

## Robert Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Lecture 10B

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### Centralization of Worship in Deuteronomy 12, Halwarda's Article

#### III. The Centralization of Worship and Its Implications for the Date of Deuteronomy

##### A. D. Halwarda's "The Place the Lord Will Choose" article

We introduced Roman numeral III last class. It is "The Centralization of Worship and its Implications for the Date of Deuteronomy." I think what I will do here is present to you initially the content of an article, which I think is an excellent article on the subject, by a man named D. Halwarda. He was a Dutch Old Testament scholar who died in his early 40s about 10 years ago. He was a young scholar at the point of his death and had begun to publish and do some tremendous work, but the Lord took him. He wrote an article on this issue published in this little book that is only available in Dutch. I sort of boiled down the essence of it and, at least initially, I wanted to give you that because I think he sets up the problem nicely, and from it you can get a handle on the issues involved. The title of his article is "The Place which the Lord your God shall Choose." Now you recognize that as coming from Deuteronomy chapter 12.

##### 1. The Statement of the Problem

He says, "Few Bible readers realize that in this phrase we are confronted with the root problem of modern Old Testament study, yet that is the case." Now he may slightly have over-exaggerated and overstated his case, but I think there is some value in doing that. "The root problem of modern Old Testament study is found in this phrase: 'the place that the Lord your God shall choose.' This is so because it is this phrase, concerning a legitimate place of worship in Israel, which formed a key to the first part of Wellhausen's work on the history of Israel that later became his book *The Prolegomena to the History of Israel*. The key to that work centers around this phrase. Halwarda says, "One can say that this study [*The Prolegomena to the History of Israel*] was the great turning point in Old Testament study, and in spite of criticism of the details, subsequent to the time when

it was published, for changes in method and research. It still keeps its dominant position until the present day. So thanks to Wellhausen, Deuteronomy chapter 12 has become the springboard for a completely destructive criticism of the Bible, but it's left almost nothing of the Old Testament intact." What Halwarda is doing is attaching enormous significance to Wellhausen's interpretation of Deuteronomy 12 as at the core of Wellhausen's whole JEDP hypothesis.

Halwarda continues, "What is more remarkable is that Wellhausen gave an exegesis of Deuteronomy 12 which, for the most part, has the agreement of the majority of Bible-believing exegetes. He read Deuteronomy 12 in the sense that all the offerings of Israel were to be bound to one sanctuary at a central place of worship, which ultimately became the temple. All the offerings were bound to that one place of central worship, and every altar outside of Jerusalem was illegal. Every offering that someone brought from another high place, for example, was illegal. Why? Because it was not brought at the place which the Lord had chosen. So Deuteronomy 12, according to Wellhausen and according to most Bible-believing exegetes, demanded this centralization of worship. Deuteronomy 12 meant that worship was forbidden in any place other than that central sanctuary. Exclusive rights were at the temple.

The point in which Wellhausen and most Bible-believing scholars differ is that while the latter maintain Moses as the writer of Deuteronomy 12, Wellhausen placed the writing in the time of Josiah, who was the first one to get rid of the high places and restrict offerings to the temple of Jerusalem." So that Halwarda is positing here is the basic agreement between Bible-believing exegetes and Wellhausen in the meaning and interpretation of the chapter, declaring centralization of worship, but Bible-believing exegetes would say Moses wrote that (ca. 1400-1200 B.C.). Wellhausen would say that it was the time of Josiah (621 B.C.), and that he was the first one who tried to wipe out the high places and make the exclusive center of worship in Jerusalem. So that from the orthodox side the chapter would be placed in the time of Moses. Wellhausen believed it's from the time of Josiah, 621 B.C.

a. Wellhausen's 3 Stages of the Place of Worship: Multiple Sanctuaries,  
Prophetic Opposition to Multiple Sanctuaries, Centralized Post-Exilic

Wellhausen's reason for 621 is this regulation of exclusive worship is impossible to conceive of any earlier. His theory was based on a view that the center of worship went through three discernable stages when you study the historical sections of the Old Testament. If you look at the historical sections of the Old Testament, there are three discernable phases of evolution concerning the place of worship. The first phase was this: The altar was not tied to a specific place. There were many altars and many places of worship. At the time of Judges and Samuel, you find many altars in use. It appears that the people took over the high places of the Canaanites, and no one had objections to putting altars at almost any location. At the time of Samuel, he offered at the high places so religious observances could be held almost anywhere. Wellhausen said that later there was divine approval to the existing places of worship by asserting that their origin was due to the appearance of the Lord at a particular place. It was called a theophany, which then legitimized a place as a worship site. The Lord appeared at Bethel and at Shechem, so they were legitimate places. But in this first phase there was no thought of worship being bound to one place to the exclusion of all others. Wellhausen's idea of the early, more free kind of worship--you have this spontaneous kind of religion and every occasion of life that would give rise for an expression of thanksgiving--there was an altar nearby where sacrifices were performed.

