

# Through The Bible In One Year

## The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

## Daily Devotional Companion

### Week 18

**Day 120.** Read Judges 11.1-12.15; John 1.1-28;  
Psalm 101.1-8; and Proverbs 14.13-14.

### Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Judges:** His resume didn't recommend him as Israel's savior. Born out of wedlock- his mother a prostitute. His half- brothers drove him away, insisting he would never inherit anything from their father and 'our' family. Headstrong, he ran away to a foreign country and became leader of a band of 'adventurers.' But when another enemy made war on them, the elders of his tribe turn to him to rescue them. Perhaps it was exactly his history, his headstrong ways, his rough and tumble life, that made him perfect for the job. How Jephthah must have savored the irony: 'Didn't you drive me away? So why do you come to me now when you need help?' They get the point and grovel. But he persists to make his point: 'Will I really be head? Will you follow me?' He has reason to suspect their truthfulness...and loyalty. 'The Lord is our witness!' So Jephthah defends his people, first by parley, refuting the enemy's claim to the land and then by fighting, when that fails. The Lord 'gave them into his hands,' the account says simply. But rash and headstrong, without asking what God wants, he has made a vow: 'If God gives me victory, I will sacrifice as a burnt offering whatever comes out of my house to greet me when I return in triumph.' What comes out to greet him is not his lamb, or even his dog, but his daughter. Jephthah keeps his word, even though God hates human sacrifice and deplors those that practice it. **Questions:** When I am rejected or put down by people, do I get angry and bear a grudge against them, or would I, like Jephthah—and Jesus—lay down my life for them? 2. When there is conflict, do I try, like Jephthah, first to talk things through with my antagonist? 3. What promises have I made to God— that I never should have made and did keep, or should have kept but didn't? 4. If God chose Jephthah, despite all his wounds and hang-ups, why shouldn't he choose me as his instrument and his own beloved, even with my shortcomings? Is it possible that God wants to use my very shortcomings as means to give himself glory and for the good of others he wants to save?

**John:** No baby in a manger. No shepherds watching in their fields by night or wisemen coming from afar. In John's good news account, it is Jesus Christ who has come from afar...farther than anyone else has ever traveled. John's gospel soars straight to where eternity intersects time: 'In the beginning...was the Word...and the Word was God...and

the Word became flesh. In this one person, God becomes human; eternity touches time. There are no shepherds watching over their flocks by night. But there is plenty of darkness. He is the light that shines in the darkness, which the powers of darkness cannot overcome. There are no wisemen journeying far to pay him homage and give him gifts; but he is the one who makes the long, perilous journey from eternity into time, only to be rejected when he comes into his own creation, by the very people he first formed to be in his own image and likeness. The darkness is that deep. But to those who receive him, who believe in him, he comes to bestow an incomparable gift: the right to become children again. Children born not of human descent or will, but of God. He is the Word, the complete and perfect expression of God's own heart and mind. And John, rapt by wonder beyond human ability to know and speak, says simply: 'We have seen his glory, glory as of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.' If you want truth, come to him. If you want the love of God, it will be yours in him. **Questions:** 1. How does it change my understanding, my attitude, and my actions, to know that Jesus is God in human form? That he alone is full of grace and truth? 2. How does it change me and my way of living every day to realize that Jesus Christ by his coming, his cross, and his resurrection has given me the right to be God's child? That because of Christ, God looks at me as his beloved child?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, you entered into time, so I might live in eternity. You came to your own and were rejected, so I might be accepted and be your own. You came to me, one in whom dwells the deepest darkness, as the light to overcome the darkness. You chose me, who was empty, unloving, and full of error, to fill me with your grace and truth. You are the Lord I long for. You alone, I acknowledge Lord. Come again, as Lord of your creation. Dispel my darkness, and live in me as my Light. Let your light shine through me to all around me, that they also may find their true life in you. Amen.

