*Proper Worship - Deuteronomy 12*

**Behold, how good and how pleasant [it is] for brethren to dwell together in unity! 2 [It is] like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, [even] Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; 3 As the dew of Hermon, [and as the dew] that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, [even] life for evermore.** Psalms 133

Deuteronomy 12 is a key passage unlocking the principles that the Lord has given His children to worship Him. To properly appreciate the guidelines that the Lord has laid out I would ask you to read the entire chapter (included at the end of this page) before you continue this article. I have highlighted and capitalized (for emphasis) phrases in the passage that reveal the truth, which we will focus on.

# **THE PLACE THAT THE LORD CHOOSES**

As an overview we can see that the Lord is very concerned for "**THE PLACE THAT HE WILL CHOOSE**" when it comes to worshipping Him or serving Him (12:5-6 11, 14, 18, 21, 26, 31; 14:23, 24; 16:2, 5-6, 11, 15, 16). In stark contrast are the nations who choose their own place, their own name, their own way of worship and their own sacrifices for the offering of worship to their "gods." In verse 1-4 the Lord strongly denounces the practice of the nations, even commanding the Israelites to destroy all the places wherein the nations served their gods. He wasn't nice about it either. God told the children of Israel to "**overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place**."

Throughout Deuteronomy 12 the Lord emphasizes through Moses that He has a **PLACE** where He desires His people to worship Him. First and foremost, this place is the place **THAT HE WILL CHOOSE**! Brothers and sisters, this is not a small matter. Proper worship can only be in the place that God Himself will choose. Yet, today, it seems that worshipping God is like going to a supermarket. "Worship at the church of your choice" is a common billboard seen throughout our country. This is a tragedy! Equally divisive is the discussion that takes place between Christians or between people who hear the name of God or Jesus when talking to others: "What church do you go to?" The Bible only records one church as the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). The example set forth in the New Testament is the church in Ephesus, the church in Philippi, etc., meaning that saints met as the church where they lived. In God's eyes, there is only one church of God. In God's eyes, there is only one church of Jesus Christ. In God's eyes, there is only one church of the saints in the universe. In God's eyes, there is only one church of saints in a locality. All believers are in the church, the Body of Christ. All believers bear the name of Jesus Christ. All believers are God's dwelling place on the earth today, and all believers must offer Christ to God for their worship.

According to Deuteronomy there is only one choice in the matter of worshipping God: God's choice. We should never choose any place, any way, any form, any name that is different from the Lord's choice. Choice breeds division. Choice breeds confusion. Choice breeds idolatry. Choice breeds fornication. Choice breeds the abandoning of God. But the greatest tragedy is the self-justification by those who chose. One day, many genuine believers will be unpleasantly surprised by the Lord's judgment of their personal choice (1 Cor. 3:15; Romans 14:10-12).

For the children of Israel, choice would most certainly have divided the nation into twelve (12) groups. If they were given the freedom to choose their own place of worship, they would each have chosen a place within their own borders. The tribe Judah would worship in Judah; the tribe of Dan in Dan; the tribe of Zebulun in Zebulun, as so forth. However, the Lord was particular, definite, and more than clear that there would be only ONE, unique ground on which His people can worship and they were to travel three times a year to this place, which He had chosen. For many of the tribes this meant a long and difficult journey. They took their wives and children, they took their livestock, they took their vegetables from harvesting, they took their food supply for the trip, the feasts and the return home, and they took their bedding and their tents. Yet, through all this, they went with joy and singing because they experienced the blessing of God for their oneness. This is depicted in Psalms 133, which is the song they sang as they ascended Mount Zion in Jerusalem to worship God.

The Lord's word to His own people in Deuteronomy 12:8 is: "**You are not to do whatever is right in your own eyes**." Yet, it seems that Christians are encouraged to have freedom of choice with God. Brothers and sisters, can we see that there is only one choice: God's choice? I hope you will open your heart to what God's word says about God's choice. We all have been so duped by our religious traditions and religious concepts. "Lord have mercy on us, your people, that we would no longer do whatever is right in our own eyes, but we would take your choice." Instead, can we be "**diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace**"? (Eph. 4:3).

# **The place the Lord chooses TO PUT HIS NAME**

The place that God chooses is not merely a physical place, but a kind of place that bears the Lord's name, a place of the Lord's dwelling and the place of the proper offerings established by the Lord (Deut. 12:5-6, 11). First, we will consider the place the Lord chooses to put His name. Of all the places on the earth, the Lord chose a particular place based on His name. This proves that He is not merely referring to a physical place, but it is strongly related to God Himself. It bears His name. And what is His name? For the sake of keeping in the New Testament principle, His name is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the place that God chooses for proper worship of His children. Jesus Christ is the way and the truth and the life, allowing all of His children to come to the Father (John 14:6).

