

September 16, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
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THREE IMPORTANT FEASTS Deuteronomy 16:1-17

Okay, let's be honest, some of the Old Testament laws God gave in the Mosaic law just don't make much sense to us 21st century Christians. For example, last Wednesday evening at our small group I confessed the frustration I experienced that morning reading devotionally from Leviticus. I was reading in chapter fourteen about the prescribed ritual a cleansed leper had to go through for the priest to verify that he was actually free from the disease. Here is a short segment of that context:

Then the priest shall take some of the log of oil and pour it into the palm of his own left hand and dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand and sprinkle some oil with his finger seven times before the LORD. And some of the oil that remains in his hand the priest shall put on the lobe of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, on top of the blood of the guilt offering (Leviticus 14:15-17).

I am very sure that there is a principle hidden in this process somewhere that is quite applicable to my Christian life. But for the life of me I can't figure out what it could possibly be.

Not long ago in our study in Deuteronomy we ran into some difficult statements about diet, tattoos, and strong drink. Many of those laws at least have a kind of principial application. But now we come to Moses's reminder to the people about three very important feasts on Israel's calendar. While we do not participate in killing animals for sacrifice, nor do we go to Jerusalem to celebrate, nor do

we engage in even similar feasts for seven day periods, still there are principles here that clearly apply to our Christian practices.

The Feasts of the Passover, Tabernacles, and Pentecost all hold practices and principles that supercede their practice in 1400 B.C. These feasts have a direct application to the same blessings God gives us in salvation. In fact, our own celebration of the Lord's Supper has roots in these festivals. By learning about these three festivals, we will be encouraged to remember the amazing works of grace God has done for us through Jesus Christ.

The Passover (vv.1-8).

Moses gave instruction for keeping this important feast. The time for the feast is stated in verse one. *Observe the month of Abib and keep the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night (v.1).* The month Abib is also called Nisan. Probably this was the more common name of the month. It is equivalent to our March/April.

God actually changed the beginning of the year for the Hebrews from Tishri (fall September/October) to Nisan to commemorate the stupendous act of God delivering His people from Egypt and them becoming a nation. In the context of delivering His people from Egyptian slavery God instructed, *This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you (Exodus 12:2).* God instructed His people to observe this festival every year precisely in *the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD's Passover (Leviticus 23:5).*

There is also specific instruction here about the sacrifice the people were to offer at this feast. *And you shall offer the Passover sacrifice to the LORD your God, from the flock or the herd, at the place that the LORD will choose, to make his name dwell there. You shall eat no leavened bread with it (vv.2-3a).*

On the original Passover, the night God delivered Israel from Egypt, Moses gave specific instruction about the sacrifice. *Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats (Exodus 12:5).* Now as the people were about to enter the Promised Land forty years later, the instruction sounded about the same but was even expanded. For example, the word *flock*

could refer to either sheep or goats. But the word *herd* is more of a reference to cattle. Because a cow was a lot of meat, and because the whole sacrifice was to be eaten, it would take a pretty big family to justify a cow or ox for the sacrifice. There was no mention of cattle from the herd at the original Passover. The family was to eat the Passover sacrifice at the location of the tabernacle, or later, at the temple in Jerusalem.

What was the purpose for the Passover Feast? Moses taught, *Seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, the bread of affliction – for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste – that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt (v.3b)*. Then again we can look back at verse one and learn, *For in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night (v.1)*. The whole purpose of this festival was to commemorate God delivering His people from Egypt. In light of the great cost of traveling to Jerusalem, buying the sacrifice, celebrating, etc., this should have caused the people to realize how important the worship was.

Moses also gave a few other details about what the feast entailed. The people were to remove all leaven from their surrounding, *No leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory for seven days (v.4a)*. The entire sacrifice has to be eaten the evening of the celebration, *nor shall any of the flesh that you sacrifice on the evening of the first day remain all night until morning (v.4b)*. The Passover meal was not to be eaten at home but at the place God chose. *You may not offer the Passover sacrifice within any of your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, but at the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell in it, there you shall offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, at the time you came out of Egypt (vv.5-6)*. The temporary quarters were tents. *And in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents (v.7)*. The celebration lasted all evening. *And you shall cook it and eat it at the place that the LORD your God will choose (v.7a)*.

The mention of unleavened bread seems to indicate that the Passover flowed into a second celebration, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. *For six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD your God. You shall do no work on it (v.8)*. We read more detailed instruction

about this combination in Exodus 12:14-16, the instruction for the original Passover. *This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you (Exodus 12:14-16)*.