**Day 121.** Read Judges 13.1-14.20; John 1.29-51;  
Psalm 102.1-28; and Proverbs 14.15-16.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Judges:** Again Israel goes astray, and again God sends an unlikely savior, from an unlikely home. God announces to a barren woman that she will conceive and bear a son, who will be Israel's deliverer. He is to be dedicated completely to God. Not even a hair on his head is to be cut. When her husband hears the strange news, he prays that God will send his messenger again—to instruct him as to how to raise the child to be born. God grants his prayer, but the guest comes when Manoah is out working in the field. His wife runs to tell him the good news, again. He asks how he is to raise him, and the answer is: 'Just as I said before. His mother knows how.' Manoah invites God's messenger to eat with them. He declines saying, 'Give an offering to God instead, if you wish.' Manoah asks for his name but is told simply, 'It is beyond understanding.' When Manoah and his wife offer the

sacrifice, and the flames rise up toward heaven, the messenger ascends in the flame. ‘We are doomed to die because we have seen God!’ Manoah cries in terror, but the woman is wiser. ‘If God meant to kill us, he wouldn’t have shown us all these things!’ So Samson was born and grew up, and the Lord blessed him; and the Spirit began to stir in him. Is he so headstrong because of his special birth and upbringing? He desires a Philistine woman as his wife and insists, even against his parents’ counsel. Samson’s Philistine wife is coerced to reveal his secrets. Finally, she is given in marriage to the friend who attended him at their wedding. Even these betrayals are encompassed in God’s plan of redemption, to provide an occasion to confront these enemies oppressing Israel. **Questions:** 1. What experiences, personality traits, and gifts from God make me the unique person I am? 2. How am I to use them in God’s plan to redeem the world? 3. When have I failed to listen to the counsel of my fathers and mothers in the faith and gone my own willful way in life, with difficult or even disastrous results? How can God use even my miscues to effect his purposes?

**John:** John the Baptizer himself would not have known him unless the Spirit revealed him. And so he says with certainty: ‘Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ John plays his part in God’s great drama of redemption by preparing the way, pointing toward the One, and stepping aside. Through his words and actions, two of his followers leave him to follow Jesus. Andrew immediately seeks out his brother Simon with the amazing news, ‘We have found the Messiah!’ Andrew not only tells him about Jesus, he brings him to Jesus. There is something catching about Jesus. Word of him spreads from person to person, fast as the flu. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus says to Philip, whose first act of following is to find Nathaniel, a friend from his hometown far to the north, Bethsaida. ‘We have found the one all the scriptures, from Moses on, speak about: Jesus of Nazareth.’ Nathaniel is no soft sell. Life has somehow made him cynical. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?’ he questions’ ‘Come and see!’ Philip replies, wisely knowing that his friend must decide for himself. His work is simply to bring his friend to Jesus. Jesus will do the rest. And Jesus does. He welcomes him as a person without pretense - ‘a man without guile.’ Nathaniel is a seeker not afraid to question everything...and everyone. He must personally test everything..and everyone...to see if they are true. ‘How do you know me?’ Nathaniel asks in suspicious amazement. Jesus tells Nathaniel how he saw him once—just once—standing under a certain tree. Could Jesus know him instantly, from a momentary meeting? Could it be that Jesus, thronged by crowds as he was constantly, still sees each individual person...and knows them as they are inside their hearts? Philip knows he knows: ‘You are the Christ, the Son of Living God!’ The cynic is the first to confess. **Questions:** 1. How does it affect me to know that my deepest need—to be known and accepted for who I truly am, not who I appear or pretend to be - is fulfilled in Jesus Christ alone? 2. Knowing him as I do, and having experienced his loving acceptance personally, who among my family and friends will I introduce to him? 3. Who is the most cynical, questioning person I know? How can I help them to experience the loving acceptance of Christ?

