

DEUTERONOMY 16-21 GOD'S FEASTS, MORE PRACTICAL LAWS



As we begin this study, one question that has come up has to do with the following scriptures: "However, you may slaughter and eat meat within all your gates, whatever your heart desires, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you; the *unclean and the clean* may eat of it, of the gazelle and the deer alike... You may eat it within your gates; the *unclean and the clean person* alike may eat it, as if it were a gazelle or a deer" (Deut. 12:15; 15:22).

This has to do with the person who is ceremonially unclean and has nothing to do with the meat itself. The *JFB Commentary* explains, "The unclean here are those who were under some slight defilement, which, without excluding them from society, yet debarred them from eating any of the sacred meats (Lev. 7:20). They were at liberty freely to partake of common articles of food."

In chapter 16, we begin with a *summary* of God's Feasts that adds more information about the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The sacrifices are taken "from the flock and the herd [cattle], in the place where the Lord chooses to put His name" (16:2). It is important to note the Passover sacrifice is *never* done with cattle, but the Feast of Unleavened Bread does include them (Num. 28:16-19).

It goes on to say, "You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates...but at the place where the Lord...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" (16:5-6).

Now that there is a central place of worship, the Israelites were to take their lambs to the Tabernacle to have the lambs slain, but they were still to eat it in their homes as a domestic ceremony, as long as they were within the confines of the tabernacle, or later, the temple in Jerusalem. (To read more on this subject, see the Doctrinal Paper, "The Passover of Exodus 12" at the ucg.org website, under "Papers.")

Another addition about God's feasts is mentioned in vss. 16-17: "they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you." This is the reason why we give offerings to God during each Holy Day, because it is commanded by God.

Next come the instructions about the qualifications of the *judges*, which are very high standards and still applicable today. "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. You shall follow what is altogether just..." (16:19-20).

Then, God *prohibits* setting up of *pagan trees* "as a wooden image" near God's altar. *Gill's Commentary* explains, "Of any sort of trees, as oaks or any other; not that it was unlawful to plant trees and groves of them, but not for a *religious* or idolatrous use." Certainly, this principle includes the setting up of Christmas trees as religious objects.

In chapter 17, God gives more practical and just laws, whose principles are still applicable today. Regarding a *wicked* man or woman, who worships *false* gods and practices *astrology*, it says, "You shall inquire diligently" and if found guilty, "by two or three witnesses" they were to stone the person. "So you shall put away the evil from among you" (17:7).

This might appear harsh, but it would effectively *eliminate* introducing *false religions* in Israel. It would have made it clear to all it is absolutely *prohibited*—with no exceptions accepted!

God does not deal with other nations in this way, but Israel was to be a beacon of truth to the world. It could not allow itself to be corrupted. Yet today, we have a very permissive society where there is so much confusion, and everyone does "what they think is right in their own eyes." How much pain and suffering would be avoided if wrong things were simply not tolerated or allowed to thrive.

What happens if there is a case too hard to solve by a judge? Well, God establishes a type of Supreme Court for these cases. "And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days...And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you" (16:9-10). That was the final decision, and it had to be respected, or else it could cost a disobedient person his or her life.

God shows His foresight and establishes laws if the people ask for a future king which would limit his powers. He had to be an Israelite, not a foreigner and had to be appointed by God. He should not multiply horses for himself, because, as *Clarke's Commentary* says: "As horses appear to have been generally furnished by Egypt, God prohibits these:

1. Lest there should be such commerce with Egypt as might lead to *idolatry*.

2. Lest the people might *depend* on a well-appointed cavalry as a means of security, and so cease from trusting in the strength and protection of God.

3. That they might not be *tempted* to extend their dominion by means of cavalry, and so get scattered among the surrounding idolatrous nations, and cease to be that separate people which God intended without which the prophecies relative to the Messiah could not have their due and full accomplishment."

The king should also "not multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he multiply silver and gold...and he shall write for himself a copy of the law in a book, from the one before the priests the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it *all the days of his life*, that he may learn to *fear the Lord* his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that *his heart may not be lifted above his brethren*, that he may *not* turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel."

Here, we see again the importance of *studying* God's Word, to keep one humble and wise.

Next, God again warns them against all the false religions practices of the Canaanites. "You shall not *learn* to follow the *abominations* of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices *witchcraft*, or a *soothsayer* [claiming to tell the future], or one who interprets omens [occurrences that supposedly tell the future], or a sorcerer [who uses evil spirits for divining], or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls on the dead...for all who do these things are an *abomination* to the Lord...for these nations which you will dispossess *listened* to soothsayers and diviners, but as for you, the Lord...has not appointed such for you" (18:10-14).

Then, God predicts they will one day have a Prophet similar to Moses, "a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth" (18:18). This future Prophet was Jesus Christ, as Acts 3:22, 26 says, "For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me...To you first, God, having raised up His Servant *Jesus*, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.'"

