

Sabbath Sermon: The Feasts of Leviticus 23

Andrew J. Manuse, Pastor — 5/18/2024

First Fruits Ministries, an affiliate of Corner Fringe Ministries

Torah Portion: Emor (speak): Leviticus 21-24, Ezekiel 44:15-31;
Matthew 26:59-66; 26:64; Luke 14:12-24; Colossians 2:16-23:
<https://tinyurl.com/4nvwhnyy>.



Shabbat Shalom, brothers and sisters. Please turn to your neighbors with a hug or a handshake and say good morning with the love of our LORD Yeshua. — — [pause, title screen].

There are a lot of things the LORD could have led me to share with you from this week's Torah Portion reading this week, from the set-apart priests of Leviticus 21 to the set-apart offerings in Leviticus 22, and the seven lamps that burn continually before the LORD in Leviticus 24, which reminds me that the LORD Himself sets Himself apart in His heavenly tabernacle, because He is Holy and we must regard Him as Holy indeed. But I want to take you back to the early days of my present faith, when the LORD was calling me to come to Him as He knocked on the door of my heart (Revelation 3:20). While I was still a sinner—no, while I was just a thought in the mind of God; before I was born into my sin nature at the appointed time God had designed for me—this is when Messiah Yeshua died for me so that my sins could be forgiven on that day I accepted Him as my LORD and my God and decided to follow after the Risen King in all of His ways, for all of my days (Romans 5:8). As I've told some of you, I don't think there was ever a point in my life when I doubted the existence of God, but for a long time I believed I could live however I wanted and He would just overlook all of that. Thank God for His mercy and long-suffering for I would be a dead man without it. It wasn't until I was married to Jen and God gave us our daughter Aidan Rose that I started to consider a different way, when my heart became zealous for the LORD, when I began to desire Him. This desire did not just grow out of God's calling on my own soul; however, but it also grew out of my desire to live up to the responsibility the LORD had given me to raise up my daughter in the way she should go (Proverbs 22:6). As Aidan grew into an age where we were reading to her, before Jacob was born, before we were churchgoers, when I could barely be considered a Christian, for His own reasons the LORD called me to start leading my family in weekly Bible readings. It took us several years to get through it the first time, and there's so many rabbit trails I could go down with this story, but I want to get to a few points that will introduce today's message.

I was listening to sermons as I drove to work in the morning at that time, and one of the pastors spoke about Psalm 1 in a way that struck me. We read there that a man is blessed when He meditates on the law of the LORD day and night, but he is cursed if he walks against God's way and settles into a life of sin. David's understanding here must have been inspired to some extent from what He read Joshua write down. God told this great leader of Israel who brought the people of God into His Promised Land in the flesh: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." Obedience to God's Word brings prosperity and success, the Word says. Remember Solomon who asked for wisdom, and the LORD granted it to Him, but then also gave Him great power and wealth? This can happen, but then there's Job who lost everything for his obedience, and yet God restored it all and multiplied it when Job continued to obey despite losing his material wealth? It's clear, the Word is referring to spiritual prosperity and Godly

success here, and anything that happens in the world is ancillary. In any case, the radio preacher spoke about reading the Word daily, and not just reading, but also journaling, and that this would lead to success in the faith. It took me a while to begin journaling, something I still do to this day, but from the point I began reading the Word with Jen and Aidan weekly to this very day, when I read multiple times a day, I have not stopped reading and it has not stopped bringing the LORD's blessing. To be specific, when the three of us made it through the Bible the first time—quite an accomplishment we thought at the time—we moved into a period of private study, and that's when I began reading daily, and I haven't stopped.

When I think about reading the Word daily, this reminds me of Isaiah 55:6-7, which reads, "Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near; let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon." At this point in my life I was seeking Him and I began to consider my own ways, which were severely lacking. But you see, while I was being continually pummeled by my own pride, my own selfishness, and my own ways, thinking that I was doing right for others while meeting constant rebuke from everyone close to me, I was indeed seeking answers from the LORD. He worked with me—slowly, but surely—and as I sought Him more and more, He revealed more and more to me, pardoning me of my sins and working with me to overcome them, one-by-one. He was preparing me for today and beyond—a story for another time. There came days of great bewilderment in the difficulties I was facing, and so I sought the LORD. He said in Jeremiah 29:13, "You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). As I read, day-by-day, I learned more and more about Him, about His ways, and He began to reveal some of His mysteries to me, though so much of His Word still confounded me. Thanks be to God He did not allow me to give up. I asked Him for answers, and He gave them to me. I sought to understand Him, and He came to meet with me when I studied His Word. He started to show me the areas of my life that needed to be pruned away, while providing new directions for growth. What's truly interesting about the LORD is this: At one point He had stood at the door of my heart and knocked, but when I opened to Him I had to chase Him. Though I didn't see it at the time, it was sort of like a romance, where a boy chases after a girl and thinks he has her, but she stays just out of reach, but when he starts to wander off toward his own path the girl comes back and chases him, and perhaps this back-and-forth goes on for a little while, but at some point they meet up with one another and walk together, hand in hand.