**Prayer:** You know me; and what is more, you love, Lord. How can this be? Thank God you are God and not me. Were I God, I would neither choose nor accept someone such as me. Oh, I know you know there are times when I think I am god...and play god. I am always judging myself, condemning myself. Even more often, I question and condemn others—everyone around me sometimes, and some people all the time~ like cynical Nathaniel. Yet, you have chosen this sinner to become your saint because of your Son. Your loving forgiveness and acceptance freed him from always questioning to confessing. Jesus, you are the Son of God. Jesus, you are the King of Israel. My King! And so you be the judge. I leave all that to you, not only the judging of myself, but especially the judging of my neighbor. Let me only introduce them to you, and they will see for themselves it is so. Amen.

**Day 122.** Read Judges 15.1–16.31; John 2.1-25;  
Psalm 103.1-22; and Proverbs 14.17-19.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Judges:** It's Delilah's fault! Wait. Haven't I heard that somewhere before? It echoes through history: 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit, and I ate.' The two that are supposed to be one are suddenly defiantly divided. Though she betrays him to her countrymen, though she emasculates him of his strength, though his eyes are gouged out, neither she nor his Philistine enemies are the ones who blinded him. He did it himself. His false pride and bravado, believing in his own invincibility. So the would-be savior of Israel is blinded and shackled and left totally in the power of his enemies. They make a public spectacle of him, humiliating him, to honor their gods and delight his enemies. Only there, at his worst and weakest, he is strongest. He turns to God in prayer and asks that, by his death, the enemies of God's people might be destroyed. It is by being crushed under the pillars that hold up the whole unholy edifice, that deliverance is won for God's people. Wait! Where have I heard that before? It echoes throughout all history, from the time of the fall when the cross of Christ was first foretold: 'You, Satan, will strike his heel, but he will crush your head.' **Questions:** 1. How does God's prefiguring and foretelling again and again in history and scripture the surprising plan of salvation in the cross of Christ help me to believe and accept it with assurance? 2. What faults and mistakes do I tend to blame on others? Do I truly take full responsibility for all my actions? 3. What part of the world and way of life I've created on my own needs to be pulled down, so God can have his way with me and through me?

**John:** You were holding out on me...on us! The emcee at that marriage reception wasn't really angry, just perplexed. Why did you save the best wine for last?! It makes no sense. Who will appreciate it, after we're already tipsy with the inferior stuff? Why did you hold it back? It really wasn't a matter of holding it back at all. The really good wine wasn't there at all. This wine can't be found at the wine seller's on the corner. It comes from farther away...much farther. You might say...truly....it is a special vintage. 'They are out of wine,'

the mother of Jesus tells him when the celebration is in danger of dying. 'It's not my time,' Jesus responds...but he consents anyway. Will God never tire of giving in to human need? And humans need something to celebrate. Like a marriage. Like a marriage between God and humanity, where God, as he says throughout scripture, will take poor humanity as his precious bride. 'Fill the empty jars with water; then draw it out and take it to the one in charge,' Jesus says in deceptively simple words. They do...and it is suddenly the best wine they have ever tasted. A special vintage. Fill the empty jars. Though you be empty and dry, God can...and will...fill you with and because of his love. With water. 'Unless you be born of water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the Kingdom,' Jesus will say very soon.' And take it to the One in charge. Give it to God. And the water became wine. You will be transformed forever into who you were intended to be and already are in Christ...a special vintage. **Questions:** 1. How am I being transformed by Christ's love and power, like water into wine? Since grapes must grow out in the weather and be crushed to be made into wine, what part do the troubles of life and the difficulties of relationships God has given me play in the transformation? 2. Whom do I need to intercede to God for, as Mary did to Jesus on behalf of the wedding guests? How will God use me to pour his rich wine into whatever emptiness or need they have?

**Prayer:** What a mystery. I feel somehow this mess is all mine. And yet, I feel it is someone else's fault. Even yours, God. You made the one who tempts me, who troubles me, turns my life sour, makes me fail. And yet it is mine, this emptiness, all mine. Can it be...both? What a mystery. But one thing I know, Lord. The power to turn it around is all yours. The power to fill the emptiness and turn simple water into wine is yours and yours alone. It makes me giddy just to think that such transformation is even possible, let alone certain for all who come to you. And so I come asking: fill my emptiness and transform it into joy, more and more. Make my life a sweet-tasting vintage, bringing joy to you, who by choosing me to be yours and share your intimate love, have filled my poverty with your overflowing riches. And may my life, so transformed by your word of acceptance, overflow with sweetness for everyone around me, and for all whom you invite to your wedding banquet in the coming kingdom of your Father. Amen.

