

Deuteronomy 12:4-7

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Moses asks the Israelites to worship the Suzerain (Ruler) God at the place which He chooses for His name to dwell.

Moses commanded the Israelites not to worship the Suzerain (Ruler) God the way the Canaanites worshiped their gods in all their places. To the contrary, they were to *not act like this toward the LORD your God*. The Canaanites used their idols to manipulate deities to serve their own desires. In their minds, they did not serve the gods, so much as the gods served them. Their sacrifices and worship were transactions where they got what they wanted (including moral sanction for immorality). In the book of Exodus, Moses prohibited Israel from worshiping the Canaanite gods, from serving them, and from doing “according to their deeds” ([Exodus 23:24](#)). Instead, the Israelites were to serve the LORD exclusively in order that He might bless them. The blessing would include food and good physical health ([Exodus 23:25](#)). But it also would be a natural consequence of having an entire country that obeyed God’s command to treat others with respect, care, and neighborly love.

Verse 5 begins with a strong adversative translated *But* (Heb. “ki ‘im,” “but if,” “rather”). Rather than serve local, false gods, Moses told the Israelites to *seek the LORD at the place which the LORD your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come*. The Hebrew word order (“Rather, at the place which the LORD your God will choose, you shall seek the LORD”) stresses the LORD’s sovereignty as to where He was to be worshipped. Thus, the people could not simply choose to worship the LORD (the Suzerain) at a location of their choosing (tree, high place, etc)—they had to approach the LORD where He chose to dwell. This was an important part of the suzerain-vassal covenant. It emphasized that God is the creator, who knows what is best for us, rather than a false god who promised to “get you what you want.” Worshipers were to come to God on His terms, to hear His commands, not make their own gods to fit their terms and meet their demands.

The word translated *seek* (Heb. “dārash”) in the phrase *seek the LORD* has the idea of visiting a place for a religious endeavor ([Amos 5:5](#); [2 Chron. 1:5](#)). The people of God needed to make pilgrimages to the place which their Suzerain God chose to establish His name. Once that place was found, then

the people of God would go there and present their tithes and offerings to their Suzerain (Ruler) God. Specifically, the people were to *bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock.*

- The *burnt offerings* (Heb. “ōlâ”) is literally translated as “that which goes up” usually in smoke. The worshiper who brought burnt offerings laid his hands on the animals (a bull, a ram, a goat, pigeons, or turtledoves) to declare that the gift belongs to him and that the benefits of the burnt offerings would be his ([Leviticus 1](#)). The worshiper had to offer an animal “without defect,” that is, with no physical damage ([Leviticus 1:3](#); [1:10](#)). This pictured Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice, who was without sin.
- The *sacrifices* (Heb. “zebah”) were generally offerings of thanksgiving which served to bring fellowship between God and the worshiper ([Leviticus 7:16](#); [22:18-23](#)).
- The *tithes* were a gift in the form of payment of ten percent of any agricultural products (grain, wine, oil). *Tithe* means “tenth.”
- *The contribution of your hand* can also be translated “heave offering” or “wave offering.” Something that is lifted up. It refers to a portion that was held up/offered/set apart from the larger portions and dedicated to support the livelihood of the priests ([Exodus 29:27-28](#); [Leviticus 7:14](#)).
- The *votive offerings* were any offerings made as payment of a vow. These were promised gifts ([Numbers 30:3, 4](#); [Deuteronomy 12:11](#)).
- The *freewill offerings* were gifts that were not required, which could be any sacrifice.
- The *firstborn of your herd and of your flock* refers to the first-born male oxen, sheep and goats that the worshiper sacrificed to God ([Exodus 13:2](#); [Numbers 18:15-18](#)).

These sacrifices and offerings were presented to the Suzerain LORD for the purpose prescribed. Moses told the people that *you and your households shall eat before the LORD your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you* (v. 7). The phrase *in all your undertakings* here is literally translated as “in every outstretching of one’s hand.” It refers to the fruits of man’s labor ([Deuteronomy 26:11](#)).

In addition to being commanded to enjoy themselves when they came to worship and feast, the Israelites were commanded to *rejoice* in everything they did. To get joy from their actions and activities. This fits with the covenant requirement to treat others as they wanted to be treated. It is difficult

to *rejoice* in *all your undertakings* if you live in constant fear of losing life or property. But in a self-governing society where people treat one another with respect and goodwill, as required by God's Law, it makes perfect sense that each Israelite ought to thoroughly enjoy *all their undertakings*. That would include each and every activity.

The Israelites were commanded to eat the products of their labor with gladness *before the LORD*. It is worth pausing to reflect that the LORD commands the people to *rejoice* and feast as a part of worship. The time of worship was not only to acknowledge and restore their fellowship with their God. It was also for the Israelites to enjoy good food and good company. Then they were to leave that place of worship and take that attitude with them in *all their undertakings*. Many of the sacrifices were cooked and eaten by the worshippers. The people were not only accountable to follow God's ways, for their own good. They were accountable to enjoy life; to *rejoice in all their undertakings*.

The Apostle Paul echoes this teaching, saying that God "richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17). This fits completely with the overarching theme of God's covenant. It is parental instruction to children to show them how to have the most profitable and enjoyable life, part of which is to avoid self-destructive actions; the proverbial "playing in busy streets or putting your finger in a light socket." But God also wants His children to enjoy things that ought to be enjoyable.

Biblical Text:

⁴You shall not act like this toward the Lord your God. ⁵But you shall seek *the Lord* at the place which the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come. ⁶There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. ⁷There also you and your households shall eat before the Lord your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the Lord your God has blessed you.