

BIBLE BRIEFING

“The Fun Zone”

DEUTERONOMY 16-18

Introduction

Sometimes I say that we’re the fun Church; or I use the word ‘fun’ to describe what we’re doing. I mean Christian joy that is *just flat fun!*

In the three chapters ahead of us, I hope to show you that the Jews had fun. “Fun” is probably a wrong choice of words, given its connotations in our culture. ‘Festivals’ are a good Jewish word, and we’ll see three of them. Then we’ll talk about life away from the Tabernacle – daily life as a society – where the principles laid-out were to give everyone the greatest opportunity for joy in serving the Lord.

Chapter 16

The first seventeen verses of Chapter Sixteen present the joy and rejoicing God expected at the annual calendar festivals.

Three feasts are highlighted. Moses emphasized only three of their seven special occasions because they were the feasts that every Jewish male would be obligated to celebrate at the central sanctuary every year

Deuteronomy 16:1 “Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night.

Deuteronomy 16:2 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.

Abib is mid-March to mid-April on modern calendars. It’s also called Nisan. They commemorated their deliverance, secured by the blood of the substituted lamb. Passover began a week long celebration, the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Deuteronomy 16:3 You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, *that is*, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life.

Deuteronomy 16:4 And no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory for seven days, nor shall *any* of the meat which you sacrifice the first day at twilight remain overnight until morning.

The food and eating was consistent with their haste. Symbols can be powerful; we should think about presentation.

Deuteronomy 16:5 “You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which the Lord your God gives you;

Deuteronomy 16:6 but at the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 16:7 And you shall roast and eat *it* in the place which the Lord your God chooses, and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents.

Deuteronomy 16:8 Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there *shall be* a sacred assembly to the Lord your God. You shall do no work *on it*.

It was an all-nighter! Exodus Twelve suggests the original generation stayed-up all night. And then it went on for a week. It was a time of reunion, joy, and celebration.

The next feast on the calendar was the Feast of Weeks.

Deuteronomy 16:9 “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.

Deuteronomy 16:10 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.

This came to be called Pentecost, because it fell fifty days after Passover, and the prefix, *pente*, means *fifty*. It was a celebration of God’s blessing upon them, as the corn just began to be harvested.

Deuteronomy 16:11 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.

Deuteronomy 16:12 And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.

Rejoice at the changes God has brought to your life. You, too, were a slave, but have been set free. Don't look back on slavery favorably.

Rejoice, too, at the fruit and growth in your life.

The third major feast was Tabernacles, or Booths.

Deuteronomy 16:13 "You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress.

Deuteronomy 16:14 And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who *are* within your gates.

Deuteronomy 16:15 Seven days you shall keep a sacred 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 surely rejoice.

It was celebrated for seven days after the harvest, in the fall of their year. They lived in makeshift booths to commemorate the Exodus. The theme was again joy and rejoicing.

Deuteronomy 16:16 "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; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed.

Deuteronomy 16:17 Every man *shall give* as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you.

You don't come **empty handed**. God's generosity towards you is what encourages your generosity to Him.

As God's people, we have many reasons to celebrate the greatness and goodness of the Lord. We've been redeemed by the blood of Christ (Passover), we're indwelt and empowered by the Spirit (Pentecost), and we're generously supported by the Lord in our pilgrim journey (Tabernacles). Our time here on earth is brief and temporary, but one day we shall enter heaven where Jesus is now preparing places for us.

Beginning in verse eighteen, we have a change in focus. While the feasts took place centrally, the regular day-to-day life of the community took place in the outlying towns and cities. Israel will be called upon to exhibit consistent justice and judgment as a community of people. It wasn't to restrict them from enjoying themselves; it was to enable them to live together successfully, with God's blessing, to experience the joy of serving God by serving one another.

Deuteronomy 16:18 "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.

The **gates** were a gathering place, **where leaders would be available to help the people.**

Deuteronomy 16:19 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.

Deuteronomy 16:20 You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

That all sounds great; but how do you know **what is altogether just**? The next two verses help you by reminding you that all justice and judgment stem from God.

Deuteronomy 16:21 "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.

Deuteronomy 16:22 You shall not set up a sacred pillar, which the Lord your God hates.

In other words, don't worship God, and then set up idols as well. God is exclusive, and therefore is your exclusive source for justice and judgment.

Chapter Seventeen

In chapters 17 and 18 we're still talking about their society. Any society has leadership. These are the regulations that would control a king, a priest, and a prophet. These were the three main offices in the nation Israel, in the theocracy which God had set up for these people. God laid down rules for each of these offices.

Deuteronomy 17:1 “You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God a bull or sheep which has any blemish or defect, for that *is* an abomination to the Lord your God.

This is for everyone to understand, but it’s a regulation given to the priests.

Deuteronomy 17:2 “If there is found among you, within any of your gates which the Lord your God gives you, a man or a woman who has been wicked in the sight of the Lord your God, in transgressing His covenant,

Deuteronomy 17:3 who has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, either the sun or moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded,

Deuteronomy 17:4 and it is told you, and you hear *of it*, then you shall inquire diligently. And if *it is* indeed true *and* certain that such an abomination has been committed in Israel,

Deuteronomy 17:5 then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has committed that wicked thing, and shall stone to death that man or woman with stones.

The priests had a solemn responsibility. Idolatry called for the death penalty. Now, God wasn’t trying to inhibit them by keeping them away from pagan religion. He knew it would defile and destroy them as individuals, and as a society.

Deuteronomy 17:6 Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness.

Deuteronomy 17:7 The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall put away the evil from among you.

