

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 12, Comments on Deuteronomy 12, Pohl's Addition Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 12, Comments on Deuteronomy 12, Pohl's Addition, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture analyzes interpretations of Deuteronomy 12 regarding the location of Israelite altars. Scholars Halwarda and Pohl offer contrasting views: Halwarda argues for multiple legitimate altars alongside a central sanctuary, while Pohl contends Deuteronomy 12 focuses solely on establishing a single national sanctuary, leaving the issue of local altars unaddressed. The lecture compares their interpretations, examining related passages in Deuteronomy and Exodus to support either the centralized or decentralized models of worship. Finally, the lecturer addresses the complexities surrounding "high places" and their association with legitimate or syncretistic worship practices in ancient Israel.

2. 24 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 12 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Pentateuch → Deuteronomy).



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3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 12, Comments on Deuteronomy 12, Pohl's Addition

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts, incorporating quotes where relevant:

Briefing Document: Deuteronomy 12 and the Issue of Centralization of Worship

Overview: This document summarizes a lecture by Robert Vannoy on Deuteronomy 12, focusing on the debate surrounding the centralization of worship in ancient Israel. The lecture examines the arguments of scholars Holwarda and Pohl, who offer contrasting interpretations of Deuteronomy 12 regarding the legitimacy of multiple altars versus a single, central sanctuary. The lecture provides analysis on other relevant passages from Deuteronomy, Exodus, Kings and Chronicles.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. **"The Place Which the Lord Your God Shall Choose":**
 - **Holwarda's View:** Holwarda emphasizes that the crucial point is not whether there is *one* place or *many* places of sacrifice, but that any legitimate place of worship is *chosen by God*, not by human whim. The emphasis is on the verb "choose" (bahir). As Vannoy states, "the issue is not so much whether it's one or more of them, but that it is a place of the LORD's choice, it's not just an arbitrary choice."
 - **Practical Implications (Holwarda):** The practical difficulties of requiring all Israelites to travel to one central location (e.g., Jerusalem) for every sacrifice, especially those living far away, suggest that there may have been more local altars permitted. "That would be like a family now making a trip to Florida, or something, from Philadelphia in order to offer a sacrifice."
 - **Divine Sanction:** Holwarda argues that altars would be legitimate in places where God had manifested Himself, even if not the central sanctuary. "This is not just building an altar anywhere you feel like it, but a place where there was some divine sanction in some way."

- **Holwarda's Conclusion:** Israel had a law that allowed for local altars *alongside* a central sanctuary. The regulations were about the divinely chosen place, the materials of the altar, and the kinds of offerings, all to prevent human arbitrariness. He suggests that multiple altars helped to keep the Israelites in fellowship with God and not tempted to worship like the surrounding Canaanites. "God provided many altars to keep his people from temptation. The Canaanites had altars everywhere...if Israel didn't, it could easily lead them into temptation."

1. Deuteronomy 12 as a Whole:

- **Statutes and Ordinances:** Holwarda treats the Hebrew terms *huqqim* and *mishpatim* (statutes and ordinances) as synonyms, not necessarily as separate categories of law (cultic vs. civil). Instead, he views them as the outworking of the basic commandment: to have no other Gods. "You have that mitzvah, no other gods, the basic commandment, then you have the huqqim and the mishpatim as the further outworking of the basic commandment."
- **Destruction of Canaanite Places:** Deuteronomy 12:2-4 commands the destruction of all Canaanite high places, altars, and idols. This directly contradicts the idea that Israel simply adopted these sites for their own worship, an argument made by Wellhausen. As Vannoy explains, "When you come into the land of Canaan, you're to wipe out all those places. And you're only to worship in the place which I will choose."
- **Worship before the Lord:** Sacrifices are to be done at the chosen place, and they are to be acts of thanksgiving, not magic. As the lecture states, "In Israelite understanding the fertility of the land is a gift from the LORD, as Deuteronomy 8 says. The cult, or the sacrifice, are not magical; they don't produce that. But the sacrifices are to be given as an expression of thanksgiving and rejoicing for what has already been received."
- **A Change in Practice:** Deuteronomy 12:8 suggests a change from the present, somewhat unregulated practices ("You are not to do as we do here today, everyone as he sees fit.") to a more organized approach. This is not a reference to the wilderness period, as is often assumed, but instead relates to the period of unrest in trans-Jordan prior to entering Canaan.

