**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

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**PARASHAT RE'EH**

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**Please pray for a refua sheleima for   
Leib Yosef ben Miriam.**

**The Place That the Lord Shall Choose**

**By Prof. Yonatan Grossman**[[1]](#footnote-1)

**The Structure of the Chapter**

Chapter 12 in the book of *Devarim* presents one of the greatest turning points in the general Jewish outlook – namely, the prohibition of *bamot* and the requirement that the sacrificial service be conducted exclusively in the one place that God Himself will choose.[[2]](#footnote-2) As we will see, the chapter poses a significant exegetical challenge. We will first propose the following division of the chapter and proceed from there:

**Introduction**

1) These are the statutes and the ordinances that you shall observe to do in the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess it, all the days that you live upon the earth. 2) You shall surely destroy all the places wherein the nations that you are to dispossess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every leafy tree. 3) And you shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and burn their Asherim with fire; and you shall hew down the graven images of their gods; and you shall destroy their name out of that place.

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| 1 | 4) You shall not do so unto the Lord your God.  5) But unto the place that the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put His name there, even unto His habitation shall you seek, and there you shall come;   6) and there you shall bring your burnt-offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and the offering of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill-offerings, and the firstlings of your herd and of your flock;   7) and there you shall eat before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice in all that you put your hand unto, you and your households, wherein the Lord your God has blessed you. | 13) Take heed to yourself that you offer not your burnt-offerings in every place that you see;   14) but in the place that the Lord shall choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt-offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.   15) Notwithstanding you may kill and eat flesh within all your gates, after all the desire of your soul, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat thereof, as of the gazelle, and as of the hart.   16) Only you shall not eat the blood; you shall pour it out upon the earth as water.  17) You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your corn, or of your wine, or of your oil, or the firstlings of your herd or of your flock, nor any of your vows which you vow, nor your freewill-offerings, nor the offering of your hand;   18) but you shall eat them before the Lord your God in the place that the Lord your God shall choose, you, and your son, and your daughter, and your man-servant, and your maid-servant, and the Levite that is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God in all that you put your hand unto.   19) Take heed to yourself that you forsake not the Levite as long as you live upon your land. |
| 2 | 8) You shall not do after all that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes.   9) For you are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the Lord your God gives you.   10) But when you go over the Jordan, and dwell in the land which the Lord your God causes you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety;   11) then it shall come to pass that the place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there, there shall you bring all that I command you: your burnt-offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which you vow unto the Lord.   12) And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you, and your sons, and your daughters, and your men-servants, and your maid-servants, and the Levite that is within your gates, forasmuch as he has no portion nor inheritance with you. | 20) When the Lord your God shall enlarge your border, as He has promised you, and you shall say, “I will eat flesh,” because your soul desires to eat flesh; you may eat flesh, after all the desire of your soul.  21) If the place which the Lord your God shall choose to put His name there be too far from you, then you shall kill of your herd and of your flock, which the Lord has given you, as I have commanded you, and you shall eat within your gates, after all the desire of your soul.   22) Howbeit as the gazelle and as the hart is eaten, so you shall eat thereof; the unclean and the clean may eat thereof alike.   23) Only be steadfast in not eating the blood; for the blood is the life; and you shall not eat the life with the flesh.   24) You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out upon the earth as water.   25) You shall not eat it; that it may go well with you, and with your children after you, when you shall do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord.  26) Only your holy things which you have, and your vows, you shall take, and go unto the place which the Lord shall choose;   27) and you shall offer your burnt-offerings, the flesh and the blood, upon the altar of the Lord your God; and the blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out against the altar of the Lord your God, and you shalt eat the flesh. |

**Conclusion**

28) Observe and hear all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you, and with your children after you forever, when you do that which is good and right in the eyes of the Lord your God. 

29) When the Lord your God shall cut off the nations from before you, where you go in to dispossess them, and you dispossess them, and dwell in their land; 

30) take heed to yourself that you be not ensnared to follow them, after that they are destroyed from before you; and that you inquire not after their gods, saying, “How used these nations to serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise.”

31) You shall not do so unto the Lord you God; for every abomination to the Lord, which He hates, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters do they burn in the fire to their gods.

