Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

I am sure that everyone here likes **holidays**. If you look up holiday in a dictionary, it says, “A time when someone does not go to work or school but is free to do what they want, such as travel or relax.” Well, the word holiday was originally holy-day. And it referred to Sunday, as the regular holy-day, and days like Christmas or Easter, when people stopped their regular work so they could rest and go to church and enjoy celebrating what the day signified. We see this with New Zealand still having Christmas and of course Easter next week as public holidays. And some of us will remember the times when all shops were shut on Sunday and most people went to church.

Well, holy-days is what this chapter of Leviticus is all about. To be holy is to be ‘set apart from the common.’ So earlier chapters of Leviticus are about the tabernacle as a holy *place*, the tabernacle furniture and utensils as holy *things*, and the priests as holy *people*. But this chapter is about holy *days* – the special days of the year that Moses was “*to proclaim as holy convocations*.” And a convocation is public worship. So on these days, people stopped their work and gathered for worship.

Now, we read **Colossians 2** earlier. And the problem that Paul was addressing there was that Jewish believers were telling non-Jewish believers that they still had to observe all of these Jewish holy-days in order to be saved. But Paul said, No, those days “*are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance* [or the reality] *is found in Christ*.” So that is what we want to explore today; we want to see **how Jesus Christ is** **the substance of what these holy-days were about**. And we don’t have time to explore all of the connections but hopefully what we see will enlarge our appreciation of God’s amazing love for us in Christ. So our approach will be to look briefly at each of the holy-days, then see how they are fulfilled in Christ, and then to finish with a few words about holy-days today.

1. Let’s begin then with the **holy-days** described in this chapter.
   1. I recently had the opportunity to enjoy a round of golf with two others. And on one hole, which should take you three shots to complete, I took seven! And when the guy keeping score asked me for my score, I said, “Holiness.” And because he is a minister and he understands ministerial humour, he wrote down ‘7’ because seven is the number of holiness in the Bible.
      1. And we see that in this chapter, which is full of sevens!
         1. Just count the number of holy convocations as I read them out – Sabbath, Passover, Firstfruits, Weeks, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Booths – seven!
         2. The Sabbath is what day? The seventh.
         3. And how many days were the people to eat unleavened bread? Verse 6 – seven.
         4. And how many days were the people to live in booths during the Feast of Booths? Verse 42 – seven.
         5. And the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths were all celebrated in which month? The seventh.
         6. And how many weeks from the day after the Sabbath of Passover week was the Feast of weeks celebrated? Verse 15 – seven.
         7. And in chapter 25:4, how often were the people to give the land a whole year of rest? Every seven years.
         8. And there was even a year of Jubilee? “*Seven times seven years … forty-nine years*.” There are sevens everywhere!
      2. And of course, the seventh day of the week was called the **Sabbath**. And the word Sabbath means ‘to stop and rest.’ And we see in **verse 3** that the people of Israel were to cease their ordinary work and gather for worship every Sabbath. And when they did this, they were imitating their Creator, who rested on the seventh day of creation week.
      3. But through this elaborate system of sevens and feasts and sabbatical years, the people were constantly reminded about what God *had done* for them and what He *would do* for them through His Messiah. Every time they flipped the calendar over to a new month, they should have wondered, what great acts of the Lord do we remember this month?
   2. Let’s see this as we consider the rest of the holy-days. And they divide into two groups – the **Spring festivals** and the **Autumn festivals**. (Put a chart in the bulletin)
      1. The **Spring Festivals** were Passover, Unleavened bread, First-fruits, and Weeks.
         1. And they began with **Passover**. The first Passover was when God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. On that night, each family slaughtered a lamb and put its blood on the doorframe, and the angel of death passed over those houses. And this led to the people of Israel being released from Egypt so that they could go to the Promised Land. So Passover was an annual celebration of being spared from death, released from bondage, and freedom and rest, all secured by the blood of a lamb.
         2. And the very next day after Passover, the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** began. When the people of Israel left Egypt, there was no time to bake bread with leaven, which is a type of yeast that makes bread rise. So every year after that, for seven days, the people of Israel were only allowed to eat unleavened bread. And on the first and seventh days of this week, they were to stop their ordinary work and gather for worship, as we see in **verses 7-8**.
         3. The next feast was the **Feast of First-fruits**. And you will see in **verse 11** that it was celebrated “*the day after the Sabbath*.” And the Sabbath in view there is the Sabbath during the week long Feast of Unleavened bread. Because the Jewish calendar followed the phases of the moon, Passover could be any day of the week. But the day after Passover the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread began. And somewhere in that week there was a Sabbath. And First-fruits was celebrated the day after that Sabbath. And first-fruits was, as the name suggests, when the people of Israel brought the very first produce of the harvest to the Lord as a wave-offering. But we see in **verses 12-13** that other offerings were to be presented also.
