

Deuteronomy 12:1-32

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[0 : 00] I don't know what you thought as Rachel was reading that passage to you. Last month the Daily Telegraph reported that Syrian rebels were burning down churches and desecrating Christian graves.

! A few years ago you may remember the Taliban destroyed a lot of famous and beautiful Buddhist monuments somewhere in Afghanistan. The world was outraged by it. Then we turn to Deuteronomy 12. Look at verse 2. What is the Lord commanding? These sound more like instructions for Islamic State or the Taliban than instructions for a church meeting in West London on a Sunday evening.

You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess serve 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.

Now if we're honest, we probably, even if we feel a little comfortable with that, we wouldn't want our unbelieving neighbour to know that that's what the Bible said and that's what we come to hear tonight, would we?

[1 : 04] Wouldn't they say that was very intolerant, very awful? And perhaps quietly we would like to skip over that passage, would we? Well, let's just start off with what it doesn't mean.

It doesn't mean we leave here tonight and go and ransack the Gurdwara by great and big station or go down to the Hindu temple in the old Baptist church down the road there. Nor does it mean you burn your neighbour's Quran or go into their home if they're Hindu and take apart their little shrine if they've got one.

That is not what it means. But if we do get what this passage means, then it should shape not only what we do as we gather together as God's people, Sunday by Sunday, but also our affections, our desires, our longings, and help us to be the covenant people God has called us to be.

Now to understand this we need to look again closely at the context here. Remember what's happening. Remember who Moses is addressing. They're God's covenant people. He keeps using the covenant name of God.

The Lord is in our translations, Yahweh, all through this passage. It comes to God's covenant people, whom he has rescued from Egypt, brought out of slavery. A holy nation, a people for his own possession, a kingdom of priests.

[2 : 20] A people with the privilege of having the living God in their midst. And of being called to his purposes of bringing his light and blessing to the nations. And so for them, doing what the nations around them did, or doing what they just thought was right in their own eyes, verse 8, would be totally destructive.

Destructive to the whole purpose which God had called them. Destructive to their status as being a holy nation. Destructive to their mission of bringing God's light and blessing to the world.

Destructive to their relationship with the God who had brought them. Would result in breaking the covenant. The relationship God had entered into them with.

And so the basic message of this chapter is that because the Lord is the true covenant keeping God, we must worship him as he instructs us. Because he is the true covenant God.

We must worship him as he instructs us. Not just doing what feels right. Not just doing what other people do. Not just falling into the patterns of the world around us. But doing what he instructs us.

[3 : 30] And you can see why that is the Lord's concern if you look over at verse 28. Be careful to obey all these words that I command you. Why? 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. He is a God who is good and loving.

And wants it to go well with his people. And that's why worship is to be good in his sight. And not according to our tastes and feelings. So that's the main reason.

I hope also you noticed as Rachel was reading. The kind of, the repeated heartbeat. The repeated frame of this passage. Look at, you know, the Lord isn't out to ruin us. Or to kill us.

But to give us real joy. Remember verse 7. As you follow these commands. You shall eat before the Lord your God. And you shall rejoice. You and your households. We'll look down to verse 12.

[4 : 27] And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God. We'll look at the end of verse 18. That you shall eat them before the Lord your God. And the place of the Lord your God will choose. You, your son, your daughter, your male servant, your female servant.

The Levite within your town. And you shall rejoice. Before the Lord your God. In all that you undertake. The Lord God wants what is good for his people. And the result, the consequence. Of worshipping him as he instructs. Is true joy. Rejoicing in his presence. Well that's, that's the first thing to bear in mind. The second thing to bear in mind is. What were these pagan religions doing? What were the Canaanites up to? That the Lord wanted Israel to destroy. Alright, so look back to verse 3 for a moment. Verses 2 and 3. We need to understand this.

He says, let me find the chapter again. You shall destroy all the places where the nations whom you dispossess serve their gods. So what were they doing? Well I want us to see they were sincere.

[5 : 29] They were speaking, they were sincerely seeking a spiritual connection. That's why we read on in verse 2. You shall, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree.

They worshipped on the high mountains and on the hills because they thought that was getting closer to heaven. That's what they were doing. You know, gods are up there in the sky somewhere. We want to connect with the gods. If we go up in the mountains, that will be good.

I know we hear people today saying things like, you know, being up in the Swiss Alps is a really spiritual experience. I remember seeing a bit of that program going up the Yangtze before Christmas.

