

# Deuteronomy 12:8-12

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*Moses instructs the Israelites on how they are to conduct their worship in the land of Canaan. They are to bring all their offerings in the place which the Suzerain God chooses, and they are to rejoice for God's blessings.*

After encouraging the people of God to seek the LORD at the place which He chose for His dwelling, Moses explained to them how they were to conduct their worship in the land of Canaan. When they settle in the Promised land, they would *not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes.*

The phrase *every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes* is introduced with the phrase *You shall not do at all what we are doing here today.* Clearly Moses is telling Israel something they should not do, that they were doing *today*. Which raises the question “What were the Israelites doing that particular day which would fit the description of *whatever is right in his own eyes*, and that Moses is forbidding? The immediate context of this passage deals with Moses telling Israel that they should not “... act like this toward the Lord your God,” speaking of worshiping God under “every green tree” or on “high mountains” as with pagan worship. Rather, Israel was commanded 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.” Moses was instructing Israel to worship in the specific place selected by the LORD once they inhabited the Promised Land.

That particular day, at that particular time, the people were gathered to listen to Moses speak the very words recorded in Deuteronomy. They were hearing the Word of God before it was committed to writing. They were on the east side of the Jordan River, camped in Moab ([Deuteronomy 1:1-5](#)). Moses was speaking the text of Deuteronomy directly to them. And they were gathered to hear him. They likely gathered at a place that was most convenient. Perhaps under the shade of some trees, or on an elevated place. This would be efficient and helpful for the purpose of listening to Moses. It would be *right in their own eyes*. Meaning it makes sense for the convenience of the moment. They are listening to Moses give a lengthy speech. Deuteronomy has about 28,000 words. Assuming Moses spoke at a rate of 125 words per

minute, his speech would approach 4 hours. So it would make sense for each person to seek a place where it was most convenient to hear the talk.

That was not how they were to worship God once they entered the land. They were not to seek out the place of most convenience, like “every green tree.” They were to go to a specific spot within Israel; the place God would select. Worshipping God was not to be a matter of convenience, *whatever was right in their own eyes*. Moses is emphasizing the point already made, using the illustration of the folks gathered around listening to his speech. There is a time to seek that which is most convenient; it was fine for them to do this while listening to Moses. Moses is making the point that worshipping God in the Promised Land will be different. They are to follow His commands, rather than seek convenience, and worship at the place He will direct.

From the time the Israelites departed Egypt until they arrived on the plain of Moab, the sanctuary containing the ark of the covenant had been portable ([Exodus 25:8](#)). The Israelites had been offering sacrifices to the Suzerain God anywhere they wanted to. But what was permitted during Israel’s time of transition was not supposed to be regarded as a lasting norm. The Israelites worshipped in various places because they had *not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the LORD their God was giving them*. Once in Canaan, the people of God would cease to worship Him in various places. And they were not to adopt the pagan practices of worshipping at places of their choosing (what was *right in their own eyes*). They would worship their Suzerain God in one specific place, the place which He chose.

All of this was to change when the Israelites *cross the Jordan and live in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security*. As He had done many times before ([Deuteronomy 3:28](#) for example), the LORD would fulfill His promise by giving His covenant people the land of Canaan, their “inheritance.”

The change would be that *then it shall come about that the place in which the LORD your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you*. The people, instead of bringing gifts and offerings to a portable tabernacle, were to bring them to where the LORD would choose to dwell amongst His people. Also, they would know what to bring because the LORD would tell them.

One of the things God will *command* them to bring will be *burnt offerings*. The Hebrew word for *burnt offerings* (“*ōlâ*”) is literally translated as “that which

goes up,” usually in smoke. The worshiper who brought the offerings laid his hands on the animals 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 is a picture of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus, who was without sin, and died for the sins of the world ([1 Peter 2:22](#)). There were several other items God would *command* Israel to *bring* to His designated place of worship:

- 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* (Heb. “ma’āsēr,” “tenth”) were a gift in the form of payment of ten percent of any agricultural products (grain, wine, or oil). Tithe means “tenth.”
- *The contribution* (Heb. “terûmâ”) *of your hand* refers to a portion that was set apart from the larger portions of the sacrifices after they were cut into pieces. This can be translated “lifted up” or “heave” or “wave.” These offerings were “lifted up” and dedicated to the priests for them to eat, as a means of their livelihood ([Leviticus 7:14](#)).
- The *votive offerings* (Heb. neder) were any offerings made as payment of a vow. These were promised gifts ([Numbers 30:3, 4; Deuteronomy 12:11](#)).

The initial permanent location of the tabernacle will be in Shiloh. Israel’s time of peace and security would occur under Joshua’s leadership since Moses did not enter the Promised Land. The book of Joshua tells us that, after Israel’s conquest of the land of Canaan, they erected the tabernacle in Shiloh, a site in Ephraim: “Then the whole congregation of the sons of Israel assembled themselves at Shiloh, and set up the tent of meeting there; and the land was subdued before them” ([Joshua 18:1](#)). The tabernacle of God remained at Shiloh from about 1350-1100 BC until Shiloh was destroyed and the ark was captured by the Philistines ([1 Samuel 4:11](#)). Then, the tabernacle moved to other places ([1 Samuel 4-6; 1 Chron. 16:39](#)). Eventually, the tabernacle of Moses was replaced by a tent built by David on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, where he placed the ark ([2 Samuel 6:16-19](#)), and then by the temple of Solomon ([1 Kings 6:1](#)). Jerusalem remained the chosen site for corporate sacrificial worship until the Fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC ([2 Kings 25](#)).

Moses told the people that when they gathered before the LORD at the tabernacle, that they should *rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates* (v. 12). As can be seen here, the celebration and rejoicing included everyone in a person's household. The worship of God had solemn aspects. But it was to be a time of fun and fellowship. A time of family gladness. Perhaps similar to our Thanksgiving holiday. Part of the sacrifice was to be eaten with festive rejoicing.

It also was to include *the Levite who is within your gates*. The Levites had a special role in Israel, that is caring for the tabernacle and its contents and assisting the priests in worship in the tabernacle. They lived on the offerings and sacrifices that people brought. In light of God's blessings on the Israelites, they could return a portion to Him by offering some of their sacrifice to the Levites, for their consumption (the wave offering, [Deuteronomy 12:11](#)). All was to be done with rejoicing in their hearts.

The Levites had been told earlier that they were not going to have an "inheritance" (such as land) in the Promised Land like the other tribes ([Deuteronomy 10:9](#)). They were given 48 specific cities to live in scattered among the other tribal territories. This was because they were set aside for the service of the LORD. As a result, Israelites in the other tribes were to support the Levites through their offerings. So, Moses reminded the Israelites of their responsibilities to provide for the Levite, *since he has no portion or inheritance with them*. The Levites *within your gates* who were to be cared for refers to the *gates* of the specified cities.

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>8</sup> You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man *doing* whatever is right in his own eyes; <sup>9</sup> for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you. <sup>10</sup> When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around *you* so that you live in security, <sup>11</sup> then it shall come about that the place in which the Lord your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion or inheritance with you.**