

May 1

When David heard that his son Absalom had been killed in the battle, he went to his room and wept and wailed, "My son, Absalom." Even though they had won the battle, his warriors returned like men ashamed because the king was mourning. Joab confronted him that he did not seem to appreciate that these men had saved the lives of both him and his family. Do we appreciate what others do for us? Or are we concerned only about our own feelings? David then went down to the city gate to welcome his soldiers back.

The people of Israel remembered that David as king had led them in victory against their enemies and Absalom was dead. So they wanted to bring David back to Jerusalem. David sent word to Amasa that he would be commander of the army instead of Joab since Joab had killed Absalom. As David approached the Jordan River on his return, he was met by Shimei, a Benjaminite who had cursed David and thrown rocks and dirt at him as he fled Jerusalem earlier. He pleaded for forgiveness from David, saying he knew he had sinned. Abishai wanted to kill Shimei, but David said not to do so. He swore to Shimei that he would not kill him. Are we people who can overlook a grievous insult to us?

Mephibosheth, who was crippled, came to meet David. He had not gone with David when he fled because he said that his servant Ziba had not saddled his donkey for him; instead Ziba had lied to David about him. David had earlier given Ziba the property of Mephibosheth when he helped David flee. Now David seemed not to be sure who was telling the truth, so he decided they would share the property. Do we have people who tell us lies to take advantage of us? How do we deal with them? The 80-year-old rich man Barzillai accompanied David to the river. He had used his wealth to feed David's family and men while they were in exile. Do we use the wealth that God has blessed us with to help his people? David wanted to repay him by taking care of him in Jerusalem, but he said he was too old to venture far from home. Instead, he asked David to care for Chimham, and David agreed.

May 2

While David was returning to Jerusalem, the tribe of Judah started arguing with the other tribes about rights to the king, as if David was not king over all Israel. Do we sometimes argue over issues that are really not that important? A Benjaminite named Sheba reacted by saying that the other tribes had no portion of David and led them to leave. When David reached Jerusalem he had Amasa to assemble forces to stop the rebellion that Sheba was starting. Amasa took longer than the three days he was given, so David sent Abishai to chase after Sheba. Abishai led Joab's forces after him. When Joab met Amasa, he struck him down with his sword. There are people like Joab who try to destroy anyone who gets in their way. Do we hurt other people when we try to get ahead in this world? Joab's forces chased Sheba and his followers all the way to the northern end of Israel at the city of Abel, a city close to Dan inhabited by the Maacathite people. They set siege to the city, and a wise woman in the city called for Joab and asked why he was trying to destroy such an important city. He replied that he was only interested in Sheba who had rebelled against King David. She told him that Sheba's head would be thrown over the city wall. After talking with the city leaders, she was proved correct as his head was thrown to Joab. Joab's forces then returned home. Do we, like this wise woman, look for solutions to problems that are going to end up hurting many people?

When Saul was king, he had tried to destroy the people of Gibeon whom the leaders of Israel had sworn to let live. Are we people who keep promises, or do we look for ways to get around them? God had sent a famine on Israel because of this. When David asked the people of Gibeon what they wanted, they asked for seven of Saul's sons to be executed by hanging. David gave them two sons of Saul's concubine Rizpah and five sons of his daughter Merab. This revenge made it a dark day in Israel. Bodies that were hung were not supposed to be left hanging, but these were, and Rizpah made sure to keep the animals away from them. When David heard about it, he took the bones of Saul and Jonathan and these seven and buried them all in Saul's father's tomb.

May 3

The appendix to Second Samuel gives the story of the Gibeonites versus Saul's family, a record of four giants that David's men killed, a psalm of thanksgiving (also found in Psalm 18), David's last words, a record of David's mighty men (the three and the thirty) and their exploits, and the story of David's census and its repercussion, all presented in a sandwich form called chiasmus: ABCC'B'A'. The three mighty men each stood their ground against overwhelming odds: Josheb-basshebeth took on eight hundred warriors at once; Eleazar stood his ground against the Philistines when others fled; and Shammah defended a bean field alone against the Philistines. Are we people who will defend the faith taught in scripture when others seem to retreat? Do we stand our ground for the Lord?

David wanted to take a census of how many fighting men he had in Israel. Joab warned him against this. There were times that God had mandated a census, but this census was to see just how powerful his forces were, forgetting that the real power comes from God. David insisted, and so Joab and some of his men traveled from north to south listing the fighting men for almost ten months. After David heard the number of one million, three hundred thousand men who could fight, he was convicted in heart and knew that he had sinned in asking for this census. He confessed his sin and asked God for forgiveness. Do we confess our sins when we realize them and ask God to forgive us? God sent the prophet Gad to David to offer him one of three consequences: he could choose seven years of famine, three months of fleeing his enemies, or three days of disease in the land. He chose the latter, saying that God is merciful. When the disease came, seventy thousand died. Just as the angel bringing disease was over Jerusalem, God had him stop. David saw the angel over the threshing floor of Araunah. Gad told him to build an altar there. When he told Araunah he had come to buy his threshing floor, Araunah said he would give him everything. But David said he would not offer sacrifices that cost him nothing. Are the gifts that we offer to God costly? Or do we try to offer cheaply?

May 4

When King David was old, he had trouble keeping warm. So a search was made for a young woman who could attend to him and lay next to him to warm him up. Abishag the Shunammite was found, and she became his attendant. There is no guarantee that trusting in God will mean that a person will not have health problems in old age. Do we imagine that Christians will not have problems?

After Absalom's death, his next oldest brother Adonijah decided that he wanted to be king. He got a chariot and had fifty men to run in front of him, showing his importance. His father had never reprimanded him by asking why he was doing something. He had grown up without parental discipline. Do we discipline our children so that they can learn what it means to have discipline? Now David had sworn to Bathsheba that her son Solomon would become the next king. But Adonijah gathered support from a number of people, including Joab and the priest Abiathar. Since his father was old and not well, he planned a great feast to celebrate his becoming king. Nathan the prophet went to Bathsheba and told her that she must speak to David about this. So she went to him and reminded him about his oath to her that Solomon would inherit the throne. She told him that Adonijah was already celebrating as king. Nathan came to David and confirmed what she said. So David called for Nathan, the priest Zadok, and the commander Benaiah and told them to take Solomon down to Gihon spring and have Nathan and Zadok anoint him as king of Israel there. Then they were to bring him back to the palace and sit him on the throne. When trouble arises, do we act decisively to solve the problem? Solomon was thus anointed and enthroned, and the people of the city cheered with a loud cry. When the people at Adonijah's feast heard that David had made Solomon king, they hurriedly slipped away. Adonijah fled to the altar where he grabbed hold of the horns on the altar as a place of refuge. Do we seek refuge in the cross of Christ because of our sins? He was brought before King Solomon, and Solomon said that he would not die unless wickedness was found in him. Are we also lenient with those who sin?

