

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

DEUTERONOMY 12-16

A 1999 edition of World magazine reported on Japan's attempt to save the endangered albatross... Hundreds of decoys were placed on the Izu Islands. The wooden decoys were supposed to lure birds back to their native breeding grounds.

But one albatross, a bird named Deko, fell in love with one of the decoys.

He tried to woo the cut-out bird by building fancy nests and fighting off rival suitors. Deko spends his days standing faithfully by the side of his beloved.

A Japanese zoologist, Fumio Sato, commented on Deko's strange infatuation. He said, "He seems to have no desire to date real birds..." Some of you might be thinking, "That's my problem... all I date are real birds!" or "I married a real bird!"

Evidently, Deko finds a wooden albatross more desirable than a live one.

This is how some folks feel about God. They'd rather snuggle up to *a wooden god – a god of their own making – a god they can control and manipulate - a god that won't talk back or make demands – a god that caters to their carnality – a god they can put on their mantle, rather than a God Who's on the move...*

There are plenty of people who prefer to worship a decoy.

This has been man's problem from the beginning. Whether it's *an idol, an item, an ideal, or an individual* – people tend to worship something or someone other than the one, true God.

And this is what God didn't want to happen to Israel...

Exodus 34:14 tells us, “For you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God...” God is a jealous God. He is not jealous *of you*, but He is jealous *for you*. He wants your love and allegiance.

God hates split loyalties. Anything that rivals our love for God is an idol.

The last verse in 1 John reads, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.” Well, in Deuteronomy 12-13 God tells us how... Chapters 12-13 establish safeguards to protect His people, Israel, from idolatry.

Chapter 12 centralizes worship. Chapter 13 warns about false prophets.

Before we get into tonight's chapters, remember Deuteronomy is a collection of three sermons given by Moses to Israel. Tonight, we start the second sermon...

Chapters 1-11 constitute the first sermon - *a rehearsal of history*.

The second sermon consists of chapters 12-26 – *a repetition of laws*.

And the third sermon is found in chapters 27-30 – *a prediction of the future*.

Chapter 12 begins, “These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served

their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things.”

Obviously, the Canaanites, the people Israel was about to evict from their land, were a religious people. The land was full of pagan temples and altars.

You could find an idol or altar “under every green tree”, or on every “hill”.

Canaanite religion was decentralized. There were different gods for different locales. Every town had their own Baal. And they worshipped at the *high place*.

Everywhere there was an elevation in terrain you could expect to find an altar.

Thus, you might think, “*Wow, after Israel drives out the pagans from the land they won’t have to build any temples. They’ll have plenty of altars to use!*” But that was not God’s plan! God orders the destruction of every pagan altar.

God tells them in verse 5, “But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand,

you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.”

In order to safeguard against idolatry God’s plan was to centralize worship. He had one designated location for the people to come and worship Him.

Today, everyone wants to decentralize – *there’s the local branch, the community outlet* – you can even do business at home on the Internet.

But when it comes to worship – God has always been into centralized authority.

If God had allowed the Israelites to worship on these scattered altars it wouldn’t have taken long for pagan practices and for false notions to drift into their worship. This is why He wanted them coming to the Tabernacle to offer their sacrifices.

God had an *appointed place* for worship - *appointed people* to oversee the worship, the priests – and an *appointed way* to worship, the sacrifices.

Nothing was left up to man’s imagination.

This all regulated worship. It restricted practices that could lead Israel away from God and into idolatry. With a central location worship would be done right.

Over the years God chose six locations to set up His place of worship. After entering the Promised Land the Tabernacle was stationed first in *Gilgal* – then in *Shechem, Shiloh, Nob, Gibeon*. Finally, the Temple was built in *Jerusalem*.

A couple of weeks ago I bought Kathy a Valentine’s Day present... a new set of men’s golf clubs - I even threw in a

new pair of golf shoes... men's size 12.

I'm sure you can see my wife jumping for joy over her new clubs... NOT! When you buy your wife a Valentine you get her what she wants – not what you want.

The same is true when it comes to worship. True worship offers God what He desires, not what's convenient for you. *This is why it's just as important how you worship God, as it is that you do!* And by limiting Israel to one place for worship God made sure the people were worshipping Him in the prescribed manner.

And this remains God's strategy today. Yes, we no longer worship in a physical locale – we worship God in spirit – but there's still only one place to go to truly find God... and that's His Son, Jesus. In a spiritual sense Jesus is the only legitimate place to worship. God has given us limited options. He's narrowed our choices.

