

February

February 1 Leviticus 1-3

Sacrifices were offered by people to signify self-dedication, thankfulness or worship, or seeking forgiveness. The animal being sacrificed was in place of the person offering it; the offerer placed his hand on the animal's head to recognize this, then slaughtered the animal before the priest.

The burnt offering represented complete dedication of oneself to God. The animal's life was given to represent the offerer. It was always the best, a male animal without blemish.

The "meat" or grain offering was for thankfulness and worship. The offering was presented to God, but it also provided some food for the priests.

The sin offering was a payment for sin and a plea for forgiveness. The animal gave its life for the offerer, a kind of visual recognition that "the wages of sin is death."

There was no prescribed time for these sacrifices. However, three times each year all the males had to present themselves at the Temple (tabernacle), and God had informed them that no one should appear before God empty-handed.

February 2 Leviticus 4-6

The writer makes it clear that if you sin unintentionally, you are still guilty. Sounds like our phrase, "Ignorance of the law is no excuse." There is always a penalty for sin; sin must be atoned for. To look at it from another angle, sin is our doing something that's not God's intent. God's plan always leads to the best life for us. When we discover that we've gotten off track with God's will, the best thing is to stop going in that direction and get back on God's track.

There is always an alternative for those that are too poor to give the preferred offering. If they can't give a sheep or a goat, a pair of doves is acceptable. If a person is too poor for even that, an offering of flour will do.

There was no knowledge of germs in those days, but God's commands protected them. Notice how careful they are with touching dead animals. Any pot made of a porous material that touches raw meat must be broken and discarded. Many of the "unclean" rules were related to cleanliness and sanitation.

February 3 Leviticus 7-8

The priests get a portion of each meat sacrifice, a part specified in the Law. They also get bread from the grain offerings. I've never read where their vegetables come from! Surely they eat more than meat and bread.

All the people are gathered for the consecration of the Tabernacle (also now known as the Tent of Meeting), that portable temple that would serve them until they got to their new home in the Promised Land. They watch as Moses consecrates the priests, seeing every garment that is included in their attire. (Most will never again see all that is included in what a priest must wear.)

The priests must be atoned for, before they can serve the people, for their sin separates them from God. They must be "cleaned up" before they can come to God representing the people.

February 4 Leviticus 9-10

Aaron now performs his first duties as high priest. He copies exactly what Moses did in sacrificing animals as an offering for himself and then the people. He does all motions and burning just as Moses was told by God. Now, Moses has told all the people that the Lord would appear to them this day.

Well, after all the slaughtering and placing meat on the altar, nothing happens. What next? Aaron raises his hands and blesses the people. Nothing spectacular happens. Aaron and Moses return, they bless the people, and THEN it happens! The glory of the Lord appears (probably a bright light), and a flash of lightning zaps the altar, burning up the meat. The people raise a great shout.

After God had established worship for the Tabernacle, from the lampstand and table of incense in the Holy Place to the offering of sacrifices in the courtyard, two of Aaron's sons decided to establish additional rituals of their own design. God killed them instantly! That seems harsh, to say the least. God was establishing a relationship with His chosen people; this mild form of rebellion or going their own way could not be tolerated.

February 5 Leviticus 11-13

I'm not sure why all the different unclean animals got that designation. Some are obvious, like the carrion-eating birds. Many people have suspected pork was dangerous in those days, since food preservation was not consistent. It may be that some healthy meats got caught in the same category as foods that might be "iffy" for consumption---God made broad categories concerning "split hooves" and "cud chewing" that were easy for everyone to understand. Besides health concerns, staying away from unclean foods was a matter of obedience to God. They certainly needed to learn obedience.

Certainly blood could carry disease. God gave them strict rules about flows of blood and hemorrhaging. Also, infectious skin diseases were watched carefully. We

don't have a good concept of the particular diseases prevalent at that time, and of course, God looked to the future, also. We can easily understand the cautions concerning mold and mildew.

