

Undivided Worship

BELIEVERS ARE TO AVOID IDOLS AND WORSHIP GOD ALONE.

Scripture Passage: Deuteronomy 12:1-11,29-32 Memory Verse: Deuteronomy 12:10-11a

Consider for a moment the amazing sights you have experienced in life. Perhaps you've witnessed a solar eclipse where semi-darkness enveloped you. Maybe you gazed into a starry night and saw the various constellations. Many experiences can move us emotionally: looking out from the rim of the Grand Canyon, viewing the autumn colors in the Smoky Mountains, or experiencing snow-capped peaks in the Rocky Mountains.

These sites may take our breath away, but they do not merit our worship. Our God, who created all these wonders, is alone worthy of our worship. Anything else we worship is merely an idol.

Idols may take different forms today, but they still exist. People worship money, power, reputation, position, relationships, material things, and more. None of these is inherently evil, but any one of them can become an idol and compromise our relationship with God. As you get ready to teach this session, conduct a ruthless evaluation of the potential gods in your life. And pray that you can help adults understand the danger of idols in their lives. Invite them to join you in a renewed commitment to worship God alone.



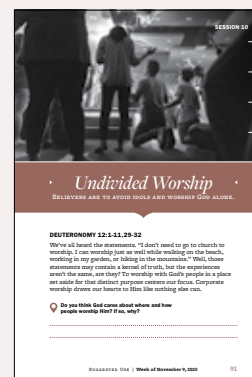
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We've all heard the statements. "I don't need to go to church to worship. I can worship just as well while walking on the beach, working in my garden, or hiking in the mountains." Well, those statements may contain a kernel of truth, but the experiences aren't the same, are they? To worship with God's people in a place set aside for that distinct purpose centers our focus. Corporate worship draws our hearts to Him like nothing else can. (PSG, p. 91)

Do you think God cares about where and how people worship Him? If so, why?



Understand the Context (Deuteronomy 12:1-26:19)

God, through Moses, reminded the people to obliterate any idols they encountered in the promised land (12:1-4). They were to worship God only as He directed and in the place that He would choose (12:5-14). They could eat meat, but they needed to observe the dietary laws God prescribed (12:15-28). They were forbidden from imitating the Canaanites' worship in any way, for God determined how His people should worship Him (12:29-32).

The people needed to shun any hint of idolatry (13:1-18). They were to rid the land of such evil wherever they found it, lest it distract them from their worship of God. Moses reminded the people of the laws regarding clean and unclean animals (14:1-21). He also instructed them to bring tithes of all they had for the Levites (14:22-29). Doing so blessed the Levites, of course, but God also would reward the people's generosity.

Moses reminded Israel to forgive debts and to free Hebrew slaves in the seventh year (15:1-18). He desired His people to value freedom and compassion. He also told them to gather before the Lord each year for the following festivals: Unleavened Bread, associated with Passover; Weeks, which celebrated the spring harvest of barley and wheat; and Shelters, which celebrated the fall harvest (16:1-17). These feasts provided opportunities for the people to worship God and to rejoice in what He had done for them as a nation.

The Israelites were called to pursue justice (17:1-13). When the day came that they established a king over Israel, he also needed to act

justly and to keep a copy of God's laws before him (17:14-20). His devotion to God needed to come first so he would fear God and rule the people with integrity.

Moses again reminded the people to treat the Levites well and to beware of spiritists and false prophets who would lead them astray (18:1-22). They were to establish cities of refuge for people who accidentally took a human life (19:1-13), and justice and fairness should mark their society (19:14-21). God even established laws governing how they engaged in battle (20:1-20).

Deuteronomy 21-25 contains laws on a variety of topics. Common themes again included extending mercy, compassion, and justice to all people regardless of their status. Proper treatment of everyone needed to prevail at every level. God's people would experience His blessing when they worshiped Him alone and treated others with the respect and dignity God required.

Lastly, the people were commanded to gather the firstfruits of their crops and bring them, along with their tithes and other offerings, to God each year (26:1-19). As they did, they affirmed that God alone had made them a people, and He alone deserved their worship. They owed their total allegiance to Him.

