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KINGDOM CODE

FALL SEASON READING GUIDE

Ninety Days Through the Seventh Month

By Rocka | Kingdom Code

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WHAT YOU ARE HOLDING

This is a ninety-day reading of the season the church has mostly stopped reading.

Scripture does not treat autumn as a mood. It treats it as an appointment. In the seventh month of the covenant calendar, God set three feasts back to back: the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths. The trumpet opens the accounting. The atonement settles it. The booth lets a forgiven people live inside the harvest with glad hearts and temporary walls. The order is not incidental. It is the argument.

Winter taught that the dark season is holy ground. Spring taught that new growth is most exposed when it is youngest. Summer taught that labor without Sabbath becomes bondage, however fruitful it looks. Fall asks the question every harvest eventually has to answer: what did the year produce, what does it owe, and who will share the bread?

Read slowly. The grain is already in the field.

THE SHAPE OF THE SEVENTH MONTH

Most Christians meet the fall feasts as background: Old Testament furniture, fulfilled in Christ and therefore safe to leave in storage. That reading survives only because few people walk the feasts in order.

Leviticus 23 places all three inside one month. On the first day, the trumpet. On the tenth, the fast. On the fifteenth, the booths, seven days of them, with an eighth day of solemn assembly at the end. Each feast depends on the one before it. The trumpet without the atonement is only alarm. The atonement without the booth is only grief. The booth without the trumpet and the atonement is only a party. Taken together, they form the shape of every honest closing: wake up, settle the account, then rejoice.

Genesis 8:22 stands under all four guides in this series: while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest shall not cease. Fall is where seedtime turns into harvest, where a year of labor becomes stored bread or lost grain. The seventh month exists so that the turn is made with open eyes.

THE COUNTERFEIT HARVEST

The world has no quarrel with a harvest festival. Tables heavy with food, markets full of apples and squash, a long weekend of gratitude: none of it asks anything hard. Scripture's name for that order is Babylon, the city that feasts without accounting. Belshazzar drank from the temple vessels on the night the kingdom was weighed and found wanting.

The counterfeit works by subtraction. It keeps the feast and drops what the feast was built on. There are three ways to do it.

The first is harvest without the trumpet. The ram's horn called Israel together, and it also warned Israel of danger. A culture of constant celebration keeps the gathering and mutes the warning.

The second is joy without atonement. The joy of Booths is commanded, and Deuteronomy says the people shall be altogether joyful. But that command comes five days after the Day of Atonement, never before it. Joy issued ahead of confession is joy on credit, and the bill always comes.

The third is a full barn with a closed gate. The harvest laws built the poor into the harvest: the corner left standing, the sheaf left behind, the tithe carried to the widow and the stranger. Zechariah pictures the nations themselves going up to keep the Feast of Booths. A harvest that stores everything for the ones who grew it has not kept the law, however grateful it feels.

This guide restores what the counterfeit removes.

THE SEASON IN THREE REGISTERS

The Calendar. The seventh month opens near the autumn equinox, as the light begins to recede. In 2026, the Feast of Trumpets fell on September 12 and the Day of Atonement on September 21. The Feast of Booths began at sundown on September 25 and runs through October 2, with the Eighth Day on October 3. A reader who opens this guide at the turn of the season opens it inside the Feast of Booths: the trumpet has sounded, the fast has been kept, and the tents are standing. The calendar walks the sequence in three weeks. This guide gives each feast a full month. Read it again next year beginning on the first of the seventh month, and you will walk it with the calendar step for step.

The Ethiopian Witness. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church keeps its new year, Enkutatash, on the first of Meskerem, which fell on September 11 this year. Sixteen days later it keeps Meskel, the finding of the True Cross, with bonfires on the eve and crosses traced in ash at dawn. A new year and the cross, in the same weeks the Hebrew calendar gives to the trumpet and the atonement. The same church preserved 1 Enoch and Jubilees whole, and both books care deeply about the calendar. Jubilees roots the Day of Atonement in Jacob's grief over Joseph and the Feast of Booths in Abraham's joy. Those passages appear in this guide as a witness the wider church largely set aside and Ethiopia kept.

The Life. You can enter this season at any point in a life: the end of a long work, the close of a fiscal year, the hour when a calling or a relationship comes up for review. The pattern holds regardless of the date. Something grew. The trumpet asks what it produced. The atonement asks what must be confessed before it can be enjoyed. The booth asks whether you will live in the result as a pilgrim or try to fortify it into a kingdom of your own.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read one passage a day for ninety days. Each day gives a Scripture reading, a short commentary on why the passage belongs to this season, and two questions for examination. Answer the questions in writing when you can. A season built on accounting deserves a written record.

At days 30, 60, and 90, stop for an extended examination. These are not optional. A guide about keeping honest accounts cannot skip its own.

Days 1 through 30, The Trumpet: the alarm, the watchman, and the reckoning every life will meet. Days 31 through 60, The Atonement: the blood that covers, the confession that names, and the finished work that ends the repeating. Days 61 through 90, The Ingathering: the booth, the commanded joy, and the table set wide enough for the stranger.

If you fall behind, do not race to catch up. Resume where you stopped. The aim was never completion. The aim is an honest ledger, closed in the right order.

WHAT THIS SEASON ASKS OF YOU

Three things, if you walk it honestly.

The first is attention. Much of life runs without a trumpet: habits, debts, and silences that never receive a wake-up call because the call is uncomfortable. The first month trains the ear to hear the alarm before it becomes an emergency.

The second is confession. Not shame, and not self-punishment dressed as piety, but a ledger opened on schedule and settled at the cross. The second month teaches you to stop borrowing joy against an account you have not yet faced.

The third is generosity. The booth teaches that a full barn is a trust, not a fortress. The third month sends you back into the field to leave the corners standing for someone who has nothing stored at all.

DAYS 1–30: THE TRUMPET

The shofar is a plain instrument: a ram's horn, hollowed and blown. In Numbers 10 its silver cousins have three uses. They summon the assembly, they sound the alarm against an enemy, and they mark the sacrifices at the appointed feasts. All three uses meet on the first day of the seventh month.

For thirty days you will learn to hear it. The trumpet is not the enemy of joy. It is the mercy that arrives before the reckoning, while there is still time to answer. A harvest that is never counted is not yet fully received. The horn calls you to count it.

Week 1: The Alarm

DAY 1 · THE PROMISE UNDER THE SEASONS

READ: *Genesis 8:20-22*

COMMENTARY

Noah comes down from the ark onto ground scoured by judgment, and before he plants anything he builds an altar. God answers the smoke of that offering with a promise pressed into time itself: while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.

Every guide in this series stands on that verse, and fall stands at its hinge. Here seedtime becomes harvest. Here a year of labor becomes bread in the storehouse or grain rotting in the field.

Notice the order. The promise follows the altar, and the altar follows the flood. Noah did not earn the harvest. He received the covenant after total loss and answered it with worship before he knew what the ground would yield. That is the posture of the seventh month. The trumpet, the fast, and the booth are not burdens added to God's goodness. They are the way a people keep faith with a promise they did not earn.

EXAMINATION

1. What altar will you build at the start of this season, before you know what the harvest will be?
2. Where has loss made you doubt that seedtime and harvest still hold for you?

DAY 2 · A DAY FOR THE TRUMPET

READ: *Leviticus 23:23-25*

COMMENTARY

The command is almost bare. On the first day of the seventh month there shall be a solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with a blast of trumpets, a holy convocation. No explanation of the sound. No new sacrifice invented for the day. Simply: rest, gather, and let the horn be heard.

Jewish tradition named the day Rosh Hashanah, the head of the year, and read it as the opening of ten days of self-examination leading to the Day of Atonement. The text itself is restrained, and the restraint teaches. Before the harvest is celebrated, before the booths go up, before anything is done with what the year produced, God asks for attention.

The modern calendar moves from work straight to reward. The seventh month interrupts that movement with a sound. Its first requirement is not an achievement or a report. It is a listening people, gathered and still.

EXAMINATION

1. What in your life has moved straight from labor to reward without a pause to listen?
2. If God asked only for your attention today, what would you hear if you gave it?

DAY 3 · THE SILVER TRUMPETS

READ: *Numbers 10:1-10*

COMMENTARY

God tells Moses to hammer out two trumpets of silver and gives them three tasks. Blown one way, they gather the congregation at the tent of meeting. Blown another, they send the camps out on the march. Blown as an alarm in war, they bring Israel into remembrance before the Lord, and the people are saved from their enemies. At the appointed feasts they sound over the sacrifices as a memorial.

Gathering, warning, and worship: one instrument serves all three. We would prefer to keep them apart. We welcome the call that gathers and resent the call that warns. But the trumpet will not divide itself for our comfort. The sound that brings the people together is the same sound that tells them an enemy is near, and the same sound that stands over the altar.

The seventh month sounds all three at once. Come in from the field. Face what threatens you. Stand before God with what you have.

EXAMINATION

1. Which call of the trumpet do you welcome, and which one do you resist?
2. What enemy of your household or calling have you been unwilling to sound an alarm over?

DAY 4 · THE HOLY GREAT ONE COMES

READ: *1 Enoch 1:3-9*

COMMENTARY

The opening vision of 1 Enoch is not gentle. The Holy Great One comes forth from his dwelling and treads the earth, even Mount Sinai. The high mountains are shaken and melt like wax before the flame. The earth is rent, and there is judgment upon all.

Jude quotes this chapter in the New Testament, and the Ethiopian church kept the whole book. Its opening supplies what the trumpet season needs: a vision of judgment large enough to make the horn make sense. The shofar is not a sound effect. It announces a real coming.

Yet the vision does not end in terror. With the righteous he will make peace. He will protect the elect, and mercy shall be upon them, and light shall appear unto them. The same coming that melts mountains brings peace to those who are ready. The trumpet frightens the unprepared and gathers the prepared, and it is the same trumpet.

EXAMINATION

1. Have you softened the reality of judgment into something that no longer asks you to prepare?
2. What would it mean to meet the coming of God as someone he intends to protect?

DAY 5 · A STATUTE FOR ISRAEL

READ: *Psalm 81:1-10*

COMMENTARY

The psalm opens with gladness: sing aloud to God our strength. Then it gives an instruction with a calendar in it. Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day, for it is a statute for Israel, a rule of the God of Jacob.

