

June 1

The book of First Chronicles lists several tasks of the Levites in the service of the temple. Some were gatekeepers. Others had charge of the utensils of service. They had to count them when they were checked out and when they were turned in. Still others had the responsibility of the furniture and holy utensils and food offering ingredients: the choice flour, wine, oil, incense, and spices. Some prepared the mixing of the spices. Another one was in charge of making the flat cakes. Others were in charge of the rows of bread that were prepared each Sabbath. Finally, some of the Levites were singers. Each person had his job and the temple service was carried on, not because one person did everything, but because each person did the task he was assigned. It is the same way with the church today. One person doesn't do all the tasks of ministry; rather, each disciple has a ministry to perform and the work of the church is done because the work is distributed across many people. Do each of us have the task that we do to advance the work of God's church?

It would seem that Paul sent his letter to the Roman church by the hand of Phoebe, a servant (or was it an official servant, that is, a deacon?) of the church at Cenchreae. He says that she had been a benefactor of Paul and many others as well. Are we those who help people as we have an opportunity? Further, are we people who can be trusted to carry out a sacred task? The letter to Rome that she carried has changed the course of history.

Of all the people to whom Paul sent greetings, eight are women. Three of those women were praised as workers for the Lord. Do we imagine that women have nothing that they can do in the Lord's kingdom?

Paul finished his letter by saying that the gospel reveals a mystery; that mystery was that the gospel was to go to the Gentiles to bring about their obedience to the faith. Some Jews thought it was only for them. Do we imagine that the gospel is only for people who look like us?

June 2

One day David made one of those wishes for something that was not possible. He remembered the taste of the water from the well at Bethlehem where he had grown up and wished that he could drink water from that well again. But at that time there was a Philistine garrison stationed there. His three main warriors heard him wish that and they went to Bethlehem, fought the Philistines, drew water from the well, and brought it to David. David was appalled that they had risked their lives for what he thought was an empty wish. He said he could not drink the water, for he thought it would be like drinking these men's blood. So he made the water into a drink offering to the Lord and poured it out in God's honor. Do we sometimes fantasize with empty wishes? Do we replace such wishes with things that honor God?

The Corinthians had a unity problem. The church there had divided into four different camps. Some saw Paul as their leader, some Apollos, some Cephas (that is, Peter), and others chose to follow just Christ. The latter had the right idea, but they seem to have participated in the division. Instead of saying that all the Corinthian disciples belonged to Christ, they formed a Christ party. In doing so, they had become sectarian. Later in his letter to them Paul would state, "You all belong to Christ." Do we let our understanding of some doctrine create a division in God's church? Paul argued that Christ was not divided and that Paul was not the one who was crucified for them. They were not baptized into his name, implying that they would belong to him. Rather they were baptized into Christ's name, meaning that they belonged to Christ. Do we realize that our baptism means that we belong to Christ?

Wisdom is an important attribute. But there is human wisdom and divine wisdom. In his wisdom, God has made it so that one cannot come to know God through human wisdom. The idea that a person can be made right with God because the Messiah died on a cross seems foolish to human wisdom. Are we enamored with human wisdom? Do we have the faith that leads to the righteousness that God gives?

June 3

When David decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, he consulted with the leaders of Israel. That was a wise move. The problem was that he failed to consult God's word. Do we consult God's word or just make decisions based on what people think? They put the ark on a cart pulled by oxen. When the oxen stumbled, Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark. No one was supposed to touch the ark. It was always supposed to be carried by poles. God struck Uzzah dead. He had a certain reverence for the ark (can't let it fall off of the cart), but not the reverence that God had commanded. He had made up his own idea for the kind of reverence needed. Do we decide for ourselves the kind of reverence that God wants? Or do we look to God's word? David later brought the ark to Jerusalem with the Levites carrying the ark by the poles attached to the ark just as God's word says to do.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he did not try to use words of human wisdom to teach them about the things that God has given us. Rather he used the words taught by the Spirit. Do we try to share the gospel using our own wise words, or do we share what the scriptures say about Jesus? Whose words do we use? Paul said there are three situations that people can be in. He says that some people are "soulical," that is, they depend only on human wisdom at the level of the soul or human life. They cannot understand the things of the Spirit because they are spiritually discerned. Other people are "spiritual"; they are able to discern what is going on in the world on a much higher level, but those who are not spiritual cannot understand where they are coming from. Finally, there are people who are "fleshly"; these people live their lives driven by desires of the flesh. Christians should be spiritual, but it is possible for Christians to be fleshly. Do we let ourselves be guided by the words inspired by the Spirit of God or by the desires of the flesh?

The Corinthians were following after Christian leaders, but Paul wrote that these leaders were just servants of God. God is the One at work to make things happen. Do we view men as leaders or rather as servants?

June 4

After David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, he placed it in a tent that he had set up for that purpose. The tabernacle was now at Gibeon after Shiloh had been destroyed. Rather than moving the tabernacle to Jerusalem, David decided to build a house, a permanent temple, as a place for the ark. He told the prophet Nathan of his plans, and Nathan said that he should do so, for God was with him. That night God spoke to Nathan and told him that David was not to build a temple for him. For hundreds of years a tent had served as his sanctuary. He had never told anyone to build him a permanent house. Do we ever decide on our own what God would like? Do we tell others that what they want to do is okay when God has not said so? God did tell Nathan that he would bless David and build him a house, that is, a dynasty.

In discussing the divisions in the Corinthian church, Paul told them that he wanted them to learn the meaning of the phrase, "Not beyond what is written." Unity comes when we stick with what the scriptures say. When we add our own ideas to God's word and try to enforce those on others, we end up with divisions. Do we go beyond what is written in God's word? In doing so, do we put ourselves in the place of God?

Paul asked the Corinthians why they were bragging about what they had. He said, "What do you have that you did not receive?" If we have good looks, those came from our ancestors. If we have intelligence, that likewise is a gift from God; we did not create our own brains. If we have knowledge, we should thank our teachers. If we got it from reading, we should thank the authors. The scriptures say that the ability to get wealth comes from the Lord, and oftentimes it is inherited from parents. Our very life came from them and ultimately from God. Do we brag about the things we have, both tangible and intangible?