February 6 Leviticus 14-15

It was a very big event when a person who had been declared unclean because of a skin disease (such as leprosy) had been healed and is restored. After all, medicine was not very advanced; healing was seen as a product of God's great mercy. Notice that even the poorest of these recovered unclean persons must sacrifice a lamb---what an obvious prophecy of Jesus!

I love the symbolism, in 14:7, of a live bird being released in the open fields when this person with the infectious skin disease is restored to the community. Freedom! They're now free to come and go as they please.

Mildew was, and is, a dangerous health risk. If it is persistent in a home, beyond the ability of cleaners to get rid of it, it's common for young children to be subject to constant respiratory disorders. Is it too drastic a step to tear down the house? Sometimes it's the only way to stop the mildew!

God makes provision, in chapter 15, for protection from various types of diseases, keeping persons with a "discharge" away from others until their uncleanness ceases. Though not a disease, care is taken that a woman's regular menstrual cycle doesn't spread disease through contact with blood. "Life is in the blood," but blood can also carry disease.

February 7

Leviticus 16-18

The high priest had to first offer sacrifices for his own sin, before he could represent the people before God. Note that he also, when he entered the Most Holy Place, had to carry burning coals and throw incense on them just before he came before the Ark of the Covenant, so that he'd make a little cloud and only see the Ark through a haze. The best of men are remarkably unclean compared to the holiness of God.

The concept of a scapegoat (16:8-10) is still with us. A scapegoat, to us, is a person who is punished for the wrongdoing of others. Here we see all the sins of the people symbolically placed on the scapegoat, then the scapegoat is released in the desert, never to return.

Verse 17:15-16 surprised me! I'm amazed that God would allow them to eat an animal they found dead or that was killed by wild animals. It just doesn't seem like safe food.

The sexual standards set forth in chapter 18 establish limits that strengthen the family. Beyond that, though, people are now freed to experience the joys of close ties that aren't twisted by sexual desire.

February 8

Leviticus 19-21

Verses 19:16-18 expand on the decree, the same way Jesus did. Even hard feelings toward your neighbor open a door for Satan to do great damage, both to the neighbor and yourself. Verse 19:17 says something like, "look, if you've got a problem with something your friend is doing, tell her. You share the guilt if you don't help her see the problem."

Chapter 10 has the Ten Commandments woven throughout it. It sheds a different light here and there, as in 19:32. Part of how we show respect for our "father and mother" is in showing respect for the elderly, our fathers and mothers in faith. No matter how much we think we know, we still need the connection to preceding generations to keep us steady and upright.

For grievous sins against God, the people were required to kill the person by stoning. This particular method recognized that sins were against the community, not just a private matter. All men were required to participate by throwing a stone; it took many, they all shared in upholding God's commands.

The Bible is consistent in declaring the practice of homosexuality detestable and an abomination, in both the Old and New Testament. What is so wrong with this, when many find the practice natural? Obviously, it deviates from God's plan for populating the earth; sin is the act of going against God's plan by promoting our own "better idea." Also, we find abundant life and receive God's blessings by allowing ourselves to be disciplined and guided by God. We don't have to understand. We don't have to see that God's commands are reasonable. God does not have to explain His every move --- we must have faith that God knows what He's doing. If God has to answer to us, he is not our God.

God made this people different. They recognized that. They just didn't understand that every difference was part of the jigsaw puzzle called abundant life-The kingdom of God.

February 9

Leviticus 22-23

A priest had to be more careful than anyone else to not do anything that would make him "unclean," for in this condition he could not eat anything offered to God -- and this was his only food!

A priest had to be careful to treat each offering with respect, and each required action with respect. They set the standards for holiness.

Anything they treated as special was special, anything "average" was seen that way by everyone. If we are now a royal priesthood (I Peter 2:9), then we also have the responsibility to treat the holy things as holy, such as the cross, the name of Jesus, clergy, the communion elements, and so on. Careful!

Each of the required Feasts reminded the people of a key part of their history, as well as their dependence on God. The Passover reminded them of their escape from slavery in Egypt. The Feast of Weeks commemorated the giving of the Ten Commandments, plus the beginning of the wheat harvest; remember that God provides our daily bread. The Feast of Tabernacles would remind them of their time in the desert, plus the giving by God of the fall harvest.