May 5

When David was about to die, he encouraged Solomon to be strong and courageous. He told him to keep the commandments that God had given. If he lived faithfully with all his heart, God would make sure that his descendants would succeed him on the throne. Do we encourage our children to be faithful to God? David also instructed Solomon on how to deal with those who opposed and supported his kingdom. He had been powerless to do anything against Joab when he murdered the commanders Abner and Amasa, but now Joab had supported the wrong son as king. He told Solomon that Joab should not die a natural death. Solomon was to be loyal to the sons of Barzillai since Barzillai was loyal to David and fed him and his family when Absalom rebelled. He also told Solomon to use his wisdom on how to deal with Shimei, the antagonist Benjaminite who favored Saul's family and had cursed David as he fled from Absalom. David had forgiven him, but he had not forgotten. The writer of the book of Hebrews says that God not only forgives us of our sins but also does not remember them any more. Do we say we forgive people but keep remembering how they sinned?

Adonijah approached Solomon's mother Bathsheba with a request that was really a plot. He asked her to ask Solomon to give him the beautiful Abishag as his wife. She thought this was a romantic thing and agreed to do so. But Solomon realized it was a plot to legitimize Adonijah's plan to be king. Only the king has the king's women, and although the aged David had never consummated his marriage to Abishag, she was still considered a wife of the king. Solomon sent Benaiah to execute Adonijah for treason. Do we have the wisdom to see through people's plots that they devise? The conspirator Joab fled to the altar in Jerusalem and held the horns of the altar for refuge. When he refused to leave, Solomon told Benaiah to execute him there for treason. Next, Solomon told Shimei to move to Jerusalem. He had him swear that he would not leave the city of Jerusalem on pain of death. However, Shimei chased two run-away slaves to Gath. He was executed also for violating his oath. Do we keep our promises or treat them lightly?

May 6

Solomon went to Gibeon where the tabernacle had been relocated in order to offer sacrifices. God appeared to Solomon in a dream and asked him what he wanted God to give him. He said that he was young and the task of governing the people was difficult, so he wanted an understanding mind and the ability to discern what was good and what was evil. Do we ask God for wisdom? James says that God will give it if we ask. God told Solomon that he would give him a wise and discerning mind to know what the right thing to do was. God also said that because he had asked for wisdom rather than riches or long life or victory over enemies, he would also give Solomon riches and honor and, if he was faithful to God, long life. What kind of priorities do we have? Do we want things or the ability to do the task that God has given us? We may not have the job of ruling God's people like Solomon, but we should want to do, whatever our job is, the best possible.

Solomon showed his wisdom when two prostitutes who had recently given birth appeared before him. One claimed that the other's son had died in the night and she had switched babies, giving the claimant the dead child. The other denied the accusation, saying that the living child was hers. When they continued to argue before Solomon, he called for a sword and said to divide the living child in half. The real mother said to give the child to the other mother and let it live, while the other mother was willing to let this child also die. Solomon said to give the child to the woman who wanted the child to live because she was the real mother. Do we use the wisdom that God has given us to settle disputes?

When Paul cast a spirit of divination out of a slave girl, her owners were upset and had Paul and Silas beaten and thrown in jail. There they prayed and sang hymns. God sent an earthquake that opened the jail's doors and stocks. When the jailer realized that the prisoners were still there, he wanted to know what to do to be saved. They preached to him, and he and his family believed and were baptized that night. Do we want to put off baptism until the convert understands everything?

May 7

In the fourth year of his reign, Solomon began to build a temple for the Lord. It took seven years to build and the footprint was four times as large as the tabernacle (both length and width were doubled). It was made with stone walls and foundation; the stones were covered with wood, and then the wood was plated with gold. It had rooms for storage and the priests on three sides around it and both inner and outer courtyards. It was a magnificent structure. If we are the temple of God today (God's Spirit living in us), do we live our lives in such a way as to make this spiritual temple a magnificent structure? Are our lives golden or does the bare wood show through? How is God glorified by us?

When Paul and Silas preached in Thessalonica, many of the Jews who rejected the preaching became jealous of their success and gathered a mob which caused an uproar in the city. Jason, who was keeping them, had to put up a bond guaranteeing peace, and so the brothers and sisters in Christ sent Paul and Silas to Beroea. The Jews there were said to be more noble than those in Thessalonica. They searched the scriptures to see if what Paul was preaching was true. Do we search the scriptures to see if the religious messages we hear can be found there? When the Jews in Thessalonica heard that they were in Beroea, they followed them there to cause trouble. They stirred up a crowd for a disturbance. Some people seem to love a good fight and are willing to join any uproar without knowing what it is really all about. Do we find out all the facts before opposing something or are we excited by the latest hype?

Paul was sent on to Athens where he was disturbed by all the idols he saw there. As he preached about Jesus and the resurrection, some philosophers thought he was talking about new gods (plural). From their background they apparently misunderstood him to think that the word *anastasis* (Greek for resurrection) was talking about a consort of Jesus named Anastasia. Do we pay close attention to what we hear and read? Or do we read into it the ideas that we already have? Do we do this as we read the Bible? Or do we let the scriptures speak for themselves?

May 8

Solomon was a man full of wisdom from God. In building the temple, he did not try to do everything himself. He had many workers. When it came to working in bronze, he hired a craftsman from Tyre named Hiram, who was full of skill, intelligence, and knowledge. Solomon was not threatened by someone who could do his work well. Sometimes we feel threatened if someone else is going to get the glory and honor that we want. But it is a matter of working together; God is the one deserving the honor. Are we threatened by others who seem to have ability from God?

When the temple was finished, Solomon gathered all the leaders of Israel to dedicate the temple. The priests carried the ark of the covenant from the tent which David had pitched for it in old Jerusalem (the City of David, also known as Zion) to the most holy place in the new temple built north of the city on Mount Moriah. A cloud filled the temple so that the priests could not stay in it. Many sacrifices were offered, and Solomon stood before the altar in the presence of the people and, raising his hands to heaven, prayed to God. He said that there was no other god like God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who live for him with all their heart. We may break God's covenant, but he doesn't. Our love may falter, but his love and mercy are steadfast and loyal toward us if we live for him with all our heart. Do we live for him with all our heart? Do we remember his new covenant ratified with the blood of Jesus and try to keep it always?