As you read through Deuteronomy 12:1-26:19, highlight the imperatives. Why do you think God considered these specific actions so corruptible that they called for the death penalty for fellow Israelites? (PSG, p. 92)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 6** (Poster: Ancient Covenant Structure) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 8** (Handout: Praying Scripture in Numbers, Deuteronomy).

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 91 of the PSG. Encourage adults to create a list of reasons why people don't come to church. Record their responses on the board and discuss which excuses might be the easiest to use and why.

ASK:

Do you think God cares about where and how people worship Him? If so, why? (PSG, p. 91)

EXPLAIN:

Share that a significant issue that God led Moses to address with His people was how and where they worshiped Him, especially compared to how other people in Canaan worshiped their deities.

TRANSITION:

As the Israelites prepared to enter the promised land, God provided specific instructions about their worship practices. He had high expectations for them to follow those instructions. As we dig into those expectations in this passage, reflect on your own worship and any adjustments God might be leading you to make in that area.



Group Activity Option

Music

Guide adults to reflect on the lives of people who do not follow Christ and ask: **What are some of the philosophies or ideas that people build their lives upon? Why are people drawn to those as alternatives to following and worshiping Christ as Lord?** Discuss responses. Invite adults to sing “The Solid Rock” (*Baptist Hymnal* 2008, No. 511). Lead a prayer asking the Lord to give each adult the strength to build their lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

Remove Idolatry (Deut. 12:1-7)

1 “Be careful to follow these statutes and ordinances in the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given you to possess all the days you live on the earth. **2** Destroy completely all the places where the nations that you are driving out worship their gods—on the high mountains, on the hills, and under every green tree. **3** Tear down their altars, smash their sacred pillars, burn their Asherah poles, cut down the carved images of their gods, and wipe out their names from every place. **4** Don’t worship the LORD your God this way. **5** Instead, turn to the place the LORD your God chooses from all your tribes to put his name for his dwelling and go there. **6** You are to bring there your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tenths and personal contributions, your vow offerings and freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. **7** You will eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice with your household in everything you do, because the LORD your God has blessed you.”

(v. 1) Moses again reminded Israel to *be careful to follow* God’s commands (see also Deut. 4:6,9; 6:3). The Hebrew wording highlights the enduring nature of God’s *statutes and ordinances*. While they were written in stone, they also needed to be written on the hearts of God’s people. God expected faithful obedience. Moses described God as *the LORD, the God of your ancestors* to remind the people that their covenant relationship with God went back many generations.

(vv. 2-3) The words *destroy completely* are emphatic in Hebrew. God’s people were to rid the land of *all the places* where idolaters would *worship their gods*. The Canaanites often used *high mountains* and *hills* as holy sites because they believed it put them closer to their gods. They also might establish a shrine under a *green tree* that could suggest fertility. The Israelites often violated God’s command against worshipping Him at the high places (Deut. 12:13-14). Kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah tried to rid the land of these sites, but with limited success (2 Kings 18:4; 23:8-9).

The Israelites were to *tear down their altars* and *smash their sacred pillars* that represented the gods of Canaan. • *Asherah poles* were wooden poles that represented Asherah, the consort of Baal, Canaan’s chief god. God’s people were to *burn* these, along with cutting down *carved images*. The Israelites were to *wipe out their names* from the land. Only the name of Israel’s God would stand in Canaan!

(vv. 4-5) *Don’t worship the LORD your God this way* highlighted God’s expectation as He brought Israel into the land. He called the people to a new

way of life. They were free to live by His commands and to worship Him alone. This would prove radically different from Canaan’s paganism.

Moses highlighted the proper place for Israel to worship: *the place the LORD your God chooses*. God had not yet revealed this place since the people still had to take the land. In Israel’s early days, the people set up the tabernacle at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1; 1 Sam. 1:3). David later brought the ark of God to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:1-19), where Solomon also built the temple. This affirmed Jerusalem as God’s chosen place (1 Kings 8:15-21).

(v. 6) The people were to *bring* their *burnt offerings* to atone for sin or for general dedication (Lev. 1). *Sacrifices* denoted offerings of any kind. The law also required *tenths* (tithes) at various times during the year to provide for the Levites and to celebrate God’s blessing.

Worshippers often brought *personal contributions* or *freewill offerings* and *vow offerings* for general thankfulness. God also outlined the dedication of *the firstborn* from the people’s animals (Ex. 13:1-2,13). This practice was associated with the Passover when God struck the firstborn of Egypt, including the cattle (Ex. 12:12; 13:14-15).