### The Sacrificial Service in the House of God Reflects the Prohibition of "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain"

From the outset of our study of Moshe's oration concerning the *mitzvot*, we have followed the approach that maintains that the order of the oration is based on the order of the Ten Commandments. According to this approach, chapter 12 parallels the command, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." In essence, there is only a slight difference between the prohibition to serve God anywhere else other than in the place that He chooses and the prohibition to taken the name of God in vain. Just as it is forbidden to offer sacrifices to God wherever one wishes, it is forbidden to utter the name of God whenever one desires.

At the beginning of the chapter, we find a find a remarkable play on words between the command to eradicate the names of idols from the land and the prohibition to destroy the name of God: **"And you shall destroy their name** out of that place. You shall not do so unto the Lord your God. But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes **to put His name there,** even unto His habitation shall you seek, and there you shall come" (3-5).[[3]](#footnote-3) The play on words emphasizes the spiritual gap between the service of God, which is conducted exclusively in one place, and idol worship, in which the various gods are worshipped upon every hill and under every leafy tree.

The great emphasis of the chapter on the bearing of God's name as opposed to the destruction of the name of the idols parallels the prohibition in the Ten Commandments to take the name of God in vain. The novelty lies not only in the parallel between taking God's name and offering sacrifices to him, but in the different formulations used to describe the resting of the *Shekhina* in the book of *Shemot* and in the book of *Devarim.*

In the book of *Devarim*,the *Shekhina* is described as the place in which God chooses to rest His name there: "But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose… to put His name there, even unto His habitation shall you seek, and there you shall come"; or: "then it shall come to pass that the place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there." This stands in contrast to the book of *Shemot,* where God Himself is described as resting in the *Mikdash*: "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (*Shemot* 25:8). The book of *Shemot* uses language that is much more corporeal than the language of the book of *Devarim.* The change in the book of *Devarim* may stem from a fear of corporealization, as we saw in previous *shiurim*, but without a doubt it shifts the discussion in the oration concerning the *mitzvot* from the prohibition of "you shall have no other gods" to the prohibition of "you shall not take the name of God in vain."[[4]](#footnote-4)

**The Division of the Chapter**

Thus far we have dealt with the introductory section of the chapter, but the great challenge of the chapter still lies ahead of us. The chapter is filled with redundancies, which cannot be explained away as rhetorical repetitions that are part of the oration. The heart of the chapter, verses 4-27, is divided into two parts, verses 4-12 and verses 13-27. There are significant differences between the two parts, including the use of the plural (with minor exceptions) in the first part, as opposed to the general use of the singular in the second part.

As we shall see, and as I have attempted to show in the structure of the chapter presented above, each of the two parts of the chapter are further divided into two sections. Our mission below will be to focus on each half separately, with all its complexities, and to crystallize an overall picture of the chapter.

**The First Part – The Prohibition of *Bamot***

In broad terms, the first half (verses 4-12) deals with the obligation to build a Temple and offer sacrifices only there. In the second half, there are almost no prohibitions, but primarily allowances that come in response to the prohibition of *bamot* (13-27).

The idea of distinguishing between sacrificial meat and meat of desire (*basar ta'ava*, the meat of an animal that was not offered as a sacrifice) is revolutionary. The people of Israel have thus far been living under the perception that in order to eat meat, an animal must be sacrificed. This is primarily because of what is stated in *Vayikra* 17:

Whatever man there be of the house of Israel who kills an ox or lamb or goat in the camp, or that kills it without the camp, and has not brought it unto the door of the tent of meeting to present it as an offering unto the Lord before the tabernacle of the Lord, blood shall be imputed unto that man; he has shed blood; and that man shall be cut off from among his people. (*Vayikra* 17:3-4)

The second half of our chapter deals with the prohibition of *bamot* by granting certain allowances, e.g., meat of desire. Before addressing this part, we will focus on the linguistic difference between the two halves.

When Moshe speaks of the command to bring offerings to the Temple and the prohibition of *bamot*, he uses the plural, this being a national command. When he begins to speak of meat of desire, he no longer directs his word to the nation as a whole, but rather to the individual who desires to eat meat.

