

Be Holy for I AM Holy Series
Sacred Time

Leviticus 23:1-6, 10, 15, 24, 27, 34, 37-38

Old Testament Sermon Series on Leviticus

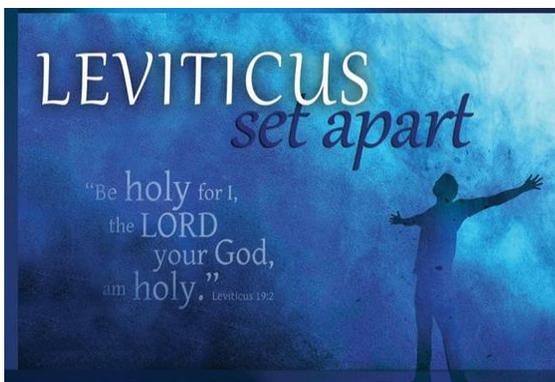
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

November 1, 2015

TEXTS: Leviticus 23:1-6, 10, 15, 24, 27, 34, 37-38

We continue this morning in our fall series on the Book of Leviticus. If you're just joining us now, the Book of Leviticus is the third book of the Bible. It comes third after the vast narratives



of Genesis and the great redemption in the Book of Exodus. In Leviticus, we meet with God as a community of faith. Each section of Leviticus begins with the Lord speaking to Moses and then Moses speaking to the people. Leviticus is like a long extended dinner conversation, if you will, with the living God. He is speaking directly to us, and what He says over and over is that we are to “be holy as He is holy.” We are to be set apart; we are to be different, distinct, a different pattern of life, new affections

that come in us through being in relationship with Him. In recent weeks, we have looked at how being set apart, or being holy unto God, affects how we live. It affects our most intimate relationships. It affects how we consider what it means to be a spiritual leader.

This morning, we turn to the question of what does being in relationship to God have to do with time? It is very appropriate, isn't it, on the start Daylight Saving Time? I want to give a nod to Ben Franklin for coming up with the quote: “Time is money.” Ben Franklin used this phrase in his short treatise called: *Advice to Young Tradesmen, Written by an Old One*. We recognize the value of time. It is a precious commodity. Sometimes large prize monies can be decided by fractions of time intervals. We live in a society where we are surrounded by devices that can calculate or calibrate time, and yet most of us wish we had a little more time. Many of us find that we live in the midst of a variety of calendars. I counted 12 calendars that I live inside of. I live inside of the civic calendar. I am forced to change my clocks today with all of you and to observe certain federal holidays. I live inside of an academic calendar. I live inside of a calendar of extracurricular activities. There is a personal family calendar marked with birthdays, special occasions, days of remembrance. Some of us live inside the Hallmark calendar that tells us when to buy certain sweet objects and give cards to one another. Others are more closely in touch with an agricultural calendar and buy foods only at certain times of the year, or others

may work the land. We live inside a seasonal calendar, a weather calendar. Others live inside of a sports and entertainment calendar where we know when our favorite shows are on seasonally. Others know when our favorite teams are playing. I went to conduct a piece of business a couple weeks ago, and I came to visit this store and the store was closed at normal business hours. There was a message that said, "We are closed because the Columbus 'so-and-so' team is beginning their season." I didn't even know who that was and why that impacted a local business, but they were shut down. Others live inside a calendar of watching the planets, the movements of the stars and are intrigued by that. So we see there are competing calendars that we are in. We long for more time, but what we really long for is ordered time. We long for time that has a regular rhythm, and we long for time that has meaning to it.

This morning, God addresses us as His people with His vision of how time is to be experienced, what it means, and how it should be guarded and protected. Time, after all, is one of God's great creations. Leviticus 23 is all about time. It is about a sacred rhythm of living, one that invites us into life lived in imitation of God our Creator and Redeemer, and life lived not in a meaningless chain of similar days, but in a weekly rhythm that is guarded for worship and a yearly pattern that is designed to carve into our minds and hearts the deep affections of knowing God and loving Him. Let's follow Leviticus 23 together this morning, and I promise you that this chapter on appointed times will lead us beautifully to celebration of communion, Christ's appointed time for us.

Leviticus 23 begins with the Lord speaking. As we have said, the whole book proceeds in this way: God speaks to Moses who speaks to the people, to us, and He says in Leviticus 23:2:

"These are the appointed feasts of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are My appointed feasts."

