

CHAPTER 16

In this chapter we have,

- I.** A repetition of the laws concerning the three yearly feasts; in particular, that of the passover (v. 1-8). That of pentecost (v. 9-12). That of tabernacles (v. 13-15). And the general law concerning the people's attendance on them (v. 16, 17).
- II.** The institution of an inferior magistracy, and general rules of justice given to those that were called into office (v. 18-20).
- III.** A caveat against groves and images (v. 21, 22).

DEUTERONOMY 16:1-17

YEARLY FEASTS

Much of the communion between God and his people Israel was kept up, and a face of religion preserved in the nation, by the three yearly feasts, the institution of which, and the laws concerning them, we have several times met with already; and here they are repeated.

I. The law of the passover, so great a solemnity that it made the whole month, in the midst of which it was placed, considerable: *Observe the month Abib*, v. 1. Though one week only of this month was to be kept as a festival, yet their preparations before must be so solemn, and their reflections upon it and improvements of it afterwards so serious, as to amount to an observance of the whole month. The month of Abib, or of *new fruits*, as the Chaldee translates it, answers to our March (or part of March and part of April), and was by a special order from God, in remembrance of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, made the *beginning of their year* (^{Exodus 12:2}), which before was reckoned to begin in September. This month they were to keep the passover, in remembrance of their being *brought out of Egypt by night*, v. 1. The Chaldee paraphrasts expound it, "Because they came out of Egypt by daylight," there being an express order that they should not stir out of their doors till morning, ^{Exodus 12:22}. One of them expounds it thus: "*He brought thee out of*

Egypt, and did wonders *by night*.” The other, “and thou shalt eat the passover *by night*.” The laws concerning it are,

1. That they must be sure to sacrifice the passover in the place that God should choose (v. 2), and in no other place, v. 5-7. The passover was itself a sacrifice; hence Christ, as our passover, is said to be *sacrificed for us* (^{<48E>}1 Corinthians 5:7), v. 7), and many other sacrifices were offered during the seven days of the feast (^{<48B>}Numbers 28:19, etc.), which are included here, for they are said to be sacrificed *of the flock and the herd*, whereas the passover itself was only of the flock, either a lamb or a kid: now no sacrifice was accepted but from the altar that sanctified it; it was therefore necessary that they should go up to the place of the altar, for, though the paschal lamb was entirely eaten by the owners, yet it must be killed in the court, the blood sprinkled, and the inward parts burned upon the altar. By confining them to the appointed rule, from which they would have been apt to vary, and to introduce foolish inventions of their own, had they been permitted to offer these sacrifices within their own gates, from under the inspection of the priests. They were also hereby directed to have their eye up unto God in the solemnity, and the *desire of their hearts towards the remembrance of his name*, being appointed to attend where he had chosen *to place his name*, v. 2 and 6. But, when the solemnity was over, they might *turn and go unto their tents*, v. 7. Some think that they might, if they pleased, return the very morning after the paschal lamb was killed and eaten, the priests and Levites being sufficient to carry on the rest of the week's work; but the first day of the seven is so far from being the day of their dispersion that it is expressly appointed for a *holy convocation* (^{<48E>}Leviticus 23:7; ^{<48B>}Numbers 28:18); therefore we must take it as Jonathan's paraphrase expounds it, *in the morning after the end of the feast thou shalt go to thy cities*. And it was the practice to keep together the whole week, ^{<48E>}2 Chronicles 35:17.