There was in the Corinthian church a man who was committing incest with his step-mother. The Corinthians arrogantly refused to discipline him. Do we overlook flagrant sins to keep peace in the church?

June 5

God had Nathan tell David that his son would build a temple for him. In some sense that was fulfilled when Solomon, the son of David, built a magnificent physical temple for the worship of God. But in another richer sense, that was fulfilled when Jesus, called the son of David since he was a descendant, established his church. The church is called a temple since God's Spirit dwells in Christians. Peter writes that we are living stones in that house of God. Do we see ourselves as part of this new temple? Do we see Jesus as the builder of the greater temple? David's response to the news about his son building the temple was to offer a prayer of praise to God. Do we praise God in our prayers?

When the Ammonite king died and his son became the new king, David sent messengers to the son with words of consolation. The king's advisors, however, told him that they were being sent as spies. He cut off half of their beards and their robes at the waist and sent them back to David as an insult. Do we ever have people that we are trying to help rebuff our aid and maybe insult us? How do we react if this happens?

First Chronicles recounts how David wanted Joab to take a census of the fighting men to find out how large an army he had. Joab tried to warn him that this would not be pleasing to God, but he could not be deterred. It was only after the census was finished that his conscience finally got the better of him and he repented. But even then God sent the prophet Gad to David with a choice of consequences. Do we ignore those who try to turn us away from sin? Do we have to see the consequences before we can admit that we were wrong?

There have always been people involved in sexual sins, but today they seem to be blatantly open. Paul gave spiritual reasons why disciples should not be involved in sexual sins: we are members of Christ and we should not join his members to a prostitute; sexual sins are against a person's own body; and God's Spirit lives within a Christian's body. Do we treat our bodies with the holiness that a Christian is called to have?

June 6

God told David that because he was a man of war who had shed a lot of blood he would not be allowed to build a temple for him. However, he said that his son would build the temple. David started preparing to gather material for the building: the stones, cedar, gold, silver, bronze, and iron. He instructed his son Solomon on how to build the temple. David was a planner. Do we make plans and prepare to carry out those plans? David also organized the priests and Levites to work in the temple. He divided them into twenty-four groups with the understanding that each group would work for a week. That way the work would not be a burden on anyone. Do we organize our work for the Lord so that people do not get burned out with too much work? Do we ask people to share the work so that it gets done?

Paul gave instructions to the Corinthians about marriage. Because God has made people with sexual desires, those desires are to be expressed only in marriage of a man and a woman. He said that married couples should not deprive one another of sexual relationships. Sometimes couples use sex as a tool to get their way in marriage. That is a kind of selfishness. Are we guilty of manipulating our spouse to get our way? Paul wrote that if people could remain single without sinning, he or she should do so. But it was not a sin to get married. To those who were already married, he said to stay married. If it was not possible to continue the marriage because of some problem, he said the people should stay unmarried or else work out the problems and be reconciled once again. Are we devoted to the one we are married to? Do we try to work through any problems that arise? He also wrote that if a Christian was married to an unbeliever, the Christian should try to maintain the marriage. If, however, the unbeliever wanted to end the marriage, it could be ended. The believer was not enslaved to do what the unbeliever wanted. Do we use threats to end a marriage if we don't get our way? Paul also said that married people care about both the things of the Lord and the desires of the spouse. Do we find the balance in our lives to try to satisfy both the Lord and our spouse?

June 7

Before David died, he gathered all the leaders together and told them of his plans to have Solomon build a temple for the Lord. He had gathered much building material and to that he added from his own treasury three thousand talents of gold and seven thousand talents of silver. He then asked the leaders to donate for the upcoming temple. As a good leader, he asked them to do what he himself was doing. A leader is one who goes before. It is not right to ask people to do what we ourselves are unwilling to do. Do we set an example for others in our giving? The leaders gave over five thousand talents of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze, and a hundred thousand talents of iron.

David praised God for the offering made. He listed all the things that belong to God: greatness, power, glory, victory, majesty, and the kingdom. He said that riches and honor come from God. He told God that all things come from him and they were just giving him what was his own. Do we consider that everything we have actually comes from God and that anything we give him is really his? It is like the father who gives the child money to buy him a present. Do we praise God when he opens our hearts to give?

Some in Corinth believed that because idols were not real gods, it was okay to go to an idol's temple and share in the meat from the sacrifice. Paul disagreed and said that weak Christians may consider the idols to be real. These Corinthians' influence might cause the weak Christians to sin, and in doing so they would sin against Christ. Christians have to watch out for their influence. Do we consider who we might unintentionally cause to sin? If we do, will God hold us guiltless?

Paul also said that he had given up his rights to be married, to be paid, not to work as a tentmaker, and to act like other Jews, all for the sake of the gospel. Do we insist on our rights? Do we ever give up our rights like Paul did so that the gospel of Jesus might spread?

June 8

Solomon wrote to Hiram, king of Tyre, asking for materials to build the temple. He was going to build a great house because God is greater than all the false gods. He told Hiram, "But who is able to build him a house, since heaven, even the highest heaven, cannot contain him? Who am I to build a house for him except as a place to make offerings before him?" Solomon realized that God cannot be confined to a box.

Sometimes people treat God like he is only in one place. If they need him, they go to that place, perhaps a church building, to pray to him and ask for help. Then they can leave him behind or put him back in the box. When Jacob was fleeing to Laban to escape his angry brother Esau and had a vision of God at Bethel, he said, "Surely God is in this place and I did not know it." He thought he had left God back home. Do we treat God like he is in a box? Do we think he is God only in one place? A church building is a place for corporate worship, but God cannot be confined to a special building. Do we see his work in our everyday life?

We may be tempted to treat the commands of baptism and the Lord's Supper as some sort of magical guarantee of salvation. But important as they are, Paul warned the Corinthians against putting our trust in them. He wrote that the ancient Israelites had been baptized in the cloud and in the sea. They were thus completely surrounded by water when they crossed the Red Sea, with cloud overhead and walls of water on their sides. They ate spiritual food in the desert, the manna as bread from heaven, and they drank water from the rock which Paul equated with Jesus. So even though they had a metaphorical kind of baptism and Lord's Supper, God was not pleased because they kept on sinning. Their baptism was not one of being dead to sin. God calls us to live holy lives because he is a holy God. Do we live the holy lives he asks us to? Or do we depend on our obedience to a few of his commands to save us? He wants our complete devotion, not a selective one.