The Lord hates other names besides His own. This is clearly seen in 12:3b when the Lord told the children of Israel to destroy the names of the nation’s gods out of the place that He would choose. The Ten Commandments show in principle how the Lord esteems His name in: Exodus 20:1-7, "**I [am] the LORD thy God, …You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness [of any thing] that [is] in heaven above, or that [is] in the earth beneath, or that [is] in the water under the earth: 5 You shall not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God [am] a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth [generation] of them that hate me; 6 And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. 7 You shall not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain**" (*emphasis added*; see also Deuteronomy 5). His name is just Himself. When we call on the Lord's name, we get Him, Jesus Christ. His choice for worship is that we would ONLY worship in His name. Matthew clearly confirms this in 18:20, "**Where there are two or three gathered INTO MY NAME, I am in their midst**."

The Lord is utterly offended when we take His name in vain. We may think to curse using the Lord's name is the only way to take His name in vain. Surely it is one of the ways to take His name in vain. However, there are many other ways to take the Lord's name in vain. Taking His name in vain means to make His name vanity or to lessen our esteem for His name. In other words, anything that causes us to decrease our esteem for the Lord Himself is to take His name, His person, Himself, in vain. One such way to take His name in vain is to associate the Lord's name with another name. That is why He stresses over and over that "I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me." This is equivalent to saying, "You shall have no other names before Me." I think you all agree in principle until I continue by asking, "What is Baptist? What is Presbyterian? What is Lutheran? What is Roman Catholic? What is Pentecostal? What is Cornerstone? What is a Korean Church? What is the First Church on the Block? Etc. etc." These names are improperly and presumptuously associated with the precious Lord Jesus' name.

Brothers and sisters, please consider this matter carefully and soberly before the Lord. It is not my goal to unjustly or irrational offend any of God's children, but I believe the Lord Himself is very concerned about our acceptance and justification of other names associated with Jesus Christ. Let me give an illustration of my feeling: if my wife took another mans' name, how would I feel? I would be devastated, angry, hurt, jealous, confused. Isn't the Lord Jesus Christ our husband? Aren't we as His believers His bride (Eph. 5:23-32)? Wouldn't taking another name at least infer that we are spiritually dating another? And if we are so bold to declare our allegiance to such a name other than Christ, isn't this spiritual fornication against our husband, the Lord Jesus?

The Lord desires only His name to be used and proclaimed and loved and cherished and honored and worshipped among His people. What is His name? Jesus Christ! So, if you ask me what the name of my church is, I will respond: Jesus Christ. If you ask me what church do I go to? I will tell you: Jesus Christ. I believe the Lord is grieved when He looks at His people and sees literally thousands of "brand names" and "generic names" for His ONE Body of Christ on the earth. They may profess Jesus Christ, but they have also associated His wonderful, pure, matchless, unparalleled, holy name with another name. Nothing and no one can be on the Lord's level nor associated with Him. He is THE Lord! He is the THE Leader. He is THE Captain. He is THE Pioneer. He is THE Author of our faith. He is THE Perfector, too. He needs no other name and He hates all other names that might distract His children from Him. And He said, that any other names would distract His people. In Revelation 3:1, the Lord rebukes the church in Sardis, "**you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead**." They associated another name besides the Lord and thought it was okay. God called it dead! Let me remind us all, the first and foremost commandment is: "**I am the Lord your God**." He is unique. He is the Only One. He is holy! In the New Testament the Holy Spirit in Greek actually means: the Spirit, the holy. None compares or can be associated with Him!

1 Corinthians 12:12 says, "**For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ**." Christ only has one Body and that Body is His. Therefore, it must bear His name and no other. 1 Corinthians 1:10-12 say, "**Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion. For it has been made clear to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of the household of Chloe, that there are strifes among you. Now I mean this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?**" The Lord only has one name: Jesus Christ. And even the association with Paul or Apollos or Cephas is a seed of division, which the apostle clearly condemns in that section of the Word. We must be practical and realize that we have denominated the Lord's name in hundreds of ways. This isn't the sad part. The horror is that we defend the other names! We have no feeling that we as the Lord's precious Body are dividing ourselves by our choice! "Lord, forgive us for our blindness, our rebellion, and our unwilling to change!"