Notice that these are God's times, but yet they were to proclaim them as holy convocations. A convocation, if your Latin is rusty, is *convocare*, which means *to call together*. These are not only God's times, but notice profoundly that you are required to announce them so. You see, Hallmark will never send you a batch mailing saying: "This is the day for worship. Cancel all your other engagements." ESPN will never say: "We are going through a blackout period to guard time for your life of worship." You must proclaim them. They are God's times, but you have to announce them. Notice that they are convocations, they are a calling together. They are not designed to be celebrated alone. I am so glad I am not the only one at Kenwood Baptist Church this morning. As the staff gathers for prayer, we praise God that God's feasts are to be celebrated together.

He begins His introduction of these feasts with the celebration of the Sabbath. In Leviticus 23:3,

the Lord says:

“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.”

The Hebrew expression *Shabbat Shabbaton* is a superlative. It is a day of total, complete rest; it is a holy convocation; it is a ceasing of your regular, ordinary labors. It is something that belongs to God, and it is to be celebrated “in all of your dwellings throughout the land, among all the people.” The Sabbath is given, and it is given as a gift. This pattern of a day off a week is unique in the ancient world. It is something that does not make sense other than God's explicit commands and directions. I read an article in *The Atlantic* this week, and the author made the point that the celebration of a weekly rhythm makes no sense. I thought, “You know, it doesn't make sense except that God commands it, except that God reveals His intention for the Sabbath.” Scripture gives us three different rationales for this weekly pattern.

The first rationale is in Exodus 20 where the Lord says that we are to keep the Sabbath in imitation of God as our Creator. Exodus 20:11 says:

“For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

This taking of a day off a week means that you have time to pause. It is okay to look at sand dunes, the evergreen trees, and say: “God, Your works are amazing and I delight in them and You are my Creator. I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

The second rationale the Lord gives for keeping the Sabbath is that it is to be in remembrance of God's saving activity, that He is not only our Creator, He is our Redeemer, our Savior. We read in Deuteronomy 5:15:

“You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

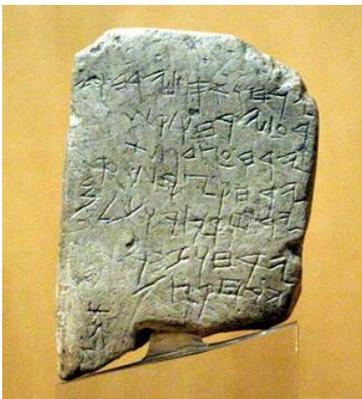
Keeping the Sabbath means you have a day off. It means that you don't live as a slave. Slaves don't have days off. Their lives are an unbroken chain of work, and many of us today, though we live in the wealthiest country on the planet, are slaves. We are enslaved to our work, and our work never takes a break. The Lord says: “My people have a day off because I am their Creator and I am their Redeemer. When He leads us out of Egypt, He says He led us out with an outstretched arm and lifted our heads up high. See the dignity of a day off, and that day off is designed for rest and for worship.

The third reason He gives for keeping the Sabbath is in Exodus 31:12. We are told:

“You shall keep My Sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.”

We keep the Sabbath because it is a sign that we belong to God, that He is ours and we are His, that He is our Covenant Lord. When you gather for worship on Sunday morning, just walking into the building, before you even make it into the building, you are saying: “The living God is my Creator. Hallelujah! What He has made is wonderful to behold, and I am His.” You walk into the building, and you say: “God is my Redeemer and He has lifted my head up high. I do not carry the burden of a taskmaster without an unbroken day off.” You say: “This day to worship Him is a sign that He is mine and I am His, and I belong to Him forever!” That is even before the prelude begins. That can happen in the parking lot and as you come in to prepare your heart for worship. This is the gift of the Sabbath. It is the design of God for a weekly rhythm of worship.

Not only does God give us a weekly pattern, Leviticus 23 unfolds with a pattern of yearly worship, that the years are to be marked in a regular way. We have a few calendars in our home. We’ve got the peel off daily type; we’ve got the hang it in the pantry, wish everyone had all their events on it type; and then we have a few electronic versions and we wonder, like many of you, why these don't just integrate automatically. But, the first calendar we have from ancient Israel is a small, pocket-sized one. It is four inches high by three inches wide, and this is



one of the earliest Hebrew inscriptions that we have. It is from the time of King David, about 1000 BC, and it is just a calendar. It lists the months, and it lists the rhythm of the year. The rhythm of the year begins in September: two months for gathering; then two months for replanting; two months for sowing; one month for cutting flax; one month for reaping barley; one month for reaping and measuring grain; two months for pruning vines; and one month of summer fruit. It takes you all around the year, a yearly rhythm that is rooted in the agricultural year and cycle. It is a little like the