But then slowly a change began to set in. We're still not to the second phase, but change begins to be set up under the influence of the early prophets, Amos and Hosea. Criticism began to arise against the unbridled cult. With the rise of the prophetic movement, they began to proclaim that true worship was not the offering of the blood of bulls and goats, but it was ethical living. The prophets didn't desire cultic activity; they wanted a proper way of life. They wanted ethics. It wasn't that they opposed multiplicity of altars as such, but they saw a danger in a religion that laid stress on the cult because the moral demands of God did not get their due when people went flocking to the altar and just going through all those ceremonies. Thanks to this opposition of the prophets

[this is all Wellhausen's theory, Halwarda is summarizing it] the high places lost their significance. Moreover, the political situation slowly led Jerusalem to come to the foreground. After the fall of Samaria in 722, there was no longer competition from the Northern Kingdom as concerns cultic observance. At about the same time, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed in the south the unassailable position of Jerusalem. Jerusalem begins to get center-of-attention by the time of Isaiah.

All of these factors together lead to the second phase in which Jerusalem and the temple become dominant. Wellhausen said it was understood that a radical abolition of the entire cult could not succeed. So there was an attempt at reformation and concentration. Now, you can't entirely obliterate the cult. Prophets were opposed to it, but they couldn't entirely obliterate it, so there was an attempt to concentrate it, reform it, and that prophetic influence was behind this development. But even though the prophets and the priests were deadly enemies--basically two different spheres of religious concern--yet the prophets and the priests worked together in this matter of reformation and concentration. They had a mutual interest there. Because the priests in Jerusalem had a great material advantage from concentration of worship in the capital, the prophets promoted the same also in connection with their monotheistic concept of God. So you need really to stop talking, as Wellhausen did, about "the god of Bethel," "the god of Beersheba," the god of all these places. There was one God and one legitimate place of worship. So through this common influence, prophetic influence and priestly influence, that all comes to bear on the attempt of Josiah to wipe out the worship at the high places and in every place in the land except Jerusalem, and that was his great reformation in 621. That's the second phase.

Yet that attempt was doomed to failure; people were attached to the holy places. As soon as Josiah died, worship returned to these places. The reformation would never have had a remaining effect, according to Wellhausen, if it had not been for the exile. Because with the exile, the people were uprooted completely, taken out of the land, and the whole worship system was broken off. When Cyrus, in 539 B.C. gave the edict that permitted the return, there was a generation that had never been able to sacrifice at all.

They hadn't grown up with the old practices of earlier times. And only at that point was there a generation of people that could dedicate their heart and soul to the accomplishment of the reform ideas of the centralized cult.

So that brings in the third phase: The exile made this complete break with the past, and after the exile and the return, the people no longer thought of establishing high places. They just accepted as self-evident the goal of the prophets and the priests before that there should be one place of worship, and that was at Jerusalem in the temple. That's the third phase: the post-exilic time of real adherence to one place of worship that was never experienced before that.

#### b. Significance of Deut. 12 for the Wellhausen Theory

We want to go a little bit further with setting the background to Wellhausen's position and to understand the key role that chapter 12 plays, and then see what the chapter says and what we do with that. I will continue to summarize for you the article written by Halwarda on "The Place which the Lord your God shall Choose" and the significance that he attaches to the interpretation of Deuteronomy chapter 12 in connection with Wellhausen's whole structure of this JEDP theory. And in the process of that, he begins by mentioning that Wellhausen's theory went through three discernable phases with relation to history of worship in Israel. So there was the first phase in which there was multiplicity of sanctuaries. There was the second phase with the influence of the prophets in their opposition to multiplicity of sanctuaries and in favor of centralization of worship. But that was not entirely successful until after the exile when we come to the post-exilic times. Then you come to the third phase where you do have the establishment of the central, exclusive place of worship. So that was generally the development that he sketched, and we discussed that in the last class hour.

