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DEUTERONOMY 15:1-17:7

As we continue in our study of *Deuteronomy* today, we're going to be looking at **chapters 15, 16** and a small portion of **chapter 17**.

Chapter 15 tells us how the Israelites were to treat their poor. God's will for His people was that the poor were to be taken care of and one way He did this was by providing a Sabbath Year.

Once a week the Jewish people were to have a Sabbath Day of rest, and every **seven years** the Jewish people were to have a Sabbath Year.

During that year, the Jews were not to cultivate the land, but they were to allow the land to rest. They were to trust Almighty God for their sustenance that year.

The Sabbath Year involved much more than rest for the land. It also meant the canceling of debts and the setting free of the servants who had served six years. Not only was the servant to be freed, but he was to be supplied liberally with livestock, with grain and with wine.

Now, we've said before that all the commandments given in the Old Testament do not apply to us today. I mean, God hasn't told you and me to observe a Sabbath year nor even a Sabbath day. We're to set aside the first day of the week for worship and bringing our tithes and offerings to the Lord, but that's not the Sabbath. The religious people still observe the Sabbath which is on a Saturday, but we observe the Lord's Day which is on Sunday.

Although God hasn't told us to do all these things, the principles are still there for us! **"Everything written beforehand was written for examples for us."**

God wants us to open our hearts to the poor people around us. God has blessed us and He wants us to bless others. We grieve the heart of God when we don't give to those who are in need.

Chapter 15 goes on to tell us that if a servant has come to love his master and chooses to remain with him, then he would have an awl put through his ear as a sign that he was a servant by choice.

Surely there is a spiritual message here for you and me. we should love God so much that we want to serve Him willingly and joyfully and gladly.

Paul called himself a bonds slave of Jesus Christ. And that's exactly what we are...and as His bonds slaves we must be willing to serve Him and we must serve Him with joy and gladness!

We've seen in the past weeks that God told His people that obedience would bring His blessings and disobedience would bring His cursings.

Well, if the Jewish nation had followed these commandments, **if they had observed the Sabbath Years like they had been commanded, they would have prospered in the land. However, we know they didn't.**

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We know they were eventually taken from the land. The **Book of Jeremiah** tells us they were exiled in Babylon for seventy years...because they had not observed their Sabbath years as God commanded. And **2 Chronicles** tells us that they would be in exile “until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths.”

If you multiply 7 times 70, it is obvious that for 490 years the Jewish people had flaunted this commandment in the face of Jehovah...but the land eventually enjoyed all their Sabbaths due it while the people were in exile.

Well, what I want us to look at during the remainder of this lesson are several of the Jewish feasts. God gave His children seven feasts to observe and today, we'll look at the four mentioned in **Deuteronomy 16**.

Let's look first at the **Feast of Passover**...and since this feast is given in detail in **Exodus 12**...let's turn there...and as we read this passage, pay close attention to what it says...because I'm going to ask questions later! ☺

Exodus 12:1-14...

This is the first feast God gave His people and it spoke of redemption. God had redeemed His people from the land of Egypt, from bondage and from slavery.

And as you look back through the corridors of time it's very easy to see that this feast speaks of the true Passover Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ!

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul speaks of Christ, our Passover, who was sacrificed for us.

The **New Testament** makes it very, very clear that the Passover Feast given to the nation of Israel was a **shadow** of that which would be accomplished in the very Son of God.

Remember, John the Baptist said when he saw Jesus coming toward him, **“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”**

We're going to come back to the **Feast of Passover** later, but let's quickly look at the other feasts mentioned in this chapter...

The second feast that we need to consider today is actually part of Passover...Passover was a one day feast and the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** is a seven day feast.

Deuteronomy 16:1-4...

Passover speaks of redemption or *salvation* and the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** speaks of *separation*.

God told His people that they were to eat no leaven at all. We know as we study the Word of God that leaven speaks of sin.

And God said to the nation of Israel 3,500 years ago...

“Listen, Israel, I redeemed you out of your

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**bondage and slavery. Now, You belong to Me...
start living that way...purge out the leaven."**

God says the same thing to you and me. He redeemed us out of our bondage and slavery to sin. When He saw the blood of Jesus applied to our hearts, He passed over us. Now, He's saying, **"You belong to Me! I have redeemed you...You're Mine! Now, purge out the sin from your life and live like it!"**

We couldn't get the sin out of our lives before we were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb! But now...because of the sweet and abiding presence of the Holy Spirit who dwells with you and me, we can, by His enabling power start living like we belong to God!

Do we still sin? Yes! But we should sin much less and we should constantly be striving through the power of the Holy Spirit to purge our lives of sin!