When Paul left Athens, he went to Corinth where he met Aquila and Priscilla. He established a church there, and when he left after a year and a half, Aquila and Priscilla went with him as far as Ephesus. He went on to Jerusalem and then to Antioch. A man named Apollos came to Ephesus and preached about Jesus in the synagogue. However, he only knew about the baptism of John, not about Christian baptism. They took him aside and taught him God's way more accurately. Do we teach others God's way more accurately or just complain about them?



May 9

When Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple he had built, one of the things he prayed about was that foreigners would hear of God's great name, mighty hand, and outstretched arm and come to pray to him. He asked God to answer their prayers so that all the peoples of the earth would know his name and fear him. Are we also interested in all the peoples of the earth coming to know about God? Do we help to share the message of Christ and his gospel throughout the world? What people groups are we involved with?

After the dedication of the temple, God appeared to Solomon a second time and said that he had heard Solomon's prayer. If Solomon lived as David his father had, keeping God's commandments, he promised that Solomon would always have a successor on the throne of Israel. But if he or his children turned away from God and worshiped false gods, he would not only destroy them, but this house of worship that Solomon had built would become a heap of ruins. Do we realize that God's blessings are conditioned on our continued faith in him? Do we sometimes presume that God will bless us no matter how we live?

The Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's wisdom and fame and so she came to visit him to see if this report were all true. The writer of 1 Kings notes that his fame was due to the name of the Lord. She told him that she had not heard half of what was true. His wisdom and prosperity far exceeded the report that she had heard. Jesus said that she came from the ends of the earth to hear Solomon, but One greater than Solomon was here. Do we come to Jesus to hear what he has to say? He is the One greater than Solomon. Do we spread the report of him throughout the world?

The Christians at Ephesus gathered up the magic books that they had and burned them publicly, showing that they trusted in the power of God rather than a power that the world searches for. Do we get rid of those things that we thought would bring us power rather than God?

May 10

King Solomon loved many foreign women. He had a thousand wives and concubines. God had said not to marry foreign women because they would lead their husband astray from him. Sure enough, that is what happened to Solomon. Do our spouses lead us closer to God or away from him? Solomon built high places for his pagan wives to please them. As a young man he was noted for his love for the Lord, but in his old age he worshiped false gods to please the women in his life. Do we lose the fervor for God that we had in our youth? Do we let aging affect how we feel about God? Growing older should make our faith stronger.

Because of Solomon's backsliding, God told him that he would tear away most of the tribes from his son. God raised up enemies to Solomon: Hadad the Edomite, Rezon the king of Damascus, and Solomon's foreman Jeroboam. The latter was approached by the prophet Ahijah and told that God would give him ten tribes to rule over. God promised if Jeroboam would do what is right in his sight by keeping his commandments, he would make his descendants into a dynasty like he did for David. Unfortunately, Jeroboam did not have trust in God's promise later in his life. Do we trust that God will keep his promises? Jeroboam had to flee to Egypt until after Solomon's death.

When Solomon died after a forty year reign, the people gathered at Shechem to make his son Rehoboam king. They asked him to reduce the burdens that his father had placed on them, and he replied that he needed three days to consult with his advisers. The old counselors of his father advised him to listen to the people. He didn't really like that advice, so he asked his friends that he had grown up with. They said he should be tough with the people. He chose to follow their advice. Do we seek out advisers who will tell us what we want to hear? It didn't turn out well for Rehoboam. When he told the people that he would be tougher than his father, they said they would not follow him and made Jeroboam their king. He was left with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Do we expect that our own advice will turn out well for us?

May 11

In spite of God's promise to Jeroboam, he began to worry that his people might change their allegiance from him to Rehoboam if they went up to Jerusalem to worship. So he had two golden calves made and set them up at Dan in the north and Bethel in the south of Israel. He told the people that these were the gods who brought them out of Egypt. Do we worry about what might happen rather than trusting God's promises? God sent a prophet from Judah to confront Jeroboam while he worshiped in Bethel. The prophet told him that a future king named Josiah would offer his priests' bones on this calf's altar. Jeroboam stretched out his hand toward the prophet to have him arrested, but his hand withered. When the prophet prayed for his hand, it was restored to normal size again. Do we pray for those who wish us harm?

When Jeroboam wanted to reward the prophet, he said that God had told him not to eat or drink while he was in Israel. Then he left to go back to Judah. An old prophet heard what had happened and went to find this prophet from Judah. He found him resting along the way. He lied to him and told him that an angel had appeared saying to find the prophet and bring him back to eat and drink. Apparently the prophet from Judah was hungry, for he believed the lie and returned with the old prophet. Do we believe lies that tell us what we would like to hear? When people tell us something different than what God's word says, are we inclined to believe it? While they were eating and drinking, the word of the Lord came to the old prophet, and he told the prophet from Judah that he would die because he had disobeyed the word of the Lord. As the prophet went home to Judah, a lion attacked and killed him.

When Jeroboam's son was sick, he sent his wife to the prophet Ahijah to ask if the boy would get well. Ahijah said that because Jeroboam had caused Israel to worship idols, most of his family would be destroyed. The son would die when the wife returned home. The son died just as Ahijah said would happen. Do we lead other people to disobey God's command? Do we suppose that God will not punish us for that?

May 12

Rehoboam's mother was an Ammonite woman named Naamah. While a mother who worships God can influence her children for good, one who does not worship him will influence her children for evil. Rehoboam did not follow in his grandfather David's footsteps of worshiping God alone. High places, pillars, and sacred poles were built in the country of Judah. God was not pleased, and he brought King Shishak from Egypt to invade the land. Shishak took away the treasures from the temple and the palace, including the gold shields that Solomon had made. Do we think that God will bless and protect a country that turns from following him? There was war with Jeroboam throughout the reign of Rehoboam and that of his son Abijam. However, a country can turn back to God with the right leaders. When Abijam died, his son Asa became king. Asa destroyed the idols from the land and removed his idolatrous grandmother Maacah from being queen mother and burned the idol she had made to worship. He reigned for forty-one years.

The calf worship in the northern county of Israel that Jeroboam started did not lead to stability. Jeroboam's son was killed by Baasha who replaced him as king. Then later his son as king was killed by Zimri, who lasted only seven days when the general Omri attacked him. For six years Omri fought with Tibni as to which of them would become the next king. Omri, who only ruled for twelve years, was a noted person in the ancient Near East. He built the capital city Samaria. In Assyria the country of Israel was known as the land of Omri. However, God only gave him thirteen verses in 1 Kings, and it records that he did more evil than all who were before him. Do we suppose that just because a person is politically and internationally important such a person is important in God's sight? He does not view leaders like people do.