The trumpet is a statute, not a feeling. It sounds on the appointed day whether the heart is ready or not. The psalm goes on to explain why that matters. God recalls the day he lifted the burden from Israel's shoulders and freed their hands from the basket. He pleads with them to have no strange god among them. Open your mouth wide, he says, and I will fill it.

Obedience kept on schedule is the channel the promised joy travels through. The feast will come. The first duty of the seventh month is not to feel festive. It is to keep the appointment.

EXAMINATION

1. What obedience have you delayed because the feeling for it had not arrived?
2. What burden did God lift from your shoulders that you have stopped remembering?

DAY 6 · THE TRUMPET AT SINAI**READ:** *Exodus 19:16-20***COMMENTARY**

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, a thick cloud on the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Sinai smoked like a kiln because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The trumpet grew louder and louder. Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.

The first trumpet in Scripture is not blown by a priest. It sounds from heaven over the mountain where the covenant is made. Every shofar in the seventh month repeats, in small, what Israel heard at Sinai: the holy God is near, and the people must decide how they will stand before him.

Israel trembled and asked Moses to stand between them and the voice. Hebrews will later say that we have not come to that mountain but to Mount Zion and to Jesus, the mediator of a better covenant. The trembling is still right. Now it can lead us nearer instead of driving us back.

EXAMINATION

1. When the presence of God has made you tremble, have you drawn near or kept your distance?
2. What would it look like to treat this season as an approach to the mountain rather than a date on the calendar?

DAY 7 · THE WALLS OF JERICHO

READ: *Joshua 6:1-5, 15-20*

COMMENTARY

Jericho is shut up inside and out, and God's strategy looks like nonsense. March around the city once a day for six days. Seven priests with seven rams' horns go before the ark. On the seventh day, march seven times, sound a long blast, and let the people shout. The wall will fall flat.

For six days nothing happens. The stones stand. The watchmen on the wall presumably laugh. Israel keeps walking.

The rams' horns at Jericho did not work by acoustics. They worked by obedience carried past the point where it looked useful. That is how most walls fall: not through a sudden stroke of cleverness, but through faithfulness repeated on schedule until the day God appointed. The seventh month asks the same of us. Keep the appointments. Keep sounding the horn. The wall is not your problem to solve.

EXAMINATION

1. What wall in your life have you stopped circling because six days produced nothing?
2. Where are you looking for a clever solution when God has asked for patient obedience?

Week 2: The Watchman

DAY 8 · THE WATCHMAN'S DUTY

READ: *Ezekiel 33:1-9*

COMMENTARY

God gives Ezekiel a hard office. When the sword comes upon a land and the watchman sees it and blows the trumpet, anyone who hears and ignores the warning bears his own blood. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow, the one who dies still dies in his iniquity, and his blood God will require at the watchman's hand.

The trumpet is not optional equipment for a watchman. It is the whole job. Silence in the face of danger is not caution or kindness. It is failure at the one thing the post exists to do.

Every household, church, and community has watchmen: parents, pastors, elders, friends who see further than others. The seventh month is a summons to take up that office and to take it seriously. The word may be unwelcome. It may be ignored. The watchman is not responsible for the hearing. He is responsible for the sound.

EXAMINATION

1. Who has God placed under your watch, and what have you seen coming that you have not yet named?
2. Are you more afraid of being unwelcome than of being silent when it mattered?

DAY 9 · CAUSE AND EFFECT**READ:** *Amos 3:1-8***COMMENTARY**

Amos argues from the barnyard and the hunting ground. Do two walk together unless they have agreed? Does a lion roar when it has no prey? Does a bird fall into a snare when there is no trap? Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid?

Every question expects the answer no. Effects have causes. A lion's roar means a kill. A trumpet in the city means danger at the gate. Then Amos names the cause behind his own message: the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord has spoken; who can but prophesy?

Our age is flooded with manufactured urgency: alarms that sound constantly and mean nothing. The danger is that we learn to ignore every horn. Amos insists that a real trumpet has a real cause. The first question when it sounds is not how loud it is, but what set it off.

EXAMINATION

1. What warning have you dismissed as noise that had a real cause behind it?
2. Has the flood of false alarms made you deaf to a true one?

DAY 10 · MY ANGUISH**READ:** *Jeremiah 4:5-8, 19-22***COMMENTARY**

Blow the trumpet through the land, Jeremiah cries. Raise a standard toward Zion; disaster is coming from the north. Then the prophet's own body breaks into the announcement. My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent, for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.

Jeremiah does not blow the horn from a safe distance. He feels the wound he announces. The watchman is also a member of the city.

That is what separates a prophet from a critic. The critic sounds the alarm and enjoys it. The prophet sounds it and grieves. Jeremiah's anguish does not soften the message. God's verdict stands: my people are foolish; they are skilled in doing evil, but how to do good they do not know. But the prophet speaks it as one who would give anything for it to be untrue.

EXAMINATION

1. When you have had to warn someone, did you speak as a critic or as someone who shared the wound?
2. What truth are you avoiding because saying it would cost you grief?

DAY 11 · CONSECRATE A FAST**READ:** *Joel 1:13-15***COMMENTARY**

The summer guide read Joel's promise of restored years. This is the alarm that comes before it. The locusts have stripped the land. The grain offering and the drink offering have been cut off from the house of God because there is nothing left to offer.

Joel's instruction is not to wait for better times. Put on sackcloth, you priests. Consecrate a fast. Call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord, and cry out. Alas for the day, for the day of the Lord is near.

The restoration of chapter two does not come by skipping chapter one. The fast is called while the barns are still empty and the vines still bare. Grief is gathered, not hidden. The elders stand in front of it. We want hope without lament. Joel will not allow it. The road to restored years runs through a consecrated fast.

EXAMINATION

1. What loss in your life needs to be lamented before it can be restored?
2. Who are the elders who should stand with you in that grief, and have you called them?

DAY 12 · AN ALARM ON THE HOLY MOUNTAIN**READ:** *Joel 2:1-11***COMMENTARY**

Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain. Joel sets the alarm where the stakes are highest: not on the border, but on the mountain where God dwells. What follows is a vision of an army like dawn spreading over the mountains, a people great and powerful, running like war horses, climbing walls, marching in ranks that do not break. The earth quakes before them. The sun and moon are darkened.

The trumpet in Zion is aimed first at the people of God, not at the nations. Judgment begins at the house of God.

Joel's alarm is proportionate to the danger. It is not polite, and it is not calibrated to anyone's comfort. It is as loud as the threat is real. Yet the same chapter turns at verse twelve with the words, even now, return to me with all your heart. The loudness of the trumpet is itself a mercy. God warns loudly because he intends to be heard.

EXAMINATION

1. What warning have you asked God to deliver more quietly than the danger deserves?
2. Where has the house of God, including your own place in it, needed the alarm first?

DAY 13 · AGAINST THE FORTIFIED CITIES**READ:** *Zephaniah 1:14-18***COMMENTARY**

The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast. Zephaniah piles up the words until they sound like the day itself: wrath, distress, anguish, ruin, devastation, darkness, gloom, clouds, and thick darkness. A day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.

Notice the target. Not the weak, not the poor, but the fortified cities: the places built on the conviction that enough stone makes the reckoning irrelevant. Their silver and gold will not be able to deliver them.

Every generation builds battlements of its own: savings, reputations, institutions, networks, and the quiet belief that we are secure enough to be exempt. Zephaniah does not condemn provision. Joseph stored grain by God's command. He condemns trust placed in walls. The trumpet is blown against battlements because battlements are where the heart hides from God.

EXAMINATION

1. What have you built that you quietly trust to keep you safe from reckoning?
2. If your walls came down tomorrow, what would remain for you to stand on?

DAY 14 · LIFT UP YOUR VOICE LIKE A TRUMPET**READ:** *Isaiah 58:1-9***COMMENTARY**

Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression. The trumpet here is a human voice, and the prophet is commanded not to muffle it.

The transgression Isaiah is sent to declare is surprising. The people are religious. They seek God daily and delight to know his ways. They fast. But they fast while exploiting their workers, and quarreling, and striking with a wicked fist. God asks whether that is the fast he chooses. The fast he chooses is to loose the bonds of wickedness, to share bread with the hungry, to bring the homeless poor into your house, to cover the naked.

The Day of Atonement is near, and Isaiah prepares the ground for it. A fast that leaves injustice untouched is not a fast. Then comes the promise: your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily. When you call, the Lord will answer, here I am.

EXAMINATION

1. Where has your devotion stayed private while injustice around you went untouched?
2. Whom do you need to speak to plainly, as a trumpet and not a whisper?

Week 3: The Accounting

DAY 15 · THE SEVEN YEARS OF PLENTY

READ: *Genesis 41:46-57*

COMMENTARY

For seven years the land of Egypt produced abundantly, and Joseph gathered up the food and stored it in the cities, grain like the sand of the sea, until he stopped measuring because it could not be measured. Then the famine came, as he had said, and it was severe over all the earth. But in Egypt there was bread.

Joseph did not skip the counting because the plenty felt too good to interrupt. He counted because plenty was the only window in which counting could do any good. Accounting in a good year is not pessimism. It is foresight.

And the storehouse was not only for Egypt. All the earth came to Joseph to buy grain. The faithful steward's barns fed his enemies' children and his own brothers who had sold him. The trumpet of the seventh month asks the same kind of question: what have you gathered, and whom will it feed when the lean years come?

EXAMINATION

1. In a season of plenty, what are you counting and storing, and what are you simply consuming?
2. Who might one day come to your storehouse in need, and will there be bread when they arrive?

DAY 16 · KNOW THE CONDITION OF YOUR FLOCKS**READ:** *Proverbs 27:23-27***COMMENTARY**

Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds, for riches do not last forever, and a crown does not endure to all generations. Proverbs says nothing here about acquiring more. It says to know what you already have.

The shepherd who walks among his sheep sees the limp, the thinning coat, the ewe that stopped eating. The owner who manages from a distance sees a number on a page until the number collapses. Wealth left unattended does not stay wealth. It drifts toward loss by a thousand small neglects.

The proverb ends in plain abundance: lambs for clothing, goats to buy a field, milk enough for your household and your servant girls. That provision comes to the one who pays attention. The accounting of the seventh month begins here, with the discipline of going out to look. Not at projections, not at last year's report, but at the present condition of the flock you have been given.