Paul wrote that when temptations come, God will provide a way of escape. Do we look for that way of escape, or for the temptation?



June 9

When Solomon completed the temple, he had the ark of the covenant moved from the tent in the city of David (that is, old Jerusalem) to the most holy place in the temple on Mount Moriah. A cloud filled the temple and the priests were unable to stand in the temple to minister. This shows that while God was present among his people, there was still a sacred separation between God and man. Do we realize that in Jesus God has come close to us, and yet there is still a sacred separation? He is the holy One! And he calls us to be holy in our everyday lives also.

In dedicating the temple, King Solomon climbed up on a platform so all the people could see, and he got down on his knees to pray to God, the king bowing to the King of kings in heaven. Do we ever kneel to pray to the One who is our king above?

In this day and age when some people seem to have trouble telling any difference between men and women, the apostle Paul seems out of date. Paul told the Corinthians that men were to pray with their heads uncovered and women with their heads covered, thus showing the difference. He said that the original woman was created both from man and for man, and yet man and woman are not independent of each other. Just as the original woman came from man, so now all men are born of women. Do we understand both the difference between and the interdependence of men and women? Some today seem to think that men don't need women and women don't need men. But in God's wisdom we were made for each other.

Paul told the Corinthians that they needed to take the Lord's Supper in a manner that was worthy. He said that we need to examine ourselves before we eat and to discern Christ's body when we eat. In doing so, we put our lives up against Christ's death on the cross for us. Hopefully, this helps us resolve to do better in the days to come. Do we examine our lives and think about Christ as we share in the Lord's Supper?

June 10

As Solomon prayed at the dedication of the new temple, he asked God to answer the prayers of those who turned to God in sorrow according to their hearts and their ways. He said that only God knows the human heart. If the people were taken off into captivity, he said to listen to their prayers if they repent with all their heart and soul. Do we realize that God knows what is really in our hearts? It is not enough to go through the actions of worshiping him. True worship happens in the heart.

Solomon also prayed that God would answer the prayers of the foreigners who came to worship at the temple. This was so that all the peoples of the earth would know God's name and fear him. Do we realize that God is concerned about all the peoples of the earth? Jesus told the apostles to make disciples from all the nations. Do we support the effort to evangelize people from all around the world?

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that the Spirit gives gifts for the common good. The gifts are not for our benefit but to build up the church. He said that the church is like the human body. The body has many different parts with different functions, but all are needed to have the body work as a whole. Just as the body is not made up of one part (for example, the eye) with one function (that is, seeing), so each disciple in the church has his or her own function. There is no jealousy in the human body between the parts, for they all work together for the good of the body. Even so, the disciples in the church should work together, exercising their gifts, for the good of the church without jealousy. Do we find our place in a church using the gifts that God has given us to help the church to grow?

Paul told the Corinthians that love is more important than any of the gifts that the Spirit may give. One may have a gift, but if it is not used with love, it doesn't do any good. Spiritual gifts may pass away, but love continues on. Do we use the gifts that God has given us with love? Paul says love is even greater than faith and hope.

June 11

When the queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon, she asked him all sorts of questions. With the wisdom that God had given him, he was able to answer all of them. She was so impressed that she said that his wisdom was over twice as much as the report that she had heard in her home country. She said that his servants who heard his wisdom all the time must be very happy. Do we have people who share wisdom with us? Do we listen to what they say?

The queen of Sheba gave Solomon one hundred twenty talents of gold, a great many spices, and precious stones. In return, he gave her whatever she wanted. She received from him much more than what she had brought him. Jesus has given us much more than the queen of Sheba gave Solomon, including eternal life. What do we give him in return? There is no way to pay him back. But that does not mean that we don't even have to try. Do we feel obligated to God for his blessings?

When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam became king in his place. At his coronation, the people asked him to reduce the burden that Solomon had placed on them. He consulted the older advisors of his father, who gave him a wise answer of speaking kindly to the people. He was not pleased with their answer so he asked the young men who were his peers. They told him to be tough and answer roughly. He took their advice and most of the people rejected him from being king. The writer of Second Chronicles says this happened because God brought it about to fulfill the prophecy of Ahijah. Do we ask God to give us wisdom? James says to do so if we lack it. Do we realize that God is at work in the world to bring about events?

Paul told the Corinthians that when we pray and when we sing we should use our minds. Do we really think about what we are saying and singing, or do we just say the words without thinking about them? He said that things done in the assembly should be for building up people. Do we try to build up others when we gather to worship God together?

June 12

After Rehoboam lost the support of the northern tribes of Israel, he raised an army from Judah and Benjamin to take back the whole kingdom. However, God had the prophet Shemaiah to tell the people to go home because this change of kingdom was from him. In the meantime, Jeroboam in the north alienated the Levites with his golden calf idols because he let just anyone who had a young bull or seven rams to offer become a priest. The Levites moved to the south to support Rehoboam. Also, those who were true to worshiping God at the temple according to the Law of Moses moved south. Sometimes it is necessary to make changes to keep worshiping God according to the scriptures. Are we willing to make changes in our lives to serve God as he asks? For three years the king and people of Judah served God and everything went well there. But after Rehoboam's reign was solidified, he abandoned serving God according to his law. So God raised up Shishak, a king in Egypt, to attack Judah. Shishak came with an army made up of Libyans, Sukkiim, and Cushites. The prophet Shemaiah told Rehoboam and the officials of Judah that because they had abandoned God, he had abandoned them to Shishak. They humbled themselves as a result, and God said that he would not let Shishak destroy Jerusalem, but they would have to serve him since they had decided not to serve God. Shishak took the treasures of the temple and palace to Egypt. Do we realize that God controls the leaders of nations?

Some of the Corinthians were denying that there was such a thing as the resurrection of the dead. Paul said that the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Jesus were the four important facts of the gospel. Just as the burial shows that he was really dead, so the appearances show that he really came back to life. Paul wrote that if there is no such thing as resurrection from the dead, then Jesus could not have risen from the dead, and our faith is in vain. But he did rise from the dead; Paul says that Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection. He shows it can be done. When he comes again, those of us in Christ will also rise from the dead. Do we believe that we will rise from the dead at Christ's second coming?

