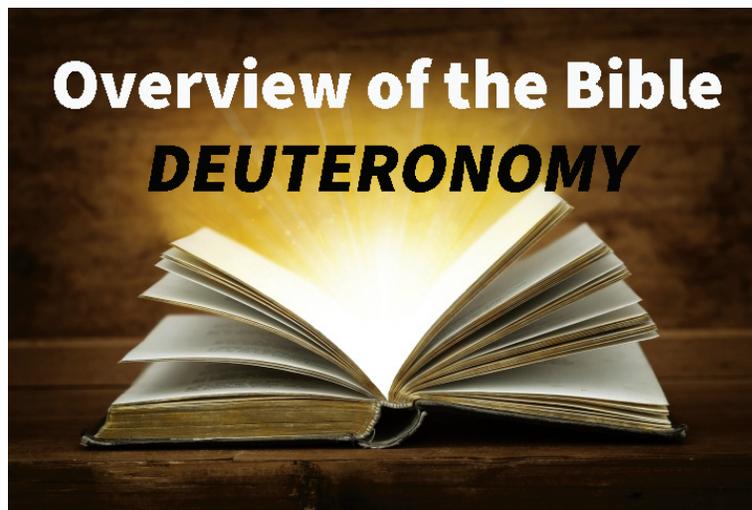


DEUTERONOMY:  
*Deuteronomy 12 - 15*  
*Lesson 38*  
Wednesday, March 31, 2021

THE ABOLITION OF IDOLATROUS  
PLACES.  
THE CENTRALIZATION OF WORSHIP.  
ABSTINENCE FROM BLOOD



The larger section of the Second Discourse begins here and extends to the end of ch. 26. It consists of a code of laws and constitutes the nucleus of the whole book.

So far as any orderly arrangement can be discovered, chs. 12–16 is taken up with the more strictly religious duties; chs. 17–20 with civil ordinances; and chs. 21–26 with social and domestic regulations.

Perhaps more has been written about this particular chapter than any other in the legal corpus of Deuteronomy. The reason for this is the frequently made assertion that the core theme of Deuteronomy—centralization of worship—is most clearly articulated in this chapter. Indeed, the phrase “*the place which the LORD will choose*” appears six times: 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26 (plus three times in ch. 14 [vv. 23, 24, 25], one time in ch. 15 [v. 20], six times in ch. 16 [vv. 2, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16], two times in ch. 17 [vv. 8, 10], one time in chs. 18 [v. 6], 26 [v. 2], and 31 [v. 11]—a total of twenty-one occurrences).<sup>1</sup>

1–3. An injunction to destroy all traces of Canaanitish idolatry: see on 7:1–5.

4–28. No sacrifice to be made to Jehovah, unless at the one place which He Himself prescribes. This law of the centralization of worship is one of the main arguments employed by critics in support of the theory of the late origin of the book of Deuteronomy. The practice of sacrificing at local shrines, it is said, was universal till the time of Josiah, and could hardly have been so if there had been an earlier prohibition.

4. Ye shall not do so] i.e. worship Jehovah in the places where the Canaanites worshipped their gods. 7. Ye shall eat] The reference is to the sacrificial meal at which part of the offerings were eaten by the worshippers: see on Lv 3. 15. This is a slight modification of the law prescribed in Lv 17:3, 4.

16. On the prohibition to eat blood see Lv 3:3; 17:10–16. 31. Every abomination] see on Lv 18:21.<sup>2</sup>

Works Cited

<sup>1</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 405.

<sup>2</sup> J. R. Dummelow, ed., *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), 128

## CHAPTER 13

### WARNINGS AGAINST TEMPTATIONS TO IDOLATRY

The people are warned against three possible sources of temptation to idolatry, viz. the false prophet (vv. 1–5), an erring member of the family (vv. 6–11), and an apostate city (vv. 12–18). In each case the tempter or tempters must be put to death without mercy.

In this chapter the concern of Moses is still with purity of worship. In ch. 12 the emphasis was on idolatry; here the emphasis is on the idolater. In the case of the former, Israel is to demolish all places and relics associated with idolatry. But what if the temptation is not from one of the silent Asherim or cult images, but instead is from a vocal prophet (13:1–5), a family member (13:6–11), or evangelistic rabblers (13:12–18)? In each instance Israel's response is to be quick and decisive: such persons "shall be put to death" (vv. 5, 9–10, 15–17). Even a whole community may be the object of a holy war if it allows itself to be swayed. There is no indication that subsequent repentance is an option that alleviates the recrimination.<sup>3</sup>

2. A sign or a wonder is not enough to establish the credentials of a prophet. If he seeks to turn the people from the worship of Jehovah, he confesses himself thereby a tempter to evil, and must be put to death: Mt 24:24; 2 Th 2:9; Rev 13:13, 14. 6. Even should the tempter to apostasy be the nearest and dearest, no mercy must be shown to him (v. 8): the zeal of the Levites (Ex 32:25–29) and of Phinehas (Nu 25:7, 8) and our Lord's words, Mt 10:37; Lk 14:26. The same principle is enunciated in Mt 5:29, 30.

12–18. An instance of this may be read in Jg 19; 20. 13. Men of Belial] RV 'base fellows' or 'sons of worthlessness.' Belial is not a proper name: Jg 20:13; 1S 25:25; 1K 21:13. 16. The street is the open square or marketplace of the city. The word rendered every whit is the same as that used to denote the 'whole burnt offering,' so that the clause may be translated 'as a whole burnt offering to Jehovah thy God.'