And Sue, whatever her name is, I've forgotten. Sue Perkins, the comedian who was hosting it. At one point she got to Tibet. And she was with a Tibetan farmer around these amazing mountains. And she said, no wonder you believe in God.

This is your office. Look at it. High places, seeking spiritual connection. They're all so sincere. Look at verse 31. They were so sincere in their worship of God.

[6 : 29] So sincere in what they were doing to get God's favor that they would even sacrifice their children. Verse 31. You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way. For every abominable thing the Lord hates, they have done for their gods.

They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. See, they were sincere. They were sincere. They were seeking spiritual connection. And the goal of their worship was really man-centered.

It was all about them. What they wanted was fertility and therefore prosperity. So back in verse 2, the Lord talks about every green tree. And then verse 3, the Asheri poles.

These were all symbols of fertility. What they wanted, the whole Canaanite religion was essentially based on sex. It included orgies and going to shrine prostitutes. The idea was to try and get their gods to make the land fertile, make their crops fertile.

Or make their families fertile so they had more children. What was the ultimate consequence of all that? Fertility led to prosperity. They wanted to get rich.

[7 : 38] They wanted the crops to go well. Now think about those things. They were seeking spiritual connection. Being sincere in what they believe. Wanting, essentially, fertility and wealth.

And doing all this through man's design. Through their own plans. Don't you see those things around us today? Think about spiritual practices today. For example, I have a friend who tells me that the Lord Buddha is his spiritual guide.

So he comes to church occasionally. Although he doesn't need to. Because he's got a connection with Jesus. He doesn't need to come to church. He's got Buddha as his spiritual guide. Mixing Christianity with religions around him.

I have another friend who, after a very hard demanding day at work, goes home, exercises and practices Zen meditation. I have another friend who says she wants to make it to church.

And it's about 200 meters from her front door to the church. She doesn't manage it though. But she does often light a candle on a Sunday morning. It seems to me that yoga and mindfulness are often

people seeking spiritual connections.

[8 : 46] People do it through diets as well. You know, the latest sort of fad is this ancient grains diet. I shouldn't mock it too much. Because that's actually what a lot of celiac people have to eat. But with it can come a whole kind of package of pseudo-spiritual stuff.

Going back to primitive cavemen. We'll be more in touch with our nature. Of course others will feel that things are more spiritual. If they've got crystals.

Or they're meditating. Or a friend of mine last night. A good Christian friend. Posted it on Facebook. A picture of what I thought was a rock concert. Turns out it was a great worship service she was at. And she said it was really great. Because at one point the lead singer of the worship band came off the stage and was singing right behind them. Rejoicing in the presence of the lead singer. Anyway, others will talk about having a real...

People who have a gift of leading worship. Who lead us into God's presence. What do they mean by that? They mean a certain feeling of euphoria that you could also get at a rugby match or a rock concert.

[9 : 54] Or wherever your particular thing that gives you a buzz is. Because you see so often we can fall into thinking about spiritual things the way the rest of the world does.

And again, think about the goals that these people were pursuing. Wealth. Prosperity. Fertility. Go to WH Smith and look at the magazines.

What investments you should make. Look at Cosmopolitan and Psychologies and these kind of magazines. All telling you about how to have a great sex life. See, modern Western materialism is basically Canaanite paganism rebranded for the 21st century.

Verse 31, the Lord talks about the sons and daughters being sacrificed for the farmers of their gods. Well, child sacrifice happens all over the city, doesn't it? Not usually through burning.

But through abortion. For children who are too inconvenient. Or often for children who are sacrificed on the great altar of Korea. See, our land is not much different when we look closer to the land the Israelites are taking over.

[11 : 06] So the challenge for us is to be faithful in worshipping the living God. Our covenant God. As he has called us to. And not slip into the spiritual sounding practices of the world around us.

Or the desires and ambitions of the world around us. Which are just Canaanite ones, really. So why shouldn't we? Why should we be different? Well, as we look briefly at this. Moses gives us at least three reasons.

Three reasons. Firstly, three reasons to take God at his word. And worship the living God as he instructs us, not as we feel. Firstly, because he's true, he is gracious, and he is generous.

He's true, he's gracious, and generous. So first of all, he's the true covenant God. All these other nations had no revelation. They were just making things up out of their own heads.

