

The Book of Deuteronomy, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: The Feasts and Just Leaders

Deuteronomy 16:1–17:20

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this lesson must handle the appointed feasts rightly. They were genuinely given by God to Israel under the covenant through Moses, and they were shadows pointing to Christ. Paul names festivals among the things that “are a shadow of the things to come” whose “substance belongs to Christ” (Colossians 2:16–17), and he declares plainly that “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7). We do not bind these feast days on Christians. We honor them as God’s word for their time and rejoice that their substance has come.

The lesson also guards the law of the king against a mistaken reading. Deuteronomy 17 does not promise a future earthly political kingdom for national Israel. It anticipates the King God would choose, and that hope lands on Jesus, who right now reigns as Lord and Christ at the Father’s right hand (Acts 2:30–36; Colossians 1:13). The kingdom is here, spiritual and present, with Christ on the throne, not a political throne yet to be restored. We read these chapters forward to Him.

Beyond doctrine, the lesson aims at the student’s formation. The timeless themes, remembering redemption, worshiping with joy, loving impartial justice, and leading in humble submission to God’s word, are meant to shape how we worship, how we treat others, and how we steward whatever influence we have. The God who hates the bribe and the proud heart is forming a people marked by justice, joy, and humility under their King.

Question 1

Student Question:

What did the three pilgrimage feasts, Passover, Weeks, and Booths, teach Israel to remember, and why does God so tightly bind remembering His redemption to rejoicing before Him (16:1–17)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Three times a year Israel gathered for the great feasts (16:16). Passover, with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, recalled the night God brought them out of Egypt; they ate “the bread of affliction” so that “all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt” (16:3). The Feast of Weeks celebrated the harvest with freewill generosity. The Feast of Booths had them dwell in shelters, remembering wilderness days, with the command to be “altogether joyful” (16:15).

Notice the rhythm: each feast was rooted in remembering what God had done, and each overflowed into rejoicing. “You shall rejoice before the Lord your God” runs like a refrain (16:11). God did not want a people who forgot His deliverance, nor a people who remembered it grimly. Remembrance and joy belonged together.

God tied joy to memory because gratitude is the soil of glad worship. A people who forget their redemption drift into either complacency or empty ritual. By building remembrance into the calendar, God kept the story of grace fresh, and fresh grace produces real rejoicing. The feasts were, in a sense, God protecting His people’s joy by protecting their memory.

These feasts were Israel’s under the Old Covenant, shadows pointing forward (Colossians 2:16–17). Passover especially pointed to Christ our Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). We do not keep these feast days, but the principle endures and even deepens: God’s redeemed people remember His saving work and rejoice. We do this supremely as we gather on the Lord’s Day around the Lord’s Supper, remembering the deliverance Christ accomplished.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Three feasts rooted in remembering God’s deliverance
- Remembrance and rejoicing bound together
- Gratitude as the soil of glad worship
- Passover a shadow fulfilled in Christ our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7)
- Feast days not bound on Christians, yet the principle deepens
- The Lord’s Supper as remembrance and joy for the church

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God tie remembering His deliverance so tightly to joy?
- How does forgetting God’s saving work dampen worship?
- How does the Lord’s Supper carry forward the heart of these feasts?

Question 2

Student Question:

Each feast called Israel to deliberately remember God’s deliverance. What practices help you regularly remember what God has done for you, and how does remembering fuel genuine joy in worship?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Israel was commanded to remember deliberately, not to leave gratitude to chance. The feasts were structured acts of memory: eat this bread, dwell in these booths, bring this offering, and as you do, remember. God knew the human heart forgets, so He built remembrance into the calendar.

We are no different. Left to ourselves, we forget what God has done and our worship grows thin. So we need our own practices of remembering: the weekly Lord's Supper, regular reading of Scripture that rehearses God's acts, testimony shared among believers, gratitude named in prayer. These are not empty rituals but disciplines that keep grace fresh.

This question asks what actually helps you remember. Be specific. Is it a habit you keep, a place, a song, a journal of answered prayer? And where has forgetfulness crept in, leaving your worship dutiful rather than glad?