Finally we learn that the feast ended with corporate worship in a *solemn assembly*. It is possible, yeah likely, that this “solemnity” might have set the tone for the entire week-long celebration. Yes, it is possible for God’s people to rejoice in respectful awe.

But is there any principle found in this instruction that can be applied to modern Christians? Yes. We celebrate our deliverance by the blood of the Lamb. We do this each time we meet for Communion or “the Lord’s Table” as we sometimes call it. The juice of the communion cup reminds us of the blood Christ shed to bring about our deliverance from sin. He has delivered from the penalty of sin. He has delivered us from the power of sin. Because of His sacrifice, we are no longer slaves but are brought into fellowship with Christ. Paul wrote, *Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands – remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:11-13)*.

Also during that celebration, and rightly at many other times also, we consecrate ourselves to ridding our lives of the “leaven” of sin. The unleavened bread of communion reminds us of the old life of sin that needs to be done away with. We should regularly (not just during Communion) *Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:7)*.

We do not “celebrate” this wonderful freedom from sin in order to gain freedom from sin. That is illogical. The observance of Communion is not a law, a tradition we must keep, but a response. The Lord’s table is a solemn assembly of corporate worship when we seriously contemplate the marvel that God’s grace has granted us eternal freedom.

Feast Of Weeks (vv.9-12).

Again we find instruction for keeping the feast in verse nine. The time for the feast is stated as, *You shall count seven weeks. Begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain (v.9)*. In other words, the whole nation counted seven weeks from when grain harvest begins. That idea is conveyed by the instruction *from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain*. Or, seven weeks after beginning the harvest of “winter wheat.” The grains that were planted in the winter would have grown and ripened in the early spring just like they do in South Carolina.

It would seem then that grain harvest generally began the day after the Feast of Unleavened Bread ended. This jibes with the instruction, *You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year’s end (Exodus 34:22)*. The Feast of Weeks was in Sivan and the Feast of Ingathering (Booths) was near the end of the year. Further instruction was that *You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath (Leviticus 23:15-16a)*. So the time of this feast was 50 days after Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread which gives us the New Testament name Pentecost. It was on the 6th day of Sivan (our May/June).

The sacrifice required is stated as, *Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you (v.10)*. In this feast, the sacrifice was in proportion to God’s prospering of the people. It was to be *the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you (v.10)*.

On the one hand, it was a freewill offering according to God’s blessing. On the other hand, there was a required tithe. The instruction in Leviticus for this sacrifice doesn’t leave a lot of room for “freewill.” *Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD. You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the LORD. And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, and one bull from the herd and two rams. They shall be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest (Leviticus 23:15-20)*.

Why celebrate this feast? What was its purpose? Simply stated, *You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt; and you shall be careful to observe these statutes (v.12)*. The feast was a dedication of the first fruits of the harvest to God. It reminded the people that it was only possible for them to give part of the harvest to God because God had delivered them from slavery and given them their own property.

Then there were other details given. *And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there (v.11)*. This feast was a joyous celebration, not a solemn assembly. Like the other two important feasts, it was held at the place where God made His name dwell. That of course was wherever the Ark of the Covenant was located (either at the tabernacle or later at the temple). Everyone was invited to participate in the joy: *You and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you*.

Modern Christians don’t do the Feast of Weeks. No, but there are some principles we can apply to our Christian lives. I find it quite interesting that this particular feast began on Sunday. That was really

odd compared to the other feasts. But, counting off seven weeks plus one day from the previous Sabbath puts this feast beginning on a Sunday. That means that the Lord's people were celebrating liberty from slavery on Sunday like we do every week.

Also, there is a clear biblical connection between this feast and our celebration of receiving of the Holy Spirit. In New Testament times, the day of this feast was the very day God the Holy Spirit came to the Church. He is the blessing of God to us. We respond to God's provision by offering ourselves as sacrifices to Him. We give of ourselves in practical ways. Like a tithe that is required. As freewill offerings knowing how God has blessed us. Here is our instruction for sacrifice: *Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name (Hebrews 13:15).*

Feast of Booths (vv.13-15).

Consider first, the instruction for keeping the feast. The time for the feast is stated generally in verse thirteen. *You shall keep the Feast of Booths seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your winepress (v.13).* We know that the feast began the 15th day of Tishri (September/October). The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) you will remember signaled the beginning of harvest season for grain, particularly similar to our winter wheat which ripens in late spring. The Feast of Booths, on the other hand, signaled the end of harvest season when all the other produce, especially fruits, wines, nuts, and such were gathered in. That is why this feast is also called the Feast of Ingathering.

