

Sermon Summary: God's Calendar for God's People

Leviticus 23:1-3, 9-25 and 33-44

Overview

Leviticus 23 establishes a calendar of sacred gatherings, work, rest and celebration for Israel. These appointed feasts taught God's people to remember his rescue and provision, worship together and live in healthy rhythms. Although Christians are not required to keep the Old Testament festivals, each points to Jesus Christ, in whom their deepest meaning is fulfilled.

1. Why We Need Rhythms of Rest and Celebration

Modern life has weakened the natural rhythms of work, rest and community celebration. Technology keeps us constantly available, while even our leisure can become another stream of information. We struggle to be still. Israel's calendar deliberately made space for worship, rest, remembering and rejoicing.

2. The Sabbath: A Pattern for the Feasts

The weekly Sabbath was a day without ordinary work and a day of sacred assembly. It established the pattern shared by the festivals: time set apart to rest and worship the Lord. These were genuinely 'holy days', not merely opportunities for a break.

3. Israel's Appointed Feasts

Sabbath: Weekly rest and worship, reminding Israel that life is not only about work.

Passover: Remembered God's rescue from Egypt, when the blood of the lamb marked the homes spared from judgment.

Unleavened Bread: Remembered Israel's hurried departure from Egypt, when there was no time for bread to rise.

Firstfruits: Offered the beginning of the harvest to God, acknowledging his provision and anticipating more to come.

Weeks (Pentecost): Celebrated the harvest fifty days after Firstfruits, thanking God for what he had supplied.

Trumpets: Announced the seventh month, a particularly sacred season in Israel's calendar.

Day of Atonement: The annual occasion when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place and atonement was made for the people.

Tabernacles: A joyful week of living in temporary shelters, recalling how God sustained Israel in the wilderness, including his provision of food and water.

4. The Festivals Find Their Fulfilment in Christ

Paul describes the festivals and Sabbaths as shadows whose reality is Christ (Colossians 2). Christians do not need to recreate the old calendar to possess what it pointed towards. Lenny traced the ways the festivals reveal Jesus:

Sabbath: Jesus gives true rest from the burden of trying to earn acceptance with God. We rest in his completed work and look forward to final rest.

Passover: Jesus is the Passover Lamb. His sacrificial death protects his people from judgment; John draws attention to his unbroken bones, echoing the Passover instructions.

Unleavened Bread: Jesus is the bread of life, the true bread from heaven who gives life that lasts.

Firstfruits: Christ's resurrection is the firstfruits of the future resurrection of all who belong to him. His victory promises a greater harvest of life.

Pentecost: The Spirit came upon the disciples at the Feast of Weeks, and about 3,000 people were added to the church. The harvest celebration becomes a picture of the gospel harvest.

Trumpets: The trumpet points forward to Christ's return, when his people will be gathered to him. Lenny described this fulfilment as still future.

Day of Atonement: The sacrifices anticipate the atonement accomplished through Jesus; this had been addressed in an earlier sermon.

Tabernacles: As water was poured out in remembrance of God's wilderness provision, Jesus invited the thirsty to come to him for living water.

5. Three Ways to Respond

Stop and rest. Build genuine quiet into life. Step away not only from work but also from constant media and activity. Make room for prayer, Scripture, silence and unhurried time with God.

Remember. The festivals recalled what God had already done, rather than trying to earn his favour. The Lord's Supper is a central Christian act of remembrance. Deliberately mark and recall God's faithfulness.

Rejoice. God's people have reasons to celebrate together. Rejoice in his goodness to others as well as to yourself. We can afford to have a lower threshold for a celebration because we have Christ, the reality to which the feasts pointed.

Big Idea

God gave Israel a rhythm of rest, remembrance and rejoicing, and every feast points to Jesus Christ. Because we have the fulfilment rather than the shadow, we can rest in his finished work, remember his saving goodness and celebrate the life he gives.