

Robert Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Lecture 14

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Response to Wellhausen's View of the Centralization of Worshiping in Ancient Israel

Let's get back to our discussion. We were discussing centralization of worship issues. Last week we looked at the place of centralization of worship and Wellhausen's reconstruction of Israel's religious development. What we want to do today, "B" on your sheet, was a suggested response to Wellhausen's view of the centralization of worshiping in Ancient Israel. Now what I'm going to do initially here is give you pretty much the way in which Halwarda has argued against Wellhausen's position. If you look on your bibliography, page 5, at the bottom of the page is "Centralization of Worship in Deuteronomy," and you notice the fourth entry there is Halwarda. It's a Dutch article translated "The Place the LORD Shall Choose." That article has not been translated into English. I think it's quite a good article, and much of what I'll say here is pretty much the way he develops his thesis from that article. Halwarda mentions that in the history of opposition to Wellhausen's theory, most of the objections are directed against various details of the system. You see here is Wellhausen's system, and you get critics of the system to focus on this detail or that detail or some other detail, but a lot of the opposition of Wellhausen's system has been directed against various details of his system. But what Halwarda argues is that it should be realized that the centralization of worship is the key point in the whole system. In other words, if you are going to get at the Wellhausen system, that centralization issue is the key issue in this whole system.

1. Halwarda's Response to Wellhausen: Historical Books Have Multiple Altars

Halwarda says when you look at the Old Testament, you notice quite quickly that in the historical books that cover the time from the Judges up to and including the time of the Kingdom, you repeatedly find multiplicity of altars referred to. That being the case, multiplicity of altars from Judges up to the Kingdom Period, he says, it's hardly satisfactory to say that worship was illegal, or illegitimate, in all these places where

reference is made to worship apart from worship at the tabernacle, or later in the temple. Now he says, of course, there are examples of worship that were illegitimate, that were not in conformity with the Mosaic laws. For example, in Judges 17, you remember the story of a fellow named Micah who had these household idols, and the Danites come by and take these idols and migrate north with Micah's Levite. They then set up a place of worship there and an altar. Certainly that worship was illegitimate. It goes against the requirements of the Mosaic law. We also have the complaint about Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, when you read the books of Kings. Every king of the north, it says, made Israel sin. Now, that sin was he built those golden calves and altars at Bethel and Dan in the north.

2. Not Multiplicity of Altars but Golden Calf Worship Jeroboam's Problem

Now, what Halwarda thinks the issue is, is not so much that there was an altar in the north, which would have been legitimate, but there was golden calf worship, which was certainly a violation of the second commandment: "You shall not make unto you any image or likeness." So you can find examples of worship and altars that were illegitimate. But you also find many for which there is no condemnation made; they're very godly people who are sacrificing at these altars, and it seems to be perfectly legitimate. So in that period for Judges through to the Kingdom, it seems like the multiplicity of altars is not condemned *per se*.

3. Elijah and Altar on Mt. Carmel (1 Kgs 18-19)

An illustration Halwarda brings out, and I think this is an important one, is in the ministry of Elijah. Remember Elijah confronted Ahab at Mount Carmel. In the process he restored an altar of the LORD that had been broken down. Then you had that contest between the LORD Yahweh and Baal. The LORD answered Elijah's prayer, and fire came from heaven and lit that altar as a demonstration of the existence and power of Yahweh over and against Baal who couldn't do that. Certainly that was an altar apart from the altar of the temple. That was subsequent to the time that the temple had been

built. Rather than condemnations of this as another altar, it seems the Lord sanctioned that altar in the north in the time of Ahab.

Later, Halwarda says, I think this is in the context where Elijah is discouraged as he is fleeing from Jezebel, in 1 Kings 19:10, after he fled all the way down to Mount Horeb: “And the word of the Lord says to him, ‘What are you doing here?’ He replied, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant and broken down your altars and put your prophets to death with a sword. I am the only one left.’” You see, his complaint is, not that there are too many altars, but the Israelites were breaking down the altars of the LORD and were not using the altars of the LORD. They weren’t paying attention to the prophets. “They have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars and put your prophets to death with a sword.”

