

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 9

Day 57: Read Leviticus 19.1-20.21; Mark 8.11-38; Psalm 42.1-11; Proverbs 10.17.

Reflection Question

Leviticus: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.’ If contagion can be caught, so can wholeness—at least from God, when it is the Holy God who calls us back into intimate relationship with him. The wholeness God gives is a matter of inner spirit, and is demonstrated from the inside outwardly through one’s actions. And the state of the heart shows most clearly in our actions or inaction toward those it is easy to overlook or look down upon. So God commands seemingly strange commands like not reaping to the very edges of your field at harvest, and not going over the vineyard a second time to get every grape: the gleanings are to be left for the poor and alien. God’s people are to rise for the aged and show respect for the elderly, who are so often and easily shoved to the side. And the reason God gives for such commandments: “I am the Lord your God.” God provides for everyone, especially the poor, the neglected, and the outcast, and so will God’s children—his people made holy by his forgiveness and renewed relationship. God’s people are commanded not to hate their brothers and sisters in their hearts, and to talk with them personally whenever wrong is committed. They are not to bear grudges, but to love their neighbors as themselves. Who is this neighbor? Even the alien living among them! “Love the alien as yourself,’ God commands, ‘for you were aliens in Egypt, and yet I chose you and delivered you. I became your God when I made you my people.’ Everyone is welcome with God. Still, there are actions, issuing from an ungodly disposition of heart and mind, that cut people off from life with God. People are not to dabble in the occult, turning to mediums or spiritists; they are to be removed from among God’s people, for they are a source of infection. People who sacrifice their children to other gods will die. Both the adulterer and the adulteress will die, as will all who abuse the sacred gift of sexuality, dishonoring the God who gives the gift to all. When Christ comes, he will have conflict over these very stipulations because of men abusing the spirit while settling for the appearance of keeping them. It is really a matter of knowing the Holy God, and loving him so much as to love—in action—like the One who delivered us from death to life with him. Questions: 1. Who are the poor, neglected, and outcast in my community? How am I called to help provide for their basic needs of companionship and caring? 2. What groups or individuals does my faith community or church tend to ignore or overlook in our community? Is there anyone we have written off as not worthy or capable of God’s

salvation? What can I do to open the eyes, hearts and hands of others to these people? 3. Who among my sisters and brothers in faith have I had conflict with? Am I bearing a grudge against someone? 4. How well does my sexuality reflect God's holiness?

Mark: Who are you, Jesus? A sign from heaven would be nice. Then we could be sure of you, Jesus. Then we would believe and follow. Jesus just sighs in response...deeply. No sign will be given...except one that you will believe unbelievable: a despicable death, and a unreasonable resurrection. 'Who do you say I am?' Jesus asks. It is the most important question anyone could ever ask...and the question everyone will be asked. The answer given will decide everything. Peter professes: You are the Christ—God's anointed and chosen one. It is only after that confession that Jesus teaches them what it means to be God's chosen: the chosen sacrifice, to suffer and die so that others may have life. Even Peter is repulsed by this sign from heaven. Surely God would not work in such a way with his Anointed One. This is the way, Jesus seems to say. If anyone wants to follow me, they, too, must take up their cross, embrace the way of dying to self, give up all right to themselves. This is the way he goes. This is the way to follow. This is the way to life. The only way. **Questions:** 1. How do I seek to bolster my faith in God's presence and power by external signs of success or effectiveness? Do I follow faithfully whether the way is easy or difficult, as much when I seem to fail as to succeed and experience smooth sailing? Why or why not? 2. Whom do I say Christ is personally? Publicly, to the people I know, through my actions as well as words? 3. Where is following Christ most difficult in my life right now? What cross(es) I am called to bear right now? The cross is suffering deliberately accepted on behalf of another, or because of another. Who is that 'other' for me right now?

