



Deuteronomy - Chapter Sixteen

III Deuteronomy 12:1-26:19 - Moses' Second Speech: Specific Covenant Stipulations (continues)

Summary of Chapter Sixteen

The main focus of this chapter is to provide a summary of three of the great festivals that are to be compulsory for all men to attend. The first is the Passover, celebrating how God brought the people out of Egyptian slavery; the second is the Festival of Weeks, which is to thank God for the harvest; and the third is the Festival of Booths, which recalls how God sustained the people during the wilderness years.

The chapter concludes with the command to appoint judges and officials to provide civil government over the towns, with the final few verses starting a section outlining forbidden forms of worship.

III.h Deuteronomy 16:1-17 - Feasts

This section deals with the three main Israelite festivals: Passover/Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks or Pentecost, and the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles. If Deuteronomy's detailed laws are arranged in the order of the Ten Commandments, this section corresponds to the Sabbath law in Deuteronomy 5:12. All the festivals occur at the central place, a point repeatedly made in this chapter. For those who lived outside of Jerusalem, attendance at the festivals entailed several days of pilgrimage as shown in Luke 2:41-52.

These were only three or four actually, counting the Festival of Unleavened Bread as a separate festival to Passover, of the seven festivals of Israel. Not mentioned in this chapter are the festivals of Trumpets, of First Fruits, or of the Day of Atonement.

III.h.i Deuteronomy 16:1-8 - The Passover Reviewed

Passover is considered the most significant of the festivals since it is a celebration of God bringing his people out of Egyptian slavery. Without specifically naming it, the narrative includes the continuation of the Festival of Unleavened Bread over the seven days following Passover.

¹ Observe the month of Abib by keeping the passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night.

Deuteronomy 16:1

Abib is the first month of the Hebrew calendar (Exodus 12:2 and Leviticus 23:5), corresponding to March/April in the Gregorian calendar.

Keeping the passover to the Lord your God. Prophetically, the Festival of Passover clearly presents Jesus as the ultimate Passover: <<*Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end*>> (John 13:1), <<*Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed*>> (John 19:31), and: <<*Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*>> (1 Corinthians 5:7-8), the Lamb of God who was sacrificed: <<*The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'*>> (John 1:29), and whose blood was received and applied, so that the wrath of God would pass over those who believe in him.

The Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night. Exodus Chapter 12 describes the first Passover, when Israel was delivered from Egypt, and God sent his judgement upon the firstborn of Egypt. God passed over the homes which obediently sacrificed the Passover lamb and applied its blood to the door posts of their homes.

² You shall offer the passover sacrifice to the Lord your God, from the flock and the herd, at the place that the Lord will choose as a dwelling for his name.

Deuteronomy 16:2

You shall offer the passover sacrifice to the Lord your God, at the place that the Lord will choose as a dwelling for his name. At the first Passover, each family in Israel sacrificed the Passover lamb in their home. However, when Israel came into the Promised Land, the sacrifice was to be made at the tabernacle and later, the Jerusalem temple.

The flock or the herd. In Deuteronomy, the Passover sacrifice need not be a lamb as was indicated originally: <<***Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household***>> (Exodus 12:3).

³ You must not eat with it anything leavened. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it – the bread of affliction – because you came out of the land of Egypt in great haste, so that all the days of your life you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt. ⁴ No leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory for seven days; and none of the meat of what you slaughter on the evening of the first day shall remain until morning.

Deuteronomy 16:3-4

You must not eat with it anything leavened. Leaven was a picture of sin and corruption, because of the way a little leaven would influence a whole lump of dough, and also because of the way leaven would ‘puff up’ the lump, even as pride and sin makes people ‘puffed up.’ Jesus warned his disciples of this: <<***How could you fail to perceive that I was not speaking about bread? Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees!***>> *Then they understood that he had not told them to beware of the yeast of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees*>> (Matthew 16:11-12). Significantly, God called them to walk unleavened after their initial deliverance from Egypt; symbolically, they were being called to a pure walk with the Lord.

Some suggest there was also a health aspect in getting rid of all the leaven; that since they used a piece of dough from the previous batch to make the bread for that day, and did so repeatedly, that harmful bacteria could take hold in the dough, so it was good to remove all leaven and start all over at least once a year. The purity of the Festival of Unleavened Bread followed upon the blood-deliverance of Passover; Christians can only walk in purity before the Lord after they have had the blood-deliverance at the Cross.