So, someone could argue that has nothing to do with legality of sacrifices having been brought to Jerusalem or the legality of those brought elsewhere than Jerusalem. But that doesn’t really seem like an adequate response to this. It seems that certainly that there weren’t any problems with altars apart from Jerusalem.

I think the issue is an issue that’s been created by Wellhausen and those people who followed him. It seems like to Elijah the multiplicity of altars was no issue. It was just accepted that there were a lot of altars that are centered all over Jerusalem, but there are a lot of other altars. It wasn’t that there was some history of progression from many altars to one altar. That seems like a concept that is totally foreign to Elijah.

4. High Places Canaanite Altars Were Prohibited

Now, of course, there were altars on high places, but I’ll just say this at this point and we’ll come back and look at it in more detail. It seems that some of the high places were illegitimate because they were taken over from the Canaanites, which was specifically prohibited. It seems that some of the other high places were places of worship to the Lord. In fact, that’s specifically said in certain cases. There seems to be nothing wrong with that. But it does seem that at the high places gradually you begin to get this sort of syncretistic kind of worship and confusion between Baal worship and

worship of the Lord. At that point, it became wrong.

So you get those kings in the south of which it is said, “They did good in the eyes of the Lord,” like Josiah and Hezekiah. Josiah did tear them down. Asa and Hezekiah did good in the eyes of the Lord except they didn’t tear down the high places. That seems like something that was sort of a blotch on their reigns to some extent. They should have them torn down. But then the question is why should they have torn them down? Is it because there was an altar in Jerusalem? That could be one possible answer. Or is it because there was heathen worship going on there? I’m inclined to this later. Or was it this syncretistic worship? We’ll come back to that.

5. Samuel and Multiple Altars

The books of Samuel are particularly important with respect to this question. Samuel was certainly a prophet of the Lord, a reformer. He called the people back to the Lord and away from heathen worship. He built a number of altars at different places. In chapter 9 of 1 Samuel, you read in verse 12 when Saul is out looking for his lost donkeys and his servant says let’s go inquire from this man of God, Samuel the seer. Verse 12 says when they come to the town and ask and if there was a seer there, they responded, “He is, he is ahead of you. Hurry now; he is just come to our town today for the people have the sacrifice at the high place.” And as you read down through that chapter, you find Samuel goes and officiates at this sacrifice located at the high place.

Verse 13: “As soon as you enter the town you will find him before he goes up to the high place to eat. The people will not begin eating until he comes because he must bless the sacrifice. Afterwards those who are invited will eat. Go up now and you should find him about this time.”

Verse 19 says, “I am the seer,” Samuel replied. ‘Go up ahead with me to the high place, for today you are to eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and tell you all that is in your heart.’” Verse 25 says, “After they came down from the high place into the town, Samuel talked with Saul on the roof of the house,” and so forth. It seems quite clear that Samuel’s sacrificing, and there was this sacrificial meal that Saul partook of at

Ramah.

In 1 Samuel 7, verse 6, Samuel sacrifices at Mizpah. “When they assembled at Mizpah, they drew out water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted they confessed, ‘We have sinned against the Lord.’ Samuel was the leader of Israel at Mizpah.” At verse 9 it says, “Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out to the Lord on Israel’s behalf, and the Lord answered him.” That’s another place where he sacrificed.

At chapter 11 Samuel does it at Gilgal. In 1 Samuel 11:15, Samuel says, “Let’s go to Gilgal and reaffirm the kingship. So all the people went unto Gilgal and confirmed Saul as King in the presence of the Lord. They sacrificed fellowship offerings.” Samuel went to these various places, so certainly there were a number of altars where Samuel sacrificed.

Later in the book, chapter 16, when the Lord tells Samuel to go and anoint David to replace Saul as King, you read in the second verse (this verse has often been discussed from the ethical question it raises), but you see in the first verse the Lord says to Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1) “‘How long will you mourn for Saul since I have rejected him as King over Israel? Fill your horn with oil; be on your way. I’m sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem; I’ve chosen one of his sons to be King.’ Samuel says, ‘How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me.’” What’s the Lord response? “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have to come to sacrifice to the Lord.’” So it must have not been unusual for sacrifices to have been offered in Bethlehem. In that light, Saul would not have realized what was going on. I won’t get into the ethical issue it raises.