Perhaps this is why the LORD can say in Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me," but then He also can say in Matthew 7:7, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Who is knocking on the door? Who is pursuing whom? Who is opening the door to whom? The answer is simple: When our relationship is working with God the way it should be, we are pursuing one another, and we might even pull back from one another from time to time, until at some point we meet in a loving embrace and sit down to dine together, to feast on the Way, the Life and the Truth that He provides, and to reach a level of joy in unity that is truly just getting started. We only have a downpayment of the Holy Spirit, Paul said in Ephesians 1:14, and one day He will bring us into the inheritance He has prepared for us, for we are His possession for His glory, and He has redeemed us from the destruction due to us so that we can share in His glory with Him in an eternal relationship that grows more and more intimate with each passing day. Yes, this intimacy and growth is what I found in Him by reading His Word each day. It's the reason I stand up here preaching to you now.

I so desire everyone He is calling to experience the joy I personally feel with each and every new thing He reveals to me. It's exciting, it's joyful, and it will only get better.

In any case, I landed on Leviticus 23 for today's message, and that relates to the story I'm relating to you in a big way: As I was reading the Word of God day in and day out, year in and year out, that same preacher who encouraged me to read God's Word in this very manner emphatically expressed his displeasure in "~LEVITICUS~"—speaking of it in that nasally, cranky voice as if it was something stinky that he had to hold away from his face while reading it, but read it he did. Though he was apparently greatly displeased in having to do so, he encouraged me to kind of just get through the book for those first couple of years so I could get on to the rest of the Bible without falling short, and I did just that. He wasn't the only one with this opinion, mind you. In fact, most Christians I knew had a similar opinion about Leviticus, and many even used the same dismissive voice when talking about it. But one year when I got to the chapter, I was resolved to look for Yeshua in the details, to seek Him while He could be found, to call on Him while He was near, and the Messiah started to peak out from behind His door on almost every page. The LORD had mercy on me that year, for when I got to Leviticus 23 He gave me something to seriously ponder, and from that point forward I could not let it go. I'm going to give you the punchline up front, and then we're going to explore it in some detail a little later. That year I read what you see up on the screen and it was like a punch in the gut when I was finished reading for the day. The LORD said, "The feasts of the LORD ... these are MY feasts," and He didn't just say it once, but three times. In addition to that, He said that keeping His feasts would be "a statute forever throughout your generations"—not just once or twice, but four different times. To be clear: I just pondered this internally that first year. I thought about it for months, but then I let it go, thinking, "well, that's a Jewish thing, right? It says Israel, and I'm Christian, right?" Well no, actually, because as God explains in Isaiah 56, "Don't let the son of the foreigner say, 'God has separated me from His people,'" but I didn't see that one until much later. And while I pondered God's holidays that He described in great detail, I couldn't help wonder why the Bible that spoke about the God I desired to know more intimately didn't seem to describe the holidays I celebrated. Was I missing something? How could I be? How could so many Christians get this wrong? These types of questions are what caused me to dismiss the conviction of the LORD that first year, but I'll tell you what, He wasn't done with me, and this is a lesson in the LORD's long-suffering and patience with us. I had sought Him and found Him, but I didn't like what I found at first. I'd have to change too many things. And what would I tell my wife or parents? I closed that door for a year, but I'll tell you what, when I got to Leviticus 23 the next year, He just kept right on knocking, and this time He knocked harder. As I walked away from my daily reading that second year, I asked my wife Jen, "Hey Jen, I've been reading Leviticus 23 and God describes the holidays He wants us to keep there. Why aren't we keeping those feasts? Why do we have different ones that don't seem to be in the Bible." I was still so new in my walk, and she shrugged her shoulders, focused on other things, and so that's as far as I got. I don't remember how many years Yeshua and I played this game, but I'll tell you what, I kept asking Jen this same question each year that I read through the section, and each year I researched the question more and more. I found out the holidays we were celebrating had pagan roots, but I justified keeping them by saying that we weren't doing that—no—we were worshipping Jesus, of course.

