

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 10

Day 64: Read Numbers 4.1-5.31; Mark 12.18-37;
Psalm 48.1-14; and Proverbs 10.26.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Numbers: Life together with God in the community of faith must be ordered to reflect God's will and ways. It must reflect the very being of the God who created us. As God is one in a trinity, with perfect harmony between each person, so that they are one God, so must the community reflect a fundamental unity in diversity. Among the priests and Levites, each man is assigned a specific task to do when setting up and taking down the moveable Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting where God consented to dwell among his people. Each is to take care of the part they are given to play, and not usurp one another's roles. So among God's people today, each person is given a unique mix of gifts and a role to play in his work that is uniquely hers or his. Working together in concert, God's people accomplish all God's work. To maintain the health and wholeness of God's people, provision must be made to remove sources of contagion and provide ways to heal breaches caused by misbehavior in the family. Symbolically, this was shown in sending anyone, man or woman, who had an infectious skin disease like leprosy, outside the camp. God's people are to be perfectly holy, like the living God they follow. God commands that whenever someone wrongs another, they must admit it and pay them back. God even stipulates they must add one fifth of the value extra to make restitution. Realizing that a husband's jealousy could disrupt the most intimate and basic of relationships—marriage—God provides a way to determine whether or not wrongdoing has occurred, providing a way for a wife to prove her innocence and clear her name. Jesus will later free a woman caught in the act of adultery, saying 'Go, and sin no more.' He will also chastise men for being too eager to sunder what God has joined together. Questions: What are the gifts God has given me to use for his kingdom? What tasks is God calling me to do with those gifts? 2. From whose gifts and work do I benefit most directly in his kingdom? Whom can I thank right away for using their gifts and strength for me? 3. What sin or wrongdoing do I need to confess confidentially to my pastor or a trusted, mature Christ-follower, so I can be freer to work for God, using my gifts at the tasks he's given me? Whom have I wronged that I need to make restitution to? How can I make restitution?

Mark: Jesus' day almost looks like a presidential news conference in an election year. He fields controversial question after question. Not believing in resurrection, some of the

religious party known as Sadducees try to trap Jesus. ‘If a woman marries seven times, whose wife will she be in the resurrection, if there is a resurrection?’ Jesus unravels the riddle by appealing to scripture. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—of the living, not the dead. Life with God in eternity is not like life here and now. There is no marriage there, but everyone stands with God as the unique individual they are, just as the angels God also created do. Another teacher of the Law asks which commandment is most important. ‘Love’ he responds. ‘Love God with all your being, and your neighbor as yourself.’ Love sums—and satisfies—the whole law. Questions: 1. What faith questions do I have with God? Which of them are genuine wanting to know, and which are more self-serving, like justifications of my own viewpoint, so I don’t have to follow what is plain in God’s Word? 2. How does the fact that marriage is for this world and time change the way I look at it? Does it make it more precious because it is temporary, like a flower that blooms and passes away, never to return?

Prayer: God, you made me to be who I am—uniquely gifted and important in your plan for your world. Help me to discover every day your purpose and plan for me particularly, among the particular people you have placed me. Forgive my fogging things with my self-serving doubts and questions. So often they are just a disguise I hide behind when I know perfectly what you would have me do—love. Love you with all my being. Love those around me as I love myself. I know. That means to place them first, instead of always seeking my own good and well being first, as I will always do when left to myself. Your Son didn’t. Let me love like him. Let me love you wholly, always and with everything I am. That will make me then love like you, love others as myself, just as you do—because to love is to become like the beloved. Amen.