ancient Israelite *Farmer's Almanac*. Yet, as exciting as the paleo-Hebrew script is of listing this rhythm of the year, to me, the most exciting piece of this inscription are the letters in the bottom left-hand corner which give the name of the person. The name of the person is Abijah, which means *Yahweh is my Father*. “Yahweh is my Father, and I live in a world that has a rhythm and an order.” It has a pattern to it. Creation is designed in a regular rhythm of months and years, and yet when we read in Leviticus 23 further, it is not only that God is the Creator of time and builds the universe in this regular cycle, but God also superimposes on top of the agricultural calendar a redemptive calendar. God places on top of ordinary time a celebration so that we would have special times to gather to remember what He has done. Leviticus 23:4

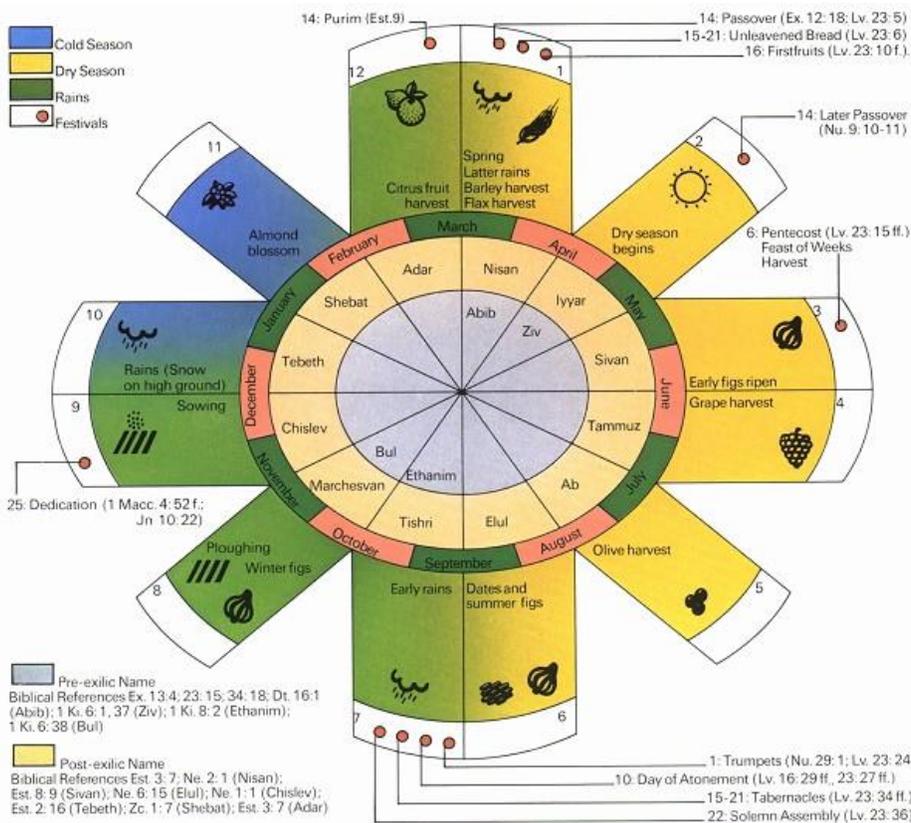
then says:

“These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them.”

There are major festivals. The first is in Leviticus 23:5:

“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD's Passover.”

The Passover is in the springtime and is designed to help us remember God's bringing us out of Egypt, that He passed over us with the blood of the Lamb. For Christians, we remember the Passover as the time in which the Lord Jesus was offered as our Passover Lamb. This rhythm of the year can be observed in a regular seasonal pattern around the year. This illustration is one



way of depicting it. What I want you to see in that is that you have the hot months in the summer, cold months in the fall. Around 6, 7, 8, and 9 o'clock, you have the winter months. Then you come up into the springtime, and it is in the springtime that the Lord says: “I want you to start counting the months of the year from the spring. Count Passover as the first month because, though the year moves in this way, redemption also moves in this way, and we remember the high point

of God's saving action at the Passover. Not only is the Passover a time of remembrance, but this feast extends for seven additional days—the feast of Unleavened Bread. We remember the coming out of Egypt and not having time for the bread to rise. On the first day after the first Sabbath of this Spring Festival, the Lord gives another feast which He calls the Feast of the Firstfruits in Leviticus 23:10. He says:

“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘When you come into the land that I give

you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.”

