

Believers are to avoid idols and worship God alone

FIRST THOUGHTS

When you think of all the wonderful sites you have seen in your life, it can take your breath away. A total solar eclipse, standing near the rim of the Grand Canyon, looking up at the full moon on a clear starry sky : all these things are amazing. Yet, they do not merit our worship. Our God is the creator of all of these and He is the only one who is worthy of our worship. If we worship anything else other than God Himself, it is an idol. Idols may take different forms today. People worship money, power, positions, relationships, and material things. None of these are inherently evil, but any one of them can be placed above God and compromise our relationship with Him. The second commandment makes it crystal clear, ” **Do not make an idol for yourself**” (Exo. 20:4). Idolatry is making something a god other than Yahweh in your life. In ancient times it was a carving out of wood, stone, or metal. Today, idols are not made with our hands but with our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. Only God can give us comfort, security, and fulfillment; idols are impotent and always disappoint! Worship only our God in the way He wants to be worshipped. He must be first and foremost in our lives. We worship God everyday by doing what pleases Him. Corporate worship with God’s people in a place that honors God, draws our hearts to Him like nothing else can. As we study this lesson, conduct an evaluation of the **potential gods in your life** then recommit your worship to God and God alone. God is great! Hallelujah 🙌.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

God, through Moses, is reminding the people to avoid all and any idolatry that they find in the promise land. They were to worship God the way He specifies and, in the place, He specifies, no exceptions. They were strictly forbidden to imitate the Canaanites’ worship in any way. For God determined how His people should worship Him. Moses is again reminding the people of God’s law regarding clean and unclean animals, bringing the tithes to bless the Levites, forgiving debts and freeing Hebrew slaves. Moses is reminding the people of the various festivals to observe each year to continue worshipping God and rejoice in what the Lord had done for them as a nation. The Israelites were also called to **pursue justice, extend mercy, and compassion to all people**. If one day they were to have a king, he too was called to follow the letter of God’s law and be devoted to God. The Levites were to be treated well and Moses warned the people against spiritualist and false teachers. If His people would worship God alone and treat others with dignity and respect, they would experience God’s blessings. God commanded the people to gather the first fruits of their crops and bring them along with their tithes and offerings to Him each year. 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 God!

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.)

REMOVE IDOLATRY Deut. 12:1-7 • Believers should be prepared to recognize and avoid false gods.

“Be careful to follow” God’s commands. While they were written on stone, they also needed to be written on the hearts of the people. God expected faithful obedience. “Destroy completely.” The Israelites were to tear down the pagan alters and smash their sacred pillars that represented the gods of Canaan. The Israelites were to wipe out their names from the land. Only the name of Israel’s God would stand in Canaan land. God called His people to live different from the pagan Canaanites. They were free to live by His

commands and worship Him alone. To show their faithfulness and thankfulness the people were to bring burnt offerings, sacrifices, personal contributions, freewill offerings, and vow offerings. Moses commanded them to rejoice in their worship. Worship and feasting in the presence of God was a family event and all family members celebrated their relationship with God and one another.

WORSHIP GOD Deut. 12: 8-11 • We are to worship the Lord by bringing our offerings to Him.

Individuals' personal preferences or convictions did not necessarily align with God's expectation for proper worship while the Israelites wandered in the wilderness or while they were camped in the plains of Moab. The people needed God's instructions to guide their lives more than ever when they entered and possessed the promised land. The promised land would initiate a new phase and they would need the stability God's commands would bring. Moses wanted them to start getting ready for the challenges they would face. Moses called the promise land a "resting place" and an "inheritance." These people had wandered for 40 years and a resting place would provide them with security after being on the move for so long. This inheritance, was a promise from long ago and it was God and God alone who would cause the people to inherit the land. Their response was to worship God in thankfulness. Moses assured the Israelites that once they took possession of the land it would be God who decided how He would be worshipped and where "His dwelling place" would be. God did not want the people to corrupt themselves spiritually or morally like the Canaanites. He wanted Israel to **be holy and set apart leading others to Him.**

STAND FIRM Deut. 12:29-32 • Believers should be strong spiritually, worshiping God alone.

The conquest of Canaan would include 2 aspects: God's sovereignty and Israel's responsibility. Victory ultimately belonged to God, and they would serve as God's instrument of judgement against the Canaanites. Moses urged the people to avoid becoming lured in to the spiritual practices of the enemy "destroyed before them." They needed to stay away from evil and choose God's way. Questions of how these pagans might worship their gods was both off limits and dangerous. God did not want His people to adopt pagan practices. Their practices were utterly reprehensible and repulsive to God's nature. God warned His people to avoid these depraved ways because these were the reasons God was driving the Canaanites out. How could these people burn their own sons and daughters in fire as part of worshipping their pagan gods? The Israelites' absolute devotion to God was crucial! Moses' last words were "obey everything I command you" and once again, "do not add to nor take away from God's commands".

APPLICATION

Having promised the Israelites military victory God knew they faced another threat-spiritual corruption. He called His people to be holy and set apart. He wanted to be worshipped exclusively His way and in the place He would choose. Moses is constantly encouraging and warning the people as God has instructed him to do. Brothers and sisters, God continues to call true believers to be holy and set apart from this pagan world. We already have the victory in Christ, but we must not let the world corrupt our faith and our worship. The church is to be a place where we honor, worship, and serve God decently and in order. We are not to bring worldly ways into our worship. The word of God continues to encourage and warn us about the commands of God. **We worship God**, not ourselves and not other people. **Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior** and we are empowered **by the Holy Spirit to serve**. God has high expectations for us to follow His commandments. Reflect on your worship and let God lead you higher in Him.