

February 1

God told Moses that two lambs a day were to be offered to him, one in the morning and one in the evening, that is, the later afternoon as we would call it. At the time of the offerings, the priests were also to burn incense on the altar of incense in the tabernacle. Then in the evening, the lamps in the tabernacle were to be lit for the night. The worship of God was not to take place just on the Sabbath, but it was a daily thing. Do we worship God daily? Do we light the lamp of God's word by reading it every day? Do we offer the incense of prayer on a daily basis?

When Jesus rose from the dead, the guards at the tomb went to the Jewish leaders and told them what had happened. Jesus' point of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus proved true. If they would not believe Moses and the prophets, they would not believe even if someone were to rise from the dead. Instead of saying they had been wrong, they decided to bribe the guards. They offered them money to say that the disciples stole the body while they were asleep and, "If the governor hears about this, we will persuade him and make you without worry." The RSV translation of "keep you out of trouble," which has expanded to many standard translations such as the NIV, NRSV, ESV, and CSB, gives only one possible meaning of the phrase. Dead men don't worry, and the penalty for sleeping on duty while thieves made away with the body would have been death. Are we the sort of people who refuse to change our minds even if we are confronted with evidence? Do we hold to what we have always believed even when shown in the Bible that we are wrong? Do we ever use duplicitous language to confuse people about what we really think?

When Jesus gave the Great Commission, he said to go, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey all that he commanded them. Do we refuse to go? Do we want to baptize those who are not disciples, people who want to be saved from sin but are not interested in following Jesus? Do we teach people but fail to teach them to obey? Or do we teach them to obey just some of Jesus' commands?

February 2

God told Moses that Bezalel and Oholiab were to be in charge of building the tabernacle. He said that he had given them ability, intelligence, knowledge, and all kinds of skill that they would need to construct the tabernacle. We need to acknowledge that these things come from God. Sometimes we become proud of how smart we are, what we can do, and what we know. We fail to give God the glory for them. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" And he said, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." Do we brag about ourselves, how good or smart or able we are?

Moses was gone up on Mt. Sinai for forty days. In that time the people seem to have forgotten about God's covenant. They felt like they had lost their leader: "We don't know what has happened to him." Aaron and Hur had been left in charge. Hur seems to have disappeared from the narrative. Some leaders just abdicate their responsibility. Aaron was swayed by the people to create an image of a calf god. Some leaders are actually followers. They want to know what people think and are influenced by their peers rather than being true leaders and influencing the people. Moses is the example of a true leader. When God told him that the people had already gone into idolatry and he was going to destroy them, Moses successfully plead for their lives. He cared about the people he was leading. When he came down from the mountain, he was so angry at seeing what the people had done that he threw down the tablets containing the Ten Commandments and they broke at the foot of the mountain. It was a righteous anger. He destroyed the idol that the people wanted and disciplined them by making them drink water polluted by gold dust from the destroyed idol. A true leader does what is right and is not afraid to discipline his followers if need be. If God has called you to be a leader, what kind of leader are you? One who doesn't do anything, one who does what people want, or one who cares for his followers and does what God wants? How do we treat our leaders? Do we let them lead, or do we want them to do what we want?

February 3

Since Moses broke the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments, God told him to cut two more tablets and bring them up the mountain and God would write the commandments on them once again. This time Moses was gone another forty days, but the Israelites had learned patience in waiting for him and did not make another calf god idol. Do we learn patience from our experiences? God does not work on our time schedule. Isaiah says that those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. Have we learned to wait for God to work?

God told Moses that his name was Jealous. He is jealous of his worship and doesn't want it given to anyone or anything else. Do we put God first in our lives? He is jealous of anything that is put before him.

We are not under the Law of Moses with its Sabbath rest commandment given to the nation of Israel, but there are things we can learn from it. That commandment was not repeated under the new covenant of Jesus because his covenant is for the whole world. Gentile slaves would not be allowed to take off work on the Sabbath, and God doesn't give commandments that people cannot keep. They may find one hard to keep, but it can be kept. God told Moses that the Sabbath should be kept even in times of plowing and harvest. Undoubtedly there were Israelites who were concerned about their crops and found that one hard to keep. But if they trusted God, they would not lose out by keeping the commandment. Do we trust God even when common sense says not to do so?

As the tabernacle began to be built, both men and women with willing hearts gave the necessary materials. They brought their jewelry and cloth. Women who were skilled in spinning cloth made the blue, purple, and crimson goods, and women whose hearts moved them used their skill to spin the goats' hair. Are we willing to give of our possessions, even valuable possessions for the work of the Lord? Even more, are we willing to use our skills to further his purposes?

February 4

Moses delivered all the necessary materials to build the tabernacle to Bezalel and Oholiab and the skilled workers who would help them. The Israelite people, however, kept bringing even more material to them. Finally, the workers went to Moses and said that they had more than enough material to build the tabernacle. The word went out to stop bringing items for the tabernacle. Can we imagine a situation today when God's people would bring more than enough to carry out his purposes? Would that truly change the world? One of the items constructed was the bronze wash basin outside the tabernacle. It was made from the bronze mirrors of the women who served at the entrance of the tent of meeting. Bronze mirrors do not offer the best reflection, but it would be over two thousand years before glass mirrors were invented. Such polished mirrors were among the best available and were a necessary item for a woman's beauty work. These women gave up expensive and dear items for the glory of God. Are we willing to give up things that are dear to us for God's glory?