17. Cursed thing] RV 'devoted thing': see on 7:26; Lv 27:26–29.<sup>4</sup>

## CHAPTER 14

### DISFIGURING FOR MOURNING FORBIDDEN CLEAN AND UNCLEAR MEATS SPECIFIED

1. Practices connected with idolatry: see on Lv 19:27, 28.

2. The foundation of the entire moral and ceremonial law is contained in this and the preceding verse. Israel is the people whom Jehovah has chosen and called His children. As such they must be holy: see intro. to Lv 17–26.

3–20. On the law of clean and unclean beasts, see Lv 11 and notes. 5. The pygarg is probably a kind of antelope. The exact meaning of the Hebrew word is doubtful, as it only occurs in this passage. As the chamois is unknown in Palestine, a species of wild mountain sheep is probably meant.

21. That dieth of itself] For the meaning of this prohibition see on Lv 17:10–16. On the prohibition to see a kid in its mother's milk see on Ex 23:19.

### Works Cited

<sup>3</sup>Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 408.

<sup>4</sup>J. R. Dummelow, ed., *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), 128

22. The produce of the soil is to be tithed and the tithe eaten at the central sanctuary, except when this is inconvenient on account of distance (v. 24), in which case the tithe is to be turned into money and spent on a sacrificial feast to which the Levites are to be invited (vv. 25–27). Every third year the whole tithe is to be devoted to charity. According to the law in Nu 18:21 the tithe is given to the Levites exclusively. It has been supposed that the tithe in Deuteronomy is a second tithe, different from that in Numbers, and made after the first, or Levite's tithe, has been deducted from the produce. But, as no mention is made of more tithes than one, the different destination of the tithes may be considered as indicating different stages of legislation. In later times, however, a distinction was made between the first and second tithes, the first being devoted to the Levites, and the second consumed by the offerer.<sup>5</sup>

## CHAPTER 15

### THE SABBATICAL YEAR

Three items are discussed in this chapter: The Sabbatical Year (vv. 1–11); guidelines for owners of slaves (vv. 12–18); and the sacrifice of firstlings, (vv. 19–23), a law whose current positioning in the corpus might at first sight seem out of place and somewhat intrusive.

Deuteronomy 14:22 spoke of what Israel is to do with possessions “*year by year.*” Deuteronomy 14:28 mentioned what Israel is to do with possessions “*every three years.*” This emphasis on time continues into ch. 15: “*at the end of every seven years*” (15:1), and then follows a commentary on observance of the Sabbatical Year.

This particular year was initially described in Exod. 23:10–11. There the emphasis was on allowing the land to lie fallow for the sake of the poor and the animals, but it said nothing about remitting the debts of the poor (as does Deut. 15:1–6) or lending to the poor (as does Deut. 15:7–11). A second emphasis is found in Lev. 25:1–7. The land, or rotating portions thereof, is to lie fallow every seventh year. It is to be a rest for the land that “*I [the LORD] give*” (Lev. 25:2). The crop that grows by itself will provide the necessary food for both the family and the indigent (Lev. 25:6).

Chapter 15 of Deuteronomy adds yet another factor. In the Sabbatical Year there is to be a remission of debts (15:2). Presumably, this particular directive would be applicable only to a number of people, for in any given society what is the ratio between creditors and population? The additional stipulation about debt cancellation also envisions more clearly a people who are about to move into a more complex, highly developed society in which economics will play a larger role than before. This will include the accumulation of equity, financial security, and the borrowing, lending, and investment of money.<sup>6</sup>

This deals with the year of release, or the Sabbatical Year, and should be compared with Lv 25. In addition to the rest for the land and the manumission of Hebrew slaves in the seventh year, it prescribes a release of debts (vv. 1–5); only, however, so far as Hebrew creditors are concerned, and proper loans, not money due on account of purchase (vv. 3, 8, 9).

4. Save when there shall be] RV ‘Howbeit there shall be.’ The law is intended to prevent poverty. 10. ‘The Lord loveth a cheerful giver.’ II. The ideal state of matters is contemplated in v. 4: here we have the actual fact. There will always be poor people, but poverty will be exceptional, if this injunction is conscientiously carried out: see vv. 4, 5.

#### Works Cited

<sup>5</sup> J. R. Dummelow, ed., *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), 128

<sup>6</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 410–411.

12–18. See also Ex 21:2–6; Lv 25:39–46. The subject of slavery is connected with that of poverty, as it is implied here that the poor person has been sold as a slave for debt. Every seventh year the slave has to be released. He is not to be sent away empty, as the probable result would be a return to slavery. He is to be liberally furnished, so as to be in a position to earn a livelihood and make a fresh start in life. This is a very wise as well as humane prescription.

16. If a slave elect to remain in the master's service instead of accepting release, a formal compact must be made to that effect. In Ex 21:6 the ceremony is performed in public before the magistrates; here it seems to be private. The boring of the ear and the fastening it to the doorpost with the awl signified that the person was permanently attached to the house and was bound to obey the words of his master: cp. on Ex 21:6.

19, 20. In Nu 18:15–18 the firstlings of clean beasts are the perquisite of the priests. Here they are to be eaten by the owner and his household annually at the central sanctuary. Much ingenuity has been expended in the attempt to reconcile these two regulations. The simplest explanation is that they belong to different stages of legislation.

21. Whatever is offered to God must be the best of its kind: cp. 17:1, and see on Lv 22:17–25.<sup>7</sup>

#### Works Cited

<sup>7</sup>J. R. Dummelow, ed., *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), 128-129