Prayer: God, you are completely crazy. Even the alien? How can the alien be my neighbor? I don't know them. They are so....different...strange...foreign to me. What's that? I was an alien? Before you delivered me. Before you chose and accepted me to live with you forever. I see. We are the same, the alien and me. They are me. I am them. In your eyes. Thank you for accepting me. Let me embrace the aliens you put in my life—every person you put in my life, because, when I am honest, I admit that ultimately I really don't know or understand another human being. The center of their being is blank and impenetrable to me, a deep darkness I cannot see into with my puny light. Let me embrace them, the way you, Lord Christ, embraced me: with the cross. Thank you for the Cross. And thank you for my crosses. Amen.

Day 58: Read Leviticus 20.22-22.16; Mark 9.1-29; Psalm 43.1-5; Proverbs 10.18.

Reflection Question

Leviticus: 'I am the Lord who *makes* them holy.' The holiness we need comes to us from God, not through our actions. Our actions are to spring from the holiness God gives us, from God's own nature and character given us as a gift through relationship with him. It is

the same for every person, people and priests alike. It is the living God and their relationship with the real God that sets them apart, not any inherent quality or superiority. They are different, not in themselves, but in knowing this God and the new nature that is received from him. He is the God who makes holy everyone who comes to him.

Questions: 1. Am I different from others around me who don't know or follow God? How? Why? 2. Do I subtly demonstrate a superiority over others? How can I keep from that, still knowing that I have been chosen by God and gifted with a relationship with him? 3. God stresses that he is the God who *makes* people holy. By using the present tense and implying ongoing action, what is God saying about the need to rely upon him and his actions repeatedly for the holiness I need to demonstrate? What helps me to advance in holiness, and what holds me back?

Mark: To see Jesus in all his glory! What more could anyone want? What less could anyone want? I envy those three. How could they ever doubt or disbelieve after seeing Jesus in all his glory. And hearing God speak directly to them. I would want to stay there, basking the beauty of experience, too. But that is not where faith is tried and tested. That is not where the faithful are appointed to live...and follow Christ. In the valley, they do not believe. Why can't we do what you do, Jesus? Why can't we destroy the demonic and free people to life as God intended? Only by intimate time with God. Only in intimate, unbroken relationship with God. Questions: 1. Do I tend to require times of special warmth and joy, of feeling God's presence and power, to have strength to minister and serve for God in my daily routines? Or am I relying on God's promise to be with me in the midst of daily drudgery and difficulty? 2. How important is maintaining a personal and intimate relationship with God first and foremost, before my serving or speaking on his behalf to others? How faithfully and effectively do I use the means God has given me to strengthen and maintain our relationship—prayer, reading the Bible, worshipping, serving and sharing my faith with others, having significant spiritual relationships with other believers, and giving generously? Which of these means should I focus on strengthening right now?

Prayer: God, you make me holy. Let me let you. You began to even before I was born. You formed me for holiness when you first made me—as you make every person—in your own image and likeness. You made me—us—to share your nature, O Holy One. You perfected the process two thousand years ago, through the cross and resurrection of your Son. Dying and rising, he showed the way. He became the way. But dying is so hard. I cannot handle it. I can't even help in the process. The old nature within me claws and scratches to survive at any cost, and the cost of its survival is usually the pain of people around me, people I hurt. Yet you make me holy. Do it today, every day, until the final Day. Every day put to death the unholy self in me that seeks to secure its survival, and raise me to new life in Christ, your Son. So it will be your holiness, from beginning to end. Amen.

Day 59: Read Leviticus 22.17-23.44; Mark 9.30-10.12; Psalm 44.1-8; Proverbs 10.19.