**Day 123.** Read Judges 17.1–18.31; John 3.1–21;  
Psalm 104.1–23; and Proverbs 14.20–21.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Judges:** He is the worst kind of a thief and has a curse on his head. He stole from his own mother, and she cursed him. But the curse turns to a blessing when he confesses and returns the stolen silver. The blessing turns to a curse when she takes the silver and invests it...in an idol. Bad investment, it turns out. Her son, Micah, takes it into his house, adds more relics of his own to grace his household shrine, and installs one of his own sons as

priest. Why not get a corner on the market? Everybody does what was good in their own sight anyway, after all. But only Levites are to be priests according to God's plan, and a Levite he is definitely not. By chance, (providence really) a Levite stumbles by 'in search of some other place to stay.' Well, isn't everyone always looking for the greener grass? Micah offers him a deal he cannot refuse. But the plot thickens. Members of another tribe in Israel spy out a place for themselves and their tribe. They spy the shrine with its idol and the priest and are duly impressed. They are also 'real religious.' They ask the priest to inquire of God and he gives them good news: they will be successful in their venture. On the way back from the conquest, they carry off as spoils (put plainly, they steal)...the priest, and the very valuable (in worldly terms only) idol. Micah protests feebly, but how can he? The thief who stole from his own mother? Who made an idol against God's own express word? Who set up his own worship and reaped the rewards of religion for himself? And then the tribe does the very same thing. They set up for themselves their own shrine and secure their own priests—not descendants of Aaron, the priest appointed by God, but of Moses himself—who lead them in worshipping the idols right up to the Captivity; when, for worshipping idols and doing injustice to one another, Israel is conquered and deported as slaves from the Promised Land. The problem was, as the writer of Judges says with impressive understatement, 'in those days there was no king.' Especially not God. Thy kingdom come, God! **Questions:** 1. How was my life chaotic and inconsistent—hurting others and even myself—before God ruled my life? How is it so even now, even though God has called me to be his own, since I remain both sinner and saint all my life until the Kingdom comes finally? 2. How is God's grace even greater, since he accepts sinners and transforms them into sinner-saints, one day, after the time of our bondage, to be delivered to the true freedom of children of God?

**John:** Even the religious leaders, the teachers and council members, are in the dark. In him was life, and the life was the light...and the light shines in the darkness. Nicodemus, a member of the ruling council and teacher to Israel, comes in the dark. After nightfall, so no one would see him coming to Christ. Somehow he has gotten a glimpse...seen a glimmer...of the light, so he comes to Jesus. His darkness deepens. How can this be? How can someone be born again? No one can see the kingdom, unless first born again!? It will be a kingdom without people then. Who will see the kingdom? Jesus tries again. How does one explain such mysteries? He speaks spiritually...and only the Spirit can interpret. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless born of both water and the spirit. Of water, the way everyone born comes bodily to physical life; and of the Spirit, the only way anyone can come to eternal life with God. Otherwise, it makes no sense at all. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, which shouldn't have saved anyone, but did, because it was God's way, so must the Son of Man be lifted up that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life, which shouldn't work but it will, because he is God's Way. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life.' The judgment is this: the light came into the darkness and people loved the darkness, to hide their dark deeds. But for those who would live truly, the light has come; and they are drawn and come to the light. Like Nicodemus in his darkness, they come seeking the light. **Questions:** 1. How has the Spirit given me a new birth and a new

life in Christ? 2. How does the Spirit help me understand spiritual truths and mysteries I could not comprehend or believe by my own powers?