The link the feasts make is crucial: remembering fuels joy. When we recall what God has rescued us from and given us in Christ, joy is the natural overflow. If worship has gone flat, the cure is often not trying harder to feel something but returning to remember what God has done.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Deliberate remembering versus drifting forgetfulness
- Practices that rehearse God's saving acts
- The weekly Lord's Supper as remembrance
- Forgetfulness as a root of flat worship
- Remembering as the fuel of genuine joy

Discussion Prompts

- What practices most help you remember what God has done?
- Where has forgetfulness made your worship dutiful?
- How could remembering renew your joy this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

What does God's demand for "justice, and only justice", and His forbidding of bribes and partiality, reveal about His own character and what He requires of those who judge (16:18-20)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Israel was to appoint judges in all their towns, and the charge was uncompromising: "You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe", for a bribe "blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous" (16:19). The summary rings out: "Justice, and only justice, you shall follow" (16:20).

These commands flow directly from God's own character. He is the God "who is not partial and takes no bribe" (10:17), who defends the orphan and the widow. The judges of Israel were to mirror the Judge of all the earth. To pervert justice was not merely a social failure; it was to misrepresent God Himself.

Impartiality is hard precisely because power, wealth, and relationship constantly press the scales. The bribe is dangerous because it blinds even the wise; self-interest corrupts judgment we would otherwise trust. God knew this and named it directly, refusing to let His people pretend that a little favoritism was harmless.

The promise attached to justice is telling: “that you may live and inherit the land” (16:20). A society that loves justice flourishes; one that sells it rots. God’s passion for impartial justice is timeless. The New Testament carries it straight into the church, where favoritism is named sin (James 2:1–9), because the God we serve has not changed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Justice and impartiality rooted in God’s own character
- The bribe blinds even the wise
- Judges meant to mirror the impartial Judge of all
- Justice tied to the flourishing of the community
- Favoritism named sin in the church (James 2:1–9)

Discussion Prompts

- How does God’s own impartiality shape what He requires of judges?
- Why is the bribe so spiritually dangerous?
- Where does the call to impartial justice reach into the church today?

Question 4

Student Question:

God hates partiality and the bribe that blinds the wise. Where are you tempted to show favoritism, bend the truth for advantage, or let self-interest cloud your judgment of others?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

We are not all judges in a courtroom, but we all render judgments daily: about people, situations, and what is fair. The temptation to partiality follows us everywhere. We bend toward those who can help us, away from those who cannot, and we read the same action generously in a friend and harshly in a rival.

The bribe that “blinds the eyes of the wise” is not always cash. It can be the desire to be liked, the fear of an important person’s displeasure, or the quiet pull of our own advantage. These bend our judgment as surely as money does, and usually without our noticing.

This question asks for honesty about your own favoritism. Where do you treat people unequally? Where do you shade the truth when it benefits you? Where does self-interest cloud how you judge someone’s words or motives? James presses the same point, warning the church against honoring the rich and despising the poor (James 2:1–9).

The call is to a clear-eyed fairness that comes from fearing God more than people. When we remember that we stand before an impartial Judge, the pressure to flatter and favor loses its grip. Loving justice begins in the small, daily judgments of ordinary life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Everyday judgments shaped by partiality
- Non-monetary “bribes”: approval, fear, advantage
- Reading the same act differently in friend and rival
- Fearing God as the cure for people-pleasing
- Fairness lived out in small daily judgments

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to show favoritism?
- What “bribes” of approval or advantage cloud your judgment?
- How would fearing God more than people change how you treat others?

Question 5

Student Question:

What do the warnings against false worship, the Asherah, the pillar, and the blemished sacrifice, teach about how seriously God takes the purity and sincerity of worship offered to Him (16:21–17:7)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After justice, the text turns to worship and guards it fiercely. Israel was forbidden to plant an Asherah or set up a pillar beside God’s altar (16:21–22), Canaanite forms God “hates”. And no animal “in which is a blemish, any defect whatever” was to be sacrificed, for that “is an abomination to the Lord your God” (17:1). Worship was to be pure in object and sincere in quality.

The chapter then describes the careful handling of a charge of idolatry: it must be “inquired diligently”, established by “two witnesses or three”, never one (17:2–7). God took the worship of other gods so seriously that it was a capital matter under the Old Covenant, yet He hedged it with safeguards against false accusation. Both the seriousness of idolatry and the protection of the innocent mattered to Him.

Underneath these laws is a single truth: God will not share His glory, and He will not accept careless worship. To offer Him a blemished animal was to treat Him as less than worthy, to give Him the leftovers. God names this an abomination because it lies about His worth.

