

# BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

*I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger... John 6:35*

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## DEUTERONOMY 12-16

Up until now, Moses has mentioned fundamental commands such as the Ten Commandments, love and fear of God, and general exhortations against idolatry. He has delivered inspirational sermons stressing the people's duty toward God and their obligation to live up to the holiness of the Land.

Chapter 11 began by putting the commandments into perspective—saying that the choice of whether or not to accept the Torah is nothing less than the choice between blessing and curse. Moses wanted the people to understand that their relationship with their God was about choices that could dramatically affect their lives for better or worse—for blessings or for curses. The following chapters focus on restating the most fundamental laws.

### CHAPTER 12 - A Prescribed Place of Worship

*1 "These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth.*

Verse 1 perfectly summarizes the subject Moses is about to cover—the statutes and judgments—but he first goes on to emphasize the absolute imperative that they must defeat the enemy in the land: "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods..."

Read on, and notice the strength of the verbs used to cast down the places of idol worship: utterly destroy, break apart, cut down, burn. We see that the nations have multiple places of worship—on hills, mountains and under every leafy tree—whereas the Holy One has one unique place in mind.

If we have a problem with God's command to destroy the places of worship of the inhabitants of the land, verses 30-31 might put this into perspective for us: *"take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, ... for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.*

In the NT, Paul exhorts us to cast down the strongholds/imaginations/thoughts/false doctrines of the gods of this age, lest we be snared by them. No doubt he got his doctrine on the warfare in our minds from the Torah, when he wrote:

2 Cor. 10:4-5 The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty, through God to the pulling down of strongholds. Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

**Q. What are some strongholds that may ensnare us? Can they be so familiar to us that we don't see them as enemies that need to be destroyed, because they hinder our spiritual growth?**

### A Place of Rest & Rejoicing

*v. 5-7 "You shall seek **the place** where the LORD your God chooses out of all your tribes **to put His name for his dwelling place**; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your*

*sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks.*

8-13 *"You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes— for as yet you have not come to **the rest**<sup>1</sup> and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you. But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land ... and **he gives you rest** from your enemies... then there will be **the place where the LORD your God chooses to make his name abide**. There you shall bring your offerings) **and you shall rejoice... in the place** which the LORD chooses, in one of your tribes...*

**Q. What do these words – *the place, rejoice* and *rest*– invoke for you?**

Has this term – ‘the Place’ – been used elsewhere in the Torah? Yes, this *place* occurs numerous times in Genesis 22:3-4 and 28:10-22. There we find the stories of Abraham taking Isaac to *the place* where he would offer him to God, and Jacob resting his head on a stone and having a dream, proclaiming: “Surely, the LORD is present in this place and I did not know. ...this stone... shall become a house of God.”

When we see links like this, we understand that events in the lives of the Patriarchs are not isolated historical events, but prophetic shadows of future events in the lives of their children—even to the end of the Age. God not only possesses the place, but He possesses the people who would worship there following their victories over the Canaanites. We need to understand that the Torah's narratives have more to do with the future than the past! These repetitions prompt us to bring narratives together to form a larger picture.

We normally understand this ‘place’ to be speaking of Jerusalem. After crossing the Jordan, it will be 440 years before the temple is built in Jerusalem by Solomon.<sup>2</sup> However, we should not restrict our thoughts of Jerusalem to the geographical location of the city, although that remains as truth. Scripture also speaks of a Heavenly Jerusalem and a New Jerusalem in several places<sup>3</sup>—it is most fully described in Chapter 21 of the book of Revelation.

As New Covenant believers, we too are given ‘gold card access’ to this place of rest and rejoicing—a place of rest from our enemies; a place where the LORD our God ‘makes his name abide’. This is an affirmation of ownership, the equivalent of taking a possession. When you were baptised, you were baptised “INTO THE NAME of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt.28:19). God’s name speaks of his very character, and it is his desire for His name, his character, to abide in each and every one of His children: "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and **you are not your own**? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

Eph. 2:19-21 *Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together ...*

It is the LORD’s desire and intention that His children be transformed into his likeness —As we draw near to Him, he draws near to us—*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit* (2 Cor. 3:18).

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<sup>1</sup> See Hebrews 3-4 and Matthew 11:28-9

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 5:3-5

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 52:1, Galatians 4:26, Hebrews 11:10, 12:22-24, and 13:14

This is a profound subject, not to be taken lightly, and worthy of much contemplation.

## **Sacrifices & the eating of meat**

Deut. 12:13-27 deals with offerings and the eating of meat. Two strong points are made here:

1. Burnt offerings must be made only 'in the place which the LORD chooses, in one of your tribes' (v.14)—'the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name' (v.21).
2. A prohibition against eating blood. The LORD allows them to eat meat to their heart's content, but they are to '*be strong not to eat the blood*'.

This admonition is first detailed in Leviticus 17:10-16, where the eating of blood is also a prohibition for "any stranger that dwells among you". This is no doubt why the consuming of blood is one of the four prohibition listed in Acts 15:20 for Gentile believers.<sup>4</sup>

Leviticus 17 emphasises that the life of the flesh is in the blood<sup>5</sup> ... *and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.*' Of course, Jesus knew full well what this was pointing to when he said:

53 "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him...." 60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" 61 When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you?"