**TO BE HIS HABITATION, HIS DWELLING PLACE**

In the type in Deuteronomy 12, the children of Israel were required to come to a particular geographical location. This means that in the Old Testament the chosen ground was an actual physical place. Three times per year, the Lord required that all the males from all twelve tribes of Israel travel to Jerusalem in order to present the firstfruits, the top offerings of the blessing the received from the Lord, back to the Lord (Deut. 16:16; Exo. 23:17). Jerusalem was the place of God's choice for worshipping Him. Why? Because Jerusalem was the place of the physical temple where God Himself chose to dwell (1 Kings 811; 2 Chronicles 5:14; 7:1, 2, 3).

The Jews, although failing miserably before the Lord in many ways throughout their history, have maintained a sacred tradition, which keeps the Lord's choice. Besides Jerusalem there has never been another place for the temple. The Israelites feared God's commandment and although they set up alternate places of worship, which offended the Lord to the uttermost, they never built another temple besides in Jerusalem. Even while exiled in Babylon they met in synagogues, but they did not build another temple to worship God at. This is a picture for all of us to hold to. The temple was the place of God's choice for His dwelling place.

In the New Testament the habitation of God, the dwelling place of God is no longer a physical temple but a spiritual entity. The temple as God's dwelling place seen in 1 Kings 8:11 and 2 Chronicles 5:14; 7:1, 2, 3 typifies the New Testament church: "**Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, and such are you**." (1 Corinthians 3:16-17) "You" in these verses refers to the saints in the church in Corinth. The saints are God's temple for His dwelling place on earth in the New Testament age.

Another substantiation that God's dwelling place in the New Testament is not physical is seen when you compare John 4:21-23 with Ephesians 2:22. In John 4, the Lord was unveiling His new dwelling place to the Samaritan woman. "**Jesus said to her, Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is of the Jews. But an hour is coming, and it is now, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truthfulness, for the Father also seeks such to worship Him**." It is clear by these verses that the Old Testament physical temple has changed to the New Testament "spirit" of the believers. John 3:6 said that the Spirit begets spirit. In other words, our human spirit, begotten of the Spirit of God is now God's dwelling place.

Ephesians 2:22 says much the same thing, "**In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit**." Some translations render the word spirit as "the Spirit." This is okay, but it hides the true meaning of God's dwelling place being in man's regenerated spirit in the New Testament. Paul was writing to the saints in Ephesus (1:1) and he told them that they were being built together into a dwelling place of God. Where? In their spirit, which has been regenerated by the Spirit of God. Therefore, John in his gospel, written around AD 90 as one of the last New Testament books says, "**God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness**." Where is the New Testament place of worshipping God? Our spirit. We, the believers in Christ, are God's New Testament temple where He dwells.

# **FOR THE PROPER OFFERINGS AT THE CROSS**

The last qualifier for the place which the Lord would choose is "**where we bring our burnt offerings, and our sacrifices, and our tithes, and heave offerings of our hand, and our vows, and our freewill offerings, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks**" (Deut. 12: 6). John 4:24 says it this way, "**Those who worship must worship in** spirit and **truthfulness**." Truthfulness in the New Testament context refers to the fulfillment of the Old Testament offerings by Christ. Christ is all the offerings for us to offer to God as our worship. Christ is our burnt offering. Christ is our sacrifices. Christ is our tithes. Christ is our heave offerings of our hand. Christ is our vows. Christ is our freewill offerings. Christ is the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks. We don't offer some rituals or practices to God as worship, but we offer our experiences of Christ to God. For instance, John the Baptizer said, "**Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**." Was Jesus a little lamb? No. He is the fulfillment of the trespass offering in Leviticus 4-6. John 6:35 says, "**I am the bread of life**." Is Jesus a piece of bread? No. He is the unleavened meal offering (Lev. 2) of which we partake in our spirit for life and life supply in our daily living and worship of God.

Hebrews 9:11-14 continues this thought: "**But Christ, having come as a High Priest of the good things that have come into being, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not of this creation, And not through the blood of goats and calves but through His own blood, entered once for all into the Holy of Holies, obtaining an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who are defiled sanctifies to the purity of the flesh, How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?**" The Lord replaced all the animal sacrifices as the burnt offerings (Lev. 1) and the sin offerings (Lev. 3) and the heave offerings, and wave offerings, and voluntary offerings, etc., etc. Christ is the offerings we present to God for our worship.

This may be the most crucial aspect of the proper worship of God: the cross. Without the cross there can be no practical outworking of the Lord's desire to gather His ONE people to worship in ONEness. Without the cross we will choose our own way to worship. Without the cross we will take another name along with or in place of the precious Lord Jesus. Without the cross we will live and act according to our human preference, doing whatever is right in our own eyes, rather than following the Spirit. Without the cross there will be no anointing from the Lord as to the proper leading in the Spirit.

