

Deuteronomy

Lesson 11

Chapter 16

E. Laws for the High and Holy Feasts

The LORD ordains three high and holy feasts for the life of the Israelites in the Promised Land – the celebration of Passover, the celebration of Weeks, and the celebration of Booths. First, we come to Passover. Chapter 16, verse 1.

1. Feast of Unleavened Bread

“Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night. ² You shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to establish His name. ³ You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, the bread of affliction (~~for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste~~), so that you may remember all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt. ⁴ ‘For seven days no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory, and none of the flesh which you sacrifice on the evening of the first day shall remain overnight until morning. ⁵ You are not allowed to sacrifice the Passover in any of your towns which the LORD your God is giving you; ⁶ but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name, you shall sacrifice the Passover in the evening at sunset, at the time that you came out of Egypt. ⁷ You shall cook and eat it in the place which the LORD your God chooses. In the morning you are to return to your tents. ⁸ 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.” (16:1-8).

a) The Month of Abib

The Passover in Egypt occurred in the month of Abib. Some English versions spell it *Aviv*. The title means *an ear of corn*. Ancient Egypt and all of the world at that time operated on a strictly lunar calendar of twelve months in each year, with the new moon as the start of each month. The Egyptians did not keep a running tally of years as we do. The tally of years stated over with the reign of each new pharaoh. We are different. For instance, we live today in 2021, which means 2021 years have passed since the BC/AD system was implemented by the Church within the Roman Empire. The Church leaders’ thinking was that the calendar should reflect our LORD’s birth; therefore, they picked the Roman year that they ascertained was the year of Jesus’ birth, named it year 1 AD. Every year before the birth of Jesus was recalculated backward and called BC years.

We have numerous copies of the ancient Egyptian calendars, and Abib or Aviv cannot be found on any of them. Therefore, we can rightly assume that Abib or Aviv is a Hebrew word that identified the month the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt. He brought them out in the month of the *ear of corn*. The *ear of corn* in Hebrew is pronounced Abib or Aviv in English. The LORD set this month as the first month of each new year.

Until entering Egypt, patriarchs of the Godly line of Adam, through Seth and on to Jacob, counted the months by numbers, not names. Coming out of Egypt, the Israelites and the LORD still used numbers to identify the months instead of names. Obviously, the Exodus occurred in the lunar month of the harvest of the ear of corn, and the LORD gave it the name of Abib.

The name of the month of Abib was changed to Nisan in Jewish life following the return from the Babylonian exile in 536 BC. The Babylonian Empire was also on a strictly lunar calendar. The corresponding month was called Nisan, and the Israelites adopted the Babylonian month names for their calendar upon their return to the old Southern Kingdom area after release from exile. For the Israelites of the Exodus, they departed Egypt on the 15th of Abib. For the returning Israelite from the exile, they had renamed it the 15th of Nisan.

b) The Day of Abib

The Exodus occurred on the 15th of Abib, but the Passovers preparation and meal happened on the 14th of Abib. The whole plan was put in place by the LORD the week before. On the 10th of Abib, each family selected a spotless lamb, quarantined it for safety, fed it lavishly, and pampered it fully. On the morning of the 14th of Abib, the lamb was slain and roasted, its blood painted on the doorframes, the bitter herbs gathered, and each family closed the doors in the late afternoon for the Passover meal. With the coming of dark on the 14th, the change of day and the night of the 15th began, the firstborn's death occurred in every home without the blood on the door. In the middle of the night, Pharaoh called for Moses to demand that the Nation of Israel leave his land. The word was spread, the tribes assembled, the parade out of Egypt started soon. The first step out of Egypt began at Pi-Rameses on the 15th of Abib as the sunset (16:6). With about thirty minutes of sunlight left, the nation walked into the night, in the light of the full moon, and settled for the first camp later at Succoth. Pi-Rameses and Succoth both stand in the Nile Delta (Numbers 33:5).