When Paul was worshiping in the temple, some Jews from Asia, who had seen him in the city with Trophimus, a Gentile, supposed that he had brought this Gentile into the temple and caused a riot because of it. Are we guilty of making suppositions that later prove not to be true?

May 13

Omri's son Ahab replaced him as king, and he has the distinction of doing more evil than his father. He married the Sidonian princess Jezebel who was a worshiper of Ba'al. He built a temple for Ba'al in the new capital city Samaria and also worshiped him. God was angry with him and sent the prophet Elijah to say that there would be no rain until he said so. Do we believe that the attitudes toward God can affect the weather? God took care of Elijah hiding by the creek Cherith east of the Jordan River and then, when it ran dry, with a widow and her son in the Sidonian city of Zarephath. After three years, God told Elijah to meet Ahab. He found Obadiah, who was in charge of the palace, and told him to tell Ahab he wanted to see him. Obadiah told Elijah that he worshiped God and had hidden a hundred prophets when Jezebel was killing God's prophets. When Ahab met Elijah, he said that Elijah was a troubler of Israel, but Elijah replied that it was Ahab and his family who were troubling Israel by forsaking God's commandments and following Ba'al. Do we trouble those around us by disobeying God?

Elijah told Ahab to gather the people of Israel together with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Ba'al at Mount Carmel. There he proposed a test to the people. He and the prophets of Ba'al would both build altars and put sacrifices on them, but call on their own gods to light the fire from heaven. He said that they were many but he was the only prophet for God, forgetting that Obadiah had told him of a hundred prophets for God. Do we sometimes feel alone, thinking that we are the only ones truly serving God? From morning to mid-afternoon the prophets of Ba'al called on him to answer with fire, cutting themselves to get his attention. Elijah mocked them, saying maybe Ba'al was traveling or in the bathroom. When it came Elijah's turn, he had twelve jars of water poured over his sacrifice. When he prayed to God, God answered with fire from heaven that not only consumed the sacrifice but the altar as well. Elijah had the false prophets of Ba'al captured and killed for misleading the people. Are we concerned today about people who claim to be God's prophets but who mislead people?

May 14

After the encounter with the prophets of Ba'al at Mount Carmel, Elijah went to the top of the mountain to pray for rain. He bowed to the ground with his face between his knees. Do we pray on our knees when we are serious about our prayers? Seven times he sent his servant to see if there were clouds. Do we give up easily if our prayer is not answered right away? Finally, on the seventh time the servant reported that a cloud was coming up from the Mediterranean Sea. Elijah sent word to Ahab to get his chariot ready and hurry to Jezreel; then he went there himself.

When Jezebel heard that he had killed her four hundred and fifty false prophets of Ba'al, she sent a messenger to Elijah that she was going to have him killed. He fled south to the land of Judah, and leaving his servant at Beersheba, he traveled through the wilderness to Mount Sinai (also known as Mount Horeb). There God asked him what he was doing there. He replied that he was zealous for God and was the only one of his prophets left and was himself in danger of losing his life. He spent the night in a cave there. The next day God asked him the same thing and he replied just as he had done the day before. God told him that he had seven thousand in the country who had not bowed the knee to Ba'al. Do we sometimes feel alone and think that we are the only ones? Do we forget that God is with us? Do we not realize that God has other servants too? God told Elijah to anoint Hazael as king of Aram, Jehu as king of Israel, and Elisha as his servant. He left and found Elisha and called him to follow him. Sometimes we just need a companion to go with us on our journey for God.

Ben-hadad the king of Aram gathered an army and attacked the city of Samaria. He asked Ahab king of Israel to give him his wives, children, gold, and silver. At first Ahab agreed, but then he wanted more. Have you met people whose greed cannot be contained? Ahab told him that the man who puts on his armor for war should not brag like the one who takes it off when it is over. God's prophet told Ahab how to defeat Ben-hadad with his young warriors so that he would know the Lord was God.

May 15

Ben-hadad the king of Aram decided that he had been defeated because the God of Israel was a god of the hills and not of the plains. Do we sometimes make God regional? Do we think that he is God at our home town but not when we are on a trip? He gathered a great army to fight Israel on the plains. God sent a prophet to King Ahab to say that even though his forces were outnumbered, he was going to let him win the battle so that he would know that the Lord was God. Do we look for proof that God exists and is working in our lives?

Ahab wanted to buy the vineyard of Naboth for a vegetable garden because it was next to his summer palace in Jezreel. Naboth refused to sell, and Ahab was so despondent that he went to bed and refused to eat. Do we sometimes pout like a child if we don't get our way? His wife Jezebel told him that she would get the vineyard for him. She wrote to the city leaders in his name saying to falsely accuse Naboth of cursing God and the king. They got two worthless fellows to make the false accusation, and Naboth was stoned to death for blasphemy and treason. Are we surprised that injustice happens in this world? Jezebel told Ahab that Naboth was dead and to go claim the vineyard. God sent the prophet Elijah to tell Ahab that he was going to destroy his family like he did with Jeroboam and Baasha. Ahab was so upset that he humbled himself before God, tearing his clothes, fasting, and wearing sackcloth. Are we humble before God when we sin, showing our repentance? God told Elijah that because Ahab was humble before him, he would bring the destruction on Ahab's son instead of him.

While Paul was in prison in Caesarea, he spoke with the governor Felix about justice, self-control, and the coming judgment. Felix was frightened by these subjects, but he sent Paul away saying that he would call for him again at an opportune time. He did call for Paul other times, but it was to ask for money to be released. After two years when Festus replaced him, he left Paul in prison to please the Jews. Are we more interested in money and pleasing people than in what God's word says?

May 16

When the king of Aram had said that God is not a God of the plains, God had allowed Israel to defeat him. While he should have been killed in the defeat, Ahab had allowed him to live. He repaid Ahab's mercy by taking the city Ramoth in Gilead. Some people have no sense of gratitude. Are we people who are thankful for what we receive? Ahab wanted to retake the city of Ramoth and he asked Jehoshaphat to join him in the battle. Jehoshaphat agreed but he wanted to consult the prophets of God first. Four hundred prophets told Ahab that he would win a great victory there. When Jehoshaphat asked if there was not a prophet of the Lord that they could ask, Ahab said there was one, Micaiah, but he always prophesied disaster. When Micaiah was called, he prophesied that God had sent a lying spirit into all of the other prophets to convince Ahab to go to his death at Ramoth. Ahab chose to believe the four hundred prophets rather than Micaiah. Do we look for evidence that what we want to do is God's will? Or do we search the scriptures to find out his will for our lives? In the battle an archer shot an arrow at random, and it struck Ahab in a joint in his armor. He left the battle but died from the bleeding by that evening. Do we see God at work in our lives by random events that happen?