The Feast of the Firstfruits is celebrated on Sunday, the day after the Sabbath, in connection with the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Feast of the Firstfruits is the day on which Christ rises from the dead, and He is called in 1 Corinthians the *firstfruits of the resurrection from the dead*. You bring the firstfruits to God. The firstfruits are those first stalks of grain that begin to ripen, and you harvest that as the beginning of your harvest, and you bring it to God, because when you sow seed and it begins to rise up and grow, the beginning of that harvest are these first sheaves. You bring it to God and dedicate it to Him and it is offered and waved in the sanctuary. The firstfruits serve as the guarantee of the rest of the harvest. Christ’s resurrection is the guarantee of yours and mine. We bring the firstfruits to God, and God tells us in Leviticus 23:14:

“You shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God.”

This is a profound lesson for us: you give the first sign of the increase to God, and then it sanctifies everything else. If you live in a pattern of life that says I'm giving to God my surplus, that will end up as giving to God very little. If you live a pattern of life instead that says I give my first to God and not the last, then everything that you have you see in light of that. That is why God calls us to be tithers. We give the first of our gifts, the increase, to God and it sanctifies all the rest. You then live on the 90% with gratitude and thanksgiving. If you squeeze and hoard and then say, if I have anything left over I'll give it to God, that places God as last in our affections. God designs this for our own good and joy. Once we offer the firstfruits, then we go and count seven Sabbaths from then. It turns out to be 50 days later. The Septuagint translation of this 50 days is *Pentecost*, and we get the Feast of Pentecost. Pentecost is a celebration of giving the firstfruits to God, and Pentecost is the reality of the full harvest coming in. It is a celebration of the job completed. At the Feast of Pentecost, you don't offer a sheaf of grain, you actually offer loaves. You gather it in, you bake it, and then you give to God the completed task. What a joy to honor God as He provides for us. The Feast of Pentecost is remembered in the third month coming out of Egypt, and it is remembered as that time of coming to the base of Mount Sinai and God speaking to His people in the glory of His presence. This Feast of Pentecost is remembered in the church as the time when Jesus pours out the Spirit with fiery glory and commissions the church as His witnesses in the world. The Feast of Pentecost is a sacred gathering of the people.

In Leviticus 23, as the chapter proceeds, it moves then to the fall. In the fall is a cluster of holy days, time set apart for worship and rest. In Leviticus 23:24, we read:

“In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn

rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation.”

The 10th day is the Day of Atonement, and the 15th day of this month is the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles that is remembered as a time when God sustains us in the wilderness as we await entrance into the Promised Land. We see in Leviticus 23:37 that:

“These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim as times of holy convocation, for presenting to the LORD food offerings, burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day.”

These are God's times, and it is God's vision of life for you and me that life should be lived in a rhythm of weeks and years, and in a time of worship and rest. We are created by God; we are not slaves; we are in covenant relationship with God. It means that the year is a pattern where we remember God's saving actions on our behalf.

As this was true in ancient Israel, it is true for Christians today. We gather on Sunday remembering Christ's bursting forth at the first dawn of the new creation. We gather together to remember Him as our Passover Lamb, to remember the pouring out of the Spirit on Pentecost, and we remember the promise that He will sustain us in the wilderness as we await that final trumpet call when all will rise. Time does have a meaning to it. The calendar is God's idea, and many of us live either consciously or unconsciously inside the dominant secular calendars of our day. Some of us know the lyrics of Stings song *Every Day Is Just The Same*:

“Every day's just the same
Nothing seems to happen in this life of mine
Everything's so grey...
After birth, nothing's changed
All I get is frustrated with the way things are
Nothing seems to work...
Pull me here, push me there,
Take me 'round the corner. . .”

You see, life is not to be a chain of everyday unbroken gray, every day's the same. That's the devil's calendar: every day is the same. Others of us have adopted a rival calendar. We are peeking at the wrong time. Others of us have a pseudo-rhythm. Instead of work and rest for worship, others of us have become huge fans of Loverboy's great 1981 hit: *Everyone's Working for the Weekend*. What a dreadful vision: work, earn money to blow it on the weekend for my own leisure and entertainment. That's a sad, depressing vision of time. It's rooted in a very secular view of time and rooted in the consumerism of our culture: earn to spend. God's vision of time is that your work matters to God, and you are free to worship Him. The Lord provides us constant reminders of His character and actions in these holy times in the weekly rhythm, in the

yearly rhythm. I want to challenge you in three ways from Leviticus 23.

