

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 14, Response to Wellhausen's View on Centralization Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 14, Response to Wellhausen's View on Centralization, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt discusses Halwarda's critique of Julius Wellhausen's theory regarding the centralization of worship in ancient Israel. Halwarda argues that Wellhausen incorrectly emphasizes the transition from multiple altars to a single one, citing Old Testament examples where multiple altars were not condemned. The lecture uses examples from the books of Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Deuteronomy to support Halwarda's claim that the key issue was not the number of altars but the nature of the worship performed. The lecturer examines the interpretation of Deuteronomy 12, suggesting that "the place the Lord shall choose" allows for multiple locations, not just one central location for worship. Finally, the ethical implications of deception in 1 Samuel 16 are briefly discussed.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 14 – 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 14, Response to Wellhausen's View on Centralization

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts by Robert Vannoy on Deuteronomy, focusing on his response to Wellhausen's views on the centralization of worship in ancient Israel.

Briefing Document: Vannoy on Deuteronomy and Centralization of Worship

Subject: A critique of Julius Wellhausen's theory of religious development in Israel, specifically focusing on the centralization of worship, and an alternative interpretation of Deuteronomy 12.

Main Argument: Robert Vannoy, drawing heavily on the work of Halwarda, argues that Wellhausen's reconstruction of Israel's religious history, which posits a progression from multiple altars to a single, centralized altar (especially in Jerusalem) as mandated by Deuteronomy 12, is flawed. Vannoy proposes that the Old Testament, particularly the historical books, demonstrates that multiple altars were considered legitimate at various points in Israel's history. He also argues that Deuteronomy 12 doesn't necessarily demand a single, centralized place of worship.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Wellhausen's Centralization Theory:

- Vannoy explains that Wellhausen saw the centralization of worship as a key element in Israel's religious development, culminating in the reforms of Josiah (621 B.C.)
- Wellhausen's theory suggests a progression from many altars to one central altar.
- Vannoy notes that most critics of Wellhausen have focused on specific details of his system, but Halwarda rightly points out that the centralization of worship is *the* key issue.
- As Vannoy puts it, "...if you are going to get at the Wellhausen system, that centralization issue is the key issue in this whole system."

1. Multiple Altars in the Historical Books:

- Vannoy, citing Halwarda's argument, points out that the historical books (Judges through Kings) consistently refer to multiple altars.

- He notes that simply dismissing all non-Jerusalem altars as illegitimate is not a good fit with the Old Testament record.
- He acknowledges that some altars were illegitimate, like those of Micah (Judges 17) and Jeroboam (golden calves at Bethel and Dan).
- However, other altars were used by godly people, like Samuel, without condemnation, suggesting that a multiplicity of altars wasn't inherently wrong.
- Vannoy says, "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."

1. **Elijah's Altar on Mt. Carmel:**

- Elijah's restoration of a broken-down altar on Mt. Carmel and God's subsequent affirmation is a critical example of God sanctioning an altar outside of Jerusalem (1 Kings 18).
- Vannoy explains: "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."
- Elijah's discouragement in 1 Kings 19 highlights a concern about the *abandonment* of Yahweh's altars, not the existence of multiple altars in and of themselves.
- Vannoy notes, "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."

1. **High Places:**

- Vannoy acknowledges the existence of altars on "high places."
- Some were illegitimate because they were Canaanite places of worship, which were prohibited.
- However, some high places were used to worship the Lord.
- The problem with high places was that it eventually led to syncretistic worship, mixing Baal worship with Yahweh worship.

- He points out that kings were sometimes faulted for not tearing down high places, not necessarily because of the existence of an altar outside of Jerusalem, but rather because of the heathen worship happening there.

1. **Samuel's Multiple Altars:**

- Samuel, a prophet and reformer, built and officiated at altars in various locations, including Ramah, Mizpah, and Gilgal, demonstrating that this practice was considered acceptable.
- 1 Samuel 9 discusses Samuel sacrificing at the high place before a meal with Saul.
- In 1 Samuel 7:6 Samuel sacrifices at Mizpah.
- In 1 Samuel 11:15 Samuel facilitates the confirmation of Saul as King at Gilgal and there they have fellowship offerings.
- Even in 1 Samuel 16, God tells Samuel to take a heifer to Bethlehem to sacrifice as a way of deceiving Saul when going to anoint David as King, indicating this would have been normal.
- As Vannoy notes, "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."

1. **David's and Absalom's Use of Altars in Various Places:**

- The story of David and Absalom provides further evidence for the acceptance of multiple altars. David gives permission for Absalom to offer a sacrifice in Hebron in 2 Samuel 15.
- Vannoy states, "There were still, it seems with no questions involved, altars apart from the central altar."