Ahaziah became king of Israel following his father Ahab's death. When he fell through the lattice in his upper chamber, he was injured and sent an inquiry to the false god Ba'al-zebub in the city of Ekron as to whether he would recover. God told Elijah to meet the messengers and send them back with the question, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire from Ba'al-zebub, the god of Ekron?" When Ahaziah heard this, he sent soldiers to arrest Elijah, but God twice sent fire from heaven on them. A third captain that was sent pleaded with Elijah to spare him and his soldiers. Are we wise enough to know when to ask for mercy? Elijah went with him to Ahaziah and again delivered the question God asked. He was told he would die because he had trusted in Ba'al, the god of his mother, instead of the true God. He did die, and his brother Jehoram became king because he had no son.



May 17

When it came time for Elijah to leave this world, he told Elisha to stay in Gilgal, but Elisha refused to leave him. This process was repeated in Bethel. The company of prophets there asked Elisha if he knew that his master was leaving, and he answered yes. They went on to Jericho where for a third time Elijah asked him to stay. Each time he refused to leave Elijah. Are we persistent in our friendships like Elisha was? When they came to the Jordan River, Elijah rolled up his cloak and struck the water with it. The waters miraculously parted for them to cross. On the other side, Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Elijah replied that if he saw him depart, it could be granted. Suddenly, a chariot of fire pulled by horses of fire separated them and Elijah went up into the heavens in a whirlwind. Elisha watched him go, crying out, "Father, father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel." He tore his clothes in sadness, and picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen off. He used the cloak just as Elijah had to cross back over the river. Elijah had prepared Elisha to continue his work when he was gone. Do we prepare others to continue our ministry so that it will continue when we are gone?

It is a rare time when God works in a miraculous way in this world's history. The time of Elijah and Elisha is one of the exceptions. Other miracles cluster around Moses and Joshua, Daniel and his three friends, and Jesus and the apostles. God is still at work in this world even if he does not break his natural laws with miracles. Do we have spiritual eyes to see him at work? When the company of prophets saw the waters part for Elisha, they realized that he had inherited Elijah's powers. However, some boys decided to mock Elisha because he had a bald head. He cursed them, and bears came out of the forest to maul them. Do we mock those with whom we disagree? Can such negative speech be right? Elisha used his miracle power to help others. When a widow was in financial straits, he caused a jar to pour enough olive oil that it could be sold to pay off her debts. When we see people who need help, do we use what God has given us to help them?

May 18

The commander of the army of Aram was an important man named Naaman, but he suffered from a skin disease that turned his skin white. His wife's servant was a girl from Israel, and she told her mistress that he could be healed by the prophet in Israel. When he told the king of Aram, he wrote a letter to the king of Israel for Naaman to take with him, asking the king to cure him. Do we look to government officials to solve problems that really only God can solve? The solutions are religious, not political. The king of Israel thought this was a pretence for war, but Elisha sent word to him to have Naaman come to his place. When Naaman arrived, Elisha sent out a servant to tell him to dip himself seven times in the Jordan River in order to be healed. Naaman was angry because this was not the way he expected to be healed. Do we sometimes think that God is going to work in a certain way and then get upset when he doesn't fulfill our expectations? Naaman's servants told him that if the prophet had asked him to do something great, he would have done it; however, the prophet asked for something easy, so he should do that. He went to the Jordan and dipped seven times in the river. His body came up clean that seventh time like the skin of a young child. He returned to Elisha to thank him. Are we thankful when God answers our prayers? He offered gold and silver and clothes to Elisha, but Elisha repeatedly refused to take them. He would not use his miracle power that God had given him to enrich himself. It was for the benefit of others. This is why Jesus refused to turn the stones to bread after fasting for forty days. He would not use his power for his own benefit. In the same way, he refused to come down off the cross and save himself as his mockers suggested. He stayed on that cross for our benefit. Do we use the gifts that God has blessed us with for our own benefit or to help others? Elisha's servant Gehazi did not understand why his master had not taken the wealth that Naaman offered. He followed Naaman and told him that Elisha had sent him to get some silver and clothes for two prophets who had just come to visit. Naaman gave him more than he asked for. Elisha confronted him, saying that he would have Naaman's skin disease; he left Elisha with his skin white.

May 19

When the king of Aram would bring his forces into Israel, Elisha would warn the king of Israel where he was going to be. At first the king of Aram thought he had a traitor, but one of his officials told him that the prophet Elisha knew his secrets. So he decided to send an army to capture Elisha. They surrounded the city of Dothan where Elisha was, and Elisha's servant was very afraid. But Elisha prayed that his servant could see his protection. He saw horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. Do we realize that God protects us when he still has work for us to do? Then Elisha prayed that God would strike the army with a kind of blindness. He met them and told them that this was the wrong city and he would lead them to the right one. They followed him to Samaria and then Elisha prayed that God would open their eyes to their reality. They were surrounded by Israel's troops. The king of Israel wanted to know if he should kill them. But Elisha said that he should feed them instead. They gave them a great feast and sent them back to the king of Aram. That put a stop to the raiding parties from Aram. The wise man Solomon wrote to feed your enemies and in this way you would heap burning coals on their head. Do we do good to our enemies?

The king of Aram did attack the city of Samaria after this and tried to starve the people out. It was so bad that one woman cooked and ate her own son. The king of Israel wanted to kill Elisha because he blamed God for the trouble. Do we blame God when things go wrong? Should we be surprised if unbelievers want to take out their frustration on believers? Elisha told the king that the next day there would be plenty of food, but the king's right hand man did not believe it. Elisha told him he would see it but not eat from it. That evening God caused the army of Aram to hear the sound of an advancing army against them, and they fled for their lives. Some men found the camp of Aram deserted. They sent word to the king, who sent out scouts to verify it. The next day people rushed the gates to get to the food in the camp. The king's right hand man was trampled in the gate by the crowd, fulfilling Elisha's prophecy. Do we believe that God can turn things around very quickly?

