, chapter six, verse six. However, the unity of worship, and through this unity, the purity of worship that Moses called for here--depended on the people of Israel bringing all their sacrificial offerings to the place where the Lord made His Name--that is to say, His presence--known. That unity dissolved at several points in Israel’s history as various leaders set up alternate sites, claiming them to be the place where God was to be worshiped--Judges, chapters eight and eighteen, and First Kings, chapter twelve, for example.

It was to be there, “the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation,” that they were to bring all the offerings listed in verse six and celebrate the sacrificial meals referred to in verse seven. We learned about the various sacrifices in our lesson from Leviticus, chapters nine and ten back on February ninth of this year, but here, Moses lists the sacrifices in four pairs. First, the sacrifices intended for the altar: the burnt offerings and sacrifices being particularly mentioned as the two

primary kinds, that, according to Numbers, chapter fifteen, verse four, included meat-offerings and drink-offerings.

Second were the “tithes and the contribution that you present.” The tithes were the tithes of the field--produce and cattle, in accordance with the instructions found in Leviticus, chapter 27, verses thirty through 33 and Numbers, chapter eighteen, verses 21 through 24, that were to be brought to the sanctuary because they were to be offered to the Lord. The sacrificial meals came from the “contributions” or “gifts,” and various groups were allowed to partake of portions of these sacrifices.

Third were the “vow offerings and freewill offerings.” The priests and Levites had a share in some of the offerings, those who made some of the offerings were to eat their part of the sacrifice--particularly the tithe and peace offerings--, and all the congregation was to participate in the freewill offerings and the various feasts.

Last were the offerings of the firstborn of the herd and flock that were commanded in Exodus, chapter thirteen and Numbers, chapter eighteen. The flesh of these offerings could be eaten by the priest as well as by the person who made the offering.

Because God is Holy and He had chosen the people of Israel out of all the peoples of the earth to spread the truth about Him, they must also be holy and united in their worship and in their pursuit of the one, true God. Only by eliminating all forms of idolatry and uniting as one in worship could they realize the destiny that Lord set before them.

Lest the people misunderstand Moses' instructions here as they compare their recent practices with the more permanent arrangements he's setting forth, he reminds them in verses eight and nine, “You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes, for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the Lord your God is giving you.”

Now, we don't know exactly what they were doing there that day, but it seems that, because they had been on the move for the last forty years, there could have been days when the Tabernacle wasn't assembled and there was no opportunity to offer the daily or individual sacrifices. As a result, some of the sacrifices had been ignored or neglected to the point that individuals would bring their offerings whenever they pleased, rather than when the regulations concerning the sacrifices prescribed them to be brought. Once they entered the Promised Land and the Tabernacle was set up for what could possibly be the last time, there would be no excuse for not bringing their offerings and sacrifices as required.

Moses concludes this alert notification in verse nine with an interesting concept that we find in the New Testament: "For you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the Lord your God is giving you." There was a rest for the people of Israel that was to be expected when they conquered the land, purged it of all the pagan influences, and followed the Lord's instructions. They would find rest from their enemies; they would find rest in the inheritance that the Lord was giving to them; and they would dwell securely in the place God had prepared for them.

This rest is a picture of the rest that we find in Christ that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews speaks about. There were those, he writes in the closing verse of chapter three who "were unable to enter [His rest] because of unbelief." However, for those who have entrusted their lives to Christ, he tells us in verse three of chapter four: "For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, 'As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."'" Then, adding in the idea of rest from the fourth commandment to keep the Sabbath holy, he concludes in verse nine by saying, "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience."

There was a type of rest awaiting the children of Israel as they followed the statutes and rules of the Lord that Moses has been reminding them about--a rest they could only enjoy as they trusted God, did what He had instructed them to do, and thereby experienced to the fullest the inheritance He had prepared for them. For us today, there is a rest as we cease from our attempts to earn our salvation and trust in the Lord Jesus alone to be our Savior, and experience the fullness of the inheritance that Peter celebrates in the opening verses of his first letter when he writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." And there is yet an eternal rest to be experienced as you--First Peter, chapter one, verse nine--"[obtain] the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

So, with these promises of rest and the inheritance God has promised them, the people of Israel are to strive to experience the fullness of the rest awaiting them as they remain faithful to the Lord's statutes and rules as Moses explains in these chapters.

In verses ten through nineteen, Moses reminds them of their duties to present the offerings as the Lord has prescribed and to care for the priests. Verses twenty through 27 contain instructions for eating meat and a reminder about the people's responsibility--once again--to offer the sacrifices according to the Lord's instructions. Then Moses recaps all that he's just told them with yet another reminder of the importance of following the Lord's instructions in verse 28 : "Be careful to obey all these words that I command you, that it may go well with you and with your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God."