c) The Week of Abib

For seven days after leaving Egypt, the bread that the Israelites ate was unleavened. The dough had not had time to rise in Egypt in their hurry to go, but it was cooked anyway unrisen. It was the only bread the Israelites had to eat until they could camp at a safe place. But when the nation enters the Promised Land, the whole nation must reenact that seven-day occurrence in remembrance of the Exodus departure.

d) The Sacrifice of Abib

We do not know where the sacrifices in Egypt occurred. Undoubtedly the slaying of the lambs happened at the home of each family. But for the future in the Promised Land, the killing of the lamb on the morning of the 14th of Abib will change. It will occur at *"the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name, you shall sacrifice the Passover in the evening at sunset, at the time that you came out of Egypt."* *You shall cook and eat it in the place which the LORD your God chooses."*

The LORD can make any changes that He desires. Here He desires. He makes a change in the Passover preparation. In the original Passover, the lamb was slain at the daybreak of the 14th. In the Promised Land, the lamb is to be slain at sunset on the 15th. Why? The LORD wanted Israel to remember the actual time of the first step of leaving Egypt. He said to do it, *"at the time that you came out of Egypt."*

In Numbers 28:16 – 25, we find the details for the Passover offering and the following week. Verse 16.

"Then on the fourteenth day of the first month shall be the LORD'S Passover. ¹⁷ On the fifteenth day of this month shall be a feast, unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. ¹⁸ On the first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work. ¹⁹ You shall present an offering by fire, a burnt offering to the LORD: two bulls and one ram and seven male lambs one year old, having them without defect. ²⁰ For their grain offering, you shall offer fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for a bull and two-tenths for the ram. ²¹ A tenth of an ephah you shall offer for each of the seven lambs; ²² and one male goat for a sin offering to make atonement for you. ²³ You shall present these besides the burnt offering of the morning, which is for a continual burnt offering. ²⁴ After this manner you shall present daily, for seven days, the food of the offering by fire, of a soothing aroma to the LORD; it shall be presented with its drink offering in addition to the continual burnt offering. ²⁵ On the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work."

In that short summary, we have the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

2. Feast of Weeks

Second, we come to the Weeks. Verse 9. *"You shall count seven weeks for yourself; you shall begin to count seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. ¹⁰ Then you shall celebrate the Feast of*

Weeks to the LORD your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give just as the LORD your God blesses you;¹¹ and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, in the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name.¹² You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.” (16:9-12).

a) Seven Weeks until the Feast

The Feast of Weeks is the countdown to the Day of Pentecost. Notice that the day is not tied to the calendar, as was the date of the Passover. Why? On the lunar calendar, observed by the whole world at that time, the Passover could be kept on the same day of the same month every year regardless of the season that first month appeared in. The lunar year contains 354 days, eleven days short of a full solar year. That means that every year, the first month of the year falls eleven days earlier in the season than it did the previous year. When three years had passed, the first month occurs thirty-three days or a little more than a month earlier than three years before. Therefore, on the lunar calendar, the Exodus date of Abid 15th would move backward through the seasons every year until it returned to the same week in the same season and month of the *ear of the corn*, nineteen years later. But the Feast of Weeks could not be tied to the calendar because it was tied to the time to “*put the sickle to the standing grain*” depended on the season of harvest and not the month on the calendar that moved through every season over the years.

The Feast of Weeks countdown started with the first day of putting the “*sickle to the standing grain*.” We find the Feast of Weeks with the same instruction in the Book of Leviticus for setting its countdown to start with the day of the cutting of the grain. Leviticus does not tie the feast to the calendar. Seven weeks multiplied by seven days meant forty-nine days were counted to come to the end of the seven weeks. The harvest would begin, and forty-nine days later, the harvest should be over. This feast is all about the grain. What grain? Barley planted in the winter, called *winter barley*, is ready to begin the harvest in mid-Abid, about the 15th of the month. In 538 AD, the Jewish calendar has been manipulated to force the Passover of Abib 15th (Nisan 15th) to fall in the Spring in March or early April. For our purposes, we will use the manipulated Jewish calendar as an illustration for our purposes here.