Everything else stopped for these festivals! All men were required to bring an offering to the tabernacle (later the temple). It was a holiday, a HOLY day. All focus was on God, which (like the Sabbath) brought refreshment.

February 10
Leviticus 24-25

Human life is precious. Anyone who takes a life owes his own life in return. Anyone who breaks a bone deserves a bone of their own to be broken, owes an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth. What do we owe, then, when it was our sins that cost Jesus His life? We owe our own lives, turned over to Him, given completely.

The concept of a Sabbath year is scary and, as far as we can tell, it was never practiced by the Israelites. Imagine doing so well in six years that you could take the seventh year off! Can we depend on God to supply our needs that well? My goodness, some still have trouble taking the seventh day off from their job!

If you'll remember your multiplication tables, you'll realize that the Year of Jubilee the Israelites were supposed to observe came immediately after a Sabbath year. That's two years off in a row---that's putting an awful lot of trust in God. They never could manage.

I love the idea of land reverting back to its original owners on the Jubilee Year. There was a kind of equality built into this, a kind of fairness, a "loving of the neighbor." There was a rest from the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.

God commanded that they not charge interest to a fellow Israelite borrowing from them. Why get profit from someone else's distress? What kind of love is that?

February 11
Leviticus 26-27

God lays it out pretty frankly to the Israelites. If you follow my decrees and commands, you'll experience blessings constantly. It'll be a great, abundant life. That's what God's commands are for, to bring each of us as abundant a life as possible.

It's troubling that God would become their worst nightmare to those that turn away from Him. Is that love? Yes! God never encourages disobedience, but will make it as uncomfortable as possible, because of love. Choose life! Turn back to God. Choose life!

Out of great love and thankfulness to God, some would occasionally dedicate themselves or part of their belongings to God, making a vow. Understand that this was very serious -- if they wanted their belongings back, they had to buy them back! As Jesus said, though, "Anyone who puts his hand to the plow and turns back is not worthy of the kingdom of God."

February 12

Numbers 1-2

The census gives us a lot of good, basic information. God was giving them the number in their army---every man 20 years of age or older was considered drafted, except those that had a disability. The tribe of Judah, which Jacob had given the richest blessing to, was now the largest. However, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh combined, both descended from Joseph, numbered nearly as many.

You can see how two million has become a popular guess for the number of Israelites that escaped from Egypt: The men eligible for the army numbered 603,550, so if you add together those with the disabled men, women, and children, surely two million is a safe and conservative estimate. Note that the Levites were not counted (not expected to be soldiers).

God had a particular order in mind for how the tribes camped around the Tabernacle, and for how they would travel. (If the order had been Moses' idea, you can bet there would be grumbling.) It's not easy moving two million people!

February 13

Numbers 3-4

God claimed the Levites for service in the Tabernacle, as assistants to the priests (descendants of Aaron). This was in place of all the firstborn sons in Israel, which God had previously claimed. Still, each Israelite

firstborn son still had to be redeemed (bought back from God) for a certain price. Notice that the Levites were definitely the smallest tribe.

Levi, son of Israel, had three sons. The descendants of these three formed three divisions of Levites, each with their specific Tabernacle responsibilities. Considering the size of the Tabernacle, there were plenty of Levites to keep it in spectacular condition.

When the camp moved, the Ark of the Covenant was carefully covered so that no one ever laid eyes on it. (It was said such a one would surely die!) Every piece of furniture and every utensil was carefully wrapped and padded.

Notice that a Levite must be 30 years old to work in the Tabernacle. At 50, they retired.

February 14

Numbers 5-6

At first reading, the test for an unfaithful wife seems just plain ridiculous. If the woman drinks the muddy water and gets sick, she must be guilty. If the muddy water doesn't make her sick, she's innocent. What a test!

Yet consider this: The only one who knows the truth is God. There were no witnesses to the adulterous act. Truth be told, this unfaithfulness test can only be accurate if God helps, and since God is the only one that knows the truth,...I guess it would work.