Paul said in **1 Corinthians 5**: ***"Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump..."***

See, God's concern for Israel was contamination and His concern for us is the same. He knows our frame...He knows we're but dust and He knows we need to get rid of sin so we won't be contaminated by it!

That's why He forbade Israel to intermarry with heathens. and that's why He forbades us to intermarry with non-believers... ***"Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate and do not touch what is unclean..."***

2 Corinthians 6:17

The next feast I want us to think about is the **Feast of Weeks** or the **Feast of Pentecost**.

The word **"Pentecost"** means **"fifty."**

And fifty days after the **Feast of Firstfruits** was the **Feast of Pentecost**. It was a celebration of the wheat harvest. But for the Christian it was the day the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the believers gathered together...

- and noise as a rushing mighty wind came and filled the whole house - and tongues as of fire rested on each one of them

- and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other languages.

- And Peter began to preach a very powerful sermon and do you remember what happened? **Three thousand souls were saved that day!**

Let me tell you something very interesting...in the original **Feast of Pentecost** there were **two loaves of bread** required to celebrate...This is the only feast requiring **two loaves of bread**.

This referred to the future time when both Jew and Gentile would come together before God on equal terms! By the way, these loaves were not unleavened but **leavened**. And this is a picture of the church...Jew and Gentile...and it pictures that the church on earth has never been completely free from sin. One day it is going to be...when we all get to heaven...but not before!

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But, Pentecost also speaks to us of power. What happened in **Acts 1**?

The timid became fearless...

The weak became strong...

The coward became brave...

Lives were changed...

A little more than a month before, Peter denied he even knew Jesus and at Pentecost, Peter preached and three thousand souls were saved. How we need to experience Pentecost again!

God also instituted the **Feast of Tabernacles** or **Feast of Booths**. The people were to go out and build temporary shelters to remind them of the temporary tents their forefathers dwelt in during the wilderness wanderings.

Five hundred later, the Gospel of John tells us that the Lord Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us. And this word for "dwelt" is the word "tabernacled." God, in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ came and "pitched His tent"...and dwelt among men so that man might dwell with Him forever!

This is a very, very brief account of the four feasts described in **Deuteronomy 16**. How I wish we had the time to cover the other feasts. But, in the time we have left, I want to very hurriedly bring to your attention today the Passover and tell you how it is celebrated **today** and has been for the past 2,000 years as opposed to how it was celebrated 3,500 years ago and why there is a huge difference.

Do you remember I told you I was going to ask questions about the account of the Passover Feast that we read in **Exodus**? Do you remember the three elements we read about? What were the three elements that were to be on the Passover table that first Passover night?

- 1) **a lamb**...it was the blood of the lamb that was applied to the doorpost and the lintel. It was the blood of the lamb that allowed the death angel to pass over their houses. The lamb was the focal point of the supper.
- 2) **unleavened bread**...
- 3) **bitter herbs**...

These were the only three elements God commanded.

But, let me tell you something very interesting. For the past 2,000 years the Jewish people have kept Passover differently.

They still have the bitter herbs. And these bitter herbs are usually in the form of horseradish and their purpose is to bring tears to their eyes as they eat it, to remind them of the grief and suffering their forefathers endured in Egypt.

They also have the unleavened bread, but it's different now and we'll see how in just a few minutes.

The third item...in fact the most important item at the first Passover...the lamb is missing. The lamb is not on the table...instead a roasted **shank bone** is on the table in place of the lamb.

Also, there is always a green vegetable...usually parsley...something to remind them of the season of the year. There is also a mixture of chopped nuts, chopped apples, raisins and honey. There is also a roasted egg and salty water. There are also three glasses of red wine...and another larger glass of wine called "the cup of Elijah."

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I wish we could cover all of these elements in detail. However, because of time, I want us to cover especially the shank bone and the unleavened bread.

By the way, every year a local Messianic Jewish congregation keeps the Passover and the public is invited. It is a wonderful dinner to attend. The pastor of their congregation goes through the Seder or Passover meal and explains all the elements and there is much joyous Jewish singing and Jewish dancing as well as a nice dinner served after the Seder supper is eaten.

Now, I want to go back and tell you something about the roasted shank bone. In **Matthew 23**, Jesus cried out to the Jewish people and said,

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that kills the prophets and stones them there were sent unto her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings and you were unwilling.

Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!

For I say unto you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the LORD!’”