(v. 7) Implicit in the idea of eating *in the presence of the LORD* was the idea that the Israelites would *not* worship in this manner elsewhere. Moses commanded them to *rejoice* in their worship. The wording suggests that worship and feasting were family events. All family members should celebrate the blessing of their relationship with God and with one another.



SUMMARIZE:

APPLICATION POINT: Believers should be prepared to recognize and avoid false gods.

Use this content from Understand the Context (PSG, p. 92) to overview briefly Deuteronomy 12:1–26:19:

This week's study comes from the latter part of Moses's second message (12:1–26:19). . . . These applications addressed specific matters the Israelites would face in the years ahead. Moses's words would teach the Israelites how to live as God's people in the land He was giving them.

READ:

Point out **Pack Item 6** (Poster: Ancient Covenant Structure). **As a volunteer reads aloud Deuteronomy 12:1-7**, direct adults to listen for the parts of the covenant listed on the poster. Invite adults to match words and phrases from the Scripture passage with the parts of the covenant.

DISCUSS:

Direct adults to review Deuteronomy 12:1-7 (PSG, pp. 93-95) and to look for God's instructions about idolatry in the promised land. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share what they found. Lead a brief discussion about how Israel's worship of God should differ from pagan worship in Canaan.

ASK:

Why was it important for the Israelites to focus first on ridding the land of the pagan worship sites and related objects? (PSG, p. 95)

TRANSITION:

The Lord knew that pagan influences would compromise Israel's worship. He also knew that adopting His standards would help Israel avoid idolatry in the future.



Group Activity Option

Storytelling

Prior to the session, enlist a volunteer to review Deuteronomy 12:1-7 and the information from “Remove Idolatry” (PSG, pp. 93-95). Guide the volunteer to prepare an oral history as if they were an Israelite relaying the content of the passage to their grandchildren thirty years after the event. Invite them to role play, telling their story to the group and answering questions as a parent or grandparent might.

Worship God (Deut. 12:8-11)

8 “You are not to do as we are doing here today; everyone is doing whatever seems right in his own sight. **9** Indeed, you have not yet come into the resting place and the inheritance the LORD your God is giving you. **10** When you cross the Jordan and live in the land the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and he gives you rest from all the enemies around you and you live in security, **11** then the LORD your God will choose the place to have his name dwell. Bring there everything I command you: your burnt offerings, sacrifices, offerings of the tenth, personal contributions, and all your choice offerings you vow to the LORD.”

(v. 8) Moses’s words pointed Israel to the future: *You are not to do as we are doing here today.* The people had received God’s commands at Mount Sinai and had committed themselves to Him (Ex. 19–24). Yet, they had not entered the land where they could apply fully the commands that God was giving them. Moses described the people’s current situation: *everyone is doing whatever seems right in his own sight.* Individuals’ personal preferences or convictions did not necessarily align with God’s expectation for proper worship.

The wording Moses used anticipated the mood of the book of Judges, when such an approach led to spiritual rebellion (Judg. 17:6; 21:25). The people needed God’s instruction to guide their lives. Without it, their own choices would lead to ruin. Settling the land would initiate a new phase of the Israelites’ existence, and they would need the stability God’s commands would bring.

(v. 9) Moses affirmed the people had not yet arrived in the promised land. They had camped in the Plains of Moab. From there they could see Canaan across the Jordan Valley, but they had yet to enter and conquer it. So, while much of what Moses was telling them applied to the future, he wanted them to start getting ready for the challenges they would face.

Moses used two terms to describe the land Israel would receive. First, he called it a *resting place*. The Hebrew word used here is related to the language used when Naomi sought security for her and for her daughter-in-law, Ruth (Ruth 1:9; 3:1). Ruth’s marriage to Boaz brought them rest and security (4:9–10).

Second, Moses referred to Canaan as Israel’s *inheritance*. This word often appears in the Bible to describe the promised land (Ps. 136:21–22). Moses affirmed it was the land *the LORD your God is giving you*.

