

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 15, Altars, Summary [Final Lecture] Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 15, Altars, Summary [Final Lecture], Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Robert Vannoy's "Deuteronomy" discusses the debated interpretation of Deuteronomy 12:14 regarding the location of altars. The text examines whether the verse mandates a single altar or allows for multiple altars authorized by God, exploring various interpretations of key Hebrew terms and drawing parallels from other biblical passages like Exodus 20 and Numbers 16. The lecture highlights scholarly viewpoints supporting the possibility of multiple altars alongside a central sanctuary, contrasting this with earlier critical theories proposing a strict centralization of worship. Finally, it situates this debate within broader discussions on the structure, integrity, and historical development of Deuteronomy.

**2. 32 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 15 – 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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on15.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 15, Altars, Summary [Final Lecture]

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpt on Deuteronomy:

Briefing Document: Deuteronomy and the Question of Altar Centralization

Main Focus: This lecture addresses the debate surrounding the apparent conflict between Exodus 20 (allowing multiple altars) and Deuteronomy 12 (often interpreted as mandating a single, centralized altar) in the Old Testament. The lecture argues against the traditional critical view that Deuteronomy enforces a single sanctuary and proposes instead a model that emphasizes divinely chosen locations for altars rather than a singular centralized site.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Nature of Altars:

- **Uncut Stones:** Exodus 20:24-26 specifies that altars should be made of earth or uncut stones. This instruction, according to the lecture, wasn't just for the wilderness period, but for the time after entering Canaan. The primary point is to differentiate these altars from the altars of the Canaanites.
- **Quote:** "Israel was to have a distinctively different kind of altar than the heathen Canaanites did. Their worship was not to be confused with the Canaanite worship."
- **Multiple Altars in Practice:** The lecture cites the time of Samuel as an example of multiple altars being used, demonstrating that the idea of a single altar wasn't always the practice.

1. Deuteronomy 12: The "Single Place" Debate:

- **The Verse in Question:** Deuteronomy 12:13-14 is the central passage debated: "Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you please. Offer them only at the place the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, and there observe everything I command you."
- **"One of Your Tribes" Interpretation:** The lecture challenges the idea that "in one of your tribes" necessarily means only one location. The Hebrew usage could mean "any of your tribes" or "in any number of your tribes," rather than being restricted to a single tribal location.

- **Analogy with Deuteronomy 18:6:** The lecture draws an analogy with Deuteronomy 18:6 regarding Levites coming "from any of thy gates," demonstrating that "one" can also signify "any" depending on context.
- Quote: "The expression can be translated explicitly either way 'from one of' or 'from any of.' It depends on a large degree on the context in which it is placed."
- **Singular "Place" Debate:** While the text uses the singular "place," it is argued that this doesn't necessarily preclude multiple locations. It uses Numbers 16:7, where "the man" is singular but refers to multiple potential leaders (either Moses and Aaron or 250 rebels) as another example of this idea.
- **Central Point:** The key is not the *number* of locations, but *how* the locations are selected – not by human whim but by divine designation.
- Quote: "The question is not one or more, but whether the places are selected by human, arbitrary means or by divine choice. It's not in 'every place' chosen by humans, but 'in the place' chosen by God."

1. The Practicality of Multiple Altars:

- **Family Journeys:** Deuteronomy 12:18 mentions the whole family, including servants and Levites, journeying to the chosen place. For those in distant locations like Dan, a long journey would be required three times a year.
- **Levite Practicality:** A single sanctuary would be logistically impossible for all Levites to be present constantly, supporting the idea of local sites and a central sanctuary.
- Quote: "It is impractical to have only one place of sacrifice; it couldn't be carried out."
- **Flexibility:** The lecture highlights that not all sacrifices had to be performed at the central sanctuary (e.g., Deuteronomy 12:21), supporting the idea of permissible sacrificial acts in other locales due to distance from the primary worship center.

1. The Character of the Altars, Not Number

- **Focus:** The lecture emphasizes the purpose of the regulations in Deuteronomy 12 is to differentiate the Israelite altars from those of other religions, not to limit the number of altars to one central location.
- Quote: "The real focus in the context of Deuteronomy 12 is not between many YAHWEH altars and one, but between those of the Canaanites and to other gods whose name is to be destroyed and the place and name of the place of where YAHWEH shall abide." It is not their number, but their character, which is in question."
- **Authorization:** The lecture argues that other altars, if divinely authorized, are not necessarily excluded by Deuteronomy.

1. Alternative to Critical Theories:

- **Critical View:** The lecture references Wellhausen's view that Deuteronomy mandated a single altar, as part of his historical reconstruction of the development of the Old Testament.
- **Alternative View:** The lecture presents an alternative orthodox perspective supported by scholars like Halwarda, Thompson, and Manley, who see Deuteronomy 12 as focusing on the *character* of altars and their divine designation, not as a mandate for a single sanctuary.
- **Countering Wellhausen:** Manley's work is mentioned as a significant counter to the Wellhausen's idea of progressive and parallel development of law codes through J, E, D, and P.