Day 65: Read Numbers 6.1-7.89; Mark 12.38-13.13;
Psalm 49.1-20; and Proverbs.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Numbers: I want to go deeper...farther...in knowing God. What then? God provides for making special vows and living in a special way. The Nazirite who has taken the special vow cannot violate his time growing closer to God even if his father or mother dies. Throughout the period of their separation, they are consecrated to God. It is a difference of degree only, not of kind. Everyone who believes in and follows God will live differently than the world around them lives. God desires and delights when we set aside special times for him alone, when we dedicate our selves alone to God in prayer and devotion. God delights in the generous giving of his children. So God appoints a day for each of the twelve tribes’ leaders to bring their offering as the Tabernacle is consecrated. The whole community is included in the offering, giving of themselves back to God for the blessings God first bestowed on them. God even commands the priest to speak for him to the people saying, ‘The Lord bless you and keep you...’ This is what God deeply desires and

delights to do. Questions: 1. When and how do I make special times just for God, to lavish my love upon him and strengthen our relationship? 2. What is the next step for me to grow closer to God? Read scripture? More fervent prayer? Getting together with other Christ-followers in a small group? Serving others more? Giving more generously? Telling others about God's majesty and love?

Mark: Chameleons? Pretenders just appearing to be genuine? What if someone is just putting on an act? 'Watch out,' Jesus warns. He especially warns against pretending in terms of religion, people who appear to have their act perfectly together with God, making a show of praying profusely, but showing no compassion for the helpless and hopeless. Jesus watches as people give their offerings in the temple. Large sums change hands. One hand drops in two copper coins. 'Look!' Jesus cries. The disciples are stunned. At whom? That man in the ornate robes carrying the empty money chest? No, rather at the widow in her worn clothes. She gave more. She gave all she had. She gave her heart and soul. Watch out. What the world counts as good can be bad, and what God esteems, the world counts as nothing at all...or even negative. Be on your guard, people of God. The world will not love you. The world cannot love you, because it cannot love anything other than itself and its own good. Questions: 1. When do I try to put on an act before others? Why do I put on an act before others, caring more for what they think than what God thinks? 2. When have I suffered for going a different way than the world around me because I follow Christ? If I haven't suffered so, why not?

Prayer: God forgive me for posturing. Forgive me for pretending. What others think about me is way more important than it should be. Your thoughts are what matter. What you want is what matters. You look inside and see the heart. You know what lies there, even better than I do; and you love me still. Give me your heart, that I may love so, and cease pretending. Draw me deeper, closer, to you. Work your transforming power through the ways you give for us to grow closer together: your Word, your holy Supper, your people, your service and witness. Let me love genuinely, even as you love. Then let people think and do what they will. Let me live now and always to please only you. Amen.

Day 66: Read Numbers 8.1-9.23; Mark 13.14-37;
Psalm 50.1-23 and Proverbs 10.29-30.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Numbers: The people must be purified if they are to live with the Holy God. The Levites whom God chooses to serve in the Tabernacle for all the people of Israel must be completely cleansed. They must be sprinkled with the special water of cleansing. They must shave their entire bodies and wash their clothes, too. They must offer sacrifices for their own sin before they can serve where God dwells. Israel celebrates Passover in the wilderness, remembering and reliving God's great deliverance when he freed them from

slavery in Egypt. Even the alien who lives among God's people is welcome to celebrate the feast of deliverance, if they are cleansed according to God's appointed way. But anyone who does not submit to God's cleansing must be excluded. They are unfit for intimate relationship with God shown in meal fellowship. Throughout their wilderness wandering, the people of God follow God's leading. As the pillar of cloud moves by day, so they move. Even at night, when the way would be especially hazardous, they follow God in the pillar of light that streams from his presence, lighting their way. Whether by day or night, they followed God's leading. Questions: 1. Have I received the cleansing of God by accepting Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for my sin? Have I submitted to be baptized among God's people, to be cleansed through the washing of water and God's Word? 2. Do I faithfully worship God among God's people to celebrate the deliverance he won for us in the cross of Christ? Do I thankfully and regularly share fellowship with him in his holy Supper together with God's people? 3. When has following God been relatively easy, like walking is easy in broad daylight? When has following God seemed like stumbling in the dark?

Mark: The world will not last forever. History is not circular or cyclical, as some falsely teach. One day it, and everything that belongs to it, will pass away, when the Son of Man comes in a glory which can only be imagined now, dimly. In the meantime? What will the world give us? Trouble. Turmoil. Distraction. Deflection. 'Keep awake' Jesus urges. 'Keep alert' Jesus pleads. There is one similarity in the Son of Man's coming - both came at a particular instant of time. The first, hidden and humble—a baby born in a stable, a criminal crucified on a cross. The second will be like lightning in the sky. Be ready. Questions: 1. How do I prepare when a special friend is coming to visit? 2. How do I prepare for the coming of my Lord? 2. How do I keep my focus and balance as I am about the work God has for me here and now, even as I remember and anticipate the coming of Christ at the end of time?