A person taking a vow as a Nazirite has regulations to obey that are quite stringent. Understand that the Nazirite never thinks about how eating a grape skin or seed makes him less Godly. It makes no difference whether or not it is reasonable. It's just a matter of being obedient to the Lord. The Nazirite would do whatever was required, no matter how strange, to prove his love for God by being obedient.

February 15

Numbers 7

Moses now anoints every furnishing in the tabernacle, a very long and painstaking process. Though everything as a whole has been consecrated to God, now each item particularly is given into His service.

The tribes each now bring an offering, identical and generous. No tribe is held up as better than any other, and no tribe tries to outdo any other.

In 7:89, God speaks to Moses personally. He hears God's voice!!! Still, I think we have an advantage over that. God speaks directly to the inside of us.

February 16

Numbers 8-9

After the generous offerings for the dedication of the Tabernacle, God had a meeting with Moses in which Moses heard God's very voice. The message concerned the golden lamp stand in the Holy Place: Make sure the light shines in front of the lamp stand. Why was this so important? In this way, God's lamp would provide light for the priests as they worked. God showed His care for those working in His service.

When the Levites were given in to God's service, the whole community was required to lay their hands on them, signifying that the nation was giving these men to God, to serve Him and to represent them.

Notice how strict Passover observance was. If anyone missed celebrating it with a sacrifice, unless he was unclean or on a journey, he was to be cut off from his people. No one could befriend them or buy or sell with them.

February 17

Numbers 10-11

I hope the Israelites understood why the trumpets were used for both gathering the people and for starting to a new home, as well as for going into battle. In each case, it was a time of turning resolutely toward God for leadership.

These people certainly needed to make God their leader! He had taken the position of leadership, but the hearts of the people weren't consistently following God. It angered God that He could not do enough to satisfy them. Some even said they'd rather be slaves of Pharaoh than servants of the living God.

In an incredible show of power, God answered their complaint about having no meat, suddenly bringing enough quail to last a month. Everyone benefited, but God brought judgment on all that had complained. As God

trained the Israelites to be His people, He had to eliminate the destructive tendencies, by even going so far as to kill the complainers.

February 18

Numbers 12-13

Though the Israelites were heading for the Promised Land, they weren't really ready to conquer it. Now that their complaints against God were settled (for a while), now complaints against Moses increased, led by his own sister and brother. God stifled that complaint by a display of great power, as he instantly made Miriam a leper. Would she stay that way? The story implies that the disease stuck with her for seven days.

The twelve spies find that the Promised Land is good and bountiful, yet ten of them say that it can't be conquered. Are they nuts? Didn't they see the miracle of the quail? Didn't they see what happened to Miriam? God would supply whatever they needed, if they would only be obedient. Whew! What grand blessings of God have we passed up because we didn't trust God to break down the barriers that lay ahead?

February 19

Numbers 14-15

God is angry. He has prepared a place for His people over several centuries and, now that He has brought them to it, they will not go in and occupy it. It takes less effort for people to fear than to trust.

For the second time, God declares He will destroy all the people and start over with Moses (see Exodus 32). And for the second time, Moses changes God's mind, reminding God that His power is displayed more in forgiveness than wrath. Justice must be done, though, and the ten spies that doubted God die of a plague, and God declares that no one 20 or over will enter the Promised Land; they'll linger in the desert (40 years) until only Joshua and Caleb, the faithful spies, still live.

To reinforce His original promise, God instructs Moses next, "When you enter the Promised Land, these regulations will apply...".

February 20

Numbers 16-18

The Israelites didn't care at all for the idea of wandering in the desert for the next forty years. They'd made a mistake in judgment that seemed to

carry a punishment way too strict. Rebellion was in the air. The nation couldn't last with this kind of subversion of authority.

When 250 men rebel against Moses and Aaron, saying, "We're just as holy as you are!" God cleans house. The rebels are swallowed up by an earthquake, and another 14,700 are killed by a plague before Aaron can offer incense (prayer) for them.