The writer of the book of Hebrews draws an analogy from the tabernacle in chapter 9. He lists the items in the tabernacle and states that the outer room stands for this present age and the inner room for heaven itself. Since only the high priest could enter the second room, Jesus is our high priest who entered into heaven with his own blood as an offering for our sins. Do we honor Jesus as our great high priest? The writer says that he cannot go into detail about the items in the tabernacle, but that has not stopped preachers in the past from completing the analogy. The ark of the covenant in the inner room represents the throne of God in heaven. The inner room is the church. The curtain between the two rooms is death. The courtyard is the people of this world. The altar of burnt offerings, including sin offerings, is the offering of Jesus on the cross as our sin offering. The wash basin at the entrance where one washed before entering is baptism. The altar of incense represents prayers; the lampstand is the light of God's word read; and the table of the bread of the Presence is the Lord's Supper. Do you see the force of the analogy?

February 5

Under the supervision of Bezalel and Oholiab, the parts of the tabernacle and the items with it were constructed. The book of Exodus says that they did all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. When Moses saw that all the work had been done according to the commands, he blessed the workers. Do we do all the work that God has given us just as he commands? If so, he will bless us.

One day while Jesus was teaching, the crowd around him told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside wanting to see you." In response, Jesus asked, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Then he answered his own question: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." Do we want to be a part of Jesus' family? Are we people who do God's will, or does our own will reign supreme?

Teaching beside the sea, Jesus spoke in parables to the large crowd gathered. One of the most famous is the parable of the sower. He said that a sower went out to spread his seeds. Some fell on the pathway, but the birds ate those seeds. Some fell on rocky ground, but shortly after the plants sprang up, they withered due to lack of soil. Some fell among weeds, but when the plants grew, the weeds also grew and choked them out. Finally some fell in good soil and produced plants that yielded many more seeds. When the disciples later asked him about the parable, he said that some people fail to understand the message and consequently do not change their lives so as to be forgiven. Then he explained the parable to them. Some people hear the word of God and, not understanding it, Satan makes sure they forget it. Other people joyfully accept the word, but they have no endurance, and when trouble comes their way, they fall away. Still other people accept the word, but this world's worries, the pull to acquire wealth, and all sorts of desires are also present and choke the word so their lives are not changed. But some people who hear the word accept it and bear the fruit of it. The question is, what sort of people are we? Do we try to understand? Do we endure? Are we choked by the world? Do we bear the word's fruit?

February 6

After Moses assembled the new tabernacle and placed the furnishings inside, he anointed it all with the special mix of olive oil, making it holy. Then he anointed Aaron and his sons so that they could serve God as priests. As Christians, we are anointed with the Holy Spirit so that we can serve God as priests. The book of Revelation says that by dying on the cross Jesus has made us a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father. As such, we offer spiritual sacrifices: our bodies as living sacrifices, sacrifices of praise (that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name), doing good, sharing what we have, and bringing others to faith in Christ. Priests are intermediaries between God and man; therefore, being priests, we can go to God directly. He hears our prayers. Are we acting as priests? Do we pray for one another? Do we offer spiritual sacrifices? Do we see ourselves as holy people, anointed with the Holy Spirit?

The book of Leviticus begins with rules about animal sacrifices. The first sacrifice described is the burnt offering. In the Greek Old Testament this is translated as *holokautoma* (wholly burnt), from which we get the word holocaust. It was an offering that was completely burnt up. There was no way to take back such an offering. It was completely turned to smoke. What do we offer to God that is completely given to him? The term holocaust is applied to the Nazi extermination of Jews in World War II because of the burning of the corpses of those who were so ruthlessly killed. It may equally be applied to the burning in incinerators of the corpses of babies who are also ruthlessly killed before they are born. One may call this the American Fetal Holocaust. But the offering is not made to God. It is a sacrifice to our own desires.

When the disciples were on the Sea of Galilee and a storm came up, they were afraid. They woke Jesus up, and he asked why they were afraid. Was it because they had no faith? He rebuked the wind and waves and they quieted down. Then the disciples were afraid, saying, "Who is this?" Are we ever afraid of the power of Jesus? Are we in awe of him?

February 7

When God gave the instructions in Leviticus on grain offerings, he said that they were to be from the first fruits. God expects to receive our offerings from the first of the blessings that he gives us. When we give back to God, do we give him first from our paycheck or does he get leftovers? He wants to be remembered first.

When an Israelite offered a sin offering, God said that when the priest made atonement on his behalf in the sacrifice, God would forgive his sin. But it was not the sacrifice of the animal that took away sins. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says in chapter ten that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins. In chapter nine he writes that a death has occurred that redeems the people under the first covenant from their transgressions. He is talking about the death of Jesus on the cross. The animal sacrifice was the means of asking for forgiveness, but Jesus' death is the grounds for God actually forgiving sins. In the same way, the apostle Peter writes that baptism saves us as an appeal of a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The water of baptism is merely the means of appealing for forgiveness. The actual grounds for the forgiveness is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Is our faith in the fact that we have been baptized or is it in the fact that Jesus died and rose again? The latter is where our faith is supposed to be.

As Jesus was on his way to heal Jairus' daughter, a woman with a flow of blood reached out in faith to touch his clothes. As a result, she was healed, but Jesus would not let her be silent about it. She had to confess to everyone there that Jesus had healed her. Do we reach out to Jesus for our healing, both physical and spiritual? And do we share with others that he is the Great Physician who has healed us?

Herod had had John the Baptizer beheaded because he preached against Herod's incestuous marriage to his brother's wife. This gave Herod a guilty conscience. He thought that Jesus was John raised from the dead. Do we try to hide our sins but have a guilty conscience instead?

February 8

Jesus was not born into a rich family. The book of Leviticus gives the rules for sacrifices of purification. A sheep or goat should be offered, but if a person could not afford one, two turtledoves or two pigeons could be offered instead. That was what Mary offered according to Luke chapter two. There was a level of poverty even lower that would offer only a dish of flour. So Jesus' family was not completely destitute. Do we rank the people we meet according to their wealth? Do we look down on those who don't have as much as we do? Would we have looked down on Jesus' family?