In 2021 AD, Abib 15th fell on Saturday, March 27th. The count begins. Forty-nine days later, on our calendar, is May 22nd. The count is over. The celebration occurs on the fiftieth day. We know the fiftieth-day festival with the name of the Day of Pentecost. Left to Israel’s devices with only this information in this passage, it would have to use great care in deciding when to put the sickle to the grain to make sure the fiftieth day did not fall on the Sabbath. Work could not occur on the Sabbath, so the sickle would never strike on that day. The sickle could be put to the grain on any other day except Friday. From Friday to Friday, forty-nine days later, would place Pentecost of the Sabbath. Besides all of that, part of every Friday was designated for preparation for the Sabbath. But the nation of Israel would not be left to its devices. In Leviticus 23:15, we learn that the day of harvest begins the day after the Sabbath on the first day of the week. The farmer would put his sickle to the grain and take the first cutting to the holy place in his tribal area to offer *firstfruits* on the first day of the week. Thus, grain harvest began on Sunday, so Pentecost would always fall on Sunday, the day after the Sabbath.

b) Sincere Tributes with the Feast

The Day of Pentecost required a sincere tribute with the feast of a freewill offering. We mentioned the freewill offering without discussion in chapter 12. It is time to make that discussion because it is paramount to understanding of the Day of Pentecost. It is a spontaneous and a voluntary gift “*which you shall give just as the LORD your God blesses you....*” The tithe of the grain was required at the beginning of the harvest, with the first ten percent of the grain going to the Levites at the local place of worship designated by the LORD. The freewill offering was not a tithe; it was over

and above the tithe based on the LORD's blessings from the crop. The secret to the amount of the offering looks to the word "tribute" for an understanding. The tribute this early in the Scripture means *whatever you believe you can afford to give from what the LORD as He has blessed*. Once the kings come on the scene in Israel, that will all change. The Kings will demand taxes, and they will call them *tributes*, whether from the people of the Nation of Israel or the people of alien nations that they control. For now, the tribute of the freewill offering deals with a gift from each family unit.

c) Submissive Rejoices at the Feast

The Day of Pentecost is a day for submissive rejoices at the feast with every man, woman, boy or girl, family member, employee, Levite, stranger, orphan, or widow. With the crop in the barns, everyone feels the security of knowing to rejoice that bread can be prepared for meals at least until the harvest of the next crop of Spring barley is ready to harvest. Numbers 28:26-31 details the steps in the ceremony. Verse 26. *"Also on the day of the first fruits, when you present a new grain offering to the LORD in your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work."*²⁷ *You shall offer a burnt offering for a soothing aroma to the LORD: two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs one year old;*²⁸ *and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for each bull, two-tenths for the one ram,*²⁹ *a tenth for each of the seven lambs;*³⁰ *also one male goat to make atonement for you.*³¹ *Besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, you shall present them with their drink offerings. They shall be without defect."*

d) Statute Reason for the Feast

The Day of Pentecost has a statute reason for the feast. What is the reason? Moses says in verse 12, *"You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt."* Doubtless, fifty days on the trail out of Egypt means something important. What can it mean? We know that the nation arrived at Mount Sinai three months to the day after leaving Egypt (Exodus 19:1). Tracing their journey backward from Mount Sinai about forty days, the purpose for the Pentecost event had to be the crossing of the Red Sea, the most significant event in the entire journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai. When the LORD blew the waters back and dried the sea's bed for a safe crossing, the nation took to the path and left Egypt behind. You see, that sandy beach where the Israelites were camped at the Red Sea was still Egyptian land. Once they entered the dry path through the Red Sea, they were in God's land – His and His alone. The day of the Red Sea crossing was the symbolic day that Israel was no longer a slave in Egypt. It was an important point for them always to remember.

With that, we will leave the Feast of Weeks.