EXAMINATION

1. What have you been given to tend that you have not looked at closely in a long time?
2. What small neglect, left alone, is slowly becoming a loss?

DAY 17 · THE SHREWD MANAGER**READ:** *Luke 16:1-13***COMMENTARY**

A rich man hears that his manager has been wasting his goods and demands a final account. The manager, knowing he will be dismissed, reduces what his master's debtors owe so that they will receive him into their homes. The master commends him, not for his dishonesty, but for his shrewdness.

It is one of Jesus' most uncomfortable parables, and its point is sharp. The children of this age act decisively when their future is at stake. The children of light often do not. Use unrighteous wealth to make friends for eternity, Jesus says, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

Then he draws the line through ordinary life. One who is faithful in very little is faithful also in much. The accounting of God reaches the checkbook before it reaches the pulpit. No servant can serve two masters. Money will either serve the kingdom or rule the heart. There is no third option.

EXAMINATION

1. If your finances were read aloud as a testimony, what would they say you serve?
2. What would decisive action look like if you took eternity as seriously as the manager took his dismissal?

DAY 18 · EACH OF US WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT**READ:** *Romans 14:7-12***COMMENTARY**

Paul is writing about quarrels over food and holy days, the disputes believers love to judge one another by. His correction is simple. Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Why do you despise him? We will all stand before the judgment seat of God. Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess. So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Of himself. Not of his neighbor, not of his church's rival, not of the Christian online who holds the wrong opinion. The ledger each person will answer for is his own.

It is easier to audit someone else's field. Their weeds are more visible and their failures cost us nothing to name. But the trumpet season is not a license to evaluate others. It is a summons to examine yourself. The same judgment seat that relieves you of the burden of judging your brother also removes every excuse for neglecting your own account.

EXAMINATION

1. Whose failures have you been examining more carefully than your own?
2. What would you say before God if the account were yours alone to give today?

DAY 19 · THE FIRE WILL TEST IT**READ:** *1 Corinthians 3:10-15***COMMENTARY**

Paul has just called the church God's field. Now he calls it God's building. Like a skilled master builder he laid the foundation, and others are building on it. Let each one take care how he builds. No one can lay any other foundation than Jesus Christ.

On that foundation some build with gold, silver, and precious stones. Others build with wood, hay, and straw. From the street the two may look much alike. The Day will disclose the difference, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work survives, the builder receives a reward. If it burns, he suffers loss, though he himself will be saved, as through fire.

The question here is not who stands on the foundation. That is settled by grace. The question is what was built on it. Wood and straw go up quickly and look impressive. Gold and stone are slow and costly. This season is the rehearsal for the fire, held while there is still time to change materials.

EXAMINATION

1. What have you built quickly this year that would not survive fire?
2. Where is God asking you to choose the slower, costlier material?

DAY 20 · A MIST THAT VANISHES**READ:** *James 4:13-17***COMMENTARY**

Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow we will go into such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit. You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

James does not forbid planning. He forbids planning that forgets its own frailty. The merchant's error is not his calendar but his assumption that the calendar belongs to him. Instead you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

Then James closes with a sentence that belongs at the center of any honest accounting: whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. The ledger counts more than wrongs committed. It counts known goods left undone. A mist cannot postpone its obligations to a more convenient season. The good you already know to do is due today.

EXAMINATION

1. What good have you known for a long time that you still have not done?
2. Which of your plans assume a tomorrow that God has not promised?

DAY 21 · ROCK AND SAND**READ:** *Matthew 7:21-27***COMMENTARY**

Not everyone who says Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of the Father. On that day many will list their works: prophecy, deliverance, mighty deeds, all done in the name of Jesus. And he will declare, I never knew you.

Their works are not described as false. They are described as disconnected from obedience and from relationship. An impressive record of religious activity is not the same as a foundation.

Then the parable. The wise man hears and does, and builds on rock. The foolish man hears and does not, and builds on sand. The rain, the floods, and the wind come to both houses. The storm does not check credentials. It tests foundations. The difference between the two builders was invisible in fair weather and total in the storm. The seventh month asks the question plainly: when the weather turns, what will your house be found standing on?

EXAMINATION

1. Where has religious activity in your life replaced simple obedience to what Jesus said?
2. What storm is testing your foundation right now, and what is it revealing?

Week 4: The Last Trumpet**DAY 22 · THE HARVEST IS THE END OF THE AGE****READ:** *Matthew 13:36-43***COMMENTARY**

Summer read the parable of the wheat and the weeds. Here Jesus explains it privately. The one who sows good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world. The good seed is the children of the kingdom, and the weeds are the children of the evil one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.

Jesus gives the harvest its final meaning. It is not only an autumn event on a farm. It is his own word for the last judgment. The angels will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

The farmer's patience in the parable was not indifference. He waited so that no wheat would be lost. But the waiting has an end. The seventh month rehearses that ending every year, so that it is not a surprise when it comes.

EXAMINATION

1. Have you treated the harvest as a pleasant image rather than Jesus' word for judgment?
2. What in your life is growing entangled with what will one day be gathered and burned?

DAY 23 · THE LOUD TRUMPET CALL

READ: *Matthew 24:29-31*

COMMENTARY

After the tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. The stars will fall and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn and see him coming on the clouds with power and great glory. He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds.

Every trumpet in the seventh month points forward to this one. The yearly shofar is a rehearsal. This is the performance.

The lesser lights go out first. Sun, moon, and stars give way until only the sign of the Son of Man remains to be seen. Everything we have relied upon for light will fail before his coming, and what remains will be him. The final trumpet does not only warn. It gathers. It reaches the four winds and brings home everyone who belongs to him.

EXAMINATION

1. What lesser lights have you relied on that will go dark before his coming?
2. If the gathering trumpet sounded today, would it find you among his people or apart from them?

DAY 24 · THE CRY AT MIDNIGHT**READ:** *Matthew 25:1-13***COMMENTARY**

Ten virgins take their lamps to meet the bridegroom. Five bring extra oil. Five do not. The bridegroom is delayed, and all ten grow drowsy and sleep. At midnight a cry goes up: here is the bridegroom, come out to meet him.

All ten wake. All ten trim their lamps. Only five have oil. The foolish ask to borrow, and the wise refuse, not from cruelty, but because oil of this kind cannot be shared. While the foolish go to buy, the bridegroom arrives, and the door is shut.

The parable does not condemn sleep. Both groups slept. It condemns being unprepared when the waking comes. Readiness is not something that can be borrowed at the last moment from a more faithful friend. It is accumulated slowly, in the ordinary hours, by those who expect the bridegroom to come. The cry at midnight is the trumpet in its most personal form.

EXAMINATION

1. What part of your readiness have you been counting on borrowing from someone else?
2. What would it mean to keep your lamp supplied in the ordinary hours of this week?

DAY 25 · CHILDREN OF THE DAY**READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11****COMMENTARY**

Paul reminds the Thessalonians of what they already know. The day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night. While people are saying peace and security, sudden destruction comes, like labor pains upon a pregnant woman, and there is no escape.

Then he turns. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. You are children of light, children of the day. So let us not sleep as others do. Let us keep awake and be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

The day that surprises the careless does not surprise the watchful. The believer is not spared the day. He is dressed for it. Paul closes with a command that keeps the watching from becoming lonely or anxious: encourage one another and build one another up. The trumpet season is kept in company.

EXAMINATION

1. Where have peace and security become a lullaby rather than a gift?
2. Who is keeping watch with you, and whom are you encouraging to stay awake?

DAY 26 · THE SEVENTH TRUMPET**READ:** *Revelation 11:15-19***COMMENTARY**

The seventh angel blows his trumpet, and loud voices in heaven say, the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. The twenty-four elders fall on their faces. The nations raged, they say, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, small and great.

The first six trumpets of Revelation bring plagues. The seventh brings an announcement. It does not warn of a reckoning to come. It declares a transfer already accomplished. Then God's temple in heaven is opened, and the ark of his covenant is seen.

Two details deserve attention. The reward is given to small and great alike, by one standard. And the ark, gone from Israel's story since the Babylonian conquest, is seen again. What was lost is not lost to God. The final trumpet reveals the covenant that was kept all along.

EXAMINATION

1. Do you live as though the kingdom of the world already belongs to Christ, or as though it is still up for grabs?
2. Where have you assumed God keeps a different ledger for the great than for the small?

DAY 27 · THE HOUR OF HIS JUDGMENT

READ: *Revelation 14:6-13*

COMMENTARY

Summer ended with the harvest of Revelation 14. Fall returns to the verses just before it. An angel flies overhead with an eternal gospel for every nation, tribe, language, and people: fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth. A second angel announces that Babylon the great has fallen. A third warns against the mark of the beast.

Then a voice from heaven: blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.

The hour of judgment is called gospel. For those who die in the Lord, that hour means rest. Their deeds do not accuse them. Their deeds follow them, like a harvest brought in behind the reapers. The same hour that brings Babylon down brings the faithful home. The difference is not the hour. It is where the heart has been found.

EXAMINATION

1. Can you hear good news in the hour of judgment, or only threat?
2. What deeds would you want to follow you, and what are you doing this week that will?

DAY 28 · THE SECRETS OF MEN**READ:** *Romans 2:1-16***COMMENTARY**

Paul sets a trap for the reader who has been agreeing with his indictment of pagan sin. Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. In passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you practice the very same things.

Then he names the danger of presuming on grace. Do you despise the riches of God's kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that his kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? A hard and impenitent heart stores up wrath for the day of God's righteous judgment.

The chapter ends with the sentence that closes every loophole: on that day God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. Not only what was seen. The secrets. Every hidden account will be opened, and it will be opened by the one who died for sinners. That is both the most frightening and the most hopeful fact in the passage. The judge of every secret is also the Savior.

EXAMINATION

1. What secret would you least want read aloud, and have you brought it to Christ yourself?
2. Where have you mistaken God's patience with you for his approval?

DAY 29 · THE KING SETTLES ACCOUNTS**READ:** *Matthew 18:23-35***COMMENTARY**

A king wishes to settle accounts with his servants. One owes ten thousand talents. A single talent was roughly twenty years of a laborer's wages. Ten thousand of them is a debt no man could repay in a thousand lifetimes. The servant begs for patience, and the king, moved with pity, forgives the entire debt.