I mean, we gave the kids chocolate crosses, not bunnies, after all, and the jelly bean and egg hunts were just good old fun, right? It was OK to dress up like a zombie or vampire because we would scare away all those real ghouls, right? The evergreen tree we erected in our home each year—cut from the

forest of course because the fake tree just wasn't authentic, decorating it with gold and silver and all the other idols we had collected over the years—that was all for Jesus! Just like the golden calf in the wilderness was the God who brought Israel out of Egypt, right? We even had little manger scenes we hung from its branches next to Snoopy flying a plane underneath that angel that had to be at the top. ... Which angel was that, by the way? I read just yesterday in my daily reading in Isaiah 13, "How did you come to fall from the heavens, morning star, son of the dawn? How did you come to be cut to the ground, conqueror of nations?" ... I could get into a very long winded sermon about the origin of all these pagan rituals, and maybe someday I will. I taught in detail on why we must avoid the Devil's number one holiday this past October 31, and that Bible study is available on our YouTube channel if you'd like to explore (<https://youtu.be/fwef0h93kyY>). For today's purposes, let's just consider verses 2 through 7 in Jeremiah 10, and tell me this doesn't ring a few jingle bells: "Thus says the Lord: 'Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples are futile; for one cuts a tree from the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails and hammers so that it will not topple. They are upright, like a palm tree, and they cannot speak; they must be carried, because they cannot go by themselves. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor can they do any good. Inasmuch as there is none like You, O Lord (You are great, and Your name is great in might), Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For this is Your rightful due. For among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like You' (Jeremiah 10:2-7). Do you see what happens when you read the Word of God day and night? The idea that the evergreen tree represented eternal life and pointed to heaven was quaint, but when the Christmas tree dried out at the end of the season and needles dropped all over the house, it was hard to see that same vision. Was it a sign that the season had come to an end, or perhaps that no idol we could possibly erect could replace true worship of the living God, who is eternal? Now, when some people read the words, "Do not be afraid of them," they might think, "well see, these decorations can't do any harm," but that's not what God means here. He said, "Do not learn the ways of the Gentiles," just to be clear, and when Gentiles stand around and sing gleefully, "Oh Christmas tree," who or what are they worshipping? God said to both the Jews and the Gentiles "seek [Me] and you will find [Me]." He said, "put away the former things." In fact, He further said in Matthew 10:28, "do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." You see, as Jeremiah 10 continues, the LORD said the same thing. We read, "do not be afraid of them," relative to these idols cut from the forest and brought into the home, but then we also read, "O Lord, You are great and Your name is great in might, who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For this is your rightful due."

The LORD desires that we worship Him, and He desires we worship His way. He does not want us to worship Him the way pagans worship, nor does He want us to worship in the way our own hearts desire. He explains this over and over and over again, all throughout Scripture, but perhaps most pointedly in Deuteronomy 4, where we read: "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live.... You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. ... Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth" (Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 15-18). Did the LORD command that we hunt down

chocolate bunnies in a nod to Ishtar the fertility goddess of the pagan world while we celebrate His resurrection from death, or did He say to do something else in memory of Him, instead? Didn't He say in Luke 22:15-16: "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Didn't He also say, "Do THIS in memory of me"? And so, when we celebrate Passover, one of the feasts of the LORD, in memory of Him, do we not look forward to the time when we will eat it with Him again in His Kingdom? He fervently desired to eat with His disciples then, and He fervently desires that we—His modern day disciples—eat with Him now. Remember Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." We certainly should not add to the Word that He has commanded us, and nor should we take away from it, and everything in His Word is consistent and clear.

Why do so many overlook God's commands? Yeshua explained in Matthew 15:8-9: "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." We do not want to worship the LORD in vain in the way other men have devised; we want to worship Him for His glory according to His own Word! He will not bear sin and the sacred assembly. He just won't. In fact, when our "hands are full of blood," when we are enamored with disobedience and idolatry, He will not hear our prayers nor regard our worship (Isaiah 1:10-20). The section I'm referencing in Isaiah 1 concludes, "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword"; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." Didn't He also say through His Apostle, "the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God." He desires for our hearts to repent and turn toward Him and His ways, which He has explained to us, and He calls us to do this in His Word repeatedly and without ambiguity. As for me and my house, our family began to dismiss "Easter" first, celebrating "Resurrection Day" more and more until we came to full knowledge of the Truth, but Christmas was the first one we let go. The last Christmas we celebrated followed our first Yom Kippur. There were several years in a row where nausea began to set in as we examined the materialism under that tree we brought in from the forest, but this last year, just the mere glow of blue lights in the corner of my living room made me feel ill. Leviticus 23 came up again at that moment, and Jen and I agreed, "we're not going to do this anymore," but how would we keep the feasts of the LORD? How do we do things His way?