Now, to protect innocent life, God tells them when they enter the Promised Land to set up *six cities of refuge*, where people charged with involuntary manslaughter could flee and be protected until the death of the high priest.

In the Old Testament, because of Israel's lack of faith, God permitted them to go to war to defend their land. They were to trust in Him and be brave. Humanitarian laws were set up for them and even for their enemies. They were exclude from war those who had recently built a home, had started working the land, were cowardly, or were recently married.

Outside of their land, they first were to offer peace terms to a city and if they accepted them, they were not to kill them but only take tribute from them. If they refused the peace offer, the males would be killed, but not the women or the children. Inside of the Promised Land, because of the absolute corruption of the Canaanites, they were to totally eradicate the populace, and God gives the reason: "lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods and you sin against the Lord your God" (20:18).

God then gives what can be called an *ecological* law about selective forestry: "When you besiege a city...you shall not destroy its trees...Only the trees which you know are *not* trees for food [fruit trees] you may destroy and cut down" (20:19-20).

What happens if a homicide is found and no one witnessed the crime? God says the city closest to the murder is responsible to investigate and find the guilty. If no one is found, then the elders of the city are to make a sacrifice and show their innocence.

Then God describes the humanitarian treatment of the women captured during a war. If an Israelite wanted to marry her, he could, provided he gave her a month to mourn her family. In those times, a woman would automatically adopt the religion of her husband, and she would become an Israelite.

Regarding men with two wives, something God never approved, but allowed, He lays out the laws to treat the least liked wife with respect, and the man could not choose the child to receive the birthright, it would always go to the firstborn of either wife.

What happens when a parents conceive a *juvenile delinquent* who refuses to obey God or his parents and has become a glutton and a drunkard? The parents should come before the elders of the city, and be witnesses against their own son. After the elders view the case, and if he is guilty, he is to be stoned,

“and you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear” (21:21). Again, this measure would prevent others from copying this type of rebellious attitude that corrupts much of society.

As Israel is ready to become a nation, God is concerned about its civil laws, all derived from the Ten Commandments, the backbone of God’s laws and the principle of *love* toward God and neighbor.

The Bible says, “You shall not see your brother’s ox or his sheep go astray, and hide yourself from them: you shall surely bring them back to your brother...You shall do the same with his garment, with any lost thing...or if you see your brother’s donkey or his ox fall down...you shall surely help him” (22:1). Today this can be applied to a neighbor’s dog, a faulty sprinkler or a home fire.

God also has a law against *transvestism*, the practice of men wearing women’s clothing or vice-versa. “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, or shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the Lord your God” (22:5). This is another manifestation of homosexuality, but regarding the wearing of wrong clothing. *The JFB Commentary* explains, “The adoption of the clothing of the one sex by the other is an outrage on decency, obliterates the distinctions of nature by fostering *softness and effeminacy in the man, impudence and boldness in the woman as well as levity and hypocrisy in both*; and, in short, it opens the door to an *influx of so many evils* that all who wear the dress of another sex are pronounced ‘an abomination unto the Lord.’”

Next is another *ecological* law way ahead of its time. It mentions that if a nest falls from the tree, and the mother and the eggs are in it, you are to only take the eggs, but not the mother bird, she is to be freed. This makes sense to preserve the specie, since the mother can produce more birds.

The JFB Commentary says, “Accordingly, the counsel given in this passage was wise as well as humane, to leave the hen undisturbed for the propagation of the species, while the taking of the brood occasionally was permitted as a check to too rapid an increase.”

Now comes a *safety* law from God, “When you build a new house, then you shall make a *parapet* for your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it” (22:8). *Clarke’s Commentary* mentions, “Houses in the East are in general built with flat roofs, and on them men

walk to enjoy the fresh air, converse together, sleep, etc.; it was therefore necessary to have a wall to prevent persons from falling off. If a man neglected to make a sufficient defense against such accidents, and the death of another was occasioned by it, the owner of the house must be considered in the light of a murderer.” Again, here is a principle that is applied today by construction companies.

Afterwards comes some agricultural laws that are already explained in Lev. 19:19, in Bible Study #31.

Finally, God gives laws protecting the *virginity* of a woman. If a husband accuses her of not being a virgin, the father was to produce the evidence that she was, and the husband was to be punished and fined. But if she feigned being a virgin and it is found she was not, she would be stoned, “because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel, to play the harlot in her father’s house. So you shall put away the evil from among you” (22:21). Again, this would avoid other young girls from committing the same sin.

What about *rape*? God says, “If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her *in the city* and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them...the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor’s wife; so you shall put away *the evil* from among you. But if a man finds a betrothed young woman *in the countryside*, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman...for just as when a man rises against his neighbor and kills him, even so is this matter. For he found her in the countryside, and the betrothed young woman cried out, but there was no one to save her” (22:23-27). As we can see, these are all just and humane laws that God gives His people for that age. How much better off would society be today if it adopted these wonderful principles!