That servant goes out and finds a fellow servant who owes him a hundred denarii, a few months' wages. He seizes him by the throat, refuses his plea, and throws him into prison. When the king hears, he summons the first servant: should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?

Jesus ends without softening. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. The accounting turns inward on mercy itself. Forgiveness received and withheld reveals that it was never truly received.

EXAMINATION

1. Have you forgotten the size of the debt that was forgiven you?
2. Whose smaller debt are you still holding by the throat?

DAY 30 · APPOINTED ONCE TO DIE**READ:** *Hebrews 9:27-28***COMMENTARY**

It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment. So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Two sentences close the month of the trumpet. The first states the appointment every life will keep: one death, one judgment, no second attempt. The second tells us why that appointment need not end in despair. Christ was offered once, and he bore sins that were not his own.

Notice the word once, used for both. Man dies once. Christ was offered once. His single offering answers our single appointment. And his second appearing is not to settle the account again. That was finished at his first. He comes to save those who are waiting for him. The trumpet has sounded for thirty days. Here the alarm begins to turn into good news.

EXAMINATION

1. Do you live as though the appointment with judgment is real and singular?
2. Are you waiting eagerly for his appearing, or quietly hoping it will be delayed?

DAY 30 EXAMINATION: THE ACCOUNT OPENED

Thirty days under the trumpet. Before you enter the Day of Atonement, stop and write.

1. What has the trumpet exposed? Name it plainly. Not a category of weakness, but the specific thing this month brought to the surface that you were not looking at on the first day.
2. Whose ledger have you been reading instead of your own? The alarm is easy to hear when it is aimed at someone else. Name where you have spent this month auditing a brother, a leader, or an institution when the account in question was yours.
3. Where have you been a silent watchman? Ezekiel's watchman answers for the warning he did not give. Name someone under your care who needs a word you have been withholding, and name the day you will give it.

The Day of Atonement cannot cover a debt the trumpet was never allowed to name.

DAYS 31–60: THE ATONEMENT

Ten days separate the trumpet from the fast. On the tenth day of the seventh month, and on no other day, the high priest passed behind the veil with blood in his hands. It was the only fast the law commanded, and the only day the Most Holy Place was entered at all.

For thirty days you will stand at that veil. You will read the ritual of the two goats, the great confessions of Israel's history, and the New Testament's answer to what the ritual could only picture. The aim is not to produce guilt. Guilt already exists. The aim is to see it named, carried, and covered, once and for all.

Week 5: The Blood That Covers

DAY 31 · TWO GOATS

READ: *Leviticus 16:1-10*

COMMENTARY

The chapter opens with a death. Aaron's two sons had drawn near the presence of the Lord on their own terms and died. Now God tells Aaron how he may enter the Most Holy Place without dying: not whenever he chooses, but once a year, with blood, dressed in plain linen, after atoning for himself and his house.

Then Aaron takes two goats from the congregation and casts lots over them. One lot is for the Lord. The other is for Azazel. The first goat is killed as a sin offering. The second is kept alive, presented before the Lord, and then sent into the wilderness.

One atonement requires two goats because sin requires two remedies. It must be paid for, and it must be removed. The blood of the first goat covers. The departure of the second carries away. Either one alone would leave the work half done. The Day of Atonement holds both, and so does the cross.

EXAMINATION

1. Have you received forgiveness while still carrying the guilt as though it had never been removed?
2. Where have you tried to approach God on your own terms rather than on the terms he gave?

DAY 32 · THE GOAT SENT AWAY**READ:** *Leviticus 16:20-22***COMMENTARY**

When the sanctuary has been cleansed, Aaron brings the living goat forward. He lays both hands on its head and confesses over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, all their transgressions, all their sins. He puts them on the head of the goat and sends it into the wilderness by the hand of a man appointed for the task. The goat bears their iniquities to a remote place and is let go.

Picture it. Two hands pressed down on coarse hair. Sins named aloud, one by one. Then a man leads the animal past the edge of the camp until it is out of sight.

The removal of sin in Scripture is not vague. It involves naming, transferring, and sending away. What is confessed only in general terms tends to stay close. What is named and laid on another is carried off. The Day of Atonement teaches the specificity of confession, and it teaches the distance of removal: out of the camp, into the wilderness, gone.

EXAMINATION

1. What have you confessed only in general terms that needs to be named plainly?
2. Can you believe that what was laid on Christ has been carried out of sight?

DAY 33 · THE ONE COMMANDED FAST**READ:** *Leviticus 23:26-32***COMMENTARY**

On the tenth day of the seventh month is the Day of Atonement. You shall afflict yourselves. You shall do no work on that very day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. Whoever does not afflict himself on that day shall be cut off from his people.

Jewish tradition has always read afflict as fast. It is the only fast the law of Moses commands. Israel had many feasts. It had one appointed day of self-denial, and the penalty attached to neglecting it was among the most severe in the law.

The modern church knows how to feast and has largely forgotten how to fast. But the seventh month will not allow joy to be separated from the empty stomach that precedes it. The body is not left out of repentance. Hunger becomes a kind of prayer, a physical confession that we do not live by bread alone. The feast that follows is sweeter because the fast was kept.

EXAMINATION

1. When did you last deny your body anything for the sake of seeking God?
2. What would it look like to keep one day this season as a day of fasting and confession?

DAY 34 · JACOB'S GRIEF**READ:** *Jubilees 34:10-19***COMMENTARY**

Genesis tells how Joseph's brothers dipped his coat in the blood of a goat and sent it to their father. Jubilees adds the date. It was the tenth day of the seventh month. Jacob mourned all that night and refused to be comforted, and Bilhah and Dinah died in their grief that same month.

Then Jubilees makes its claim. For this reason it is ordained for the children of Israel that they should afflict themselves on the tenth of the seventh month, on the day the news that made Jacob weep for Joseph came to him, and make atonement for themselves with a young goat once a year, for they had grieved the affection of their father regarding his son.

Whatever one makes of the history, the theology cuts deep. The first goat's blood in this story covered a lie. The Day of Atonement answers it with a goat whose blood covers sin. A father's grief over a lost son, caused by his other sons, is remembered every year until it is healed. The gospel will finish that story.

EXAMINATION

1. What have you covered with a story instead of a confession?
2. Whose grief has your sin caused, and has it ever been acknowledged?

DAY 35 · WE ARE GUILTY CONCERNING OUR BROTHER**READ:** *Genesis 42:18-24***COMMENTARY**

Twenty years after they sold Joseph, his brothers stand before an Egyptian governor they do not recognize. Under the pressure of his accusation, the old guilt breaks through. In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul when he begged us, and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.

Reuben adds his own bitter memory: did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? Now there comes a reckoning for his blood. They do not know that Joseph understands every word. He turns away and weeps.

Buried guilt does not decay. It waits. The brothers carried theirs for two decades until famine and fear forced it into speech. The Day of Atonement gives a fixed date for what might otherwise wait for a crisis. Confession on schedule is a mercy. It spares us from needing a famine to find our tongues.

EXAMINATION

1. What guilt have you carried for years without speaking it aloud?
2. Will you let a scheduled season of confession do what a crisis might otherwise force?

DAY 36 · WHEN I KEPT SILENT**READ:** *Psalm 32:1-7***COMMENTARY**

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

David describes what came before that blessing. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. Day and night your hand was heavy upon me. My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Unconfessed sin is not only a spiritual problem. It lives in the body. It dries the strength and bends the bones.

Then the turn is almost abrupt. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Nothing changed between the wasting and the forgiveness except that David stopped hiding. Silence corrodes. Confession releases. The psalm ends with God as a hiding place, surrounding the forgiven with shouts of deliverance.

EXAMINATION

1. Where do you feel the weight of something unconfessed in your body or your rest?
2. What would you say to God today if you stopped covering it?

DAY 37 · A CLEAN HEART**READ:** *Psalms 51:1-12***COMMENTARY**

After Nathan confronts him over Bathsheba and Uriah, David prays the fullest confession in Scripture. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

He does not minimize the harm to Bathsheba or the murder of Uriah. He names the offense beneath them: against you, you only, have I sinned. Every sin against a neighbor is first a sin against the God who made him.

Then comes the request at the heart of the psalm. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. David does not ask only for the record to be cleared. He asks for a new heart, because the old one produced the sin. Forgiveness that never reaches the heart leaves the source untouched. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, he prays. The joy of the booth begins here.

EXAMINATION

1. Have you asked for forgiveness of a deed without asking for a new heart?
2. What sin is ever before you, and what would a renewed spirit do differently?

Week 6: The Confession That Names**DAY 38 · WE HAVE SINNED****READ:** *Daniel 9:3-19***COMMENTARY**

Daniel reads in Jeremiah that the exile will last seventy years, and he realizes the years are nearly complete. He does not celebrate. He turns his face to the Lord with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

His prayer is the great corporate confession of the Old Testament. We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled. To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame. Daniel is a man against whom his enemies could find no fault. Yet he prays we, not they. He does not exempt himself from the guilt of his people.

We do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, he says, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, hear. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake. The confession of a righteous man on behalf of a guilty nation is one of Scripture's clearest pictures of intercession, and one of its clearest pictures of Christ.

EXAMINATION

1. Where have you distanced yourself from the sins of your family, church, or nation instead of confessing them as your own?
2. What would change if you prayed for your people as Daniel prayed for his?

DAY 39 · HIGHER THAN OUR HEADS**READ:** *Ezra 9:1-15***COMMENTARY**

Ezra learns that the returned exiles have intermarried with the surrounding peoples and taken up their abominations. His response comes before any words. He tears his garment and cloak, pulls hair from his head and beard, and sits appalled until the evening sacrifice.

Then he falls on his knees and spreads out his hands. O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens.

Ezra does not rush to fix the problem. He sits with its weight first, for hours, before he prays. Confession that hurries to a solution often skips the grief that makes repentance real. Only after the appalled silence does he pray, and his prayer ends without excuse: here we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this. The honest confession does not bargain. It stands exposed and waits for mercy.

EXAMINATION

1. Have you hurried to repair something before you let yourself feel its weight?
2. What would it mean to stand before God in your guilt without offering an excuse?