As stated above, prophetically, the Festival of Unleavened Bread relates to the time of Jesus’ burial, after his perfect, sinless sacrifice on the Cross, during which he was received by God the Father as holy and complete: ‘the Holy One

who would not see decay or corruption' (Acts 2:27), perfectly accomplishing salvation for all who would believe in him. Christians may regard the entombment of Jesus as a small thing in God's redemptive plan; but it was an essential part of Paul's Gospel: <<*For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures*>> (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it. Unleavened Bread is the name of the seven-day festival after Passover, thus making it an eight day festival in total; refer to Exodus 12:15-20 and 23:15).

Because you came out of the land of Egypt in great haste. For the first Passover, the unleavened bread was a practical necessity; they left Egypt in such a hurry there was no time to allow for the dough to rise.

So that all the days of your life you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt. Remembrance leads to obedience; refer to Deuteronomy 8:2-3 and comments made there.

⁵ You are not permitted to offer the passover sacrifice within any of your towns that the Lord your God is giving you. ⁶ But at the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name, only there shall you offer the passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, the time of day when you departed from Egypt.

Deuteronomy 16:5-6

You are not permitted to offer the passover sacrifice within any of your towns. This may seem to reverse the provision of Exodus 12:21-24, which envisages the Passover being celebrated in homes. Deuteronomy, however, anticipates settlement in the land.

⁷ You shall cook it and eat it at the place that the Lord your God will choose; the next morning you may go back to your tents. ⁸ For six days you shall continue to eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly for the Lord your God, when you shall do no work.

Deuteronomy 16:7-8

You shall cook it. The Passover sacrifice was to be roasted, not boiled: <<*They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in*

water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs>> (Exodus 12:8-9).

You may go back to your tents. For this pilgrimage festival, Israelites needed to stay in temporary accommodation near to the central sanctuary. There would be insufficient accommodation to rent, even if the people could afford it, and so it was prudent to take tents with them.

III.h.ii Deuteronomy 16:9-12 - The Festival of Weeks Reviewed

Fifty days after Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread, Israel was to come together to give thanks for the first harvest. Because of the elapsed time, i.e. fifty days, it was known as Pentecost.

⁹ You shall count seven weeks; begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain. ¹⁰ Then you shall keep the festival of weeks to the Lord your God, contributing a freewill-offering in proportion to the blessing that you have received from the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 16:9-10

The Festival of Weeks is called the Festival of Harvest in Exodus 23:16. The seven weeks are counted from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain, thus marking the end of the grain harvest. The Greek name for this festival is Pentecost, meaning fifty days, or seven weeks counting inclusively, refer to Acts Chapter 2 for the significance of this festival to Christians.

A freewill-offering is an expression of thankfulness for the blessing of harvest.

¹¹ Rejoice before the Lord your God – you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you – at the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ¹² Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and diligently observe these statutes.

Deuteronomy 16:11-12

Rejoice before the Lord your God. There was no ritual of sacrifice commanded at Pentecost. Instead, it was a time of joyful thanksgiving for the harvest, and a heartfelt response to God for his goodness.

You and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns. Landless people are again included; refer to

Deuteronomy 12:12 and the comment made there. The Israelites are called to **remember** their slavery in **Egypt**, a time when they were also landless. The joy of Pentecost was intensified by remembering the bondage Israel had escaped.

Prophetically, this is a powerful picture of the work of God in the New Covenant, fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost in Acts Chapter 2:

- No atoning sacrifice was necessary because the price had already been paid by Jesus.
- There was a great harvest made unto God, and great thanksgiving for that harvest.
- The response to God on the day of Pentecost was not done out of obligation to a particular law. It was the joyful heartfelt response of God's people unto him.
- The church, founded on the day of Pentecost, would include the 'leavened bread' of the Gentiles, waved as now being holy before God, made holy by the work of Jesus now their Messiah too.

III.h.iii Deuteronomy 16:13-17 - The Festival of Booths Reviewed

The Festival of Booths or Tabernacles is called the Festival of Ingathering in Exodus 23:16 and 34:22. Occurring in September/October, it focuses on the harvest of summer fruits such as dates, grapes, and olives. This is the festival in which the law was to be read every seventh year; refer to Deuteronomy 31:9-13.

¹³ You shall keep the festival of booths for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing-floor and your wine press.

¹⁴ Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns. ¹⁵ For seven days you shall keep the festival to the Lord your God at the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate.

