

Deuteronomy 16:9-17

Dr. Steven R. Cook

“You shall count seven weeks for yourself; you shall begin to count seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain.”¹⁰ “Then you shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give just as the LORD your God blesses you [the freewill offering was in proportion to the blessing];¹¹ and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst [everyone participates; cf. [Deut 12:7, 12, 18; 14:29](#)], in the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name. [requiring a pilgrimage to a central place]¹² “You shall remember [זָכַר *zakar* – remember, recall to mind; cf. [Deut 5:15; 15:15; 24:18, 22](#)] that you were a slave in Egypt [Moses mentions Egypt 49 times in Deuteronomy], and you shall be careful to observe these statutes [statutes = written laws].¹³ “You shall celebrate the Feast of Booths [בִּטּוּחַ *sukkah* - tabernacles, shelters, huts; cf. [Lev 23:42-43](#)] seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat;¹⁴ and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns [everyone participates; cf. [Deut 12:7, 12, 18; 14:29](#)].¹⁵ “Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses [requiring a pilgrimage to a central place], because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands [God keeps His word], so that you will be altogether joyful.¹⁶ “Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses [to give homage], at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths, and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.¹⁷ “Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.” [the gift to God was to be in proportion to the blessing; cf. [2 Cor 9:7](#)]

Observations:

Moses had previously directed Israel to observe the annual feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread, both of which commemorated Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Deut 16:1-8). In this pericope, Moses instructs them to observe the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths (Deut 16:9-17).

Moses opens, saying, “You shall count seven weeks for yourself; you shall begin to count seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain” (Deut 16:9). It was the responsibility of the Israelites to begin counting from the time they began to harvest the grain, and they were to count forward seven weeks. This would have

corresponded to the time when they harvested grain in March-April. Thus, the Feast of Weeks would have occurred in late May or early June, depending on when the harvesting began. Jack Deere states, “It was also known as the ‘Feast of Harvest’ (Ex 23:16) and the ‘day of firstfruits’ (Num 28:26). Later it was given the title ‘Pentecost’ based on the Septuagint’s translation of the ‘50 days’ (Lev 23:16).”¹ Peter Craigie writes:

The dating of the feast is given in relative and imprecise terms in this context; seven weeks (hence the title of the feast, “Weeks”) were counted from the beginning of the harvest of grain. In Lev 23:15-16, the date is more explicitly defined as being fifty days (seven weeks, the fiftieth day being the day of the festival) after the offering of a sheaf at the beginning of Passover.²

On the fiftieth day following the beginning of the grain harvest, Moses instructs, “Then you shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give just as the LORD your God blesses you” (Deut 16:10). This was to be a time of celebration to the Lord in which Israelites brought a “freewill offering” in proportion to the Lord’s blessing. Jack Deere writes:

The Feast of Weeks was a celebration of God’s rich provision for His people. Therefore, each freewill (voluntary) offering was to be in proportion to one’s blessings from the Lord (cf. v. 17; 15:14). Paul may have had this standard of giving in mind for Christians rather than a system of tithing when he directed the Corinthian Christians to give as each one “may prosper” (1 Cor 16:2).³

And this celebration was to include the residents of a household as well the less fortunate within the community. Moses states, “and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, in the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name” (Deut 16:11). The word *rejoice* translates the Hebrew verb שמח *samach*, which means to *be joyful* or *be glad*. God desired His people rejoice, and this time of happiness was connected with the nation’s feasts and worship (Deut 12:7; 14:26; 26:10-11; 27:7), and was to be shared with family and others in the community. This rejoicing was good for

¹ Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 292.

² Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 245.

³ Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 292.

the soul, “for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh 8:10).⁴ The festival was tied to the tangible goodness of the Lord who had blessed them with food for another year.

It was during this time of celebration and joy that Israel was to remember their past experience as slaves in Egypt. Moses states, “You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes” (Deut 16:12). The word *remember* translates the Hebrew verb זָכַר *zakar*, which means *to remember*, to *call to mind*, which Moses tells them to do on several occasions (Deut 5:15; 15:15; 24:18, 22). God’s people were commanded to remember their past servitude in Egypt, and that memory was to have a direct influence on how they understood God’s goodness toward them. God loved them, liberated them, and pulled them out of Egypt with much wealth so they could begin as a new nation (Ex 12:35-36). Moses mentions Egypt 49 times in the book of Deuteronomy. Eugene Merrill states:

The focus of the festival was a joyous meal in celebration of the bountiful blessing of God in providing crops of grain. All the members of the community, regardless of their social or economic status, were invited to participate in the festivities. The most disadvantaged among them were, in fact, especially to be welcomed, for Israel must remember their own bondage in Egypt and how the Lord had freed them so that now they could enjoy such blessings (v. 12). The sign of that divine favor was the produce itself, a portion of which must be presented to the Lord and to his needy people. The amount to be offered should be in proportion to the abundance with which God had blessed in every case.⁵

Next, Moses set forth a third festival which was intended to help them remember their time after they came out of Egypt. Moses said, “You shall celebrate the Feast of Booths seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat;¹⁴ and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns” (Deut 16:13-14). The Feast of Booths (הֶסֶךְ *sukkah* – *hut, shelter*) was also known as the Feast of Tabernacles and was an autumn festival that took place in the month of Tishri, which corresponded to September-October. The tabernacles were basically huts constructed of tree branches and foliage, and the Israelites were to live in these temporary structures for seven days. Leviticus makes clear this was to be practiced by all subsequent generations of Israelites as long as the Mosaic Law was in effect (Lev 23:39-43). This annual practice of living in temporary shelters for seven days following God’s harvest-

⁴ This time of rejoicing did not rule out times of grief or mourning, which are common expressions when one experiences the death of a loved one (Gen 23:2; 1 Ki 13:29; Eccl 3:4).

⁵ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 254.

blessing would help to keep His people humble, and would cement their connection with their ancestors who lived in similar shelters after they came out of Egypt and lived in the wilderness (Lev 23:43). But it was also to be a time of celebration, as God would bless their labor with a plentiful harvest that would provide their nutritional needs for the coming year.

Moses went on to say, “Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful” (Deut 16:15). God promised to continually bless His people’s labor from year to year, but they had to be faithful to follow His directives concerning these annual festivals. And this festival was to take place at the location of God’s choosing. First, this was at the tabernacle and later at the temple.

Summarizing these three annual festivals, Moses states, “Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths, and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed” (Deut 16:16). God called the men of Israel to take responsibility for their families and communities and to gather together three times a year to celebrate God’s goodness, remembering their time of slavery in Egypt, and the Lord’s deliverance. And they were to come with hands full of harvest-blessings, which gatherings and contributions constituted an ongoing pledge of loyalty to the Lord, recognizing Him as their Liberator and Blessor. And the gifts were to be in proportion to the blessing, as Moses said, “Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you” (Deut 16:17). God was going to bless their labor from year to year, and He required they acknowledge and celebrate His goodness with these three annual festivals.

Present Application:

As the Church, there is similarity between God’s deliverance of Israel and Christians. Like Israel, we should remember we were once enslaved in a kingdom, the kingdom of darkness over which Satan rules (Acts 26:18; Col 1:13; cf., John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor 4:4; 1 John 5:19), and were helpless to liberate ourselves (Rom 5:6). But God desired our freedom from Satan’s domain, and He sent His Son into the world to be our Liberator. As a human, Jesus was born without sin (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 John 3:5), which meant He was born free. Furthermore, He maintained His freedom from Satan’s domain by living righteously in the Father’s will (Matt 5:17-18; Heb 10:5-9). Finally, Jesus willingly went to the cross and died in our place (John 3:16-17; 10:14-18). Jesus said, “For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). He willingly shed His blood on the cross as payment for our sin-debt. Jesus

purchased our freedom. As Christians, we “have been bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:20a; cf., 1 Cor 7:23a), and the payment of our sin-debt was not “with perishable things like silver or gold...but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:18-19). Through the work of Christ, God has disrupted Satan’s domain of darkness, and having “disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him [Christ]” (Col 2:15). Our freedom came when we responded positively to the message of the cross, believing “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4). Having trusted in Christ as Savior, God “rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13-14). And now we are “children of God” (John 1:12), brothers and sisters to the King of kings and Lord of lords, and as such, are directed “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Eph 4:1). And we look forward to future rewards for our life of faithfulness (2 Cor 5:9-10; 2 John 1:8), knowing we do our work “for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve” (Col 3:23-24).

Unlike Israel, the church does not have obligatory holidays (i.e., Resurrection Sunday or Christmas). However, we are directed to gather together as believers, “not forsaking our assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Heb 10:25). When the early church met, they were “continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). It was also a time of giving to support ministry and others in need (2 Cor 9:6-7, 12). As Christians we are directed to do “all things without complaining or arguing” (Phil 2:14). Rather, we are to “always give thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father” (Eph 5:20), and to “Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; and in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Th 5:16-18). And when we gather, we are to “continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb 13:15-16).