Number one: Embrace that **time really does belong to God**. I want to challenge you to tithe your time. I thought for many years about this. I love tithing our earnings and have done that for decades. It's deeply meaningful, and I know many of you find it an act of worship that brings you joy. Would that we all would experience that. But, another commodity that we have that is very precious is our time. A close friend of mine was explaining how she sees her workweek and the hours that she gives to work. She tithes that amount of time and says that's her volunteer time for the Lord. That is a great way of evaluating that: I am giving back to God, not only my increase, but I am giving to Him in a disciplined way a slice of my time to sanctify all the rest.

Number two: If God designs life to be lived as a series of weeks, that means that **Sunday is to be reserved for worship**. We are in trouble here. We are in trouble in a society that knows no bounds, a society that delights to say we are open 24-7, 365 days a year. We are open all the time, because the messaging of that is: "Your fundamental existence is as a consumer. You exist to buy things, and we are open for business." God's people live in a different world, a world that says one day a week is guarded for us, and it is held back for worship. Too many families are teaching their children that God is in second, third, or fourth place, that the athletic calendar is first: "Would that I would never cause discouragement to my teammates or offend my coach anyway. I've made a commitment." Yet, we are subtly communicating that commitment to God is underneath that one.

Many of you know the story of Eric Liddell, the flying Scotsman. He was the fastest man in Scotland and Olympic contender in the 1924 Olympics. Eric Liddell's story was the subject of the



film *Chariots of Fire*. In the heart of the film, was a dramatic moment in Eric Liddell's life. The qualifying heats for his best event, the hundred meter dash, was scheduled for Sunday, and he refused to run on Sunday. The British government met with him, considered that he was disgracing the nation by refusing to do this. Many of you may not know that Eric Liddell was born of a missionary family in China, grew up in China, and then returned to China as an adult.

He would not budge from his commitment and so was placed in the 400 meter dash, which was not his best event. In a dramatic turn of events, Eric Liddell refused to compromise and kept the Sabbath holy to God. Right before the 400 meter final, in which he was not expected to place, let alone win, right before he entered the stadium, the man who was massaging him and

preparing him handed him a note that simply said: "He that honors Me I will honor." Eric Liddell, though he was placed in the outside lane, the worst possible placement for the race, sprinted the 400 meters, won the race by over five meters, and set a new world record. He honored God. How many of us today are teaching our kids that God is first, not the world, not the team, not the musical? God is first. How many of us, if we don't do that, really shouldn't be all that surprised if our children grow up with God in second, third, or fourth place in their lives? We need a renewed commitment to guard worship. The culture will not guard it for us.

Number three: This means that **the year is designed fundamentally to remember God as our Creator, Redeemer, and Covenant Lord**. This is the rhythm of the year. It is not primarily about the change of seasons. It is certainly not about a sports rhythm. I grew up thinking life began in the spring with the Detroit Tigers' spring-training. It goes to the summer time, then you make it into football season, then you make it into basketball season. Then you can't wait for baseball to start again, and that's the rhythm of the year. Others are trapped inside other pseudo-rhythms. This is God's rhythm, and it's for our good so that we remember who we are, and we remember who we are when we remember who God is.

Communion:

It is no coincidence that Jesus, on the night in which He was betrayed, gathered with His disciples. It was a Passover meal, and He broke bread in their presence, and He said: "This is My body which is broken for you." Then He said: "Do this in remembrance of Me." When we gather for the celebration of communion, we are remembering who God is, what He has done for us, and in the end, who we are. We need a constant reminder of these things. Later in the meal, He took the cup in the presence of His disciples and said: "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood." As we prepare our hearts to celebrate the Feast of Christ, we come remembering who He is and what He has done for us. We remember that He is at the top, not second, third, or fourth place in our affections and that He has made us to know Him. This is not the table of Kenwood Baptist Church. It is the table of the Lord Jesus Christ. Your only requirement to come to this table is to be a sinner who has asked Christ for forgiveness. We all need forgiveness for how we have squandered time or misappropriated it or put God in second or third or last-place. Ask Him for forgiveness. Let Christ come in and renew us, and let's partake together.

Father, we thank You for the great gift of weekly worship. We thank You for the great gift of Sabbath time of rest. We thank You, Lord, for the gift of remembering who You are, and when we remember who You are, we remember who we are. We ask Your forgiveness. Cleanse us, Lord, we pray, and renew us as we feast together now.

In Christ Name, Amen.