May 20

God had told Elijah to anoint Jehu as king of Israel, but he had put it off and it fell to Elisha to do the job. Do we put off doing the things that we know God wants us to do? Jehu was the commander of Israel's army that was fighting the Arameans at Ramoth in Gilead. Elisha sent a young prophet to anoint Jehu as king. When he got to Ramoth, he went with Jehu into a private room and told him that the Lord was making him king of Israel. He said that Jehu was to destroy all of Ahab's family; they had left the worship of God for the worship of Ba'al. Then the young prophet fled. When Jehu came out of the room to the other military leaders, they asked him what the young prophet wanted. When he told them that he had been anointed as king of Israel, they immediately proclaimed him king. King Jehoram (or Joram, as he was also called) did not excite much loyalty because of his wicked ways. People who do evil may gain loyalty by force, but in their hearts others are not really loyal to them. Jehu traveled to Jezreel where Joram and Ahaziah, who was both the king of Judah and Joram's relative, were staying. When they came out to meet him, he killed both of them. Then he went into Jezreel where Jezebel was staying. She fixed up her hair and painted her eyes and looked out her second story window, calling him a traitor. He asked who was on his side, and some of her eunuchs, now not so loyal, also looked out the window. He said, "Throw her down," and so they did. Do we think that power can enforce loyalty? Surely kindness is much better at producing loyalty.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans that they were called to be saints, that is, holy people. Do we see ourselves as called by God to be holy? Sometimes we may say, "I'm no saint," but God calls each of us to be one. He wrote that the good news of Jesus is God's power to save, but it must be believed. Do we believe in Jesus and have that saving power in our lives? The gospel reveals the righteousness that God gives those who believe in Jesus. But God's wrath against irreverence and unrighteousness is also revealed. Do we really believe that God is going to destroy those who refuse to believe and obey him? It will happen.

May 21

When Jehu became king of Israel, he went to Samaria and planned a ruse to root out Ba'al worship from Israel. He said he worshiped Ba'al more than Ahab and ordered a countrywide celebration of Ba'al at its temple in Samaria. Worshipers of Ba'al came from all over the country for the celebration. When the sacrifice to Ba'al was made, Jehu instructed his soldiers to go into the temple and kill every worshiper. He told his friend that this was to show his zeal for the LORD. While this was drastic action, something had to be done to root out the worship of Ba'al that Ahab and Jezebel had brought into the country. What kind of zeal do we have for God? Because he rid the country of Ba'al worship, God told him that four generations of his family would be kings over Israel. However, he did not destroy the golden calves in Dan and Bethel that Jeroboam had set up. Because of this, God allowed Hazael king of Aram to conquer all the land of Israel on the east side of the Jordan River. Do we worship God but hold on to sins that cause us loss? God will not extend his protection if we are not totally true to him.

King Jehoshaphat of Judah had arranged a marriage between his son Jehoram and Omri's granddaughter Athaliah. When Jehoram died, his son Ahaziah became king, but he was killed by Jehu. Athaliah was not satisfied with being queen mother. She killed her grandsons, Ahaziah's sons, so that she could be queen. However, Ahaziah's sister Jehosheba, who was the wife of the priest Jehoiada, took her brother's youngest son Joash and hid him. She believed that saving the lineage of David was more important than her family relationship. Do we value the things of God more than family? Jesus taught that we must put him first above our family. When Joash was six years old, the priest Jehoiada called the temple guards that were getting off duty and going on duty and showed them the boy king. They guarded him as he was anointed and crowned as king. Athaliah heard the cheering of the people and came to see what was happening. She cried treason, but Jehoiada said to take her out of the temple and kill her. Then the people went to the temple of Ba'al in Jerusalem and destroyed it. There is happiness when wickedness is gone.

May 22

When King Joash of Judah became older, he was concerned that the temple of God needed repair. He told the priests that they should use the census tax and the silver from the offerings to repair the temple.

However, after a few years no repairs had been made. Do we delay in doing the things that need to be done? So the priest Jehoiada made a hole in the top of a chest and placed it at the entrance of the temple so people could put an offering in it for the repairs. When it became full, the money would be counted and used to pay workmen to repair the temple. No accounting was required of those who paid the workers because they were honest people. Can the same thing be said of us? Are we honest in how we handle money?

Joash ruled Judah for forty years, but was murdered by two of his officials. When his son Amaziah became king, he put those murderers to death, but he did not kill their children. It was the practice in the ancient Near East to kill all the families of someone who did such a crime, but the Law of Moses forbade this practice. Children were not to be killed for the sins of their parents. Do we follow what God's word says, or are we influenced by the practices around us? Amaziah went to war against the land of Edom and won. He was proud of his victory and sent word to King Jehoash of Israel, the grandson of Jehu, that he wanted to meet him in battle. Jehoash tried to discourage him from fighting him, but Amaziah insisted. Judah was defeated by Israel, Amaziah was captured, a length of the wall of Jerusalem was destroyed, and the treasures in the palace and temple were taken to Samaria. Do we sometimes let the pride in what we have done in the past lead us into doing something else that results in loss?

The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans that the wrong view of God leads to various kinds of sin. One might say that the wrong view of God leads to the wrong view of man. In other words, idolatry leads to immorality. What kind of view of God do we have? Do we remake him in our minds how we want him to be? Do we think that gives us permission to sin?

May 23

Every society has its ups and downs. The two kingdoms of Israel and Judah were no exceptions. In the northern kingdom of Israel Elisha had told King Joash, the grandson of Jehu, that he would defeat the Arameans three times. His son, named Jeroboam, recovered the territory that Jehu's son had lost. God had raised him up as a deliverer. He had a reign of forty-one years. In the southern kingdom of Judah, King Azariah, also known as Uzziah, reigned fifty-two years. He did what was right in the sight of the Lord and was victorious also. However, when he became proud and disobeyed God, God struck him with a skin disease that made him ritually unclean. His son Jotham took care of the kingdom for him. But then things became worse. Jeroboam's son only ruled six months before he was assassinated, and his assassin only ruled one month before being killed himself by Manahem. To secure his kingdom, he heavily taxed the wealthy and gave the money to the Assyrian king. He ruled harshly for ten years, followed by his son who ruled only two years before being killed. Jotham's son Ahaz also turned to the Assyrians for help when he started worshiping idols. God supported the kings who trusted in him, but not those who failed to do so. Do we trust in God? Do we encourage our society to trust in God?

Paul wrote to the Romans that no one can be considered righteous because they keep God's law. The problem is that we don't always keep it. The only way to be righteous in God's sight is to have God consider our faith in Christ as being our righteousness. He does this because he is good. But how do we increase in faith? Paul wrote that Abraham grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God. Instead of focusing on the problems, he focused on the promises of God. Do we focus on God's promises or on our problems? When we realize that we are made right with God because of our faith in Jesus, it gives us peace with God. We no longer have to worry about being good enough. But we should be good; God wants us to be good. But trying to be right with God because we are good is like putting the cart before the horse. We are right with God because of what Jesus did on the cross. Do we thank him?

