

Three Annual Feasts

DEUTERONOMY 16:1-17

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This morning, since it is the fifth Sunday, we are doing something a bit unusual. Several years ago, we set aside every fifth Sunday as a time to spend a bit more effort coordinating our songs with a number of scripture readings, and that is what we hope to do today. In just a moment, I'd like for us to look together at a passage of scripture in Deuteronomy 16. I want us to learn something from this passage, and then some of the men of the congregation will publicly read several other passages, and we will sing several songs as a way of reinforcing what we have learned from this passage in Deuteronomy. I will then return for a few moments to give an invitation before we end our service with a song and a prayer.

But we start today in Deuteronomy 16 (p. 313). We are here this morning to worship God, and we know that worship has always been important, all throughout the history of God's people - from the opening chapters of Genesis all throughout the Patriarchal and the Mosaic Age and into the Christian Age. God has always expected and has deserved worship. Worship is the idea of showing our reverence for God. And in Deuteronomy 16, before the people cross over the Jordan River into the Promised Land, Moses reviews the Law, and he summarizes the three annual feasts where God expected the people to travel to one place to celebrate in his honor. There were others, but these are the big three. Three times a year, God expected his people to make a pilgrimage to meet together **"...in the place where the Lord would choose to establish His name."** Later, this would be Jerusalem, but at this point, Jerusalem had not yet been conquered. So, this passage is looking forward in hope. Notice, please, Deuteronomy 16:1-17,

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

of Egypt. ⁷ You shall cook and eat it in the place which the Lord your God chooses. In the morning you are to return to your tents. ⁸ Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the Lord your God; you shall do no work on it.

⁹ “You shall count seven weeks for yourself; you shall begin to count seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. ¹⁰ Then you shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give just as the Lord your God blesses you; ¹¹ and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, in the place where the Lord your God chooses to establish His name. ¹² You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.

¹³ “You shall celebrate the Feast of Booths seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat; ¹⁴ and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns. ¹⁵ Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the Lord your God in the place which the Lord chooses, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful.

¹⁶ “Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths, and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed. ¹⁷ Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you.

So, we have three feasts described for us here: We have the Passover, also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread (in verses 1-8), we have the Feast of Weeks, that would later be known as Pentecost (in verses 9-12), and we have the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Tents (in verses 12-15). I’ve put a chart on the wall up here, giving us an overview. The Jewish people had a number of feasts and celebrations throughout the year, but these are the three where God insisted that everybody come together in Jerusalem.

Passover, the first of the three, was held in the early Spring and was meant to remember the Exodus from Egypt. We’re studying this in our Sunday morning class right now - Moses, and the Ten Plagues (including the death of the firstborn), and the instruction to sacrifice a lamb, using it’s blood as a sign on the doorposts, sparing the lives of the firstborn for all who obeyed. As they prepared to leave Egypt, God told them to basically eat standing up. Today, we might say that we are hitting the drive-thru! They didn’t have time to let the bread rise. It was to be unleavened. And this, of course, is carried over into the New Testament with Jesus. In just a moment, Hans will read a passage about Jesus being our Passover Lamb, and then Michael will lead us in a song about Jesus being the Lamb of God. We have already had the Lord’s Supper today, where we shared unleavened bread, representing the body of Jesus, and we shared the fruit of the vine (grape juice), representing the blood that Jesus poured out for us on the cross.

The second annual feast that called for a trip to Jerusalem was known as the Feast of Weeks, because it happened seven weeks after Passover. The Feast of Weeks was to celebrate the spring barley harvest, and it also happened to be (according to tradition) the anniversary of the giving of the Law of Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Later, this holiday came to be known as Pentecost, going back to the Greek word for “fifty,” because it happened 50 days after Passover. As Christians, Pentecost is important to us, because it is the day the church was established. In Acts 2, the disciples came together seven weeks after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, Peter preached, and 3000 people were baptized. By the way, this means that the preaching of the New Law happened on the anniversary of the giving of the First Law, the Law of Moses. And you might remember that at the giving of the Law of Moses, 3000 people were killed in the Golden Calf incident. In contrast, 3000 were born again at the giving of the New Law. An interesting contrast!

And the third feast that required a trip to Jerusalem was the Feast of Booths, or the Feast of Tabernacles, where everybody would basically camp out in the backyard for a week in the Fall each year, to remember how they had lived in tents during the forty years they had wandered in the wilderness. Of all of the holidays, this one was the most “in tents.” By the way, the Feast of Booths is coming up. It starts in two weeks, on Sunday, October 13.

So, this is the overview, and as you can see on the front of today’s bulletin, we have three very practical applications to read about and to sing about for the rest of our time together - and all three are tied to this passage in Deuteronomy.

- First of all, Jesus is our Passover (as we have already reviewed).
- Secondly, I want us to think for a bit about what Moses said in verse 16, where he said that during these three feasts, the people “*...shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed.*” You can look up this phrase using your phone or some Bible software, and you will find that it is repeated several times throughout the Law of Moses. And the basic idea is: When we come to worship God, we need to be prepared. We need to come with something to offer, and under the New Covenant, we are the sacrifice. So, Jon-Michael will bring us the passage from Romans, applying this concept to us, and then we will sing about that.
- And finally, we will close with the reminder from Deuteronomy 16 that all of us are invited to participate in worship. In other words, worship is personal. This isn’t something that other people can do for us, but all of us must appear before the Lord in worship. Jim will lead us through Hebrews 12, and then Michael will lead a song based on that passage before I come back to give an invitation.

At this time, though, let’s listen very carefully as Hans reads from 1 Peter...

****SONG AND SCRIPTURE SERVICE****

INVITATION:

As we come to the end of our time together this morning, we want to invite everyone here to make a decision to follow the Lord more perfectly. For those of us who are Christians, perhaps we need to recommit to appreciating and celebrating the fact that Jesus is our Passover Lamb. Perhaps we need to recommit to bringing ourselves to worship as the sacrifice, that we do not come before God empty-handed, that we fully participate in worship.

But if you have not yet obeyed the gospel, we would invite you to do that. God sent his Son Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins, as a Lamb who died in our place. We turn to him in faith, we turn away from sin, and we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. If you’d like to study further, please get in

touch. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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