

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

DEUTERONOMY 12-16

Years ago World magazine reported on Japan's attempt to save their endangered albatross. Hundreds of decoys were placed on the Izu Islands. The wooden decoys lured the birds to their native breeding grounds.

But one albatross named Deko fell in love with one of the decoys. He tried to woo the wooden bird as if it were alive. He built a fancy nest and fought off rival suitors. A zoologist commented on Deko's strange infatuation, "[He has no desire to date real birds.](#)" Some of you might be thinking, "[That's my problem... all I date are real birds!](#)" or maybe, "[I married a real bird!](#)"

Evidently, Deko finds wooden albatrosses more desirable than live ones... And this is how some folks feel about God. They'd rather snuggle up to *a god of their own making who they can manipulate and control... a god who doesn't talk or make demands... a god that caters to their carnality... a god that sits on their mantle, rather than a God Who is on the move.* Plenty of folks prefer worshipping a decoy - a *fake god*. This was the mistake God didn't want Israel to make.

Exodus 34:14 declares, "[For you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.](#)" God is not jealous *of you*, but He is jealous *for you*. He wants your love and loyalty. He wants nothing to rival our love for Him. The last verse in 1 John is "[Keep yourselves from idols.](#)" Chapters 12-13 *teach us how.* They set up safeguards to keep God's people from idolatry. [Chapter 12 centralizes worship... While Chapter 13 warns of false prophets...](#)

Before we get into today's chapters, remember Deuteronomy is a collection of three sermons given by Moses to Israel. Chapters 1-11 was the first sermon - *a rehearsal of history*. Chapters 12-26 - *a repetition of laws*. And Chapters 27-30 - *a prediction of the future*.

Today, we move into Moses' second sermon. *He lays down the Law* to the second generation that left Egypt and were about to enter the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy is the Law applied to people who've come out of the wilderness and will live in a new land.

Chapter 12, "[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 will evict from the land, were a religious people. Their 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 - different gods were in different locales. Every town had its own Baal.

They worshipped at their local *high place*. Wherever you saw an elevation in terrain expect to find an altar. And you might think, “*Wow, after Israel drives out the idolaters they won’t have to build a Temple. They’ll have plenty of altars to use!*” But that wasn’t God’s plan! The Hebrews were to destroy of all pagan altars.

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.*” To safeguard against idolatry God centralized their worship. He had one designated location for His people to worship Him.

Today, everyone wants to decentralize. *There’s the local branch, and the community outlet*. People don’t even go into the office anymore, they work from home.

But when it comes to worship, God has always been into *centralized authority*. If He’d allowed the Israelites to worship on these scattered altars it wouldn’t have taken long for pagan practices and false notions to drift into their worship. True worship was standardized.

God had an *appointed place* for worship, **the Tabernacle** - an *appointed people* to oversee worship, **the priests**... and an *appointed way* to worship, **the sacrifices**. Nothing was left up to man’s imagination.

This regulated worship. It restricted practices that could lead Israel away from God and into idolatry. Centralization insured that worship was done right.

Over the next few centuries, God chose six locations in the Promised Land to set up His Tabernacle. It was first set up at *Gilgal*; then *Bethel*, *Shiloh*, *Nob*, then *Kiriath-Jearim*. Lastly, a Temple was built in *Jerusalem*.

One year I bought Kathy a Christmas gift... *a brand new set of men's golf clubs!* I even threw in a new pair of golf shoes, men's size 13. *If you know my wife you don't believe that for a second.* No, when you buy your wife a gift you get her what *she* wants, not what *you* want. And the same is true when it comes to worship.

True worship offers God what He desires, not what's convenient for us. *This is why it's as important **how we worship God**, as it is **that we do!*** By limiting Israel to one place for worship God made sure the people were worshipping Him in His own 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 gives us limited options. He narrows down our choices.

Today, the fixtures of Judaism have been replaced by faith in Jesus. Jesus is now our *appointed place*. *He's our appointed person. He's our 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 *"green trees"* - you came to the Tabernacle. Likewise, if you want to find God today come to Jesus!