(v. 10) The Israelites needed to *cross the Jordan* to claim the promised land. The river was much wider in Moses’s day, and many may have wondered how they would accomplish this. The book of Joshua records how God parted the waters of the Jordan and the people crossed on dry ground (Josh. 3:15–17). The word *inherit* is related to the word “inheritance” in verse 9. God again made it clear that He was the One who would cause Israel to inherit the land.

The verb *gives you rest* also is related to the word “resting place” in verse 9, while *security* is related to word “trust” (see Prov. 3:5). Indeed, trusting in God brought security to the Israelites. As they lived under the umbrella of God’s care, they would learn to trust Him even more.

(v. 11) Moses reaffirmed that once the people possessed the land, God would decide where He would have *his name dwell*. He stressed the importance of allowing the Lord to determine how and where they would worship Him. They would face many temptations to compromise spiritually as they entered the land. They might even see practices that seemed enticing to them, but God wanted them to experience life as He designed it.

Verse 11 essentially repeats the command from verse 6 that the Israelites bring their various *offerings* and *sacrifices* to the place God would choose. The Canaanites had corrupted themselves spiritually and morally and would face God’s judgment. God wanted His people to be holy, set apart for Him. Their lives would point people to the God they worshiped; and, as they lived by His ways, they would become more like Him (Lev. 19:2).



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: We are to worship the Lord by bringing our offerings to Him.

Call on a volunteer to read aloud Deuteronomy 12:8-11 as adults listen for the differences between the Israelites current behavior and what they would experience in the promised land.

ASK:

Why is it dangerous to follow our own ideas about worshiping God instead of following His design?

EXPLAIN:

To explain God's plan for the Israelites' worship in the promised land, share this content from page 96 of the PSG:

[In the wilderness] the Israelites were sacrificing whatever and however they wished. Rather than having multiple or even a portable worship hub, they needed a centralized site where they could celebrate, worship, and participate in their God-directed rituals and services. Having a set place would give the Hebrews a sense of permanence.

ASK:

Why did God want to designate a certain place for His people to worship Him? Why was that important to Him—and to them? (PSG, p. 97)

DISCUSS:

Highlight the ideas of “resting place” and an “inheritance” for the people. Lead a brief discussion on how the promised land would provide those things for the Israelites and how that should have informed their worship of God. Emphasize how attractive security and stability would have been to a people who had wandered in the desert for forty years.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Prior to the session, use the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 95) to prepare a presentation on “Sacrifice and Offering.” As you share with the group, highlight the resource(s) you used to gather information. Explain the value of using a Bible dictionary and other resources to supplement learning about biblical topics. Ask the question included in the Bible Skill activity: ***How does bringing our offerings of time, talent, and treasure to our house of worship bring praise to God and bless others?*** Allow a few volunteers to share their thoughts and discuss those responses with the group. Challenge adults to evaluate the offerings they make to God each day.

Stand Firm (Deut. 12:29-32)

29 “When the LORD your God annihilates the nations before you, which you are entering to take possession of, and you drive them out and live in their land, **30** be careful not to be ensnared by their ways after they have been destroyed before you. Do not inquire about their gods, asking, ‘How did these nations worship their gods? I’ll also do the same.’ **31** You must not do the same to the LORD your God, because they practice every detestable act, which the LORD hates, for their gods. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. **32** Be careful to do everything I command you; do not add anything to it or take anything away from it.”

(v. 29) The word translated *annihilates* often carries the connotation of total destruction. Canaan’s *nations* consisted of many smaller kingdoms. When the Israelites’ arrival threatened their survival, they would join together to fight them (Josh. 10:1-5; 11:1-5).

The conquest of Canaan would include two aspects: God’s sovereignty and Israel’s responsibility. Moses reminded the people the victory ultimately belonged to the Lord, but they would serve as His instruments of judgment.

The words *you drive them out and live in their land* highlight Israel’s role as God’s instrument. The people were a tool in God’s hand. In the end, the judgment of the Canaanites would lead to the Israelites receiving their inheritance.

(v. 30) *Be careful* echoes verse 1. Moses had urged the Israelites to pay close attention to all of God’s commands. Now, he urged them to avoid becoming *ensnared* in the spiritual practices of enemies *destroyed before you*. They needed to stay away from evil and choose God’s way.