         4. And then, the last of the Spring festivals was the **Feast of Weeks**. Seven weeks after First-fruits day, or fifty days after the Sabbath of Unleavened Bread week, a harvest offering was presented to the Lord, as detailed in **verses 15-21**. So this was the *end* of harvest time. Now the people were celebrating the fullness of the Lord’s blessings.
      2. Well, that brings us to the **Autumn Festivals**, which were the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths.
         1. And they began with the **Feast of Trumpets**. On the first day of the seventh month, trumpets would blast out and the people ceased from their ordinary work and gathered for worship. It was a celebration of their special, covenant relationship with God. And from **verse 25** and **Numbers 29**, various offerings were again presented to the Lord.
            1. Now, look again at your bulletin chart. Israel actually had two calendars – a religious calendar and a civil calendar. The Feast of Trumpets was celebrated on the first day of the seventh month of the religious calendar. But that was also the first month of their civil calendar. And that means that the Feast of Trumpets was celebrated on New Years day! And so the Jewish year began with trumpet blasts and worship!
         2. 10 days later it was **the Day of Atonement** – the most important religious festival of the year. And we looked at all of the details of this festival back in chapter 16, so we won’t repeat all that today. But it was the only day that the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place in the temple, and it involved lots of sacrifices and blood being sprinkled throughout the tabernacle and on the people to make atonement for sin – to make them at-one with God, again..
         3. And then the last of the Autumn festivals was the **Feast of Booths**, which is also known as the Feast of Tabernacles. Five days after the Day of Atonement, this seven day festival began. On the first day, as **verse 35** explains, there was to be no work and the people gathered for worship. Then for seven days food offerings were presented to the Lord. And the next day, the eighth day, again, no work and gathered worship. And if you look at **verse 42**, for the seven days of the festival, all of the people had to live not in their homes, but in booths built of branches that they had built outside. And they were to do this to remember the time that they had journeyed through the wilderness in tents as the Lord brought them from Egypt to the Promised Land.
      3. Well, that is all of the holy-days. But before we move on to their fulfilment in Christ, just one, practical point about these festivals.
         1. According to **Exodus 23**, the people of Israel were to gather three times a year – the first time was for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the second was for the Feast of Weeks, and the third was for the Feast of Booths. And because the festivals were grouped together, as we have seen, this meant that these three occasions basically took in all of the festivals.
            1. And while it is not difficult to imagine everyone rolling up while the Israelites were effectively a large camp in the wilderness, I have often wondered how this happened later on in Israel. Psalms 120-134 are called the **Songs of Ascents**. And we understand that the people would sing those Psalms as they journeyed to the temple in Jerusalem for these three festivals. But did everyone in Israel head to Jerusalem, once Israel became a nation with towns and cities? And what about the people who stayed in Babylon after the exile or those who left Israel to live elsewhere? Did they all head to Jerusalem three times a year, every year? Have you ever wondered that?
            2. Well, first off, **Deuteronomy 16:16** explains that this requirement only applied to the males of the family; women and children were *encouraged* to attend but not *required* to attend.
            3. And I also learned this week that as the people spread out in Israel and further abroad, it seemed impractical and unrealistic to expect everyone to journey to Jerusalem, three times a year, every year. And so, what the Jewish religious leaders eventually decided was that if you lived within a 22km radius of Jerusalem, you had to go to Jerusalem for the three feasts, but if you lived further than 22km, you were *encouraged* to come but not required to do so.
            4. And because of this, a roster of lay-people from the different tribes was organized, who represented all of Israel at these feasts. And those who didn’t go to Jerusalem would have special services in the local synagogues.
2. So that’s our explanation of the holy-**days**. But as **Colossians 2:17** says, those festivals were *shadows* of which Jesus Christ is the *substance*. So let’s turn our attention, secondly, to Jesus Christ as the **Holy Substance**.
   1. And I very deliberately ended our last point with that explanation of the 22km rule of the Jewish leaders. Boys and girls, do any of you know what city Jesus lived in? Nazareth. And Nazareth was about 90km away from Jerusalem. **So do you think that Jesus went to all three feasts, every year, or just some of them?** Well, we don’t have to guess. As I explained, God’s law required every Jewish male to attend all three feasts, every year. And the only account in the Gospels of Jesus as a young lad is that time when His parents thought He was lost in Jerusalem. And here is how that account begins: “*Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when* [Jesus] *was twelve years old, they went up according to custom*.” So Jesus was part of a family that obeyed the command to attend the feasts. And later, during His public ministry, many of His sermons and miracles were performed in Jerusalem at feast time. So Jesus *definitely* went to Jerusalem, three times a year, each year.