As stated, each half of the chapter is subdivided into two sections. The most surprising element here is that the two sections repeat themselves. Let us examine the parallels between the two sections of the first half of the chapter:

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|  | Part I – The Prohibition of *Bamot* |
| 1 | 4) **You shall not do so unto the Lord your God.**  5) **But unto the place that the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes** to put His name there, even unto His habitation shall you seek, and there you shall come;  6) **and there you shall bring your burnt-offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and the offering of your hand,** and your vows, and your freewill-offerings, and the firstlings of your herd and of your flock;  7) **and there you shall eat before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice** in all that you put your hand unto, you and your households, wherein the Lord your God has blessed you. |
| 2 | 8) **You shall not do after all that we do here this day,** every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes;  9) **for you are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance,** which the Lord your God gives you.  10) But when you go over the Jordan, and dwell in the land which the Lord your God causes you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety;  11) **then it shall come to pass that the place which the Lord your God shall choose** to cause His name to dwell there, **there shall you bring all that I command you: your burnt-offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the offering of your hand,** and all your choice vows which you vow unto the Lord.  12) **And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God,** you, and your sons, and your daughters, and your men-servants, and your maid-servants, and the Levite that is within your gates, forasmuch as he has no portion nor inheritance with you. |

### Part I, Section 1: The Theological Significance of Concentrating the Service in one Place

What is the meaning of these repetitions? Let us try to paint a picture based on the first difference – the parallel between "You shall not do so unto the Lord your God" and "You shall not do after all that we do here this day."

The *Rishonim* disagree about what is included in the first prohibition, "You shall not do so unto the Lord your God." The Ramban, the Chizkuni, and one explanation in Rashi assert unequivocally that this command teaches us the prohibition to erase god's name. Although this is the halakhic interpretation of the verse, it does not necessarily accord with the plain sense of Scripture.[[5]](#footnote-5)Rashi, in his first explanation, tries to understand the plain meaning of the verse:

"You shall not do so unto the Lord your God" – i.e. to burn offerings to God at any place you choose (as do the idolaters, cf. v. 2), but at the place which He will choose (cf. vv. 5-6). Another explanation is: "You shall pull down their altars… You shall destroy their names… But you shall not do this to the Lord your God" – it is a prohibition addressed to one who would blot out the name of God from any writing…. (Rashi, *Devarim* 12:4)

Rashi understands that according to the plain sense of the words, this command means that one must refrain from worshipping God in any place, in the manner that the nations worship their idols.[[6]](#footnote-6) According to the plain sense of the text, and based on the context, there is no doubt that Scripture is directing us to the difference between the service of God and the worship of the other nations. The service of God is described as intrinsically the opposite of the worship of the other nations.

There is a positive side to the creation of a geographical gap between man and God. The spiritual benefit that may be gained from the day-to-day distance from the Temple is fear of the majesty of the house of God. When a person reaches the Temple on one of the pilgrimage festivals, a great sense of fear awakens in his heart. He can only experience this fear of God's majesty if he does not come into contact with the Infinite on a daily basis. This feeling also prevents levity in the Temple, of the sort that is frequently found in synagogues.

Another point arising from the verses, which in my opinion is even more central that the fear of God's majesty, is Scripture's insistence on not telling us that the place which God will choose is in Jerusalem. It is God who decides where he will rest His name, not man. This stands in contrast to the idolatrous idea that it is the person who decides where he wants his god to reside. According to the pagan nations, it the deity who works in the service of man; when the nations worship their gods, they are, in great measure, forcing them to work for their benefit.[[7]](#footnote-7) When God leaves for Himself the choice of the place, He is saying to the people of Israel that He does not work for them; the people of Israel turn to Him, and He decides whether to fulfill their requests.

We are left with the impression that through the concentration of the service in one place, as it is presented in the first half of the first part of the chapter, the service in the Temple becomes the antithesis of idolatry. The picture changes in the second half of the first part, despite the similarity between the two sections. There we get the sense that the Temple substitutes for the situation in the wilderness.

### Part I, Section 2: Concentrating the Service in One Place as a Social Stimulus

Many *Rishonim* are puzzled by the words of Moshe: "You shall not do after all that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes." Already in *Vayikra* 17 Israel was commanded not to offer sacrifices outside the *Mishkan*/Temple. Why, then, is Israel described as doing "every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes"? The Ibn Ezra offers the most daring explanation, suggesting that the words in our *parasha* are directed at those members of Israel who did not observe the earlier command.