Because they're made in God's image and living in God's world. They know there's a God out there. And so they're trying to connect with him, but had no information. It was all imagination, not revelation.

[12 : 05] But the one true God had revealed himself to Israel, hadn't he? He had rescued them out of slavery. He had spoken his word to them at Mount Sinai. And he has redeemed us through the blood of his Son.

He has given us his word here in Scripture. So he's no longer guessing. No guessing at all. He is the true God. And as the true God, he will brook no rivals.

If you look at verses 3 to 5 for a moment. You see what Israel was to do in contrast to what the other nations did. The end of verse 3. Chop down the Asherim poles. Don't worship where they worship.

Why? Destroy their name out of that place. Then verse 4. 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.

See the contrast? The name of those guys was to be obliterated. And the name of the true God was to be exalted and to be the focus and the place of worship. Now what does a name mean?

[13 : 11] Well, a name summed up the whole character, of course. But I can think about what I do when I'm given a book. When I get a book. First thing I do, I write my name in it. What does that say? This is my possession.

I have rights over this. Paul just lent me a book tonight. I better make sure it's got his name in it before I write my own name in it. I won't do that before, I promise. The name was all about ownership.

And possession meant power and authority. There is only one true God. He placed his name in that land and a place in that land. So this is my land. I am in control here.

This belongs to me. You are my people. And so Israel and their worship were to be, were to exhibit that, to show that, to get rid of all this Canaanite stuff.

Because they had no authority there, but the living God did. That's why they were to worship him as he revealed. He's the true God. And what were they to do? Let's pick it up in verse 5.

[14:10] What was all that about?

Because they were the sacrifices that the Lord God had commanded. And the offerings that the Lord God had commanded. So that people could connect with him. So that sinful people could come into his presence.

And enjoy his presence. And as verse 7 says, rejoice in his presence. Now that principle has not changed. Of course the application of it has.

We no longer have a temple, a physical temple to go to, do we? Why is that? Because the story has carried on. The revelation has become more complete.

John chapter 2. The Lord Jesus. The one in whom all the glory of God dwelt. Tabernacled amongst us. Goes into the temple in Jerusalem. And having cleared out the temple says, destroy this temple in three days.

[15:20] I will rebuild it. John adds. John chapter 2 verse 21. He was speaking about the temple of his body. Because Jesus is now the one through whom we have access to the living God.

We don't go to the high places. We don't go to the rock concerts. We don't go to the meditation to have a spiritual connection with God. We go to Jesus. Who is the fulfillment of the temple.

Who is the one who has completed all the sacrifices. So that sinners like you and I can be connected with the living God. And can enjoy his presence. Rather than being terrified by it.

So the place of worship is different. Now we don't go to a place. We go to a person. You should notice verse 7. What the result of this worship is. For Israel as they gather in God's presence.

For us as we come through the Lord Jesus. The living God. Verse 7. You shall eat before the Lord your God. And you shall rejoice. You and your households. In all that you undertake. In all that your Lord your God has blessed you.

[16:26] See we come to God through Jesus. Who fulfills it all. And it's not individualistic. That's what we're hearing this morning. It's not individualistic. We come together.

As God's people. Rejoicing. Together. In his presence. Not only that. It's the future. That awaits us. Look at verse 9.

We'll come back to that point later. Let's just move on. We're to worship the Lord in the way he instructs. Because he's the true covenant God. That's the first reason.

Secondly. Because he's a gracious covenant God. He wants us to enjoy his presence. He wants us to enjoy that forever as well. So let's look at verse 8 for example.

You shall not do according to all that we're doing here today. Everyone doing what is right in his own eyes. It's what they were doing on the journey through the wilderness. Those days are gone. The story is progressing.

[17:25] The Lord Moses tells them. You're not going to do that anymore. Why? For you have not yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the Lord your God is giving you. But when you go over the Jordan and live in the land the Lord your God is giving you to inherit.

And when he gives you rest from all your enemies around so that you live in safety. Then to the place the Lord your God will choose to make his name dwell there. There you shall bring all that I command you.

Your burnt offerings and your sacrifices. Your tithes and the contribution that you present. And all your finest vow offerings that you vow to the Lord. You see all the things that this gracious God gives to his people.

In those verses. He's going to give them a place to live. Rest. An inheritance. A place that was theirs. No more having to deal with enemies. No more frustration.