The word *inquire* connotes a serious investigation. This word is used of Ezra regarding his determination to devote his attention to God’s Word (Ezra 7:10). God did not want His people to consider even for a moment adopting the idolatrous practices of Canaan’s inhabitants. Questions of how these pagans might *worship their gods* were both off limits and irrelevant.

(v. 31) Moses reiterated that Israel should *not do the same to the LORD*. God did not want His people adopting pagan practices that had resulted in the Canaanites’ judgment. The wording around *detestable* denotes a practice that is utterly reprehensible and repulsive to God’s nature. It elsewhere refers to idolatrous practices (Isa. 41:24; Jer. 2:7) and other corrupt behavior (Lev. 18:22; Jer. 6:15; Ezek. 22:11). God warned His people to

avoid these depraved practices because they were the very reason God was driving the Canaanites from the land (Lev. 18:24-30).

Moses’s astonishing statement *they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire* must have shocked the Israelites. How could people sacrifice their children as an act of worship? Sadly, the Bible records that God’s people eventually fell into such perversion themselves during the days of the prophet Jeremiah, who warned them that God would judge their evil (Jer. 7:30-33).

(v. 32) The command *be careful to do* again repeats the Hebrew word that occurred in verses 1 and 30. The Israelites’ absolute devotion to God was crucial. Moses encouraged the people to pay attention to and to obey *everything I command you*. God’s ways led to life as God intended, while the Canaanites’ way led to death. His words were all they needed. They did not need to include Canaanite idolatry in their worship.

Regarding God’s commands, Moses told them not to *add anything*, including pagan practices. He also told them not to *take anything away from it*, lest they become the ones who decided which of God’s commands they would follow and which they would ignore. His instruction—no more and no less—was all they needed.

Key Doctrine

The Scriptures

Scripture reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. (See Psalm 119:89; Matthew 24:35.)



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: Believers should be strong spiritually, worshiping God alone.

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Deuteronomy 12:29-32 while adults listen for what God would do and what the Israelites were to avoid in taking possession of the land.

LIST:

Draw two columns on the board, *God* and *The People*. Direct adults to scan Deuteronomy 12:29-32 and call out actions of God and actions of the Israelites. Record responses in the proper columns on the board.

DISCUSS:

Facilitate a discussion about the dangers the Israelites faced. Summarize this content from pages 97-98 of the PSG:

“Having promised His people military victory, God knew the Israelites faced another threat—spiritual defeat. He did not want His people to go after foreign gods. A concern was that the Hebrews would attempt to incorporate some of the Canaanites’ religious practices and beliefs into Judaism. The word for this type of mixing is ‘syncretism.’ . . . Verse 31 twice mentions their gods. The Egyptians and Canaanites worshiped multiple gods. Temples and altars dotted the landscape. Verse 31, though, speaks twice of the Lord, singular. Worshiping one God differentiated the Israelites from all other people groups”

ASK:

How do we draw the line so we practice only what God finds acceptable in worship? (PSG, p. 98)

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Fishing Lure

Display a fishing lure (or a picture of a lure) and read Deuteronomy 12:30. Ask: *Why is this an effective tool for catching fish? What potential snares and lures were dangers to the Israelites as they took possession of the promised land?* Affirm that believers still face dangerous snares today. Ask: *What might entice people to experiment with false religious practices? How can we avoid those things and show others that Jesus is a better option?*

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

List the following points on the board from Apply the Text on page 99 in the *Personal Study Guide*:

- Believers should be prepared to recognize and avoid false gods.
- We are to worship the Lord by bringing our offerings to Him.
- Believers should be strong spiritually, worshipping God alone.

RANK:

Guide adults to reflect on the statements and to rank them from easiest to most difficult. Allow volunteers to share which statements they find easiest or most difficult to do and to explain why.

REFLECT:

Direct adults to find the second set of questions on page 99 in the PSG. Guide them to consider how they can avoid being drawn away from faithfulness to God in their daily lives.

PRAY:

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Numbers, Deuteronomy*). Lead adults to use the prompts on the handout to pray Deuteronomy 12:32 back to God. After a few minutes, close in prayer, asking God to help adults honor God and His Word through genuine worship.



AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email adults to remind them of the prayer exercise from the Challenge activity. Encourage them to continue using the prompts from **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Numbers, Deuteronomy*) to pray that the Lord will lead them to remain faithful to Him as they worship and serve Him.

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