The simple reading appears to be that of the Ramban:

What the verse means is that the Israelites were commanded in the wilderness to offer all of their cattle and sheep as peace-offerings before the *Mishkan*, wherever it may be found. But if one does not want to eat of a cow or sheep, he is not at all obligated to offer a sacrifice… But after they come to the rest and the inheritance, they are not to do this. Rather, they are obligated to come to a specific place, chosen by God, and there they are to bring their sacrifices, and tithes, and firstlings, and eat them there within the wall before God.

According to the Ramban, there was no permanence to the site at which the people of Israel offered their sacrifices, since the *Mishkan* moved. Thus, in the wilderness, the reality was that one day they would offer sacrifices in a certain place because the *Mishkan* was located there, but the next day they might offer their sacrifices in an entirely different place. During the time that Israel was in the wilderness, there was no sweeping negation of all the other places, as there would be in the time of the Temple. In the generation of the wilderness, the offering of sacrifices was conditioned on the location of the *Mishkan.*

In the second half of the first part, Moshe contrasts the period of Israel's sojourning in the wilderness with the time that they will be living in the land of Israel. Here we find not a theological struggle between the service of God and idol worship, but rather a social-conceptual change between the period of the wilderness, when each person finds himself at the very most among his fellow tribesmen, and the period of Israel's settlement in the land, when all of Israel are concentrated in one place.

This may explain the appearance of the Levite at the end of the second section (v. 12). This is the first time that he is mentioned in the first half of the chapter; there is no repetition. When the discussion is on the theological plane, no mention is made of the Levite's mission, but when we discuss the social order, there is room to talk about the Levites.

It turns out, then, that the significance of the second half of the first part of the chapter lies in its emphasis of the concentration of the service in one place not from a theological perspective, but rather from a social perspective. The Temple leaves the inter-religious dialogue and becomes the internal cultural focus of the people of Israel.

### Part II: Meat of Desire and the Prohibition of Blood

Let us turn now to the novelty found in the second part (vv. 13-27), as opposed to the first part. As was already intimated, the essence of the second part is the response to the prohibition of *bamot* that the people of Israel had just now received. Until now, the people's mindset was that anyone who wished to eat meat had to offer a sacrifice. Upon Israel's entering the Promised Land, and owing to the distance from the Temple, the Torah sees fit to permit the slaughter of meat of desire even in other places, provided that it not be a sacrifice in its own right.

The main novelties of the second part begin in verse 15 – the allowance granted to an unclean person to eat of the meat and the prohibition of blood. As was already noted, the second part is also divided internally into two sections, with significant linguistic repetitions:

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| Part II – Meat of desire and the prohibition of blood | |
| 1 | 13) Take heed to yourself that you offer not your burnt-offerings in every place that you see;  14) but in the place that the Lord shall choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt-offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.  15) **Notwithstanding you may kill and eat flesh within all your gates, after all the desire of your soul, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you;** the unclean and the clean may eat thereof, as of the gazelle, and as of the hart.  16) **Only you shall not eat the blood; you shall pour it out upon the earth as water.**  17) You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your corn, or of your wine, or of your oil, or the firstlings of your herd or of your flock, nor any of your vows which you vow, nor your freewill-offerings, nor the offering of your hand;  18) **but you shall eat them before the Lord your God in the place which the Lord your God shall choose,** you, and your son, and your daughter, and your man-servant, and your maid-servant, and the Levite that is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God in all that you put your hand unto.  19) Take heed to yourself that you forsake not the Levite as long as you live upon your land. |
| 2 | 20) When the Lord your God shall enlarge your border, as He has promised you, and you shall say, “I will eat flesh,” because your soul desires to eat flesh; **you may eat flesh, after all the desire of your soul.**  21) If the place that the Lord your God shall choose to put His name there be too far from you, **then you shall kill of your herd and of your flock, which the Lord has given you, as I have commanded you, and you shalt eat within your gates, after all the desire of your soul.**  22) Howbeit as the gazelle and as the hart is eaten, so you shall eat thereof; the unclean and the clean may eat thereof alike.  23) Only be steadfast in not eating the blood; for the blood is the life; and you shall not eat the life with the flesh.  24) **You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out upon the earth as water.**  25) You shall not eat it; that it may go well with you, and with your children after you, when you shall do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord.  26) Only your holy things which you have, and your vows, you shall take, **and go unto the place which the Lord shall choose;**  27) and you shall offer your burnt-offerings, the flesh and the blood, upon the altar of the Lord your God; **and the blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out against the altar of the Lord your God,** and you shalt eat the flesh. |