May 24

King Ahaz of Judah had turned to the Assyrians for help against the northern kingdom of Israel instead of trusting God for help. The Assyrians came and set siege to Samaria for three years. When it finally fell, they deported the people to other countries, and repopulated it with people from other countries. Lions were attacking the people, so they asked the king to send them a deported priest to teach them how to worship the God of this country. He did so, and they learned how to worship the LORD. But they also worshiped the old gods they used to worship in their former country. In doing so, they didn't really worship the LORD because he is a jealous God who requires worship of him alone. Do we worship God alone, or do we also worship other things, such as money or job or family? God wants to be first in our lives.

At that same time Hezekiah followed his father Ahaz as king of Judah. He removed the images and pillars of idolatry set up during his father's reign. He destroyed the bronze snake that Moses had made to save people from snake bite because people had begun to worship it as an idol. Do we turn things that God has commanded in the past into idols? Do we worship his commandments instead of Him? But serving God alone did not keep Hezekiah from having trouble with the Assyrians. Having destroyed the northern kingdom, they wanted the southern kingdom as well. They conquered many of the cities of the south, and then turned against Jerusalem. One of the officials of Assyria told the people not to let Hezekiah convince them to trust in God to save them. Do we have people telling us that we should not trust in God, that he will not be able to take care of us and save us?

Paul wrote to the Romans that when we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into his death. We share death with him, killing the old people that we once were. We rise from the water to live a new kind of life. If we are dead, we need to realize that dead people don't sin. Paul says we need to consider ourselves as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Do we consider that we died with Christ when we were baptized?



May 25

We ought to pray every day. Paul told the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing. But there are times that call for special intense prayer in our lives. Hezekiah, king of Judah, experienced two such times within a short period. The Assyrians were attacking the land of Judah and one of the officials told the people of Judah that God could not save them. Then the Cushite Pharaoh Tirhakah (identified with Taharqa) brought an army from Egypt; the Assyrians turned their attention to fighting it. But the king of Assyria sent a message to Hezekiah saying that he should not rely on God to save him. He took the letter to the temple and spread it out before God. He prayed to God to save the people from the Assyrians. God sent the prophet Isaiah to him with the message that even though the king of Assyria thought he was great, he was able to conquer lands because God had planned it from days of old. God promised that the king would not lay siege to Jerusalem and would return to his own land. The angel of the LORD struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand Assyrian soldiers, and the king returned to Assyria. Do we believe that God can save us in a dramatic way? He already did when he raised Jesus from the dead and promised to raise us when he comes again.

It was during this time that Hezekiah became deathly ill with a boil. God sent Isaiah to him, saying that he should prepare to die. He turned his face to the wall on his bed and prayed with tears, telling God how he had always tried to serve him. God then told Isaiah to return to Hezekiah and tell him that he would add fifteen years to his life. Do we believe that God can answer our prayers? Do we pray with intensity like Hezekiah?

Paul wrote to the Romans that even though our body of flesh wants us to do the things that we are told not to do, we can overcome through Jesus if we set our minds on the things of the Spirit rather than the things of the flesh. What kind of mindset do we have? Do we think about the things of the Spirit? Do we read the Bible to learn what those things are?

May 26

There is a saying, “Like father, like son.” It was not true in the case of Hezekiah’s son Manasseh. He turned to the worship of idols and the heavenly bodies: sun, moon, and stars. He defiled the temple with pagan altars and practiced occult arts. He filled the land with violence and so affected the society with his fifty-five year reign that God decided to give the people over to their enemies. It is difficult to know what causes such a rebellion against the faith of his father. Do we raise our children to share our faith in God? Hopefully, they will not rebel. His son Amon continued his evil ways and was assassinated by his servants. Amon’s son Josiah became king at eight years of age.

When Josiah was about twenty-six years old, he ordered the repair of the temple. As the work was being done, the high priest Hilkiyah found the book of the law which had been lost. Perhaps we do not lose our Bibles, but if we do not read them, they are as good as lost. Hilkiyah gave the book to the king’s officials, and they read it to the king. When the king heard what God said he would do if the people turned to false gods, he tore his clothes in sorrow. How do we react when we find out that God is displeased with the way we are living? Josiah sent his officials to the prophetess Huldah to find out what God wanted. God’s reply was that he was going to bring disaster on the land and its people. However, he said that because of Josiah’s reaction to the reading, he would not do it in his lifetime. Do we live our lives in such a way that God changes the course of history? God told Abraham that he would not destroy Sodom if there were ten righteous people there. Josiah had the book read to all the people of Judah. Do we share what we have found in God’s word with others? The king and people made a covenant to follow God alone. Then Josiah followed through with his promise to God. Do we make promises to God but fail to keep them? He had all the idols and pagan altars in the temple and throughout the country torn down and destroyed. Then he went to Bethel where the golden calf of Jeroboam had been and destroyed that altar just as the prophet had said would happen. Are we repulsed by the worship of false gods like he was?

May 27

When Josiah heard the reading of the book of the law, he not only rid the country of idols but also proclaimed a celebration of the Passover. No Passover had been kept like this since the time of the judges. When we read the Bible, do we want to do what it says? Or do we make excuses, saying that our ancestors didn't do it that way? Josiah also removed the wizards and mediums from the country. The author of Second Kings says that there was no king like him who turned to God with all his heart, soul, and might, following the Law of Moses that was in the book that had been found. Do we follow God with all our heart, soul, and mind according to what we read in God's word? Although Josiah was pleasing to God, the people of the country had been corrupted by Manassah's reign, and they served God only because the king said to do so. Do we serve God out of our own faith, or only because it is the cultural thing to do? Pharaoh Neco (that is, Necho/Nekho II) took his army north to help his allies the Assyrians against the coalition of Babylonians and Medes. Josiah tried to stop him since he was opposed to Assyria. Neco killed him at Megiddo. Three months later he deposed Josiah's son Jehoahaz and put his son Jehoiakim on the throne as a client king. Unlike Josiah, Jehoiakim did what God saw as evil. So he brought the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar against him. This is when Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon. Jehoiakim served the Babylonians for a while but then rebelled. So after a siege of the city, Jehoiakim was dead and his son Jehoiachin was taken captive to Babylon. Another son of Josiah, Zedekiah, was made king. He later rebelled also, which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonians. These kings had let the political situation destroy their country. Do we place our hopes in politics rather than in God?