Prayer: Come, Lord Jesus! What? You will, all in 'good time?' Good time! There is much about the times now that is not good. Oh, you know? Of course you know. You are the Crucified One. And Risen One. And Reigning One. You will come again. You will never forget me, nor any single child of yours, anywhere or anytime. Thank you for the hope that births in the center of my soul. Thank you for the courage and confidence you set ablaze in my deepest being by your promise to come again. You are the King...my King. Come...when you will. You know best. You are best. And in the meantime, turn me to my menial tasks you've appointed me to do. Let me do everything—however insignificant it may seem—for you, my coming King. Amen.

Day 67: Read Numbers 10.1-11.23; Mark 14.1-21;
Psalm 51.1-19; and Proverbs 10.31-32.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Numbers: How can God's people unite and act as one people? How can they concentrate their powers to accomplish God's purposes? They must be called, and they must be coordinated. Leaders are essential. God commands the making of two silver trumpets, for two purposes: calling the community together and for setting out on the journey. When both are sounded, the community is to come together before God at the Tent of Meeting, the place God has appointed to meet with him. When one trumpet is sounded, the people of God set out on the journey, each in their own order. The priests, who are the mediators between God and the people, are to sound the trumpets. They are to use them to call the people to celebrate the festivals—the holy times God has appointed for God's people to remember and relive God's gracious acts of provision or deliverance. They are also to sound the trumpet in times of danger, when the armies of Israel go out to battle. Only battles in their own land, against an enemy that is oppressing them. There are to be no offensive wars of conquest by the people of God. Then God will remember them and rescue them from their enemies. But the most dangerous enemy is already present - themselves. The people have cravings for the rich foods they enjoyed in Egypt. They are even willing to go back, back to slavery. They are already enslaved to their cravings. Moses himself complains. The burden of leading God's people is too heavy for him to carry it alone. God listens patiently and provides a plan to ease the burden. Select seventy elders of Israel and bring them before God. He will put some of the same Spirit he gave to Moses on them, and they will share the leadership. As far as meeting the peoples need for food, is God to weak? "Now," God says "you will see whether what I say will come true for you." 'You just wait and see!' Questions: 1. How carefully do I heed the call of God to gather with the community of faith? Do I just do so at special festival times, or am I part of the people on the march, on the journey with them continually? 2. What "battles" does God's Word call me to fight for him now in my own spiritual life? In my family, friends, fellow workers and community? In the world? 3. What cravings do I have that make me want to turn back rather than going forward with God? 4. What one thing can I do immediately to help ease the burden and share the work of the leaders of God's people?

Mark: Has she no shame? The air is filled with sweet perfume. This woman, so scandalously dressed, and acting more scandalously still, bathes Jesus' feet with perfume and her...tears. Does she weep because she is sorrowful...or deliriously happy? She caresses his feet and wipes them with her hair. Scandalous! Surely this Jesus can't be close to God, if he would get so close to her kind. If Jesus were a prophet he would know all about her. He does know all about her. He knows the most basic fact of all - she is beloved of God. Though she has done much wrong, God has forgiven her all, so she loves with abandon, with all she has and is. Her sorrow and shame have been transformed by the alchemy of God grace to pure joy...and devotion. 'She has done a beautiful thing that will be told wherever the Good News is proclaimed' Jesus says. The Good News is that anyone, everyone, is acceptable to God, just as they are. Even the one who betrays Jesus. On the way to the cross, Jesus is sad for him, not for himself. He even eats with the one who would

betray him, feeds him food from his own hand. He wants everyone to have life with him...everyone. Questions: 1. Whom do I tend to forget, overlook, or even disdain as beyond the concern of God? 2. Do I love Jesus with complete abandon, not caring what others think? How do I lavish my love on Jesus? 3. Who has betrayed or hurt me that I can treat graciously like Jesus did his betrayer? Do I sorrow for them or seek revenge?