June 13

Rehoboam's son Abijah depended upon the Lord. When Jeroboam tried to attack him, even using an ambush with soldiers on two sides, Abijah's forces were able to be victorious because of his dependence on the Lord. He ended up taking cities from Jeroboam's kingdom. After his death, his son Asa succeeded him as king. Asa followed his father's example in depending on the Lord. Do we set a good example of faith for our children? Asa went throughout his kingdom, removing places of pagan worship that people had built. God rewarded him with ten years of peace. During that time, he fortified the cities to be ready in case of invasion. Do we both depend upon God and also take preventive measures in our life? Is this a path of true wisdom? After the ten years of peace, Zerah the Cushite led a million man army of Cushites and Libyans against Judah. Asa prayed to the Lord because they were outnumbered two to one. The Lord delivered Judah, and they won the battle. Afterwards, the prophet Azariah met Asa and told him and his men, "The LORD is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you abandon him, he will abandon you." In response, Asa went throughout the country, destroying any idols that he found. He even removed the queen mother because she had an idol that he destroyed. Do we seek God, or do we abandon him? However, when Asa was in his thirty-sixth year as king, Baasha, king of Israel, began to attack Judah. Instead of depending on God, Asa sent treasures to the king of Aram, asking him to attack Israel. The prophet Hanani rebuked him for seeking this political answer instead of trusting God to fix it. Do we look for political solutions to our country's problems instead of turning to God? As we grow older, do we forget the lessons of faith that we learned in our youth?

When asked what kind of body we will have in the resurrection, Paul showed that God knows how to make different kinds of bodies. He said that spiritual bodies, unlike our present bodies, would be imperishable, powerful, and glorious, able to live in an imperishable world. Do we look forward to that new world, or are we caught up in this world?

June 14

When Asa's son Jehoshaphat became king, he obeyed the commandments of God like his father had in his earlier years. He sent out officials and Levites with the scriptures to teach the people the word of God. God blessed him with peace, and the kingdoms around Judah feared the Lord. Jehoshaphat had over a million men in his army. He made a marriage alliance with Ahab in Israel, taking a granddaughter of Omri as a wife for his son. When Ahab wanted him to go with him to battle Aram, he agreed. First, Jehoshaphat wanted confirmation from God that this was in God's will. Most of the prophets said Ahab would win victory, but the prophet Micaiah predicted failure and Ahab's death. Although Jehoshaphat wanted confirmation, he went ahead with Ahab to battle anyway. Do we go to God's word to find out what to do, but then go ahead and do what we wanted to do in the first place? Ahab tried to void the prophecy by disguising himself in the battle, but an archer shot an arrow and by chance it struck him at a crack in his armor, and he died. Do we try to get around God's word by making up our own way? God sent the prophet Jehu to rebuke Jehoshaphat for supporting Ahab in this battle. Later, when three kings of Edom in Seir, Moab, and Ammon raised an army against Judah, Jehoshaphat prayed to God for help. Do we pray to God in times of trouble? What about in times of peace too? The prophet Jahaziel said that God would give the victory even without the warriors' help. The army went forth singing praises. When they got to the battlefield, they found that the different peoples had fought with one another, and all their soldiers were dead. The people had a special ceremony to bless the Lord. Do we thank the Lord when he answers our prayers?

Paul told the Corinthians that God is a God of comfort whom we can rely on in times of trouble. Do we look to God for our comfort? Paul also said that he only wrote things that could be understood. However, Peter wrote that some people twist the scriptures to their own destruction. Do we try to understand God's word? Are we careful to watch out for those who would twist the scriptures?

June 15

Jehoshaphat had arranged a marriage between his firstborn son Jehoram and Ahab's daughter Athaliah. One must be careful that the person one marries also believes in God. When Jehoram became king at his father's death, his wife influenced him to secure his kingdom by killing his brothers. He did evil in God's sight, and so God brought evil on him. Edom rebelled against him, the Arabs attacked and killed all his sons except for the youngest, and he died from a painful bowel disease that lasted two years. Do we listen to our spouse when he or she wants us to do things that God disapproves of? His son Ahaziah became king, but he lived like the kings of Israel because his mother influenced him to do the things that God called wicked. Ahab's family members were his counselors, and he went to visit his uncle Jehoram, king of Israel. His timing was bad, for this was the very time that Jehu had been instructed by God's prophet to kill off Ahab's family. He was killed by Jehu along with his uncle and the rest of Ahab's relatives. Do we value our family, even if they do not follow God, more than we value our relationship with God? When his mother Athaliah saw that her son was dead, she killed all but one of her other children so that she could become queen. However, Ahaziah's sister, Jehoshabeath, was a believer in God. She was married to the priest Jehoiada and saved her one-year-old nephew Joash from her mother by hiding him. Although parents have a great influence on children, a good parent will not necessarily have a good child, nor will an evil parent necessarily have an evil child. Jehoshabeath was a good child from an evil parent. Do we follow God despite what our parents may say?

When Joash was seven years old, the priest Jehoiada consulted with other leaders to make Joash king. The priests, Levites, and other leaders gathered in Jerusalem to crown him. The Levites stood guard around him in the temple. When Athaliah heard the cheering, she came to see what was going on. She cried, "treason," but they dragged her to the palace where they killed her. Then they killed her priest of Ba'al. Do we have the courage to oppose those who use power to do wrong?

June 16

Joash served God all the lifetime of the priest Jehoiada. Do we realize the importance of a good religious mentor? He even restored the temple because it had been trashed by Athaliah's sons. But when Jehoiada died, he listened to the officials of Judah and turned to the worship of idols. Who do we listen to for religious ideas? Is our faith so wishy-washy as to change when some other advice is given? Under the influence of God's Spirit, Jehoiada's son Zechariah rebuked Joash and the people for rejecting God. Rather than repent, Joash had Zechariah killed in the temple courts. Sometimes God works very slowly as we count it although Isaiah says we should wait for the Lord. But sometimes his vengeance comes swiftly. By the end of that year the army of Aram had attacked Judah, killed the officials, taken spoils of war to Damascus, and left Joash wounded. Then two of his servants killed him. It is a dangerous thing to reject the teaching of the Spirit of God.