1. Pohl's Modification of Holwarda:

- **One Central Sanctuary, Multiple Local Altars:** Pohl argues that Deuteronomy 12 primarily addresses the *central sanctuary* and not the question of *local altars*. He sees the plural "places" in Deut 12:2-3 as referring to the central sanctuaries of the Canaanites which were to be destroyed. "You're to destroy their sanctuaries, and then you are to bring your offerings to the central sanctuary that the LORD will choose in place of them."
- **National vs. Local Levels:** Pohl proposes that Deuteronomy operates on two levels: a national level requiring *one central sanctuary*, and a local level where multiple altars were permitted. "On a national level, there's to be one central sanctuary; on the local level, many altars could be built."
- **Support from Other Passages:** Pohl cites Deuteronomy 16:21, 27:5-6, and 33:19 as passages that suggest local altars in Israel. These verses speak of altars built on Mount Ebal and Gerizim, an altar not associated with the central sanctuary, and references to sacrifices being offered in Zebulun and Issachar territory, respectively. "That doesn't seem to be talking about a central sanctuary; that seems to be talking about local altars."
- **Exodus Parallels:** Pohl sees a similar pattern in Exodus, with the tabernacle (Exodus 25-27) as the national central sanctuary and the altar law of Exodus 20:24-26 as allowing for local altars. This pattern suggests that Wellhausen was comparing two different levels of understanding and therefore saw a contradiction. As Vannoy states, "What Wellhausen did was to compare (B) with (A); he's taking two different levels--one level in Exodus and the other level in Deuteronomy--and comparing them."
- **Critique of Wellhausen:** Wellhausen's approach compared local altar laws in Exodus with the supposed singular sanctuary in Deuteronomy, seeing a historical development over time. Pohl's view is that both texts address the local and national levels at the same time.

1. Vannoy's Analysis of Pohl and Holwarda:

- **Pohl's Exegesis Preferred:** Vannoy seems to favor Pohl's interpretation, finding it less forced than Holwarda's.
- **"Place Where I Cause My Name to Dwell":** This phrase is linked to the central sanctuary, either the tabernacle or the temple.

- **Local Altars in Practice:** Vannoy states that "For others--a sin offering, a trespass offering, whatever occasion might require an offering, paying a vow--he could go to the nearest local sanctuary, and normally that would be the case."
- **High Places:** The issue with high places was not the places themselves but the syncretism and idolatry that developed there. "It's purification of worship; it's not centralization of worship."
- **Kings & Chronicles Passages:** Passages from Kings and Chronicles, seemingly contradicting one another regarding King Asa and the high places, suggest that it is necessary to differentiate between altars used in legitimate worship of the LORD and altars associated with syncretistic worship of other gods. As Vannoy points out, "It seems to me you have to make distinctions between the type of worship that was going on at high places. It wasn't always necessarily evil or wrong."

1. **Summary of Holwarda and Pohl:**

- **Holwarda:** Deuteronomy 12 does not support the idea of a *single* legitimate altar. Multiple altars are acceptable, as long as they follow God's regulations and are in a place chosen by the LORD.
- **Pohl:** Deuteronomy 12 addresses the issue of the *national central sanctuary*, while not forbidding or prohibiting local altars.

Implications:

- **Challenge to Traditional Interpretation:** The lecture challenges the common assumption that Deuteronomy 12 mandates a single, centralized place of worship and provides support for the idea that local altars also had a place in ancient Israelite practice.
- **Importance of Context:** The lecture emphasizes the importance of reading texts within their literary and historical contexts.
- **Nuance in Biblical Interpretation:** It also demonstrates that careful analysis and consideration of multiple perspectives can enrich our understanding of the scriptures.
- **Worship in Modern Context:** Ultimately the lecture emphasizes the need to worship according to the regulations that God has given while avoiding syncretism and idolatry.

This briefing document provides a concise summary of the main arguments and ideas presented in the lecture excerpts. It should allow for a clear understanding of the debate surrounding centralization of worship in ancient Israel and the relevant theological implications.