**Prayer:** Come, Holy Spirit complete God's new creation in me. Do your work, like the wind, unseen, within. With gentle whispers or gale-force storms, have your will and way with me. Otherwise I will not be born again. I, otherwise, will never see the Kingdom. Come, Holy Spirit; and make me new. I perish unless you do. Lift up Christ crucified before my dark eyes as my light and draw me to the light, that I may be in the light, as he is in the light and all my deeds may be done in the light. Amen.

**Day 124.** Read Judges 19.1–20.48; John 3.22–4.3;  
Psalm 104.24-35; and Proverbs 14.22-24

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Judges:** There was no king in those days. Certainly God was not their king, anyway. A Levite took a concubine, the Story says, who was 'unfaithful' to him and went back to her own home and family. What transpired between them to cause such a drastic course no one knows, for the Story does not tell us. It could simply have been a case of homesickness. But the Story does say her husband followed her to persuade her to come back with him. He took two donkeys with him, besides the servant, which means he must have had hope. And she, for her part, was willing; for she welcomed him into her father's house. And she went with him...after three days of hospitality. A happy ending! But there was no king in those days. Certainly God was not king then...as now. Truly happy endings—completely happy endings—are unheard of where there is no King. On the way home the husband skirts by a town of pagans, not daring to trust them, and chooses instead a city of his kindred, Israel, of the tribe of Ephraim. They prepare to bed down in the square. An old man opens up his home, offering the travelers refuge for the night, even though it is late. Some men of the town pound on the door, intent upon sodomy. The old man pleads with them. Such things are not done in Israel. In desperation the old man offers his own daughters. When they still would not listen, the husband takes forceful action alone: he shoves his wife out the door to do with as they please. Raped repeatedly, she dies on the doorstep. Tragedy. He takes her home, cuts her into twelve pieces, and sends a piece to every tribe in Israel. It is a summons. All Israel comes out as one man and assembles before God in Mizpah. As one man they give their verdict: they will not go home until justice is done. An army of 400,000 is arrayed against the guilty tribe, who can muster a mere 26,000 of their own. They inquire of God: Shall we go up against our brother? God says, 'go' - twice. Two times they are defeated, with terrible losses. How can it be? With such a just cause? With such overwhelming odds? Weeping, they inquire a third time. 'Go', God says, 'only this time, use their own pride to defeat them.' Feigning defeat, they come from ambush and defeat the enemy...that is their own kin. The victors treat their

own kindred the way they treated the Ammorite people of the land when they first conquered it, for such horrible deeds: total destruction. Tragedy upon tragedy. A cartoonist once drew a character who said, 'We have met the enemy...and it is us.' It is us. The mystery of evil. Our story. Sometimes the people of God act worse than the 'heathen.' But there was no king at that time. So God will shove in the way an innocent to whom we will do exactly what we want: the King who was crowned with thorns.

**Questions:** 1. How does my own wrongdoing toward others become a barrier to others believing in God's existence or goodness? 2. What does it say about God's patience and love, that he suffers wrongdoing by his own people and loves them still? 3. What injustice do I know of that is being done today that I need to address as God's person, sinful as I am myself?

**John:** 'He must increase, and I must decrease.' How could John say such a thing? The whole countryside had gone out to him, the fiery prophet, to be baptized. Even soldiers and tax collectors, and he never minced words with them. Repent. Do justice. And now, to end with a whimper instead of a bang? Just fade away? He must increase, and I must decrease? His own followers are wondering. The one you baptized, this Jesus, everyone is going to him. John just smiles. The One who is from above is above all. This One speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Why would anyone settle for less? John, why don't you just push your followers away...force them to go to Jesus... and life. The leaders of the religious party known as the Pharisees have heard of Jesus now. They know that he is making more disciples than John, becoming a bigger problem than ever John was. As lightning strikes the tallest tree, so they will ultimately strike Jesus. But John himself will not go out with a whimper. The powers of this world will not permit it. **Questions:** 1. How can I live every day so that Christ increases and I decrease, just like John? How can it actually become my joy—give me true happiness - to see Christ increase and I decrease? 2. Why do I often act more like the Pharisees and resist Christ's coming to complete ascendancy in my life?