Prayer: Your call, O God, comes so clearly! Your Word challenges me like a trumpet's call. Your Son's whole life, his every act, sounds an alarm, and a call. Your gracious love calls me to your heart, just as I am, and I learn I am loved. And in the movement, I am freed to love again. To love you, as I most deeply desire, with all my heart, strength, mind and soul. To love others, even as you love. The tears I owe you, for the countless wrongs I have committed against your love, let me shed for those who wrong me. Let me bear with you the burden of others, as you have borne mine. Amen.

Day 68: Read Numbers 11.24-13.33; Psalm and Proverbs.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Numbers: God's deep desire is to shower his Spirit abroad. He calls seventy elders to share leadership with Moses. God transfers some of the Spirit from Moses to them and they....prophesy! They speak for God, speak God's Word, at that particular time and place, for the Spirit imparts gifts in that way - when and how the Spirit chooses. Two of the appointed leaders lag behind and begin to prophesy in the camp, not at the appointed place of meeting, the Tabernacle. Moses' zealous aide, Joshua, protests: stop them! But Moses speaks for God's own heart when he says, "Would that all God's people were prophets!" Would that everyone was given the Spirit to speak for God! And yet, the Spirit's gifts are given to each person as the Spirit decides. There is not cause for jealousy. Moses' own brother and sister—his older,(and they think), better qualified, siblings—complain about the role God's given him. Miriam is struck with leprosy, sent outside the camp, but Moses pleads for her healing. Twelve men are chosen for a special mission: to explore the land God has promised and return with a report. On returning, two tell of the bounty and beauty, while ten warn of fearful enemies lurking there. 'They are stronger than we are!' Their reports sows doubt and chills all Israel. 'We can certainly do it!' the two report. They count in the equation one factor the others overlook - the living God who already delivered them from slavery to the most powerful nation in the world. Questions: 1. When has the Spirit come upon me, giving me words and courage to speak up for God or tell another about God's love for them? 2. Have I ever been jealous of someone else's gifts from God, or their role for God? How does that impact my own effectiveness for God? 3. When have I succumbed to fear or doubt, in the face of circumstances, not trusting God to lead and provide for me some course of action he desired me to take?

Mark: Just bread and wine? Come on, Jesus. Can't you come up with something more spectacular? This? This common loaf, your body? This average wine, your blood? Can something so common mean a whole new covenant has finally come? No more endless lines of bulls and calves to be sacrificed for sins repeated again and again, their blood poured out at the altar? No more spotless lambs must die, after you do. When your blood is poured out, sins are truly forgiven. Forever forgiven. No new law codes to keep us forever scrabbling, fighting our way forward, and forever falling further behind. And look who can eat the meal of the new covenant with him: the same old disciples, who argued and fought amongst themselves. Peter the denier. Judas the betrayer. Not one of them could watch with him even one hour in prayer when he turned to them in his hour of greatest need. As the mob arrests Jesus, one young 'follower' squirms out of their grasp, right out of his robes, stripping himself naked. The others who all forsook him and fled. Their fear and faithlessness is laid bare for all to see. Let us thank them for their honesty and humility, to tell such a tale on themselves. It's all right, to Jesus. He will clothe them with his own righteousness. 'This is my body broken for you, that you may be made whole again. This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you, that you may have life abundant.' Questions: 1. Do I truly believe what Jesus says in his Supper, that he did it all "for you"—for me personally? 2. What does it mean to me? How does it change me to know that Christ comes to live within me through his holy Supper, despite my failings? 3. How often, and how faithfully, do I receive Christ's body and blood in his holy Supper with other sisters and brothers in Christ? 4. When have I run away...abandoned Jesus...in the face of others' opposition or questioning? What am I facing now that might cause me to deny him?