4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 12, Comments on Deuteronomy 12, Pohl's Addition

Deuteronomy 12 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Holwarda, what is the primary issue concerning "the place which the LORD your God shall choose," and what is it not?
2. What does Holwarda believe is the fundamental requirement (mitzvah) that underlies the statutes and ordinances in Deuteronomy?
3. How does the text interpret the phrase, "you shall not do so unto the Lord your God," in Deuteronomy 12:4 in the context of the Canaanite practices?
4. What does Holwarda argue was the reason for the seemingly unregulated sacrificial practices in the time period Moses was addressing in Deuteronomy 12:8?
5. How does the text explain that the Israelite sacrifices were different in concept than those of the Canaanites?
6. According to the text, when is the "resting place" that is referenced in Deuteronomy 12:9 achieved?
7. What two levels of sanctuaries does Pohl identify when he analyzes both Exodus and Deuteronomy?
8. What does Pohl argue is the primary focus of Deuteronomy 12?
9. According to the text, why did good kings wipe out the high places?
10. According to the text, what is the difference between how Kings and Chronicles record King Asa's actions regarding high places?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Holwarda argues that the primary issue is whether the place of sacrifice is selected by divine choice (the Lord's choice), not whether there are one or multiple places. The issue is not about the number of altars, but that they must be built in locations designated by God.

2. Holwarda believes the fundamental commandment (mitzvah) is the first commandment, "have no other gods." The statutes (huqqim) and ordinances (mishpatim) are further expressions of this basic loyalty to the LORD.
3. The phrase "you shall not do so unto the Lord your God" refers to not worshiping God in the manner of the Canaanites at their heathen places of worship. The command is to reject the syncretism of Canaanite religious practices.
4. Holwarda argues that the seemingly unregulated sacrificial practices of that time were a result of the disruption and unrest caused by the wars in trans-Jordan as the Israelites moved into that area, which is why the people were sacrificing anywhere they wished.
5. Israelite sacrifices were expressions of thanksgiving and rejoicing for blessings already received from the Lord. Canaanite sacrifices, in contrast, were viewed as magical rituals intended to ensure fertility.
6. According to Holwarda, the "resting place" was achieved immediately after the conquest, during the time of Joshua as evidenced by Joshua 21:42 and 22:4, and not during the time of David.
7. Pohl identifies two levels of sanctuaries: one national level, represented by the tabernacle in Exodus and the central sanctuary in Deuteronomy 12, and a local level, represented by multiple altars in both books.
8. Pohl argues that the primary focus of Deuteronomy 12 is the central sanctuary, not the prohibition of local altars. The chapter addresses regulations for the singular, national place of worship.
9. Good kings wiped out the high places to combat syncretism, or the combining of Israelite religion with Canaanite worship. It was not the altars themselves but the type of worship practiced there that was the problem.
10. Kings says that King Asa did not remove the high places, while Chronicles says that he removed the foreign altars in the high places. The text suggests this difference might be because Kings refers to legitimate altars dedicated to the Lord, and Chronicles refers to places of syncretistic or heathen worship.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Respond to the following questions in a well-organized essay format with a clear thesis and supporting arguments.

1. Compare and contrast Holwarda's and Pohl's interpretations of Deuteronomy 12. How do their approaches differ regarding the issue of local altars and the central sanctuary, and what implications does this have for understanding Israelite worship?
2. Analyze the significance of the phrase "the place which the Lord your God shall choose" in Deuteronomy 12. How does its interpretation evolve in the discussion presented in the text, and what are the implications for how the Israelites were to approach worship?
3. Discuss the role of the high places in Israelite worship. How did the legitimacy and use of these sites change over time, and why?
4. How does the text use the concept of "syncretism" to explain changes in Israelite worship practices? Provide textual examples to support your argument.
5. Evaluate the arguments for and against the idea that Deuteronomy 12 mandates a single, centralized place of worship. Consider the historical and theological contexts to support your assessment.

Glossary

Arbitrary Choice: A decision made without any specific reason, plan, or system; random and not based on divine or regulated guidance.

Central Sanctuary: The main or primary place of worship, designated by God, where the most significant religious rituals were performed (such as the tabernacle and later the temple).

Cult: The religious practices and rituals of a specific group or culture, encompassing worship, sacrifices, and other observances.

Exegesis: A careful and critical interpretation of a text, especially from the Bible, to understand its meaning and context.

High Places: Elevated locations where altars and places of worship were built, often found in the Canaanite culture, which were sometimes co-opted by the Israelites (often associated with syncretism).

Huqqim: Hebrew term often translated as "statutes," referring to religious or cultic requirements.

Mishpatim: Hebrew term often translated as "ordinances," referring to civil or criminal laws.

Mitzvah: Hebrew term often translated as "commandment," referring to a fundamental obligation or requirement.

Syncretism: The merging or blending of different religious beliefs and practices, often resulting in a new or altered form of worship.

