The Place He Chose

Deuteronomy: Choose Life | Week Thirteen | Deuteronomy 12:1–32

THE BIG IDEA

Israel is walking into a land with an altar on every hill, and God says: not like that. He chooses the place, he gathers the people, and he sets the table. Worship is not something we design or consume. It is something God gives. And all three lead to Jesus, the place where God meets us, the one who gathers strangers into a family, and the one who gave his own life so that we can come near by grace, not by anything we bring.

01 Share life

Take a few minutes to catch up with one another before you open the passage.

1. What was a high point and a low point from your week?
2. Where have you seen God at work recently, and where has it been hard to see him?
3. When we last met, we each named one step to take. How did it go, and what got in the way?

02 Setting the scene

Chapter 12 is where the laws begin. Eleven chapters of remembering and loving have laid the foundation, and now Moses turns to how Israel will worship in the land. This week opens the third section of our series, Worship. The land they are entering is not godless. It is full of gods, with altars on every mountain and under every green tree, and everyone doing whatever seems right in their own eyes. Into that world God says two things. Tear those altars down, and do not worship me their way. Then he says something six times in one chapter: turn to the place the LORD your God chooses. He will choose the place. He will gather the whole household there, servants and Levites included. And when they arrive, he will sit them down to eat and rejoice in his presence.

03 Read the Word together

Read this passage aloud together, slowly. If you can, read it twice, with a different person reading each time.

DEUTERONOMY 12:1-32 CSB

Open your Bibles together and read Deuteronomy 12:1 through 32. Have three readers take a section each: 12:1–12, 12:13–19, and 12:20–32.

First impressions

4. What word, phrase, or image stood out to you as you read?
5. What did you notice, or what surprised you, about how God wants to be worshiped here?

04 Study the Scripture

The sermon followed three things God does in this chapter: he chooses the place, he gathers the people, and he sets the table. Work through each one in order, and reread the verses as you go.

GOD CHOOSES THE PLACE Read verses 1 to 14 again.

Israel could have picked any altar with a view. Instead God says the place is his to choose, and he says it over and over. Verse 4 names a subtler danger than leaving God for Baal: keeping the LORD's name and borrowing everyone else's way of worshiping him. We still build God the way we build everything else, one who agrees with us and never asks too much. And verse 31 shows where the other altars lead: a god you have to keep feeding slowly feeds on you. Notice, too, the word in verse 6: bring. God has blessed them, and they come with something to give.

6. What is the difference between worshiping a different god and worshiping the true God our own way? Where do you see yourself editing God down to something more convenient?

7. The sermon said it is easy to walk into church as a customer, asking only what did I get. What would change if the question on the way to the car were, did I bring myself, my attention, my voice, my generosity?

GOD GATHERS THE PEOPLE Read verses 12 to 19 again.

Look at who keeps showing up at the place. You, your sons and daughters, your servants, and the Levite who has no land of his own. God does not give each person a private altar. He chooses one place and brings everyone there together. You choose your friends, but you do not choose your family, and the only thing this crowd has in common is that God chose them. Then Moses gets blunt in verse 19: do not neglect the Levite. When you celebrate what God has given, do not forget the people serving among you.

8. Who is at God's table that you would never have picked? What does it tell you about God that he gathered them beside you?

9. Think about how many people served before you walked in the door on Sunday. Who is one person you have never noticed or thanked, and what would it look like to honor them this week?

GOD SETS THE TABLE Read verses 5 to 7 and 15 to 18 again.

After all the tearing down, what happens when everyone finally arrives? They eat. Three times Moses says rejoice. God does not gather his people only so they can obey him. He wants them to enjoy him. And the joy is always before the LORD, joy that knows where it came from. Joy has to go somewhere, and praise is where it goes. Give God the first word when something good happens. And if you are running on empty, notice the Levite at the table: the feast is a place to be fed by the joy of others until yours returns.

10. Are you better at feeling guilty in God's presence than at rejoicing in it? What good thing from this week needs to be handed back to God before it goes anywhere else?

Once the place became a person, worship was no longer tied to an address. Jesus sent his people to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, and everywhere they went a table appeared. The God who gathers his people is the same God who sends them. That is why the groups matter. A room of two hundred is a hard place to be known. A table is small enough that someone notices when your chair is empty.

11. Which table will you sit down at this season? And who is at the edge of the table, someone standing where you once stood, that you could invest in?

05 Back to Jesus

This is not an extra step. It is where the whole passage has been heading.

Where is the place? Israel answered with the tabernacle, Shiloh, and Jerusalem. Then Jesus told a Samaritan woman at a well that the Father would soon be worshiped neither on her mountain nor in Jerusalem, because he had already called his own body the temple. The place became a person. And the verse we skipped, verse 23, says the blood is the life. On the night before the cross, Jesus lifted a cup and said this is my blood. Moses says the blood is the life. Jesus says, then I will give you mine. We come, not because we brought enough, but because Jesus gave enough.

12. If the place where God meets us is Jesus himself, what changes about where you go looking for God this week, and how you come to the table on Sunday?

APPLICATION

What is God telling me to do today? Write down one specific step you will take this week.

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06 Pray together

Share one request with the group and pray for one another, naming the step each person wrote down above.

Prayer requests

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A PRAYER TO CARRY WITH YOU

Father, you chose the place, and the place is your Son. Forgive me for building you on my own terms and for coming to worship as a customer instead of a worshiper. Open my eyes to the people you have gathered beside me, especially the ones I overlook. Teach my joy its first address, so that every good thing this week goes to you first. And when I have nothing to bring, let me come with empty hands, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Before we gather again

Three simple things to carry into the week.

- Read Deuteronomy 12 again on your own and ask God what he is saying to you.
- Take the one step you named above and tell someone in the group you did it.
- Sit down at the table you named in question 11, or reach out to the person at its edge. We will talk about how it went next time.

07 Notes and reflections