   2. And I have not mentioned this just as an interesting fact; it has to do with our salvation! You see, our major problem, as human beings, is that we are law-breakers. God is good and His law is good, but we break His commandments and we fail to keep them as we should. And if this is not fixed, we could never enter God’s presence. **So what we need is a Saviour who does two things**:
      1. First, **He must obey God’s law, perfectly**, so that we can be credited with His obedience. And Jesus did that, not only with the festivals, including the Sabbath, but with every command of God. So the moment a person receives Christ as Saviour and Lord, their spiritual bank account is filled with Jesus’ law-keeping. So that means that if you are a believer, when God looks at you, He sees the perfect obedience of Jesus!
      2. But receiving Christ’s obedience isn’t enough; we also need our sin and guilt to be taken away. And that is the second thing Jesus accomplished for us. And that too is a big part of what all of these holy convocations pointed to.
         1. I won’t itemize the list here but one commentator lays out all of the different animal sacrifices of the daily offerings, the Sabbath offerings, the monthly new moon offerings, and the offerings required for each of the festivals we have described, that the priests had to present. And when you put it all together, they offered **1278** animals every year!!!
         2. And on top of that, you have the animals that the people brought as burnt offerings and peace offerings and sin offerings and guilt offerings.
         3. And on top of that, every family was to kill a lamb for Passover.
         4. **1 Kings 8** describes the dedication of the temple. We are told that 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep were offered as peace offerings!
         5. Jewish historical documents describe the priests sacrificing animals and wading about in blood that reached up to their knees! There is even one historical record of a feast day when 1.2 million animals were slaughtered!
         6. And you have to ask, why, right? It is sickening! It is appalling! Why would the Lord require such bloodshed? Well, the Lord tells us why in **Hebrews 10:3**, “*These sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins*.” And if there are that many sacrifices and that much blood, then there must be a whole lot of sin! But we have referred to this next verse of Hebrews 10 many times in our Leviticus series: “*It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*.” So all of the sacrifices of the feasts pointed forward to a *greater* sacrifice. And that sacrifice is the sacrifice of Jesus. Instead of putting us to death and condemning us to an eternity in hell, God made salvation possible by the blood and death of His beloved Son. And if you think all of the dead animals and blood is appalling, it gives you some idea of the agonies that Jesus suffered on the cross to take away the sins of His people.
         7. And this, brothers and sisters, is the gospel proclaimed by the daily offerings, the Sabbath offerings, the Passover lambs, the Unleavened bread offerings, the Feast of First-fruits offerings, the Feast of Weeks offerings, the Feast of Trumpets offerings, the Day of Atonement offerings, and the Feats of Booths offerings: “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*.”
      3. So, are you a believer? Do you believe that you are a guilty sinner whose only hope for salvation is the perfect obedience and perfect sacrifice of Jesus?
   3. But there is more that we can say about how Jesus Christ fulfils these holy-days. And how He fulfils each holy-day could easily be a sermon in its own right. But today we will have to be satisfied with the key fulfilments.
      1. The first holy-day was the **Sabbath**. It was the weekly day of rest. Well, in **Matthew 11:28**, Jesus said, “*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*.” And we go to Him by trusting in His obedience and His sacrifice, as we just explored. We learn that we cannot save ourselves and that we cannot add anything to the salvation He has secured. And so, “*we … find rest for our souls*.” Do you know this rest?
         1. Now, there is another aspect to this rest but we will come back to it in connection with the Feast of Booths.
      2. But the next feasts were **Passover** and **Unleavened Bread**.
         1. And Passover points to Jesus. John the Baptists called Jesus “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*.” **Ephesians 1:7** says, “*In Him we have redemption through His blood*.” By His blood, our sin and guilt is washed away, completely! God no longer sees our sin and guilt. And Jesus has also delivered us not from slavery in Egypt but slavery to sin. We are now able, by the power of His Spirit, to resist temptation and to choose to do good!
         2. And in connection with **Unleavened bread**, please turn to **1 Corinthians 5:6** (p. 954). In the Bible, leaven is a symbol of sin. And it easily spreads out and infects a congregation, as it had done in Corinth. So Paul said, “*Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*.” So, because of the obedience and the sacrifice of Christ, God views His children as sinless! Do you hear that, believer? When God looks at you, He always sees you joined to or hidden in Christ; so in His eyes, you are sinless! But we are to strive for sinless-ness, also. We won’t attain it until heaven. But we should never be satisfied with sin.
      3. The next feasts were **Firstfruits** and **Weeks**.
         1. And again, the New Testament makes a direct connection between **firstfruits** and Christ. **1 Corinthians 15:20** says, “*Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*.” So, just as Jesus was resurrected and ascended to heaven, all who have believed in Him for salvation will be resurrected to eternal life in heaven!