Thanks be to God He tells us—not just what to do, but also what not to do—using parables, as He has from the beginning all the way through to the end. As John explains in 1 John 5:3, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." But often there's confusion. Often there's misunderstanding. Those who dabble in the Word by reading commentaries or devotionals without just getting into what the LORD has written, these are the ones who don't know their left from their right, and some teachers will tell you your left is your right and your right is your left. Only the ones who truly seek the LORD in His Word by reading it day and night, every day and night, are meant to understand what He desires. This, as I've showed you, He also commanded, because He knew and devised that only when we spend intimate time with Him would He reveal His mysteries to us. Even the disciples wondered why God did things this way, even from the very beginning, and they asked Yeshua: "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, 'Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they

do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.' But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Matthew 13:10-17). Do you have eyes to see? He said: "Seek and you shall find." Do you have ears to hear? He said: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." Do you have a heart for the LORD? Do not stop chasing Him until you find the Way, the Truth and the Life, for no one will get to the Father except through Him, and He does not heap up heavy burdens hard to bear, but lays a very light yoke on us that is easy, and it is a light burden indeed. He said: "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

And while we certainly can rest with Yeshua every day and night as we study His Word and get to know Him better, He has explained to us how He wants us to come to Him during special, appointed times, especially when we have finished laboring, so that we can rest in Him. He wants us to set apart His Feasts so we can be with Him and focus only on learning at His feet. Mary chose this better way, as Yeshua explained to her sister, saying, "Martha, Martha ... You are worried and troubled about many things, but few things are needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42). You see, Yeshua had gone to Martha's home, and Martha was consumed with serving Him; it distracted her from resting and hearing His Word. She even grew angry at Mary, who sat at the LORD's feet to hear His Word, but Yeshua corrected her: One thing is needed during these holy times when the LORD comes to dine with us; only that we sit down to rest and learn from His Word. For those who believe we ought to continue to work or serve during these times, I feel sorry, for this is contrary to the Word of the LORD and it will not lead to ultimate joy. This same exact lesson was taught in the Exodus story, where Pharaoh represents those who don't know the LORD and don't want to keep His feasts the way He instructed. In Exodus 5, when Moses told Pharaoh, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us." He also explained, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness,'" Pharaoh replied, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice and let Israel go?" and he also said, "You are idle! Idle! Therefore you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' Therefore go now and work..." It is the enemy who tricks us into working or serving on the days when the LORD has instructed us to rest, but the LORD has instructed us to sit at His feet. This is the better choice. The LORD has said to come before Him to honor His name and give Him thanksgiving and praise. This isn't optional for those who want to truly know the LORD; this is His command.

And so we read again in Leviticus 23, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.'" At the end of the chapter, the LORD reemphasizes this Truth to create a bookend for everything in between. We read again: "So Moses declared to the children of Israel the feasts of the LORD." What are those feasts listed here on which we must rest?: The weekly Sabbath, the Passover, the First and Seventh Day of Unleavened Bread, the Pentecost, the Day of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Eighth Day. Each of these feasts represents a day in which the LORD has commanded that we do no work; that means no vocational work, no avocational work, no charitable

work, no evangelical work, except by happenstance, no culinary work, and no housekeeping. No work, except for that work that requires the protection of health and life, and especially those things the LORD puts in front of us while we are on our way to the synagogue, if you will, as Yeshua demonstrated! But note, if there is a life to save or health to restore, we do this on the way to the synagogue. The intent is clear. These are days to rest at His feet, and these shall be statutes “forever,” He said.

I think it's important to pause and point out how repetitive the LORD is about this, and He is repetitive for good reason. A general rule of Scripture is when the LORD repeats Himself two or three times, He is establishing an eternal Truth, and we see two or three witnesses right here to the fact that “By the mouth of two or three witnesses, every Word shall be established” (Deuteronomy 19:15, Matthew 18:16, 2 Corinthians 13:1), and these are not the only examples of this principle. So what then is a witness, according to Scripture? Moses explained in Deuteronomy 31:26: “Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you...” Yes, the Scripture itself is a witness that explains to us the Truth that God has designed for our good, and when our desire is to pursue God by obeying His Word, we grow in a loving relationship with Him and draw ever closer to the eternal One who has promised us a place with Him in eternity. Do you see now why I started today's message the way I did? It was by reading the Word of the LORD repeatedly, day after day, year after year, by seeking the LORD with all of my heart, that the LORD revealed measures of His Truth to me, and He will do the same for you. It took much repetition, but the witness of Truth in God's Word stood upright in my life and ultimately led me to the Way of the LORD. After we gave up Christmas, we kept our First Passover and then each and every one of the feasts that year, and we've been keeping each of them ever since, while casting off our former ways. While I can't describe in words the extent of blessing and joy that has risen in my heart from this obedience, all I can say to you is that each and every year He pulls us closer in; each and every week, in fact. And I so desire each of you hearing this message to experience this same relationship with our God, if you haven't already, for there is nothing like coming to sit at our Master's feet, to learn from Him and grow ever closer to Him at each opportunity He provides for us.