The book of Leviticus says that if a person deceives or defrauds his neighbor and then realizes that he has done wrong, that person must not only offer a sacrifice but also pay back the neighbor 120% of the ill-gotten gains. One would not get to keep what had been dishonestly acquired if he or she truly repented. Do we believe that restitution is a part of repentance, or are we willing to just let that pass?

When Herod's step-daughter danced before him, he rashly promised her anything she wanted up to half of his kingdom. He regretted that promise when under her mother's urging she asked for the head of John the Baptizer on a platter. She gave up an opportunity to have whatever she wanted in order to help her mother get revenge. She gave the head to her mother and so ended up with nothing. Do we sometimes make rash promises without thinking through what the consequences will be? Are we so caught up with revenge that we end up losing everything?

Jesus' disciples saw him take five loaves of bread and two fish and so multiply them that he was able to feed a large crowd of five thousand men plus women and children. After sending the disciples across the Sea of Galilee, he went to pray and then walked across the water to them. They were astounded by this. Mark says they did not understand about the loaves because their hearts were stubbornly hardened. Do we let our preconceived ideas keep us from understanding who Jesus is?



February 9

After Aaron and his sons had finished the process of being ordained as priests, the glory of the Lord appeared to the people and fire came out from the Lord and lit the burnt offering on the altar. This was the altar that Moses had been told to keep the fire burning all the time and not let it go out. It was the fire from God. Do we have the fire from God's word burning in our hearts? Do we keep it burning and never let it go out?

When Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu offered incense to God, they did not use holy fire to burn it. Instead they used fire from a strange source that God had not commanded. As a result, fire came forth from the presence of the Lord and consumed them. Thus they died in God's presence. Moses told Aaron that God said he would show himself holy through those who were near him and thus be glorified by all the people. Do we make up our own ways to worship God? Do we think he is pleased if we do so?

Shortly after the death of his sons, Aaron was told that priests were not to drink wine or strong drink when he or his descendants were officiating at the tent of meeting. Perhaps that gives us a clue as to why Nadab and Abihu decided to offer incense with strange fire. Alcoholic drinks dull the reasoning power of the mind and take away inhibitions that should not be removed. Do we seek to find pleasure in liquid spirits rather than in the Spirit of God?

The Pharisees and scribes were upset because Jesus' disciples were not following the tradition of the elders to wash their hands before eating. Jesus responded that their traditions often conflicted with God's commands. A man could fail to honor his aging parents (that is, provide for them) if he said that he had pledged his money to God. That is just lip worship, not heart worship. Jesus says worship is vain if people teach human commands as doctrine. Do we hold to our human traditions rather than the commandments of God?

February 10

While the burnt offering in Leviticus was to be completely burnt up, the sin offering (also called the purification offering) was only partly to be offered in fire on the altar. Meat left over from the offering was the property of the priests and they were to eat it. After Aaron's two oldest sons died, Moses was upset with Aaron and his other sons because they did not eat the meat from the sin offering. Aaron asked if God would really be pleased if he ate from the sacrifice on the day that his sons died. Moses was satisfied with this answer. Do we think that God doesn't care how we feel after a tragedy, that he is a heartless taskmaster? This account would indicate otherwise; he understands.

People who are looking for mistakes in the Bible sometimes point to the fact that our English Bibles list bats as a kind of bird. The same could be said for whales as a kind of fish. However, this is to ignore that ancient cultures did not organize animals according to modern science. We organize by bone structure, skin type (hair, feathers, scales), and breathing (lungs vs. gills). The ancient Hebrews organized according to movement: walking, swimming, flying, scurrying (including mice, lizards, centipedes, and snakes), and insects. Bats are flying animals and whales do swim. It is the translation using the words birds and fish that give the wrong impression. Do we look for problems in the Bible? Or do we try to understand what is written?

Jesus asked his disciples who people thought he was. They answered that people thought he was John the baptizer, or Elijah, or another one of the prophets. Then he asked who they thought he was. Peter quickly answered that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. But when Jesus told them that he must suffer, be rejected, die, and rise again after three days, Peter took him aside and rebuked him. He apparently thought that Jesus did not understand his role as Messiah. Jesus indicated that Peter was doing the work of Satan, tempting him to change his mission. Do we try to change Jesus' mission into something that we would like better? He came to save the world from sin and reconcile us to do God's will.

February 11

The book of Leviticus has various rules about diseases. If a person had a contagious skin disease (traditionally called leprosy), that individual was to wear torn clothes and disheveled hair and a covering on the upper lip to warn others away. If he or she was near someone else, they were to cry out, "Unclean, unclean" as a warning. Such an individual was to live alone outside the camp so that the disease would not spread. In doing so, the diseased person was showing care for those who were healthy. Those who were thus required to undergo the additional hardship of exile were to care about those who were better off. Are we people who care about those who are better off than we are? Or are we jealous of them? If something bad happens to us, do we wish it on others also? Jesus underwent the evil of the cross because he cares about us. But because of the healing resurrection, he does not warn us away, but invites us to come to him.

If a piece of cloth or leather was found to have a disease (probably mold) that could not be washed out, that item was to be destroyed to keep the infestation from spreading. It seems that evil spreads more quickly than good. We must be careful of the evil around us and around our family, especially our children, lest it spread to us and our family as well. Jesus teaches us to pray, "Do not lead us into temptation." Sometimes we must cut off from our life those situations and individuals that threaten to lead us into sin. Do we continue to keep those practices and friendships that are hurting us spiritually?

When Peter saw Jesus transformed at his transfiguration talking to Moses and Elijah, he spoke up and said, "Let us build three booths" to honor all three. Mark notes that he said this because he didn't know what to say. Are we, like Peter, sometimes people who speak up even when we don't know what to say? We may just feel like something needs to be said, but we end up saying the wrong thing. Peter was rebuked by a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." Do we listen to Jesus? It is better to hear than to speak.