Joash's son Amaziah became king after his death. At first he served the Lord. He had a strong army and attacked Edom and destroyed many of the Edomites. However, then he took their idols back to Judah and worshiped them. God sent a prophet to him who asked him why he was serving gods who couldn't save their own people, but he refused to listen to that prophet. He was so proud of his victory that he wanted to fight the army of Joash of Israel. King Joash tried to dissuade him from the war, but he wouldn't listen. Joash soundly defeated him, tore down two hundred yards of Jerusalem's wall, and took the treasures of the temple and palace to Israel. Amaziah was killed by conspirators after that. Do we learn from the mistakes of our parents, or are we doomed to repeat them? Do we listen to good advice, or do we refuse to listen?

Paul told the Corinthians that we speak the word of God to unbelievers because of four things: our faith, our fear for them, the love of Christ, and because God has made us ambassadors for Christ with a message of reconciliation. Do we share that message with others as God wants us to do? Do we consider ourselves as Christ's ambassadors in this world?



June 17

Amaziah was succeeded on the throne of Judah by his son Uzziah (also known as Azariah). At first, he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and God blessed him. He had victories over the Philistines, the Arabs, and the Meunites. The Ammonites paid tribute to him. He had an army and fortified Jerusalem and other cities. But then he became proud. Do we let the blessings that God gives us make us proud? Do we start to think that we have done these things ourselves? He tried to offer incense in the temple which only the priests were supposed to do. He was opposed by the priest Azariah and eighty other priests, but became angry when they tried to stop him. Do we have the courage to oppose those who are doing what God says not to do? A defiling skin disease (leprosy?) broke out on his forehead, and he rushed out of the temple. From then on he had to live in a separate house, and his son Jotham ran the affairs of the kingdom. When he died, Jotham became king.

Jotham served God, but he was succeeded by his son Ahaz who served idols instead. He even closed the temple of God and stopped the sacrifices. Because of this, God brought armies against Judah from Aram in Syria, Israel, the Edomites, and the Philistines. Instead of turning to God, Ahaz tried to get the Assyrians to help him. He ended up paying them tribute, but other than destroying Aram, they did not help him. Do we think our problems can be solved by political and international means rather than turning to God? Do we ignore the trouble that God brings on our country if we turn away from him?

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that there are two kinds of sorrow or grief as regards sin. There is a worldly sorrow that only leads to death. There is also God's kind of sorrow that leads to repentance and salvation. Judas is a good example of the first kind. When he regretted betraying Jesus, he committed suicide. Peter is an example of God's kind. He wept bitterly when he realized he had denied Jesus, but later became a leader. What kind of sorrow for sin do we have: worldly or God's kind?

June 18

King Ahaz had closed the temple of God and stopped the sacrifices during his rule. It was up to his son Hezekiah as king to reopen the temple and have the priests and Levites cleanse and sanctify it so that God's anger could turn away from Judah. They started on the first day of the first month and didn't finish until the sixteenth day. After the temple was cleansed, they rededicated it with sacrifices, music, and singing. Hezekiah commanded that the sacrifices were to be offered for all Israel, even though the northern tribes had attacked Judah during his father's reign. Do we care about the spiritual well-being of those who have opposed us in the past? Or do we hold grudges? It was too late in the year to keep the Passover feast in the first month, but the Law of Moses provided that if one could not keep it in the first month, it should be kept at the same time in the second month. So Hezekiah and his officials decided that they should keep it in the second month. He sent letters by messengers throughout the northern tribes inviting them to Jerusalem to keep the Passover. Only a few came for the feast; most of the people in the north ridiculed the messengers. They had been alienated from God by their worship of idols. Do we realize that if we turn away from God, we may lose the ability to return to him? The worship of God can become a laughing matter to unbelievers. Of those who came from the north, not everyone had time to sanctify themselves according to the temple regulations. Hezekiah prayed that God would accept their intentions even though they were ritually unclean. He did forgive them; he wants people to turn to him. Do we sometimes insist that people must get everything exactly right to be acceptable to God? The people kept the Passover feast for the seven days of Unleavened Bread. There was so much joy in returning to God's way that they kept the feast for another seven days. The Passover had not been kept in such a way with the whole nation involved as this one was since the days when Solomon was king. They went back to the Law of Moses to keep it as it was commanded. Do we look to scripture to find out what God wants and do it even if it has not been followed for hundreds of years? Or do we say we have always done it in our ancestors' way?

June 19

When the fourteen days of the great Passover called by Hezekiah were over, the assembled people left, but they didn't go straight home. Instead, they went throughout the land and destroyed the pillars, sacred poles, high places, and altars dedicated to idols. The celebration of the feast had motivated them to serve only God. When we leave the assembly of the church, do we feel motivated to serve God? Does that assembly change our actions in any way? From his possessions, Hezekiah provided the animals for the daily burnt offerings morning and evening, as well as the offerings for the Sabbath, new moon, and feast days. What kind of sacrifices do we offer to God? The Law of Moses provided for the support of the priests and Levites through the tithes of the people, but those had been neglected over time. The people who had been changed by celebrating the Passover now brought in their tithes so that the priests and Levites could dedicate themselves to serving in the temple and studying and teaching the Law. They were so zealous in this that store rooms had to be made in the temple to keep the goods brought in. Do we ever neglect to offer tithes to God? If so, do we make up our offerings later? Paul told the Corinthians that we will reap in the way that we sow, either sparingly or bountifully. He said that God is able to provide us with all that we need to help every good work.

Later Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invaded Judah and besieged the fortified cities. Hezekiah strengthened the walls of Jerusalem and stopped up the springs in the countryside outside the city to get ready for the siege. He encouraged the people that God was with them to protect them. Sennacherib sent messengers to say that no god of the nations had been able to protect the people from his army and Hezekiah's God could not do so either. Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah prayed to God, and he sent an angel to destroy the Assyrian army. Sennacherib returned back home with his army in tatters. He was later assassinated by his own sons. Do we make preparations for possible problems that may arise? Do we believe that God can save us from troubles when we can't save ourselves? Do we pray about it?