God takes one more step to cement the authority of His chosen leaders, Moses and Aaron. Out of twelve staffs put in the Tabernacle overnight (one representing each tribe), only one budded, Aaron's. It not only budded, but overnight had budded, blossomed, and produced almonds! Finally the people get the point, are remorseful, and quit their grumbling for a while.

February 21

Numbers 19-20

There needed to be a way for the people to recognize the danger of touching a dead body. The cautions in chapter 19 address that threat of contamination. That was taken very seriously---anyone who didn't abide by these regulations would be cut off from the community.

Moses and Aaron made a major error when God instructed them to bring water from a rock, 20:2-13. After all the controversy and grumbling there had been about Moses' and Aaron's leadership, the saving argument had always been that God was the real leader behind them. Now Moses and his brother say they are bringing water from the rock. For this mistake, Moses will not be allowed to lead the people into the Promised Land.

Edom would not let the two million Israelites pass through their country, no one knows why. They'll pay dearly for this in later years at the hand of God.

February 22

Numbers 21-22

The Israelites have finished their years of wandering and now are headed for the Promised Land. It is critical that the people be unified now, so when the people grumble against Moses again, God sends snakes to attack the offenders. Perhaps it indicates grumbling against church leaders disrupts the church more than it does the leaders?

It seems odd, to say the least, that God would command the total destruction of human beings in opposing countries. Remember, though, that God has given these countries over 400 years to turn to Him and away from idols. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had worshiped a living God in their sight, and they were seemingly impressed by God's providential care of these patriarchs. God had told Abraham that the Promised Land would come to his descendants later, for the present inhabitants' "sin was not yet complete".

Balaam is a prophet-for-hire. He hears from God, but listens with the other ear to the call of cash. You can't have it both ways! (Matthew 6:24)

February 23

Numbers 23-25

God is straightening the 'prophet-for-profit' out. He allows Balaam to go to Balak to prophesy about Israel, knowing that Balak has promised him a reward. God has commanded Balaam to speak only what He says. Balaam does so, but it soon becomes obvious that choosing to speak God's words, without lying, will bring no monetary reward.

By the time Balaam leaves Balak, Balaam seems sold out to God. I reckon he had to find a new job.

As the Israelites approach the Promised Land, you'd think they'd clean up their act and try to get closer to God. Instead, they slip into sexual immorality with the Midianites. God sent a plague, and, you know, I think God would have let it wipe out all the Israelites if someone had not made a stand for God. Hurray for Phinehas!

February 24

Numbers 26-27

The last census taken was in Numbers 1. The population has not changed much, but the balance of the tribes has shifted. The Levites had increased only slightly. Notice that this census for the Levites included all the males a month old and more, while the other tribes started counting at 'army' age, 20 and above. Even though a couple generations had died in the desert, the next generation replaced the numbers.

When you think about Joshua's qualifications, he was the obvious choice to succeed Moses. He had been Moses' assistant for forty years. He was a good military leader. He had great faith in and love for God. He

and Caleb were the only two men left in all of Israel that had ever been to the Promised Land.

It was obvious that God was not going to change His mind about Moses not entering the Promised Land. God directed him to set his house in order; his place of death was now in sight.

February 25

Numbers 28-29

The people were to give a daily offering plus a monthly offering plus offerings on festival days. They constantly kept God in the forefront of their thinking, keeping their relationship vibrant and alive. They were God's people, all the time.

Now, God did not say who was to provide these regular offerings in particular. The whole nation was responsible. As with any other offering, the heart and soul and mind mattered even more than the offering.

There were three festivals in which all males were required to be present. Passover, Feast of Weeks, and Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Trumpets was considered part of the Tabernacles celebration.

February 26

Numbers 30-31

A vow, as stated here, is a promise made to God. A woman's vow had to be approved (patriarchal society) by her father or, if married, by her husband. Remember that every vow obligated a person to a prescribed offering, too.

Moses was about to die, but there was one piece of unfinished business: The Midianites, who had caused some of the Israelite men to sin by sexual immorality, must be destroyed. This included every person except any virgin women. (A girl who had slept with a man was considered to have become one flesh with him.) This was accomplished by only 12,000 of the Israelite army. Our best guess of the size of the Midianite army was at least 100,000, but could easily have been double that. Not one Israelite soldier was lost in the battle.