         2. And in terms of the Feast of **Weeks**, we read that it took place 50 days after the Sabbath of Unleavened Bread week. And the Greek word for the fiftieth day is **Pentecost**. So when Greek became the common language in Israel, the Feast of Weeks came to be known as the Feast of Pentecost. Now, does Pentecost ring any bells for you? Acts 2! So the day when Jesus poured out His Spirit on the church was the day of the Feast of Weeks! And then Peter preached the Pentecost Day sermon. And do you remember what happened in response? 3000 were added to the church that day! And that harvest continues today. And if you put your trust in Jesus today, you will be the next one included in the vast number of those that the Lord Jesus is gathering into His church!
      4. Well, the final three feasts were **Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Booths**.
         1. And some of you will know which New Testament verses I am about to read out in connection with Jesus as the fulfilment of the Feast of Trumpets - **1 Thessalonians 4:16** says, “*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God*.” And in terms of the resurrection, **1 Corinthians 15:52** says, “*In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable*.” So the Feast of Trumpets is a shadow of the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus and the Day of Judgment. And for the believer, the trumpet will be a call to rejoice, but for the unbeliever, the sound of the trumpet will be terrifying. Which will it be for you?
         2. And as we noted earlier, the **Day of Atonement** was the one day of the year that the High Priest was allowed to enter into the Holy of holies in the tabernacle. But once his duties were completed, he had to go back out. And the next day he had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins again. But **Hebrews 8:1-2** says that in Jesus, “*we have … a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man*.” And He is there permanently, interceding for us. And because of His once-for-all, perfect sacrifice, **Hebrews 10** says that “*we can draw near [to God] with a true heart and full assurance of faith*.” Jesus Christ has made atonement for us – forever!
         3. And the last feast was the **Feast of Booths**. And you will remember that the people of Israel had to live in a booth of branches for seven days to remember their time in tents in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. Well, right throughout the New Testament believers are described as pilgrims or travelers who are on a journey to the ultimate Promised Land – heaven. But do you remember what Jesus said in **John 14:1-3**? He said, “*Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also*.” The promise of Jesus is that there is a room or a booth waiting for each believer in heaven!
            1. And we spoke about rest, earlier, in connection with the Sabbath Day. But it is not just us human beings that long for salvation rest. Our study of Leviticus has revealed how corrupted and distorted and warped all of creation is because of sin. **Romans 8:22** says, “*For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now*.”
            2. Well, when Jesus returns, **Revelation 21:3** says, “[*God] will dwell with … His people*.” And do you know what the Greek word translated as “dwell” literally means? Booth or tabernacle; God will tabernacle with us! And Revelation 21 continues, “*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away*.”
         4. So the Feast of Booths points us forward to the eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth with Jesus.
3. And congregation, these are just some of the ways that Christ fulfils the Holy-days of Leviticus 23. But I hope they have helped you to see how these festivals were *shadows* of which Jesus Christ is the *substance*. And I hope that they have expanded your understanding and appreciation of everything that Jesus has done for believers. And that brings us very briefly to our third and closing point – **our Holy-days today**.
   1. Today is Sunday. We don’t cease from our work and gather for worship on Saturday – the Sabbath, we do it on Sunday. And this is because Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday. And in so doing, He reset the salvation calendar.
      1. You see, He was crucified on Passover day, which was Friday. Unleavened bread was the next day – the Sabbath. But the day after the Sabbath, Sunday, was the day of **Firstfruits**. And that is the day that He arose.
      2. And seven weeks later it was Sunday again when the Feast of **Weeks** or Pentecost Day was celebrated, and the Lord Jesus poured out His Spirit on His disciples.
      3. And this is why Sunday came to be known in the New Testament as **the Lord’s Day**.
      4. So the Lord’s Day, Sunday, is our weekly day of rest. And when we observe the Lord’s Day, we are imitating God’s pattern of 6 days of work, one day of rest. And we gather to worship and celebrate the rest for our souls that Jesus has secured for us on the cross. But we also look forward to eternal rest – the coming of Jesus and the glorious new heavens and new earth.
      5. And we get to do this every Lord’s Day! What a precious gift of God!
   2. And of course, coming up on Friday we will have an extra opportunity to gather here and thank and praise God for what Christ did for us on the cross. And we do this on Christmas Day and sometimes on Ascension Day, also. In Scripture we are commanded to give thanks, always, for the many blessings which are ours in Christ. And so it has become customary across the Christian world for believers to hold thanksgiving services to remember and celebrate the great acts of salvation done for us by the Lord Jesus.

The holy days of God’s Old Testament people were shadows of which Jesus Christ is the substance. What they had in shadowy form, we understand with crystal clear clarity because Christ has come and we have the New Testament. Praise God for the gospel of the holy-days. Amen.