2. That they must eat unleavened bread for seven days, and no leavened bread must be seen in all their coasts, v. 3, 4, 8. The bread they were confined to is here called *bread of affliction*, because neither grateful to the taste nor easy of digestion, and therefore proper to signify the heaviness of their spirits in their bondage and to keep in remembrance the haste in which they came out, the case being so urgent that they could not stay for the leavening of the bread they took with them for their march. The Jewish writers tell us that the custom at the passover supper was that the master of the family broke this unleavened bread, and gave to every

one a piece of it, saying, *This is* (that is, this signifies, represents, or commemorates, which explains that saying of our Saviour, *This is my body*) *the bread of affliction which your fathers did eat in the land of Egypt*. The gospel meaning of this feast of unleavened bread the apostle gives us, ^{<483>}1 Corinthians 5:7. *Christ our passover being sacrificed for us*, and we having participated in the blessed fruits of that sacrifice to our comfort, *let us keep the feast* in a holy conversation, free from *the leaven of malice* towards our brethren and hypocrisy towards God, and *with the unleavened bread of sincerity* and love. *Lastly*, Observe, concerning the passover, for what end it was instituted: “*That thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of Egypt*, not only on the day of the passover, or during the seven days of the feast, but *all the days of thy life* (v. 3), as a constant inducement to obedience.” Thus we celebrate the memorial of Christ's death at certain times, that we may remember it at all times, as a reason why we should *live to him that died for us and rose again*.

II. Seven weeks after the passover the feast of pentecost was to be observed, concerning which they are here directed,

1. Whence to number their seven weeks, *from the time thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn* (v. 9), that is, from the morrow after the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, for on that day (though it is probable the people did not begin their harvest till the feast was ended) messengers were sent to reap a sheaf of barley, which was to be offered to God as the first-fruits, ^{<820>}Leviticus 23:10. Some think it implies a particular care which Providence would take of their land with respect to the weather, that their harvest should be always ripe and ready for the sickle just at the same time.

2. How they were to keep this feast.

(1.) They must *bring an offering unto God*, v. 10. It is here called a *tribute of a free-will-offering*. It was required of them as a tribute to their Sovereign Lord and owner, under whom they held all they had; and yet because the law did not determine the *quantum*, but it was left to every man's generosity to bring what he chose, and whatever he brought he must give cheerfully, it is therefore called a *free-will offering*. It was a grateful acknowledgment of the goodness of God to them in the mercies of these

corn-harvests now finished, and therefore must be *according as God had blessed them*. Where God sows plentifully he expects to reap accordingly.

(2.) They must rejoice before God, v. 11. Holy joy is the heart and soul of thankful praises, which are as the language and expression of holy joy. They must rejoice in their receivings from God, and in their returns of service and sacrifice to him; our duty must be our delight as well as our enjoyments. They must have their very servants to rejoice with them, “for remember (v. 12) that *thou wast a bond-man*, and wouldest have been very thankful if thy taskmasters would have given thee some time and cause for rejoicing; and thy God did bring thee out to keep a feast with gladness; therefore be pleasant with thy servants, and make them easy.” And, it should seem, those general words, *thou shalt observe and do these statutes*, are added here for a particular reason, because this feast was kept in remembrance of the giving of the law upon Mount Sinai, fifty days after they came out of Egypt; now the best way of expressing our thankfulness to God for his favour to us in giving us his law is to *observe and do according to the precepts* of it.

III. They must keep the feast of tabernacles, v. 13-15. Here is no repetition of the law concerning the sacrifices that were to be offered in great abundance at this feast (which we had at large, ^{<892>}Numbers 29:12, etc.), because the care of these belonged to the priests and Levites, who had not so much need of a repetition as the people had, and because the spiritual part of the service, which consisted in holy joy, was most pleasing to God, and was to be the perpetual duty of a gospel conversation, of which this feast was typical. Observe what stress is laid upon it here: *Thou shalt rejoice in thy feast* (v. 14), *and, because the Lord shall bless thee, thou shalt surely rejoice*, v. 15. Note,

1. It is the will of God that his people should be a cheerful people. If those that were under the law must rejoice before God, much more must we that are under the grace of the gospel, which makes it our duty, not only as here to rejoice in our feasts, but to *rejoice evermore, to rejoice in the Lord always*.

2. When we rejoice in God ourselves we should do what we can to assist others also to rejoice in him, by comforting the mourners and supplying the necessitous, that *even the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow may rejoice with us*. See ^{<893>}Job 29:13.