February 12

The book of Leviticus has many rules about ritual cleanness and uncleanness. Many of these rules are designed to promote good health. While we are no longer under the Law of Moses, that law having been replaced by Christ's teachings, we can learn that we need to live our lives in a healthy sort of way. Do we practice unhealthy habits and then expect God to answer our prayers for good health?

God told Moses to instruct Aaron that the priests were not to go into the inner room of the tabernacle at just any time. Rather, only the high priest was to enter that room and that only on one day a year. He had to bathe and put on the high priestly garments and bring in incense and the blood of a bull for his sins and the blood of a goat for the sins of the Israelite people. This day was called the Day of Atonement, or more literally, the Day of Covering, when people's sins were covered over. The book of Hebrews says that Jesus is our great high priest. Unlike the Aaronic high priests who entered the most holy place year after year, Jesus entered into the true holy place, that is, heaven, only one time, when he died on the cross. There he presented his own blood to God as an offering for our sins. He was not garbed in beautiful, colorful clothes like those high priests. Rather he was clothed in the righteousness that comes from living a perfect, sinless life. There was no need first to offer blood for his own sins since he was sinless. The incense he offered was the prayer for forgiveness for those crucifying him and the penitent thief crucified with him. That Friday was the true Day of Atonement when our sins were covered over by his blood. Do we truly appreciate his suffering that takes away our sins?

As Jesus traveled with his disciples, they argued with one another along the road. When they came to the house where they stayed in Capernaum, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" They were silent and could say nothing because they had been arguing about who was the greatest. He said, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Are we willing to be a servant to everyone?

February 13

On the Day of Atonement (literally, the Day of Covering) the high priest would make atonement for the tabernacle because it remained “with them in the midst of their uncleanness.” Here we see the graciousness of God. Even though the Israelites sinned over and over, the symbolic throne of God on the Ark of the Covenant remained in their midst. The same is true of us. We may mess up, but God in his grace and mercy still cares about us. Do we appreciate that God is still with us?

When the high priest went into the inner room, the most holy place, no one else could be in the tabernacle. He had to be alone. Jesus, as our high priest, had to die alone for our sins. He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Do we appreciate the loneliness of Jesus on the cross for us?

On the Day of Atonement, two goats were involved in the ritual. Both of them in some sense represent what Jesus has done for us. One of the goats was sacrificed as a sin offering for the people. Jesus is our sin offering. On the head of the other goat, the scapegoat (short for escape goat), the high priest would lay his hands and confess the sins of the people. Then the goat would be led into the wilderness and turned loose. It was said that this goat bore the iniquities of the people and carried them away. Jesus bore our iniquities on the cross and took them away. He was in a sense our scapegoat. That term is usually used in a derogatory sense. And Jesus did suffer a shameful death. Do we thank Jesus for taking our sins on himself as he hung on that cross of shame?

The book of Leviticus lists various kinds of incest forbidden. One should not marry his father’s daughter like Abraham did. One should not marry two sisters at the same time like Jacob did. One should not have sex with his daughter-in-law like Judah did unwittingly. So we should not point to our ancestors and say such and such a practice is okay. Do we sometimes make excuses for ourselves by saying that our family has always done it this way, when God says not to do so?

February 14

The book of Leviticus has a section on holiness. In it God says, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." To be holy means to be set apart, to be different from the wicked world around us. That difference is grounded in the fact that God himself is holy. Many of the teachings in this section echo the Ten Commandments: don't worship other gods or make idols, keep the Sabbath, revere your father and mother, don't steal or defraud, don't lie and give false testimony, don't commit adultery or other sexual sins. These are a part of being holy. This section also has what Jesus calls the second most important commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." What does that mean? The paragraph that includes it explains it. Do not hate your relatives. Make sure to reprove your neighbor if he or she is doing wrong. Do not take revenge or hold a grudge against people. These are the practical things that grow out of love. Are we people who actually love our neighbors by how we act? Do we hold grudges or plot revenge, even if we fail to carry it out?

The section has a similar command: "You shall love the foreigner as yourself." This is especially appropriate in this day of racial tension. We are uncomfortable and sometimes afraid when people are from a different culture than ours. But we need to treat these people with love. The people of Israel were forbidden to completely harvest their fields. They were to leave the edges for the poor and the foreigners to come and harvest. Do we care about those from another country or another race? God is the creator of all.

The section contains a command on not stealing or defrauding workers. Day workers were to be paid at the end of the day. Their wages were not to be held back. Those involved in buying and selling were to use honest weights and measures. Jesus was upset when he saw that people were using the temple of God as a marketplace. Because of restricted access, outrageous prices were being charged. Jesus called it a den of thieves. Do we cheat others when we get a chance, or are we honest?

February 15

God told Moses that sacrifices offered to him should not be blemished. This is why Jesus had to live a perfect, sinless life to be our sacrifice for sin. Further, the Israelite people were not to eat of any of their harvest until they had offered the first fruits to God. When we make an offering to God, do we give him the first part from our earnings, or does he get the leftovers of what we spend on ourselves and our desires?

When the Pharisees and Herodians tried to trap Jesus by asking him whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar or not, he asked to see a common coin called a denarius. When they produced one, he asked, "Whose image and inscription is on this?" They answered, "Caesar's." So he said, "Give to Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's." The questions we have to ask are: What is the image of God on? What is his name on? People are made in the image of God, and he puts his name on his people, that is, on us who are Christians. Do we give ourselves to God? Since God expects unblemished offerings, do we try to present ourselves to him as holy people? Or do we continue in our favorite sins, saying that Jesus' death will forgive us?