Jesus said, ***“Your house shall be left unto you desolate.”*** There will be a spiritual vacuum that will come over the Jewish people during the period between Jesus’ ascension back into heaven and His coming again. **And this bone, if you think about it...symbolizes that spiritual vacuum.**

God said to the nation of Israel, according to **Exodus 12**, that at the first Passover there was to be a lamb that was taken by the whole household. And that lamb was to be eaten by every member of that house and the blood of that lamb was to be shed on the doorpost and the lintel of that house.

There is no longer any lamb. There is no shed blood. There is no temple. There is no tabernacle. There is no priesthood.

There is no way our Jewish friends can keep the Passover unless they recognize as Paul did and as our Messianic Jewish friends do that Christ is our Passover Lamb.

As long as the nation of Israel as a national entity refuses to come to the Person of Jesus Christ, the best that they have to offer is a shank bone...no Lamb...just a shank bone. And they will tell you today they have the bone to remind them of the lamb...but they will also tell you, “We no longer can have that sacrifice because we have no temple in Jerusalem. We have no priesthood.”

And so, they live today in the shadow of the truth...they live in a spiritual vacuum. **But, God still loves Israel and has never left her without an answer. And that’s what I want you to see next.**

Remember we said the **focal point** of the first Passover and all the Passovers celebrated until the temple was destroyed was the lamb? But, after that...the focal point shifted to the unleavened bread and a little drama that is played out at every Passover Feast.

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This little drama, they say, replaces the lamb. They don't know why...but they say that tradition says that what they are doing in this little drama replaces the lamb.

So, what is it they do? Simply this. At the very beginning of the Seder the father or the host who's in charge will have a silk sack with three compartments in it...or they might have an ornate tray with three divisions...

The father comes and very carefully, very meticulously will reach into the center compartment of this sack, making sure that he takes the center piece out...**not the top, not the bottom, not the first, not the third, but the center piece.** He will take the center piece and he will **break it in half.**

He will take one half of it and he will take linen cloth and he will wrap it in a linen cloth and after he wraps it in a linen cloth, he will take it and he will go somewhere in the house and he will hide it away.

Then they will go through the ceremony and at the end of eating the main meal, and after drinking three cups or three sips of **what must be red wine**, then the host or the father sends the children scampering off through the house to find the piece of unleavened bread wrapped in that linen cloth.

And if you were to ask the Jewish leaders... "Why rabbi, do we keep the Passover this way? Why do we enact this drama?" He would say, "*We don't know...tradition tells us to do it!*" If you were to ask, "How did it start?" He would say, "*We don't know, tradition tells us to do it!*"

If you were to ask, "What does it mean?" He would say, "*Well, the best we can tell you is that this bag or this ornate tray that is one unit made up of three compartments with three pieces of unleavened bread speaks of the unity of Israel with its three segments of people...*

- the priesthood...

- the Levites...

- the common Jewish people...

all united together as one family called the nation of Israel."

"Well, that sounds good! Nothing wrong with that! But, why do you take this center, middle piece and break it in half and wrap it in linen cloth and hide it away and after three glasses of red wine you find it, and when you find it everybody's joyous and everybody partakes of it? Why do you do this?" He would say, "*We don't know!*"

Folks, this isn't speaking of Israel as a unity in three segments, but rather it's talking about the triune God. **One true and living God!**

Jewish people have always been monotheistic and we as Bible-believing Christians are monotheistic. One true living God...the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...Jehovah Himself!

But, that one true living God throughout all the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the New Covenant which was written by Jewish people as well, point to the fact that God in His Person is

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three individual persons making one true living God...not three, one God made of three persons!
The Father. The Son. The Holy Spirit!

And this silk sack depicts the unity of God in the three persons of God! That's why it is the center piece, the second piece that must be pulled out. Why the center second piece? Because Jesus Christ is the center or the second Person of the Triune God!

It was Jesus and His disciples who also lived out the Passover as God had ordained it and during that time Jesus, the Messiah, instituted what we call the Lord's Supper, and He took the unleavened bread and He broke it and He said, ***"This bread is My body which is broken for you."***

And so the Jewish people take this piece, the middle piece, and they break it, depicting the death of our Lord, the Messiah, Jesus. And then it's taken and wrapped in linen cloth and hidden away!

What happened with the body of the Lord Jesus Christ? After the Lord shed His blood for our sins, His friends took His body down and wrapped it in linen cloths and they put it in a tomb...for how long? Three days!

Three days...pictured by the three glasses of red wine...and of course the rabbis don't know why the wine must be red, but we do! This wine symbolizes the blood of Jesus. And after three glasses, representing the three days He was hidden away in the tomb, then they go and find it with great joy!