#### c. 3 Phases in Israel's Worship Altar Locations

### 1. Law Code: Exod. 20

So to pick up from that point, then, these phases of history of Israel's worship in connection with place of worship: multiplicity of altars, centralization of altars, whatever--there is that progression that Wellhausen saw. Now, to continue. Wellhausen said that not only did history move in these three phases, but we discover the same three phases in the law given. Not only did the history of worship move in that sequence, but in the laws of Israel you find the same three phases represented. The reason he says that is that the altar law of Exodus 20 corresponds to the first phase of the theory: the multiplicity of altars. The altar law is found in Exodus 20. Now Exodus 20 occurs in the "Book of the Covenant," and in verses 24 through 26 you read, "An altar of earth you shall make unto me, and shall sacrifice thereon your burnt offerings, and your peace offerings, your sheep, and your oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto you, and I will bless you. And if you will make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone: for if you lift up your tool upon it, you have polluted it. Neither shall you go up by steps unto my altar, that your nakedness be not discovered thereon."

### 2. Deuteronomy 12: Centralization to One Place

Note the phrase "But in all the places where I record my name." The Lord will come unto them, and the altars that were built in various places should correspond with the description that he lays out there. But according to Wellhausen, the altar law of Exodus 20 presumed multiplicity of altars corresponding to the first phase. That law can be attributed to J and to E--the JE document--and that the picture of multiplicity of altars reflected there corresponds to the historical picture provided by those two sources.

Now, when you move on further, Deuteronomy 12, according to Wellhausen, demands destruction of the heathen places of offering and commands that the Lord be worshipped in one place. So that Deuteronomy, then, and the law in Deuteronomy 12, correspond to the second phase of this development. Of course, as we discussed before, Wellhausen puts that at 621 B.C. when Josiah promoted his reformation. Of his JEDP sources, that leaves only P. And according Wellhausen, P is clearly later than D because

in D centralization is explicitly commanded and thus must still be finding existing, contrary practices, but P does not lay stress on that anymore. P just assumes that one central sanctuary is normal. In that document there is only one place. According to P there was never any other way. It is just a matter of assumption; there is one place of worship, and it is not a matter of conflict with the multiplicity of altars. In the time of P, they presumed there was one place of worship; everybody's in agreement with that. He then assigns that to the third phase: to post-exilic times for the origin of that.

Now he finds that sequence also confirmed by other matters--we don't want to get into all that--but the force of Wellhausen's system rests not on just one single point, but he brought to bear on this issue coming from a lot of different directions, and his evolution of worship is sort of something that comes to conclusion on the basis of a lot of converging evidence. This is just one factor that is key to his theory: the progression and relation to the place of worship, not only historically but also legally. He has one firm date, 621 B.C. and that D document. So he worked back from 621 to an earlier time; then he worked the other direction subsequent to 621 to date this post-exilic material.

Of course, the result does havoc to the entire Old Testament. Because, what serves as foundation for the Old Testament?--The Pentateuch. He divides the Pentateuch up into JEDP source documents, and none of them are any longer foundational. Because Moses, rather than being the *foundation* for all that follows, Moses is the *result*. He's the outcome. He's the final point that is reached in the history of the Old Testament religion. Religion in the older times was no different than the Canaanite religion. The Lord was simply a god no different than the other Canaanite gods. So that the starting point for Wellhausen's system is not Mosaic revelation, but early Semitic heathenism. What Wellhausen's system does is run from heathenism up to Moses. So what, according to the biblical structure, is the beginning?--the Mosaic revelation. For Wellhausen, "Mosaic revelation" is the end. That's where everything is moving, particularly in the prophetic movement towards, monotheism, centralization of worship, and ultimately working out the implications of that, and the Levitical legislation with its detailed ritual. That's the final point.

### 3. Prophets as Innovators

In the process of doing that whole line of destruction of multiple worship site and progress towards centralization, the prophets are left hanging in the air. Because the prophets, then, are no more reformers standing on the foundation of Moses. The prophets don't proclaim the old ways and call the people back to them. The prophets are innovators: They're proclaiming new ways. So the function of the prophets is not to defend and proclaim the way of Moses, you might say, that had originally been revealed as over against heathenism, and to call Israel back to their argument that Israel is distinct from heathen origins. But the prophets lead the people by their ethical preaching from early heathenism and bring them finally to Moses. That's what Wellhausen's theory does. The prophets lead people by their ethical preaching out of heathenism and really bring them to "Moses," the "Moses" of Wellhausen's system.