And so, with that, I really want to move into Leviticus 23 and go through it with you to express the LORD's heart for us during His appointed times. The first thing I want to show you is how these feasts truly do belong to the LORD. It's true, Yeshua said in Mark 2:27, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath,” but what does this truly mean? Does it mean we can do whatever we want on the Sabbath for our own delight? Before I show you God's own Word that rebukes this thought, just think about the statement. Did God love David because the king sought his own way, or did God love David because he was a man after God's own heart? Do we see any evidence of pride leading to success or joy, or does pride always lead to a fall? Didn't we hear Yeshua explain in Matthew 13 earlier that those who do not understand Him are the ones with hearts that have grown callous. Solomon explained, “there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12). He also explained, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to counsel.” What better counsel is there than the Word of God, which is life to us? In context, Yeshua's saying simply meant to rebuke the rabbinical rules that the Pharisees had devised as part of their oral tradition for the Sabbath and the other holy days, when God's Word is very simple and clear concerning what the LORD expects from us. He simply made the day for us to rest from all of our work so that we could come before Him and feast in His presence. As you can see in the first underlined instance on the screen, these holidays of the LORD are simply “His appointed times.” They are His feasts. They are His mo-ah-dim. They are “the

appointed times of Me, of Yahweh,” to be specific. He said this three times, just to make sure we understand. These are the times in the year He has called us to come and meet with Him and everyone else who loves Him. Do we not desire to do this?

Consider the parable Yeshua taught in Luke 14:16-24: “Then He said to him, ‘A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.’” Do you grasp the meaning here? The LORD desires that we come to dine with Him. He wants our company. He is the one who heals the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind and dresses them in white garments, because they appreciate the company of the one who Created and Redeemed them. For those who prefer the company of other suitors, for those who pursue their own way instead of His, what will meet them at the end? Do we not all eagerly desire to eat with Yeshua, as He eagerly desires to eat with us? He said, “If you love Me, keep my commandments.”

And so, as we look again at the introduction to Leviticus 23, we can see that these Holy Feast Days, these appointed times of the LORD are not just days to come and rest with Him, but also to come and rest with one another. The Feast Days of the LORD are mikrah kodesh (מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ), meaning formal assemblies set apart as sacred to God, or holy convocations. With one exception, these are all meant to be rehearsal dinners for when we will all dine with Yeshua together. He has commanded us to come together and not only rest but celebrate with other believers who are also building close relationships with the LORD, with everyone who has set apart their lives for His purposes and given Him their whole hearts. We do this specifically to help each other prepare for the work we have to do on all the other days, whether that work is vocational, avocational, evangelical, charitable, political or otherwise. These feasts are our time to recharge with the only true source of power that there is in the universe, and we can only accomplish this when we obey the LORD in the way that He has said.

The writer of Hebrews explained very clearly the heart we ought to have for the LORD on these days. We read in Hebrews 10:22-25: “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” He wrote that we ought not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. These are the same words as we see in Leviticus 23. He is saying, quite directly, do not forsake the LORD’s Holy convocations—His Holy assemblies—for these are the days we come together to inspire one another, to learn from the LORD, to exhort one another, and to comfort one another. But as this Word also makes clear, some do forsake these days. Why? Because they don’t have eyes to see or ears to hear and their

hearts are far from the LORD, but rather they seek their own foolish way. This is what the LORD has said. Those who love the LORD will draw near to Him with true hearts in full assurance of faith, we read. These have their hearts sprinkled by the LORD from an evil conscience and bodies washed with pure water. These hold fast to the confession of their hope without wavering and trust the one who promised us eternal life, for He is faithful to those who are faithful to Him. Now, perhaps they don't know? Perhaps they've been deceived? I believe the LORD is merciful and long-suffering, but He also has made available His Truth for all with eyes to see and ears to hear. This is why our Great Commission on the other six days of the week is to bring the good news of redemption, to baptize new believers into salvation through Yeshua, and to teach the commandments of God. There's another word we ought to consider so we who obey the LORD do not get puffed up in the pride of our obedience. Paul explained that each of us are servants assigned by the LORD to our roles. Using an agricultural metaphor, he wrote, "I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6). Thus, whether we teach the commandment or show a good example of how we exercise it in love to those who are observing us, it is God who ultimately works to change the hearts of those we reach. He is the one knocking on the doors of their hearts. He did this for me and my house, and He is doing it for yours. Pray that in His long-suffering He keeps knocking on the doors of all His people's hearts.