DAY 40 · THE BOOK FOUND IN THE TEMPLE**READ:** *2 Kings 22:8-20***COMMENTARY**

During repairs to the temple, Hilkiah the priest finds the Book of the Law. It had been lost so long that its discovery was news. Shaphan reads it to King Josiah, and when the king hears the words, he tears his clothes.

Great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, he says, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book. Josiah did not write the neglect. He inherited it. But he does not hide behind the inheritance. He grieves it as his own.

The prophetess Huldah brings God's reply. Judgment on the city will come, but not in Josiah's days, because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard. Some guilt is old and familiar. Some arrives the day we finally read what we had ignored. The Day of Atonement is for both. A tender heart is one that tears its robes as soon as the word lands.

EXAMINATION

1. What part of God's word have you recently rediscovered that exposed something you had not seen?
2. Is your heart tender when the word confronts you, or defensive?

DAY 41 · INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE SEA**READ:** *Micah 7:18-20***COMMENTARY**

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

These verses gave rise to Tashlich, a custom kept on the afternoon of the Feast of Trumpets. Worshipers walk to moving water and cast bread or empty their pockets into the current as a sign of sins carried away.

Micah's image is chosen with care. Buried things can be dug up. Hidden things can be found. But the depths of the sea have no floor a man can walk to. What God casts there is not stored for later use. It is gone. And Micah grounds that certainty in covenant: you will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

EXAMINATION

1. What sin has God cast into the sea that you keep diving after?
2. Do you believe his delight in steadfast love is greater than his anger toward you?

DAY 42 · SCARLET AND SNOW**READ:** *Isaiah 1:10-20***COMMENTARY**

Isaiah addresses Jerusalem as though it were Sodom. God is weary of their sacrifices, their new moons, their appointed feasts. Their hands are full of blood. When they spread out their hands in prayer, he hides his eyes.

Then the command: wash yourselves; make yourselves clean. Cease to do evil, learn to do good. Seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

Then the invitation: come now, let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. Scarlet dye was prized in the ancient world because it held fast. Isaiah chooses the stain everyone knew could not be washed out, and promises to wash it out.

The offer is complete, and the response is required. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land. If you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword. Cleansing is free. It is not casual.

EXAMINATION

1. What stain have you assumed is too deep to be washed out?
2. What obedience, especially toward the vulnerable, belongs with your confession?

DAY 43 · FOR MY OWN SAKE**READ:** *Isaiah 43:22-25***COMMENTARY**

God's complaint is startling. You did not call upon me, O Jacob. You have been weary of me. You have not honored me with your sacrifices. You have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities.

Then, with no transition and no condition, comes the reversal. I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

The doubled I leaves no room for any other agent. And the reason given is not Israel's repentance or worth. It is for my own sake. God forgives because he is the kind of God who forgives, and he will not be otherwise.

That is the deepest ground forgiveness can stand on. Not our sincerity, which wavers, or our effort, which fails, but the unchanging character of God. The ledger is cleared by his hand and for his name. What he has chosen not to remember, we have no business bringing back up.

EXAMINATION

1. Where have you believed forgiveness depended on how well you repented?
2. What sin do you keep recalling that God has chosen not to remember?

DAY 44 · TURN AND LIVE**READ:** *Ezekiel 18:21-32***COMMENTARY**

The exiles had a proverb: the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. It was a way of blaming the previous generation for the present disaster. Ezekiel 18 dismantles it. Each soul answers for itself, and every soul may turn.

If a wicked person turns away from all his sins and does what is just and right, he shall surely live. None of his transgressions shall be remembered against him. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?

The chapter closes with an appeal that sounds almost like pleading. Cast away all your transgressions. Make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone. So turn, and live. The door of repentance is not narrow because God is reluctant. It is open because he is eager.

EXAMINATION

1. What proverb or excuse have you used to explain why change is not really yours to make?
2. What concrete act of turning is before you this week?

Week 7: The Finished Work

DAY 45 · THE RECORD OF DEBT

READ: *Colossians 2:13-15*

COMMENTARY

You who were dead in your trespasses, God made alive together with Christ, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, triumphing over them in him.

The word Paul uses for the record of debt described a handwritten certificate, the kind a debtor signed to acknowledge what he owed. Our certificate was real, signed in our own hand, and it stood against us.

God did not pretend the document did not exist. He canceled it, and he nailed it to the cross, where it was fixed to the body of his Son. The debt was not ignored. It was paid in public.

Then Paul adds what the payment accomplished beyond our own relief. The powers that accused us lost their weapon. An accuser with no debt to point to has nothing left to say.

EXAMINATION

1. What part of your debt do you still treat as unpaid?
2. What accusation still has power over you that the cross has already disarmed?

DAY 46 · PIERCED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS**READ:** *Isaiah 53:4-12***COMMENTARY**

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah wrote centuries before Golgotha, and he wrote the clearest words of substitution in the Hebrew Scriptures. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Here the two goats of Leviticus become one servant. He is cut off out of the land of the living, as the scapegoat was led out of the camp. His life is made an offering for guilt, as the first goat's blood was offered. What the Day of Atonement pictured with two animals, the servant accomplishes in one body. By his knowledge the righteous one shall make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

EXAMINATION

1. Do you believe your own iniquity was among what was laid on him?
2. Where have you judged suffering as punishment when it might have been love bearing a burden for others?

DAY 47 · THE MERCY SEAT

READ: *Romans 3:21-26*

COMMENTARY

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. There is no distinction. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood.

The Greek word Paul uses for propitiation is the same word the Greek Old Testament uses for the mercy seat, the gold cover of the ark where the high priest sprinkled blood on the Day of Atonement. Christ is not only the offering. He is the place where God meets sinners in mercy.

Paul names the problem the whole system addressed. For generations God had passed over sins in his forbearance. How could he be just and still forgive? The cross is the answer. God shows his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

EXAMINATION

1. Have you tried to resolve the tension between God's justice and mercy by quietly minimizing one of them?
2. Can you receive justification as a gift with no distinction between you and anyone else?

DAY 48 · THE CONSCIENCE CLEANSED**READ:** *Hebrews 9:1-14***COMMENTARY**

The writer walks through the tabernacle: the lampstand and the table in the Holy Place, and behind the second curtain the Most Holy Place, with the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered with gold. Into that inner room only the high priest goes, once a year, and not without blood.

The Holy Spirit, says the writer, is teaching something by that arrangement. As long as the first tent stands, the way into the holy places is not yet opened. Its gifts and sacrifices cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper. They deal with food, drink, and washings, regulations for the body until the time of reformation.

Then Christ appears as high priest of the good things that have come. He enters once for all, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood. How much more will the blood of Christ purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. The old system cleansed the outside. Christ reaches the conscience.

EXAMINATION

1. Where does your conscience still feel unclean after you have confessed?
2. What dead works are you still offering to God in place of trust?

DAY 49 · ONCE FOR ALL**READ:** *Hebrews 9:23-26***COMMENTARY**

Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own.

The writer presses the point with a single word, repeated. Once. If Christ had to offer himself repeatedly, he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

The Aaronic priesthood carried its own weakness in its calendar. Every year the Day of Atonement came again, a reminder that last year's blood had not finished the work. Christ's sacrifice carries no such calendar. When the church keeps the rhythm of the seasons, it does not repeat the atonement. It remembers an atonement that is finished, and gives thanks.

EXAMINATION

1. Do you approach God as though your forgiveness needs to be earned again each time?
2. How would your worship change if you kept this season as remembrance rather than repair?

DAY 50 · HE SAT DOWN**READ:** *Hebrews 10:1-18***COMMENTARY**

The law has only a shadow of the good things to come. Its sacrifices, repeated every year, cannot make perfect those who draw near. If they could, they would have ceased, because the worshipers, once cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin. Instead, in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year, for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Then comes the contrast of posture. Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

The old priests stood because their work was never finished. Christ sat because his was. By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. The chapter closes with the promise of the new covenant: I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

EXAMINATION

1. In what part of your life are you still standing, working, as though the sacrifice were incomplete?
2. What would it mean to rest in a work that is finished?

DAY 51 · FAITHFUL AND JUST**READ: 1 John 1:5-2:2****COMMENTARY**

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

John names two lies. The first says we have no sin. The second says we have not sinned. Both leave the truth outside the door. Then he names the alternative: if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The words are chosen carefully. Not merely merciful, which could sound arbitrary. Faithful, because he keeps his word. Just, because the debt has been paid. Confession is not a plea for leniency. It is an appeal to a promise already made and a price already given. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins.

EXAMINATION

1. Does confession feel to you like begging or like trusting a promise?
2. What part of your life are you keeping in the dark while claiming fellowship in the light?

Week 8: The Fountain Opened

DAY 52 · THE LAMB OF GOD

READ: *John 1:29-34*

COMMENTARY

The next day John sees Jesus coming toward him and says, behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

The Baptist had preached judgment: the axe laid to the root, the winnowing fork in the hand, the chaff burned with unquenchable fire. When the one he had been preparing for finally arrives, he does not call him judge or king. He calls him Lamb.

Every sacrifice in Israel's worship stands behind that word: the Passover lamb, the daily lambs of the morning and evening offering, the goats of the Day of Atonement. John gathers all of them into one. And the scope is not Israel's sin alone but the sin of the world.

The verb matters too. He takes away. The blood on the mercy seat covered sin for a year at a time. The goat carried sin into the wilderness once a year. The Lamb of God removes it, and the removal does not need to be repeated.

EXAMINATION

1. Have you pictured Jesus more as the judge John expected than as the Lamb John saw?
2. What sin have you believed could be covered but never truly taken away?

DAY 53 · THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION**READ:** *2 Corinthians 5:14-21***COMMENTARY**

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

Paul uses the language of accounts. In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. The ledger was open, and God chose not to enter the debt against us. He could do so because of the exchange in the final verse: for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Then Paul hands the reconciled a commission. We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. Be reconciled to God. The atonement is not only something we receive. It becomes a message we carry. Whoever has been spared the counting of his trespasses is now sent to announce the same mercy to others.

EXAMINATION

1. Whose trespasses are you still counting when God has stopped counting yours?
2. To whom is God sending you as an ambassador of reconciliation?