Discussion of Lying to Saul to Save Lives (1 Sam. 16)

That’s an interesting passage , 1 Samuel 16:2. That gets into the question, “Is it ever right to deceive someone?” I think there are cases where there is no obligation not to deceive someone and where one is not culpable for deceiving, particularly in the context of almost war as it is here or where there is a life at stake. You have a higher obligation, it seems to me, to the other person involved than you do to “tell the truth.” Then you get

into of question of what's the truth and what's a lie. These are definitional and semantic questions, and it gets very complicated. I don't think we can address that issue. I've discussed this in Old Testament History. I don't think you can address that issue apart from the ninth commandment, "Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor." It's not just an abstract commitment to truth. It's you and by your words you are to protect your neighbor; that's your positive obligation. It seems to me when you work out the implications of that, this kind of text is consistent with that view. There are other texts in the Old Testament that are to be taken in a similar way, as well. Now, you particularly you get into that kind of thing, as I've said, in Old Testament History.

Some of the Korean fellows here know a lot about the war type situation in Korea. And my wife grew up in the Netherlands, an occupied country. Her parents housed Jews and protected them. You get that question: What if the S.S. knocks on your door, what do you do? Do you say, "Here they are," or do you deceive them? I think it is your Christian responsibility to deceive them. That's not bearing false witness against your neighbor. People can have different views on that. It's a tough question.

In Walter Kaiser's book on ethics, he tries to make that distinction and say that it is never right to deceive but in some cases you can conceal. And uses an illustration where you can conceal. We may never know whether Samuel was questioned saying, "What are you doing?" Samuel says, "I'm going to do that," and it's true. Yet it's concealing his true intent and his true reason for going there. So he's deceiving Saul at the same time, as far as I'm concerned. I'm not sure that distinction helps that much. (Student says something) That's a technicality, I think, because the end result is the same. He's led to believe one thing when in actual fact is he's going for another reason. Even though technically you can argue that, is that distinction really worth a whole lot? Maybe it's worth something. (Student says something) You see, Hodge says about a lie, even if you say something that doesn't correspond to reality, Hodge says that's not a lie if there's no obligation to tell the truth. So if you are not obligated to tell the truth, it's not a lie. So then it depends how you define your terms too. That will take us way aside from this question. Point is, there was an altar at Bethlehem. At this time, it doesn't seem unusual

to go to Bethlehem and sacrifice, not at the tabernacle.

6. Multiple Altars in Samuel Continued

See this would still fit with this area because Wellhausen would say at this point before 621 B.C. you had multiplicity of altars. So he appealed to this as well. On the occasion when David was not at his place at Saul's table, chapter 20 of 1 Samuel, Saul excuses him initially on the assumption that he was unclean. This was on the occasion of the feast of the new moon day. You read in 1 Samuel 20:26 Saul said nothing that day for he thought David wasn't there at his place and something must have happened to David to make him ceremonially unclean. "But the next the next day, the same day of the month David's place was empty again. Then Saul said to his son Jonathan, 'Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the meal yesterday or today?' Jonathan answered, 'David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem. He said, "Let me go because my family is observing a sacrifice in the town and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favor in your eyes let me get away to see my brothers." That is why he has not come to the King's table'" Now, of course, it had been arranged by David and Jonathan previously that this was the response that would be made; but again, the point's is what we're discussing is that Saul would have thought it perfectly normal that David had gone to Bethlehem to offer a sacrifice. He gave a legitimate excuse. Nobody sees a deviation from the law on that.

Now, those are some of the references that show multiplicity of altars. Then some people respond and say that Deuteronomy 12 says, "When he giveth you rest" (that's in verse 1 and verse 10). Verse 1 says, "These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land the Lord your God, the God of your fathers has given you to possess--as long as you live in the land." Verse 10 says, "You will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the Lord your God has given you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety."

