

Calendars and Christ

Leviticus 23:1-25:55

Introduction

Monuments and Holidays: Love **monuments** (e.g., walking DC). It matters what we memorialize because we memorialize what we value (literally lift up). 9/11 #neverforget (we're prone to forget). What we memorialize matters (hence Civil War monuments). **We use monuments and memorials to tether our lives to the past provision of God** (in Bible). We not only use monuments, we use **holidays** (lit. holy days). Holidays help us remember and direct our hearts toward what we value.

- US Federal Holidays (10): **New Year's Day** (1/1), **MLK** (3rd Mon Jan), **Washington's Birthday** (3rd Mon Feb), **Memorial Day** (Last Mon May), **Juneteenth** (6/19), **Independence Day** (7/4), **Labor Day** (1st Mon Sep), **Columbus Day** (2nd Mon Oct), **Veterans' Day** (11/11), **Thanksgiving** (4th Thurs Nov), **Christmas** (12/25).

Lord of My Calendar: These holidays intrude on your calendar (e.g., trash collection, day off, mail, bank, etc.), *forcing* you to contemplate their meaning by interrupting your life.

- We've seen this in the journey to Sinai (Ex 23) and now we see it more fully in Leviticus.
¹ The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, These are the appointed feasts of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts (Lev 23:1-2).
 - He is building a nation, teaching them his character, and leading them from slavery through the wilderness to the promised land.

Shaping My Love: How does God disciple our hearts? Head (thinking), hands (doing), hearts (loving). It's impossible to love what you don't know, but knowing isn't the end. God calls us to "love" him.¹ We are ultimately and usually led less by what we know and more by what we love (we are desire-ers more than think-ers).² **God uses rhythm, liturgy, calendars, and schedules not only to guide us on his path but to shape us in his ways.**

- "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt 6:21).
- (1) What we invest in (time and money) **reveals** what we value.
 - Checkbook and calendar. It is quite easy to tell what someone values by how they spend their money and their time (e.g., amazingly odd to skip gathered worship on Christmas for something else, even something good; you're just telling on yourself; I value human family more than faith family). **We are not canceling church for football, even the Superbowl.**
- (2) What we invest in (time and money) **elevates** (or creates) value.
 - When you spend a lot of time on something, you start to *care* about it more and more (e.g., slow DIY; fireplace).

¹ Matt 22:37 (Great Commandment)

² James K. A. Smith

- If you **know (head)** that Jesus is important, and you want to **love (heart)** him more, then you need to show up in your actions, **do (hands)**, daily, weekly, annually, etc.
- (3) What we invest our time in **shapes** our character.
 - Our routines mold us into the kind of people we become. What we regularly do forms what we long for. Repeated actions form lifelong patterns.
 - Kids claim they want independence and freedom but crave structure and guidance. One of the most important things to the flourishing of a child is a consistent schedule (e.g., eat, sleep, play, learn, etc.). Healthy moods are created by repeatable patterns.

God's rhythms shape our hearts to find rest and redemption in Christ.

1. Sacred Calendar (ch. 23)

Seven Celebrations: Ch 23 lists seven regular festivals the people of God are meant to follow. Six of them annually and one weekly (Intro, vv. 1-2; Outro, v. 44).

- (2) **Passover** (and the Feast of **Unleavened Bread**) vv. 4-8
 - Commemorates Israel's deliverance from Egypt. The hallmark of "unleavened bread" (bread that has no yeast and hasn't risen, i.e., **cracker**) is a reminder of the haste at which they fled from Egypt (not time for the bread to rise).
 - It *becomes* a symbol of holiness. The leaven must be left in Egypt (i.e., the sin and corruption of Egypt can stay there).
 - It's a long story, but Israel actually has two calendars, a religious and a civil. The civil New Year is in September (*Rosh Hashana*) but the religious New Year actually starts at Passover.
 - The **first event of their new calendar** is this Passover meal.
- (3) Feast of **Firstfruits** (aka **Harvest**) vv. 9-14
 - Thanksgiving for the first harvest. Because God is the one who has provided everything, we give him our first and best as a reminder that it all belongs to him.
 - J the B: "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven" (aka "from God"), (Jn 3:27).
 - Everything comes from God "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).
 - We take all that we've been given from God, and we walk around with pride. How can we think, "If God gave it to me, it's mine." #entitled
 - Everything from the breath in our lungs, the food on our table, to our eternal salvation is from God. It's a gift!
- (4) Feast of **Weeks** (aka **Pentecost**) vv. 15-22
 - Celebrated 50 days after the Feast of Firstfruits (7 weeks + 1 day = seven Sabbaths later).
 - Originally a wheat harvest festival, it later became associated with the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai.