Deuteronomy 16:13-15

You shall keep the festival of booths for seven days. This was to happen on the fifteenth day of the Jewish month Tishri according to the Jewish ceremonial calendar. The Festival of Booths or Tabernacles was a time to rejoice in God's deliverance and provision for Israel during the time of wilderness wandering; a time when having come into the Promised Land, looking back with gratitude on all God had done to deliver and provide in the tough times in the wilderness. Leviticus 23:39 says of the Festival of Tabernacles, on the first day there shall be a Sabbath rest, and on the eighth day a Sabbath rest. The Festival of Tabernacles began and

ended in rest; it was all about celebration, rest and refreshment, remembering what God had done.

Rejoice during your festival. This was a time of great celebration for the whole family and indeed the whole community.

Your male and female slaves. This again reveals the great social good God intended in the Sabbath and in the Festivals; in other ancient cultures, there was no day off, and there were no holidays. Here, God commands holidays and rest days, all centred on him!

You shall surely celebrate. The superabundance of the land is again anticipated.

¹⁶ Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose: at the festival of unleavened bread, at the festival of weeks, and at the festival of booths. They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed; ¹⁷ all shall give as they are able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he has given you.

Deuteronomy 16:16-17

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God. Presumably females were free to journey for the festival (v.11 and v.14), but it was obligatory only for males. Jesus was obedient to this command; he made the trip from Galilee to Jerusalem to be at these festivals: *<<Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival>>* (Luke 2:41-42), *<<Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near>>* (John 7:2), *<<But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret>>* (John 7:10).

At the place that he will choose. Once again the festival is to be held in a central location chose by God. Ultimately, that would be in Jerusalem. The repeated mention of anticipated **blessing** provides incentive for Israel to enter the land.

Prophetically, the Festival of Tabernacles speaks of the millennial rest of comfort of God for Israel and all of God's people; it is all about peace and rest, from beginning to end. Tabernacles is specifically said to be celebrated during the millennium: *<<Then all who survive of the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year by year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the festival of booths. If any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain upon them. And if the family of Egypt do not go up and present themselves, then on them shall come the plague that the Lord inflicts on the nations that do not go*

up to keep the festival of booths. Such shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to keep the festival of booths>> (Zechariah 14:16-19).

III.i Deuteronomy 16:18-18:22 - Leaders

These laws mainly concern various leaders for the people of Israel: judges, priests, kings, and prophets. As in the NT, all leaders of God's people are under the authority of God's Word. Leaders, like parents, exercise God's authority toward those under them, so again the sequence of the Ten Commandments is observable, as this section reflects the fifth commandment: <<*Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you*>> (Deuteronomy 5:16a).

III.i.i Deuteronomy 16:18-20 - Municipal Judges and Officers

The first sub-section deals with appointing members of the civil government who are to ensure that any disputes are judged fairly and impartially.

¹⁸ You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people.

Deuteronomy 16:18

The appointment of judges in towns for judicial purposes recognises the size of the population and the spread of the land; refer to Deuteronomy 1:9-18.

¹⁹ You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. ²⁰ Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

Deuteronomy 16:19-20

You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes. Justice derives from the character of God: <<*You must not be partial in judging: hear out the small and the great alike; you shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgement is God's*>> (Deuteronomy 1:17). God knew the importance of just judges and officials to a nation. They are called to pursue justice, and only justice.

III.i.ii Deuteronomy 16:21-17:7 - Forbidden Forms of Worship

Moses provides a summary statement of some of the things the people are forbidden to do when they come into the land. The purpose is to drive all evil from before them.

²¹ You shall not plant any tree as a sacred pole beside the altar that you make for the Lord your God; ²² nor shall you set up a stone pillar – things that the Lord your God hates.

Deuteronomy 16:21-22

You shall not plant any tree as a sacred pole or Asherah, nor shall you set up a stone pillar. Such sacred totems were common among the Canaanites. Israel might have been tempted to be ‘seeker sensitive’ and add such items to their worship of the God of Israel. He wanted none of it: things that the Lord your God hates. Canaanite worship items were to be destroyed; refer to Deuteronomy 7:5 and 12:3. This law prohibits syncretistic practices at the central place. King Manasseh was one of the leaders guilty of violating this command of God: <<*The carved image of Asherah that he had made he set in the house of which the Lord said to David and to his son Solomon, ‘In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name for ever; I will not cause the feet of Israel to wander any more out of the land that I gave to their ancestors, if only they will be careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them’*>> (2 Kings 21:7-8).