1. Three Significant Areas of Deuteronomical Study:

- **Structure and Integrity:** The covenant/treaty analogy supports the unity and integrity of Deuteronomy.
- **Centralization of Worship:** The Halwarda, Thompson, and Manley model challenges the view that Deuteronomy mandates a single, centralized altar, offering an alternative to Wellhausen.
- **Sequence of Law Codes:** Manley's critique of the JEDP documentary hypothesis regarding sequential development of codes is also important.

Conclusion:

The lecture argues that a proper understanding of Deuteronomy 12, when considered alongside other relevant passages, does not necessitate a single, centralized altar for Israelite worship. Rather, it suggests that the focus is on *divinely designated* places of worship, with a central sanctuary holding primacy, but not to the exclusion or illegality of other altars that were divinely authorized. This interpretation provides an orthodox alternative to the critical theory of a progression from multiple altars to a single, centralized one. This position is well supported by a number of scholars, and supports the overall integrity and historical unity of the book of Deuteronomy.

4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 15, Altars, Summary [Final Lecture]

Deuteronomy Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to Vannoy, what materials were prescribed for the construction of altars in Exodus 20:24-26, and why were these materials chosen?
2. What is the apparent contradiction between Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 12 concerning the location of altars, and how does Halwarda begin to address it?
3. Explain Halwarda's interpretation of the phrase "in one of your tribes" from Deuteronomy 12:14.
4. How does the example of the Levites in Deuteronomy 18:6 help in interpreting Deuteronomy 12:14?
5. How does the rebellion of Korah in Numbers 16:7 illustrate the potential meaning of the singular "the man" in relation to divine choice?
6. What is the key distinction, according to Halwarda, regarding the location of altars, in the context of divine choice versus human selection?
7. What practical challenge was presented by the command in Deuteronomy 12:18, requiring the whole family to journey to the designated place of worship, and how does Halwarda use this to support his argument?
8. According to Halwarda, what is the main point concerning the number and location of altars?
9. What is Manley's view on the central issue of Deuteronomy 12 concerning the altars?
10. What are the three main issues in Deuteronomistic studies where an orthodox perspective challenges critical theory, as summarized by Vannoy?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Altars were to be made of earth or uncut stones. This was not specifically meant for the wilderness but for the time after entering Canaan. The materials were intended to be distinct from the altars of the Canaanites.

2. Exodus 20 seems to allow for multiple altars, while Deuteronomy 12 appears to centralize worship in a single location. Halwarda questions if Deuteronomy demands centralization or if it was a longer period of development.
3. Halwarda argues that the phrase "in one of your tribes" does not necessarily indicate only one tribe. In Hebrew usage, it can also mean "in any of your tribes," implying a wider range of acceptable locations.
4. The phrase used in Deut. 18:6, "from any of your gates", is identical in Hebrew to the phrase, "in one of your tribes" in Deut. 12. This indicates that "one" can be interpreted as "any," which helps understand that Deut. 12:14 was not meant to mandate one single location.
5. In Numbers 16:7, God chooses "the man," even though multiple individuals were under consideration for the role. This illustrates that singular language does not always mean only one, and can mean a collective.
6. The key distinction is not about the number of altars but about their selection. God did not allow altars to be built by human decision, but in locations designated by divine choice.
7. The command for the whole family to travel to the chosen place, potentially multiple times a year, presented logistical challenges and demonstrates the impracticality of a single sanctuary with no other altars allowed.
8. The main point is that Israel never had a law binding the cult to only one place. Instead, the law provided for local places in addition to a central sanctuary.
9. Manley argues that the central issue in Deuteronomy 12 is not about the number of altars, but rather their character. The focus was whether altars were dedicated to YHWH or to other gods.
10. The three main issues are: the structure and integrity of the book of Deuteronomy, the centralization of worship, and the sequence of law codes (J, E, Deuteronomy, Holiness, and Priestly).

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer the following essay questions, drawing from the source material.

1. Analyze the differing interpretations of Deuteronomy 12:14, focusing on the grammatical possibilities and how they relate to the question of multiple vs. single altars.
2. Compare and contrast the views of Wellhausen and Halwarda on the issue of centralization of worship. Discuss how Halwarda uses the historical context of Canaanite practices and Deuteronomy 12:18 to support his arguments.
3. Explore the significance of the altar regulations in Exodus 20:24-26. How do these regulations contribute to the distinctive identity of Israelite worship compared to Canaanite practices?
4. Discuss the implications of the idea that "the place" chosen by God is not necessarily exclusive to one central location. How does this interpretation challenge traditional views of centralization?
5. Synthesize the views of Vannoy, Halwarda, and Manley on the relationship between Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 12. How do they reconcile the seemingly contradictory statements about the placement of altars?

Glossary of Key Terms

Canaanites: The people inhabiting the land of Canaan before the arrival of the Israelites. Their religious practices were distinct from those of the Israelites.

Centralization of Worship: The idea that all worship should be conducted in one central sanctuary (typically in Jerusalem).

