

WEEK  
7

Oct. 26-Nov. 1,  
2026

# Daily Bible readings

## Exodus 16:1 - 27:21

### Daily bread: A gift from God Monday, Oct. 26 Exodus 16:1-36

Long before Jesus ever taught his disciples to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” God had already shown what that looks like.

It wasn’t long after leaving Egypt that the people began to think that maybe they hadn’t had it so bad there. The Egyptians, who seem to have been remarkably efficient, would have made sure that their slaves had the food they needed to stay healthy—not as a matter of generosity, but to ensure productivity. The people complained to Moses, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

Safety and security is always the best way to lead people into slavery, whether it is formal legal slavery or more indirect servitude. The Romans would later speak of using “bread and circuses” to keep the populace in line. Today political and business leaders still use fears of both real and imagined threats to persuade people that obedience is a small price to pay to be kept safe and comfortable.

When water became scarce, as we read about yesterday, God provided water.

In today’s reading, God does the same with food.

With food, though, God also brings a test of faith by providing only enough for one day at a time, except for the Sabbath when he provides a two-day supply. When some of the people try to hoard the food, it rots.

If sin is defined as anything that separates us from God (which is my favored definition), I think this is one of the most challenging sins of our day.

I have to confess that I place far more trust than I should in my retirement accounts. That gives me a strong interest in preserving the “kingdom” of the economy when I should be concerned only for the Kingdom of Heaven.

How many of us have stayed in soul-crushing jobs for fear of losing a steady income and insurance? How many people are trapped in destructive relationships because of the financial risk of leaving?

We tell ourselves we are being prudent and responsible, but the line between prudence and fear is narrow and so blurry it sometimes disappears completely.

In the recent fracturing of Methodism it’s been impossible to miss the reality that many of the strongest congregations in our new church are those who lost their disaf-

### Daily reflections by Rev. Mark Fleming

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filiation votes and had to walk away from churches and facilities they had invested time, talent, effort and money in for many years. They serve as an example to us that sometimes that we depend on ends up being a hindrance rather than a help.

Jesus repeatedly confronts people to “come and follow,” and warns of the impediment that possessions and illusions of security can be.

We wholeheartedly want God to give us this day our daily bread, but can’t resist the urge to hold back some for tomorrow.

## Monday meditation

### Proverbs 8:32-36

“Now then, my children, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it.

Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For those who find me find life and receive favor from the Lord.

But those who fail to find me harm themselves; all who hate me love death.”

## Prayer focus

Grant us the faith to keep your ways, even when they call us to step out beyond our sense of safety and security.

## A little help from friends and family

### Tuesday, Oct. 27

### Exodus 17:1 – 18:27

In this series of seemingly unconnected stories we see some of what happened in the early days of wandering in the wilderness.

One mystery is solved: If you wondered what happened with Moses’s family while he was plaguing Pharaoh with demands for freedom for the people, we get the answer here. Moses had sent his wife, Zipporah, and sons, Gershom and Eliezer, to live with Zipporah’s father, Jethro.

Having heard of what happened in Egypt and knowing that Moses had returned, Je-

thro brought them to where he was. After hearing the details from Moses himself, Jethro said, “Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly” (vs. 18:11). This appears to be the first instance in scripture of a person believing in God based on the testimony of another person.

The rest of the reading, from God providing water for the people to Jethro’s suggestion that Moses create a leadership structure to spread responsibility among the people, has a common theme of reminding us that we can’t do it all ourselves.

When the people again grumble about the lack of water, Moses takes his problem to God (always a wise move). God tells him to strike a rock with his staff – the same staff he had once used to turn the water of the Nile to blood.

While in Egypt the result had been to make fresh water undrinkable, this time it results in fresh water pouring forth from a rock. The power was not in the staff, but in Moses’s faith and obedience in doing what God told him to do, even to the point of believing the same action could provide two very different results.

