

1. It's a Calendar!

(P) Who owns a Calendar/Diary and uses it? Our lives are filled with important dates. Our diaries or calendars tell us when they're on. Whether it's things like Easter, or Christmas, or the queen's birthday, All Soul's day, ANZAC day. Not all of these events are days off work,— but most of the time there is some kind of Remembrance or celebration, so we celebrate things like Australia day, or remember Armistice day. Generally these celebration days are done together as a whole community. Why are we talking about the calendar and events throughout the year?

(P) Well in today's passage what we see is God's calendar for the Israelites. It doesn't go into full detail for what needs to occur on these important days, if you see verse 2 The Lord said to Moses - speak to the Israelites and say this to them – these words are going to the whole community, it's going to the congregation of Israel – not just to the priests. So it's like a church calendar to stick on your fridge – God is saying to his people - here are all the important dates within the year in which I want you to assemble together- and when you do this – this will set you apart, it will be a holy assembly.

So today we're going to quickly look at the 7 different feasts and look at what they were all about, what did it mean for the Israelites, and finally look at what it means for us today.

2. Sabbath

Well what are these appointed feasts?

Well, God starts off by saying there are 6 days where you may work, but the seventh day is to be a Sabbath day, it was to be a stop day. That's what Sabbath means – to cease, to stop. This stop day was to happen once a week. It's first in our list because this was a weekly event, whereas every other feast was done once a year.

What was the purpose of the Sabbath? Keeping the Sabbath day is a part of God's 10 commandments and I think there are four things that we learn about the Sabbath day from the Old Testament and what it was all about:-

- It gave them rest – they stopped work, rested their bodies physically, but it wasn't a day in which they could do whatever they wanted - it gave them time to rest with God – to focus on him – after all it was the Lord's Sabbath. What were they to focus on?
- It reminded them that they were in a special relationship with God and that it is God who makes them holy, they were God's people – Ex 31:12
- In Exodus 20 – the Sabbath day is to remind them that God the creator of the world stopped working on the 7th day after his 6 days of working.
- In Deut 5 – they were to remember that God is the one who rescued them from slavery in Egypt.

So that was the first thing we see. They were to have a weekly Sabbath.

3. The Festivals

Then we get to the list of feasts or Festivals,

So let's begin and see what these festivals meant for the Israelites.

The First two are the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread.

In the first month - Passover is on the 14th, and the Feast of unleavened bread on the 15th. They follow right one after the other.

Now these feasts are linked closely together in the calendar and in history. Both of these festivals look back to the moment when the one true and living God rescued the Israelites, his people out from Slavery in Egypt.

The Israelites to spread the blood of a Lamb on the door frame of their house, so that as the angel of the Lord passed through Egypt, it would pass over their house. That was the Passover feast and the unleavened bread that they had to eat for a week was to remember how quickly they left Egypt. God says I want you to remember that I rescued you, and of how suddenly they had to leave Egypt.

The next two feasts are the First fruits and the feast of weeks.

This time the feasts are linked not because they are celebrated the day after the other, but it's because they are both connected to the harvest time. So the day of Firstfruits was the day when the Israelites would be ready to harvest their crop. Now what do you do with that first bit of grain you harvest - you don't use it for yourself, or give it to your animals, what you do with it is that you take it the house of God and you offer it to the Lord as a wave offering. What the Israelites are supposed to be saying with these actions is this (pause) Lord we know all things come from you, it was to say that they were thankful for all the God has provided for them.

I myself have not done any harvesting, but I've been told that it's the busiest time of the year for farmers and it can be crazy. During harvest time – you are working as hard as you can. At the end of harvest time, which God said it was to be 50 days, you then had to go back to the tent of meeting and you were to present an offering of new grain. This was called the Feast of weeks or sometimes known as Pentecost(meaning 50th day). They were to bring an offering but this time it was two loaves of bread with yeast in it and many other offerings were to be made as well. Again, this was a time for the Israelites to express their thankfulness and gratitude to for everything that he had provided for them. Verses 22 also show that it was required for the Israelites to be generous with what God had provided for them and to leave some of their harvest for the poor and non israelites.

Then At the end of verse 22, we have a phrase that says I am the Lord your God – God reminding the Israelites again of their special relationship, and it also conveniently breaks up our festivals. Why are these four festivals lumped together –it is because they are all spring time festivals. It's part of one season in their calendar.

Well, What happens next, we've got 3 more feasts to go?

Illustration

I lived in Malaysia for the first 7 years of my life, and for every day that I could remember living there – we heard the Muslim call to prayer every morning at dawn, and a few more times throughout the day. For Muslims this is a call for them to prepare themselves for prayer.

If you can imagine this – for the Israelites ON the first day of the seventh month –a trumpet call resounded over their land! This was the feast of trumpets. Now we don't get told much about this feast in this chapter, but It's another day where the Israelites were to stop working and spend time

making offerings to God. Now the blowing of trumpets was to remind the Israelites that the day of atonement was coming. It was time for them to stop, to focus again on God, and to prepare themselves for the day of atonement.

So, 10 days after the blast of the trumpets, comes the day of atonement-verse 26, - We've seen that the atonement is right at the heart of book of Leviticus – It's the day of the year when God symbolically cleanses the sin of his people so that they could remain in his presence and continue to have a relationship with him. As Ben shared with us in his sermon – sin is serious stuff and so the atmosphere on this day was more of a solemn day rather than a celebration, it was more of a fast than a feast – it was a day of sorrow as the people repented from their sins. Although, there was hope as they also remember that God is cleansing them from their sin.