And this is why Moses commanded Israel to tear down the idols and 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."* When you obey and do all God tells you to do, you'll live in peace and rest. Then when you worship, *"you shall rejoice before the LORD your God."*

Along with verse 7 this is twice God tells His people to *"rejoice..."* *Make no mistake about it God wants our worship to be joyful!* He wants to be approached with a merry heart. Charles 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 service for a hanging! *When you worship God rejoice!*

The next verses differentiate between *butchering meat for food* and *offering meat for a sacrifice*. In the wilderness every animal was considered a sacrifice and brought to the Tabernacle, but no longer. Now steaks could be butchered and eaten anywhere. Only animals intended as a sacrifice were killed at the altar.

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." Be a vegetarian if you like, but I'm holding onto this verse! I'm eating as much meat as *my heart desires!* *Your pastors have staff meeting at Longhorn every Monday.*

Verses 21-28 explain what to do if you live a long way from the Tabernacle. You're not required to treat every animal you've raised for food, as a sacrifice.

Verses 29-32 sums 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.' A holy God is not to be worshipped in pagan ways. God has His own way to be worshipped. *If we love and respect God will comply with His ways.*

"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." Awful child sacrifice was common among the Canaanites.

"Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it."

Every year students at Calvary Chapel Christian School are required to do a science project. One year we had a student build a volcano - a snow-capped mountain with hot lava bubbling up from inside. *At the time each science project had to have a theme verse.*

This boy's verse was Matthew 7:15, "Beware of false prophets..." We he was asked what his 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, which is what Moses addresses next...

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." The rest of the chapter indicates this is a false prophet, but the implication is that the man's power is real.

This shouldn't surprise us, not only did Moses throw down his rod and it turn into a snake - the Pharaoh's magicians duplicated the 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 "*lying wonders!*"

Just because a man *comes with a miracle* doesn't mean he *comes from God*. It's not the **miracle** that reveals the prophet's identity, it's his **message**.

Moses says 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 the Egg McMuffins - the man is 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 I would watch "*Hollywood Squares*." Has-been stars sat in a giant tic-tac-toe box and answered questions – some answers were true, others were false. Contestants judged whether the stars were offering the correct answer, or just bluffing. And life is a lot like Hollywood Squares.

You don't have to know all the ends and outs and nuances of doctrine to pass the test. You just need to know if the man is loyal or not to the one, true God or chasing after other gods! *Is he sincere or bluffing?*

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." In ancient Israel spouting false doctrine was a capital offense. Deceivers were put to death. Cults and kooks weren't allowed to set up shop. It was considered as serious to damn a man's soul as it was 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 threat here isn't from the crazy cultist on the street corner with the bullhorn. Moses was more concerned about the wife lying in bed next to you, 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 the friend who says to his single buddy, "Come to the dance they're hosting at the Temple of Ashtoreth. We can meet some cute girls." Moses warns about the person who "secretly entices" you to sin - not just the out-spoken, and public heretic.

He's concerned about the relative or 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." There should be no pity for the deceiver - even if he's your family member. If your own mom *defies God*, or *denies truth*, or *deceives others*, it was your duty to turn her in.

The death penalty here indicates God takes spiritual deception seriously. *God's truth* supersedes *family ties*.

Of course, we live now under a New Covenant, where God is extending grace, so the proper approach today to a heretical relative is to love the person, and try to convert them - *but never accept their heresy*. Love your family, but loyalty to God's truth is more important than your 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." Today, we live under a New Covenant where God's Spirit changes hearts. Heresy is stamped out when the heretic is converted.

The pardon of Jesus and the transformative power 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 OT remedies, but our attitude toward false doctrine should be just as serious. We need to have **a zero tolerance**.

"So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you." How **we** deal today with heresy is different, but not less important.

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.”

