

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 24

Day 162. Read 1 Kings 8.1-66; Acts 7:51-8.13;
Psalm 129.1-8; and Proverbs 17.1.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: The festival might well have been the finest in all of Israel's history. To dedicate the temple, Solomon summoned all the officials and leaders; and all the people of Israel came together to celebrate. As the priests and Levites brought the Ark of the Covenant, the Tent of Meeting, and all the furnishings into the temple, so many sheep and cattle were sacrificed they could not be counted. The poles for carrying the Ark were so long that their ends could be seen in the Holy of Holies, the innermost sacred place, from the Holy Place before it. As soon as the priests put the Ark in place and withdrew, an impenetrable cloud filled the temple, so thick that the priests could not do their service. God had kept his promise. God had come to dwell in the midst of his people, in the house they had prepared for him. Solomon prayed that God would listen whenever his people made their prayer to him, turning toward the temple. Solomon prayed that in the face of every enemy, every disaster, and even their own apostasy, God would show mercy toward all who prayed toward the temple, "For they are your people and your inheritance, whom you brought out from slavery in Egypt." A vast assembly celebrated the festival for seven days before Solomon blessed them and sent them home. All rejoiced for the good thing the LORD had done for his people. God kept his promises. **Questions:** 1. Do I remember and give thanks for God's faithfulness and his promises to me? What are the main promises God has made to me (and everyone who believes) from the Bible? 2. Paul says in the New Testament that I am 'a temple of the Holy Spirit.' How does it change my attitude and actions to know that God, good to his promise, dwells in me as his temple? 3. Do I participate in worship, celebrating God's goodness together with other believers faithfully? Am I reaping the benefits of being part of a faith community while returning to God the thanks he deserves?

Acts: The tables have been turned. The accusers are now the ones on trial. With supernatural courage, Stephen confronts his hearers with the evidence of their own wrongdoing. Following in the footsteps of the persecutors in the past, they are repeating the wrong. They stopped their ears, dragged him out of the city, and began to stone him to death. While they vent their hatred on him, lifting stones to kill him, Stephen lifts up

as his last words a prayer for his persecutors: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” The prayer of Jesus Christ from the cross—‘Father forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing’—reverberates wherever his people are persecuted. And as they suffer, still showing compassion for their very oppressors, Christ shines through their words and deeds. The day Stephen died, the first martyr, a great persecution of the church began - encouraged by one man named Saul. Saul saw Stephen die, and heard his prayer. And Saul will become, when transformed by the forgiving love of Jesus Christ, the very answer to Stephen’s prayer that the sin not be held against him. **Questions:** 1. When I am called to account for my hope in Christ Jesus, do I stand tall like Stephen, even if it means to my hurt; or do I tend to waver or compromise? What would help me to have the confidence and fire of Stephen? 2. When someone wrongs me, do I tend to want revenge, nurse a grudge, or truly forgive the other person? 3. Whom do I need to be praying for that God would not hold their sin against them?

Prayer: My loving Lord, you are worthy of all praise, and honor, and glory forever. My gracious God, I thank you for your goodness. I rejoice in your wisdom. I stand in awe of your mighty power. Most of all, I worship and adore you for your steadfast love and mercy. You did not hold my sin against me, but for the sake of your Son crucified, you freely and fully forgive all the sins I have committed, I do commit, I ever will commit. May my heart, my mind, my body, my soul ever be a temple of your praise. And as you did not hold my sin against me, lead me to never hold others’ sins against them; but let me graciously lift them to you, the Source of grace and forgiveness. Amen.

Day 163. Read 1 Kings 9.1–10.29; Acts 8.14-40;
Psalm 130.1-8; and Proverbs 17.2-3.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: ‘Well begun is half done’ says the old proverb. Solomon began well enough. He prayed for wisdom. He built a house for God. Another proverb says, “All’s well that ends well.” A tombstone has the birthdate, followed by the death date, with a dash in the middle. That dash is the life. It is not easy to finish well in this world, however well we begin. After Solomon dedicates the temple, God appears a second time to him. “If you walk before me with integrity,’ God says, “I will establish your throne. But if you turn away, I will remove Israel from the land and abandon this temple.” It’s about relationship, not rules or rituals. The key is to ‘walk the talk.’ Solomon pulled a fast one on the neighboring king who supplied much of the materials for the temple, including a huge gift for God. In return, Solomon gave him twenty towns. Poor ones. Solomon conscripted people of the land not kindred to Israel into slave labor. Having known oppression and slavery in Egypt, Israel now is turning into an oppressor. Solomon undertakes great building projects, including creating fortress-cities as army outposts to strengthen his rule. His fame spreads, so that even the Queen of Sheba comes and brings him gifts out of the