Critical Theory: A perspective that challenges traditional views, often with a focus on historical and literary analysis of religious texts. In this context, it's associated with the Documentary Hypothesis (JEDP) and Wellhausen.

Documentary Hypothesis (JEDP): A theory that proposes the Pentateuch was compiled from four originally separate sources: J (Yahwist), E (Elohist), D (Deuteronomist), and P (Priestly).

Halwarda: A scholar whose views on the interpretation of Deuteronomy 12 are discussed at length in the lecture. He argues that Deuteronomy does not demand a single central altar.

Levites: Members of the tribe of Levi who were designated to be priests and to perform religious duties.

Manley: An author who supports the view that Deuteronomy does not demand a single central altar and whose work is referenced in the lecture.

Theophany: A visible manifestation of God to humans.

Uncut Stones: Stones that have not been shaped or hewn by human tools.

Wellhausen: A key figure in critical theory, who argued that the centralization of worship in Deuteronomy was a late development in Israelite history.

5. FAQs on Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 15, Altars, Summary [Final Lecture], Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Altars and Worship in Deuteronomy

1. **Why were altars in the early period of Israelite history constructed from earth and uncut stones, as described in Exodus 20:24-26?** The use of earth and uncut stones for altars was a deliberate choice to distinguish Israelite worship from that of the Canaanites. These simple, natural materials stood in contrast to the elaborate, often idolatrous altars of the Canaanites. This practice was not just for the wilderness period but was meant to continue even after they entered the Promised Land. The instructions in Exodus 20 were given at Sinai, before the golden calf incident and with the expectation of soon entering the Promised Land. The regulation emphasized God's choice of location for the altar, removing it from the arbitrary choices of the people.
2. **Does Deuteronomy 12 mandate the centralization of worship at a single location?** Deuteronomy 12:14 is often interpreted as mandating a single central sanctuary. However, the phrase "in one of your tribes" could also mean "in any of your tribes." The Hebrew usage allows for the interpretation that God would choose places within various tribes, rather than one single location for all sacrifices. The critical point is not whether there was one location or many, but whether the locations are chosen by divine selection, not by human preference or arbitrariness. Deuteronomy 12 should be read in harmony with Exodus 20:24.
3. **How can the singular phrase "the place" in Deuteronomy 12:14 be reconciled with the possibility of multiple altars?** The singular form "the place" does not necessarily exclude the possibility of multiple locations. It's similar to how "the man" is used in Numbers 16:7 in reference to leadership, which in that context could refer to Moses and Aaron, or the 250 Levites involved in the rebellion. The key element is that the place or places were to be chosen by the Lord. Thus, "the place" refers not to a single specific geographical site, but to any location divinely appointed. It's the divine authorization, not the number of sites that is central.

4. **How does the passage in Deuteronomy 18:6 about the Levites support the argument that there could be multiple places of worship?** Deuteronomy 18:6 discusses Levites coming "from any of your gates." This is analogous to the "one of your tribes" language in Deuteronomy 12:14. The focus isn't on a single gate or a single tribe, but on any Levite coming from any gate, emphasizing that Levites from all over the land could minister. Similarly, worship could have taken place at multiple sites where God chose, instead of just one location.
5. **What practical challenges would there be if all sacrifices had to be offered in one central location?** If all Israelites, including families with servants and Levites, were required to make multiple annual trips to a single sanctuary like Jerusalem, the logistical burdens would be immense. Consider families from the far north in the city of Dan, having to travel approximately 150 km to Jerusalem multiple times a year with their entire households. Levites would likely be constantly on the road facilitating these journeys. The sheer distance and travel time would create immense difficulties.
6. **Did Israel always have a law binding worship to only one central sanctuary?** It's argued that Israel never had a law requiring worship at only one location. Instead, the law provided for local places of worship alongside a central sanctuary, such as Shiloh and later Jerusalem. While a central sanctuary and the ark were the primary locations, worship at other divinely authorized altars was not considered illegal. The main distinction was not about the quantity of altars, but about how they were designated and built.
7. **How were the locations of altars determined according to this interpretation, if not arbitrarily?** Altars were not to be constructed just anywhere. Rather, the locations had to be divinely designated, often through theophany (God's manifestation). The materials of the altar and the offerings themselves also were regulated. This system allowed for scattered local altars, keeping the people in fellowship with God without requiring impossible travel to a distant central sanctuary. It also helped them to avoid the influence of nearby Canaanite worship practices.

8. **What is the main point of contention regarding altars in Deuteronomy, according to this interpretation, and how does it relate to the Canaanites?** The core issue in Deuteronomy is not about the number of altars (one versus many), but about their character. The legislation is primarily concerned with distinguishing Israelite altars from Canaanite altars. The focus was on destroying the altars of pagan gods and ensuring that the locations where Yahweh was worshipped were divinely authorized and had distinctively non-Canaanite construction and practices. The argument is that even with multiple authorized altars, the key was divine approval, not the absence of other altars.