3. Feast of Booths

Third, we come to the Feast of Booths. Verse 13. *"You shall celebrate the Feast of Booths seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat;*¹⁴ *and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns."*¹⁵ *Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, 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."* (16:13-15).

a) Seven Days until the Feast

The feast of Booths is celebrated seven days after the gathering *"from your threshing floor and your wine vat."* I find this interesting because the feast seems to be tied to a harvest from the field of the grain and grapes, but it does not say that specifically – it is the gathering from the threshing floor and wine vats.

The process of gathering the grains began with the sickle in the field. The stalks of grain are cut. The stalks are gathered in large bundles tied with string or rope. The bundles are stored in a dry area to allow the stalks to dry. When bone dry, the bundles are taken to the large threshing floor to be broken apart and threshed. Therefore, the stalks of grain are not taken directly to the floor after harvest. The stalks must be sufficiently dry in the process to allow all the grains to break loose from the stalk in the threshing process. The drying takes some time.

Now winemaking should not be on the lips of a Baptist minister – especially one who had never tasted any wine. Nevertheless, we come to the topic, and it must be discussed. The harvest of grapes occurs when the firmness of the fruit feels just right to the grower. They could not be too soft so that damage occurs in transportation. They could not be too hard, so they need to be stored for an extended time under the tons of grapes' weight. At just the right ripeness, the grapes are taken from the vine to the vat and crushed by workers' feet – stems and all. The crushed grapes, stems, and flesh stay in the vat for fermentation. At the right temperatures, the natural yeast in the air will begin the process. If the winemaker adds yeast, the process takes at least a month. Without yeast, as was the case in those days, the process can take much longer. Once the mixture, called *the must*, is fermented, the mixture's pressing begins, and the vat's vine juice flows. At that time, the winemaker gathers the juice from the vat, fulfilling the instruction, “*after you have gathered in from ... your wine vat.*”

In Leviticus, the Feast of Booths is tied to the calendar as follows. “*On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the LORD.*” (Leviticus 23:34). Exodus chapter 23 and Numbers chapter 29 agree with the Feast of Booths' start date found in Leviticus as the fifteenth day of the seventh month. The Leviticus and Exodus passages are given just one year out of Egypt and the date would work great for that year on lunar calendar. The Numbers passage is given thirty-eight years later. At that time, two nineteen-year cycles had passed the date would be good for the first Feast of Booths in the Promised Land. The lunar calendar had naturally aligned itself back into the right season.

In the Promised Land, with the gathering of the grain at the threshing floor and the gathering of the wine from the vat completed, seven days later, the seven-day Feast of Booths began on the fifteenth of the seventh month. Now we need to think about this. The Day of Atonement always occurs on the calendar on the 10th of the seventh month. This instruction states that the Feast of Booths begins after a seven-day waiting period on the 15th of the seventh month. This means that the gathering from the threshing floor and the vat had to occur before the Day of Atonement. The question is, “Why, here in Deuteronomy, did Moses not tie the Feast of Booths to the calendar as he did in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers? It could be that the Feast of Booths could not always be on the 15th of the seventh month every year because of the way the lunar calendar worked. We do not know the answer to this question with any certainty.

b) Seven Days of the Feast

Moses' summary found in Deuteronomy does not detail the events of the seven days of the feast. We are thankful for the record in Numbers 29:12-38. Verse 12.

“Then on the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work, and you shall observe a feast to the LORD for seven days.¹³ You shall present a burnt offering, an offering by fire as a soothing aroma to the LORD: thirteen bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs one-year-old, which are without defect;¹⁴ and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths *of an ephah* for each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each of the two rams,¹⁵ and a tenth for each of the fourteen lambs;¹⁶ and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering.

¹⁷Then on the second day: twelve bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs one year old without defect;¹⁸ and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams and for the lambs, by their number according to the ordinance;¹⁹ and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings.