- In the New Testament, Pentecost is when the Holy Spirit was given to the church (Acts 2), showing that the Spirit fulfills what the Law foreshadowed.
- This feast highlights God's provision and His covenant—just as the first harvest was given to Him, so too the first fruits of the church (believers) were gathered through the Spirit's outpouring.
- Commands leaving the edges of the fields for the poor and sojourner, reinforcing God's concern for justice and generosity (Lev 23:22)
- (5) Feast of **Trumpets** vv. 23-24
 - Marked by the blowing of trumpets (shofar) to signal the start of a new agricultural year and a call to repentance leading up to the Day of Atonement.
 - Trumpets were used in worship, warfare, and royal proclamations, making this feast a declaration of God's rule and call to readiness.
 - A reminder that God reigns as King over time and history.³
 - Minimal details are given in Leviticus, but later Scripture ties the blowing of trumpets to God's final judgment and the return of Christ:
 - The trumpet will sound, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thes 4:16)
 - At the last trumpet, the dead will be raised imperishable (1 Cor 15:52)
- (6) Day of **Atonement** vv. 26-32
 - The holiest day of the Jewish year, when the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the nation's sins (Lev 16).
 - Involves two goats (one sacrificed and one sent as a scapegoat into the wilderness to bear Israel's sins).
 - The sprinkling of the blood on the mercy seat inside the Holy of Holies.
 - A day of fasting and repentance.
- (7) Feast of **Booths** (aka **Ingathering, Tabernacles, Sukkot**) vv. 33-43
 - Celebrated at the end of the agricultural year, when the final harvest (grapes, olives, figs) is gathered.⁴
 - The most joyful of all the feasts, filled with singing, celebration, and gratitude.
 - Later descriptions explain how participants will construct **temporary tabernacles**, tiny field huts, from branches to symbolize God's provision for his people in the wilderness.⁵ **Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell** (Neh 9:21).
 - Even in the wilderness, he met them, dwelt with them, and sustained them, and he promised to bring them to the promised land.
 - It's a feast characterized by joy and gratitude because of God's provision. It's the moment when all the waiting, anticipation, and uncertainty is turned to relief (e.g., plant, water, and wait; growing grass or vegetables; much out of your control; almost feels like magic).

Sabbath: (1) Sabbath⁶

³ Some Jewish traditions connect it to the creation of the world

⁴ Ex 23

⁵ Lev 23, Deut 16

⁶ Gen 2:3, Ex 20:8-11

- Before these six festivals are mentioned the foundational routine is mentioned in v. 3: ³ Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwelling places (Lev 23:3).
 - Just like God rested on the seventh day of creation, his people are called to rest every week. That attitude of rest shows up throughout these festivals.
 - Repeatedly they are told to have a holy convocation and not do any ordinary work.⁷ The idea of solemn rest is woven throughout each festival because it is the foundational way the people relate to God.
- But this is always “rest with a purpose.” **Rest without worship is just a nap. Holidays without worship are just vacation.** This isn’t to say anything against naps or vacation (both are good). God doesn’t just want you to take a break; he wants you to dedicate a stop to your work so you can worship.
- We are called to work hard and rest well. Rest is actually worship.
- It reflects the character of God. God created for six days and rested on the seventh. Our rest mirrors God’s rest. When we rest, we reconnect with the garden paradise that God intended us to live in. God *designed* us this way.
 - 1: “Pastor told me he never takes a day off because Satan never takes a day off.”
 - 2: “Seems to me that Pastor needs to pick a better role model.”
- But our rest is meant to be “holy” rest. It’s meant to be worship. All rest isn’t Sabbath rest. Sabbath rest is holy rest. It should *necessarily* include worship.
 - We are called to cease activity for a purpose (the worship and enjoyment of God).
 - **The Sabbath is not a vacation.** If your rest keeps you from worship, then it is not sabbath rest.