Prayer: O, my God, you shower your Spirit upon your people. You appoint us all to important tasks in your Kingdom, calling us to share the work which can only be accomplished by all of us together. Forgive me for running from you call. Forgive me for the jealousy I harbor as I imagine others have greater gifts and get greater recognition. We are all called to proclaim your unbelievable love to the people we know. We are broken because of our self-centeredness. Break us of our selfishness by your Holy Spirit. Make us one with your living body, Lord. And then disperse us like the bread which is broken, to be your body scattered into in the world you came to redeem. Amen.

Day 69: Read Numbers 14.1-15.16; Mark 14.53-72;
Psalm 53.1-6; and Proverbs 11.4.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Numbers: The men sent to explore the Land of Promise spread bad reports, exaggerating the dangers and forgetting the power God provides those who trust him. At these rumors, the people are easily swayed. 'If only we had died in Egypt! Has God brought us out of slavery only to let us die at the hands of new enemies now?' 'I know what to do,' the discouraged people say, 'let's choose new leaders who will take us back to Egypt. Pharaoh will take us back, if we grovel good enough. You can be we'll be able to get our old slave tasks back.' They are ready to stone Moses and the leaders who brought them out of Egypt. God's patience is finished. 'I will strike them down and make a greater, stronger nation out of you, Moses' he decides. 'Just a minute, God' Moses intervenes, 'What will everyone think? How about the Egyptians, who will say God was toying with Israel and always planned to destroy them. Or the people holding the promised land. They will say God was too weak to keep his oath and give them the land.' And God relents. God is persuaded from his course. "I have forgiven them as you asked." But not one of them will see the promised land in their lifetime. No one, except the ones who believed me, Caleb and Joshua. They will lead a 'new' people into the Promised Land. Everyone else will fall in the wilderness. Belatedly, the people turn and try to take the promise land through their own might. Defeat follows, for they are not going God's way. Questions: 1. What is hardest for me about following God? What tempts or causes me to become discouraged or disheartened? 2. Do my words and actions encourage others or weaken others in following Christ confidently? 3. Do I pray to God for others who are turning away from God, just as Moses intervened with God for Israel? 4. What am I trying to do in my own strength and wisdom rather than following God's lead and way?

Mark: That obnoxious cockcrow. It always comes at the most inopportune time. When you'd rather be sleeping; rather be in your bed than out and about, rather be safe than exposed and... sorry. But there it is. The cockcrow. And already Peter has denied Jesus three times, while Jesus is on trial for his life. 'Are you the Son of God?' The charge is blasphemy—lying about God, or ridiculing, or making light of God. Don't speak, Jesus, and you may have a chance, Jesus, even now. "I am," he says simply. He seals his own fate. No need of fact-finding commissions, no inquisitions; he has hanged himself. Except. Except, by the time the cock crowed once, Peter had denied Jesus three times. It was just as Jesus said. How could he have known? He couldn't have, of course,...unless....he is the Son of God? **Questions:** 1. What does it say about Jesus that he knows everything about me, from the inside out, even before I act? That he accepts me even so, just as he did Peter? 2. Before whom do I tend to downplay the lordship of Jesus in my life? How? Why?

Prayer: I don't even want to talk about it, God. I don't want to talk about how I deny or abandon you to protect my fragile self. It's no surprise, really, that I would abandon you. This thing within me will do almost anything to preserve itself. It will gladly leave others to their own fate. It will even leave you. Especially you. I don't even want to talk about it. But I will talk about you. You know it all, everything about me, what I do or don't do. Such knowledge is too deep for me. Such love is too deep for me, that you would put your life on the line for mine. That is what kills me...kills the thing inside me, holding me

captive to myself. You must be God, to love so. Only this God-sized love can turn my shame into the light of day. Your cry from the cross—‘Father, forgive’ - signals the dawning of a whole new day, just as the cockcrow did for Peter on the day you died. You are God. You are my God. Amen.