Well we have one more feast to go, and that is the feast of tabernacle, on the 15th day of the 7th month the feast of tabernacles was to begin and it lasted for 7 days. Instead of living in your house, you were to build a tent to live in – made out of leafy branches. And what were they to do? They were to Celebrate and Rejoice. They lived in the tents to remember that God rescued them from slavery in Egypt, and that the Israelites were not fixed in one place, but were moving from place to place. This celebration was massive and incredibly extravagant. The book of Numbers tells of the massive amount of offerings each day that was to happen. This feast was to Celebrate God's goodness and to rejoice in it.

There we have the festivals – the Israelites festive calendar for the year.

What's the point of all this? What's the significance of this? but why were they to do all these rituals? IS it just ritual that they were to go through? No! These feasts and rests were always

supposed to be expressive of what goes on in your heart and minds. It was supposed to be a response to the relationship that the living God has with you.

Well as we look at these feasts and celebrations chapter I think we are to see three main things...

The first is that the Israelites were to :

1. **Remember that God rescued them** –it was a day that you were to stop and remember that God rescued them from slavery in Egypt, remember how quickly they had to leave, remember how God has brought them back into relationship with him.
2. **REST** - As God created the world, he worked for 6 days, saw it was very good, and then rested on the 7th day. God created us to not just be workers. We weren't made to work 7 days a week. We were made to have a relationship with God. The Israelites were to rest, not just for the sake of their bodies, but so that they can stop work and focus on the relationship they have with God. The third thing that I think the purpose all these festivals for the Israelites was for them to
3. **Rejoice** in all the good things that God had given to them – When the Israelites were wandering around in the desert, they had to depend upon God to provide everything for them, and he did. He gave them food and water in the desert – more than they needed. The Israelites were to rejoice because God is abundantly giving everything that they need. So in these celebrations there is rejoicing. There is celebration as they remember God rescuing them, God providing for them, and for bringing them into relationship with him. That was what the Israelites were to be As they were being involved in these feasts.

4. What about Now?

How can we make sense of these feasts? What do we do with this chapter?

The first thing to say is we are not obligated to follow these laws in chapter 23.

Col 2:16-17. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.¹

All these festivals that the Israelites celebrated were looking backwards to what God has done, , but what Paul is saying here is that all these festivals, they actually point to Christ – he is the reality of all these festivals. SO we no longer have to follow these feasts, because Jesus has fulfilled them all.

1 Corinthians 5:7-8

⁷ Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.⁸ Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.²

Jesus fulfills the Passover and unleavened feast.

What about the Festival of booths – where are people are reminded that God provides for them?

Well Jesus says to us – If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’³ Jesus is the person that we go to – he is the one person that will satisfy our every need.

¹ *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Col 2:16–17.

² *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Co 5:6–8.

³ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Leviticus: Holy God, Holy People* (Preaching the Word; Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 208.

Can you see how Jesus fulfills these feasts?

So what do these festivals help us with? Well I think the New Testament brings up these same points that we find in our chapter today:-

We are to remember Christ and what he has done for us.

We have events in our church calendar today to help us remember- days like Christmas and Easter, and holy communion – We gather together, we stop work, and we should focus on our relationship with God.

The second thing is We are to REST –

Now we are to REST in two ways...

The first one is that we are to enter into God's eternal REST – God promises his people a place where you can receive eternal rest. A place for all those who believe in Christ. A place where there will be no more pain, no more wars, no more tears. Have you entered into that eternal REST? As Hebrews says, Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.⁴ Jesus said – Come to me all who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest.

The second type of REST is the here and now. What do we do as we wait for Jesus to return?

Well, although it's not a law that we need to follow, I think it is good wisdom from God to STOP. We have such busy lives don't we? I think my average answer to how am I going is – I've been busy. We see in society the bad effects of being busy and overworked. If you're too busy you burn out, and become overstressed, you become sick more easily, you're no longer

⁴ *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Heb 4:11.

efficient in how you work. I think there is great wisdom in STOPPING from your normal work and resting, give your chance a body to rest.

I personally find this really hard to do- there are always so many things to get done – but God wants us to stop, our stopping says – Lord I trust you I trust that everything will go as you have planned, I've done my 6 days of work, But it's not just resting for yourself – our REST is to focus and reflect on our relationship with God, to spend time engaging with God - whether it's reading our bible, praying, having fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. I know I need to STOP more and think about how I live life. I don't want people to see me and think the point to life is working – No the point of our life is having a relationship with God – do our families, do our work colleagues, do our friends – see that the important thing in our life is our relationship with God?

The third is to REJOICE in Christ

We are good at grumbling aren't we? It's raining, we grumble about being wet, it's hot and we grumble about it being too hot and there's no rain, The Israelites – although God had rescued them from slavery, and provided everything for them – they still grumbled in the desert. We are very good at grumbling – and yes life is hard, and life is difficult and sometimes all that we can see are thunderstorms and darkness – but we are asked by God to remember that he is Lord over all things. We can rejoice in Christ, even though we have tears running down our face. We can REJOICE because Jesus is returning and that will be a day when everything will be put right, God will be just in his judgement on everyone and everything, and there will be no more tears, no more pain. We can rejoice in Jesus because we have eternal life. God says to be thankful in all circumstances. We have been given a great many of things here in

Sydney. For us to have a home with more than one room – we can be thankful. For us to be able to walk outside with freedom and not be scared for our life – we can be thankful and Rejoice. For us to be able to have a meal at least three times a day – we can be thankful. For us to have fresh clean water, we can be thankful. We have so much that we can be thankful for, and as paul writes in colossians – whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

So, we don't have to follow any of these laws that are found in Leviticus – However, it does teach us that we are to Remember Christ and what God has done for us, We can REST in Christ –Stop and know he is God, and we are to Rejoice in Christ because of what has been done for us.

Today I want us to think about How you can Remember, Rest and Rejoice?

AMEN