Why is this weekly pattern so significant?

- “To rest in the midst of a great work communicates, to others as well as to my own soul, a consciousness that I am not the engine of the great work... To think of myself as essential and necessary is to idolize my own power. The practice of rest helps to rescue me from that idolatry, freeing me to humbly and thankfully find my place in the great work [of God]” (McRoberts).
- “The Sabbath was a weekly tutorial for anxious people” (Ed Welch).
- God is sovereign over our time and schedule. We depend on him. We trust him. When we rest we are saying, “I’m not God, God is God.” **What a gloriously freeing truth.**
- Our hearts long for rest (“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give them rest”)⁸
- Sabbath is not a law to be obeyed but a grace to be received.
- The world tells us, “You are what you produce,” but God says, “you are my beloved child.”

For Our Good: The Sabbath is not a rule to make you holy but a command to bring you joy.

⁷ Lev 23:7-8, 21, 23, 25, 29-31, 35

⁸ Matt 11:28

- Jewish saying during Babylonian Exile: “More than Israel kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath kept Israel.” It was a weekly reminder of who was really on the throne.
- “What you cannot rest from you are a slave to” (work=money; alcohol=addiction; etc.)
- Being *set free* and learning to *live free* are different things. Liberation isn’t only getting out of slavery but getting the slavery out of you.
- “If you don’t take a break, eventually you just break.”
- “I’d rather burn out than rust out” is something only someone who has never burned out would say.
 - *Sabbath is not laziness. You **labor** for six days. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work. You toil, work, and struggle for six days, and then you rest.

Application: What shapes your week? Your Year? Are you just working for the weekend? Are you just living for the vacation?

- If you examine the priorities of your calendar, your budget, your daydreams, are you longing for the person of Christ and the people of God or the comforts of this world and the idols of your heart?

2. Daily Worship (ch. 24)⁹

Daily: In light of the weekly Sabbath, and the annual festivals, it can be easy to lose sight of the daily call to walk in light of the presence of God (e.g., Sunday-only Christians—more like 25%-ers; Christmas Christians; there are people who consider me their pastor who *rarely* attend church).

- God calls us to both special celebrations and ordinary discipleship—to worship not just on feast days but in the rhythms of daily faithfulness.

¹ The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly. ³ Outside the veil of the testimony, in the tent of meeting, Aaron shall arrange it from evening to morning before the LORD regularly. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. ⁴ He shall arrange the lamps on the lampstand of pure gold before the LORD regularly. ⁵ “You shall take fine flour and bake twelve loaves from it; two tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. ⁶ And you shall set them in two piles, six in a pile, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. ⁷ And you shall put pure frankincense on each pile, that it may go with the bread as a memorial portion as a food offering to the LORD. ⁸ Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the LORD regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever. ⁹ And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the LORD’s food offerings, a perpetual due” (Lev 24:1-9).

⁹ Lev 24:10-23: This passage recounts an incident where a man, the son of an Israelite woman and an Egyptian father, blasphemes “the Name” (YHWH) in a fight. He is brought before Moses, and God commands that he be put to death by stoning, with the entire congregation laying their hands on his head (symbolizing responsibility for the sin). This leads to a reaffirmation of *lex talionis* (law of retaliation): “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (vv. 17-22), ensuring justice is proportional and not excessive. The chapter closes with the execution of the blasphemer, emphasizing God’s holiness, justice, and the seriousness of using His name rightly. Though the “eye for an eye” principle may seem harsh, it was meant to limit retaliation, preventing escalating cycles of vengeance. Jesus later fulfilled and transformed this principle, calling His followers to mercy and non-retaliation (Matt. 5:38-39).

Daily Bread (vv. 5-9): Along with the continual burning of the Menorah, God commanded that twelve loaves of bread—known as the Bread of the Presence—be placed before Him in the Tabernacle every Sabbath.