Moses is concerned about a city dedicating itself to a false god. Imagine a city in the Nevada desert, calling itself “*Sin City*” - or a city in Louisiana marketing revelry and lewdness... Moses says if you hear of this, launch an investigation. “*Inquire, search out, ask diligently...*”

And if it's true “*that such an abomination was committed...*” Then strike it's residents with the sword. “*Utterly destroy it.*” Even burn the city to the ground. Verse 16, “*it shall be a heap forever. It shall not be built again.*” It makes you wonder what would happen to cities like Las Vegas, New Orleans, Los Angeles, even Atlanta if we were under the laws of ancient Israel... Cities dedicated to sin and vice would be destroyed.

And notice the word, “*heap.*” It's the Hebrew term, “*Tel*” or “*mound.*” Journey through Israel and you'll see the man-made hills dotting the landscape. “*Tels*” are ruins of ancient cities... *Tel-Dan, Tel-Megiddo, Tel-Aviv.*

Verse 17 reveals God's motivation in all this, “*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.*” God wants to turn from His anger and show mercy. This is His intention, *what is ours?*

Deuteronomy 14, “*You are the children of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead.*” Slashing and shaving were pagan customs used to mourn a lost loved one.

The idea was that my suffering can improve mine or someone else's lot in the afterlife. If I endure a painful ordeal, God will have pity on me. It was like serving a penance. But God says, *that's not how it works!* *The only suffering that can save is the suffering of Jesus.*

This is the difference between doing a *penance* and *repentance*. Penance believes my suffering can atone for my sin. Repentance is when I turn from sin and trust in Jesus' suffering... In short cutting and shaving were pagan practices while Israel is “*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.*”

Verses 3-21 rehearse God's dietary laws. Here's how to keep “*kosher*” - which means “*proper.*” Kosher laws differentiated between clean and unclean foods.

This reminds me of the Jewish rabbi, and Catholic priest who both attended the same public dinner. When the platter of ham passed by the rabbi, he politely declined.

The priest asked, *"Come on, when are you going to forget those silly rules, and eat ham like the rest of us?"* The rabbi replied, *"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 food preparation and sanitary conditions the health advantages of these laws have been minimized, but in Moses' day these laws were crucial. They benefited Israel's health and nutrition.

In the Middle Ages when the bubonic plague swept Europe, Jews were the only people unaffected. This is why they were accused of poisoning the rivers and streams. Their diet and hygiene gave them immunity.

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

Moses distinguishes between clean and unclean or 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..."* Venison is a kosher meat.

Moses continues with the edibles, *"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 fit foods.

Verse 7 begins the inedible. *"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 (these are the rock badgers you see in Israel today); 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 to eat swine - *bacon, ham, sausage, pulled pork barbecue*. I'm a pig-eating Gentile 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 - no scales. Shrimp, clams, lobsters were unclean - no fins. When you sit down at Red Lobster for the shrimp

lovers' feast say a prayer and thank Jesus we're saved by grace and free from 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 a baseball bat - *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. "You may eat all clean birds." But don't eat dirty birds. And in verse 13 listed among the dirty birds are of course, the Falcons - and the Hawks.

"You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; (Kosher law required meat to be properly butchered. That meant roadkill was off-limits.) 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." This is probably refers to a pagan custom that God wanted prohibited, but the Jewish rabbis took this to mean that a kosher Jew should never eat a cheeseburger - *meats and milk don't mix*.

ˆ Verses 22-29 rehearse the tithes the Hebrews were required to pay. "You shall truly tithe (the word means 10%) all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year." - 10% of income or "increase."

"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 would bring their 10% to the Tabernacle, and eat a ceremonial meal; then they left the rest to the priest.

But notice the purpose of the tithing, verse 23, "that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always." *How do you learn to honor and trust God sincerely? By regularly giving 10% of your income to Him...*

The discipline of tithing brings a seriousness to my devotion - an honesty to my faith. If I refuse, all my claims of trusting God sound empty. A fear of the Lord that doesn't warrant a dime on a dollar is a bit hollow.

It reminds me of the bus driver who greeted his passengers, "Pay up or get off the bus." When he became a Christian, and joined the church, he was made an usher. And his zeal for the Lord was contagious. The pastor though had to calm him down a bit when it came to collecting the offering. When he passed the plate he'd say, "Pay up

or get off the bus."