Reflection Question

Leviticus: The blind, the injured, the maimed, anything with sores, defect or blemish of any kind, cannot be offered to God. Only the perfect can be offered to the Perfect One. Understood as human action, this leads to legalism—an incessant, insecure striving after perfection. God is pointing toward—prophesying, in fact— the perfect sacrifice that is to come, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Contrary to God’s deep desire, what God really wants and seeks, people will replace right relationship with rules and rituals. People will turn their eyes from the perfect love of God who wants to restore relationship toward the sacrifices we offer, scrupulously seeking perfection in them. The Sabbath must be kept perfectly. The festivals God gave to turn to him in thankful remembrance of his saving acts and provision, can become empty rituals, rather than open doors to deeper relationship. The Feast of Booths is a time to relive the wilderness wandering. For a week people are to live in tents, remembering and experiencing anew the dependence of God’s people upon God day by day as he led them through the wilderness to the promised land ‘so your descendants will know...I brought them out of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.’ The festivals are precious gifts to renew relationship, not paths to perfection. God’s people must climb using their own powers. Questions: 1. Am I thankful for my imperfections and failures in following God? Do they just exasperate me and cause me to despair, or do I understand them as gifts that lead me to deeper dependence on God? 2. Where and how in my faith life have I striven to present perfection to God as my own accomplishment? When I try that, do I tend to give up in failure or think I succeed—do I tend more toward spiritual despair or vanity, not simply accepting who I am and how God works with my imperfections and failures?

Mark: The disciples were quiet—when Jesus asked them ‘What were you talking about on the way?’ They should have been quiet on the way, quiet and content in their hearts. Instead they were demanding and arguing: who will be the greatest with Jesus? The real answer: the childlike one. The one who trusts totally Another, who provides everything needed. The one who knows nothing in themselves is the reason for the favors that come freely from the One who loves them just as they are. Not the one with the most abilities, not the hardest working, or the smartest. Even if someone isn’t just like us in following Jesus the way we think is right. Be careful. Don’t do anything to cause someone to stumble, especially the weakest. Everyone who follows Jesus will be seasoned—salted with the fire of faith and the Spirit—to influence the people around them, but woe to the one who loses the seasoning and influences others in the direction of destruction. Like the very religious leaders who try to trap Jesus when they ask one-sidedly ‘Is it permitted for a man to divorce his wife?’ What God has joined together—people whom God has put in relationship with himself and one another—let no one put asunder! **Questions:** 1. How

'salty' (seasoned with the joy, love, peace, patience and other gifts of the Spirit) am I right now? Why? What increases my 'saltiness?' 2. In which of my relationships is the life of Christ in me attracting others to God? In which am I repelling people? What can I do to turn these around? 3. How do I angle for visible or tangible preference publicly in following Jesus, in my faith community or church? Do I envy others who seem to be making more progress than me spiritually, or who get the 'limelight' of public display?

Prayer: O Christ, you are perfect in every way. Stand before me when I stand before God. My own imperfections mean I dare not stand on my own. You give me your perfections, and take my failures upon yourself, at the cross. Let me hide behind your cross. Such love alone is perfect and pleases the Father fully. Let me hide behind you like a little child, timid and shy, hiding behind the folds of its mother's skirts when a stranger comes, for I am a stranger from the perfection of the Father. Season me for your service. Let me humbly, and humanly, love others as you love me. O Christ, all praise is yours~ including the praise of my imperfect life lived wholly for you now~ for you are perfect in every way. Amen.

Day 60: Read Leviticus 24.1-25.46; Mark 10.13-31; Psalm 44.9-26; Proverbs 10.20-21.

Reflection Question

Leviticus: The essence of the law is reciprocity: punishment equal to the crime: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. A life for a life. But what do you do when the offense is committed against the Holy God directly and personally? What do you do when someone curses God, or blasphemes—speaks untruthfully of God? The law says that anyone who blasphemes the Name of God must be put to death. The blasphemer must be taken outside the camp. Then everyone who heard the blasphemy must lay their hands on the guilty one's head to transfer back contamination and therefore guilt they have received in hearing the unspeakable. Twice the command is repeated to make the emphasis on how important it is: the blasphemer must be put to death and the entire community must put him to death by stoning. They dare not even touch the guilty one, for to touch them means to incur guilt. Blasphemy is the crime Jesus will be accused of and condemned for. He made himself equal to God! As the law requires—almost as if a prophecy is being fulfilled~Jesus will be killed outside the camp, beyond the walls of Jerusalem. And, as the law requires, no one of the chosen people will touch him. He will die at the hands of foreigners. The law also commands the Year of Jubilee. It is the Sabbath of sabbaths, coming after seven times seven years. Then, on the Day of Atonement, the trumpet is to be sounded throughout the land to all its inhabitants, and each one returns free to the heir ancestral home. Debts are cancelled. People sold as slaves are set free. When Jesus dies on the cross and rises from the tomb, the true time of Jubilee has begun. Questions: 1. What financial debts do I have that I would like to have cancelled? What spiritual debts? 2. If my life and actions are like words that speak to others, what is my life saying about God now? Does it commend God, or is it blasphemy—bringing discredit on God? 3. How

