

The Lord of Festivals – *Deuteronomy 16:1-17*

Introduction – One of the things you should learn as you read through your Old Testament is that God loves a party. In this conclusion to the exposition on the fourth commandment, we see the Sabbath mind played out in the three annual feasts of God's people. Of course the fulfillment to these ceremonies is found in the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus Christ. And this, of course, means that we learn from these festivals much of the heart of Sabbath keeping and the gift of being in Christ.

Passover and the Feast of Deliverance (vv1-8) – The first feast(s) mentioned here are the Passover followed by the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:4-8). The unleavened bread was to “*remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt*” (v3). Paul tells us that Jesus Christ is our Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7-8) for He perfectly fulfilled the requirements of the Passover lamb (1 Pet 1:19, John 19:36). We are told to keep the festival by getting rid of the leaven of malice and wickedness. We are to learn from the way the Passover was kept to take great care that it is all out of our lives and homes, our mouths and hands.

Bread of Affliction (v3) – When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we certainly see the connections to Passover, but we must also see the advancement of the covenant. We have moved from partaking of the bread of affliction and now we partake of the bread of heaven. The celebration of the Lord's Supper was not an annual festival for the early Christians, but was practiced daily and weekly. Unleavened bread would not have been available, for instance, when Pentecost was celebrated and when the Holy Spirit came, which was the first recorded time (after its institution) of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:41-42, 46-47). This is also why the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated as a feast of thanksgiving and not a fast of morbid introspectionism.

Pentecost and the Feast of Abundance (vv9-12) – The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) was the harvest of the firstfruits (Lev 23:9-14). God would bring the seed to harvest and the feast was an annual remembrance of this. After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, God celebrated His own festival of firstfruits in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit where three thousand believed. Passover led to Pentecost. The bread of affliction led to a great harvest – and that was only the beginning, the firstfruits.

Tabernacles and the Feast of Faithfulness (vv13-15) – The Feast of Tabernacles (or Ingathering) was celebrated at the end of the harvest seasons. In this feast, God's promised faithfulness (future-looking) was celebrated. He is going to bring in what He has promised. After being questioned for speaking to a Samaritan woman, Jesus told His disciples to look at the fields, “*for they are already white for harvest!*” (John 4:35). Jesus was hungry for souls and intended to reap a great harvest. When the Samaritan woman testified of Jesus (4:39), many believed, proving what Jesus had declared of Himself, “*this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world*” (4:42). The church was established to be that great harvester on behalf of and through the power of Jesus (Matt 28:18-20).

Over and Over Again (vv16-17) – Jesus Christ has fulfilled these festivals as the true Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacle feast (Matt 5:17-18). Nevertheless, we find the principle of regular assembly to remember, to renew, to rejoice, and to rest before God in our Lord's Day worship (Heb 10:24-25). God is the Lord of festivals and so God's people should imitate Him in this. God loves a party, He loves celebration, and He loves solemn assemblies – rejoicing with due dignity in His name. He loves these things done without forgetting those who are hurting and in need. All are summoned; all are to be allowed to participate if they come with faith in Him.

The Sabbath Mind – That is what I have called this section of Deuteronomy (14:21b – 16:17) and there has been a fair amount of repetition. Not only that, the book itself has already spoken of the importance of these gatherings, these feasts, and the ritual of memorials and renewals. What of it? Is it changing the way you view your keeping of the Fourth Commandment? Paul instructs us that joy is a duty and this is also required here (v11, 14). Might it be summarized, “Remember the Gospel, to keep it holy with overwhelming generosity and celebration, and a delight with solemn rejoicing and rest”? Well, are you?

The Only Feast, The Only Sabbath, The Only Strength (Rom 8:1-2, Gal 5:1-4) – Union with Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit is the only way to true and eternal life. Too often, however, shallow-thinking Christianity from the flesh strait-jackets the gospel so that this only applies to the moment of conversion. Renewal comes through disciplined repetition with faith and with the faithful. The Gospel in its fullness is never without fresh application for the follower of Jesus. “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*” (Matt 11:28-30).