

Into the Promised Land - Joshua's Story

Lesson #31“ - Law & Justice & Celebration”

[Chapters 15 and 16 of Deuteronomy]

•HANDOUT•

► This study opens with Chapter 15 and the laws and principles regarding the loaning of money, especially how it affects the poor. We will find that the issue of debt and one's relationship to money in our culture is quite different than what the Lord is commanding in this passage. In fact, Moses makes a strong connection between Israel's financial health and their willingness to fully obey the Lord.

Too bad we can't get our political leaders to take this passage of scripture seriously.

Deuteronomy 15:1-6 • At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts. This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel the loan he has made to his fellow Israelite. He shall not require payment from his fellow Israelite or brother, because the LORD's time for canceling debts has been proclaimed.

You may require payment from a foreigner, but you must cancel any debt your brother owes you.

However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today.

For the LORD your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you.

Q: God was establishing what kind of economic system in Israel?

Deuteronomy 15:7-11 • If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs.

Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward your needy brother and give him nothing. He may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.

There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

Q: In Verse 4, God had said He was setting up this system so there wouldn't be the chronically poor in Israel. Now in verse 11, it says "there will always be poor people in the land." Is God contradicting Himself?

Moving from Principles of Debts to the issue of Slaves ...

Deuteronomy 15:12-18 • If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.

But if your servant says to you, "I do not want to leave you," because he loves you and your family and is well off with you, then take an awl and push it through his ear lobe into the door, and he will become your servant for life. Do the same for your maidservant.

Do not consider it a hardship to set your servant free, because his service to you these six years has been worth twice as much as that of a hired hand. And the LORD your God will bless you in everything you do.

Q: Why would a Hebrew sell himself into slavery?

Q: What allowance was made if a Hebrew slave didn't want to be set free after the seventh year?

► The chapter ends with the “Law of the Firstborn.”

► Every firstborn male from everyone's flock was to be set apart to the Lord. It was not to be worked as the other animals were used or worked – it was not even to be sheared. Instead it was to be brought to the tabernacle [and later, the temple] and given to the priests for sacrifice unto the Lord. A portion of the sacrificed animal went to the family who brought the animal. Thus they took part in what was a joyful ceremonial meal before the Lord.

Should the firstborn male have a defect, the animal was given to the priests, but not sacrificed to the Lord. Instead, it was sold and the money was given to the Lord.

Q: What three things did the “Law of the Firstborn” represent to Israel?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Chapter 16 • The Three Annual Major Feasts:

All Israelite men were obligated to appear before the Lord for all three annual festivals.

Each was to bring a contribution proportionate to the Lord's blessing on his labor.

► The first of the three Feasts is the observance of the Passover.

Passover celebrates the 10th plague against Egypt, when the Angel of Death claimed all the lives of the firstborn males in Egypt, both human and animals, but “passed over” the Hebrew houses that had blood of the “Passover Lamb” smeared on the doorpost. This is the same night the Lord led Israel out of Egypt.

Even though each family sacrificed the Passover lamb at their home on the first Passover, once Israel was dwelling in the Promised Land they were to sacrifice at the tabernacle [and later, at the temple.]

God instructed Passover to be celebrated in the month of Abib, because that is the month of the Exodus. [Abib falls between March & April on our Gregorian calendar. After Judah returned from the 70 year Babylonian captivity, the month's name “Abib” was changed to “Nisan” (ref: Nehemiah 2:1)].

As part of the Passover celebration, Israel was to eat unleavened bread for six days. This was to remind them that they were to remember all the days of their lives the day when they came out of Egypt. Although consuming the unleavened bread was a practical necessity at the Exodus, leaven became a picture of sin and the unleavened bread represented God's redemption and His call to His people to walk pure before Him. On the seventh day of eating the unleavened bread, they were to gather together in a sacred assembly to worship the Lord, together. On that day, no work was to be done.

Q: What does the Passover represent to Christians today?

► The second of the three is the observance of the Feast of Weeks – which is Pentecost.

The Feast of Weeks [Pentecost] was a feast associated with the joy of harvest. This was the time when Israelites brought a freewill offering to the Lord as a demonstration of their thanks for His Redemption. The Lord began this section of scripture with: “You shall rejoice and you shall remember.”

Q: Why should Israel rejoice, and what were they to remember?

Q: How does the celebration “Feast of Weeks” relate to the Christian Church?

► The third of the Observances is the Feast of Tabernacles.

► The Feast of Tabernacles was also referred to as the Feast of Ingathering and it was also called the Feast of Booths [Sukkot]. It was to be celebrated in the month of Tishri [Sept./October] seven days after the processing of the grain at the threshing floor and the grapes in the wine-press. It was a time of rejoicing for God's deliverance and provision for Israel during the wilderness wandering was celebrated. It was a seven-day feast where everyone was urged to be joyful and it ended with an Assembly.

Q: If this was a feast to celebrate the harvest, why was it also referred to as the Feast of Booths?

Moses switches to a new Subject: “Israel's Judicial System”

This is introduced here to show the changes that will need to take place in the Land. This will move them from a single authority representing God to a system where judges would be appointed to act as magistrates for every town the Lord was about to give them . . .

Deuteronomy 16:18-20 • Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly. Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Q: Were these “judges” and “officials” like those described in the Book of Judges?

Once Again, Moses switches subjects by warning the people, once again, against idolatry. The concluding thoughts of Chapter 16 are connected to the admonishments in Chapter 17, which is why we will study them as a unit. This is where we will begin the study next time.



Next Time • Lesson #32
“Spiritual Justice for Israel”