7. Unstable Times: Deut. 12 Centralization only when God Give Rest [after David/Solomon]

Some people say that these were unstable times: the times of Samuel and Saul. Deuteronomy 12:10 says that these laws are to be followed “when the Lord God gives you rest.” Then 2 Samuel 7:1&11 is pointed to. 2 Samuel 7 is the chapter where the Lord gives David the promise that he will build him a house. You read in 2 Samuel 7:1: “After the King was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies...” Verse 10 says, “I will provide a place for my people Israel and plant them so that they can have a home of their own and will no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders of my people Israel. I also will give you rest over all your enemies.” Many people say that the conditions, or the condition, of rest did not develop where Deuteronomy 12 would apply until the time of David when in 2 Samuel 7 it says, “The Lord had given him rest from all his enemies.” I don’t think that solves the altar problem that at that point the conditions are developed that would cause Deuteronomy 12 to have applicability. Notice that Absalom, even after 2 Samuel 7 organized his revolution that was centered in Hebron, in 2 Samuel 15:7 you read there, “At the end of 4 years Absalom said to the King, ‘Let me go to Hebron to fulfill a vow I made to the Lord. While your servant was living in Geshur, in Aram, I made this vow. If the Lord takes me to Jerusalem, I will worship the Lord in Hebron.’ So the King said to him, ‘Go in peace.’ So he went to Hebron.” And, of course, it was a deception, with Absalom representing himself to be going to Hebron to pay his vow and to worship the Lord and pay his vow including offering sacrifice. So there must have been an altar in Hebron. Absalom does that, but he does that with the agreement of David. There were still, it seems with no questions involved, altars apart from the central altar.

Then also, if the rest that’s talked about in Deuteronomy 12:10 refers to rest from external enemies, then Deuteronomy 12 would be applicable for only very brief periods, mostly during and after the time of Solomon. It seems much better to understand the term “rest” as referring not to external enemies but internal. See David’s reference in 2 Samuel

7 is to external enemies, but it seems better to understand the Deuteronomy 12 reference as to internal enemies, and that rest was really achieved immediately after the conquest. Remember the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh came across to help in the conquest, then they went back to their territory east of the Jordan. You read in Joshua 22:4: “Now that the Lord your God has given your brothers rest as he promised, return to your homes in the land Moses, the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan” Now rest was achieved immediately after the conquest. Those internal enemies were defeated. The Canaanites were defeated. And if that’s the case, then that means that the law of Deuteronomy 12 would be in effect and applicable during the time of Samuel and during the time of Saul. We can better look for it there than during the time of David. You also have that reference periodically through the book of Judges after victory has been achieved over some of these internal enemies. They were mostly internal in the book of Judges, with maybe one exception.

8. Rest in Joshua 21:43

If you look at Joshua 21:43 you read there: “The Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers. They took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them. The Lord handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the LORD’s good promises to Israel failed; everyone was fulfilled.” That sounds like it’s pretty absolute terms, yet you turn over to the first chapter of the book of Judges and you find a number of tribes that say they’ve not yet possessed this or that part of their territory. There’s still much to be done. I think what’s referred to in Joshua is that resistance was really broken and the people were enabled to go in and settle down in their assigned territories. The conquest of the land was something that had really been accomplished, yet there still remained work to be done. There’s this reference to rest in Joshua 22.

9. Exodus 20:24-26 Altars of Uncut Stones

The other thing is this: What about Exodus 20:24-26? We haven't looked at that yet, let me read that. This is often called the law of the altar. The Israelites are told: "Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. If you make an altar of stones for me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it. And do not go up to my altar on steps, lest your nakedness be exposed on it."

Now what's the point of the regulations about the building of altars in Exodus 20:24-26? Why does it talk about uncut stones and an altar of earth? Was that meant only for the wilderness period? There's no indication of that. It seems to be meant for the time that Israel would come into the land of Canaan. You notice the regulations concern how the altars were to be built--do not build it with dressed stones: do not make steps; that sort of thing. It's to be an altar of earth. It also addresses the places where they were to be located. "Wherever I call my name to be honored" (NIV translation). That's where an altar can be built. The King James says "In all places where I record my name." It seems like there is to be some sort of divine sanction of a place. In other words, God chooses a place. Then there are these regulations about what type of altar there will be, but there's no indication about only one altar. It seems that the practice generally during the time of Samuel clearly corresponds with this legislation. There are a number of altars where Samuel sacrificed.