bounty of Africa. He fashions two hundred large, golden shields and puts them in the temple treasury as the affluence grows; he fashions a great throne of ivory, overlaid with gold, as his own seat. He accumulated 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses—the finest weapons available - and even exported chariots and horses to neighboring countries. In Solomon, the “golden age” of Israel has come. But “All that glitters is not gold,” the old proverb says. This is only physical gold. His spiritual mettle is something less than golden.

Questions: Why is it that times of success and prosperity may lead me farther from God, while difficulty and troubles lead me closer to God? Which am I in now? How is my current situation affecting my relationship with God? 2. Do my business methods, workplace ethics, and dealings with others reflect God’s own character and actions? 3. What is my greatest challenge in my workplace or dealings with others currently? How can I show forth God’s character in this challenge?

Acts: Samaritans accepted the Word of God?! Samaritans?! Those enemies of Israel, who had co-mingled the true faith with other religions, just as they had co-mingled the blood line of Abraham with foreigners—accepted the Word! It was what Jesus had promised: “You will be my witnesses in Judea...and Samaria...when you have received power from on high.” Now that the Holy Spirit has filled his people full to overflowing, where will it stop? Not until it reaches the ends of the world. Who will stop it? No one. It won’t stop until everyone has heard...and accepted the Word. Peter and John traveled to Samaria, prayed for the Samaritans who had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus, laid hands on them (actually touching Samaritans?) and...they received the Holy Spirit. It’s infectious. It’s spreading like the flu, from one Spirit filled person to someone uninfected who comes into contact with them, only faster than the flu. Someone tries to buy that power with money. He is rebuked. It can’t be gotten that way...or that cheaply. It is priceless. It can be ‘purchased’ only as truly priceless things can: by giving your whole life for it. The Spirit leads Philip to walk in the less traveled desert road, to run up to a chariot and speak to a stranger...who at that particular moment is reading from the Bible the prophecy of the Lamb who was slain for sin...and the man is baptized into the Lamb. The Spirit suddenly takes Philip away...to proclaim the Word from one town to another until he comes to Caesarea. The Spirit is moving. Moving fast!

Questions: 1. Do I listen and look for the Spirit to lead me through my day, considering every event and situation not as accident but as an opportunity, engineered by God himself for me to work for him? 2. Who are the ‘Samaritans’ in my community whom people may consider second class citizens or second-rate people, not worthy of too much attention or incapable of responding well if approached with the Good News? What can I do to help reach them with God’s love? 3. Like Simon, who tried to buy the power to bring the Spirit upon people for his personal gain, how much of my life and work for Christ is motivated by my own benefit and how much of it is truly for God or the benefit of other people?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, fill me full to overflowing. When I rise in the morning, call me forth to a new day to follow you. Open my eyes to your working. Let me see every event, every situation, every person as put there by you, an opportunity to show forth the Spirit of Christ in inviting words and servant actions. Open my eyes especially to see

those I overlook...or ignore...in my ignorance...as being beneath my attention... or beyond your power to touch. No one is beyond your power, if I was not. Amen.

Day 164. Read 1 Kings 11.1–12.19; Acts 9.1-25;
Psalm 131.1-3; and Proverbs 17.4-5.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: Solomon outlived his first love. “As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods.” He crossed the boundary between love and lust. Far beyond any real need, he sought some sort of comfort or security or even success through—it can’t be called relationships. How do you have a relationship with wife 527 or 682? Do you even know their names? Do you really know anything about them? The boundaries he exceeded were not just of number...but of country and faith as well. Many of the marriages were simply political, to solidify alliances and secure the state. Pharaoh’s daughter was such a wife, but there were others....many others...from the countries all around. They brought an alliance...safety and security...and their gods and goddesses. There was Ashtoreth, the fertility goddess, and Molech, the war god to whom children were sacrificed. And as he grew old, Solomon’s heart turned...away from the living God...towards gods of wood, and stone, and metal. Solomon forgot the living God who had even appeared to him personally—twice- in favor of gods who could neither see, or hear, or speak, or move at all. When someone...or something...comes between someone and the living God, consequences inevitably occur. A kingdom based on unbelief...or belief in false gods, which is the same...cannot stand. Solomon ruled ruthlessly. His son threatens to be even more ruthless, against the wise counsel of older men who see truly. The northern ten tribes of Israel rebel, all because Solomon rebelled against the living God. He who asked for wisdom, who wrote the proverb, “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” did not practice what he proclaimed. **Questions:** 1. What friends, family members, fellow workers, neighbors, or others help me to know the living God more? Which pull me away or weaken my relationship with God? 2. As I grow older, am I compromising my faith with the world, or am I more able to stand against the influences, subtle or obvious, which call me to compromise? 3. What kind of influence am I having on those around me and, especially, those nearest to me? Am I influencing them toward God or away? How can I increase my influencing power for God?

