

Deuteronomy 12:8-14 (John Brereton) 130359

The Divine Ground of Gathering, Part 2 (12:8-14)

Before turning to the Old Testament once again to follow the outline of the truth concerning meeting together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I would like to turn to a verse in Romans 15:4: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

We find here the God-given authority to turn to that which was written aforetime — to that which was written before the Book of Romans was written — indeed to go back to the earliest parts of the Word of God, because we are told that they have been "written for our learning." When we minimize or turn away from the truth contained in pictures and principles found in the Old Testament, we are turning away from that which was written for our learning.

Turn to Deuteronomy 12:8-14:

"Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the Lord your God giveth you. But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the Lord your God giveth you to inherit, and when He giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the Lord: and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God, ye, and your sons, and your daughters, and your menservants, and your maidservants, and the Levite that is within your gates; forasmuch as he hath no part nor inheritance with you. Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: but in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee."

We notice that in Genesis 22 God introduced us to the concept that there would be a place, chosen by Himself, to which He would lead the man of faith, and there, in response to the love shown out in the gift of the Son by the Father, the man of faith could be led of God to the place where he would find "the ram caught in a thicket by his horns" and where he could enjoy the privilege of worship in the very presence of the Lord Jesus.

Now, when we come to the Book of Deuteronomy, we find the direction that God gives concerning that place. In Genesis 22 we are simply told that Abraham, the man of faith, was led by God to the place. Now we are given instructions concerning the place. We find, first of all, that there is a distinct warning given against every man doing that which is right in his own eyes. We are told specifically at the end of verse 8, "Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes." In other words, the concept of every man deciding for himself, without reference to the instruction that God gives, is condemned at the start. We are not left to our own devices. There is direction.

The next thing we notice here is that it is the Lord who will choose. So we are told in verse 11, "Then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there." We are not told here where that place was to be, but we are told there was to be "a place," and it would be characterized by the name of the Lord being there, and the children of Israel were told that that was where they were to come.

Now, you know the history of the children of Israel. There were twelve tribes. When the land of Israel was divided, it was divided into twelve portions and each one of the tribes was given a portion of the land. I have no doubt that each one of those twelve tribes would have very much liked to have had the place be in their area of the country, but they had nothing to do with the choosing of the place. When we come down to verse 13, we read, "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: but in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes." There would be one place, chosen of God, in one of the tribes, and they were all, as one nation, to acknowledge that one place that the Lord had chosen to put His name there.

The Word says, "Take heed to thyself." How much we need that instruction today! It seems that we live in a day like never before, when the popular thing is for every man to do that which is right in his own eyes. Freedom of choice! We have it actually included in the Constitution. Every man has freedom of religion, and he is free to choose how he is going to worship. Well, beloved brethren, it is true, and we thank God for it, that that freedom is extended in this land as far as not being repressed, but you and I are not given by God the freedom or the right to make our own choice. He has given us, as He gave the children of Israel, the most explicit directions. As we read these directions given to the children of Israel, let us remember what we read in Romans 15, that what was written aforetime was written for our learning!

The Old Testament is not a Jewish history book. It is the Word of God that has been written for your learning and for mine, and here we are told, "Take heed." A place — a place for Israel, and, in establishing this place, God was speaking to you and He was speaking to me. So He says, "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest; but in the place that the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes."

Now turn on to Deuteronomy 15:8-11:

"But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother,

and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.”

One of the characteristics of those who were going to enter into the land was a care one for another.

Now, if you would go on to chapter 16:16:

“Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which He shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the Lord empty.”

Now turn to chapter 17:513:

“Then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, which have committed that wicked thing, unto thy gates, even that man or that woman, and shalt stone them with stones, till they die. At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you. If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the Lord thy God shall choose; and thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and inquire; and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment: and thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the Lord shall choose shall show thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee: According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall show thee, to the right hand, nor to the left. And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously.”

You will perhaps recall the comment that was made as to how often in the Word of God the number three comes up in connection with the truth that God gives us concerning how His people should meet together collectively to worship Him. We noticed that it was on the third day that Abraham came to the place to which the Lord was leading him, and now we find that when God gave Israel instructions concerning the place that He would choose, three specific things are given in connection with that place. They are worship, binding decisions and prayer.