The Sadducees presented an unreal, hypothetical situation to Jesus concerning the afterlife of a woman married in turn to seven brothers. Jesus said that they did not know either the scriptures nor the power of God. God has shown his power by raising Jesus from the dead, and he promises to do the same for us when Jesus comes again. From the scriptures Jesus showed that God told Moses that he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As people count this, they had been long dead, but since God is the God of the living, not the dead, they were still alive in some sense. Are we secularists like the Sadducees who see death as the end? Or do we hold to the promise of God that we will rise again? Do we look to the scriptures for the truth about death and life?

Jesus quoted Moses to say that the greatest commandment is to love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Do we love him like that?

February 16

There were three times a year that Israelite men were to assemble where the tabernacle (and later, the temple) was located: the Feast of Unleavened Bread (at Passover time), the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and the Feast of Booths. Two of these were times of remembrance of what God had done for the people: Unleavened Bread for the deliverance from Egypt and Booths for the forty years of care in the wilderness. The scriptures do not mandate any annual holidays for Christian remembrance (although Easter and Christmas have been invented to fulfill that lack), but Jesus did mandate the Lord's Supper by saying, "Do this in my memory." The early church celebrated this meal at least weekly to keep that memory fresh. Do we remember what Jesus has done for us on a weekly basis? There is danger in forgetting what God has done for us in Jesus.

To provide a safeguard against generational poverty, God told Moses that every fifty years at Jubilee property should be returned to the family of the original owner. Not everyone is blessed with ancestors who know how to handle money, and this provided a way to restore equality in finance to those who had lost out. While we do not have Jubilee laws today, are we concerned to help the poor break the cycle of generational poverty?

Jesus warned against religious leaders who liked the honor of religious titles and best seats in the synagogues, but who were willing to enrich themselves by cheating widows out of their houses. What a contrast their actions were to God's intention at Jubilee! But today there are still people who will do anything to make a buck off of the poor. Do we care about the poor and try to defend their rights against those who would take advantage of their lack of knowledge about handling money?

Jesus commended the poor widow who put two *leptons* (together worth 1/64 of a day's wage) into the temple treasury, which was all the money she had. Would Jesus commend our way of giving back to God?



February 17

God told the Israelites that if they obeyed him, he would bless them. Rain would fall in its season and crops would grow. There would be plenty to eat and there would be peace in the land. They would defeat their enemies and their number would multiply in the land. No one would make them afraid. But if they disobeyed him, he would bring the opposite of a blessing. There would be disease in the land. Crops would fail and their enemies would be victorious. They would be afraid even when no one was against them. If these things did not bring them to repentance, he would bring even more against them. There would be no rain, and wild animals would attack their children and livestock. If they still wouldn't repent, he would bring more disease and their enemies would once again win. If they still continued in rebellion, he would allow their enemies to remove them from the land. But being a gracious God, if they would finally come to their senses and turn to him, he would allow them to return to the land, and he would bless them. Does any of this sound familiar to our own circumstances? If so, perhaps we need to return to God and receive his blessings.

Jesus told his disciples that the temple stones were all going to be thrown down. In their lifetime they would see the abomination of desolation (the hated thing that destroys, i.e., the Roman armies), and it would be time to flee for their lives. All this happened in the war with Rome in A.D. 66-73 with the temple being destroyed in the midst of those seven years in A.D. 70. He told the parable of the fig tree: Just as the fig tree putting out leaves means that summer is coming, so all these things that happened mean that his coming is near. He promised that he would come on the clouds with great power and glory and send his angels to gather his chosen people. The first part of this prophecy came true within forty years. Are we looking forward to the second part of the prophecy? Have we given up hope that Jesus will come again? Jesus said that no one knows the day or hour when that will happen except for God the Father. That means we should always be ready and be watching for his coming. Are we staying spiritually awake and watching?

February 18

When God told Moses to count the men who were able to fight in war, he called for twelve men to help him. Leaders need helpers. God listed those men by name. When the census was taken, names were listed and although the scriptures only list the total number of warriors for each tribe, it says that it is the number of names. Names are important. They give us an individuality. When Jesus says that he is the good shepherd, he also says that he calls his sheep by name. Jesus knows each and every one of us who belong to him. Do you realize that you are not just some nameless believer, but that Jesus knows you as an individual?

At the Passover meal called the Last Supper, Jesus gave the bread at that meal and the cup at the end of it special significance. He said that the bread is his body and the cup is the blood of the covenant. When we take the Lord's Supper to remember him and his death on the cross, do we also remember that we are in covenant relationship with him? That death did not just take away our sins; it calls us to follow him in his new covenant.

Sometimes we overestimate our own spirituality. After that Passover meal, Jesus and his disciples sang hymns (traditionally, Psalms 115 to 118). Then they left for the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem. On the way Jesus told them that they would all be scattered like sheep when he, the shepherd, was struck in accordance with scripture. Peter spoke up and proclaimed that he would not fall away even if all the rest of them did. Jesus replied that before the second rooster crow of the coming morning Peter would have denied Jesus three times. Peter and all the disciples protested, but Jesus knew them better than they knew themselves. After his resurrection, Jesus showed his forgiveness of Peter. Do we realize that Jesus knows when we will fail but he will also forgive us?

While Jesus prayed at Gethsemane, his disciples fell asleep. Do we sometimes find ourselves sleepy during church or Bible reading?

February 19

God told Moses that the Levite tribe would be responsible for transporting the tabernacle from place to place. The tribe was made up of three clans, the descendants of Levi's three sons. There was a division of labor among the clans. The clan of Gershon was responsible for the cloth and leather coverings over the tabernacle and the cloth fence around the courtyard. The clan of Kohath was in charge of all the furnishings inside and outside the tabernacle. The clan of Merari was responsible for moving the wooden walls and supports, including the support bases. Each clan had its own job to do. In the same way there is a division of labor in the home, the community, and the church. Each person does not do everything, but together everything gets done. Have you found your work in the home, the community, and the church?