Before we finish by briefly detailing the meaning of these holy days the LORD has appointed, consider one more Truth about them. They are "a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings." The word "statute" is "Khu-Kah (חֻקָּה)," meaning a prescribed enactment or fixed order, and the word "forever" is "olam (עוֹלָם)," which means an indefinite futurity, always, a continuous existence, eternal, or everlasting. Just to make sure we grasp this concept, the LORD reemphasized this point by noting these appointed times will be a statute forever "throughout your generations," or "li-do-ro-te-khem (לִדְרוֹתֵיכֶם)," meaning throughout the ages, periods, generations, "in all your dwellings," or "bi-khol mosh-vo-ty-khem (בְּכָל מִשְׁבְּתֵיכֶם)," meaning in all your settlements, in all your assemblies, in all your dwelling places. These feasts are important to the LORD and He cares so deeply for His people that He wants us to celebrate them forever with Him. As Paul wrote in Colossians 2:17, they "are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Messiah." In other words, these feasts point forward to an eternal reality in Messiah Yeshua that God wants us to recognize not just now, but forever, and they will have even more meaning later on when Yeshua returns. And so, as we keep these feasts as rehearsals each and every week, and each and every year, we look back at what God has accomplished for us and forward to what God has promised, and we ought to spend that time resting in His presence in the moment, which is our present reality. In Leviticus 23 itself, the LORD's declaration, "it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings" applies only to First Fruits, Pentecost, The Day of Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement. The LORD uses the phrase, "It shall be a statute forever in your generations" to apply to the Feast of Tabernacles, leaving out the part about dwellings because the feast itself is celebrated outside in temporary structures. What then about the Sabbath, the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Are they not feasts forever? In Exodus 12:14, the LORD said about Passover, "So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to Yahweh throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast as an everlasting ordinance." In Exodus 12:17, the LORD explains about the Feast of Unleavened Bread, "Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance." The feast applies to everyone, "whether he is a stranger or a native of the land," we see in verse 19. That's Jews and Gentiles alike. Finally, the weekly Sabbath Day is included in Leviticus 23 as an appointed time and holy convocation, but it is in Exodus 20:8, where the LORD commands: "Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it Holy." The word zakar (זָכַר) there for

“remember” literally means to “keep in remembrance,” which is ultimately a prophesy in which the LORD warns His people not to forget about this most holy day. In Deuteronomy 5:12, where the LORD reiterates the commandment to Israel, we read: “Observe the Sabbath Day, to keep it Holy, as the LORD your God commanded you.” The word “observe” is “shamar (שָׁמַר)” in Hebrews, meaning to keep, to watch, or to preserve. Thus, it is clear from context within the whole counsel of God that each of the feasts listed in Leviticus 23 are meant to be kept forever and remembered by all. Do you see why He wants us reading the Word every day and night?

"Why ought we keep these feasts forever?," we might ask. In Ecclesiastes 3:1-14, Solomon begins to explain the importance of God's eternal order when it comes to His appointed times. We read: "To everything there is a season, ... He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God. I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him." Perhaps this gives us another look at what Yeshua meant when He said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." On the physical level, the LORD commands us to rest on the Sabbath so we can enjoy the good fruits of our labor. It is a feast day specifically so we can enjoy the food, beverages and other gifts of God that He has blessed us with in our lives. On the spiritual level, the appointed times remind us of eternity, which is a concept generally outside our grasp, but one that God wants us to explore. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 that we ought to “keep the feast” of Passover “with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” What truths can we discover by sincerely keeping God's appointed times the way He desires? Can we not learn more and more about our Savior at each and every celebration He has invited us to? Do we not learn more about one another the more times we come together? Is there not an eternity of learning that we can enjoy—together? This is the LORD's desire! As Paul rushed back to Jerusalem to keep Pentecost in Acts 20:16, he showed us the urgency by which we ought to keep these holy days. They all point to Yeshua, and they are all meant to honor Him. Thus, we ought to turn away from man-made concepts of worship and toward Biblical patterns of worship, and celebrate the memorials like God intended, a remembrance to honor what Yeshua has done for us already and a celebration of our faith in anticipation of what He still intends to do.