Also in chapter 17 the Hebrews encounter their first violent opposition from the previous inhabitants of the promised land as they face the Amalekites. When it looks like the Amalekites are going to be too strong for them, Moses again takes the staff and raises his hands to God. As long as he keeps them raised, God helps the people prevail against their foe, but when Moses lowers his hands, the Amalekites again overwhelm them.

While it’s easy to focus on the staff, raising hands is often associated with prayer... it’s not too much of a stretch to draw from this the lesson that as long as we keep our hands lifted in prayer (literally and figuratively), we can resist the forces that come against us. It is when we give in to our fatigue and cease to pray that we lose ground.

But here Moses needed more than just divine help – he also needed help from his companions. They provided him a stone to sit on, and Aaron and Hur held his hands

high, physically supporting him in prayer.

Just in case we still haven't gotten the message, Jethro sees that Moses is heading toward burnout in the overwhelming task of mediating the myriad of petty disputes that arise any time a group of people has to live and work together.

Jethro suggests that he delegate the care of the people to able leaders within the community, so that most disputes can be resolved without involving him. That frees Moses for the work of teaching God's law and addressing the most critical and complex issues.

These verses are often used as a model for a small-group structure within the church that focuses not on an elaborate command and control structure, but that involves the whole community in interpreting and implementing the faith.

## Tuesday meditation

### Proverbs 9:1-6

Wisdom has built her house; she has set up its seven pillars. She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table.

She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city, "Let all who are simple come to my house!"

To those who have no sense she says, "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of insight."

### Prayer focus

God, plant wisdom within my heart and within my church community, that we may walk in the way of insight.

## Ten ways to prevent conflict

### Wednesday, Oct. 28

### Exodus 19:1 – 20:17

It would be challenging to find anyone in the world—or at least the western world—who hasn't heard of the 10 Commandments. Not many people could name all of them, or maybe not any of them, but most peo-

ple are at least familiar with there being a list of 10 laws from God. (It says something about the way people understand God that the phrase most likely to be remembered is "Thou shalt not...", even though half are phrased in positive, not negative, terms.)

This is one of those places where reading through the whole book makes a huge difference in meaning.

Think back to yesterday's reading. Moses was in danger of being overwhelmed with the responsibility of mediating conflicts within the community. He accepts Jethro's advice to change the focus of his efforts from resolving the community's conflicts and instead to equip them to resolve those conflicts themselves.

It can't be a coincidence that immediately after that conversation, God provides him with the 10 Commandments. Not only does God provide the 10 Commandments, but he does it in a manner to make sure that people understand that these laws are the word of God, not just suggestions from Moses.

Also, realizing how early this takes place in the time in the wilderness helps understand why God begins the commandments the way he does: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

That wasn't a long-ago event they knew from history. It was just a few months ago.

God is making sure they understand that this frightening oracle of the mountain isn't some new God they have come upon in a strange land. No, this is the same God who rescued them, who parted the sea, and who provides water and manna and quails. And it's the same God who wants to be first in their hearts.

This also helps understand why the 10 Commandments focus so much on things that avoid conflict. These are the first instructions for the community members who are to serve as judges, keeping peace among the people.

## Wednesday meditation

### Proverbs 9:7

Whoever corrects a mocker invites insults; whoever rebukes the wicked incurs abuse.

#### Prayer focus

Lord, grant me the wisdom and courage to speak your peace into conflict, even when it's not appreciated.

## Fear defeats fear

### Thursday, Oct. 29

#### Exodus 20:18 – 21:36

The remainder of chapter 20 after the 10 Commandments is about the relationship of people to God.

To our eyes this can appear odd. We live in a day when government and law are kept in the secular realm, and relationship with God is a separate, religious, matter.

But in the days of the Exodus, the whole identity and being of the people was based on their relationship with God...it didn't just shape their worship practices; it shaped their life, community and culture.