- The twelve loaves represent the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. feeding of the 5,000).
- This was a reminder of the covenant God made for his people. His was a permanent, eternal promise that could never be broken.
- And a reminder that “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).
 - The provision we need comes only from God.
 - The life we need comes only from God.
 - When we pray that God will “give us this day our daily bread” (Mat 6:11) we are asking for material provision but also recognizing what we need is more than tasty meal.
- Every time we take the Lord’s Supper we are reminded that Jesus’ body was “given”¹⁰ for us. He made the way that we could not make!¹¹

Give Me Oil in My Lamp (vv. 1-4): If you look in Ex 25¹² we saw the instructions for a lamp (menorah) made of pure gold, with seven branches, resembling an almond tree, and filled by pure olive oil.

- It was meant to illuminate the Tabernacle **perpetually**. It was to be filled with oil every day so that the **light never went out**. The Tabernacle was never to be in darkness, a reminder that **God’s presence was always with his people**.
 - This tradition forms the basis of Hanukkah, when Jewish freedom fighters reclaimed the Temple during the Maccabean Revolt (167–64 BC) after Antiochus IV defiled it (e.g., sacrificing pigs, setting up an idol of Zeus). Rabbinic tradition states that only one day’s worth of pure oil remained, yet God miraculously kept the lamp burning for eight days until new oil was purified. *The Hanukkah menorah has nine branches (one for each day plus a central “servant” candle), while the seven-branch Menorah was used only in the Temple.
- The picture of God’s presence gets expanded in the NT as the church is described as seven lampstands. *preview of coming attractions.
 - ¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest (Rev 1:12-13). ²⁰ As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (Rev 1:20).
- Just as the Menorah in the Tabernacle symbolized God’s presence, the church is called to bear Christ’s light to the world.

¹⁰ Lk 22:19

¹¹ Time prevents discussion of Jesus and the Pharisees argument about Sabbath and Jesus’ use of 1 Sam 21 when David ate the Bread of Presence reserved for the priest.

¹² Ex 25:31-340

- In fact, God warns the church of Ephesus (Rev 2) that, if they don't repent, he will *remove* their lampstand.
- ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matt 5:14-16).
- In the parable of the 10 Bridesmaids (Matt 25:1-13), half of them are wise and half are foolish. They all wanted to join the bridegroom but half of them brought no oil for the night's journey and their lamps burned out. A lamp without oil is as good as a flashlight without batteries.
 - A lot of us have the *stated desires* for the presence of God without pursuing the *daily intimacy* with him.
 - We fill our lamps with everything *but* the Spirit of God. I think a lot of us have filled our lamps with the wrong fuel. We pour morality, good intentions, lip service, or guilt into our spiritual tank and wonder why they engine won't run. For some of us, the tank is just empty. We're running on fumes!
- God is **inviting** you to experience his daily illumination. He doesn't want you to be running on empty.

3. Future Freedom (ch. 25)¹³

¹ The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, ² "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the LORD. ³ For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, ⁴ but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the LORD. You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. ⁵ You shall not reap what grows of itself in your harvest, or gather the grapes of your undressed vine. It shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. ⁶ The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your male and female slaves and for your hired worker and the sojourner who lives with you, ⁷ and for your cattle and for the wild animals that are in your land: all its yield shall be for food. ⁸ "You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. ⁹ Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. ¹⁰ And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan. ¹¹ That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. ¹² For it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you. You may eat the produce of the field.

¹³ Leviticus 25:23-55 establishes that the land belongs to God, and His people are stewards, not owners. It commands redeeming and supporting the poor, prohibiting interest on loans to fellow Israelites, and ensuring that slaves and debts are released in the Year of Jubilee. Property was restored to original families every 50 years, reinforcing God's provision and justice. This system foreshadows ultimate rest and freedom in Christ (Isa. 61:1-3), calling God's people from greed to generosity, from self-interest to community, and from bondage to true worship.

Cycles of Sabbath: Leviticus 25 establishes Sabbath rhythms for Israel's land and people, emphasizing rest, release, and restoration. Every seventh year was a Sabbath Year, when the land rested and debts were released. After seven cycles of seven years (49 years), the 50th year was the Year of Jubilee, when slaves were freed, debts were canceled, and land was returned to its original owners. This system protected against perpetual poverty and oppression, ensuring renewal for future generations.

