

## **(12/14) Deut 12,13,16 “Worship” - Handout<sup>8</sup>**

### **Summary**

This week's study spans three sub-sections all dealing with the worship of Israel. Chapter 12 emphasizes the differences between the cultic practices of the other nations and Israel. Chapter 13 discusses the importance of serving God alone and calls for the elimination of people, leaders, and whole communities that advocate following other gods. Chapter 16 describes three specific annual pilgrimage feasts that comprised the annual religious calendar.

### **Deuteronomy 12**

As Moses repeats the law to the people of Israel concerning the worship of YHWH (God) there are some particular themes and emphasis that emerge:

- There is a dramatic transition from wanderers to settled worshippers.
- Strong prohibition about adopting the practices of the people they are displacing.
- The phrase “don’t worship as they do” seems to mean that Israel should not worship anywhere they choose, under every tree, atop every mountain, etc. Instead there is only ONE place to properly worship God, at “..the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling.”
- The ONE proper place of worship is the place where God is present, where his name dwells
- Centralization does not necessarily mean Jerusalem. Josh 8.30ff (Shechem), Jer 7.12 (Shiloh)
- There is a strong emphasis on worship as a family “sons, daughters, menservants, maidservants, and Levites”
- The primary mood and activity of these worship gatherings is to “rejoice before the Lord your God.”
- Clear distinction is made between sacrificial slaughtering and other animal slaughtering (12.15f)

### **Discussion**

1. Why was it important for Israel to “centralize” their worship in the Promised Land?
2. Since the specific town associated with “the place where God causes his name to dwell” is not mentioned, how might this be adapted in later years of Israelite history? (1 Kings 12:25f; Deut 27:1-8)
3. How do the dominant themes of this worship section enlighten our worship today? What is central and basic about worship?
4. Worship is clearly associated with the presence of God, how does being in the presence of God impact the nature and activity of worship?

### **Deuteronomy 13**

After describing the importance of keeping the worship of YHWH free from pagan-cultic influences, the author addresses how to deal with people who attempt to influence Israelites to follow other gods. The treatment is severe; they are to be purged from Israel. This emphasizes the extreme concern about

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<sup>8</sup> Derived from Mark Hamilton, “Now Choose Life! Deuteronomy for a Renewing Church”, 2001.

syncretism, the mixing of pagan worship with the worship of YHWH that threatened Israel's existence. It is interesting to note that this is precisely the problem that led to Israel's downfall in later years.

## **Discussion**

1. What other gods threaten our practice of worship?
2. In what ways is the danger of worshipping other gods still a problem for us?
3. How do we protect ourselves from the influences of worshipping other gods?

## ***Deuteronomy 16***

Chapter 16 describes three annual pilgrimage feasts and a brief mention of judges. The three feasts mentioned here are Passover, Weeks or Pentecost, and Tabernacles or Sukkoth. The feast of Pentecost basically coincided with the corn harvest (May/June), while the feast of Sukkoth coincides with the vintage harvest (Sept). The description of the feasts in Deuteronomy differs in some interesting ways from the older descriptions in Exodus and Leviticus. Note the following:

- Passover is changed from a house celebration to being celebrated at the central sanctuary... → pilgrimage feast
- The animal sacrifice associated with Passover is described as a "sacrifice" instead of a simple "slaughtering" (Ex 12.8f) infusing more theological significance into the event.
- (v. 2) speaks of both "flocks" and "herds" indicating that other animals besides lambs were acceptable
- There is no specific mention of the "Feast of Unleavened Bread" which was a separate feast but often followed directly after the Passover meal. Although it is mentioned in v. 16.
- All of the feasts are given specific theological motives
- Passover → remember the time of your departure from Egypt
- Weeks → remember you were slaves in Egypt
- Tabernacles → remember the Lord's blessing

## **Discussion**

1. What advantages / disadvantages are there to having regular religious celebrations?
2. How does the annual cycle of celebrations shape the community of faith? Across generations?
3. How does our annual calendar reflect our understandings about God and his work in our world?