Today, the fixtures of Judaism have been replaced by faith in Jesus. Hey, Jesus is the *appointed place – appointed person - appointed sacrifice.*

This is why Jesus told His disciples, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."** In ancient Israel, if you wanted the true God you didn't waste your time looking on hills, or under every green tree – you came to one location. Likewise, if you want to find God come to Jesus!

And this is why Moses commanded the Hebrews to tear down the pagan altars.

Verse 8, **"You shall not at all do as we are doing here today -**

every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes - for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you. But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, then there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide.

There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the LORD. And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God...”

Notice twice Moses says, “you shall rejoice before the LORD your God...”

God wants our worship to be joyful. He wants us to approach Him with a merry heart. Spurgeon wrote, “All Christian duties should be done joyfully; but especially the work of praising the Lord. I have been in congregations where... the spirit of the people seemed so damp, so heavy, so dead, that we might have supposed they had met for a hanging - rather than for blessing the ever-gracious God.”

I hope no one ever mistakes our worship for a hanging!

The next few verses differentiate between slaughtering meat for food and for sacrifice. Not every slab of meat was a sacrifice. Steaks can be eaten anywhere.

I love verse 20, “When the LORD your God enlarges your border as He has promised you, and you say, 'Let me eat meat,' because you long to eat meat, you may eat as much

meat as your heart desires.” Hey, be a vegetarian if you like, but I’m holding onto this verse. I’m going to eat as much meat as *my heart desires*...

If anybody’s interesting we can go to *Outback Steakhouse* after the service!

Verses 21-28 explain what to do if you live too far from the Tabernacle.

Verses 29-32 sum up the chapter, **"When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.'**

"You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it."

In addition to serving our church as an elder, Larry Wilson also judges the science projects turned in by the students at Calvary Chapel Christian School. Last week, Larry told me about a student who built a volcano. It was a snow-capped mountain with hot lava bubbling up inside. Apparently, each science project has to have a theme verse, and Larry asked the lad about his verse.

He answered with Matthew 7:15, “Beware of false prophets...” Larry wondered what that verse had to do with a volcano. The little boy answered, “False prophets are like volcanoes. They look pretty on the outside, but there’s trouble brewing on the inside.” *What a perceptive young man.* False prophets are like volcanoes.

And that’s what Moses addresses next in chapter 13...

"If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass..." Notice, the false prophet’s power might be real. Remember not only did Moses throw down his rod and it turn into a snake – the pharaoh’s magicians duplicated the same miracle.

2 Thessalonians 2:9 refers to the future Antichrist as “the lawless one (who) is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception...” There is such a thing as a *lying* wonder...

Just because a man does miracles doesn’t mean he was sent by God.

It’s not the miracle that reveals the prophet’s identity, it’s his message.

Moses teaches us to listen to the man’s teaching... verse 2, “of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods' - which you have not known - 'and let us serve them...'” If the prophet invites you to serve other gods it doesn’t matter if he turns water into coca-cola – or multiplies Egg McMuffins – he’s of the devil.

"You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul." The false prophet can be a test.

As a kid we grew up watching "*Hollywood Squares*".

Stars and starlets answered questions – some answers were true, others answers were false. Contestants judged whether the stars were offering the correct answer, or just bluffing. It was a super-sized game of tic-tac-toe.

Hey, life is a lot like Hollywood Squares. Success comes by differentiating the truth from a bluff. Not that we're expected to know every nuance of doctrine.

But all of us should be able to identify the spirit behind the prophet.

Embrace a man who's greedy, lustful, abusive, pompous – and you've indicted your own sensibilities. If you know Jesus you'll recognize His Spirit. It'll be one of servant hood, and giving, and gentleness, and sacrifice, and love, and humility.

The false prophet poses a test – *are we attracted by the right stuff?*

Verse 4, "You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.

But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you

to walk.

So you shall put away the evil from your midst.”

Spouting false doctrine was a capital offense in ancient Israel. A deliberate deceiver was put to death. Cults and kooks were not allowed to set up shop.

It was considered more serious to damn a man’s soul than to kill his body.

"If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you..."

Notice the degree to which this abolition on idolatry is to be carried out. The concern is not just the crazy man standing on his soapbox at the street corner.

Moses was concerned about your wife lying in bed, whispering in your ear, **“Honey, why are we being so narrow? Judy says the yoga classes at the Temple of Baal help her relax. They’re offering a stress reduction class next week. Let’s give it a try?”** Or a friend, saying to his single buddy... **“Hey, come with me to the dance they’re hosting at the Temple of Ashtoreth. We can meet some cute girls.”**

Moses warns about the one who **“secretly entices”** - not just the public heretic.