would it have felt to have been a slave freed in Jubilee, or one who received back free the land you had sold because of your debts? What is the 'jubilant' life like that I can and should lead now knowing that Jesus has cancelled my sin, given me a home with God forever, and freed me for new life now?

Mark: Jesus looked at him and loved him. Why? Because he had followed the religious rules since his youth? Because he lacked nothing? Outwardly, his act is together. He has it all. No. Because he was still seeking, still hungry for God. His heart was still restless...and so he came to Jesus. 'You lack one thing,' Jesus replied, inviting him: 'Go, sell everything, then come and follow me...you will receive everything you long for.' He went away sad. A camel can go through the eye of a needle easier than a rich person—someone whose hands are full—can get to where God rules. Who can be saved? If we aren't like him, we all want to be: to have life safe and smooth and sweet. Life is found finally in the dying. Your destination is discovered in the leaving, not the settling. 'Lord, we have left all to follow you.' Would that it were so, for Jesus promises: 'there is no one who has left home, family, or anything for my sake and the Good News, who won't receive a hundredfold in this world...along with eternal life in the world to come. That's the new kingdom math: minus is plus. Questions: 1. Have I totally committed myself to Jesus, dedicating every part and parcel of my life to him? What areas am I holding back? 2. Have I every experienced the holy sadness Jesus causes when he talks directly and personally to me about an area of my life or my actions that show I am not his wholly? Am I thankful for that painful lesson he teaches me then? What is he teaching me now? 3. What blessings of the 'hundredfold' he promises have I experienced since following Christ? New family and friends in the faith? New fields for laboring? Greater joy and assurance in life knowing that eternal life awaits me?

Prayer: God, help me to live my life jubilantly. Let me live with joy and hope-filled expectation, knowing that Jubilee is coming—the time when your whole creation will be set free, I along with it, forever. The joy of the knowledge is unspeakable. In truth, Jubilee has already begun—in your Son's cross and resurrection. But one day it will come in completeness. Till then, keep me expectant. Keep me looking forward, watching for you and waiting upon you, both jubilant and needy. Make me seek security in one thing alone, dependent on only one thing. You. Let me hunger for you. Let me long for you as a desert thirsts for the spring rain that brings life. Your Word tells me you look on all who thirst and hunger for you with love. Then let me be jubilant in what I lack and long for. Let my thirst for you never be slaked, lest I grow forgetful of you or settle for less than you. Let Jubilee come to everyone I know, and let me so live that others around me find the way to true freedom. Set me aflame with the joy and hope of jubilee that is the love of Christ. Use me as your instrument to free others from whatever binds them and keeps them from true freedom in knowing you. Amen.

Day 61: Read **Leviticus 25.47-27.13; Mark 10.32-52; Psalm 45.1-17; Proverbs 10.22.**

Reflection Question

Leviticus: What is my responsibility to others, in this world where circumstances can change almost instantly? Is there any at all? Is it every person for themselves? What if someone experiences difficulty and must seek help from others, or even from me? God's people share responsibility for everyone, especially the person to whom life deals hard knocks. We are called to buy back the one who sells themselves to foreigners because of the trouble they run into in life. If someone becomes beholden to you, let them off the hook. God's great Year of Jubilee is coming, when all God's people will be set free. In the meantime, live jubilee to the people around you. Live as one who frees others, for God says 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt so you would no longer be enslaved.' Freedom, finally, is to listen to God and follow his lead. So God warns 'If you will not listen and carry out all that I say, you will experience the pain of slavery to terror, disease, fruitless labors, and to enemies. The sound of a windblown leaf will terrify the person who doesn't follow God. But even then, whenever people turn away from God, God promises that those who turn and return to him will be received back. For the sake of God's covenant—his Word given—he will accept back all who return to him. Questions: 1. In what aspect or area of my life am I feeling least secure right now? What are my greatest fears? 2. What addictions do I tend to 'sell myself' into slavery to? Eating? Buying and owning? Succeeding at work? Sports? Health and fitness? Unhealthy relationships? Sexuality? Other? 3. How does knowing and trusting God help with my fears? My tendencies toward enslaving myself (compulsiveness, obsessions, addictions)?