Peter put himself in a position to be tempted to deny that he knew Jesus. He followed Jesus at a distance and came right into the courtyard of the high priest. The guards were keeping a fire there in order to warm themselves, and Peter joined them. After a while a female servant saw him and accused him of being a follower of Jesus. Perhaps afraid, he denied it. He moved away as a rooster crowed. She told others there that Peter was a follower. Now he was confronted with multiple people accusing him. Feeling the pressure from the crowd, he denied Jesus again. Finally, the people around him realized from his accent that he was not local but from Galilee. A third time he denied knowing Jesus. It was when he heard a rooster crow again that he finally left in bitter tears. Jesus teaches us to pray, "Do not lead us into temptation." Do we sometimes, like Peter, put ourselves in situations where we are tempted and leave those situations too late?

Pilate realized that Jesus was being brought before him out of the jealousy of the chief priests. He knew Jesus was innocent, but it was easier to give way to the crowd than do what was right. Do we listen to those around us rather than listening to God to determine what is right?

February 20

When it was time for the tabernacle to move, the priests would go inside to cover the furnishings. The curtain that separated the holy place from the most holy place was put over the ark of the covenant. Then it was covered in leather and a blue cloth. The outer blue cloth seems to have served the purpose of warning people to stay away from this holy box. Finally, carrying poles were attached. Other furnishings had a blue cloth over them too, but that cloth was covered by still other coverings. Then carrying poles were also attached to these items. Once everything was covered, the Levites from the clan of Kohath were allowed to go in and carry out the furnishings, but they were not allowed to touch the holy items. In fact, they were forbidden even to look upon these items under penalty of death. There was a great sense of the sacred about this task. God is a God of both the near and the far. There is a danger in forgetting the sacred farness of God and becoming too complacent with him in our attitude. He is a holy God. Do we take our religion with the seriousness that a holy God deserves? Do we emphasize his nearness and forget his sacred distance?

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, those who passed by hurled insults at him. The chief priests and the scribes mocked him among themselves. Even those who were crucified with him taunted him although Luke says that one of them repented and Jesus forgave him. It is easy to make fun of and even bully those whom we consider different, but it is never right. Do we allow ourselves to make fun of and mentally torture those with whom we disagree? Also, if we are the ones reviled with evil words spoken against us for the sake of Jesus, he says we are blessed and have a great reward in heaven.

Joseph of Arimathea was a respected member of the Jewish council that had condemned Jesus to death. He had not consented to his death and even arranged to bury Jesus' body in his own new tomb. How often do we jump to conclusions about people and accuse them of doing the same things that people they are associated with do? We may be wrong.

February 21

The Israelite priests were to bless the people using this saying: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." So often we try to scare people by saying that God is watching everything we do, good or bad. But in this blessing God is watching over people to be gracious and give peace. Do we imagine God's watching us as waiting for us to sin so he can punish us? Or do we see him as a gracious God who watches over us to protect and care for us? That is a real difference and a blessing.

The twelve leaders of the Israelite tribes brought gifts to God to dedicate the altar. They also brought six wagons and twelve oxen to be used in the service of God. The clans of Gershon and Merari were given the wagons and the oxen to pull them in order to transport the tabernacle, for the support bases each weighed a talent, that is, 75 pounds. But the holy furnishings were carried on the shoulders of the clan of Kohath because those items were sacred. Each leader gave the same offering because all the tribes were considered equal. No matter our service, we are all equal before God. But we can offer things for God's service that will help others do their job. What kind of offerings do we bring to God?

Mary Magdalene told Jesus' disciples that he was alive and had appeared to her, but they did not believe her. Two who traveled with Jesus on the road reported this to the disciples, but they were not believed either. Then Jesus appeared to the eleven and confronted them because of their unbelief. Do we believe in Jesus' resurrection because of what the scriptures say, or do we insist that we are not going to believe unless we see it for ourselves?

Jesus told the disciples that the one who believed the good news and was baptized would be saved. However, those who fail to believe will be lost. If one truly believes, that person will be baptized. Are we people who truly believe and obey his commands?

February 22

What is the value of reading through the Bible year after year? When one comes to the offerings of the leaders of the Israelite tribes in the book of Numbers, it may seem boring (or is that, booooooring?). The same sacrifices are repeated for each one. But in one year the value of the sacrifices sticks out. In another, having finally made some sense of the genealogies elsewhere, one realizes that the first leader is an ancestor of Boaz and David and Jesus. Then one realizes that the majority of the sacrifices are the offerings variously called peace, well-being, or fellowship (depending on the translation one is reading). Those offerings provide a lot of meat for the one offering the sacrifice. What does one do with the meat from two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five lambs? If you are a leader, you share that meat with others. That is not mentioned in the text, but it seems to be implied. But why is the full list repeated for each individual? It is because God wants us to know that he sees and values the offering of each individual. Do you sometimes think that God doesn't need your offering because it makes so little a difference? God is interested in what you as an individual are offering back to him and he will bless you for it.

The angel Gabriel appeared to the old priest Zachariah while he was offering incense in the temple. He told Zachariah that his prayers had been answered and that his wife finally was going to have a child. This was good news, but Zachariah had a hard time believing it. He and his wife Elizabeth had been praying for a long time, and it seemed there was no answer. Isaiah says that those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. God answers prayer in his own good time. Zachariah's son was John the Baptizer, a very significant individual. Do we give up on a prayer request because we think God is not hearing this one?

When Elizabeth became pregnant with John, she said that God had taken away her disgrace. That implies that others were talking about her, maybe saying there was something wrong with her. Are we people who talk about others and spread untrue stories about them?

February 23

After the Israelites left Mount Sinai, they started to complain because they didn't have meat to eat. They remembered that in Egypt they could eat cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic, but here they only had "this manna" to eat. They complained about what God had given them. They seem to have forgotten the hard work of slavery in Egypt.