No more danger of that. A place of their own. Then verse 11. His presence. He will choose a place to make his name dwell there. He makes his name dwell among them.

[18:30] So a place. His presence. And then also a means of pardon. Verse 11. All the offerings he commands. A way to be forgiven. And after he's done all that for them.

What's worship going to be like? It's going to be fantastic. Verse 12. We're going to rejoice before the Lord their God. It's going to be moral worship. It's going to be purity.

Not the immorality of the Canaanite worship. With all its orgies. And child sacrifice. Instead everyone's going to be involved. Verse 12. You shall rejoice before the Lord your God.

You. Your sons. Your daughters. Your male servants. Your female servants. And the Levite that was within your towns. Since he has no portion or inheritance with you. So the Levites were set apart for service towards the tabernacle.

So they weren't given a portion of the land. The Lord was going to be their inheritance. So they couldn't grow crops. They couldn't make money. But they were to be included in this family gathering. As people went to Jerusalem.

[19:29] Went to what became ultimately Jerusalem. To worship God. So this worship was going to be moral. It was going to be enjoyable. They were rejoicing. It was also going to be communal.

Not merely individualistic. And socially responsible. The outsider. The one who had nothing to offer. Was going to be gathered in. See the Lord is a gracious God.

So worshipping him. His people. Become gracious and generous too. As he is. So those who have nothing. Would be included. That's emphasised again. Down in verse 19.

Take care. If we find verse 19. Take care that you do not neglect the Levite. As long as you live in your land. You see worship had this horizontal outworking as well.

To cause God's people to be generous. To look out for the needy. To be socially inclusive. And so should our worship be like that today. She said.

[20:27] Christian worship must be exclusive. Because it is only to the living God. A trine in God has revealed himself. But inclusive. In that it must include everyone. Not just the wealthy.

Or the beautiful people. Or a certain racial demographic. Or a certain socioeconomic group. I've been quite troubled recently. I've had a couple of church plants.

But good Bible believing people. It was suggested to one of them. That we should. We could get a London City Missioner. Working here. To reach out to the. The neighbourhood.

Which is mainly. Kind of council estates. And run down in a city area. Which response was. Well no. We don't want a church for those people. I'm reaching out to the graduates. Starting new jobs here. We don't want to put them off.

By having all these. All these other people here. Really? Really? Well who's your worship about then? If it's about a certain demographic.

[21:29] A certain target audience. Then you've got the wrong target. Because who is the target audience? Who are people to travel to worship? The living triune God.

He's the target audience. No one else. When we worship him in spirit and in truth. Then our worship will be inclusive. Because we'll become as generous.

And gracious as he is. And what we see there. In that worship. Is really only just a foretaste. Of what is to come. Remember what Moses said in verse 9.

He said. You're not yet in the land. But you're not yet come to your rest. And your inheritance. That Lord your God has given you. But when you do. This is what it will be like. Now we haven't yet.

Fully come to our rest. And inheritance. Have we? I mean in a sense we have. As we trust in Christ. We rest for our works. We inherit Christ. But until he comes back. We'll not participate in that inheritance.

[22:29] Nor its fullness. But when he comes back. What will we do for all eternity? We will rejoice in the presence of God. We will see him face to face.

Revelation 22. And it will be inclusive completely. Won't it? People from every nation. Tribe and tongue. Gathered around the throne. See our worship now is a foretaste.

Of the fullness. And the fulfillment of it. One day. When we will truly rejoice. See here we have a gracious God. Who gathers us into his presence.

He gives everything it takes. To bring us into his presence. And we'll enjoy that completely one day. So. Worship the Lord God as he instructs. Because he's the true covenant God.

He is the gracious covenant God. Who wants us to enjoy his presence. We see a third reason as well. Verses 15 to 28. I think people naturally think.

[23 : 27] In our culture. That rules are restrictive. The rules will limit our fun. That they get in the way. And so if God gives us rules about worship. Then surely he's trying to restrict us.

And kill our fun. He wants to. Wants to make life boring and dull. Christianity is all rules. Rules. Rules. Say some people. Well look at verse 15. You see God wants us. The Lord wants us to enjoy his blessings.

Verse 15. However. You may slaughter and eat meat. Within any of your towns. As much as you desire. According to the blessing.

Of the Lord your God has given you. See meat was used for the sacrifices. Wasn't it? So people might have thought. Well we can only eat meat. If we go all the way to this place. The Lord is going to sell us to go.