Tabernacle: A portable sanctuary used by the Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness, a physical representation of God's presence among them.

5. FAQs on Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 12, Comments on Deuteronomy 12, Pohl's Addition, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Deuteronomy 12 and Altars in the Old Testament

1. **What is the central issue regarding the phrase "the place which the Lord your God shall choose" in Deuteronomy 12?**
2. The core question revolves around whether the "place" refers to a single, centralized location for all sacrifices or a broader principle of divine designation. The emphasis is less on whether there are one or more places, but rather that the chosen place is specifically chosen by the Lord, not determined by human preference or arbitrary means. This contrasts with Canaanite practices of worship at any location.
3. **How does the concept of local altars fit into the framework of Deuteronomy, specifically in light of Deuteronomy 12?**
4. While Deuteronomy 12 emphasizes the importance of a central sanctuary chosen by the Lord, it does not necessarily prohibit local altars. Passages like Deuteronomy 16:21, 27:5-6, and 33:19 suggest that altars could be built in various locations within the land of Israel. The regulation primarily concerns avoiding Canaanite practices and ensuring altars were places where the Lord was worshipped, not idols or pagan deities. The regulations in Deuteronomy 12 concerning the "place the Lord will choose" seem to be geared towards the central sanctuary rather than local altars, which are not addressed in the chapter.
5. **What was the context surrounding the phrase "You are not to do as we do here today, everyone as he sees fit" in Deuteronomy 12:8?**
6. This phrase refers to a period of disruption during the Israelite conquest of the trans-Jordan area, specifically during the battles with Sihon and Og. Because of the wartime conditions, the normal regulations regarding sacrifices and locations were disrupted and people began sacrificing "anywhere they pleased." This was not a long term dispensation of these laws, rather a temporary allowance due to the wartime conditions that needed to change when the nation found rest in the promised land.

7. **How does the teaching of Deuteronomy 12 relate to the high places mentioned throughout the Old Testament?**
8. The "high places" were not inherently evil. They became condemned when they were used for syncretistic or heathen worship practices. There was not an issue of geography, rather, an issue of idolatry, syncretism, and/or worshiping the wrong god. The concern was about purifying worship of the LORD, not simply prohibiting all altars outside of a single central location. Israel was not to take over and use Canaanite high places, but could build altars to God in a variety of places, including on hills.
9. **What is the difference between the approaches of Holwarda and Pohl in their interpretation of Deuteronomy 12?**
10. Holwarda argues that Deuteronomy 12 does not require a single, exclusive place of sacrifice, suggesting multiple legitimate altars can exist, as long as they are divinely designated. Pohl, while acknowledging Holwarda's exegesis is possible, views it as forced. He proposes that Deuteronomy 12 is specifically about the central, national sanctuary, but does not prohibit the existence of multiple local altars. He believes the chapter is only contrasting Canaanite places of worship with the central sanctuary of Israel, and that local altars are addressed elsewhere in Deuteronomy.
11. **How does Pohl reconcile seemingly contradictory passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy concerning altars?**
12. Pohl argues that there are two distinct levels in view within both Exodus and Deuteronomy: a national level, dealing with the central sanctuary (tabernacle/temple) and a local level, addressing altars for the people. He asserts that Wellhausen mistakenly compared national regulations from Deuteronomy with local regulations from Exodus, leading him to conclude that they represented differing historical periods and views about worship. Pohl argues these need to be compared appropriately - national to national, local to local - and doing so shows harmony and continuity in the Old Testament.

13. According to the sources, what are some instances of altars outside of a central sanctuary that are considered legitimate?

14. The text mentions the altar at Bethel where God appeared to Jacob, altars on Mount Ebal and Gerizim, and the sacrifices in the northern tribes territories of Zebulun and Issachar as valid examples of local altars. Additionally, high places that were used for the worship of the Lord prior to syncretism were valid, like in the cases of Samuel, King Asa and others. The emphasis is on the divine designation and purity of worship at the altar rather than the location.

15. How does understanding the distinction between a national sanctuary and local altars affect the overall interpretation of the Old Testament law?

16. By recognizing that the Old Testament distinguishes between the central national sanctuary and local altars, a more nuanced understanding of the law is possible. It means that regulations for a central sanctuary in places like Deuteronomy 12 do not necessarily contradict the permission for other altars at a local level found elsewhere in Deuteronomy and Exodus. This allows a more cohesive interpretation and prevents the conclusion that one passage must be a later, contradictory development.