As I prepare to wrap up today's sermon, I want to take you through each of the appointed times listed in Leviticus 23 and explain both sides of each one of them at the highest level. To prepare this summary, I drew from the book, “A Family Guide to the Biblical Holidays” by Robin Sampson & Linda Pierce (Reprint 2009, Page 36). I like the book, and I recommend it for anyone who is new to Torah. In general, the Spring Festivals are a blueprint of Messiah's first coming. Yeshua was sacrificed for our sins on Passover, buried on Unleavened Bread, and arose on First Fruits. The Holy Spirit was given to the Apostles on Pentecost, and the Fall Festivals are a picture of Yeshua's second coming and the beginning of His Messianic reign. Let's take a quick look then at each one:

- First of all, the weekly Sabbath, or Shabbat, is a memorial to God's Creation of the world, for He created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day, thereby consecrating it. Thus, He calls for us to rest on the Sabbath Day as a weekly rehearsal for the millennial reign of the Messiah, when all of Creation will finally rest in the sovereignty of God before He refreshes the Heavens and the Earth and establishes His eternal kingdom.

- The Passover, or Pesach, memorializes Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage, when Moses instructed the Israelites to smear blood on their doorposts so the Angel of Death would pass them by. An unblemished firstborn male lamb was sacrificed and its blood was poured on the altar. A lamb was selected for each family, and four days before the lamb was to be slain it was brought into the home for a four-day examination period. Prophetically, Yeshua is the sacrificial Lamb of God who died for our sins. He was slain on Passover at the time the lamb was to be slain. He also had a four-day examination period before the religious leaders, and He was found without blemish.
- The Feast of Unleavened Bread, Chag HaMatzot, memorializes the time when Israel left Egypt and they did not have time to allow their bread to rise, so they brought it with them from Egypt and ate unleavened bread as they fled, crossed the Sea of Reeds, and entered the wilderness. Leaven symbolizes sin, and unleavened bread points to the sanctification. God commanded Israel to cleanse all leaven from their homes and eat only unleavened bread for seven days, symbolizing a holy walk with Him. Prophetically, Yeshua is the unleavened "Bread of Life," the "Manna from Heaven," because He lived a life without sin and was born in Bethlehem, the "house of bread." Just as matzah is striped and pierced, so was the Messiah leading up to His death on the cross. The feast falls on the day Yeshua was buried, but before that he offered up his prayers from the cross as a burnt offering that rose up into Heaven to the Altar of God.
- First Fruits, or Bikkurim, memorializes God's commandment for Israel to offer the first produce they harvested from the Promised Land to the LORD after they had conquered Jericho. Subsequently, the first of the barley harvest was brought as an offering to the priest in the Tabernacle and Temple. The priest would present the first of the harvest unto the Lord by waving it back and forth. This reminded the Hebrews that God gave them the land, and the harvest belonged to Yahweh. Prophetically, Yeshua is the First Fruits. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, "But now Messiah is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep...." Yeshua's resurrection marked the beginning of the harvest of souls. John 12:23-24,32 explains that Yeshua was likened to a grain of wheat falling to the ground and dying to produce a great harvest. Yeshua arose from the dead on First Fruits. For many years, I pondered why such an important day was not recognized as a holy convocation day, and in fact this question depressed me a bit. This year, my Mighty Men brother, Pastor Stephen Opoku, offered an idea that simply blew my mind. On each of the Holy Convocation Days, we celebrate God's work that He completed or plans to complete for all of His people together, but on First Fruits we celebrate Yeshua's action that requires our own personal faith. Romans 10:9 reads, "If you confess with your mouth that Yeshua is Yahweh, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." This faith is not something we grasp corporately, but rather something we must address on our own. None of us are saved by our parents' faith or our children's faith; we're not saved by one another's faith; we are only saved by our own confession of faith. What a day to introspectively remember what the LORD has accomplished for each one of us as we look forward to the day when He will also raise us up.
- The Feast of Weeks, Pentecost, or Shavuot, memorializes the day when God gave Israel the Torah Commandments from Mount Sinai, and 3000 lawbreakers were destroyed. Fifty days following First Fruits, Israel celebrates a remembrance of this day. Two loaves of leavened bread are presented to God, and great rejoicing takes place among Israel and all the nations to remember how God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt. Prophetically speaking, fifty days following Yeshua's resurrection, a group of Messianic Jews received the Holy Spirit. Yeshua said, "Unless I go, the Holy Spirit will not come. But when I go, I will send this Holy Spirit unto you." Yeshua had ascended into Heaven 10 days earlier. God wrote His commandments on the hearts of believers that day, and 3000 souls

were saved. Now, alive in the Spirit through faith in Messiah Yeshua, both Jews and Gentiles stand together as two loaves that can be held up as an offering to God, and their leaven, or sin, is covered by the salvational gift that Yeshua has offered to both groups without partiality.