Sometimes when people are saved, they look back at the fun they had when they were sinning and seem to forget all the consequences of that sin that kept them in despair. They say that Christianity is hard. Jesus said that the narrow gate leads to a hard road, but it is on the way to eternal life. Are we people who complain about how hard it is to be a Christian and follow Jesus? Or do we thank God for the salvation?

The people wanted meat to eat, so God sent a multitude of quail to cover their camp. They had so much quail to eat that they made themselves sick. All good things should be done in moderation. The wise man Solomon says that honey is good, but not to eat too much of it. Are we people who practice moderation, or do we give way to greed?

Moses' brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, found fault with Moses because he had married a Cushite woman, a woman from a different race with a dark skin. Are we people who are prejudiced against people of a different race or nationality or skin color? God is not a respecter of persons; he created us all. But their complaint seems to have been driven by jealousy. They also complained that God had spoken through them as well as Moses. God confronted them and said that he spoke to Moses in a special way. He then put a skin disease on Miriam until Moses prayed for his sister. Are we jealous of others whom God is using in a way that he is not using us? He will be displeased if we complain.

When the angel Gabriel told the virgin Mary that she was to have a child from the Holy Spirit, she agreed even though people around her would not understand and think she had done wrong. Are we people who are willing to do God's will even though people around us may disapprove?

February 24

Before the Israelites were ready to enter the land of Canaan, Moses sent twelve leaders, one from each tribe, into the land to spy it out. They returned saying it is a good land, but ten of them reported that it had tall people and high-walled cities and that the Israelites would not be able to conquer it. They had lost faith in God's power to help them win. Only two, Caleb and Joshua, still had that faith and pleaded that they could conquer the land with God's help. The ten leaders convinced the people that conquest was hopeless. People said, "It would be better to have died in the wilderness," and "We should return to Egypt"! So God told Moses that since they preferred to die in the wilderness, that is what would happen. They were to wander in the wilderness for another thirty-nine years, forty years in all, until all those warriors at least twenty years old were dead. Those ten leaders died from a plague. Leaders without faith produce followers without faith. Do we have the faith to see what God has done before and believe that he can do it again?

When God told Moses that the people were to wander in the wilderness for forty years, they repented and decided to attack the land of Canaan. The problem was that having disobeyed God's first command, he gave a new command to stay in the wilderness. They wanted to obey the old command that had been removed. But God was not with them to obey that command and they were defeated by the Canaanites. Do we search the Bible for old commands in the old covenant that we think we would like instead of those in the new covenant of Christ? Do we think that God will approve of this?

The most powerful woman in the first century B.C. was Egypt's Cleopatra the Seventh. Contrast that with a poor but righteous young woman named Mary in an obscure village called Nazareth. The former ended up committing suicide. The latter gave birth to the Messiah, the Son of God. God humbles the powerful and exalts the humble. How many women today are named Cleopatra versus how many are named Mary? Do we look for political power to solve our problems today?



February 25

God gave Moses instructions regarding how much grain offering and drink offering were to accompany each of the sacrifices. He said that the Israelites were to abide by these rules when they sacrificed. But then he told Moses that foreigners were to abide by the same rules when they offered him a sacrifice. God worked through the Israelite people, but he was never the God of just the Israelites. The One who created the world is God over all the people of the world. Do we sometimes think that God is only interested in our kind or race of people? Do we share the good news of Jesus with people of other cultures and nations?

Moses' cousin Korah led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. There were two hundred fifty leaders from the tribe of Levi plus some from the tribe of Reuben who joined the rebellion. The claim was that all of God's people are holy so they had as much right to the priesthood as Aaron did. They said that Moses had exalted himself, while in reality God had exalted Moses, sometimes against his will. Moses was just following what God had told him to do. It is true that God calls all of his people to be holy. But that does not mean that we get to make up our own way of serving him. Moses provided a test to these Levites. They would all offer incense to God. These leaders seem to have forgotten what happened to Nadab and Abihu when they offered incense wrong. Once again, fire came out from God and destroyed the two hundred fifty men who had made themselves out to be priests. And the earth opened up and swallowed the Reubenites who joined the rebellion. Do we sometimes let our jealousy of people lead us to disregard what God has said? Do we put our own ideas ahead of his?

When the infant Jesus was presented at the temple, the old man Simon took the child and praised God for letting him see the salvation prepared in the presence of all peoples. The old prophet Anna also praised God at that time and began to talk about the child to everyone looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. Do we realize that Jesus is the salvation for all the people of the world? Do we share that news with all who will listen?

February 26

After God destroyed the two hundred fifty Levite leaders who tried to offer incense like priests, the people of Israel blamed Moses and Aaron for their deaths. God was very displeased with this blaming of his servants and he sent a plague among the people. Moses told Aaron to get incense to offer and go in amidst the people. Aaron ran to where the plague was killing people and offered incense to make atonement for the people. The plague stopped and he stood between the living and the dead. Good leaders care for the people even when they are being unjustly blamed. When something goes wrong, are we quick to lay the blame at the foot of the leaders? Do the leaders strike back or do they try to help the followers?

After Jesus was baptized, he went into the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil. Sometimes people think that if they are baptized they will no longer be tempted. The devil doesn't give up just because someone has decided to follow Jesus. When Jesus was hungry from fasting, the devil tempted him to misuse his miracle power for his own benefit, that is, to turn stones into bread. Jesus could have done this, but his miracle power was given to help others. Then the devil lied and said that he had been given all the authority over the kingdoms of the world. He wanted Jesus to worship him. Jesus refused to believe this lie and worship something other than God. Finally, the devil dared Jesus to prove that he was the Son of God by jumping off a high point of the temple. He quoted scripture to prove that angels would catch him. But in quoting the scripture, he left out an important phase. The angels were to protect him "in all his ways." Jumping off the temple was not something that Jesus came to do. Jesus answered every temptation by quoting scripture. Sometimes we hear that we should pray when tempted. Prayer is always a good thing, but prayer keeps the focus on the temptation. Quoting scripture puts the focus on God's will. Do we commit scripture to memory so it can be used when we are tempted? Do we watch out that we do not misquote scripture in such a way that we are tempted? Do we use our gifts from God to help others or ourselves?