So the question is, how do you harmonize these? Of course, Wellhausen addresses this issue. How do you harmonize Exodus 20:24-26 with Deuteronomy 12? What Wellhausen did was to say there's a long period of development between the two laws. Exodus 20:24-26 represents an early period where you have multiplicity of altars, and you had a long period of time later--the time Josiah--when you have centralization, and thus move from one situation to another.

10. Reading Deut. 12 Correctly

The question is, have we really read Deuteronomy 12 correctly? If we think that Deuteronomy 12 requires one central altar, or one altar alone is there only one legitimate place of worship? Does Deuteronomy 12 really demand that kind of centralization? If it doesn't, then, of course, there's no conflict between Exodus and Deuteronomy. If it does require one legitimate altar, then I think there is a conflict between Exodus and Deuteronomy 12.

Let me give you what Halwarda does with Deuteronomy 12 in response to that problem: how to relate Exodus and Deuteronomy 12. Deuteronomy 12:14 is a key verse that was just brought up. "But in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of your tribes," and that goes on to say, "There shalt thou offer thy burnt offerings." I think for that statement we need to go back to verse 13, which says, "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest" Don't offer your burnt offering at every place you see. In contrast to that, in the place that the Lord shall choose in one of your tribes, there bring your sacrifices. First impression might be that there's only going to be one place, and one alone, for sacrifices to be brought. Halwarda says that you can't stop with the first impression. The expression "one of your tribes" does not necessarily indicate only one. It may have the idea of the English "any." In the place which the Lord shall choose *in any* of your tribes. Now the way he works this out, he uses several illustrations. He appeals to Deuteronomy 18:6 where you have a verse, "If a Levite comes from one [Hebrew: *ehad*] of thy gates." The idea is if a Levite comes from "any of your towns," and that is the way the NASV translates it. You could translate it "from one of your towns," but first the idea is not that if a Levite comes from only one; the idea is that he comes from any of your towns.

Deuteronomy 23:17 you have, speaking of the slave, "He will dwell with you in any place which he shall choose within any of your gates." There again the *'ehad* is to be understood as "any." "Any of your gates." So in 12:14, you have the term "one" that can be translated "any." The other thing you have is "in the place," singular with the definite article. It'll be argued, isn't that in the singular and doesn't that mean one place only? If more than one was meant, wouldn't you expect a plural? And again, Halwarda's answer

is, not necessarily. He appeals to Numbers 16, verse 7. “And the man whom the Lord chooses shall be the one who is holy.” “The man” singular, definite article, “whom the Lord chooses, he shall be the one who is holy.” In the context of Numbers 16, the context is the uprising against the leadership of Moses by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. In verse 7 you read, “The man whom the Lord does choose, he shall be holy. “The man” is singular, but the question is if the office of the priest or leader is to be confined to Moses and Aaron, or is it to be extended to 250 other people? You have a choice between two plurals. Is the leadership to reside with Moses and Aaron or with these 250 other people? The response is, “The man whom the Lord chooses shall be the one who is holy.” The meaning is clear. It’s the men, either Moses or Aaron, or Moses and Aaron. It’s those men in either case; it’s the 250 or the two. The article you see can be used in a distributive sense, not in a restrictive sense.

Look at Ezekiel 18:4. Ezekiel 18:4 is, “The soul that sins will die.” “The soul” is singular. That doesn’t mean there’s only one soul that’s going to sin that will die. It’s distributive. Any soul that sins will die. In fact, if you go back, you’ll see we already looked at Deuteronomy 18:6: “Now if the Levites--it should be the Levite--if the Levite comes from any of your towns.” That doesn’t mean one Levite only; that means *any* Levite. In Deuteronomy 23:17, which we already looked at, “The slave will go with you to any place.” That’s singular, too. It’s a distributive sense of the article; it’s not restrictive. You can’t say that it refers only to one specific person, to the exclusion of all others, that is going to die in Ezekiel 18:4. The word applies to everyone to whom the qualification applies.

So let’s go back up here to Deuteronomy 12:14: “But in the place which the Lord your God shall choose in any of your tribes.” “The place” doesn’t mean necessarily only one place but any place, that the Lord shall choose in any of your tribes is a possible valid reading. That’s the way Halwarda reads that text. There are a number of those phrases in Deuteronomy chapter 12 I want to go back and look at some of them but I think we better take a 10 minute break and we’ll come back and go further with this.

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