²⁰Then on the third day: eleven bulls, ... (*the rest is the same as the second day*)

²³Then on the fourth day: ten bulls, ... (*the rest is the same as the second day*)

²⁶Then on the fifth day: nine bulls, ... (*the rest is the same as the second day*)

²⁹Then on the sixth day: eight bulls, ... (*the rest is the same as the second day*)

³²Then on the seventh day: seven bulls, ... (*the rest is the same as the second day*)

³⁵ ‘On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly; you shall do no laborious work. ³⁶ But you shall present a burnt offering, an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the LORD: one bull, one ram, seven male lambs one year old without defect; ³⁷ their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bull, for the ram and for the lambs, by their number according to the ordinance; ³⁸ and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering.’ (Numbers 29:12-38).

Every man, woman, boy or girl, family member, employee, Levite, stranger, orphan, or widow in the town must participate in the Feast of Booths. Leviticus 23:40-43 tells us about the booths. Verse 40. *Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days.* ⁴¹ *You shall thus celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month.* ⁴² *You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths,* ⁴³ *so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt.*” (Leviticus 23:40-43).

But Leviticus was written one year out of Egypt. The seventh month restriction worked that year and possibly the second and third but not after that. It must be that after the gathering from the threshing floor and the vat, a wait would occur and the Feast of Booths in the Promised Land would occur after the Day of Atonement. The gathering just had to be completed before the Day of Atonement.

4. Feast of Unleavened Bread, Weeks and Booths

Finally, in the summary of the feast of Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Booths, Moses emphasizes the importance of bringing a gift to the LORD with these celebrations. Verse 16. *“Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths, and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.* ¹⁷ *Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.”* (16:16-17).

Everyone in the towns were to participate. Everyone was to come with a gift in hand. Everyone was to *“give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.”*

No specific gift is mentioned. No exact amount is mentioned. But the source of the gift is mentioned. Each person had a gift to give because the LORD God had given each person the blessing of the crop, and each person could bring a portion to Him in thanks to the feast. No one was to *“appear before the LORD empty-handed.”*

In the days of this story, payday came with the harvesting the different crops and the seasons of births from the herds and the flocks. These paydays were regular through the year, but they were still weeks and months apart. Today, almost everyone who works enjoys a payday weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. Upon receipt of our paydays, we, too, should appear before the LORD, and we should never be empty-handed. We all should give as we can to the LORD from what He has given to us.

With that we come to the end of the study of these three feasts.

F. Laws for the Appointment of Magistrates

First, we had the laws of the Holy Places, then the Laws of Jewish life, the laws of lender and debtor, the laws of the high and holy feasts, and now we come to the laws of the appointment of magistrates. The camp had been living together for forty years, tightly knit in every way. In the Promised Land, when the tribes are separated in their vast living areas, magistrates would be needed in each region. Moses spoke in verse 18. *“You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment.* ¹⁹ *You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds*

the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous.²⁰ Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you.” (16:18-20).

1. The Word Righteous

We come to the word “*righteous*.” We can find an understanding of that word by focusing on the first syllable – right. Doing right in the eyes of the LORD defines the word righteous. The chosen magistrates must judge and lead the tribal nations as God rules. By doing what is right is doing what God would do, deciding the way God would decide, judging the way God would judge, leading the way God would lead.

2. The Word Justice

It is impossible to separate the word justice from the word law. The LORD had taken the time to detail in writing His law for the Nation of Israel. The job of the magistrate is to judge each case before them according to the LORD’s law. Applying the LORD’s law granted the LORD’s justice in each case. But Moses used the word “*distort*” with the word “*justice*.” In this passage, to *distort justice* means ignoring the LORD’s law instead by judging according to man’s desires, according to one side’s way of thinking in deference to the other side’s way of thinking. One-sided thinking is not justice. One-sided thinking is partiality. One-sided thinking can be influenced by a bribe. One-sided thinking attached to a bribe blinds those who know better than to pervert what is right in the eyes of the LORD. Adhering to the law of the LORD is justice. Moses said of the new magistrates, *Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you.”* With that, the magistrates’ decisions will be righteous.

In our next lesson, we will come to Moses’ summary of the law of the administration of justice which must guide the magistrates in the new pPromised Land.