Day 70: Read Numbers 15.17-16.40; Mark 15.1-47;
Psalm 54.1-7; and Proverbs 11.5-6.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Numbers: Okay, I can buy forgiveness for sinning unintentionally. We all trip and fall down. There are sacrifices appointed for that. But what about the whoppers? What about people who do the premeditated, in-your-face *Sinning* with a capital ‘S’? They must be “cut off” from the people, just as a cancerous limb is amputated to save the rest of the body? Like the hardened criminal who is caught....gathering wood? Oh, it’s on the Sabbath, the inviolable, holy time to be lived toward God alone each week. Working is strictly forbidden, even gathering wood to build a fire to cook or keep the family warm? He knew better. He is held in custody until the word comes down about what to do with him. And the word is death - by stoning. No one dare lay a hand on him. No one dare touch him. He must die outside the camp, where he won’t contaminate anyone else. Questions: 1. Why does God insist so strictly that people make uninterrupted time for strengthening their relationship with him? 2. Is my relationship with God deepening, maintaining, or dwindling at this point in my life? Which of the following can I do to help my relationship with God grow: ___ Pray Daily ___ Read Scripture Daily ___ Worship Weekly ___ Have Real Spiritual Relationships With Other Believers In A Small Group Or Bible Study ___ Give Generously ___ Serve In A Ministry In The Church Or Volunteer In The Community Using My God-given Gifts ___ Share My Faith And Invite Someone To Relationship With Christ. 2. What does it signify that Jesus himself was often accused of violating the Sabbath, and ultimately condemned as a ‘blasphemer’ who was distorting and destroying the faith of Israel? 3. Why do people always tend to turn the love and freedom God gives into rules, ritual and religion rather than real relationship with God? Are there ways I do that?

Mark: The Centurion understood precisely. Pilate cut right to the chase. ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ It’s all about power and politics, after all. Everything in this world is about power and politics, about getting done what you want done, and not getting what you don’t want. Like rebellion. Like a deadly summons from a disappointed emperor, which Pilate will surely receive if he missteps here. Jesus responds simply, ‘It’s just as you say.’ Otherwise, Jesus just keeps silent. Not much charisma. Not much political savvy, and certainly not enough power, not enough to preserve even his own life. How could he ever hope to save others? Oh, well. Even Pilate knows the importance of keeping the local

customs. Society's skids must be greased. Release a prisoner in a symbolic gesture of compassion, which makes the Roman ruthlessness look all the stronger by the sharp contrast. Why not Jesus? No, this one must die. This one, not the murderer. The King must die. There is room for only one king. The religious leaders won't have him released. The people cry for the cross. To satisfy the crowd - it must be the cross. Pilate knows politics, he knows power. First an impressive show of power. Beatings. Being scourged. Public ridicule. A robe of royal purple and a crown of thorns. A public procession through the streets. Enough already. Even he realizes he is rejected by God. 'Why have you forsaken me?' he cries to a silent sky. Poor fool. He knew nothing about power and politics...or even religion. What's that? The temple curtain? The thick curtain separating off the Holy of Holies...torn in two? From top to bottom? That took some power...but what...whose? The cynical centurion who saw Jesus live his last moments...and breathe his last breath...whispered awestruck, 'This man was the Son of God.' That took some power. Power beyond imagining. **Questions:** 1. Is Jesus Christ truly my God and King, the leader of my life? What areas of my life still need to be turned over to his control? 2. Do I acknowledge Jesus publicly like the Centurion, even if it is risky?

Prayer: Lord, you know that I am a Sabbath breaker. I am forever letting myself get distracted and deflected from resting quietly in you, from taking time to sweeten our relationship. Everything else seems more urgent. So many responsibilities and people who are important to me come in between us. Is that why your Son consented to be accused and condemned as a Sabbath breaker and destroyer of religion? Was it so that I would know that how much you long to spend intimate time together even when I don't? What sweetness do I miss? What tenderness from you, to soften my all too-hardened heart? What words of guidance do I fail to hear day by day, because I don't set aside those special times to speak with you? Strange to say, when I don't set aside and share time with you alone, I do not demonstrate your presence in my life for those I meet, amidst the busyness every day. Lead me into intimate times together, Sabbath times, so, like the hardened Centurion, even I will acknowledge you publicly and Lord and God in my words and deeds to all who will listen! Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 10

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Numbers 9.15-23

Psalm: 51.1-13

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Mark 15.22-39

Theme: "Following God means ...Following God"