**Prayer:** Lord, you increase, and let me decrease. In fact, Lord, let me be nothing, and you be everything. You be all in all. Make my words and actions so like yours, that people don't see me at all, but only you. Amen.

**Day 125.** Read Judges 21.1–Ruth 1.22; John 4.4-42;  
Psalm 105.1-15; and Proverbs 14.25.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Judges/Ruth:** The comedy of errors continues. The 'righteous' retribution the other tribes have inflicted on the whole tribe of Benjamin, they suddenly realize, is unbearable. Not only had they waged war against their kindred tribe of Benjamin, nearly annihilating them,

but they had also taken an oath before God that they would not give their children in marriage to the very few who survived. Only afterwards does it occur to them the punishment has been too harsh. They go before God in Bethel and weep bitterly a whole day. The next morning they offer sacrifices to God. And suddenly a loophole in the oath occurs to them—a possible solution to the dilemma they themselves created. Was everyone in Israel party to the oath? Everyone? Not everyone. The tribe of Jabesh Gilead had not come to fight with Israel and punish the evil in their midst. So they wage war on them, killing every one, except 400 young women who had never slept with a man. And Benjamin is restored into the fold, at the offer of peace...and a fresh start. Still there were not enough wives for the men. So the elders instructed the Benjaminites to go up for the festival in Shiloh, hide in the vineyards, and capture the girls of Shiloh as they come out to the dancing in the harvest. The men of Shiloh who also made the oath will be innocent of breaking it, because they did not consent in giving their daughters as brides. They have fulfilled the letter. But the spirit is far from them. Judges ends with the sad comment: In those days Israel had no king; everyone did exactly as they pleased. But not Ruth. Ruth the foreigner. Widowed at an early age. She refuses to stay with her own people, and gives up the only good chance she has of having a husband, having children...having a life. She says to her widowed mother-in-law, Naomi, 'Where you go I will go, where you lodge I will lodge; your God will be my God.' She even invokes God's wrath upon herself if she doesn't keep her word. Have you ever seen such faith in Israel? And from a Moabite, one of a nation whom God has said will never be permitted to stand in his temple, because of the way they treated Israel in the wilderness. **Questions:** 1. Why do I try to justify my actions—prop up my ego - especially when I am in the wrong? How many times have I done so today? 2. St. Paul himself will say, 'I don't understand my own actions.' Why do I keep going down a path after I have discovered it's wrong, as if 'two wrongs make a right'? 3. Why is my judgment upon others almost always too harsh, and why am I almost always too lenient on myself? How can I view and act toward myself and others as God sees and acts towards us all, with compassion and grace?

**John:** It's hot here at the well, and I am so thirsty. But here she comes now, right on cue. 'Will you give me a drink?' She is surprised...shocked, actually. Yes, I am Jewish and you are a Samaritan, sworn enemies, separated by religion as well as race. Yes, I am a man; and you are a woman...whom men of this age look down on as mere property, not persons. Yes, your life...well, let's just say you're experienced...well-experienced...been battered and beaten up. But I know something about yourself you don't even know...that no one around you seems to see. You are precious. You are a treasure, to God and to me. I want to give you a drink. Living waters. Drink this and you will never thirst again, never long for love or seek it in all the wrong places. Ah, you think I am a prophet because I say you have had five husbands and are living with a man now who is not your husband? Surprised? Curious because I reveal so much about you? I will show you more than that. God is Spirit and seeks those who will worship him in spirit and truth. God seeks someone who will truly love him. God is like you. He hungers for you and your love, with the very love you have searched for all your life. Who am I? I am the One sent to seek you, the One who was promised to you long ago. Are those tears? Yes...of joy. Ah, here

they come right on cue. Where have you guys been? Looking for kosher food? They won't look her in the eye. They won't look me in the eye either. They can't understand yet. Look around you! The harvest is ripe right now, right here. They're Samaritans, not people precious to God. Look, she is running away but not because of their stares. She runs to tell the very townspeople who look to berate her...to bring them...so they can meet me, too...the very people who despised her. I think I will stay here awhile...in the midst of these Samaritans. Yes...a good while, say three days. That will give them something to think about. My disciples will never forget this! **Questions:** 1. What biases and barriers do I have that make me blind to the 'harvest' of people precious to God right around me? 2. What does Jesus mean when he says God wants people to worship in Spirit and truth? Is my worship Spirited? Is my worship true, that is according to God's Word and way, not my own or of any human origin?