### Part II, Section 1: Meat of Desire as a Sacrifice?

We might have expected that in light of the fact that meat of desire is permitted in all places, there would also be no need to slaughter the animal, as is required when offering a sacrifice. But if we imagine meat of desire as being totally detached from the sacrificial service, the Torah, with its command to slaughter the animal and its prohibition to eat of its blood (and the command to pour it on the ground) proves otherwise.

Scripture is intentionally vague about the relationship between the sacrificial service and meat of desire. This leaves us in doubt with regard to the status of meat of desire: Are we dealing with non-consecrated meat, or merely with a sacrifice of a different type?

### Part II, Section 2: "Only be Steadfast in not Eating the Blood"

When we examine the second section of the second part of the chapter, we find more linguistic repetition than we found in the first part: "you may eat flesh"/"after all the desire of your soul"/"the unclean and the clean may eat thereof alike"/the prohibition to eat blood, and others.

These repetitions are so blatant that we might have called them "literary copying"[[8]](#footnote-8) were it not for the small discrepancies that alter the picture and paint the second section in all altogether different light.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The most striking aspect of the second section of the second part is spiritual effort that must be made with regard to the prohibition of blood. Scripture emphasizes the matter much more strongly than in the first part: "Only be steadfast in not eating the blood; for the blood is the life; and you shall not eat the life with the flesh. You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out upon the earth as water. You shall not eat it; that it may go well with you, and with your children after you, when you shall do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord" (vv. 23-25). What does the Torah wish to achieve with this intensive emphasis on the prohibition of blood?

In the first section, as stated above, the Torah restates the prohibition to eat blood, raising the question as to the extent to which meat of desire is treated as a sacrifice.[[10]](#footnote-10) In the second section, there does not appear to be a sacrifice-like element in meat of desire. The primary emphasis regarding blood in this section is that the blood is the life, that the blood represents the soul, and that the blood therefore may not be eaten together with the flesh, and that only the flesh may be eaten, but not the blood/life/soul.

If we examine the first allowance of meat in the aftermath of the flood, we see that there as well the Torah emphasizes that one may not eat of the blood. The prohibition to eat the blood of an animal appears together with the prohibition to kill a human being. In the post-flood world, there are no sacrifices; the prohibition to eat blood is a moral commandment together with the prohibition of murder.

Regarding the words "only be steadfast," Rashi proposes two interpretations:

"Only be steadfast that you eat not the blood" – From the fact that it states, "Be strong," you may learn that they had a predilection to blood, to the eating of it. It was therefore necessary to state, "Be strong." This is the view of R. Yehuda. R. Shimon ben Azai say: Scripture merely intends to caution you and to teach you to what great an extent you must strive to fulfill the Divine commandments in general….

It does not appear that any commentator followed in the path of R. Shimon ben Azai. In contrast, we find many commentators who have adopted the first approach, which is also the more reasonable understanding of the plain meaning of the words. According to this, the people of Israel were eager to eat blood, and therefore the Torah saw fit to emphasize the prohibition on eating it. But why were the people of Israel so eager to eat blood?

The Rashbam and R. Yosef Bekhor Shor offer an entirely technical explanation of the words of Rashi. The blood is absorbed in all parts of the body and a great deal of effort is needed to remove it. Because it was so difficult, there were people who simply could not wait until the blood was removed. This explanation has also been accepted by some modern biblical scholars, but this approach is difficult in light of the continuation of the passage: "You shall do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord." If this is merely a technical matter, why is there such an elevated description of the reward for its observance, for the doing of "that which is right in the eyes of the Lord"?

It seems to me that we should adopt a different approach based on our familiarity with the practices of the idolatrous world during that period. The archaeological evidence indicates that the blood was thought to confer magical powers through which it was possible to reach metaphysical experiences and even communicate with demons, predict the future, and other idolatrous actions. In the Enuma Elish, the Babylonian epic describing the creation of man, Man is described as having been formed from clay and blood that came from the slaughter of one of the evil gods.[[11]](#footnote-11) The Torah recognizes the attraction of the pagan outlook to attaining heavenly power through the eating of blood, and it was precisely for this reason that it finds it necessary to strengthen Israel's resolve not to eat blood in so many places.