Mark: Again? What nonsense! Die in Jerusalem, condemned by the religious rulers? Rejected by the educated elite, those experts in the law? How can that be? Killed by the Romans? Well, that makes more sense, since Jesus is coming as King. As God's anointed, though, surely he will defeat the occupying power, not be defeated. The thoughts of the disciples are revealed in the request of two: let us sit right beside you when you come into your kingdom. 'You don't know what your asking' Jesus responds. The others disciples are angry, because they didn't make the request first, or thought they were more deserving. 'Don't you get it yet?' Jesus seems to be saying. 'It's about serving, not being served.' A blind beggar sees. He calls out to Jesus. Jesus heals him and says, 'Go, your faith has healed you—inside and out.' Instead of going, he follows. He joins Jesus on the way to the cross. Questions: 1. Where have I wanted or even expected that following Jesus would bring me positive results like a stable, controllable life, or approval of others, or health, and been given a cross—given hardship or a difficult task by God instead? 2. When have I been tempted to envy others God seems to be blessing more than me? 3. What would my life look like if I take completely seriously Jesus' call to serve as he served, and no longer sought to have others serve me? How would those around me I serve for Christ be affected? Transformed?

Prayer: Serve? When the world says it is better to be served? When my own nature says I deserve it? This will kill me Lord. What? That's exactly what you are after? My death? You want me to die? Oh. So I can be reborn, your child, in your image. So I can be a new creation, in your likeness. You will have to do that. My old nature is too strong. The old "I" will not have it. Oh. That's the way. Serve. Stoop lower, to rise higher. The way down is the way up. The cross and tomb the way to resurrection. You can do it, Lord. You have the power. Make me into the image and likeness of Christ. Kill me and make me alive. Make me a servant like your Servant Son. Send me to whomever you will, only come with me. Live in me and through me. I cannot do it. You can. You will. Amen.

Day 62: Read Leviticus 27.14-Numbers 1.54; Mark 11.1-25; Psalm 46.1-11; Proverbs 10.23.

Reflection Question

Leviticus: The firstborn of both humans and animals belongs to the Lord. The first portion—ten percent—a tithe—of all our property and labor produce belongs to the Lord. The deeper truth is: everyone and everything comes from the Lord and belongs to the Lord. The latter born and the other ninety percent, too, belong to the Lord. But the Lord accepts the first portion as consecrating and dedicating the whole. Those that follow are consecrated by their representative who is given to God. Just so Christ will consecrate as the firstborn all his sisters and brothers—everyone who comes into relationship with the Father through faith in him. He is the one who consecrates the whole. And the people of God are many. A census is taken there in the wilderness, and over 600,000 men of age are listed. God's people number over a million, when women, children, and the elderly are counted as well. From Abraham and Sarah, from the sons of Israel, a nation is growing that will be countless like the stars. Questions: 1. Do I thank God that Jesus has taken my place, consecrating me for relationship with God? Do I live a thankful life that dedicates everything I do for God, realizing everything belongs to God? 2. Do I give generously, the tithe, or even beyond, to thank God and dedicate the financial blessings he gives me so I use every blessing for God's purposes? 3. How does it change me to know that I am part of a huge nation, God's own people, and that I have many sisters and brothers in faith? 4. How does it change my image of myself and my actions to know I am part of an immense army of God, on the move? What is my part in the spiritual battle going on right now in place where God has stationed me?