1. **Deuteronomy 12 and "Rest":**

- Vannoy addresses the common argument that Deuteronomy 12's instructions for a central place of worship only apply after Israel has "rest."
- He argues that the "rest" in Deuteronomy 12:10 is not about rest from external enemies (as 2 Samuel 7 suggests, during David's reign) but rather "internal enemies."
- He points out that that type of rest was achieved soon after the conquest, as shown in Joshua 22:4.

- Vannoy states: "Many people say that the conditions, or the condition, of rest did not develop where Deuteronomy 12 would apply until the time of David... 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."
- He also notes that Joshua 21:43 says "The Lord gave them rest on every side," indicating that this period of "rest" began soon after the conquest of the land.
- This would mean that Deuteronomy 12 was applicable during the time of Samuel and Saul.

1. **Exodus 20:24-26 and the Law of the Altar:**

- Vannoy discusses the law of the altar in Exodus 20:24-26, which allows for altars of earth or uncut stones wherever God's name is to be honored.
- He notes that this seems to be the norm during the time of Samuel, again supporting the idea of multiple legitimate altars.
- Wellhausen viewed this law as representing an early period, preceding centralization under Deuteronomy 12.

1. **Halwarda's Reading of Deuteronomy 12:**

- Vannoy argues, following Halwarda, that Deuteronomy 12 doesn't necessarily mandate a *single* central altar.
- He notes that the phrase "in the place which the Lord shall choose in *one* of your tribes" (Deut. 12:14) can be interpreted as "*any* of your tribes."
- He points to uses of *ehad* (Hebrew for "one") in other texts like Deut. 18:6 and 23:17 where it translates to "any".
- Vannoy states, "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."
- He also argues that the singular phrase "the place" can be understood in a distributive sense, not necessarily requiring a single, exclusive location.
- He uses examples like Numbers 16:7 ("The man whom the Lord chooses") and Ezekiel 18:4 ("The soul that sins") to show how singular language can be applied distributively.

Conclusion:

Vannoy, drawing on Halwarda's work, challenges the traditional Wellhausen interpretation of the Old Testament's approach to altars and the centralization of worship. He argues that the text supports the legitimacy of multiple altars, especially in earlier periods, and that Deuteronomy 12 does not necessarily require one central location for all sacrifices. His analysis implies that the focus was on the proper worship of God (rather than the single location of that worship) and that the issue with illegitimate places of worship had to do with syncretistic practices and improper forms of worship, not with the mere fact of existing outside Jerusalem. He suggests that Wellhausen's theory may have created a problem, rather than interpreting an actual problem from the text.

This lecture segment seems to serve as the first part of an extended response to Wellhausen, setting up the argument that Deuteronomy 12 should not be read as a centralizing text. The subsequent lectures would likely flesh out this interpretation of Deuteronomy 12 in further detail.

4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 14, Response to Wellhausen's View of Centralization

Deuteronomy and Centralization of Worship: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Halwarda, what is the key issue in Wellhausen's system regarding worship in ancient Israel?
2. What examples does Halwarda use to show that multiple altars were used legitimately in the Old Testament before the centralization?
3. How does the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel illustrate the legitimacy of altars outside of the central temple?
4. Why were some high places considered illegitimate, and what role did syncretistic worship play in their condemnation?
5. How does Samuel's practice of building altars in different places support the argument against rigid centralization?
6. How does the story in 1 Samuel 16:2, where Samuel is told to say he is sacrificing in Bethlehem, demonstrate the widespread acceptance of sacrifices outside of the central place?
7. What is the significance of Deuteronomy 12:10 in the debate about centralization of worship, and how does it relate to the concept of "rest"?
8. How does Halwarda argue against the idea that Deuteronomy 12 mandates only one central place of worship, using the term "one of your tribes"?
9. Explain how the use of the definite article in Deuteronomy 12:14 ("in *the* place...") can be understood in a distributive rather than a restrictive sense. Give an example from another verse to help explain this point.
10. How does Halwarda interpret Exodus 20:24-26 in relation to Deuteronomy 12, and what does this suggest about the legitimacy of multiple altars?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Halwarda argues that the key issue in Wellhausen's system is the centralization of worship. He believes that the opposition to Wellhausen's theory should focus on this key issue, and not simply on details of the system.
2. Halwarda points to the frequent references to altars throughout the historical books from Judges to the Kingdom period, including Samuel and Elijah and places like Bethlehem and Hebron, arguing many of these sacrifices were from godly people and not condemned.
3. Elijah's restoration of an altar on Mount Carmel demonstrates that the Lord sanctioned worship outside the temple, and it also shows that the issue was not the altars themselves but to worship the God of Israel.
4. Some high places were deemed illegitimate due to their association with Canaanite worship and the later development of syncretistic practices, mixing the worship of the Lord with Baal.
5. Samuel's construction of altars in various locations like Ramah, Mizpah, and Gilgal demonstrates that a single, central place of worship was not rigidly enforced at that time; and indeed that the sacrifices were sanctioned by God.
6. The fact that Samuel was told to say he was sacrificing in Bethlehem indicates that sacrifices outside of the tabernacle were common and accepted; further, that the mention of it would be seen by others as a normal activity.
7. Deuteronomy 12:10 refers to the time "when the Lord gives you rest," which is often understood as external rest from enemies; however, Halwarda also suggests that the rest can refer to internal rest, achieved after the conquest, which would then place Deuteronomy 12 in effect at an earlier time.
8. Halwarda interprets the phrase "one of your tribes" in Deuteronomy 12:14 to mean "any of your tribes," suggesting that God could choose multiple locations within different tribal territories where worship could be legitimately offered.
9. The definite article in Deuteronomy 12:14 can be interpreted distributively, similar to how "the soul" in Ezekiel 18:4 refers to any soul, not just a single soul, thereby suggesting that multiple places of worship could be divinely sanctioned.
10. Halwarda argues that Exodus 20:24-26, which permits altars of earth or uncut stones in places where God's name is honored, aligns with the practice of multiple altars during the time of Samuel; he sees no conflict with Deuteronomy 12 as he interprets it.

Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast Wellhausen's view of the centralization of worship in ancient Israel with Halwarda's counterarguments. In your view, which perspective better accounts for the biblical evidence and why?
2. Analyze the role of "rest" as presented in Deuteronomy and other Old Testament texts, and discuss its significance in understanding the centralization of worship. How does the interpretation of "rest" influence the debate about the legitimacy of multiple altars?
3. Examine the biblical accounts of worship practices during the times of the Judges and Samuel, and assess how these practices either support or challenge the concept of a strictly centralized place of worship.
4. Discuss the ethical issues raised in the story of Samuel deceiving Saul in 1 Samuel 16, and explore how this relates to the interpretation of truth-telling within the Old Testament context and how it reinforces the normalcy of altars outside of the temple at this point in history.
5. Evaluate Halwarda's interpretation of Deuteronomy 12:14, considering his use of other biblical texts to justify a distributive reading of the phrases "one" and "the place." How does his argument attempt to harmonize apparent contradictions between Exodus and Deuteronomy?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Centralization of Worship:** The idea that there should be one primary location designated by God for all sacrifices and religious observances in Israel, typically associated with the Temple in Jerusalem.
- **Wellhausen:** A 19th-century German biblical scholar who developed a theory of the documentary hypothesis and viewed the centralization of worship as a late development in Israel's religious history.
- **Halwarda:** A Dutch scholar whose arguments against Wellhausen's views on centralization are presented in the lecture; he believes that the centralization issue is key to Wellhausen's entire system.

- **High Places:** Elevated locations, often natural or man-made, where altars were built and sacrifices were offered. Some were used for the worship of the Lord, while others were associated with pagan deities or syncretistic worship practices.
- **Syncretistic Worship:** The practice of blending religious beliefs and rituals from different traditions, often leading to a mix of the worship of the Lord with other pagan beliefs (e.g. Baal worship).
- **Tabernacle:** The portable sanctuary used by the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings, where God was believed to dwell. It served as the central place of worship prior to the building of the Temple in Jerusalem.
- **Temple:** The permanent structure in Jerusalem, built by Solomon, which became the central place of worship for Israelite religious observances.
- **Deuteronomy 12:** A chapter in the book of Deuteronomy often cited as mandating the centralization of worship in one place chosen by God.
- **Exodus 20:24-26:** A passage in the book of Exodus that outlines regulations for building altars, with an emphasis on altars of earth or uncut stones located anywhere God designates.
- **Distributive Sense:** The way of interpreting a singular term in a manner that applies to multiple instances of the same type, as opposed to only a single, specific instance; for example, "the soul that sins" in Ezekiel refers to any soul, not a particular one.
- **Rest:** A state of peace and security, often associated with freedom from enemies and the ability to dwell securely in the land; the timing of "rest" becomes important to some interpretations of when centralization became applicable.
- **Golden Calf:** The idols of a bull created by Jeroboam I in the Northern Kingdom that became a symbol of idolatry and violation of the second commandment.
- **Levite:** A member of the priestly tribe of Levi, responsible for assisting with religious practices and teaching the law.