He’s concerned about the close friend who’s “saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall

you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people.” Have no pity even if it’s a family member.

If your own mother *defied the Lord, and denied the truth, and deceived other people*, then it’s your duty to expose her sin, and demand her execution.

Obviously, God takes false doctrine – and unbiblical worship - seriously. *God’s truth* supersedes *family ties*. Loyalty ends when a parent pushes perversity.

Our approach today to a heretical relative should be to love him, try to convert him, but never support his heresy. Love your family – but loyalty to God’s truth is always more important than love for my family. *Truth is thicker than blood*.

“And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.” Remember in the Old Testament God was building in Israel an earthly kingdom. *Law governed behavior*. The Heretic was stamped out.

But in the New Testament God’s kingdom is spiritual. *Love governs behavior*.

Heresy is stamped out when the heretic is converted. The forgiveness of Jesus and the transformation of the Holy Spirit were unknown to Israel of old – but now in their wake the evil doer is no longer stamped out – *he’s won over!*

Today’s *approach* differs from Old Testament remedies – but our attitude toward false doctrine should be the same. We

need to have zero tolerance.

Verse 11, “So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.” People today deny capital punishment is a deterrent. That’s not God’s opinion. Wickedness is curbed when its punished not tolerated.

Verse 12, “If you hear someone in one of your cities, which the LORD your God gives you to dwell in, saying, ‘Corrupt men have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, “Let us go and serve other gods” - which you have not known - then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently.”

Here Moses is concerned about a city dedicating itself to some false god.

If you hear about a city in the deserts of Nevada, that calls itself “*sin city*” – or if you hear of a city in the bayou of Louisiana that markets revelry and lewdness... Moses says you conduct an investigation. “Inquire, search out, ask diligently”

“And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword - utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock, with the edge of the sword.

And you shall gather all its plunder into the middle of the street, and completely burn with fire the city and all its plunder, for the LORD your God; and it shall be a heap forever. It shall not be built again.” It makes you wonder what

would happen to cities like Las Vegas, and New Orleans, and San Francisco, and Atlanta if we were under the laws of ancient Israel... Cities dedicated to evil were destroyed.

Note also the word, “**heap**” in verse 16. It’s the Hebrew word “*tel*” or “*mound*”.

When you journey through Israel you see these man-made hills rising from the terrain. The “*tels*” are ruins of ancient cities... *Tel-Dan, Tel-Megiddo, Tel-Aviv.*

“So none of the accursed things shall remain in your hand, that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of His anger and show you mercy, have compassion on you and multiply you, just as He swore to your fathers, because you have listened to the voice of the LORD your God, to keep all His commandments which I command you today, to do what is right in the eyes of the LORD your God.”

Chapter 14 begins, “You are the children of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead. For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”

Slashing and shaving were pagan customs used to mourn a lost loved one.

The idea was similar to serving a penance - that my suffering can improve mine or someone else’s lot in the afterlife. Endure a torturous ordeal and God will have pity. God says, *not so!* The only suffering that can save is the

suffering of Jesus.

This is the difference between *penance* and *repentance*. Penance believes my suffering has an atoning benefit. Repentance turns from sin and trusts in Jesus.

Verses 3-21 rehearse the dietary laws of Israel – how to keep “*kosher*” - which means “*proper*”. Kosher laws differentiated between clean and unclean meats.

This reminds me of the Jewish rabbi, and the Catholic priest attending a public dinner. When a platter of baked ham passed the rabbi politely declined. The priest jumped in and asked, “Come on, when are you going to forget those silly rules, and eat ham like the rest of us?” The rabbi answered, “I will at your wedding.”

Four kids later, I obviously don't believe pastors have to be celibate - and if you ate lunch with me, you'd realize I've have no aversion to ham sandwiches...

Today, with modern methods of food preparation and sanitary conditions the health benefits of these laws have been minimized – but in Moses' day these laws were crucial. They protected the Israelites medically and nutritionally.

In the Middle Ages when the bubonic plague swept through Europe, the Jews were the only people who were unaffected. This is why the Gentiles accused them of poisoning their rivers and streams. Their diet and hygiene made them immune.

Today, Israel has one of the longest average life-spans of any nation. It's because of their kosher laws. God was and still is an excellent dietician.

Moses distinguishes between clean and unclean – edible and inedible.