Mark: They must have thought Jesus was crazy, or wrong. Huge crowds welcomed and acclaimed him when he entered Jerusalem. What was all that about dying...being condemned and crucified? Soon the jubilation turns to consternation. He goes to the Temple, only to overturn the tables of moneychangers. They set up shop in the courtyard of the Gentiles, the only place foreigners were allowed to worship. They were in effect forbidding them from truly worshipping God, because of the commercial clamor. Like a fiery prophet of old Jesus drives them out, quoting Jeremiah and saying 'My house shall be a house of prayer for all the nations, but you have made it a den of thieves!' All people are

precious to God. All people are welcome to God. A fig tree has no fruit...and withers. So do God's people if they do not bear fruit. The life has left them. Questions: 1. If I am the Temple of the Lord, as the Word says, what shape is my temple in? Is there too much busy-ness in my life, precluding my personal relationship with God and bearing fruit for God? 2. What is Jesus wanting to toss out of my life right now? What does he want to bring in and make possible that isn't there right now? 3. How often do I take time to shout 'Hosanna!' and declare Jesus my king, both privately in prayer, and publicly in actions? What would my life become like if I were to begin each day as though Jesus were entering triumphantly into it to take complete charge?

Prayer: You are my King, Lord Jesus, by right, by your very nature. You are the Firstborn who belongs rightfully to God. You are my King by conquest, too. You are the firstborn Lamb sacrificed for the sin of the world...for my sin. I am consecrated, made whole and holy, by your sacrifice. Come and claim all that is rightly yours...which is all that I wrongfully call mine. Come, cleanse this temple of yours. Throw out all that clutters and keeps others from coming to worship you. For you are worthy of all worship. And everyone who worships you receives life from you as a free gift. Amen.

Day 63: Read Numbers 2.1-3.51; Mark 11.27-12.17; Psalm 47.1-9; Proverbs 10.24-25.

Reflection Question

Numbers: The camp is carefully laid out. The people of God are assigned their places, sent to the four corners of the compass, north, south, east and west. In the center is the Tent of Meeting, the Tabernacle, the place of God's presence. At the center of God's people is God, in the way God consents to be present to his people. In the Old Testament times, though they surround God, they must camp far from God's presence. Only the priests—the ones who offer the sacrifices that make it possible for sinful people to draw near to God— may draw near to God in the Tent of Meeting. Only the priests may camp near the Tent. Anyone else who comes near was to be put to death. All the firstborn sons must be redeemed, so God accepts a payment in place of them. The scene is set symbolically, even prophetically, as the regulations of the Tabernacle are declared. Questions: 1. Right now, would I say that God is in the center of my life, on the periphery, or way far from the center? 2. Of the ways God invites me to draw closer to him—through reading, hearing and studying his Word, prayer, real spiritual fellowship or relationship with other believers, Holy Communion and worship, giving generously, serving people using my God-given abilities, and sharing my faith with others—which would help put God more in the center of my life?

Mark: Who is Jesus? By what right does he do what he does? What claim does he have to call on me to do things I don't want to do? He could claim his authority as the Son of God and compel people. He doesn't. He won't. Ever. God is like an owner, who leaves his

property and leaves others in charge. They are free...to care for or to abuse his belongings. He will come back. There will be a reckoning. But in the meantime, render to God what belongs to God. And what doesn't? Questions: 1. What authority does Jesus exercise over my life? Unlimited? Partial? None? How and why? 2. What part of God's creation has God left me in charge of for him? Who are the people he's put in my sphere of influence that I can serve for him? 3. Am I mistreating any of those he's put me in relationship with? How can I rectify that?

Prayer: It's all yours, O God. I am all yours, or would be, if it were up to my true desire. There is another desire within me. It is not true. It is not me. I am captive to it. Yet you have pitched your tent in the center of my soul. My very being is your abode, your Temple, and the place where I may meet you. My very being ought to be the place where others can meet you as well. I am called and graced to be your Temple. Lord, let me steward carefully and conscientiously the property you have appointed to me. Let me live so others experience your life, too, and not take theirs away, not diminish them. I am yours by right. It all belongs to you, everyone and everything. Let me live like it is all yours, all the time! Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 9

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Numbers 2.1-9, 32-34

Psalm: 46.1-11

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Mark 11.15-18.

Theme: Living Centered on God's Temple