The sacrifice required is stated as *when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your winepress (v.13b).* More precisely we learn in Leviticus, *For seven days you shall present food offerings to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present a food offering to the LORD. It is a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work (Leviticus 23:36).*

The purpose to be celebrated was *because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful (v.15b).* Celebration of the harvest was especially important to an agrarian culture. Also, it was

the celebration of the greatest act in Israel's history – God delivering them from Egypt.

Other details given include the idea that *You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns. For seven days you shall keep the feast to the LORD your God at the place that the LORD will choose (vv.14-15a).* Again, everyone was invited to rejoice.

But unique from the other celebrations is that in this case the people built temporary shelters to remind them of the way their forefathers lived when God delivered them from Egypt. *And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. You shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It is a statute forever throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 23:40-43).*

What kind of modern application can we make with the principles in this feast? No doubt it is good to focus on our temporary dwellings. We are not home yet. We need to remember that we are just passing through this world on our way home. And while we focus on the eternal instead of the passing, we can still rejoice in the blessings God gives in this life. Even though we are in temporal circumstances, God pours blessings upon us. Share those blessings with others and rejoice in what God does.

Epilogue

This passage ends with a very important repetition of the people's responsibility to maintain these feasts throughout their generations. *Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. Every man*

shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that he has given you (vv.16-17).

I emphasize this because of the very sad reality that it didn't happen. There are few references in the Old Testament that God's people kept these festivals. For example, there is no mention of Passover being celebrated from Exodus 12 until Joshua 5 when the people crossed over Jordan to begin possessing the Promised Land. Then there is no indication of the people celebrating Passover again until the day of Hezekiah (who invited people from the north to no avail). Again Josiah, Hezekiah's great-grandson, encouraged the people to observe Passover as part of his restoration of the temple and proper worship. But that was too little, too late. The damage was done and God's judgment was pending. We read in Ezra and Nehemiah that the people restored to the land after captivity observed all the feasts God prescribed—these three in particular are mentioned.

Then, almost surprisingly, there are multiple references in the New Testament that indicate the people observed these feasts. But the overriding attitude indicates that by then these were dead traditions. In the New Testament, we see that Jesus attended festivals. At the age of 12 He accompanied His mother and Joseph to Passover (Luke 2). He cleansed the temple at a Passover Feast (John 2). John mentions five times that Jesus attended various feasts. There was an unnamed feast (5:1), the Passover (6:4), the Feast of Booths (7:2), the Feast of Dedication (10:22), and of course the last Passover before He was crucified (13 ff).

But again, these feasts seemed to be relegated to dead traditions. Often Jesus taught at these feasts only to be rejected by the people who attended. The Pharisees and their crowd kept Passover even while they killed Jesus. All those feasts came to an end with the destruction of Jerusalem.

While we might feign sadness that God's people did not follow through well with the keeping of these feasts, we must honestly ponder whether our worship is any more consistent. On one hand, we must guard against getting locked into a meaningless expression of traditions. Sure we have Communion on the first Sunday each month. Sure we baptize people somewhat regularly. But do we really worship our great God at those celebrations?

Our celebrations of God and His blessings must exceed ordinances. Right celebration is more likely when we rescue our ideas about God. God does not need rescuing. But our ideas about God have been captured by a world of pleasure and entertainment. So many people in our day mistakenly believe that feeling excited, exuberant, or highly emotional is somehow a sacrifice of praise to God. That wrong conclusion is because we picture God wrongly. He is not a the Divine ATM who gives us whatever we ask for if we have the right code. He is not a weak God who finds nothing wrong with anything His darling created beings do.

This kind of wrong-headed conclusion is the reason why it is so important for us to focus on the great doctrines of the Bible. Bible doctrines teach the truth about God's person, character, and work. Bible doctrines help us understand the amazing work of God's grace poured out in redemption. Bible doctrines reveal to us the incomprehensibly big, majestic God like Isaiah and John saw. Unregenerated human nature concludes that Bible doctrine is boring.

The problem is that many professing Christians are only that – professing. Those people can only be stimulated by experience and entertainment. The great doctrines of salvation and deliverance from sin's power and penalty bring satisfaction and confidence to the soul of God's redeemed child.

Knowledge of who God is, what God does for us, helps us understand how incredibly magnificent God is and how insignificant we are. People who get that, rejoice greatly that God is so kind and gracious to us undeserving creatures.