Then, the father unwraps it as Jesus' body came out of the linen cloth! Then they break it into small pieces and everybody partakes of it. Jesus broke the bread into pieces and He said, ***"Here, take and eat...this is My body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me."***

Let me tell you one more interesting thing. For many Jewish people the other half that has been broken and not eaten is wrapped up in a linen cloth again and put on the shelf and when the next Passover comes they take it down and open it up.

They don't know why. But I'll tell you why. It's again looking forward to the coming of the Messiah the second time when He will come back to the earth. All of this is tradition! But the Jewish people keep it year in and year out and they know not what it speaks of!

Also there is the cup of Elijah...

At the very end of the Seder itself, when it's all finished and they've enjoyed the whole evening and they've gone through all of this religious ritual the father stands up and sends the youngest child to the front door, and he opens up the door and then the father prays the final prayer...praying for the prophet Elijah **to enter through that door...**

to come and drink this cup of Elijah...

to physically and personally appear and drink that last cup of wine.

The book of **Malachi** tells us that before the great and terrible day of the Lord the prophet Elijah will come. But, the Lord Jesus Christ told the Jewish people that if they had only accepted it...John the Baptist was Elijah, who was to come.

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So, they are preparing Elijah a cup...
they are opening the door for him to enter...
some even set a place for him at the table...
with an empty chair...

and Jesus said that if they had only accepted it John the Baptist was the prophet, Elijah...not Elijah reincarnated...but a man with the same mission and character and with the same spirit and power as Elijah.

But they did not accept it...and they're still looking for Elijah and their Messiah. How sad!

Let me just close with telling you how it is believed that all this came to be...**how many Hebrew Christians believe all this came about...**how all these other elements were added to the Jewish Passover table.

The first century Hebrew Christians desired to observe the ***Feast of Passover*** because God had commanded that they do this in the book of ***Exodus***, **even though they knew that this feast did nothing to atone for their sins. They knew the true Lamb of God had come and shed His blood once and for all for the Jewish people as well as for the whole world.**

The first century Hebrew Christians knew that the blood sacrifices were no longer effective, but out of tradition and respect for their forefathers and the Scriptures, they still desired to observe this feast. So, in their observance of this feast, **they shifted from shadows and signs and types to the true substance, the Person of Jesus.**

And it is believed that the first century Hebrew Christians **set this up to commemorate the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and looking forward to His second coming back to the earth.**

In A.D. 70 when the Jewish people were dispersed all over the world, and General Titus came with the Roman army and destroyed Jerusalem and sacked the Temple and the Jewish people were dispersed, they could no longer keep their Passover the way it was given in ***Exodus 12***.

When they were dispersed they were rubbing shoulders with Jewish believers who were also dispersed because they were Jews. And wherever they went, the Jewish people who were not Christians could not keep the Passover any longer, but remember, ***Exodus 12:14*** said, ***"You are to keep it throughout all your generations as a memorial unto Me."***

But they couldn't keep it anymore. But all of a sudden, they saw their counterparts, the Jewish believers in Jesus, the promised Messiah, still keeping the Passover. They were able to keep the Passover, because they didn't need a Temple and they didn't need a priesthood. Jesus, once and for all accomplished it two thousand years ago.

So, they, the Jewish people who did not know Jesus as their Messiah, seeing this way of keeping the Passover, having no other way to keep the Passover, also started to keep it...it's better than none at all.

And for two thousand years it's been handed down as tradition from Jewish family to Jewish family, so that our Jewish people today don't even know where and how it got started...but it is believed that it began by first century Jewish believers in Jesus as their Messiah, those first century Hebrew Christians that knew only too well that they were not to look for the first coming of their Redeemer.

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They were looking back to His already having come and paying the price for them once for all and looking forward to His second coming to be that King of kings and Lord of lords upon the face of the earth.

Well, what is the lesson for us today? Above all else, we need to remember again that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lamb who came to take away the sin of the world. We need to remember that the blood He shed on the Cross was sufficient to wash us white as snow. We need to examine ourselves to see if we be in the faith. Have we been washed in the blood of the Lamb?

I believe a second lesson in this for us today is that God still loves Israel! He loves her so much that He has given the Jewish people a way to see the Lord Jesus and what He did at the Cross played out before their eyes at least once a year.

I don't know if you have Jewish friends. My husband and I have a wonderful Jewish friend. He is a precious man and we have feebly attempted to witness to him. How I pray that one day, God will open the door for us to perhaps tell him a little about what we have learned today about the **Feast of Passover** as observed by Jews today.

We should pray for our Jewish friends. We should pray for the peace of Jerusalem. We should extend the hand of Christian love and friendship to God's chosen people every chance we get, whether it's reciprocated or not!