In Deuteronomy 16 we have the first, and that is worship. We find that Israel was told that three times in a year they were to go up to the place that the Lord would choose. Notice the language used in verse 16: “Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which He shall choose.” “Three times”: the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of weeks and the feast of tabernacles.

Now the Israelite was given no choice. He was specifically forbidden to make his own selection as to where he was to go. He was not to do what was right in his own eyes, but he was told that when he had these feasts to keep, that particularly expressed the offering up of worship to God, he was to go to the place that the Lord would choose. Remember, brethren, it was “written for our learning”!

The second specific thing in chapter 17 is binding decisions rendered in the name of the Lord. First of all, we are shown how that holiness becomes those who would be identified with that place and name, and so they are told of how they are to act concerning evil. It is to be judged and to be put away. Then we are told in the same chapter what Israel was to do when matters arose that were too hard for them. What were they to do? It was forbidden for every man to do what was right in his own eyes; but the Lord makes provision for an orderly settlement of difficulties. It says in verse 9, “Thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and inquire; and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment.” Where were they to go for the sentence of judgment? The end of verse 8 says, “Get thee up into the place which the Lord thy God shall choose.”

There was to be a place chosen of God — this same place where His name would be, where binding decisions could be rendered. I say “binding” because we are told specifically in verse 11, “According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do.” Now, beloved brethren, God did not (He never has and He never will, apart from the man Christ Jesus) give to man infallibility. Men make mistakes, but what He has conferred upon man is authority, and we see it very graphically pictured to us here for Israel. They were to go to the place where the Lord had chosen to put His name. There they were to present the problem, and the decision that was rendered was binding upon them. Now the instruction was given that it should be “according to the law,” that is, according to what is revealed in the Word, but the decision was binding upon all those who recognized that the center where the Lord had placed His name was the place where binding decisions were rendered. Brethren, this was written for our learning!

We still have one characteristic of the place to consider. Remember how we mentioned that there are three. The first is worship. The second is binding decisions rendered in the name of the Lord. The third, prayer, is found in 1 Kings 8:29: “That Thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which Thou hast said, My name shall be there: that Thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place.”

Here at the dedication of the temple at Jerusalem, Solomon specifically asked that prayer, which acknowledged that the Lord’s name had been placed at Jerusalem, might be answered. Daniel acted upon this principle; see Daniel 6:10.

Now I would like to read 1 Kings 12:25-33 and 13:1:

“Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Peniel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem:

behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. And he made a house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense. And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense.”

Solomon had died. The kingdom of Israel had become divided. Ten tribes had followed this man called Jeroboam, and two tribes had remained faithful to the house of David. These two tribes continued to recognize that God’s center was at Jerusalem. The Lord had not moved His name. The Lord had not established other centers even though Israel was in a divided state.

Jeroboam reasoned in his heart, and this was how he reasoned: If the ten tribes that had followed him were to continue to go up to Jerusalem, the effect would be that before long they would all be back together again and he would have lost his position as king over the ten tribes. This is what he specifically says in verse 27: “If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.”

Simply put, the principle is this: The recognition of one center results in the public manifestation that the twelve tribes were one people. It wasn’t that they were not all the children of Israel, but the act of Jeroboam in establishing two more centers of his own devising, at Bethel and at Dan, was to perpetuate the division of the people of God. Instead of having one center which would bring them together again, Jeroboam says that now there are three, and he even establishes a form of worship.

You know, it has been most striking to my soul, in meditating upon this, as to why Jeroboam chose two golden calves. What has impressed me is simply this: Jeroboam already had a precedent to follow. He could look back and say, “Israel did this once before, when they were in the wilderness on the way to the promised land, and with such an important man as Aaron they had worshipped the golden calf.” And so Jeroboam has a precedent that he can follow, but it is not according to the will of God, as revealed in the Word.

Jeroboam gives the people of Israel, the ten tribes that had followed him, two more centers, but they were not given of God. There is no suggestion that the Lord’s name was there — no suggestion that God had ordained them. Instead, we are told what Jeroboam, not God, did: In verse 29, he set up the one in Bethel; in verse 31, he made a house of high places; in verse 32, Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month; at the end of verse 32, “Sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month.”