February 27

When God led the people of Israel to Kadesh (the name means "holy"), there was no water there. Perhaps this was God's way of testing the people to see if they would trust him. The people's reaction was to complain to Moses: "It would have been better to have died earlier. You have brought us here in the wilderness to die. Here we don't have grain, figs, vines, or pomegranates, and there is no water here." Sometimes we love to complain. Are we any different from them? Moses and Aaron went to the tent of meeting and fell on their faces before the Lord. We need to learn to approach God in humble prayer in times of trouble. God told them to take the staff and assemble the people at a rock and command it in their presence to pour forth water. Moses and Aaron assembled them, but instead of speaking to the rock, Moses spoke to the people, "Shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?" No water came out, so Moses hit the rock with the staff God told him to bring. No water still, so it hit it again, and in God's graciousness water poured out. But God was not pleased, for Moses had taken the honor on himself instead of giving the glory to God. Sometimes it is said that the problem was that Moses hit the rock when he hadn't been told to do so. But that is not why God blamed him. It was a matter of God's glory. God cared for his people, and so he provided water even when he was not given the glory. But he told Moses and Aaron that they would not be allowed to enter the land of Canaan because they didn't give him the glory. Do we sometimes seek glory for ourselves rather than giving it to God? Jesus says that we are to do good works so that people will see and give glory to the Father. The glory is not for us.

After Aaron died on Mount Hor, the people left to travel avoiding Edom. They once again complained about the lack of tasty food and water. In response God sent poisonous snakes against them. When they appealed to Moses for help, God told him to make a snake on a pole and have the people look at it to be made well. Moses did so and they were healed. In the same way, we must look to Jesus who was lifted up on a cross in order to have spiritual healing. He is the only way to escape our sin.

February 28

As the people of Israel progressed toward the land of Canaan, they circled around the land of Moab and camped just north of the Arnon River, on the border of Moab. The place was named Beer (the word for "well" in Hebrew) because there the leaders of the Israelites dug a well for the people. Sometimes we have the idea that leaders are just supposed to sit back and make decisions for their followers. These leaders were actively involved in the work that was going on. What kind of leaders do we have? Those who lead by example or those who like to dictate? The Israelites sang the praises of the former.

Balak, the king of Moab, became worried over the Israelite people who were camped on his border. So he sent messengers with money to the diviner Balaam who lived in a town on the Euphrates River; he was known to be able effectively to curse a people. Balaam was interested, but he said he first needed to consult God. That night God appeared to him and told him, "You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed." Balaam told the messengers that God had refused to let him go with them. The messengers told Balak that Balaam refused to accompany them. Have you ever noticed that messages seem to change as they are told? Balak sent more messengers to get Balaam to come, promising more money. But Balaam said that even if Balak were to give him his house full of silver and gold, he could not go beyond the command of the Lord. He said the right words, but his heart was not in it. What do you do when you don't like what the word of God says? He told the messengers to wait and he would ask God again. This time God said he could go with them but only do what God told him to do. So Balaam started out on his donkey with his servants. God must have known that disobedience was in Balaam's heart, for on the way the angel of the Lord appeared to the donkey three times. Each time that the donkey tried to get away, Balaam beat the donkey. Finally, God made the donkey speak, and Balaam saw the angel. The angel told him that he could only say what God told him to say. Do we want to say something different than God's word? What would cause us to do that?

It seems that some people are itching for a fight. King Sihon of the Amorites is a good example. When the people of Israel sent word asking to pass through his land, he decided not only to deny the request but also to bring his army out to fight them. He was defeated and killed in the battle, and the Israelites took over his territory. Are we people who love a good fight, or are we peace loving people?

February 29

Is it possible to get God to change his plans by offering enough sacrifices? Balak the king of Moab apparently thought so. He had sent for Balaam to come and curse the people of Israel, but Balaam told him that he could only say the words God put in his mouth. On the next day Balak took Balaam to Bamoth-Baal (the high place of the master) where he could see the Israelites. At Balaam's instruction, Balak built seven altars and sacrificed a bull and a ram on each one. Balaam went aside to wait for God's message, but when it came, it was a blessing, not a curse. Balak was upset but not deterred from his goal. He took Balaam to the mountain peak of Pisgah where he could only see part of the people. Did he think that the blessing was for the part of the people that could not be seen? Again he built seven altars and sacrificed a bull and a ram on each. Once again, the message that God gave to Balaam was a blessing, not a curse. Balak was not the first to be stubborn in his desire to get his way; Pharaoh had tried that before him. But these men of the past are warnings for us. Sometimes we too can stubbornly continue in our own path instead of following God. So a third time Balak brought Balaam to a new place, the mountain top of Peor, to curse Israel. This cost him seven more altars constructed and seven more bulls and seven more rams sacrificed. Since Balaam realized that God was only going to bless Israel, not curse them, this time he did not go apart to seek omens. It is not clear whether in doing so he planned to bless or to curse Israel on his own. But he was not on his own because the Spirit of God took hold of him and he gave a third blessing of Israel to Balak. Balak was not the only one who kept persevering; God also persevered in blessing the people. Do we persevere in trying to get our own way with God? It will not work for us any more than for Balak. Balak then told Balaam that God had kept him from earning his wage that had been promised. Balaam responded by saying he told the messengers up front that he could only say what God told him. Then Balaam gave a fourth message about what would happen to Moab in the future. Why did Balaam go to Moab when he knew that God would bless the people? Do we ever do things that we know in our hearts that God doesn't want us to do?