Verse 3 gives us the overarching principle, "You shall not eat any detestable thing." And verse 4 lists what is not detestable... "These are the animals which you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, the deer..." Two weeks ago when we taught at the CC Costa Mesa's Marriage Retreat, Kathy and I went to church on Sunday morning - and afterwards spoke to Pastor Chuck. He confirmed with me that he'd be at this year's pastors' conference. Then he asked, "Sandy, I hope your guys have shot that meat you usually serve..." He was talking about the venison.

Now the pressure is on... We need some fresh venison for Pastor Chuck...

Moses continues with the edible animals, "the gazelle, the roe deer, the wild goat, the mountain goat, the antelope, and the mountain sheep. And you may eat every animal with cloven hooves, having the hoof split into two parts, and that chews the cud, among the animals." Split hooves and cud chewers are fair game.

"Nevertheless, of those that chew the cud or have cloven hooves, you shall not eat, such as these: the camel, the hare..." *If there's a hare in your food don't eat it!*

And not only should you not eat camels - *you shouldn't smoke them either!*

"...and the rock hyrax; for they chew the cud but do not have cloven hooves; they are unclean for you. Also the swine is unclean for you, because it has cloven hooves, yet does

not chew the cud; you shall not eat their flesh or touch their dead carcasses.” And here is a huge reason I’m glad I’m not Jewish. I love bacon, ham, sausage, and pork barbeque. I’m a pig-eating Gentile who’s saved by grace.

Verse 9 is the seafood menu. "These you may eat of all that are in the waters: you may eat all that have fins and scales. And whatever does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you." Catfish were unclean, since they had no scales. Shrimp, clams, lobsters were unclean since they had no fins.

When you sit down before the shrimp lovers’ feast at Red Lobster say a prayer and thank the Lord Jesus we’re saved by grace and free from the Law.

Verse 11 deals with poultry, "All clean birds you may eat. But these you shall not eat: **the eagle**, the vulture, the buzzard, **the red kite, the falcon**, and the kite after their kinds; every **raven** after its kind; the ostrich, the short-eared owl, the seagull, and the **hawk** after their kinds; the little owl, the screech owl, the white owl, the jackdaw, the carrion vulture, the fisher owl, the stork, the heron after its kind, and the **hoopoe and the bat**." Don’t eat bats – *the wood gets in your teeth*.

Verse 19, "Also every creeping thing that flies is unclean for you; they shall not be eaten." Flying insects were non-edible. Verse 20 "You may eat all clean birds." But don’t eat dirty birds. Moses already told us in verse 13 not to eat falcons.

"You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; (Kosher law required meat to be properly slaughtered) you may give it to

the alien who is within your gates, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner; for you are a holy people to the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk." Hey, a kosher Jew will never eat a cheeseburger. For more on verse 21 see the CD on Exodus 23.

• Verses 22-29 rehearse the tithes the Hebrews were required to pay...

"You shall truly tithe (which means 10%) all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year." Notice you tithe the income or "increase" – not the total assets. "And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always." They brought their tithe to the appointed place of worship, and ate a ceremonial meal. Then they left the rest to the priest.

But notice the purpose of tithing... "that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always." *How do you learn to honor God sincerely, and trust God honestly? By regularly giving 10% of your income to God...* The discipline of tithing brings an sincerity to my devotion - an honesty to my faith. But if I refuse to tithe, any claim to honor God – any boast that I trust God - will sound hollow and be empty.

Fear of the Lord that doesn't cost 10% of your income is not real respect.

It reminds me of bus driver who greeted his passengers with

the words, “Pay up or get off the bus.” When this man became a Christian, and joined the church, they made him an usher. And his enthusiasm for the Lord was contagious.

The pastor though had to temper his zeal when it came to collecting the offering. The guy would pass the plate and say, “Pay up or get off the bus.”

Certainly you can be a Christian and not tithe – but you learn to fear the Lord – you prove the sincerity of your respect, and the honesty of your faith by tithing.

Verses 24-26 explain long distance tithing. Rather than take 10% of your crop or herd – you could sell it and transport the money. Cash was easier to carry.

Verses 27-29 explain how every third year the tithe went to support the priests, the poor, the orphan and the widows. And if let me be honest - if everyone in our church tithed we'd have more than enough for all the above... and much more.

Chapter 15, "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called the LORD's release." Every 7 years all debts were released - *not canceled, but suspended*. This allowed the debtor to catch up on his debts.