If we closely examine the second half of the second part of the chapter, we see that the sacrificial service is mentioned only at the end, in contrast to the first half, which opens with the sacrificial service. This supports our argument that the first half deals with the mutual relationship between sacrifices and meat of desire, whereas the second half deals with the relationship between Israel and the nations with respect to the prohibition of eating blood. The primary goal of the second half of the second part is not to prohibit blood, but rather to spiritually distance the people of Israel from blood.

**Summary**

We divided the main part of the chapter into two parts, and each of these two parts we divided into two sections which focus on different issues. In the first part, the primary discussion concerns the place which God shall choose; the discussion in the first half of this part is theological-spiritual, whereas in the second half it is social-internal. In the second part of the chapter, the discussion revolves around meat of desire and the prohibition of blood; in the first section it considers the relationship between sacrifices and meat of desire, whereas in the second half we find a theological-spiritual response to the manner in which blood was perceived among the nations of the world.

It is not difficult to discern the chiastic structure of the chapter. The camp of Israel is located in the middle. There Scripture deals with the Temple from a social perspective; the question of whether meat of desire is treated like a sacrifice or like non-consecrated meat is also an internal question touching exclusively upon the camp of Israel. On the periphery, we find discussions relating to universal perceptions, whether we are dealing with the prohibition of *bamot* or the prohibition of eating blood:

I, 1: The Temple in relation to the nations of the world

I, 2: The Temple in relation to Israel

II, 1: A non-consecrated animal in relation to a sacrifice

II, 2: The prohibition of blood in the context of the relationship of the nations of the world to blood

This reading of the structure of the chapter is supported also by the concluding verses:

28) Observe and hear all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you, and with your children after you forever, when you do that which is good and right in the eyes of the Lord your God.

29) When the Lord your God shall cut off the nations from before you, where you go in to dispossess them, and you dispossess them, and dwell in their land;

30) take heed to yourself that you be not ensnared to follow them, after that they are destroyed from before you; and that you inquire not after their gods, saying, “How used these nations to serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise.”

31. You shall not do so unto the Lord you God; for every abomination to the Lord, which He hates, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters do they burn in the fire to their gods.

(Translated by David Strauss)

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1. Based on an oral presentation by Prof. Grossman, transcribed and edited by VBM staff. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We will be using the phrase "concentration of the service in one place," because it expresses the idea in a most concise manner. The equivalent term found in *Chazal* is "the prohibition of *bamot*." [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Unless otherwise specified, all references are to *Devarim* 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. When King Shelomo speaks at the dedication of the Temple, he speaks in the spirit of the book of *Devarim*, since God Himself cannot dwell in the Temple. According to Shelomo, the Temple is not the house of God, but rather a house of prayer: "But will God in very truth dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built! Yet have You respect unto the prayer of your servant and to his supplication, O Lord my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You this day; that Your eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place whereof You have said, My name shall be there; to hearken unto the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place" (I *Melakhim* 8:27-29).  [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Ramban argues that this is indeed the plain sense of the verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Ibn Ezra proposes only the first explantion of Rashi. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For example, in 2009, arachaeologists uncovered a temple to Ba'al close to the Suez Canal, the purpose of which, according to the archaeologists, was to protect the border against the Egyptians. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The parallels marked above in bold are only some of the parallels; there are others as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. It does not seem that we are dealing here with repetition for the purpose of rhetorical emphasis, because more or less the entire section is repeated. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Although *Chazal* have established that the act of slaughtering a sacrifice may be performed by a non-priest, as it is not considered part of the sacrificial service as is the sprinkling of the blood, the opening chapters of the book of *Vayikra* describe the slaughtering of the animal as an integral part of the sacrificial service, thus creating a connection by way of the very slaughtering between sacrifices and meat of desire. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In light of this account, we can understand the extent to which the Torah mocks this perception, for God is described as breathing into man's nostrils only the breath of life. While the Babylonian gods had to use the blood of another being in order to create man, God created man without any help whatsoever. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)