DAY 54 · A MERCIFUL HIGH PRIEST**READ:** *Hebrews 2:14-18***COMMENTARY**

Since the children share in flesh and blood, Christ himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

He had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. Because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Aaron entered the Most Holy Place as a sinner among sinners, offering first for himself. Christ entered as one who had been tempted in every way yet without sin. He knows the pull of temptation from the inside and was never mastered by it. That combination is what makes him merciful and faithful at once. He is not distant from our weakness, and he is not defeated by it.

EXAMINATION

1. Do you approach Christ as one who understands your temptation, or as one who stands far off from it?
2. What fear of death or loss has kept you in a kind of slavery?

DAY 55 · THEY WILL LOOK ON HIM**READ:** *Zechariah 12:10-14***COMMENTARY**

I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

John quotes this verse at the cross. The mourning Zechariah describes is not despair. It is produced by grace. God pours out the spirit, and the result is tears.

The prophet describes the mourning family by family: the house of David by itself, the house of Nathan by itself, the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves. Repentance is corporate and personal at the same time. Each household weeps its own tears.

There is a grief that drives people from God and a grief that brings them near. Zechariah describes the second. It comes from looking at the one who was pierced and recognizing that the wound we caused is the wound that heals us.

EXAMINATION

1. Have you looked long enough at the cross to grieve what it cost?
2. Is your sorrow over sin driving you away from God or drawing you toward him?

DAY 56 · A FOUNTAIN OPENED**READ:** *Zechariah 13:1***COMMENTARY**

On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

One verse answers the mourning of the chapter before. Grief is not left to stand alone. God opens a fountain.

A basin holds a fixed measure. A fountain runs. It does not empty because many come to it, and it does not ration its water by merit. Zechariah names both sin and uncleanness, the moral failure and the ritual defilement, as though to say there is no category of stain the fountain does not reach.

The old hymn took its first line from this verse: there is a fountain filled with blood. After the goats and the bulls and the yearly repetition, the prophet's last picture of atonement is not another ritual. It is water that keeps flowing. The only requirement of a fountain is that one comes to it.

EXAMINATION

1. Have you been treating grace as a limited supply you must ration?
2. What would it mean to come to the fountain today without first cleaning yourself up?

DAY 57 · NINEVEH REPENTS**READ:** *Jonah 3:1-10***COMMENTARY**

The word of the Lord comes to Jonah a second time, and this time he goes. His message is one sentence: yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

The people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least. The king rose from his throne, laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. He decreed that everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, he relented of the disaster he had said he would do, and he did not do it.

A pagan city with no covenant and no temple kept the whole pattern of the seventh month: warning heard, fast proclaimed, evil forsaken. They did it more thoroughly than the prophet who preached to them. Repentance has never been the property of those who already know the liturgy.

EXAMINATION

1. When a warning has come to you, have you responded with Nineveh's speed or Jonah's reluctance?
2. Where do you resent God's mercy toward people you would rather see judged?

DAY 58 · WATER POURED OUT AT MIZPAH**READ: 1 Samuel 7:2-12****COMMENTARY**

For twenty years the ark sat at Kiriath-jearim, and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. Samuel told them plainly: if you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you, direct your heart to the Lord, and serve him only.

They did. Then Samuel gathered them at Mizpah. They drew water and poured it out before the Lord, fasted that day, and said, we have sinned against the Lord.

The order is exact. First the idols leave the house. Then the heart is directed. Then the confession is spoken. Words of repentance while the idols remain on the shelf are only words.

When the Philistines heard of the gathering, they attacked. Samuel cried out, and the Lord thundered against them. Afterward Samuel set up a stone and named it Ebenezer: till now the Lord has helped us. Honest repentance does not end in shame. It ends in a stone of remembrance.

EXAMINATION

1. What foreign god needs to leave your house before your confession will mean anything?
2. Where can you set up an Ebenezer this season to mark how far the Lord has helped you?

DAY 59 · AS FAR AS THE EAST IS FROM THE WEST**READ:** *Psalms 103:1-14***COMMENTARY**

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit.

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

David chooses measures no one can walk. No traveler reaches the top of the sky. No traveler reaches the place where east meets west. The removal of sin is described in distances beyond human reckoning.

Then the tenderness beneath it. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. God remembers our weakness even when we forget it and demand from ourselves what dust cannot give.

EXAMINATION

1. Which of God's benefits have you forgotten this year?
2. Where are you demanding of yourself what God, who remembers you are dust, does not?

DAY 60 · FASTS TURNED TO FEASTS**READ:** *Zechariah 8:18-23***COMMENTARY**

The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace.

These were fasts of national mourning, kept in memory of Jerusalem's fall. The fast of the seventh month remembered the murder of Gedaliah, the governor left over the ruined land. Zechariah promises that the very days of grief will become days of feasting. Not replaced. Transformed.

Then the vision widens. Peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will come to seek the Lord. Ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.

The month of atonement ends where the month of ingathering begins. Mourning honestly kept becomes joy, and that joy draws the nations. The fast is the doorway to the feast.

EXAMINATION

1. Which grief in your life is God preparing to turn into a feast?
2. Is there anything in your joy that would make someone want to take hold of your robe and come with you?

DAY 60 EXAMINATION: THE ACCOUNT SETTLED

Sixty days. The fast is behind you. Before you build the booth, write honestly about what these thirty days did, not what you hoped they would do.

1. What did you confess? Name it the way the priest named sin over the head of the goat: specifically, and aloud before God. If nothing specific comes to mind, write that down. It is a finding, not a failure.
2. What are you still carrying that the cross already canceled? Colossians 2 says the record of debt was nailed to the cross. Name one thing you keep reopening as though the account were still unpaid, and ask why.
3. Whom do you owe reconciliation? Second Corinthians 5 makes every reconciled person an ambassador of the same message. Write one name. Write the next step toward that person.

The Feast of Booths commands joy. Joy that follows an honest atonement is worship. Joy that skips it is performance.

DAYS 61–90: THE INGATHERING

Five days after the fast, Israel went out and cut branches. For seven days every household lived under a roof of leaves, the wealthy landowner along with the day laborer, so that each generation would remember that God once walked with his people in tents.

Scripture gives the feast three names, and each one teaches. Booths, because the dwelling is temporary. Tabernacles, because God himself chose to dwell among them. Ingathering, because it falls when the last of the grain, wine, and oil is brought in and the field stands empty.

For thirty days you will learn to live inside a full harvest without mistaking it for a permanent house, and to set the table wide enough for the sojourner, the fatherless, the widow, and at last the nations.

Week 9: The Barn and the Booth

DAY 61 · THE FEAST AT THE YEAR'S END

READ: *Exodus 23:14-19*

COMMENTARY

Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. The Feast of Unleavened Bread in the month of Abib, when you came out of Egypt. The Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labor. And the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor.

This is the oldest outline of Israel's calendar, given at Sinai before Leviticus filled in the details. The year is bracketed by three appearances before God, and the last one falls at the close of the harvest, when the field is empty and the storehouse full.

Two commands follow. None shall appear before me empty-handed. The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord.

The ingathering is not an optional holiday at the edge of the year. It is the appearance the whole agricultural cycle was moving toward. What was planted in spring and labored over in summer is brought before God in the fall, and he receives it first.

EXAMINATION

1. What has your year been moving toward, whether or not you noticed?
2. What will you bring before God from this year's harvest so that you do not come empty-handed?

DAY 62 · ALTOGETHER JOYFUL**READ:** *Deuteronomy 16:13-17***COMMENTARY**

You shall keep the Feast of Booths seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your winepress. You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns.

The guest list is the first thing to notice. The feast is not a private household celebration. From its first instruction it reaches the servant, the Levite who owned no land, the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow.

The second thing is the command itself. Because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, you will be altogether joyful. The Jewish Publication Society renders it you shall have nothing but joy. Joy is not left to chance or temperament. It is commanded for seven days, for a people who have kept the fast and received the harvest. Each shall give as he is able, according to the blessing he has been given.

EXAMINATION

1. Whom have you left off the guest list of your gladness?
2. What would it look like to obey a command to be joyful, especially if joy does not come easily to you?

DAY 63 · DWELL IN BOOTHS**READ:** *Leviticus 23:33-43***COMMENTARY**

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the Lord seven days. On the first day, take the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and rejoice before the Lord your God seven days.

You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.

The reason given is memory. Generations who never saw the wilderness would sleep under branches for a week so that the exodus would live in their bodies.

And the command falls on every native Israelite. The landowner with a stone house left it. The rich man sat under leaves beside the poor one. A full barn exempted no one from the tent. The feast teaches that prosperity is a gift received on the road, not a fortress that removes us from it.

EXAMINATION

1. What permanent structure in your life would you find hardest to leave for a week?
2. What memory of God's deliverance do you need to keep alive in your household?

DAY 64 · ABRAHAM'S BOOTHS**READ:** *Jubilees 16:15-31***COMMENTARY**

Jubilees tells of a feast older than Sinai. In the seventh month the angels return to Abraham at the Well of the Oath and find Sarah carrying the promised son. They bless Abraham and announce what has been decreed. He and Sarah rejoice with exceeding great joy.

Abraham builds an altar and keeps a festival of joy for seven days. He builds booths for himself and his servants, and Jubilees says he was the first to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles on the earth. Each day he takes palm branches and goodly fruit, goes around the altar seven times, and praises God for all things in joy.

In this telling the feast begins as one household's answer to a promise taking on flesh. Only later does it become a statute for a nation. Jubilees adds a detail worth holding: there was no stranger with Abraham at that first feast. The booth began within one family. The law given at Sinai would open its gate to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.

EXAMINATION

1. What promise of God is taking on flesh in your life that deserves its own feast?
2. Whom would you need to invite to make your celebration look more like Sinai than like one household?

DAY 65 · NOT SINCE THE DAYS OF JOSHUA**READ:** *Nehemiah 8:13-18***COMMENTARY**

The summer guide read the first half of this chapter, where the people wept at the reading of the law and Nehemiah told them that the joy of the Lord was their strength. On the second day, the heads of the families gathered with Ezra to study the words of the law. They found written there that Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month.

So the people went out and brought branches and made booths, on their roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God, and in the squares of the city. And the text adds a sentence that should unsettle us: from the days of Joshua until that day the people of Israel had not done so. There was very great rejoicing.

The command had been in the book for centuries. It had simply not been kept, at least not like this. It took people willing to study the text and then build. Renewal often looks less like invention than like obedience to something long neglected.