June 20

Hezekiah was richly blessed by God. He had great wealth. Then he became proud. When emissaries from the Babylonian king in exile came to him, he showed them all his wealth. The prophet Isaiah came to him and asked what he had shown them. When he answered everything, Isaiah told him the time would come when all these treasures would be taken to Babylon. Some of his descendants would also be taken captive there. His resulting thought was that at least there would be peace in his lifetime. The writer of Second Chronicles says that God left him to himself in this experience in order to test him and know what was in his heart. God does not always interfere in our lives. He expects us to do right just because he tells us what to do, not because he makes us do right. Do we pass the test when God leaves us to ourselves? Do we become proud because of our blessings? Do we think only of ourselves and not of those who will come after us?

Perhaps because of Hezekiah's attitude about his descendants, his son Manasseh rebelled against God when his father died and he was king. Whatever the reason, Manasseh rebuilt the altars to Ba'al and the high places of worship, made sacred poles, worshiped the sun, moon, and stars, practiced sorcery, consulted mediums, and offered his children as sacrifices. He set up altars in the two courtyards of the temple and set up the carved image of an idol there. He filled Jerusalem with the blood of innocent people. His influence corrupted the whole nation of Judah. He ignored the warnings of the prophets, so God had the officers of the king of Assyria to arrest him and take him to Babylon. There he finally humbled himself before God and prayed to him for release. He learned that the LORD was the true God when his prayer was answered. He then tried to turn the country around. He took away the false gods and the temple idol and altars and sacrificed only on the altar of the Lord. The people, however, continued to worship at the high places. When his son Amon replaced him as king, he reverted to his father's evil practices. Do we turn back to God too late to influence our children for good? Does our influence on others lead to good or evil?

June 21

Manasseh's grandson Josiah was only eight years old when he came to the throne. He did what God considered right and lived like his ancestor David had done. By the time he was twenty, he began to rid the country of the high places, sacred poles, and idol images. He destroyed the altars of Ba'al. His reach was beyond the country of Judah into the surrounding tribes of what had been Israel before the Assyrians destroyed it. Six years later he undertook to restore the temple which had fallen into disrepair. It was while working on the temple that the priest Hilkiah discovered the lost book of the Law. When it was read to the king, he tore his clothes in sadness and sent to find out from the prophetess Huldah what these things meant for the country. Are we zealous for the Lord like Josiah was? Are we upset when we find out from the scriptures that we are not living right? God told Josiah through Huldah that the country would be destroyed because of its wickedness. However, this destruction would not take place during Josiah's lifetime because he had humbled himself before God when he heard the scriptures read. Are we humbled when we read the scriptures?

Josiah kept a Passover at Jerusalem in such a good way that the scriptures say such a Passover had not been kept since the days of Samuel. He donated many sheep and cattle for the feast. The Levites worked to prepare the meat from the sacrifices for the people; they also prepared for the priests and the gatekeepers because they were busy in the temple service. Do we try to help out those who are busy in the work of the Lord?

When Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt took his army north to help his Assyrian allies, Josiah tried to stop him. Neco warned Josiah that his fight was not with Judah, but Josiah refused to listen. The writer of Second Chronicles says that this warning was from God. Do we listen to wise advice, or do we have our minds already made up? Josiah was killed in the battle. Three sons who succeeded him, one after another, all turned out evil, and the country was taken into Babylonian captivity.

June 22

Three times during the reigns of the sons and grandson of Josiah, Jews were taken captive to Babylon. During the reign of Jehoiakim, young royal and noble sons, including Daniel and his three friends, were taken as guarantees of the treaty with Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of the reign of his son Jehoiachin, the young king and his family, the royal officials, the temple treasures, and ten thousand people, including Ezekiel and all the metalsmiths and artisans, were taken captive to Babylon. Finally, at the end of Zedekiah's reign, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and most of the people, except for the poorest, were taken to Babylon. Seventy years after Daniel was taken, as Jeremiah had prophesied, the Medes and Persians captured Babylon under Cyrus the Persian, and peoples were allowed to return to their homelands. King Cyrus issued a proclamation that the people who returned to Jerusalem should rebuild the temple of God. The book of Ezra says that the Lord had stirred up his spirit to make that proclamation. Do we believe that God is still at work influencing the leaders of the world to work his will?

Almost fifty thousand Jews decided to return to the land of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. In accordance with the king's proclamation, they were going to rebuild the temple. Not everyone returned, but those who didn't freely gave treasures and livestock to those who did to help in restoring the temple. Not everyone can go to all the countries of the world to share the good news of Jesus. But like the neighbors of those who returned, those who don't go can provide support for those who do. Are we people to go into all the world to tell the good news of Jesus? If not, do we support those who do?

When the Jews returned, they once again began the daily sacrifices where the temple had once stood. Finally, they were able to lay the foundations for a new temple. Some rejoiced, and some cried, remembering the first temple. But as they built, they were opposed by the new inhabitants of the land. Are we surprised when there is opposition to spreading the gospel of Jesus? It seems to happen often.

June 23

When the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity, they started to rebuild the temple as instructed by Cyrus, the king of Persia. However, the people who were living there while the Jews were in captivity opposed them. They had wanted to help since they also worshiped the God of the Jews, but the Jewish leaders had rejected their help since they also worshiped idols as well. The opposition became strong, and the Jews found it easier to stop work on the temple than continue working in face of the opposition. When we face opposition to spreading the gospel of Christ, do we find it easier just to be quiet about the gospel? Finally, God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the people to start building once again. Through Haggai, he asked why they were living in houses of cedar while his house was still in ruins. Do we give priority to our own concerns rather than to the concerns of God? The people began once again to rebuild the temple. Then once again the leaders of the inhabitants of the land came to ask what they were doing. They took the names of the Jewish leaders and sent off a letter to the Persian king, who by this time some twenty years later was King Darius. The king had the archives searched and found the degree of Cyrus. He wrote back that not only should the building continue, but also the costs for building should be paid from the royal treasury so that sacrifices could be offered on his behalf. Do we realize that God can turn the opposition into his benefit? When the temple was completed, the Jews once again celebrated the Passover as they had in the past.