I hope we can see from this brief fellowship that the Lord's heart is that His people worship Him in oneness by taking: Him as their unique center of worship, His name as the unique name in worship, His dwelling place (our spirit) as the unique habitation of God, and His cross as the unique way to cancel our flesh, natural inclinations and worldly mixtures in order to take Christ as the reality of all the offerings to God. If this becomes our reality, then no matter how many believers there are in a city or locality, no matter how many meeting places there are, we will all be in the ONE Body of Christ, living in oneness to express and represent the living Triune God to the entire universe here on earth. We all have the same name: Jesus Christ. We all have the same habitation or dwelling place: our spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 3:6b; Romans 8:16). We all are under the same cross of Christ. The only choice in the matter is to take God's choice!

# **DEUTERONOMY 12**

These [are] the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers gives thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth. 2 Ye shall utterly **destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods**, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: 3 And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place. 4 Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God. 5 But **unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put HIS NAME there, [even] unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither you shall come: 6 And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks**: 7 And there ye shall eat before the LORD your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee. 8 Ye shall not do after all [the things] that we do here this day, every man whatsoever [is] right in his own eyes. 9 For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God gives you. 10 But [when] ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God gives you to inherit, and [when] he gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; 11 Then **there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause HIS NAME to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD**: 12 And ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God, ye, and your sons, and your daughters, and your menservants, and your maidservants, and the Levite that [is] within your gates; forasmuch as he hath no part nor inheritance with you. 13 Take heed to thyself that you offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that you see: 14 But in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes, there you shall offer thy burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command thee. 15 Notwithstanding you may kill and eat flesh in all thy gates, whatsoever thy soul lusts after, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee: the unclean and the clean may eat thereof, as of the roebuck, and as of the hart. 16 Only ye shall not eat the blood; ye shall pour it upon the earth as water. 17 You may not eat within thy gates the tithe of thy corn, or of thy wine, or of thy oil, or the firstlings of thy herds or of thy flock, nor any of thy vows which you vow nor thy freewill offerings, or heave offering of your hand: 18 But you must eat them before the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD thy God shall choose, you, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that [is] within thy gates: and you shall rejoice before the LORD thy God in all that you put your hands unto. 19 Take heed to thyself that you forsake not the Levite as long as you live upon the earth. 20 When the LORD thy God shall enlarge thy border, as he hath promised thee, and you shall say, I will eat flesh, because thy soul longs to eat flesh; you may eat flesh, whatsoever thy soul lusts after. 21 If **the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to put HIS NAME there be too far from thee, then you shall kill of thy herd and of thy flock**, which the LORD hath given thee, as I have commanded thee, and you shall eat in thy gates whatsoever thy soul lusts after. 22 Even as the roebuck and the hart is eaten, so you shall eat them: the unclean and the clean shall eat [of] them alike. 23 Only be sure that you eat not the blood: for the blood [is] the life; and you may not eat the life with the flesh. 24 You shall not eat it; you shall pour it upon the earth as water. 25 You shall not eat it; that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, when you shall do [that which is] right in the sight of the LORD. 26 Only thy holy things which you hast, and thy vows, you shall take, and go unto the place which the LORD shall choose: 27 And you shall offer thy burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, upon the altar of the LORD thy God: and the blood of thy sacrifices shall be poured out upon the altar of the LORD thy God, and you shall eat the flesh. 28 Observe and hear all these words which I command thee, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee for ever, when you doest [that which is] good and right in the sight of the LORD thy God. 29 When the LORD thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, where you go to possess them, and you succeed them, and dwell in their land; 30 Take heed to thyself that you be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that you enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. 31 You shall not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hates, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. 32 Whatever thing I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

# **EPHESIANS 2:11-22**

11 Therefore remember that once you, the Gentiles in the flesh, those who are called uncircumcision by that which is called circumcision in the flesh made by hands, 12 That you were at that time apart from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now **in Christ Jesus** you who were once far off have become near in the blood of Christ. 14 For **He Himself is our peace**, He who has made both one and has broken down the middle wall of partition, the enmity, 15 Abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might **create the two in Himself into one new man**, so making peace, 16 And might reconcile both in one Body to God **through the cross**, having slain the enmity by it. 17 And coming, He announced peace as the gospel to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near, 18 For through Him we both have **access in one Spirit** unto the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 Being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone; 21 In whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 In whom you also are being built together into a **dwelling place of God in spirit**.