There was already a feast of Jehovah identified with God’s center at Jerusalem on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. All Jeroboam did was to copy it. He says, “We’ll have ours on the fifteenth day of the eighth month,” but it was all man-made and man-established. It was man’s center and not God’s.

Now, beloved brethren, God sent a prophet. The first verse of chapter 13 says God sent a prophet from Judah and he came up to Bethel. Verse 2 tells us that at Bethel “he cried against the altar in the word of the Lord.” Chapter 13 tells us very specifically that God would deal in His own time with this center that Jeroboam had made. The truth of the matter is that it lasted for three hundred years. Three hundred years elapsed before that which God said would happen to that center actually came to pass. The point for you and me to profit by is that it was a man-made center, and the effect was to perpetuate the division that had come in among the people of God.

Now, turn to 2 Kings 10. Almost a hundred years had gone by since Jeroboam’s day. The centers had gone on, even though God showed very clearly that they did not have His sanction. Now we come, almost one hundred years later, to 2 Kings 10:29. Speaking of a king of Israel by the name of Jehu, we read:

“Howbeit, from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan. And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel. But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.”

Jehu did much that met with God’s approval. He carried out a program concerning God’s enemies — the house of Ahab. He carried out a program that God had instituted, and God commended him for it, but we are given to see that one hundred years had not in any way diminished in the eyes of God the sin of establishing those centers at Bethel and Dan, with their golden calves, that simply kept the people of God apart. After telling us that Jehu had not turned away from the sins of Jeroboam and specifically identifying the sin as those golden calves at Bethel and at Dan, God then tells us of the good works that Jehu had done and of the reward that Jehu was going to have for the good work he had done. He then reminds us that Jehu still went on with those centers at Bethel and Dan and that he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin. Oh, beloved brethren, these things are written for our learning!

I would like you now to turn to the book of Ezra. By this time, approximately three hundred years had gone by. The ten tribes that had followed Jeroboam had gone into captivity in Assyria, and, as far as man’s records are concerned, they have disappeared. We sometimes speak of them as the lost tribes of Israel. The two tribes that had remained true to the house of David and that had continued to acknowledge God’s center at Jerusalem had also gone into captivity in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. Seventy years had passed since then, and God had determined that His people should now return to the land of promise, to the land of Canaan.

Jeremiah had said that they would be captive in that far-off land for seventy years, and now that the seventy years were over, God had raised up a man by the name of Cyrus. This man, I might say, was named by God 150 years before he was born. Cyrus was raised up of God to grant deliverance to the two tribes and to enable them to return to the land of promise.

But where were they going to go? They were forbidden, according to Deuteronomy 12, from doing what was right in their own eyes, so what did they do? Look at Ezra 3:1: “And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.” Jerusalem — God’s center—the place that God had chosen to put His name there! They went to Jerusalem!

Verse 3: “And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord, even burnt offerings morning and evening.”

Verse 6: “From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid.”

Verses 11-13: “And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because He is good, for His mercy endureth forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.”

The foundation of the temple is laid. Where? At Jerusalem! Solomon’s temple had been destroyed and the ancient men, who had been brought back to Jerusalem, saw the foundation of the new temple laid, and they wept because they compared it with Solomon’s temple and it seemed such a poor, feeble reflection of the temple that they had known.

But the young ones shouted for joy because there was to be a temple. It was a feeble company, but they had come back to where the Lord had placed His name and there they built the temple again. Nothing was left to their imagination; God’s center was at Jerusalem. Daniel had acknowledged it from Babylon when he opened his windows and prayed as Solomon had directed in 1 Kings 8 towards Jerusalem. Now they had come back to Jerusalem!

We’ll go on now to chapter 6:15-19:

“And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, and offered at the dedication of this house of God a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses. And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.”

The house was finished! There was joy! Where were they? At Jerusalem! They were now to offer their sacrifices. But there were really only two tribes there. It’s true, there were some from others, as we will notice later on, but the fact remains, basically there were only two. It was a poor, feeble company compared to the children of Israel that had entered that land of promise so many years before, but they were at God’s center. They were where He had chosen to place His name, the temple was built, and now it comes time to offer the sin offering. Were they going to offer the sin offering for their two tribes? No. They offered it for all Israel.