**Prayer:** It's a sad game I play; and I am always the loser, Lord. I endlessly justify myself and defend myself...against you, the last person I need to do so with...the last person I could possibly justify and defend myself to. You know all about me. And you love me enough to seek me out, break through all the protective barriers I build between us...and love me till I give in. Why do I struggle so against giving in to your love? I could say it is the world that has made me so, but it has only made me more so. The barriers are my own, built by my own hands...and actions...over a lifetime. How can you possibly love such a...what is that you call me...Precious person? That is what you call me. That is who I am in your eyes. Beloved. That's what you name me. That is your name for me - my Beloved. I have found the love I have longed for all my life. And I know others who long for this love. I must tell them about such love....help me do this, loving Lord.  
Amen

**Day 126.** Read Ruth 2.1-4.22; John 4.43-54;  
Psalm 105.16-36; and Proverbs 14.26-27.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Ruth:** It could be made into a movie. Or appear on a supermarket tabloid. Two widows are in danger of starving, so the young one decides to take a dangerous risk. She will go into the fields, where she will be at the mercy of the hired men, to glean a little of the grain that is left. The scripture then says, 'It so happened...' Some would think it was by accident, or chance, or luck. 'It so happened she found herself in the field of...the rich relative of her mother-in-law, who is...a bachelor. Can you see what is coming? Sure you can, if you know God and God's ways. The rich relative sees her hard at work...all day...and tells her to stick to his fields. He tells his foreman to pass the word: don't dare touch her. He tells her: 'Be sure to drink from the water jars the men fill, whenever you are thirsty.' She cannot believe this royal treatment. She asks in amazement, 'Why have I

-a foreigner-found such favor in your sight?' He has heard all about her, about her faithfulness to her mother-in-law, and how she came to live with a people who are not her own. She has character, and courage, and... a new God...THE God who blesses such compassion and faithfulness. The rich relative invites her to supper...in the field. He orders the men to let her gather right in among the crops and to drop some stalks on purpose for her. The romance is budding, soon to blossom, as the harvest proceeds. Naomi, the mother-in-law and relative of the rich man, counsels her: throw yourself at his feet...literally. She knows he will treat her honorably. When Ruth does, the rich relative warms to her even more: 'This kindness is greater than your earlier kindness to you mother-in-law, because you didn't go after the younger men.' And now comes the sudden twist in plot. Is this story going to be a comedy or tragedy? You know, if you know God and God's ways. Another man, as a closer relative to Naomi's dead husband, has a sort of 'right of first refusal.' He has the first right to procure the property, and Ruth is part of the package. The rich relative leaps into action, approaches the potential suitor in public, and coolly offers him the title. He jumps at the opportunity. Then, coolly, the rich relative plays his trump card. He reminds the would-be owner that a wife comes with the property. In fact, the son they would have together would own the property in the dead husband's name. He pulls out of the deal, because it would endanger his own estate. Wedding bells ring. It seems that good guys...and gals...do win, when God is involved. Oh, incidentally, the rich guy's name is Boaz. Quite a name, for quite a person. Ruth and he have a son whose name is almost as bad, Obed. And Obed has a son whose name is Jesse, and Jesse has a son named of all things...David. As in 'King.' In God's marvelous plan, a Moabite widow woman is the great grandmother of the greatest King of Israel. And an ancestor of his own Son, Jesus. What a story! What a God! **Questions:** 1. Who are my ancestors in faith, who made the decision to follow God and helped me know God? 2. How does remembering the thin line of faithful people stretching back to Jesus Christ himself, and back to Ruth and Boaz and beyond, change the way I think and act? Who will believe in God because of my life and witness for God?