“Of a foreigner you may require it; but you shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother, except when there may be no poor among you...” In other words, if you follow these laws – a tithe to the poor, releasing of debts every 7 years - it will eliminate a lower class. No one will be permanently

poor...

“For the LORD will greatly bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance - only if you carefully obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe with care all these commandments which I command you today.”

“For the LORD your God will bless you just as He promised you; you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over you.” Hebrews can lend to Gentiles, but not borrow from them.

In the Middle Ages the Pope prohibited Christians from lending money, so the Jews picked up the slack and became Europe’s chief bankers and financiers.

To this day, you’ll find that the world’s leading brokerage houses were founded by Jews. And it’s because God said His people would be lenders not borrowers.

Verse 7, "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs." It was her kindness and generosity that would make Israel great.

Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,' and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it

become sin among you. You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand.”

“For the poor will never cease from the land...” As Jesus would say later, “For you have the poor with you always.” “therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'

Verse 12 "If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you send him away free from you, you shall not let him go away empty-handed; you shall supply him liberally from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your winepress. From what the LORD has blessed you with, you shall give to him.” No one was really a slave. Everyone ended up with his wages.

“You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today.

And if it happens that he says to you, 'I will not go away from you,' because he loves you and your house, since he prospers with you, then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever.

Also to your maidservant you shall do likewise.” He or she was called a “*love slave*”, or as the New Testament puts it, a

bond slave. This was what Paul called himself. He was a slave to Jesus, willingly - out of love – not mere duty.

Paul realized he was better off a slave of Jesus than a free man on his own.

Is your ear pinned to Jesus' door? Have you given Him your *all...* not because you *have to*, but because *want to*? Hey, I'd rather be a deckhand on the ship that Jesus' captains - than to skipper my own fleet. Life always goes better with Jesus.

Verse 18 “It shall not seem hard to you when you send him away free from you; for he has been worth a double hired servant in serving you six years. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do.

All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to the LORD your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock. You and your household shall eat it before the LORD your God year by year in the place which the LORD chooses.

But if there is any defect in it, if it is lame or blind or has any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God.” The Lord doesn't want our leftovers. He always desires our very best! But you can share the blemished lamb with your friends. “You may eat it within your gates; the unclean and the clean person (the Jew or Gentile) alike may eat it, as if it were a gazelle or a deer (which were clean animals). Only you shall not eat its blood; you shall pour it on the ground like water.”

Chapter 16 rehearses the 3 major Hebrew feasts: *The spring feasts of Passover and Weeks or Pentecost - and the fall feast of Tabernacles.*

Verse 1, "Observe the month of Abib (our late March, early April), 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. Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to put His name." The lamb was to be sacrificed at the Tabernacle.

He goes on to describe how they should abstain from leaven for seven days. Eat unleavened bread for six days and have a holy celebration on the seventh.

Next comes the Feast of Weeks, verse 9, "You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain." This feast was also called "*Pentecost*" – the Greek word "*fifty*".

It fell on the day - after the 7 weeks after Passover – or 50 days later.

"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. 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 gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide."

Notice the poor, widow, orphan, priest – even slaves - should all be included in the party. Nobody should be left out of God’s celebrations. **“And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.”**

Finally, he mentions in verses 13-15 the Feast of Tabernacles – which was celebrated for 7 days at the conclusion of the fall harvest. He says, **“you surely rejoice.”** Tabernacles was the most light-hearted and joyful of the Hebrew feasts.

Verse 16 sums up the feasts, **“Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles;”** There were other feasts, but these three called for mandatory attendance at the tabernacle.

And notice the end of verse 16, **“And they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.”** I hope you don’t plan to appear before the Lord empty-handed.

Sin calls for a sacrifice. To appear before God without a suitable sacrifice is to appear naked and ashamed. I plan to appear before God with Jesus by my side. Verse 17 tells us, **“Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.”** Along with the sacrifice bring an offering. Jesus is the sacrifice, but what is your offering? *Your tithe, praise, service, gratitude.* Notice the rule for an offering... **“give as you are able.”**

"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.

You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not plant for yourself any tree, as a wooden image, near the altar which you build for yourself to the LORD your God. You shall not set up a sacred pillar, which the LORD your God hates."

We end up where we started in chapter 12. The Canaanites worshipped their fertility idols within groves. They trimmed the trees to look like male sexual organs. And shady practices – lewd acts – were performed in the shade of these groves.

God is warning Israel not to allow shady practices to drift into their worship. It's not just that we worship God, but God desires that we worship Him the right way.