Trust: You give back the land because all of it belongs to the Lord (remember, he *graciously* saved them from slavery and *graciously* gave them the promised land).

- If you don't farm the land every seven years, then you have to trust that God will still provide crops (which is a real-life risk). The cycle of Sabbaths and year of Jubilee are a real world test of faith in God's provision, not human effort.
 - We like to think what we have is ours, not God's.
 - We like to trust Him with our hearts, but not with our bank account.
 - These were disciplines of trust, teaching Israel that God—not their work—sustains them.
 - These rhythms reminded Israel that the land, their freedom, and their future ultimately belonged to God.

Fulfillment:

- In Daniel 9, the people of God are in exile in Babylon. They are not in the promised land. God had promised a new covenant in the earlier prophets. Jeremiah had said that the promise of restoration, return, and renewal would happen in 70 years. Daniel is sitting in Babylon and says, "Ok God, it's been 70 years, is it time?" The reply from God is that the exile wouldn't just last for 70 years but for 70 weeks of years (or 70 times 7 aka 490 years). Do you hear something in those numbers?. In Judaism, every seven days is a sabbath. Every seven years is a sabbath year. And every seven times seven years was supposed to be a jubilee year. Slaves were freed, land was returned, debts were forgiven... But 70 times 7? That's a jubilee of jubilees. Though 490 years is a long time (half a millennium), when the time finally arrives, it will be the greatest redemption of all. This will be permanent, lasting freedom (Wright *adapted*).
- When Jesus stands in the Synagogue in Luke 4 and reads from Isaiah that "¹⁸ The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." He is saying that he is the Jubilee of Jubilees, offering ultimate freedom and restoration.

Conclusion:

Jesus Is:

- Jesus is the Passover Lamb, whose sacrifice frees us from the bondage of sin.
- Jesus is the Firstfruit of the resurrection, guaranteeing new in God.
- He gives his Spirit to dwell within all who trust him, sealing us for the day of redemption.

- At the final trumpet, he will return to make all things right and gather his people.
- Jesus is the atoning sacrifice, whose blood covers our sin and whose righteousness clothes us before the Father.
- Jesus makes it possible for us to dwell with God forever, bringing us into his presence.
- He is our true rest, not just for a day, a week, or a year, but for eternity—he is rest for our souls.
- He is the Jubilee of Jubilees, freeing us not just from human debt but from eternal bondage, not just for a year but for everlasting life in his kingdom.¹⁴

Rest: We all need rest, we all need celebration, we all need sacred rhythms.

- Some of you need to reconsider your calendar—what does it reveal about your priorities?
- You may need to adjust your daily routine. You claim to want God’s presence but don’t want to spend time in his word. You want God’s guidance, but don’t want to talk to him in prayer.
- You need to examine your weekly priorities. Is the weekly worship of God with his people, his church, more important than your academic responsibilities or extracurricular activities.
 - You can’t claim to want God’s presence if every aspect of your daily, weekly, and yearly schedule pursues everything else but God.
 - You can’t claim to live for God’s purpose if your life plan is structured around your priorities rather than his.

But none of these things are the goal in themselves. The purpose of rest, rhythms, and margin is not just to be more efficient or balanced, but to know and enjoy Jesus.

- The end is not merely emotional health or better time management—though those are good—but to create space to worship, trust, and walk with God.

Jesus Is: Do you know him? Because you can.

¹⁴ “Christ is our Passover (1 Cor 5:7), who was sacrificed without a bone being broken (Exod 12:46, Num 9:12, Jn 19:32-36). In his resurrection Christ is the ‘firstfruits’ of those who have died (1 Cor 15:20-23). The Day of Pentecost, the first harvest of the new age inaugurated by Christ (Acts 2), coincided with the OT wheat festival. The Feast of Tabernacles often associated with the reign of God in the OT (Isa 52:7-13, Zech 12-14) awaits its fulfillment in the second coming of Christ, where a final ingathering will take place in the judgment of the world (Rev 14:18, 19:15)” (Rooker).