Paul wrote to the Romans that nothing can separate Christians from the love of God and Christ. He lists the things we are completely victorious over: trouble, distress, persecution, lack of food and clothes, danger, warfare, death, life, the present, the future, angels, satanic beings, the stars of astrology. Do we realize that we have victory over all of these?

May 28

After Jerusalem was destroyed, the Babylonian king killed King Zedekiah's sons in his sight and then blinded his eyes. He killed most of the officials who had led the rebellion against him and then took most of the people into exile. Should we be surprised that political rebellion has consequences? Some of the poorest people were left in the land with Gedaliah as governor over them. One of the captains of the Jewish forces that had escaped killed Gedaliah. According to Jeremiah, Gedaliah had been warned about him, but he didn't want to think evil of him. That was naïve. Jesus said to be innocent as doves but wise as snakes. Do we let people fool us about their intentions? The people who were left ended up leaving the land to go to Egypt even though God through the prophet Jeremiah had told them not to go.

The book of First Chronicles begins with many names in genealogies. Names are important because people are important. Names seem easy to forget, but we like it when people remember our names. Do we try to learn other people's names? The book begins with Adam. Since he was the first man, we are all descended from Adam. That means that all the races and nationalities have a common origin. Are we prejudiced against people of different races and nationalities? Can God who made us all from one man be pleased with that? The first chapter lists not only ancestors but also extended family members. Family is important too. Sometimes family members do not get along, but family should be there to support us in times of need.

Paul wrote to the Romans that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But people cannot be saved unless they believe in Jesus. Further, people cannot believe if they have never heard the gospel about him. They can't hear the gospel unless someone is proclaiming it. And for those who proclaim it to take it around the world, they must be sent. Those who go and proclaim it have beautiful feet, the apostle writes. We can't all go into all the world, but we can support those who go. Do we actually actively support them?

May 29

The genealogies in First Chronicles can be a bit intimidating. Although there are names like Joseph, David, Caleb, and Jesse, most of the names are foreign to English speakers. But there are hidden treasures there. One can find lists of David's brothers and sisters and of his wives and children. There is also the prayer of Jabez: "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory and that your hand might be with me and that you would keep me from hurt and harm!" God granted his prayer. Do we ask God for blessings when we pray?

Paul wrote to the Romans that because of God's mercy we should offer our bodies as living sacrifices. This is the way that we worship and serve God, living lives that are holy and pleasing to him. Rather than letting the pressures of this age and culture cause us to conform to the ways of the world, we should let God's Spirit transform us by renewing our mind to do God's will. Are we interested in God's will for our lives? Do we let that will change our will so that we follow Jesus? Will he be pleased with the offering of our lives?

Paul lists seven charismatic gifts in the twelfth chapter of Romans. Just as a human body has many parts, each doing different things, so God's church is made up of different individuals, each using the gifts God has given to build up the body of Christ. Of the seven gifts listed, only one is what we might call miraculous: the gift of prophecy. That is when God puts the words directly in a person's head. That is a rare gift, just like it was in the time of Samuel. But the Bible is a book of written prophecy. We need to listen to that prophecy today. Do we spend time reading God's word to find out his will for us individually and for the church collectively? Paul writes that if someone has the gift of service, it should be used in serving others. The same is true for the gifts of teaching and encouraging. Those with the gift of giving should be generous. Those with the gift of leading should be diligent. And those with the gift of doing acts of mercy should do them in a cheerful way. Do we use the gifts that God has blessed us with for his church?

May 30

The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans that Christians should be subject to the governing authorities. Of course, there are cases when the government wants Christians to do something wrong. In that case, as Peter told the Jewish leaders, we have to obey God rather than man. But most of the time there is no conflict. Government is necessary for orderly society. Paul wrote that Christians should pay their taxes. Jesus said the same, "Give to Caesar that which is Caesar's." Do we pay the taxes we owe? Or do we try to get around paying them? When we have to report our income, are we honest? Or do we say that we were paid in cash and there is no record so we don't have to report this? Paul also wrote that we should give respect and honor to those to whom respect and honor are due. Do we respect and honor our government officials? Or do we badmouth them if they do something that we disagree with?

Paul also wrote that the only debt we should have is love, the debt that we cannot pay off. Do we go into debt for things that we want but can't really afford? Do we find that there are good works that we should support but there is no money left to do so because we have too many debts? Love is the debt that we cannot pay off because we owe God so much. We can't really pay it back; we can only pay it forward. We love others because God loves us first. Do we show that love to others as God would have us do?

Paul also wrote that we should not be quarreling over opinions. The word for opinions is elsewhere translated reasonings. Sometimes we think that we have figured this out so it must be correct. If someone else doesn't come to the same conclusion, there is something wrong with that person. There is the danger of scorning or despising the one who says that what we think is okay is actually wrong. Another danger is judging the person who says that something is okay when we think it is wrong. But as James says, there is only One lawgiver and judge. We are right with him because Jesus died for our sins, not because we get everything right. Are we guilty of despising or judging other disciples of Jesus?

May 31

Ephraim, the son of Joseph, had two sons, Ezer and Elead, who went on a raid to capture the cattle of the people of Gath. But they were killed by the people of Gath as they protected their cattle. Almost every action has consequences. Do we teach our children to count the cost of the things they are about to do? Their father Ephraim mourned for many days over their death, and his brothers came to comfort him. Even if his children were not doing what was right, he still deeply felt their loss. Do we empathize with those who have lost children in a reckless venture? Or do we callously say that they got what they deserved? Do we try to comfort those in suffering? Ephraim later had another son Beriah who became the ancestor of Joshua, the assistant and successor of Moses.

Paul wrote to the Romans that we need to be careful about the weaknesses of others. If we do or say something that leads them into sin, Christ will hold us responsible, for he died for them as well as for us. Do we insist on our rights no matter how it affects others? Paul wrote that Christ did not please himself, so we too as his followers should please others so that they may be built up. He said that we should welcome others because Christ has welcomed us. Are we willing to welcome those that we may disagree with?

Paul said that the things that were written in former times were written to instruct us so that we might be encouraged to have hope. That hope comes if we are steadfast in our devotion to Christ. Do we look to the scriptures to find hope? Do we realize that they were written down for our benefit as well as for those to whom they were originally written?

Paul saw his work of taking the gospel to the Gentiles as one of sacrifice. He said he was a minister in the priestly service of offering the Gentiles to God. It was not a blood sacrifice; rather, it was a living sacrifice. Do we see ourselves as priests to God taking the good news to others so that we may offer them to God? Or do we think that only the preacher and elders are to do this priestly work?