A theme from yesterday's reading continues today: the people are kept away from the mountain while God is present. Only Moses approaches it.

In vs. 20:20 Moses tells the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will keep you from sinning."

It sounds inconsistent to say "Do not be afraid," and almost immediately follow it with "the fear of God." Moses explains, though, that the fear of God has a purpose: to keep you from sinning.

As Christians we talk a lot about how Jesus, through the cross, bridged the chasm between people and God. As important as that is, it presents its own danger. We can get overly comfortable with thinking of God as a celestial security blanket we turn to when things get tough. We can look at him as a servant we expect to come running when we need comfort, like a faithful pet.

There is no doubt that God is willing, even eager, to comfort and protect us, but we

must never forget that God is God. We are subject to his will, not him to ours.

The text then turns to building an altar for God. The elaborate Tent of Meeting and Temple will come much later. For now, God wants a place of worship that is simple. The altar he wants from the Israelites is made from the earth itself. It is God's gift to them, not their gift to him.

## Thursday meditation

### Proverbs 9:8-9

Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you; rebuke the wise and they will love you. Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning.

#### Prayer focus

Let me gain wisdom from all I encounter: from the words of scripture and from the example of your faithful people.

## Belief and law

### Friday, Oct. 30

#### Exodus 22:1 – 23:19

Today we continue with a collection of practical directions to the judges about how to resolve disputes. Some of the laws tell people how to act. Others provide direction for how to resolve difficult cases. Still others provide rules of punishment or restitution.

One thing that's interesting is that most of the punishments are either death or monetary. The resources needed to imprison people are beyond what a nomadic people living one day at a time can afford.

The people would have been familiar with jails—their famous ancestor Joseph spent years in one, and even sent other people to jail. But jails only work in a culture that can build strong, fixed buildings and has the wealth to employ people to guard and maintain prisoners.

Another thing that's interesting to me is how difficult it is to make the words support a political agenda, no matter how much people try to do that.

In U.S. politics, both parties pick and choose scripture texts to try to prove God is on their side. It's easy to imagine a politician eagerly quoting "If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed." Or maybe "Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt." But probably not the same politician.

In Exodus, and even more as we get into Leviticus and Deuteronomy, we'll read a lot of passages that have entered modern political debate.

Sometimes people agree with the text, and want to use scripture as a basis for gaining political support. Using less popular verses is condemned as trying to impose one's religion on others.

There's no easy way to resolve this. We live in a nation committed to religious freedom, and also to democracy. In a democracy, all people take their values with them into the voting booth; for the Christian, those values are shaped by scripture.

Christians have for centuries used their political power to support values they derive from scripture: the abolition of slavery, widespread education, dignity and safety for workers, equality for women, opposition to racism to name a few. But we also recognize that there have been times Christians have used laws to try to simply enforce conformity with sectarian preferences.

Deriving 21st-century political solutions from laws written for a very different culture and political environment more than 3,000 years ago is challenging.

It's a challenge we have to embrace, though. God clearly wants justice for all people, and the Bible is the best guide we have for what that looks like. We need to approach the challenge with lots of prayer and abundant humility, though, and recognize we don't always get it right.

And most of all we need to keep in mind that scripture is there to guide our beliefs and shape our lives. It's not a weapon to use in support of whatever we've already decided. When it doesn't say what we want it to, that means we have some serious re-

flecting to do.

Verse 22:31 puts it simply: "You are to be my holy people." It's that simple—and that challenging.

## Friday meditation

### Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

## Prayer focus

Show me that you, O Lord, are the source of all truth and wisdom. Direct my life in understanding all that means.

## Living justly and worshiping faithfully

### Saturday, Oct. 31

### Exodus 23:20 – 25:40

Today we start a section of about 10 chapters where the emphasis shifts from the gritty details of organizing a society to more exalted thoughts of worship.

The switch can be jarring for us, but it's less of a change than it might appear. Worship leads to a blessed life: "Worship the Lord your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water."