Beloved brethren, what was offered there that day was presented to God for all Israel! “Twelve he goats according to the number of the tribes of Israel.” Is that important? Yes, beloved brethren, it is very important. What that little company represented and acted upon and what they presented before God was that they were there on behalf of Israel at God’s center, and they acknowledged it in the sacrifice they offered.

If we go on to chapter 7:8, we read about Ezra: “And he [that is, Ezra] came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.” In chapter 8:31: “Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.”

You remember how it says in the sixth chapter that the temple “was finished on the third day.” Here we find that Ezra has come. This was, perhaps, sixty or seventy years after the children of Israel had come back. Now Ezra came up. Where did he go? He went to where God’s center was —at Jerusalem. It was not left to him to choose where to go, nor was it left to him to choose where he thought things would be better. Should he feel that if he went to some other place he might be able to start something that would be more godly? God’s center was at Jerusalem and that’s where he went. It tells us again, “We came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.” I believe that God uses this third day — three days, three things — over and over again —to remind our hearts that the foundation of all that we have before us is the death and resurrection of Christ.

Please turn with me to the book of Nehemiah for one verse: chapter 2:11. Nehemiah came along, another godly man, perhaps not a man of faith to the extent that Ezra was, for there is a decline in going from Ezra to Nehemiah, but the fact remains that Nehemiah had an exercise to go back to the land. He got permission from the king, and where did he go? We read here in Nehemiah 2:11: “So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.” Three days again! If you read the book of Nehemiah, you will find that things weren’t orderly at all at Jerusalem. There were all sorts of failures, but God’s center was at Jerusalem. That was where Israel was meeting together, acknowledging in their sacrifices that they were one nation before God, and Nehemiah could do nothing less than to go to God’s center at Jerusalem.

Now turn to Luke 2. Approximately five hundred years have gone by, and where was God’s center still? It was at Jerusalem — five hundred years later! It has been an immense comfort to my own soul to realize that God maintained a testimony at Jerusalem. It had become very feeble, as we find here, but God maintained the testimony at Jerusalem until the Lord Jesus presented Himself there.

Luke 2:21-22: "And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, His name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought Him to Jerusalem, to present Him to the Lord." Couldn't they have presented Him to the Lord back in Bethlehem? Why not in Nazareth? God's center was at Jerusalem. That was where the Lord had placed His name, and Joseph and Mary came to Jerusalem and presented Jesus before the Lord there.

Verses 25-26: "And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple." Was Simeon where he should be? He was at Jerusalem! The Holy Spirit told him that he would see the Lord's Christ, and the Spirit brought him into the temple to see Jesus.

Oh, beloved brethren, what a wonderful picture this is! We see just a few that were looking for redemption in Israel. They were looking for the Messiah to come, but they were there, and they were acknowledging God's center at JERUSALEM!

Verses 36-38:

"And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

Verse 37 says of Anna, "Which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." She was from the tribe of Aser, or Asher, which was one of the ten tribes. Where did she remain? Here was a woman of faith. She remained true to God's center at Jerusalem, and she departed not from it night or day.

Now, let us read verses 41-46:

"Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing Him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found Him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking Him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions."

There we have three days again. What had happened? Joseph and Mary left Jerusalem, but Jesus remained there. He remained there and they didn't realize it. How tragic to think that they didn't realize that in the path on which they started out, they left the Lord behind. They went without Jesus! They sought Him among their acquaintance and their kinsfolk. How often this can be so with us. We can start off in a path, doing that which seems right in our own eyes, and we don't realize that the Lord has been left out. He remained at Jerusalem. How could they find Him again? Not among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. They had to go back to Jerusalem and there, at Jerusalem, they found him after three days.

Oh, beloved brethren, God has written these things for our learning! As we follow this truth in the New Testament, the principles that we have found in the Old Testament will be found unchanged, and we will see that God still has a place, and He seeks, by His Spirit, to lead us there.

clickbible.org