

The Book of Deuteronomy

Lesson 11: The Feasts and Just Leaders -- Deuteronomy 16:1–17:20

Three times a year, all Israel was to drop the plow, leave the village, and travel to the place God chose, “to appear before the Lord your God” (16:16). Picture the roads filling with families, the dust rising, the songs carrying across the hills. These were not grim religious duties. They were national reunions of remembrance and joy, and at the center of each one stood a memory God refused to let His people forget.

At Passover they remembered the night of deliverance, eating “the bread of affliction” so they would recall “the day you came out of the land of Egypt” (16:3). At the Feast of Weeks they rejoiced over the harvest with open generosity. At the Feast of Booths they lived in shelters and were simply commanded to be “altogether joyful” (16:15). Redemption remembered always overflowed into rejoicing.

Then the text turns from the festival to the courtroom and the throne. “Justice, and only justice, you shall follow” (16:20), God commands, forbidding bribes that “blind the eyes of the wise”. Judges must be impartial, witnesses honest, and even a future king must be a man under the law, not above it, who writes out God’s words and reads them “all the days of his life” so his heart is not lifted above his brothers.

We do not keep these feasts, and Israel never had a king like the one this chapter dreamed of. But every thread here is pulled tight in Jesus. He is our Passover, sacrificed for us. He is the true and humble King who reigns now under the Father, the only Ruler whose heart was never lifted up. These chapters teach us to remember our redemption, to worship with joy, to love justice, and to bow before the King who alone deserves the throne.

Group Discussion: Israel’s feasts bound remembrance of redemption tightly to joyful worship, while the laws on judges and kings demanded impartial justice and humble leadership under God’s word. What do these chapters together teach us about what God values in His people’s worship and their leaders, and where do we see those same values in Christ and His church?

Personal Reflection: The king was to write out God’s law and read it “all the days of his life” so his heart would not be lifted up above his brothers. What practices keep God’s word before your own eyes daily, and where might your heart be quietly tempted toward pride or self-importance?

Read Deuteronomy 16:1–17:20

Study Questions

1. 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)?
2. 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?
3. 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)?
4. 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?
5. 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)?
6. 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?

7. 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)?
8. 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?
9. 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)?
10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 5:7, where Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed; Colossians 2:16–17, where festival, new moon, and Sabbath are a shadow whose substance is Christ; Acts 2:30–36, where the risen Jesus is enthroned as Lord and Christ at God's right hand; Colossians 1:13, where God has transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son; James 2:1–9, where favoritism is named sin against God's impartial heart

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