Our second focal text for today follows in verses 29 through 32 as Moses underscores once again the imperative of holy living even as they prepare to

seize this land inhabited by those who have rejected the one God to serve idols of their own making: “When the Lord your God cuts off before you the nations whom you go in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, take care that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods?--that I also may do the same.’ You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. ”Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.

This warning begins with a reminder that it would be the Lord Himself who would be cutting off the nations before them as they came behind Him, so to speak, to claim the land and dwell in it. After all, God was bringing judgment upon the Amorites and others who lived in the land, just as he had explained to Abraham all the way back in Genesis, chapter fifteen, verse sixteen.

Because all these nations will have been cut off by the Lord--the word we have translated as “cut off” is the same word we find after the flood when the Lord promises Noah in Genesis, chapter nine, verse eleven, “I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” The potential for a complete elimination of the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Midianites, and the Gibeonites was a real possibility as the people followed the Lord’s instructions.

So when the Lord destroys the nations that currently occupy the land, the children of Israel are fervently warned not to become ensnared by following their practices and customs. After all, if the Lord destroyed them because of the wickedness of their religious beliefs and rituals, why in the world would anyone think that God wouldn’t do the same to them if they were to start

doing the same things? But the warning was certainly necessary as if Moses knew exactly what they were going to do, in spite of the fact that God had brought such widespread judgment upon these people for what they had done.

He even tells them, “Do not inquire about their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods?--that I also may do the same.’” Not only were they not to practice the same things, they weren’t even to be curious about what they had done lest they be tempted to try it themselves. Moses knew that some of the Israelites were thinking, “Even though the people of the land have been conquered, the gods who still possess the land have to be appeased, so how can I go about appeasing the gods of the land we’ve just conquered while still fulfilling my obligations to Yahweh?” or “Can I use the worship rites and practices of the people who lived here to worship God? It seemed to work for them, wouldn’t it help me worship God myself?”

NO!! Don’t even go there. Why? Because--verse 31: “You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.” And we have testimony from the Old Testament that shows they did exactly that; for example, Second Kings, chapter three, verse 27, where “the king of Moab ... took his oldest son ... and offered him for a burnt offering.” Archaeological excavations of former places of worship in Israel have uncovered jars with the remains of infants, some not more than a week old, with some of the skeletal remains showing marks of having been burned.

The people living in the land the Lord is giving to you were destroyed because of what they worshiped and the way they worshiped--it was wicked, cruel, obscene, and an unspeakable abomination against the Lord God, and God hates those things. Don’t even think about asking how they did what they did. All you need to know was that their superstitions were an abomination before God and unworthy of the elect people of the one, true God.

Tragically, the children of Israel failed to follow these instructions, for the writer of Psalm 106 tells us in verse 35: “They did not destroy the peoples, as the LORD commanded them, but they mixed with the nations and learned to do as they did. They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood.”

This chapter closes with one, final reminder to do what God had called them to do: “Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.” Back in chapter four, Moses had given them this same warning and illustrated it by reminding them of what had happened with Baal-peor when the Israelites had intermarried with the Midianites as part of Baalam’s plan to defeat them. Once again, you can almost hear Moses pleading with the people not to fall away from worshiping and serving God, and we’ll hear even more next week. The people were to honor the Word of God as it had been delivered to them, neither adding to it nor taking away from it, for it would bring them into the fullness of God’s plan for them.

These warnings should call us today to a higher and deeper level of holiness in our own lives, allowing the Holy Spirit to examine us in every way, praying the prayer of David in Psalm 139: “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” Wherever there are idols in our lives today, we should apply the same scorched earth approach to rid ourselves of anything and everything that stands in our way to a life of holiness and devotion to loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength.

If only the children of Israel had heeded Moses’ call--how different their history would have been, but, apart from faith in the Lord--a faith that results in obedience to His law and design for our lives--there was no hope then, and there is no hope now.

Thank you for being part of our brief look at the journey of faith the Israelites followed as they made their way to the homeland God promised to them through Abraham. Next week, we continue to consider Moses' final message to the children of Israel, this time turning to the first six verses of chapter 28 and verses fifteen through nineteen where we'll be introduced to the blessings and curses that would come upon the Israelites if they succeeded or failed to do what the Lord had called them to do.

As always, as it's still a good thing to do, keep calm, trust in the Lord, and wash your hands! God bless you!

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