In Micah 6:7-8, the prophet asks rhetorically if God will be pleased with sacrifices of rams, olive oil or the firstborn. He then answers with, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

In Matthew, Jesus rebukes the establishment leaders for being committed to right worship but not righteous conduct: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."

The Bible makes no division between religious practice and "real life." Being just,

showing mercy and being faithful to God are just as much worship as are songs of praise or acts of adoration. God doesn't ask for one or the other, but both. It's not a matter of giving instructions about justice followed by instructions about faithful worship: both are about justice and both are about worship.

Before shifting gears entirely to worship, we read one of those difficult passages about God demanding his people live separately and not mix with the people who already occupy the land. Sometimes this is stated in terms that seem brutal to us.

By the time of Jesus, though, the message seems different. Jesus urges his followers not to conform to the world, but he also encourages them to actively engage with the world. The protection from pagan practices is found in Jesus, not in separation.

In 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 Paul goes even further, accepting that believers will unavoidably interact with even the most sinful people of the world: "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world." Instead, he says, the Corinthians should not associate with people who claim to be followers of Christ, but do those things.

There's no reason stated for the change in attitude as far as I know. I believe it's a matter of growth and maturing of people's relationship with God.

In the time of Exodus, it was still new. The call of the old ways was still strong, and the teachings of God through Moses were new and unfamiliar. The word of God needed time to grow within the people in safety from outside influences.

By the time of Jesus, though, it was time to take God to the whole world, and that mission can't be accomplished through isolation.

It's like the change in the way we teach and protect young people from the evils and temptations of the world. A child of 4 can't be expected to understand and resist. The same person, though, at 14 can't be

protected in the same way...they need to be growing the skills and knowledge to recognize and resist evil on their own.

## Saturday meditation

### Proverbs 9:11-12

For through wisdom your days will be many, and years will be added to your life. If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.

## Prayer focus

We pray for the courage and conviction to face the world as it is, worshiping you both with praise and with faithful actions.

## Ways of worship

### Sunday, Nov. 1

### Exodus 26:1 – 27:21

Through the next several books we will return many times to exacting details related to worship. Some are rules about priests, some are about sacrifices, some are about celebrations. Today's are about places of worship and their furnishings.

In many ways, these aren't relevant to us: we aren't nomads who build goat-hair tents for worship, and there's little likelihood of that changing. But for the people of that day, they were a command: "Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain."

Also, looking back on these rules through the lens of Jesus and his time, we see how the rules and rituals can become more of a hindrance than a help to true worship.

We're also very aware that worship doesn't always take place in a location designed and consecrated for it. The Last Supper, still the greatest model ever for Christian worship, took place in an otherwise insignificant upper room.

And, after all the pages of scripture devoted to the altars and ritual for "correct" sacrifice, we know that the ultimate, perfect sacrifice was made by the hands of unbelievers and took place in an unconsecrated dumping ground.

While keeping in mind that worship ultimately needs to take place where God decides, whether it's an ancient cathedral or an improvised space normally used for something entirely different, there are a couple of principles we can draw from passages like this.

First, worship itself is an act of sacrifice and requires deliberate thought and preparation. Whether the place is a beautiful sanctuary, a gym or an open field, and whether the songs are sung to the accompaniment of an organ, a band or no instruments at all, the act of worship deserves careful thought, preparation and intentionality.

Second, the place and pattern of worship is necessarily influenced by the circumstances of time and place.

From rough mounds of stone in Genesis to elevated dirt and later fine gold in Exodus, the appearance of worship adapts to the needs and resources of the community.

## Sunday meditation

### Proverbs 9:13-18

Folly is an unruly woman; she is simple and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way, "Let all who are simple come to my house!"

To those who have no sense she says, "Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!" But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are deep in the realm of the dead.

### Prayer focus

However worship looks, God, let me see you through partaking in it.

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