

Deuteronomy 16:16-17

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The celebrations of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths every year at the central sanctuary are summarized.

The Israelites are to bring an offering to the Suzerain God during these celebrations to acknowledge that He is the ultimate source of their blessings.

Verses 16 – 17 summarize the three annual pilgrim festivals described earlier in this chapter. Moses told the people that *three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses.*

Moses made it completely clear that all the Israelite males were required to attend these festivals. Males were required to be at these three festivals, but females were welcome and even encouraged to attend also ([Deuteronomy 16:11, 14](#)).

Moses then listed the three feasts: *the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths*. The first annual feast was the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, a seven-day festival that begins on the fifteenth day of the first month ([Deuteronomy 16:2 – 9](#); [Leviticus 23:6](#); [Numbers 23:17](#)). It combined the Passover sacrifice with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The second annual festival was the *Feast of Weeks*, a festival that celebrated the grain harvest (vv. 9-12). It was celebrated fifty days after the Passover/Unleavened Bread celebration. The third annual festival was the *Feast of Booths*, which was celebrated during the fall harvest, after the gathering of new wine and grain into storage.

Moses then emphasized that fact that no one was allowed to *appear before the LORD empty-handed*. That is, they were to give back a portion of what the Suzerain (Ruler) LORD had given them. The LORD had prospered them, and it was an act of thanksgiving (acknowledgement) to return a portion to Him. In general, the sacrifices offered went to support the celebration, and was consumed by those attending the festival, or they went to support the livelihood of the priests and Levites, who attended the tabernacle worship.

Moses told them the nature of the offering—that *every man shall give as he is able*. The offering at these feasts was not subject to the ten percent rule, the tithe requirement. Two tithe (tenth) requirements are mentioned in [Deuteronomy 14:22-29](#). The first tithe was yearly and could be made of

produce, cattle, or flock animals. That tenth must be consumed within the walls of the place God chooses. The next tithe occurred at the end of every 3 years and was called the Poor Tithe. It would be dispersed among the Levites, orphans, widows, and the fatherless. This offering was over and above the tithe, and was to be based on each Israelite giving *as he is able*.

Each person was to give *according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you*. They were to offer to Him what was possible without it being a burden. The LORD is the one who blesses His people, and He does so according to His own will. Some people have more, some have less. Each person is to decide in their heart their level of generosity. This principle carried over to the New Testament. For example, Paul quotes several Old Testament passages regarding giving, and tells the believers in Corinth that God loves a cheerful giver ([2 Corinthians 8:12-15](#); [9:6-8](#)).

This requirement to appear before the Suzerain God periodically with an *offering* is similar to the ancient Near Eastern treaties, particularly the Hittite treaty, with which the book of Deuteronomy shares many common features. In some Hittite treaty documents, the vassal (or lesser) king was required to travel periodically to the suzerain (the ruler or the greater) king in order to reaffirm his loyalty. This included paying his annual tribute. In Deuteronomy, the vassal is not a king, but an entire nation named "Israel." The suzerain (ruler) is Yahweh, the one who chose His own vassals (Israel) to be in a covenant relationship with Him.

Thus, Yahweh required Israel to appear before Him three times a year at the central sanctuary. There, they would fellowship with the Suzerain God and would thank Him for all His provisions in anticipation of the coming year. Unlike a human suzerain, who would accumulate the tribute, or use it to expand his power, the Suzerain God had no such need. Rather, the tribute God expected was used to support a festival for the people to enjoy with one another, and to support those who tended worship. The Suzerain God's desire was for the people to worship Him only, and the chief exercise of that worship was to love their neighbors as themselves. These annual festivals and the "tribute" Yahweh required are directly connected to these two primary aims.

Biblical Text:

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Every man shall give as he is

able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you.