While the specific sacrifices belonged to Israel’s covenant, the principle is timeless and reaches the church. God still desires worship that is undivided in its object (Him alone) and sincere in its

quality (our best, not our leftovers). Half-hearted, mixed, or merely outward worship dishonors the God who gave His Son.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship guarded against idolatrous forms
- The blemished sacrifice as an abomination
- God will not share His glory
- Safeguards against false accusation (two or three witnesses)
- Sincere, undivided, best worship still required of the church

Discussion Prompts

- Why does a blemished offering so offend God?
- What does God's hatred of mixed worship teach about His worth?
- How can worship today become careless or divided?

Question 6

Student Question:

God required worship free of idolatry and half-hearted, blemished offerings. What in your own worship has grown careless, divided, or merely outward, and how is God calling you to offer Him your best?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The blemished sacrifice is a pointed image. Israel was tempted to keep the best for themselves and bring God the defective animal, the one they would not miss. God called it an abomination because it betrayed a heart that valued Him cheaply. The question for us is whether we do the same in subtler ways.

Worship grows careless when we give God our leftover time, our distracted attention, our half-engaged hearts. It grows divided when we try to serve Him alongside other loves, an Asherah beside the altar. It grows merely outward when we go through motions while our hearts are elsewhere, the very thing Jesus rebuked when He quoted, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:8).

This question invites self-examination. Where has your worship become routine, distracted, or hollow? What competing loves sit beside the altar in your life? What would it look like to bring God your best, your first and fullest, rather than your leftovers?

Offering our best is not about impressing God but about telling the truth concerning His worth. Because Christ gave Himself fully for us, we respond not with blemished, half-hearted worship but with lives presented as "a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Romans 12:1).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Giving God leftovers rather than our best
- Worship grown careless, divided, or merely outward
- Competing loves beside the altar
- Lips that honor while the heart is far
- Worship as living sacrifice in response to Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Where has your worship become routine or distracted?
- What competing love sits beside the altar in your life?
- What would offering God your best look like this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

The law of the king forbade multiplying horses, wives, and silver and gold, and required the king to copy and read God's law all his days. What does this reveal about the kind of leadership God desires and the dangers of unchecked power (17:14–20)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Long before Israel had a king, God anticipated one and set strict limits on him. The king must be one “whom the Lord your God will choose”, from among his brothers, not a foreigner (17:15). He must not “acquire many horses”, nor “acquire many wives”, nor “acquire for himself excessive silver and gold” (17:16–17). Military might, political marriages, and hoarded wealth, the very things kings crave, were forbidden.

Most striking, the king was to write for himself a copy of God's law and read it “all the days of his life”, “that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers” (17:18–20). The king of Israel was to be a man under the law, a reader and doer of God's word, not a law unto himself. His reign was to be marked by humility, not pride.

This is a remarkable vision of leadership. Power tends to corrupt; God hedges it with submission to His word. The king's greatness was to lie not in horses, wealth, and harems but in a heart kept low before God and kept level with his brothers. Unchecked power, God warns by these very limits, breeds pride and drift from Him.

Tragically, Israel's kings broke these very commands; Solomon multiplied horses, wives, and gold, and his heart was turned away. The law of the king exposes the failure of every merely human throne and creates a longing for a different kind of King. That longing is the doorway into question nine.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The king chosen by God, under the law, not above it
- Limits on horses, wives, and wealth
- The king to read God's law all his days
- Humility, not pride, as the mark of godly leadership
- Unchecked power breeds pride and drift
- Israel's kings broke these very commands

Discussion Prompts

- What kind of leadership does God desire, according to the law of the king?
- Why must the king keep God's word before him daily?
- How does unchecked power endanger the heart?

Question 8

Student Question:

The king was to keep God's word before him daily so his heart would not be lifted above his brothers. In whatever leadership or influence you have, how do you guard your heart against pride and stay submitted to God's word?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The safeguard for the king's heart was simple and daily: keep God's word before your eyes "all the days of your life" (17:19). The antidote to a heart "lifted up" was constant immersion in Scripture. Leaders who lose touch with God's word soon lose touch with humility.

Most of us hold some leadership or influence, as parents, employers, elders, teachers, mentors, or simply older believers others watch. Each form of influence carries the same danger the king faced: that our hearts would be lifted up above those we lead, that we would begin to think the rules are for others and not for us.

This question asks two things. First, what keeps God's word before your eyes daily? The king copied and read it; what is your equivalent rhythm? Second, where does pride creep in? Where do you feel above correction, entitled, or impatient with those you lead?