EXAMINATION

1. What command of God is plainly in your Bible but has not been kept in your home or church?
2. Who could study the word with you until it becomes something you build?

DAY 66 · THE TEMPLE AT THE FEAST**READ: 1 Kings 8:1-11****COMMENTARY**

Solomon assembles the elders of Israel at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. The priests carry the ark of the covenant into the inner sanctuary of the new temple and set it beneath the wings of the cherubim. There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb.

When the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud. The glory of the Lord filled the house.

Solomon chose the Feast of Booths to dedicate the most permanent building in Israel's history. The house of stone was consecrated during the festival of tents. The timing makes a statement. The temple did not replace what the booth taught. It served it. God had walked with his people in a tent before he consented to a house, and the glory that filled the house was the same glory that had led them through the wilderness.

EXAMINATION

1. Have you dedicated what you have built to God, or only completed it?
2. When did God's presence last overwhelm your ability to keep working?

DAY 67 · WHEN THEY TURN AND PRAY**READ:** *1 Kings 8:33-40, 46-53***COMMENTARY**

Solomon's prayer at the dedication looks ahead to failure. When your people are defeated because they have sinned, if they turn again and acknowledge your name and pray toward this house, then hear in heaven and forgive. When heaven is shut and there is no rain because they have sinned, if they turn and pray, then hear and forgive.

Then the plainest line of all: if they sin against you, for there is no one who does not sin. Solomon does not dedicate the temple on the assumption that Israel will keep faith. He dedicates it on the assumption that Israel will need forgiveness, and he prays for the way back before the way out has been taken.

The great feast of the seventh month was kept with a prayer for mercy at its center. Joy and atonement are not separated even here. A house of worship that makes no room for repentance is built on sand. Solomon built one with the door of return already cut into the wall.

EXAMINATION

1. Have you prayed in advance for the way back from failures you know are possible?
2. Does your celebration include honest room for repentance, or does it assume you no longer need it?

Week 10: The Portion for the Poor

DAY 68 · THE FORGOTTEN SHEAF

READ: *Deuteronomy 24:17-22*

COMMENTARY

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. When you beat your olive trees, do not go over the boughs again. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.

The law does not ask only for a fixed percentage set aside in advance. It asks the farmer to leave what he missed. The gaps in an honest harvest belong to the poor.

That makes generosity part of the structure of work itself. Even a diligent harvester cannot seal his field against the hungry, because the law forbids the second pass.

The reason given is memory. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this. The one who once had nothing is commanded never to harvest as though nothing were owed to those who still have nothing.

EXAMINATION

1. Where have you gone back for the second pass that belonged to someone else?
2. How does remembering your own former need shape the way you hold what you have now?

DAY 69 · THE DECLARATION OF THE TITHE**READ:** *Deuteronomy 26:12-15***COMMENTARY**

When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled, then you shall say before the Lord your God: I have removed the sacred portion out of my house and given it to them, according to all your commandment. I have not transgressed any of your commandments, nor have I forgotten them.

The spring guide read the firstfruits declaration earlier in this chapter. This one belongs to the ingathering. The giver speaks aloud before God, giving an account of an obligation fulfilled. It is the trumpet's accounting applied to the storehouse.

Then the prayer: look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel and the ground that you have given us. The blessing of the land is asked by someone who has fed the hungry within his gates. A full barn beside a hungry neighbor is not blessing. It is evidence against us.

EXAMINATION

1. Could you make this declaration honestly about your giving this year?
2. Who within your own gates is hungry while your storehouse is full?

DAY 70 · THE FULL TITHE**READ:** *Malachi 3:6-12***COMMENTARY**

I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes. Return to me, and I will return to you.

The people ask how they should return, and God answers with an accusation that sounds almost absurd. Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. How? In your tithes and contributions.

Malachi calls withholding what is owed by its true name. The storehouse in the temple fed the Levites and the poor. When it stood empty, the people were not only stingy toward God. They were starving those God had placed in their care.

Then comes the only place in Scripture where God invites his people to test him. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Put me to the test, and see if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour down a blessing until there is no more need. The harvest is not ours first. It is his, and he is generous with it.

EXAMINATION

1. Where have you called holding back prudence when God calls it robbery?
2. What would it look like to take God at his word and bring the full portion?

DAY 71 · JOY IN THE MORNING**READ:** *Psalm 30:1-12***COMMENTARY**

I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me. O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. You brought up my soul from Sheol.

Then the line many know by heart: weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. And the psalm ends with its reversal in full: you have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness.

The whole seventh month is written into that last verse. The trumpet brought the night. The fast put on the sackcloth. Now the Feast of Booths loosens it. The gladness is real because the mourning was real first. Joy worn over unfinished grief is only a costume.

David also confesses what went wrong in his prosperity. I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved. Then you hid your face, and I was dismayed. Even the joy of the harvest must be held with the memory that it is a gift.

EXAMINATION

1. Has your night of weeping finished, or are you trying to dance while still in sackcloth?
2. Where has prosperity made you feel that you could never be moved?

DAY 72 · RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PEACE KISS**READ:** *Psalm 85:1-13***COMMENTARY**

Lord, you were favorable to your land. You restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people. You covered all their sin.

The psalm begins with a past forgiveness and asks for a present one. Revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you. Then the psalmist waits to hear. Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly.

What comes next is one of Scripture's most beautiful images. Steadfast love and faithfulness meet. Righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky.

The two halves of the seventh month, the honest accounting and the commanded joy, are shown here not as rivals but as friends who embrace. And the harvest follows: the Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness does not threaten a good harvest. It makes one possible.

EXAMINATION

1. Where have you felt truth and mercy pulling against each other, and could they meet instead?
2. What folly might you be tempted to return to now that peace has been spoken?

DAY 73 · THIS IS THE DAY**READ:** *Psalms 118:19-29***COMMENTARY**

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 118 closes the Hallel, the psalms sung at Israel's great feasts, and at Booths its words were sung while the palm branches were waved. Save us, we pray, O Lord, it cries: hoshia na, the word the crowds shouted when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

The day that the Lord has made is not any day. It is the feast day, set by God's calendar and marked by his deliverance. And the psalm ends with an unusual command: bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar. Joy in this psalm is not loose or drifting. It is tied to a gate, a stone, and an altar.

EXAMINATION

1. What stone rejected in your own story has become a cornerstone?
2. Is your joy tied to what God has done, or does it wander with your circumstances?

DAY 74 · THE FALLEN BOOTH OF DAVID**READ:** *Amos 9:11-15***COMMENTARY**

In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name.

Amos uses the word for the structure Israel built at the Feast of Booths, the sukkah, and applies it to the royal house of David. The dynasty that had seemed so solid is pictured as a collapsed tent. God promises to rebuild it, and the rebuilt booth will shelter nations who were never part of the original family.

Then the harvest runs wild. The plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed. The mountains shall drip sweet wine. The exiles will rebuild ruined cities, plant vineyards, and drink their wine. I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted.

James will quote this passage at the council in Jerusalem. The fallen booth was always meant to be raised wider than before.

EXAMINATION

1. What in your family or legacy looks like a fallen booth that God might rebuild?
2. Are you prepared for the rebuilt structure to include people who were never part of the original?

Week 11: The Table for the Nations**DAY 75 · A BOOTH FOR SHADE****READ:** *Isaiah 4:2-6***COMMENTARY**

In that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel. Those left in Zion will be called holy, when the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of burning.

Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night. Over all the glory there will be a canopy. There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and a refuge and shelter from the storm and rain.

Isaiah takes the pillar of cloud and fire from the wilderness and the booth from the harvest feast and makes them one picture. The shelter is no longer built by human hands from cut branches. God himself becomes the covering.

Notice the order again. First the washing by judgment and burning. Then the canopy of glory. The shelter covers a cleansed people.

EXAMINATION

1. What heat or storm are you trying to endure without shelter?
2. Has God's cleansing work in you prepared you to live under his covering rather than your own?

DAY 76 · A FEAST FOR ALL PEOPLES**READ:** *Isaiah 25:6-9***COMMENTARY**

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.

This is the ingathering at its farthest reach. The host is God himself, the table is spread on his mountain, and the guest list is all peoples.

The veil over the nations is swallowed, not merely lifted. Death is swallowed. The shame of God's people is taken away from all the earth.

The chapter closes with the words of those who waited. Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. Waiting is not wasted. It ends at a table.

EXAMINATION

1. Have you pictured salvation as a small room or as a table set for all peoples?
2. What veil of grief or fear are you waiting for God to swallow?

DAY 77 · A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLES**READ:** *Isaiah 56:1-8***COMMENTARY**

Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, the Lord will surely separate me from his people. And let not the eunuch say, behold, I am a dry tree.

Isaiah speaks to two kinds of people who expected to be left outside the gate. The foreigner feared exclusion by birth. The eunuch feared exclusion by his body and his lack of heirs. God answers both. To the eunuchs who keep his Sabbaths and hold fast his covenant he promises a monument and a name better than sons and daughters, an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. The foreigners he will bring to his holy mountain and make joyful in his house of prayer, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Jesus quoted this line when he cleared the temple courts. In Acts 8, the man Philip found reading Isaiah 53 on the road home from worship in Jerusalem was an Ethiopian eunuch, three chapters from this promise. The gathering God announced through Isaiah had an Ethiopian among its first fruits. The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.

EXAMINATION

1. Who in your church assumes they will be separated out, and what would welcome sound like to them?
2. Where have you treated God's house as a house of prayer for your own people only?

DAY 78 · NO LONGER STRANGERS**READ:** *Ephesians 2:11-22***COMMENTARY**

Remember that you were at one time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Paul describes the largest ingathering in history. An entire category of humanity, the Gentiles, once outside every covenant, is brought in. Christ himself is our peace. He has made the two one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

Then Paul reaches for the vocabulary of the feast and the temple. You are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. The whole structure, joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, and you are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

The booth becomes a temple, and the temple is made of people.

EXAMINATION

1. Do you remember what it meant to be far off, and does that memory shape how you treat outsiders?
2. What dividing wall are you maintaining that Christ has already broken down?

DAY 79 · THE TENT OF DAVID REBUILT**READ:** *Acts 15:6-19***COMMENTARY**

The church in Jerusalem gathers to decide a hard question. Must Gentile believers be circumcised and keep the law of Moses to be saved? Peter testifies that God gave the Holy Spirit to Gentiles just as he did to the Jewish believers, cleansing their hearts by faith. Paul and Barnabas describe the signs God did among the nations.