### 2. Halwarda's Responses to Wellhausen's Deut. 12 Theory

Now, that's basically Halwarda's assessment of Wellhausen's system. I think that gives you some insight into it and gives you somewhat of a handle on it that may be useful. If you read Wellhausen's *Prolegomena*, it is an enormously complex book. I think the presentation in Halwarda is helpful in seeing some of the implications of it. Halwarda's main point is that the history of opposition to Wellhausen's theory is mostly directed against various details of this system rather than getting at the heart of it. Of course, not that the details aren't useful too, but according to Halwarda's approach here, the heart of this system is the "centralization of worship" issue, and that's the key point in Wellhausen's whole system. That's why, as I mentioned, Halwarda said at the beginning of his article, "Few Bible readers realize that in this phrase, 'the place that the Lord your God shall choose,' we are confronted with the root problem of modern Old Testament study." That's why he feels it's so significant. I think Halwarda may have overstated his case, but still there is something here that has enormous implications.



a. Multiple Altars Sanctioned in Historical Books (cf. 1 Kgs 18-19) Elijah and the Prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel

Now, what he goes on to do is this: He points out that there are examples in the historical books covering the time from the Judges up to and including the time of the Kingdom period where the multiplicity of altars were obviously referred to in the historical books. He says it's difficult to be satisfied with saying that the worship in each case at these different altars was illegal.

He points out that there are examples of worship that were illegal and not in accordance with the law. For example, starting in Judges 17, the worship that Micah promoted described in those latter chapters in the book of Judges, where that private sanctuary was set up with the Levite, obviously idolatry was involved. It was illegal worship. Also Jeroboam son of Nebat's setting up his calves at Bethel and at Dan certainly was intended to be a rival worship center to the worship in Jerusalem, and such, was condemned as a sin.

But all of that, he says, does not take away from the fact that in this period the multiplicity of altars *per se* was not condemned, but sanctioned. He points that out in a number of cases. In the case of Elijah, in the time of Ahab of the Northern Kingdom, where he opposes Baal worship and the prophets of Baal, after that showdown with the people on Mount Carmel in I Kings 18, when Jezebel comes after Elijah, he becomes very discouraged. He flees from Jezebel and he goes out into the wilderness; and in I Kings 19:10, as he's in a cave resting, and the Lord says "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replies, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets with a sword, and I, only I am left, and now they are seeking to take my life." One of Elijah's complaints is that the people had thrown down the Lord's altars in the plural. They had abandoned the altars of the Lord and apparently were following the heathen altars. It wasn't long before that up on Mount Carmel Elijah himself erected an altar. In I Kings 18:31, "Elijah took 12 stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob. With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord and made a trench around

the altar.” Then he prayed and the Lord responded to that prayer. And you don’t get the slightest hint that there is any illegality connected with his building an altar apart from the Jerusalem altar. You get the suggestion, at least in I Kings 19:10, that a point of valid criticism against the Israelites of that time was that they destroyed the Lord’s altars.

#### b. No Prophetic Opposition to Multiple Altars

It is also at least of interest, as Halwarda points out, that we never read once of prophetic opposition against the multiplicity of altars. There is no element of the prophetic message that is explicitly directed against the multiplicity of altars. Now, if that was an issue, it would have to be an argument from silence. You could at least charge the prophets with neglect of this issue. Why didn’t the prophets come out strongly against the multiplicity of altars?

#### c. Samuel Had Many Altars

The books of Samuel are particularly important on the issue of multiplicity of altars. Samuel was a prophet; he was a reformer; he built various altars, and he sacrificed at various altars. In I Samuel chapter 9 he goes to a high place in Ramah and offers a sacrifice in the town of Ramah. In I Samuel 7 and I Samuel 10, Samuel offers sacrifices at Mizpah. And in I Samuel 11:15 he offers one at Gilgal. So you have explicit mention of Samuel offering on altars at Ramah, Mizpah, and Gilgal.