February 27

Numbers 32-33

This is quite a surprise. After forty years of journeying to the Promised Land, two and a half of the twelve tribes decide they'd be content to live just east of Canaan . This is land of peoples the Israelites had to conquer to get to the border of the land promised. Almost living into God's promise was good enough. God and Moses seemed to have been okay with this arrangement, as long as the army-eligible men left their families behind and helped secure the Promised Land for the rest.

There is some time taken here, to allow the Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh to fortify their newly-acquired cities, and to drive out remnants of the Moabites.

Chapter 33 is a review of the 40-year journey from Egypt to Canaan . Most of these location names have no meaning for us, though a few remind us of important events (Marah, Sinai, Kadesh). Note in verse 39 that Aaron must have been 3 years older than Moses; Moses had been 80 when God called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt .

The promise in verses 55-56 comes true. We'll see that the Israelites will fail to completely destroy or drive out all the inhabitants of Canaan , and it leads to their own destruction.

**February 28
Numbers 34-36**

In chapter 34, the locations mentioned might require you to find a Bible atlas to get any meaning out of this. Let me give you a general idea of the boundaries of the land God says is being given here to the Israelites. The western boundary is the Mediterranean Sea . The eastern boundary is basically the Jordan River valley, from the Dead Sea to the Sea of Galilee north another 30 or 40 miles, with the northern boundary going from there west to the Mediterranean . The southern boundary goes west from the southern end of the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean .

In addition, the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, have asked that their inheritance be just east of the "Promised Land" (usually referred to as the Land of Gilead); Moses says in 32:22 that, as long as they help subdue the land the other tribes are receiving, this will be their inheritance "before the Lord", so the land of Gilead also is included in God's gift. Gilead 's boundaries are generally as follows: The northern boundary starts at the lower end of the Sea of Galilee and goes east about 30 miles. From there, the eastern boundary goes south about 80 miles. For the southern boundary, you then go west to the Dead Sea (so this land goes half way down the Dead Sea). The western boundary is the Jordan

River valley; the other half of the tribe of Manasseh will receive an inheritance across the Jordan from their brothers in the land of Gilead .

Do you remember the promise God made to Abraham about the land? In Genesis 17:18-21, the promised gift of land was to extend from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates River. Has God downsized His promise? I don't think so, because we'll see Moses mention, in Deuteronomy 11:24 , that eventually (if they're faithful to God) their land will extend to the Euphrates River . Evidently the amount of land described in Numbers 34 was all the twelve tribes could handle right now. (They never get any closer to the Euphrates.)

You know, I had not given much thought to where the Levites would live. We have known that they wouldn't be given an allotment of land like the other tribes---God would be their inheritance. They were the tent of meeting workers, the worship leaders. Where did they go at the end of the work day? They were given cities, including grazing land. They evidently had some livestock from the beginning, not just a portion of the daily sacrifices.

The cities of refuge provided somewhere for a person to run to when he or she accidentally killed someone. There needed to be a safe place provided while the details of the homicide were being sorted out. Murder was a capital offense, and it was fair for the next-of-kin to get murderous revenge unless it could be proved that the death was accidental. (The death was not considered accidental if the accused only meant to hurt the victim.)

Chapter 36 is a little curious. Back in Numbers 27, Zelophehad's daughters appealed to God through Moses for an inheritance in the Promised Land, since there was no male heir and their father was dead. The family name (and claim) would die out. God heard their plea and provided that an inheritance would be given them. Now we need a corollary to that decision because, their tribal leaders of Manasseh say, when these girls marry a man from another tribe, the bride's land will be transferred to the husband's property and be lost to Manasseh forever. Moses asks God about it, and the decision is: They must marry within the tribe of Manasseh. No land is ever to be transferred from one tribe to another. I guess this tells me that, even though I might have considered this too little a matter to bother God about, none of our concerns are too small for God.