Humble leadership flows from a heart soaked in Scripture and submitted to the true King. The same Jesus who said the greatest must be servant of all (Mark 10:43-44) models the leadership Deuteronomy 17 envisioned. We guard against pride not by self-effort alone but by staying low before His word and following His servant heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Daily immersion in Scripture as the guard against pride
- Influence in many ordinary roles
- The temptation to feel above the rules we set for others

- Self-examination for entitlement and impatience
- Servant leadership modeled by Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What keeps God's word before your eyes daily?
- Where does pride creep into your leadership or influence?
- How does Jesus' servant heart reshape how you lead?

Question 9

Student Question:

Deuteronomy 16–17 anticipates a king God Himself would choose. How is the law of the king fulfilled in Jesus, the true and humble King who reigns now at the Father's right hand, and why must we read these promises in Christ rather than as a future earthly political kingdom (Colossians 1:13; Acts 2:30–36)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The law of the king (17:14–20) does more than regulate Israel's monarchy; it plants a longing the Old Testament never fully satisfied. Israel needed a king chosen by God, under God's word, humble, free from greed and self-exaltation, who would lead his brothers in righteousness. No son of David, not even David himself, was that king without flaw. The whole storyline strains forward toward One who would be.

That King is Jesus. He is the descendant of David whom God "would set... on his throne" (Acts 2:30), and Peter declares that God raised Him up and "exalted at the right hand of God", making Him "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:33–36). He is the King whose heart was never lifted up, who, though He was in the form of God, humbled Himself even to death on a cross (Philippians 2:6–8). He is the only Ruler who perfectly kept God's word "all the days of his life".

It is vital to read this hope rightly. The law of the king does not point to a future earthly political kingdom for national Israel, a throne yet to be restored in the Middle East. The kingdom Jesus brought is already here. He reigns now, at the Father's right hand, over a kingdom that is spiritual and present. Paul says God "has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13). Daniel foresaw that in the days of those kings "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44), and that kingdom came with Jesus and was established when the church began at Pentecost (Mark 9:1; Acts 2).

So the promises to David and the hope of a king are fulfilled in Christ and His church, not in a restored political Israel. To look for an earthly throne yet to come is to look back from the reality to the shadow, and to miss the King who already reigns. The kingdom is not "not yet" in that political sense; the King is enthroned now, and we are citizens of His kingdom today.

This reading reshapes how we live. We do not wait for a coming earthly ruler; we already belong to a reigning heavenly King. We obey Him now, we worship Him now, we proclaim His present reign. And we find in Him everything the law of the king longed for: a King chosen by God, mighty yet humble, never corrupted by power, who leads His brothers not from above them but as one who became the servant of all and now sits enthroned as Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The law of the king plants a longing fulfilled in Christ
- Jesus the Davidic King, enthroned as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:30–36)
- The King whose heart was never lifted up (Philippians 2:6–8)
- Guard against a future earthly political kingdom for national Israel
- The kingdom is present; Christ reigns now (Colossians 1:13; Daniel 2:44)
- The kingdom established at Pentecost (Mark 9:1; Acts 2)
- We are citizens of His present reign today

Discussion Prompts

- How does Jesus fulfill everything the law of the king longed for?
- Why must we read this hope as fulfilled in Christ, not a future earthly Israel?
- What does it change to know Christ reigns as King now?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across these chapters, name one specific way Jesus is forming you through them, whether in joyful remembrance, love of justice, purity of worship, or humble submission to your King.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

These chapters moved from the joyful feasts to the just courtroom to the humble throne. Each thread is gathered up in Jesus: He is our Passover, the substance of the feasts; He is the perfectly just Judge who shows no partiality; He is the humble King who reigns now at the Father's right hand.

The whole passage invites us to live as His people: remembering our redemption with joy, loving justice and fairness, offering pure and wholehearted worship, and submitting humbly to our King while leading others with a heart kept low before His word.

This capstone asks you to name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this study. Perhaps it is renewed joy in remembering His deliverance, a conviction about some favoritism, a careless place in your worship, or pride in your leadership that He is bringing low.

Choose one concrete thing and act on it. Formation is not in vague intentions but in specific steps: the gratitude practiced, the partiality repented of, the worship made wholehearted, the leadership humbled under the King who alone deserves the throne.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Feasts, justice, and kingship gathered up in Christ
- Joyful remembrance, justice, pure worship, humble submission
- Christ our Passover, our Judge, our King
- Specific obedience over vague intention
- Naming one concrete fruit of the study

Discussion Prompts

- Which thread of this passage pressed most on you?
- What one specific thing is Jesus forming in you here?
- What concrete step will you take in response this week?