And sacrifice it there. And the priest does all the business. The Lord says no. You can have a good carnivore feast. Whenever you want. According to the blessing I give you.

[24 : 22] According to. Whether you can afford to do it. Because meat obviously is expensive. It's expensive today. It's even more expensive. When you're libeling and rusted on the animals you had. But if you've got the meat.

Sister Lord. Enjoy it. Eat it. Enjoy my blessing. He is a generous God. Who wants us to enjoy. Enjoy all the blessings he gives.

And that is still true. The material blessings the living God gives us. He wants us to enjoy. So 1 Timothy chapter 4 for example.

Paul writes to Timothy. Warning about those who forbid marriage. And require abstinence from foods. That God created to be received with thanksgiving. By those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good. And nothing is to be rejected. If it was received with thanksgiving. For it is made holy. By the word of God and prayer.

[25 : 18] So we have a generous God. He wants us to enjoy. The food we have. The homes we live in. The cars we drive. If you can enjoy driving around here. I don't. The bikes you ride.

That's better. He's a generous God. He wants Israel to enjoy it. But Paul goes on in that letter to Timothy. Chapter 6. To remind the rich. To trust in him.

Who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. This God we worship is a generous God. But in our enjoyment of his gifts. We are to remember the giver.

We are to worship the giver. And know it all comes from him ultimately. And that's the point of some of the detailed instructions. If you look down to verse 23. The command is you can eat the meat if you want to. That's great.

But what does Moses warn them? Verse 23. Only be sure that you do not eat the blood. For the blood is the life. And you shall not eat the life with the flesh. You shall not eat it.

[26 : 14] You shall pour it out on the earth like water. You shall not eat it. But all may go well with you. With your children after you. When you do what is right in the sight of the Lord.

Why were they not to eat the blood? Why is that so clear there? Three times. You shall not eat it. You shall not eat it. You shall not eat it. Because the blood was the life. And who owns the life of every creature he has created?

It's the Lord, isn't it? It's all his. They were to pour out the blood as a reminder. That they didn't own the life.

Belonged to God ultimately. And the Lord actually, verse 26. Had provided those lives. The sacrificial animals. To make atonement for the lives of the Israelites.

There's another thing. They weren't just to eat wherever they wanted. Verses 26. Let's see. Verse 26. Where's it going? But the holy things that are due from you.

[27 : 15] Your vow offerings you shall take. You shall go to the place the Lord you God will choose. What was required of them? The sacrificial offerings that the Lord demanded. But also the vow offerings. What they promised to give the Lord.

As an act of gratitude and thankfulness to the Lord for what he'd given them. We probably don't make vow offerings so much today. Unless perhaps we vow part of our salary.

Part of our giving. The Lord says. Do what I've commanded. And the things you promised to give me. They're mine. You bring them to me. Because I am the ultimate giver.

I am the one who's ultimately in charge of all this. So enjoy my gifts. Enjoy the blessings I pour out on you. But remember where it all comes from. Remember I am the gracious God who provides all this.

And it is mine. Don't forget. See the Lord is generous. He wants us to enjoy the blessings he gives. But we need to recognise his ultimate authority and ownership over it all.

[28 : 15] So why do we have to do. Have to worship as the Lord God commands. Because he's the true covenant God. Who's revealed himself. We'd have to make up how to contact him.

Because he's a gracious God. Who wants us to enjoy his presence. Because he's a generous God. Who wants us to enjoy his blessings. And because.

Ultimately his name. The name of the Lord Jesus. Is the name that is above all. Isn't it? Remember that's what the Israelites would wish to proclaim. As they got rid of the pagan worship. The Canaanite worship out the land.

To obliterate that name. Because only the name of the living God mattered. We do that today. As we gather in worship. We declare that Jesus is the name above all names.

And that is a foretaste of that great day when he comes back. As Paul puts it to the Philippians. The Lord God. The Father in heaven. The Father in heaven. Has given the Lord Jesus. The name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus.

[29 : 16] Every knee will bow. And every tongue confess that he is Lord. To the glory of God the Father. That is the way the story ends. That is where this is going. That is when the mission is over.

And we rejoice in God's presence forever. And so we get ready for that day now. By worshipping as the Lord tells us. Because he is the true God. Because he is a generous God.

Because he is the gracious God. And because Jesus really has the name that is high over all. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.