In the book of Acts we often read that Jesus was hung on a tree. Of course, the cross was made out of wood from a tree, but the wording was deliberate. The unbelieving Jews confronted the Christians with the accusation that their Messiah was cursed because the scriptures say that everyone who hangs on a tree is cursed. Paul wrote to the Galatians that Jesus who bore that curse did not deserve it; rather, we were under a curse because the scriptures say that everyone who does not keep the law is under a curse. Jesus became a curse for us, taking our curse on himself. Do we realize that we were under a curse because of our sin?

June 24

Almost six decades after the temple was rebuilt, the priest and scribe Ezra resolved to leave Babylonia and return to Jerusalem. He had set his heart on studying the law of the Lord and on doing it and on teaching those laws and commands to Israel. Do we set our hearts on studying the scriptures? Do we also want to do what they say? Do we want to share with others what we learn? God blessed Ezra and gave him skill in studying the Law of Moses. When he asked Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, to allow him and others with him to return to Judah, his request was granted. Not only that, the king sent gold and silver with him to purchase animals to sacrifice for the king's benefit. Ezra wrote that God had put it in the heart of the king to glorify the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. Over fifteen hundred men returned to Judah with him. Do we influence others to serve the Lord also? Before they left, they gathered by the River Ahava where they fasted and prayed that God would protect them on their journey. Because Ezra had told the king that God is gracious to all who seek him, he was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers to protect them on the way. God answered their prayers and they arrived safely. Do we pray for safety before a journey? Ezra called for ten of the priests traveling with him to be responsible for the treasures that the king and others were sending to the temple. They counted them out before they left and then again when they arrived. Are we trustworthy people who can be trusted to take care of other people's property? When they arrived at the temple in Jerusalem, they offered sacrifices for all twelve tribes.

Paul wrote to the Galatians that the purpose of the law was not to save us but to make clear what things were wrong, that is, what things are sin. He said if righteousness could have been by keeping the law, then such a law would have been given. The problem is with us; we sin and break the law. Therefore, salvation has to be by faith in Jesus, not by keeping God's law. He wrote that when we are baptized into Christ we put on Christ like putting on clothes. Do we wear Christ every day so that people can see him when they see us?



June 25

When Ezra arrived at Jerusalem, he was told that a number of the priests, Levites, and other people had married pagan wives. He tore his clothes and pulled hair out of his head and fasted in anguish. God had warned the people in the Law of Moses not to take pagan wives because they would lead the men astray from following him. The people who trembled at the word of God gathered around Ezra as he mourned. Then he got on his knees and prayed to God. Do we bow before God on our knees when we pray? When he prayed, he used the pronouns "we," "us," and "our" to talk about the sins and guilt of the Jewish people. Good leaders always associate themselves with those whom they lead. Sometimes we want to make our disagreement with others a matter of "us" versus "them." But apart from Jesus we are all guilty before God. Thank God for the salvation that he brings. In his prayer Ezra admitted the sins of the people, thus associating himself with them. Do we admit our sins when we pray? Some of the people around Ezra suggested that they needed to put away the wives that were causing the problem. They encouraged him to take action, to do more than just pray about it. Over the next few months, meetings were held with those who had taken pagan wives, and they agreed to send those wives who did not believe in the one God away. Do we take action as well as pray?

Paul wrote to the Galatians that the flesh and God's Spirit are opposed to each other. The desires of our fleshly nature are at war with how God's Spirit wants us to live. Paul says this war is the reason that we don't end up doing what we want to do. Which side of the war do we want to win? The sins of the fleshly nature that he lists fall into four categories: the sins of a sexual and sensual nature, the sins of seeking power from a place other than God, the sins that alienate people from one another, and the sins of losing control of mind and body. On the other hand, Paul calls the virtues that the Spirit produces in our lives the "fruit of the Spirit." Fruit naturally appears on a plant when it matures. Are we letting God's Spirit mature us in Christ so that others can experience from us the sweet fruit of the Spirit? Or do we let the fruit wither?

June 26

Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia. When his brother came to visit him, he asked about the situation in Judah. He was told it was bad: the walls around Jerusalem were broken down, and the city gates had been destroyed by fire. Nehemiah was very sad about this. He wept and mourned for days. He fasted and prayed, confessing his sins and the sins of his people. Like Ezra, he prayed using the pronoun "we," associating himself with his people. Do we see ourselves as part of the people of God? Or do we have an individualistic view that separates us from other people? When Nehemiah was serving the king, he had a downcast face. The king asked why he was sad. When that happened, he was afraid, but he took courage and told the king it was because the city of his ancestors was in ruins. The king then asked him what he wanted to do about it. He silently prayed to God and then told the king that he would like to go and rebuild the city. The king asked him how long he would be gone. When he gave the king a time, the king granted his request and gave him letters of authority. Nehemiah realized that God's gracious hand was on the king. Do we realize how God works in this world through his silent influence on its leaders?

When Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, he first went out at night to inspect the walls. Do we gather the necessary information before presenting a plan to others? Nehemiah then told the Jews why the king had sent him to Jerusalem. They were encouraged and said that they should begin to rebuild the walls. Many people worked on the walls. There were priests and Levites, goldsmiths, and perfumers, to name a few. Men from other cities, including Jericho, Tekoa, and Beth-zur, joined in the rebuilding. One man worked with his daughters helping. Many hands make the work lighter. Do we work together with others to do God's work?

Paul told the Galatians that we reap what we sow. If we sow to the flesh, we will reap corruption. If we sow to God's Spirit, we will reap eternal life. Are we living our lives according to what our fleshly nature wants, or according to what God's Spirit wants?