3. We must rejoice in God, not only because of what we have received and are receiving from him daily, but because of what he has promised, and we expect to receive yet further from him: because *he shall bless thee*, therefore *thou shalt rejoice*. Those that make God their joy may *rejoice in hope*, for he is faithful that has promised.

IV. The laws concerning the three solemn feasts are summed up (v. 16, 17), as often before, ^{<0236>}Exodus 23:16, 17; 34:23. The general commands concerning them are,

1. That all the males must then make their personal appearance before God, that by their frequent meeting to worship God, at the same place, and by the same rule, they might be kept faithful and constant to that holy religion which was established among them.

2. That none must appear before God empty, but every man must bring some offering or other, in token of a dependence upon God and gratitude to him. And God was not unreasonable in his demands; let every man but give as he was able, and no more was expected. The same is still the rule of charity, ^{<4302>}1 Corinthians 16:2. Those that give to their power shall be accepted, but those that give beyond their power are accounted worthy of double honour (2 cor. 8:3), as the poor widow that gave *all she had*, ^{<0214>}Luke 21:4.

^{<5168>}DEUTERONOMY 16:18-22

YEARLY FEASTS

Here is,

I. Care taken for the due administration of justice among them, that controversies might be determined, matters in variance adjusted, the injured redressed, and the injurious punished. While they were encamped in the wilderness, they had *judges and officers* according to their numbers, rulers of thousands and hundreds, ^{<0272>}Exodus 17:25. When they came to Canaan, they must have them according to their towns and cities, in all their gates; for the courts of judgment sat in the gates. Now,

1. Here is a commission given to these inferior magistrates: “Judges to try and pass sentence, and officers to execute their sentences, shalt thou make

thee.” However the persons were pitched upon, whether by the nomination of their sovereign or by the election of the people, *the power were ordained of God*, ^{<611>}Romans 13:1. And it was a great mercy to the people thus to have justice brought to their doors, that it might be more expeditious and less expensive, a blessing which we of this nation ought to be very thankful for. Pursuant to this law, besides the great sanhedrim that sat at the sanctuary, consisting of seventy elders and a president, there was in the larger cities, such as had in them above 120 families, a court of twenty-three judges, in the smaller cities a court of three judges. See this law revived by Jehoshaphat, ^{<405>}2 Chronicles 19:5, 8.

2. Here is a command given to these magistrates to do justice in the execution of the trust reposed in them. Better not judge at all than not judge with just judgment, according to the direction of the law and the evidence of the fact.

(1.) The judges are here cautioned not to do wrong to any (v. 19), nor to take any gifts, which would tempt them to do wrong. This law had been given before, ^{<1238>}Exodus 23:8.

(2.) They are charged to do justice to all: “*That which is altogether just shalt thou follow*, v. 20. Adhere to the principles of justice, act by the rules of justice, countenance the demands of justice, imitate the patterns of justice, and pursue with resolution that which appears to be just. *Justice, justice, shalt thou follow.*” This is that which the magistrate is to have in his eye, on this he must be intent, and to this all personal regards must be sacrificed, to do *right to all* and *wrong to none*.

II. Care taken for the preventing of all conformity to the idolatrous customs of the heathen, v. 21, 22. They must not only not join with the idolaters in their worships, not visit their groves, nor bow before the images which they had set up, but,

1. They must not plant a grove, nor so much as a tree, near God's altar lest they should make it look like the altars of the false gods. They made groves the places of their worship either to make it secret (but that which is true and good desires the light rather), or to make it solemn, but the worship of the true God has enough in itself to make it so and needs not the advantage of such a circumstance.

2. They must not set up any image, statue, or pillar, to the honour of God, for it is a thing which the Lord hates; nothing belies or reproaches him more, or tends more to corrupt and debauch the minds of men, than representing and worshipping by an image that God who is an infinite and eternal Spirit.