As brutal as their culture sounds, God built-in safeguards to protect the innocent.

Deuteronomy 17:8 “If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the Lord your God chooses.

Deuteronomy 17:9 And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge *there* in those days, and inquire *of them*; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment.

Deuteronomy 17:10 You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the Lord chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you.

Deuteronomy 17:11 According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you.

Deuteronomy 17:12 Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the Lord your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil from Israel.

Deuteronomy 17:13 And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously.

Because the Law didn't cover every situation, disagreements were to be taken to the priest. Then the people were to abide by the decision given. Disobedience to the judgment of the priest was to be punished with the death penalty.

Kings are the next leaders discussed:

Deuteronomy 17:14 "When you come to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that *are* around me,'

This is a sad verse, because God never intended Israel to have a king over them. It was a concession to their weakness and lust for the world.

Nevertheless, if they were to have a king, some rules should apply:

Deuteronomy 17:15 you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses; *one* from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who *is* not your brother.

Deuteronomy 17:16 But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the Lord has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again.'

Deuteronomy 17:17 Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.

The greatest king Israel ever had, from a worldly point of view, was Solomon – *who broke all these rules!* It was after his death that the kingdom split in two and began its decline.

Chapter Eighteen

God gives rules regarding the maintenance of the priests. Then there is another warning against idolatrous practices which resort to the satanic powers. This is followed by a section of the Book of Deuteronomy which deals with prophets, and there is a wonderful prophecy about the Lord Jesus, the Prophet who was to come. The section on prophets concludes with the very interesting and important test for determining true and false prophets.

Deuteronomy 18:1 “The priests, the Levites - all the tribe of Levi -shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and His portion.

Deuteronomy 18:2 Therefore they shall have no inheritance among their brethren; the Lord is their inheritance, as He said to them.

Deuteronomy 18:3 “And this shall be the priest’s due from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice, whether *it is* bull or sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach.

Deuteronomy 18:4 The firstfruits of your grain and your new wine and your oil, and the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him.

Deuteronomy 18:5 For the Lord your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand to minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons forever.

Because of their zeal for God at the time of the incident with the Golden Calf, the tribe of Levi was set apart to be close to the Lord in serving Him at the Tabernacle. God was their portion and inheritance. They must, therefore, be provided for by their brethren, having no livelihood of their own.

Deuteronomy 18:6 “So if a Levite comes from any of your gates, from where he dwells among all Israel, and comes with all the desire of his mind to the place which the Lord chooses,

Deuteronomy 18:7 then he may serve in the name of the Lord his God as all his brethren the Levites *do*, who stand there before the Lord.

Deuteronomy 18:8 They shall have equal portions to eat, besides what comes from the sale of his inheritance.

Wherever a Levite went, he was to be provided for on a par with all the other Levites. The Lord might choose to send a Levite to another area, to help the people; he should be supported.

Deuteronomy 18:9 “When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations.

Deuteronomy 18:10 There shall not be found among you *anyone* who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, *or one* who practices witchcraft, *or a* soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,

Deuteronomy 18:11 *or one* who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.

Deuteronomy 18:12 For all who do these things *are* an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you.

Deuteronomy 18:13 You shall be blameless before the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 18:14 For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not appointed such for you.

This warning is still contemporary; it is repeated in the New Testament. Paul warns *that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils* (1Timothy 4:1). They will be resorting to the unseen satanic world. Christians are ridiculed for being paranoid about things, labeling them occult; but I don't think you can be too careful.

Deuteronomy 18:15 "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear,

Deuteronomy 18:16 according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.'

Deuteronomy 18:17 "And the Lord said to me: 'What they have spoken is good.

The children of Israel were to listen to God's prophets. Why? Because they were telling them the truth. That was the basic reason. But the second reason was to prepare them to listen to the final messenger, the final Prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Deuteronomy 18:18 I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.

Deuteronomy 18:19 And it shall be *that* whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require *it* of him.

You will recall that the Lord Jesus said again and again that the words He spoke were not His own but the Father's. For instance, in John 5:30, and several times in John 6, the Lord Jesus says that He came not to do His own will but to do the will of the Father. After the Lord's earthly ministry was finished, he prayed in that great high

priestly prayer, where He is turning in His final report to the Father. I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.... For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me... (John 17:4, 8). If God were to speak out of heaven at this very moment, **He would not say anything that He had not already said. He would just repeat Himself, because all He intends to say to you and to me is in the person of Christ.**

The greatest proof to me that the Bible is the Word of God is the fulfillment of prophecy. One fourth of the entire Bible was prophecy at the time it was written, and a large portion of that has already been fulfilled. God has recorded prophecies concerning cities and nations and great world empires. Under such circumstances, there would arise false prophets, as there are today. They wanted the status and the position that belonged to the true prophet of God. How could Israel protect themselves from the false prophets? God lays down a test by which they could be certain a man was either a true prophet of God or a phony.

Deuteronomy 18:20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'

Deuteronomy 18:21 And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?' -

Deuteronomy 18:22 when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that *is* the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

Fear is a powerful factor. If someone comes to you, and says, "God told me such and such," there is a fear that maybe it's true! Well, it needs to be tested. You don't simply accept something because someone says it was from God. It must agree, in both character and content, with the Scriptures.

Conclusion

Feasts were a regular feature of their lives. In between feasts, they were to carefully guard their hearts from wandering after pagan ideas, which would only rob their joy.

God wants your joy to be full. He wants you to have the kind of fun that is consistent with children playing under the beneficial supervision of their loving Father.