June 27

As the Jews continued to rebuild the city wall around Jerusalem, opposition arose from the neighboring peoples. At first they resorted to mocking: "Are they going to get the stones out of that burnt rubble?" "If even a fox gets on their wall, it will fall down." Nehemiah was upset by their taunts and prayed to God that he would have their words come back on themselves. Are we upset when people make fun of us? Do we trust it to God in prayer? The Jews kept on building and soon the wall was up to half its height. This upset the opposition even more. Their leaders were Sanballat and Tobiah, and they were joined by people from the Arabs and Ammonites on the east and Ashdodites on the west. These people made plans to attack the workers and stop the rebuilding. But it is impossible to keep secrets, and the Jews soon found out what they were planning. They both prayed to God and set a guard to protect the workers. When in danger, do we both depend on God but also take wise precautions? For a while, the Jews stopped working as they guarded the lowest places along the wall. But when the opposing peoples heard that their plan was known, they gave up on it, and the Jews returned to work. But this time they also carried their weapons with them as they worked in case of an attack.

The Jews faced problems, not just from the outsiders, but from fellow Jews themselves. People were having to borrow money to feed their families and pay taxes. They put up their land as security, and the wealthy nobles and officials were foreclosing on their land. They were even having to sell their children into slavery in order to pay their bill because of the high interest being charged. The Law of Moses forbade charging interest to fellow Israelites, but this had not stopped the people interested in increasing their own wealth. Do we end up hurting people as we try to increase our wealth? Nehemiah was upset when he heard about this. He called a meeting and told the wealthy that the Jews in exile were trying to buy freedom for Jews in slavery, but here they were selling Jews into slavery. They agreed to give back the land and interest. Are we willing to return those things unjustly gained when we repent?

June 28

When Nehemiah's opponents Sanballat and Tobiah, together with Geshem the Arab and others, heard that the gaps in the city wall had been filled, they sent a message to him wanting him to meet with them in the plain of Ono. They had planned to harm him there. He refused to meet with them, saying that he was doing a great work and there was no reason for the work to stop while he took off to meet with them. Four times they tried to get him to meet this way. Are we wise enough to avoid those people who wish to harm us? Finally, they sent an open letter saying that he was planning rebellion against the Persian king and hoped to have himself declared king in Jerusalem. He simply replied that none of these accusations were true and that it was a product of their own minds. He had called their bluff and they realized it. That didn't stop their efforts against him, however. They hired a Jewish man named Shemaiah to prophesy that Nehemiah was in danger and he needed to hide in the temple. He realized that he was not supposed to be in the temple and the man was trying to get him to commit a sin, thus disgracing him. Can we tell when someone is lying to us and trying to get us to do wrong? Finally the city wall was finished and the city gates were set up; it had been done in a record fifty-two days. Nehemiah realized that it was done with God's help. He appointed gatekeepers and watchmen for the city.

When the seventh month came, the time of the agricultural new year, the people assembled in Jerusalem. Ezra the scribe and priest brought out the book of the Law of Moses and read from it to the people. It was written in Hebrew, but most of the people had learned Aramaic as their language while they were in Babylonian captivity. So the Levites around Ezra interpreted in Aramaic so that the people could understand the teaching. Do we make the gospel clear to people in a language that they can understand? Or do we assume that everyone understands English? When the people learned that they were to live in booths during the Feast of Booths, they made it a point to obey. Do we obey the new things we learn from reading the Bible?

June 29

When the people assembled after the Feast of Booths, Ezra led them in prayer. In his prayer, he recounted all the things that God had done for the people throughout history. Do we think about how much God has done for us, not only in our own lives, but in the lives of those who have gone before us? He confessed that the Israelites had not always followed God in spite of what he had done for them. Even though they had sinned, God was patient with them. At the end of his prayer, the Israelites signed a document to obey the laws that God had laid out for them in the Law of Moses, with special mention of those that had not been kept in the past. Do we resolve to obey the laws of God, especially those that we have not obeyed? Afterward, they realized that there were too few people living in Jerusalem. They decided that ten percent of the people needed to move into the city. The decision as to who would move was made by lottery, but some volunteered to make the move. Are we willing to move to serve God?

Paul wrote to the Ephesians that we have been called to live our lives in a special way. We need to live them in a way that is worthy of our calling. Our lives should be marked by humility, gentleness, patience, and love. God's spirit has called us into a unity that must be maintained with peace. It is marked by the fact that we all share one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of us all. To help us, God has given certain leaders: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd-teachers. Their task is not just to do the work of ministry, but to equip all of God's holy people to do the work of ministry. Each of us has a ministry that God wants us to do. Are we doing our work of ministry? Or are we waiting for leaders to do the work for us? That shared ministry is to build up the body of Christ (that is, his church) so that we may all come to a mature unity of faith and knowledge of God's Son. We measure ourselves against Christ, not against one another. Are we keeping the unity of the Spirit with gentle peacefulness? Are we growing toward a unity of faith and knowledge of Jesus? Are we measuring ourselves against Christ himself?

June 30

Since the wall around Jerusalem was completed, the Jews gathered in the city to dedicate it. The priests, Levites, singers, and musicians separated into two groups, one led by Ezra and one by Nehemiah. They went up on the wall with Ezra's group going to the right and Nehemiah's going to the left. They walked on the wall, singing and playing music; finally, the two groups met at the house of God. There they praised God for the completion of the wall. Do we celebrate our accomplishments by giving glory to God? Or do we take all the praise ourselves?

Before he left to return to King Darius, Nehemiah organized men to care for the worship at the temple. After some time, he asked the king for permission to return to Jerusalem. There he found that in his absence the foreigner Tobiah who had opposed building the wall had moved into one of the storerooms at the temple. Nehemiah cleared the room of Tobiah's furniture, purified it, and had the dedicated items returned to the room. He further found that people had quit bringing offerings to the temple for the Levites who carried on the daily service of the temple. As a result, the Levites had left the temple and gone back to their fields. He appointed new caretakers for the temple who were trustworthy. Once again he had the people bring their offerings to the temple to support the services of the temple. The people had earlier committed themselves to the care of the temple worship, but without good leaders they had let their commitment slip. Do we sometimes get lax in our dedication to God? Do we forget the fervor we earlier had for God?

Paul wrote to the Ephesians that they should be filled with God's Spirit. That is evidenced by singing to God, praying to him, and submitting to one another. Wives submit to husbands by respecting them; husbands submit to wives by loving them as they love themselves. Children submit to parents by obeying them; parents submit to children by calmly raising them as God wants. Slaves submit to masters by obeying them; masters submit to slaves by treating them impartially. Do we sing and pray to God and submit to one another as we are filled with the Spirit?