It cannot be denied that His words were unequivocal: "This is my blood – drink it". It is no wonder that His disciples had a problem understanding his words; they were no doubt challenged to wrestle with this concept in the light of their understanding of Torah Law.

Again, at the Last Supper, Jesus, *when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for **this is My blood** of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.*

**Q. What questions may they have had, and what conclusions? How do you understand this?**

## **CHAPTER 13 – Beware of False Prophets**

*1 "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'—which you have not known—and let us serve them,' 3 "you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul."*

People are easily enticed by signs and wonders—drawn with fascination to those who appear to have a window into the supernatural realm. Notice Moses says: "the LORD your God is testing you."

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<sup>4</sup> The other three prohibitions are also found in Lev. 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> Lev.17:11

The punishment for such a one is unequivocal: that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death.

Even if they are enticed by a close family member or friend, they are to kill him, “and afterward the hand of all the people... And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from the LORD your God.” If you ever wondered why it is almost impossible to bring the gospel to the Jewish people, one answer may lie here. In the eyes of the Jews, Jesus was such a one. John 2:23: *... many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them.* Why not?

The stoning of Stephen was a stark demonstration of the hatred Jerusalem's religious authorities had for Jesus and his followers. They believed they had every right to enact this very law.

In Matthew 24:24 Jesus warns that in the last days “false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” Paul also speaks of this in 2 Thess. 2:8-12. Here we read that “God will send them a strong delusion, that they should believe the lie.” So we see that again, this will be allowed by God in the end-times, and even used as a test.

## Further Laws Reviewed

Chapters 14 – 16 contain reminders of several laws concerning:

1. Clean and unclean meat – 14:3-21
2. Tithing principles - 14:22-28
3. Sabbatical year laws concerning debts, caring for the poor, & bondservants – 15:1-18
4. Firstborn animals to be sanctified to the LORD – 15:19-23
5. Passover, Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) and Feast of Tabernacles – 16:1-17
6. Not perverting justice by accepting a bribe or showing favouritism – 16:18-20

We have looked at each of these in previous studies so will not focus on each of them again here, but we will look briefly at three points:

**1. Tithing principles:** 14:22-29 *“You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide...”* What is interesting here is that they are to eat their tithe before the LORD their God, and rejoice, with their household. Also, not forgetting the Levite, who has no inheritance with them, and the poor. How might we understand this today?

**2. Generosity to the poor:** 15:7-11 We are very much aware, both from the Torah and the NT, that generosity to the poor and outcast is fundamental to God's nature and His expectations for his people. Not only is it important, but more than that, it affects one's eternal destiny. We would all be familiar with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar at his gate. The beggar died and was carried to Abraham's bosom, whilst the rich man was tormented in Hades with no hope of escape. He cried to Abraham to at least send a messenger to save his brethren, to which Abraham replied: “They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.”

The Parable of the Sheep and Goats is another clear example. The core message there is that God's people *will* love others and be generous. Good works will flow from our relationship to the Shepherd. Followers of Christ will treat others with kindness, serving them as if they were serving Christ Himself.

**3. Justice must be administered:** 16:18 *You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. ... you shall follow what is altogether just, **that you may inherit the land** which the LORD your God is giving you.*

Judges and officers were to sit at the gate of every city. In ancient walled cities, the city gate was the place of most traffic and the visible presence of judges there was to indicate that the town was a lawful and God-honouring place. A Jewish sage offers a figurative interpretation to this, saying that “each individual should set guardians at the gate of his heart to protect him from going astray.” Wise advice, according to Proverbs and Psalms, where again we see the big picture being brought to bear on our individual lives:

Proverbs 4:23: *Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*

Psalms 141:3: *Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!*

The Hebrew word for justice, *mishpat*, means more than just punishment of wrongdoing, it has as its root meaning fairness and equity. It also means giving people their rights—giving people what they are due, whether punishment or protection or care. Over and over again, *mishpat* describes taking up the care and cause of widows, orphans, immigrants and the poor—those with no social power. Jesus very intentionally reached out to these marginalised groups during His ministry.

This vision for justice is woven into the very structure of creation, and God’s intention for his creation, and the importance the LORD places on righteousness and justice together cannot be overemphasized. They are the goal of the Torah. God’s purpose in calling Abraham was to establish, through him, a nation based on the principles of righteousness and justice. This theme was first introduced in Genesis 18:18-19 as a condition of the LORD bringing about the promises made to Abraham. This has been the focus of Moses’ discourse from the beginning.

Psalms 97:2: ***Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.***

Proverbs 21:3: *To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.*

Isaiah 56:1: *Keep justice and do righteousness... blessed is the man who does this...*

King David’s devotion to righteousness and justice was affirmed by the prophet Samuel: *David executed justice and righteousness to all his people.* (2 Sam 8:15)

Righteousness, *tsaddiq* in Hebrew, carries the meaning of purity of heart and integrity of life; conformity of heart and life to the divine law. But ultimately, we attain righteousness through faith in God who is righteous. God imputes righteousness to believers, because of Christ’s sacrifice; justice was accomplished through this Divine masterstroke.

**Q. Consider why righteousness and justice are so closely linked.**

But let justice run down like water,  
And righteousness like a mighty stream.  
Amos 5:24