5. FAQs on Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 14, Response to Wellhausen's View of Centralization, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Okay, here's an 8-question FAQ based on the provided source, formatted with markdown:

FAQ: Centralization of Worship in Ancient Israel

- **Q1: What is the central issue in Wellhausen's theory of Israelite religious development, and why is it important to address?**
- A: The central issue in Wellhausen's theory is the idea of the centralization of worship, specifically the shift from multiple altars to a single, central sanctuary (the Temple in Jerusalem). According to Halwarda, if you're going to challenge Wellhausen's system, this is the core issue that must be addressed. Many critics of Wellhausen focus on the details, but it is this shift from multiplicity to centralization that lies at the heart of his argument.
- **Q2: According to the historical books of the Old Testament, was worship limited to a single location prior to the building of the Temple in Jerusalem?**
- A: No, the historical books (Judges through the Kingdom period) repeatedly mention a multiplicity of altars. Halwarda argues that it would be unsatisfactory to view all worship outside the tabernacle (or later, the temple) as illegal or illegitimate, given the numerous examples of seemingly accepted sacrifices at various locations. While some worship was indeed illegitimate (like Micah's idols or Jeroboam's golden calves), many instances show godly people sacrificing at various altars without condemnation.
- **Q3: How does the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel relate to the concept of multiple altars?**
- A: Elijah's ministry is a significant example. He restored an altar of the Lord on Mount Carmel, separate from the Temple, and God sanctioned this altar by sending fire from heaven. This suggests that multiple altars were not inherently problematic, but rather that the *type* and *purpose* of worship at those altars was key. Elijah's concern was that the Israelites were not using the altars of the Lord, not that there were too many altars.

- **Q4: What was wrong with the "high places" of worship? Were all of them considered illegitimate?**
- A: Not all high places were illegitimate. Some were likely locations for legitimate worship of the Lord. However, many high places, often inherited from the Canaanites, became sites of syncretistic worship, mixing the worship of Yahweh with other deities (like Baal). The kings who "did good in the eyes of the Lord," such as Hezekiah and Josiah, were sometimes criticized for not tearing down the high places. The problem wasn't necessarily the existence of multiple altars but the corrupted and syncretistic worship that often took place there.
- **Q5: How does the prophet Samuel factor into the discussion of multiple altars?**
- A: Samuel, a prophet of the Lord and a reformer, is a prime example of a legitimate figure who established altars and offered sacrifices in multiple locations. He is seen sacrificing at places like Ramah, Mizpah, and Gilgal. The text notes that even the Lord instructed Samuel to tell Saul that he was sacrificing at Bethlehem, suggesting it was a perfectly acceptable practice at the time, rather than something out of the ordinary.
- **Q6: What does Deuteronomy 12 say about the centralization of worship, and how should this text be interpreted in light of these historical practices?**
- A: Deuteronomy 12, particularly verse 14, states that sacrifices should be offered "in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of your tribes". Wellhausen argued this meant one central place of worship. However, Halwarda argues against this exclusive interpretation. The phrase "one of your tribes" could be translated as "any of your tribes" and, the word "place," (singular), can have a distributive rather than a restrictive meaning. Using the examples of similar language usage in other verses, Halwarda shows that this verse can be read as legitimizing any location God chooses rather than a single, centralized location.

- **Q7: How should we understand the concept of "rest" in Deuteronomy 12, and how does this impact the application of the laws in this chapter?**
- A: Deuteronomy 12:10 states these laws apply "when the Lord God gives you rest." It has been argued that the centralization of worship applied at the time of David (2 Sam 7) who was given rest from all of his enemies. However, the author argues that the rest in Deuteronomy 12 is not from external enemies but internal ones, which was achieved immediately after the conquest, based on references in Joshua 22 and Joshua 21, implying that the law of Deuteronomy 12 is applicable as early as the time of Samuel. Therefore, the author challenges the view that Deuteronomy 12 was intended only for a time after the establishment of the kingdom.
- **Q8: What are the implications of Exodus 20:24-26 on the topic of multiple altars? How can we harmonize this passage with Deuteronomy 12?**
- A: Exodus 20:24-26 directs the Israelites to build altars of earth or uncut stones wherever God causes His name to be honored. This seems to indicate multiple, decentralized locations for worship rather than one single central location and demonstrates an early practice that seems consistent with the practice of the time of Samuel. The law does not mandate a central location, but divine selection. The author argues that there's no inherent contradiction between Exodus and Deuteronomy if Deuteronomy is not read as requiring a single place for worship. Halwarda suggests that Deuteronomy 12 is speaking about divine authorization of a location (any location) and regulations for the construction and use of the altars, not about strict centralization.