Certainly you can be a Christian and not tithe, but here you learn to "*fear the Lord*" by tithing your income.

Verses 24-26 explain long distance tithing. Rather than take 10% of your crop or herd – you could sale 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, poor, orphan and widows.

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 seven years all debts were released. Your debt wasn't canceled, but suspended. This gave a debtor the opportunity to catch up on his payments.

"*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, follow this law - release debt every seven years and it will insure that no one is 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.*" God allowed Hebrews to lend to the Gentiles, but not to 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 told His people they 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.*"

And the next verses tell us the seventh year *debt release* should not be calculated in your efforts to help the poor. Don't get stingy in Year Six knowing that relief is coming

soon. Be kind and generous toward the poor.

Verse 11, “For the poor will never cease from the land...” As Jesus reiterated this later, when he said, “For you have the poor with you always.” “therefore I command... ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.’”

The remainder of Chapter 15 deals primarily with slavery - not the chattel slavery that existed in pre-Civil War America - but a form of bankruptcy practiced in ancient Israel. Rather than hide from the people he owed, a Hebrew in hock, agreed to work off his debts.

He would serve six years; then in the seventh year go free, and not “empty-handed.” According to verse 14 the former lender should shower him with blessings. Which meant even the slave who had been unable to pay, eventually got his wages. The Hebrew were to be kind to slaves since they all had been slaves in Egypt.

Then verse 16, “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.” Many Jewish slaves found a better life in their boss’s house.

They were called “love slaves” or “bond slaves.” And to show it they took an awl and pinned their ear to the doorpost of his house. Their pierced ear was the mark.

This is why the Apostle Paul called himself “a bondservant of Jesus Christ.” Paul discovered that life was better under Jesus than living on his own... *Have you made that same discovery?* Is your ear pinned to Jesus’ door? Have you given Him your *all*! Not because you *had to*, but now you *want to*? I’d rather be a deckhand on the ship Jesus’ captains - than skipper my own fleet. Life always goes better with Jesus!

The rest of Chapter 15 deals with the offering of firstborn animals to the Lord. God spared Israel’s firstborn from the death plague in Egypt, so now all her firstborn belonged to Him, *that is with an exception...*

Verse 21, “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 leftover sacrifices. He desires our very best!

Chapter 16 rehearses the three 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.” Or at the Tabernacle.

He goes on to describe how they should abstain from leaven at the **Passover**. 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 means “fifty.” It fell on the day after the seven weeks following Passover - or 50 days later.

And here’s how to celebrate this Feast - you throw a party for your family, and invite the priest, and Levite, but also the poor, and widow, and orphan, and stranger. Recall that you were once slaves in Egypt.

Then in verses 13-15 the **Feast of Tabernacles**. This was the seven day celebration of the fall harvest. Notice verse 15 says to “**surely rejoice**.” This was the most light-hearted and joyful of all the Hebrew feasts.

And right now in Jerusalem Jewish families are outside living in make-shift tents celebrating together. The Feast of Tabernacles in 2025 is October 7-14.

Verse 16 sums up the three major 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 required mandatory attendance at the Tabernacle, and later at the Jerusalem Temple.

And notice the end of verse 16, “**And they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed**.” How can you come to God empty-handed knowing your sin requires a sacrifice. A suitable substitute is needed... I’ve pondered this, and I plan to appear before God *with Jesus by my side!* I hope you have the same plan!

Verse 17, And “**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 you bring an offering? *And what’s yours? A tithe, a praise, service, gratitude.* Note the rule: “**give as you are able**.”

The end of Chapter 16 is about appointing fair and honest judges. You don’t want a judge in Israel who takes a bribe. Verse 19 tells us, “**for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous**.”

And this chapter brings us full circle. In Chapter 12, where we started, the issue was

idolatry. God wanted Israel to worship Him alone. Now God says in verse 21, “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.”

Canaanite idolatry often happened in groves of trees. They’d trim the trees in the shape of a phallic symbol. And lewd, immoral acts took place under these trees.

God is warning Israel not to allow shady practices in shady places to invade their worship. It’s not just that we worship God, He wants to be worshipped His way.