- The Day of Trumpets, Day of Shouting, or Yom Teruah, memorializes the Jewish civil new year, which is known secularly as Rosh Hashanah. Historically, God asked Israel to blow trumpets on this day and look inward toward their own spiritual growth. It's unclear whether there is a historic event to celebrate on this day, but Jews believe the day commemorates the creation of the world. The trumpet blast can also be used to coronate a king. The day begins the 10 days of awe, during which the people of God become introspective toward God. Prophetically, the Feast of Trumpets potentially depicts the regathering of the Sacred Assembly at the sound of the trumpet (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, Revelation 19). The day may signal the second coming of Yeshua, when our Messiah Himself will be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords. Coincidentally, "no one knows the day or the hour" of Yom Teruah because it depends on the new moon sighting, a disputed signal.
- The Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, is the holiest day in the Jewish calendar that is spent with fasting, prayer and confession. The people of God use the day to seek forgiveness of sins. Historically, the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle or Temple ONLY on this day to make atonement for the nation by sacrificing several animals, including two goats. The first goat was a sacrificial goat, and the second was the scape goat. Both served as a propitiation for Israel's sin. Prophetically, Yeshua our Messiah was displayed before Israel as our one-time sacrifice for sin, and thus there is no longer a sacrifice for sins. Believers ought to use this day to repent and recommit to God's Way. Some interpret the two goats as Jews and Gentiles, both being forgiven of their sins by the Messiah. It is also possible that this day represents Judgment Day, when the sheep will inherit Heaven and the goats will be sentenced to everlasting judgment.
- The Feast of Tabernacles, or Sukkot, memorializes the time when the Israelites lived in tabernacles in the wilderness for 40 years as they came from Egypt. During this time, God dwelt among Israel as a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. Believers build, dwell in, eat, and sleep in tabernacles during this festival every year. It's a harvest festival and a very joyous occasion. Doors are left open so strangers can visit their neighbors. On the eighth day, believers return indoors to celebrate a joyous conclusion to the feast. Prophetically, Yeshua is God's tabernacle or dwelling place among men. Many believe Yeshua was born during this Feast, and John 1:14 points to this possibility. We read: "And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we beheld His glory." This feast also looks forward to the time when Yeshua will dwell among His people again as the King of Kings during His Millennial Reign on the "Seventh Day" of Creation, the day of rest. On the Eighth Day of Assembly, or Shemini Atzaret, the New Heaven and New Earth will emerge and those who belong to Messiah will dwell with Him forever.

Do you see why God wants us to keep the feasts? It's all about Him, and by obeying Him we come to know Him. And while First Fruits is not considered a Sabbath Day, the weekly Sabbath, the first and seventh day of Unleavened Bread, the Pentecost, the Day of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the first and eighth day of Tabernacles are considered Sabbath days on which we are called to refrain from all work. I've gone into some detail as to why the LORD calls us to rest on these days, but no Scripture is more clear on this calling than Isaiah 58:13-14, and this explains us how and why to obey. The NASB (1995) version of these verses reads as follows: "If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure and speaking

your own word, Then you will take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Whether the LORD is referring to the weekly Sabbath here or any of the other Holy Convocation days, which are also Sabbaths, or both, the meaning is clear: These days are a blessing from the LORD, a time to draw in near to Him, a time to learn from Him and from one another, a time to offer thanks, praise and worship to the one who created us and redeemed us and is coming again to bring us home. We ought to delight in the LORD and delight in one another, resting from all work of all kinds, for this is what the LORD desires from us, and as we know, He will come near to us when we seek to grow closer to Him. We will seek Him and we will find Him when we seek for Him with all of our hearts. I exhort you brothers and sisters to give this mindset and heart condition your deepest consideration. After several years of embracing the Truth of Leviticus 23 and abandoning the practices of men, I can assure you that my own walk is exceedingly blessed by the LORD, for He has prepared these temporary days of rest for us, and I am certain that it can only get better from here as the days carry on into eternity. Blessings and Shabbat Shalom to you all!