Acts: He begged for the privilege of putting the enemies of his faith in prison. He went out of his way to get permission from the most powerful person. Saul sought and received a letter from the very top - the high priest himself - so he could put in prison any men—and even women—belonging to the Way, that new cult that was undermining their religion. He was on fire for the faith and for God...only he did not even really know God...and his religion was unreal. So he, who was going to capture people who belonged to the Way, was himself surprised and captured on the way. A blinding light for the one who walked in

darkness. The strange Voice calling, ‘Why are you persecuting me?’ The Voice said not just ‘men and women’ or even ‘my people’ but ‘me;’ for everything done to his people is done to him personally - he loves them so and identifies with them so closely. Saul, later called Paul after the LORD called and claimed him personally, will write of all who believe in Jesus: “Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.” To hurt his people is to hurt his living body. To persecute them is to persecute him. “Who are you, Lord?” he stammers. Saul had sought a commission from the most powerful person in his religion. Saul doesn’t even recognize the One who is actually the most powerful person on earth...or in heaven - Jesus Christ. Three days of blindness follow for the one who thought he saw so clearly when, in fact, he saw nothing. Then, one of the people he was coming to arrest and put in prison was sent to free him from the prison of his own ideas of what God wanted in his life and how he could serve God. “Brother” this one called him, laid hands on him, and he received his sight. For the first time in his life, he ‘saw.’ Saul was baptized and began to proclaim the very Lord he had persecuted. God had turned an enemy into a friend. **Questions:** 1. When have I thought I knew what God wanted me to do, only to find out later I was really following my own will and not his? Whom have I hurt in my zealously to follow God? Whom have I neglected to care for as I should and share Christ with them? 2. What are my ‘blind spots’ today? How can I get to know the Lord better, so I can always be following his will?

Prayer: Lord, I will see truly only when I realize I see nothing right if I don’t see through your eyes. Holy Spirit, give me the mind and heart of Christ, so I may truly see. Break down the obstacles I build between us, especially the religion, rules, and rituals I make in place of a real relationship with you. Let me see - like Christ - that enemies are not enemies to you, but people beloved by you, whom you desire to know you and your love for them. You turned me from an enemy to a friend. Use me, my words and actions, to turn someone to you. Amen.

Day 165. Read 1 Kings 12.20-13.34; Acts 9.26-43;
Psalm 132.1-18; and Proverbs 17.6.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: It was the war that wasn’t. Solomon’s son mobilizes his army to make war on his relatives to the north. He wants to take by force what he believes is his by right. God’s word comes to the army: ‘Do not fight against your brothers. Go home, everyone of you. Dividing the kingdom is my doing.’ It is the consequence of the faithlessness of all Israel in not following the One who is the true King, God himself. There are two kings over Israel, because there isn’t the one King over Israel. Neither king is secure, because they are not securely following the King. The king of the north worries that all Israel will revert to following Solomon’s son when they go, as God has commanded, to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. Instead, he builds two temples...and puts in them, not an ark of made of

wood and holding just two stone tablets, but idols...golden calves. 'These are your gods who brought you out of Egypt,' he tells the people. To justify his actions, he pleads he's doing it for the people's own good, saying, 'It is too much for you to have to go all the way to Jerusalem.' He goes further still. He multiplies shrines on the high places and appoints his own priest, not of the Levites chosen by God. He even set up his own festival, which God did not command. Religion is used as a weapon to wield power and control people. But God does not want religion. God longs for relationship. This kingdom will come crashing down. Both these kingdoms will. Their days are numbered from the beginning.

Questions: 1. How do I try to control God by setting my own limits to what God can have or do with my time, energies, and resources? 2. What do I tend to put too much reliance upon, making it a sort of idol? 3. Do I have any jealousies or insecurities that cause me to mistrust or resist others with proper authority over me? