

**Message #21****Deuteronomy 16:1-22**

Not long ago someone said that they didn't think they needed to go to church to worship God. To that, my response was really. Where did you get that idea? What I do know is that you did not get that idea from the Bible.

The Bible is very clear that God's people are not to forsake themselves from corporate worship. At Church, there is an angelic presence that you cannot find at any other location. In fact, I am convinced that we need church to go forward in our relationship with God and our spiritual lives. Those who leave out church will soon discover their spiritual lives are going backwards.

At Church, there is the dynamic presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of His people. At Church, the word of God is carefully taught so that God's people know what to believe and how to behave. At church, spiritual gifts are used and tangible gifts are given to the Lord as at no other place of worship. So if someone thinks they can worship God apart from the church, they are spiritually delusional.

Now in the O.T. economy they did not have church; what they had was a tabernacle and later a temple and God expected His people to go there and worship Him. In fact, to experience His continual blessings, this was not optional. What we certainly see here is this:

**GOD IS TO BE EXCLUSIVELY WORSHIPPED BY HIS PEOPLE AT DESIGNATED TIMES AND DESIGNATED PLACES.**

God gave national Israel their own special annual calendar. This calendar is clearly designed so that Israel will remember and celebrate all God has done at various times of year.

Now we in the Church Age don't operate by this calendar, but the things that Israel celebrates are things we may apply because it clearly illustrates what Christ has done for His church.

Before we tackle this chapter, we need to understand Israel's calendar:

In Old Testament times, **Israel's national year officially began in the spring in a month that is called by the name Abib (six times) and by the name Nisan (two times).**

- 1) The month of Abib/Nisan is **March-April**.
- 2) The month of Iyyar is **April-May**.
- 3) The month of Sivan is **May-June**.
- 4) The month of Tammuz is **June-July**.
- 5) The month of Ab is **July-August**.
- 6) The month of Elul is **August-September**.
- 7) The month of Tishri is **September-October**.
- 8) The month of Heshban is **October-November**.
- 9) The month of Kislev is **November-December**.
- 10) The month of Tebeth is **December-January**.
- 11) The month of Shebat is **January-February**.
- 12) The month of Adar is **February-March**.

In this chapter, there are a series of three main worship celebrations, times, guidelines and places given by God to His people. These were what would be called “pilgrimage festivals” in which God’s people were expected to travel. His people could not just sit home and experience the blessings of God. His people never wanted to forget about worshipping God because this is a key to having the blessings of God.

When God’s people got into the Promised Land, they were to take time out of their lives to nationally travel to worship God at the place of God’s choosing.

**WORSHIP SERVICE #1** – Israel was to worship God at the Passover. **16:1-8**

God wanted national Israel to have national festivals so they could remember and celebrate all God had done.

According to **verse 1**, the national calendar for Israel started when God brought Israel out of Egypt. That was in the month Abib or Nisan, which was in March. This was the beginning of everything.

Now for us who live in the United States, the beginning of the New Year is January 1 and the reason why we celebrate this is not because this was the day this nation was founded; it was because in 45 BC Julius Caesar of Rome decided this was the beginning of the New Year. Almost all nations of the world follow this today. But this was not the calendar Israel was to follow.

God wanted His people to celebrate their national deliverance by celebrating the Passover. In Leviticus, the Passover and the Unleavened Bread are two separate festivals, but since they are closely linked together in time, Moses presents this as one major festival in Deuteronomy.

This would remind the people of the mighty work God had done for them as a nation in setting them free and making them His Holy nation.

Now there were nine regulations for celebrating the Passover in this chapter:

**Regulation #1** - They were to sacrifice an animal from their own flock and herd to the LORD your God. **16:2a**

**Regulation #2** - They were to sacrifice the animal at a spot God would choose. **16:2b**

This is a major point of this chapter. It is repeated six times: **16:2, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16**.

**Regulation #3** - They were to eat unleavened bread for seven days. **16:3-4**

This would remind the people that they came out of their previous state in a hurry. Moses calls it “the bread of affliction” meaning they were afflicted and suffering before God set them free. They were completely delivered in one moment not even having time for leaven to make bread. Now carefully observe in **verse 3** that you are to remember this “all the days of your life.” Remember what? You were set free by God.

Now according to **verse 4**, for seven days no leaven was to be seen. There was to be a complete break from anything that was leavened.

**Regulation #4** - They were not allowed to celebrate the Passover in any place except where God told them. **16:5-6a**

One of the real tragedies of the church is that they have promoted experiences as being the most important thing in the Christian life. The most important thing is knowing the word of God and doctrine and going to God’s place of worship and focusing on what God says, not what we have experienced.

**Regulation #5** - They are to begin the Passover in the evening when the sun goes down. **16:6b**

This is a specific time regulation. When Israel was delivered she stayed up all night. In Exodus 12:10 we learn that nothing was to be left until morning, and in Exodus 12:29-31 we learn that the Lord struck down the firstborn starting at midnight. So this was to be an all-night festival.

**Regulation #6** - They were to cook and eat the sacrificed animal at the place God chose and then return to their tents or homes the next morning. **16:7**

**Regulation #7** - They were to eat unleavened bread for six days. **16:8a**

**Regulation #8** - They were to have a solemn assembly on the seventh day to worship God. **16:8b**

God expects His people to worship Him.

**Regulation #9** - They were not to do any work on that Passover Sabbath Day. **16:8c**

Now all of this pointed to Jesus Christ. Leaven is a metaphor for sin. Jesus Christ is our Passover (I Cor. 5:7). He is the One who has the saving power to deliver us in one moment of Time. He was the firstborn who was sacrificed for us and when we believe on Him, we enter into a wonderful relationship with Him not based on any works. His was the perfect, unblemished sacrifice and the only place in the world that God has appointed for sinners to be saved is in Him at the cross.

The festival that we celebrate is the Lord's Supper. This is the feast that must be corporately observed in the Church. Paul says in Ephesians that we are to remember that at one time we were uncircumcised Gentiles who were separated from God, but Jesus Christ and His shed blood has brought us near in a real relationship with God.

**WORSHIP SERVICE #2** – Israel was to worship God at the Feast of Weeks. **16:9-12**

Now the second worship service was to take place at harvest time. It was called the Feast of Weeks and it too was to be carefully regulated:

**Regulation #1** - This Feast was to be held exactly seven weeks from the time they began cutting the grain. **16:9**

Now the actual date is not precise. But in Leviticus we learn that on the Sabbath that ended the Passover and Unleavened Bread, there was to be a count of 50 days to this festival. In fact, the Greek word for this 50 days (*pentkostos*) from which we get our English word "Pentecost."

**Regulation #2** - This feast was to be a celebration to the LORD your God. **16:10a**

Worship is much more than what can I get from going to church. It is a focus on God who is our God. It is not about us, it is about Him.

**Regulation #3** - This feast was to give a tribute to God of a free will offering based on how God has blessed them. **16:10b**

Now when an offering is a free will offering, there are no rules in giving it. This is not technically a legal tithe or legal 10 percent. This is something someone wants to give because God has blessed them so much. This point is stressed at these gatherings. God blesses His people in the year and they want to give Him more offerings than when He legally demands (**16:15, 17**). That is what a free will offering actually is. It is not mandatory. It is not solicited. It is not manipulated.

This is a key principle of giving for the New Testament believer. We are to give to the Lord cheerfully as God has prospered us (I Cor. 16:2) and if we sow bountifully, we will reap bountifully and if we sow sparingly, we will reap sparingly (II Cor. 9:6-8). When we think about all the blessings of God that we have received in our lives, how can we not want to give to Him?

**Regulation #4** - This feast was to be a joyous celebration before the LORD your God. **16:11a**

In most churches there will be those who will take the joy out of everything. They are stale, miserable, rigid people that you hope you do not meet at church. One thing we can say about them, they are not right with God. God wants His people happy to come worship Him.

**Regulation #5** - This feast was to be a feast for everyone connected to you. **16:11b**

This feast was to be celebrated by son, daughter, male and female servants, the Levite who lived in the town and the orphan and widow. They were to all celebrate this feast. Everyone should be welcomed at church, no matter what their status. All people from all walks of life—rich, poor, family members, non-family members, employers, employees—they should all go to worship God and feel welcome.

**Regulation #6** - This feast was to be a remembrance that they were once slaves in Egypt. **16:12**

If there is one thing we should remember, it is we were miserable before God set us free. Don't ever forget that.

**WORSHIP SERVICE #3** – Israel was to worship God at the Feast of Booths. **16:13-15**

The third major feast that Israel was to celebrate was the feast of booths or feasts of tabernacles. This name was due to the fact that they were to celebrate by actually building these make shift survival shelters that reminded them of how they lived when they first came out of Egypt.

**Regulation #1** - This feast was to be celebrated seven days after they had harvested grain and grapes. **16:13**

This was an end of harvest year celebration.

**Regulation #2** - This feast was to be a rejoicing feast. **16:14a**

It was a time of rejoicing for everyone to remember back to the misery days.

**Regulation #3** - This feast was to include everyone connected to you. **16:14b**

There was to be a co-equality in these meetings.

**Regulation #4** - This feast was to be celebrated for seven days. **16:15a**

This was a seven day period of time when people gathered together to reflect on the amazing sovereignty and providence and grace of God in setting them free.

**Regulation #5** - This feast was to be conducted in a place of God's choosing. **16:15b**

**Regulation #6** - This feast was to be a joyful celebration for how God has blessed your work. **16:15c**

One thing that is very sad for the people of God is that they think they have earned everything.

Now four specific additional reminders are given to God's people who would attend these festivals:

**Reminder #1** - At worship services everyone is to bring gifts and offerings. **16:16-17**

At these three annual worship services, all the men were to appear before the LORD at the place God chooses for them to appear. They were not to come empty handed. Each man was to give a gift to the Lord as he was able. According to how God had blessed each person, he was to give.

**Reminder #2** - When not at worship services the people are to be governed by that which is righteous and just. **16:18-20**

Select judges (shophetim) and officers (shoterim). Throughout the rest of the year, God wanted His people judged fairly and justly. There was to be no distortion of justice and no partiality. This is how God wants His people to be every day, even when not at worship. God wants His people honest and fair and doing what is right. He wants them conducting themselves in just ways.

**Reminder #3** - God's people must not ever set up any kind of wooden pole for worship beside the altar of God. **16:21**

Now watch this point here. The people were not to plant some Asherah tree of any kind anywhere near God's place of worship. **Here is the point: you never mix secular with sacred.**

**Reminder #4** - God's people must not ever set up some pillar to worship because God hates it. **16:22**

Do not ever worship something other than God. When God's people worship money, activity, materialism, sports, immorality, they are not just involved in something wrong; they are involved in something God hates.

When God's people gather to worship God, they are not wasting time; they are investing in that which pleases God and in that which will bring the blessings of God.