**John:** I expected something different from Jesus. More respect for my position, perhaps. I am a busy man, as Jesus is busy. My boss is the king himself, though I bother him. Best to leave kings alone. I left all that important business behind when the physicians said my son was dying. What appointment or meeting compares to that, when your own child suddenly has, a meeting, an appointment, with death? I sought out Jesus because I heard he could help. Water to wine is impressive. No point going to my king. His personal command, his whole army, could not turn that situation around. Nor would he stir himself much for someone so insignificant. So I went to Jesus, in fact I begged Jesus; but he wouldn't come with me. He was genuinely angry, like a king whose word was questioned. 'Unless you see miraculous signs, you won't believe,' he said. What else could I do? I persisted, pleading 'Come with me, before my child dies.' And he... dismissed me. 'Go,' he ordered, as if he were a king- and I actually wished he were a king when he said what he said next: 'Your son will live!' As if he knew! How could he be so sure? And then I thought, he acts the way a king acts. He knows what real power is. A king is always sure, especially when others are not, in the crisis. So I decided right then, I will take him at his

word. I left for home, and I didn't hurry either. Why should I? The king had promised. It's more than a day's journey. Before I got there, the servants met me. I searched their faces as they hurried to me. They were deeply stirred; I could see. It wasn't grief exactly; it was something much deeper. I heard it in their voices. Wonder. Amazement. I was completely calm now; for I knew what they were feeling and what they would say, as if this were a scene in a play I had written...or read. My son was alive. I asked when the turn had come even though I already knew the answer: the exact instant when Jesus dismissed me...the same moment he dismissed the fever. That figures. A king can command from far away, with the same power and impact. Water to wine? What is that wonder compared to transforming death into life? **Questions:** 1. Does Jesus command my loyalty, confidence, and faithful action, even in a difficult situation or crisis, without being physically present? Do I believe he has the power to work powerfully today, in my life and through my life? 2. When is a time that God has displayed his power and love to rescue me, heal me, or help me to a better life? How has God made me a sign to others of his compassion and power to help, just as the official became a sign, pointing to God with his own story to share?

**Prayer:** Lord, my little one is dying. Your little ones are dying. So I cry to you for the little ones you have entrusted to me. All the little ones. As much as I love them, you love them more. Come with me, I beg, and you respond, 'Go!' I think I understand what you are saying. As I go, you are present in my going. And when I go, you are already there. Your love precedes my going; your love empowers my going. Very well, I will go, though I have no idea what to say or do when I go. Your promise is sufficient. 'Your little one will live.' Have your way. Come. Let's go. Amen.

## Through The Bible In One Year: Week 18

### Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Ruth 1.11-22

Psalm: 103.1-12

Second (New Testament) Lesson: John 4.13-30, 39.

Theme: Women of God

Sunday Worship Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation:

A mark of our fallen-ness is the injustice women have suffered all through history. Used and abused, they have suffered for the sinfulness of humanity, others' sins and their own. Yet, many faithful women have risen above the injustice and pain to shine like stars in the dark, night sky. Ruth, a widow herself, leaves the comfort of her kindred and country to care for Naomi, her widowed mother-in-law; and in God's mysterious plan, she becomes the great grandmother of David, King of Israel. She also becomes the ancestor of the King of Kings, Jesus Christ. Jesus goes to a well in Samaria to give the water of life to a

woman who had suffered hard in life. Breaking down all her protective walls and the barriers human society has built between them, he restores her through the love of God. Healed and made whole herself through Christ's compassion, she becomes an instrument to reconcile and heal others. Many believe through her witness; but the male disciples of Jesus still do not see the harvest right before them, because they do not see Samaritans...especially women Samaritans...as people God cares for. After the cross, they will understand. Christ will commission a woman, Mary Magdalene, who was freed of her own demons by Christ, to proclaim the good news first.