You also have the reference in I Samuel 16:2 of his making an offering in Bethlehem, which seems to be divinely sanctioned because, notice the context: “The Lord said to Samuel, ‘How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided myself a king among his sons. Go anoint one of the sons of Jesse.’ Samuel says, ‘How will I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.’” Saul was the king, he’s going to anoint another king and Samuel is going to oppose that. “The Lord says, ‘Take a heifer with you and say, “I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.”’” That seems like it had been such a normal practice for someone to take a heifer, go to

Bethlehem and offer a sacrifice. It would have aroused no curiosity whatsoever on the part of Saul.

d. David's "Sacrifice" in Bethlehem Accepted

In a subsequent occasion, after David had been anointed and Saul was still king, David was not at his place at the table of Saul in I Samuel 20. When Saul's curiosity was aroused as to why David wasn't there, we find in I Samuel 20:24, "David hid himself in a field. When the new moon was come, the king sat down to eat, and the king sat on his seat as at other times, even on a seat by the wall: and Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side, and David's place was empty. Nevertheless Saul did not say anything that day for he thought, 'Something has befallen him, he is not clean; surely he is not clean.'" In other words, it seems that it must have been some sort of cultic meal because the first thought was he was not ritually able to come. But then on the second day, "Saul said to Jonathan, 'Why comes not the son of Jesse to the table, neither today nor yesterday.' Jonathan answers Saul, 'David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem. He said, "Let me go, I pray you; for our family has a sacrifice in the city; and my brother, he has commanded me to be there.'" So again, he went to Bethlehem. Why? To offer a sacrifice. His brother had commanded him to be there for it, and that was the reason why then he wasn't at Saul's table. So that local offering was apparently a custom at that time and no one saw any deviation from the law because someone was going to a different place to offer a sacrifice.

e. Deut. 12 and David's Desire to Build God a House

But then some say these were unstable times; the temple had not yet been built, and Deuteronomy 12:10 says, "When you go over Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God gives you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety; then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there." In other words, after the Israelites had achieved rest, then there would be centralized worship. So frequently the point is

made, that Deuteronomy says this, and that 2 Samuel 7:11 is the point at which those conditions were realized. Now 2 Samuel 7 is that chapter that contains the promises of the Lord to David concerning his house, or dynasty, that the Lord was going to establish forever when David had asked if he could build a house or temple for the Lord. In verse 11 it says, “And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies, also the LORD tells you that he will make you a house/dynasty.” Now, some have tried to argue then that any citation of a multiplicity of altars prior to II Samuel 7 was sanctioned because multiplicity was permissible until the Lord gave rest and until the situation was established of peace in which centrality of worship could then function well.

f. Absalom and the Hebron Sanctuary

But even if that’s the case, it doesn’t help with Elijah and in addition, Absalom, for example, even after 2 Samuel 7:11, organized his revolution at the sanctuary in Hebron. In 2 Samuel 15, David sanctions the wish of his son to go to Hebron to pay a vow, again without a huge dismay about going somewhere else to sacrifice. 2 Samuel 15:7: “And it came to pass after forty years, that Absalom said to the king, ‘I pray you, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the LORD, in Hebron. For your servant vowed a vow while he was in Geshur in Syria, saying, “If the LORD shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD.”’ David grants that to his son, and of course, Absalom then goes to Hebron and starts a revolution there, but the occasion for going to Hebron was again, paying a vow and offering a sacrifice.

g. Rest and Place Only Possible in Solomon’s Day – no Joshua’s Day

In addition, and this is Halwarda’s response to the 2 Samuel 7 reference, if external enemies are meant by this matter of rest and peace, the application of Deuteronomy 12 is only really possible during the time of Solomon and then for a very brief period later because if you’re talking about external enemies, almost constantly throughout Israel’s history of the nation there was threat from external enemies. There

was only a short period where there was no threat of external enemies. So Halwarda says the rest referred to in Deuteronomy 12 does not have reference to external enemies, but to internal, and that the achievement of that condition really is referred to in Joshua 22:4, right at the conclusion of the conquest of Canaan. In Joshua 22, after the conquest and the two and a half tribes are sent home, we read in verse 4, “And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers, as he promised them. Now therefore return, and get to your tents, and to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan. But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law.” So that he sees “the rest” referred to in the promises of Deuteronomy as fulfilled long before the time of David; it was fulfilled in the time of Joshua.

Alright, then to go a bit further. The Exodus 20:24-26 passage, what is the point of the regulations there? We’ll continue this next time.

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