Then James rises and reaches for Amos. After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name.

James reads the booth of Day 74 as the key to the argument. God had always intended the rebuilt tent to shelter the nations. Therefore, he concludes, we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God.

The council settled a painful dispute by returning to what the Scriptures had said all along. The booth of David was never a private renovation.

EXAMINATION

1. What burden are you placing on others that God has not placed on them?
2. What dispute in your community could be settled by returning to what Scripture has always said?

DAY 80 · THE FULLNESS OF THE GENTILES**READ:** *Romans 11:25-36***COMMENTARY**

Lest you be wise in your own sight, Paul writes, I want you to understand this mystery. A partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved.

Paul will not let the Gentile believers boast. The mercy they received came through Israel's story, not in place of it. As regards the gospel, Israel's leaders are enemies for your sake. As regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. The ingathering Paul foresees does not replace one people with another. It gathers both into one mercy.

Then Paul can only worship. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For from him and through him and to him are all things.

EXAMINATION

1. Has your own reception of mercy become a quiet sense of superiority?
2. Do you believe God's calling is irrevocable, even where its fulfillment seems delayed?

DAY 81 · FROM EAST AND WEST**READ:** *Matthew 8:5-13***COMMENTARY**

A Roman centurion asks Jesus to heal his servant. When Jesus offers to come to his house, the centurion refuses the honor. Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Only say the word, and my servant will be healed. He understands authority. He gives orders, and they are carried out.

Jesus marvels. Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. Then he widens the scene to the end of the age. Many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness.

An officer of the occupying army, with no claim on Abraham's table, becomes Jesus' example of the faith the table requires. Heritage is not a reservation. The feast will be filled from every direction by people who recognized who Jesus was, and some who assumed their places will find them empty.

EXAMINATION

1. Where has an outsider's faith exposed something missing in your own?
2. Are you trusting your heritage to secure a seat that only faith can hold?

Week 12: The Eighth Day

DAY 82 · OTHER SHEEP

READ: *John 10:11-18*

COMMENTARY

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.

Then Jesus says something his hearers did not expect. I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

The phrase I must bring them is not a hope. It is a necessity the shepherd places on himself, as firmly as laying down his life. The shepherd does not wait at the gate for other sheep to find their way. He goes and brings them.

The result is not two flocks kept politely apart, nor one flock that tolerates newcomers at its edges. It is a single flock with a single shepherd. The ingathering of the nations is not a program the church invented. It is a promise Jesus made about his own work.

EXAMINATION

1. Has your idea of the fold left out sheep Jesus has already called his own?
2. Are you waiting for others to find their way in, or joining the shepherd who goes to bring them?

DAY 83 · HE WILL SHELTER THEM**READ:** *Revelation 7:9-17***COMMENTARY**

John sees a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.

Palm branches are the sign of the Feast of Booths. The multitude John sees is keeping Tabernacles in heaven.

One of the elders explains who they are. These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. The verb is the one John uses when he writes that the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.

The booth has become God's own presence spread over his people. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore. The sun shall not strike them. The Lamb will be their shepherd and guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

EXAMINATION

1. Do you picture yourself in that multitude, palm branch in hand?
2. What specific grief do you need to believe will one day be wiped away?

DAY 84 · GATES THAT NEVER SHUT**READ:** *Revelation 21:22-27***COMMENTARY**

Winter read this vision as the end of the long night. Fall returns to it for one detail: the gates.

John sees no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. The city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light the nations will walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

Its gates will never be shut by day, and there will be no night there. The ingathering has no closing hour.

Yet the city is not open to everything. Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. The gate never closes, and holiness never relaxes. Both are true at once. The city is as wide as grace and as pure as God. Every earthly harvest ends with a barn door shut. This one does not.

EXAMINATION

1. What glory from your life could one day be carried into that city?
2. How do you hold together an open gate and an uncompromising holiness?

DAY 85 · CHOOSE THIS DAY**READ:** *Joshua 24:1-2, 14-25***COMMENTARY**

The land has been taken and the tribes have received their inheritance. Joshua gathers all Israel at Shechem and tells their history from the beginning. Your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. God took Abraham from there. He brought you out of Egypt. He gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities you had not built.

Then Joshua refuses to let gratitude remain vague. Fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and faithfulness. Put away the gods your fathers served. And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

The ingathering of a whole people's history does not end in celebration alone. It ends in a decision spoken aloud and a covenant made that day. Joshua set up a great stone under the oak as a witness. A full harvest still requires a chosen allegiance.

EXAMINATION

1. Has your faith been assumed by inheritance or chosen aloud?
2. What gods of the land where you now live compete for your household's service?

DAY 86 · THE DAY CALLED ADDITION

READ: *Jubilees 32:16-29*

COMMENTARY

At Bethel Jacob keeps the Feast of Tabernacles, and God appears to him, renews his name as Israel, and promises the land to his seed. An angel comes down with seven tablets and gives them to Jacob, who reads what will happen to him and his sons through all the ages.

Then Jubilees records a small act that became a statute. Jacob celebrated there yet another day and sacrificed on it as on the former days. He called it Addition, because the day was added, and the former days he called The Feast. Jubilees says it was then written on the heavenly tablets that the day should be added to the seven.

Leviticus commands the eighth day without explaining it. Jubilees explains it through a man who, having received a vision of his whole future, was not ready for the feast to end. The eighth day begins as gratitude that runs past the minimum. The fullest worship often starts when the required portion is complete.

EXAMINATION

1. Where have you ended your gratitude exactly at the point where the requirement ended?
2. What would your own Addition be: one act of worship past what anyone required?

DAY 87 · SEVENTY BULLS, THEN ONE**READ:** *Numbers 29:12-13, 35-39***COMMENTARY**

Numbers 29 lists the offerings for the Feast of Booths day by day. Thirteen bulls on the first day, twelve on the second, eleven on the third, one fewer each day until seven on the seventh. Seventy bulls in all. The rabbis read the seventy as an offering for the seventy nations named in Genesis 10: the whole human family carried on Israel's altar during the feast.

Then the eighth day. You shall have a solemn assembly. You shall not do any ordinary work. And you shall offer one bull, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old without blemish. After seventy bulls, one.

The Talmud explains the change with a parable. A king held a great feast for all his guests for seven days. When it ended he said to his closest friend, stay one more day, and make me a small meal, so that I may enjoy you alone.

The week belongs to the nations. The eighth day belongs to the friend who stays.

EXAMINATION

1. Whom have you carried in prayer during this season, and whom have you forgotten?
2. When the crowd goes home, will you stay one more day with God?

DAY 88 · LET US KEEP THE FEAST**READ:** *1 Corinthians 5:6-8***COMMENTARY**

Your boasting is not good, Paul writes to a church that was tolerating open sin. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Paul reaches for a spring feast to make a point that fits the fall. Every feast kept honestly begins with cleansing. A small corruption left alone works its way through everything.

Notice the tense. Let us keep the feast. Paul is not describing a date on the calendar. He is describing the ongoing life of the church. Because the Lamb has been sacrificed once for all, the people of God live in a festival that does not end, provided they keep clearing out the leaven. The seventh month closes. The feast of the new covenant does not.

EXAMINATION

1. What small leaven of malice or insincerity is working through your life unaddressed?
2. How can you keep the feast this week, not as an event but as a way of living?

DAY 89 · NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH**READ: 2 Peter 3:8-13****COMMENTARY**

Do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Peter answers the complaint every harvest season provokes. Why is the final ingathering taking so long? His answer is that the delay is not neglect. It is patience, and patience has a purpose. Every year the trumpet sounds again is a year in which someone else can turn.

But the day will come like a thief. The heavens will pass away with a roar, and the earth and its works will be exposed. Since all these things are to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be, in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God?

According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

EXAMINATION

1. Have you mistaken God's patience for slowness or absence?
2. What would a life that hastens the day of God look like this week?

DAY 90 · WORTHY IS THE LAMB**READ:** *Revelation 5:6-14***COMMENTARY**

John sees a Lamb standing as though it had been slain. The Lamb takes the scroll from the right hand of the one on the throne, and the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall down before him, each holding a harp and golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

They sing a new song. Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God.

Then the circle widens. Myriads of angels join the song: worthy is the Lamb who was slain. Then every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea.

Ninety days ago the trumpet sounded. The alarm, the blood, and the booth were all rehearsals for this scene. Here is the harvest fully gathered, every tribe and language ransomed and brought in. The last word of the seventh month is not the barn. It is the Lamb.

EXAMINATION

1. Of everything this season surfaced, what will you carry into winter?
2. Can you add your own voice to the new song, as one ransomed by the Lamb?

DAY 90 EXAMINATION: THE HARVEST DECLARED

Ninety days. Write your fall testimony before you close the book. Be specific. Abstractions do not change anything.

1. What did the trumpet expose? One thing, named plainly. If the first month changed nothing you can name, say so honestly rather than inventing an answer.
2. What did the atonement cover? Name the confession you finally made and the debt you finally stopped carrying. Then name anyone to whom you have not yet extended the mercy you received.
3. Who is still outside the booth? Deuteronomy puts the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow at the table from the first instruction. Name one person outside your own gate, whether that gate is your table, your church, or your household, and what it will cost to bring them in.

Keep what you write. Read it again when the seventh month returns.

THE LEDGER CLOSED

Ninety days ago the trumpet sounded.

You have heard the alarm, stood at the veil, and sat under branches. You have learned that the accounting cannot be skipped, that confession has to name what it confesses, and that the joy of the harvest was commanded for a forgiven people, never for a merely prosperous one.

You have learned that the booth is temporary on purpose. The barn is full, and still you live in a tent. The house God is building is not yet finished, and the gate of the city that is coming will never be shut.

Winter taught that the dark season is holy. Spring taught that new life is most exposed when it is young. Summer taught that labor needs its Sabbath. Fall has taught that every harvest must be counted, covered, and shared.

The seventh month is over. The fields are empty and the rains are coming. The light will shorten, and winter will ask you once more to rest in the dark.

Go into it with the ledger closed and the corners of your field left standing.

The Lamb who was slain is worthy. The harvest is his.

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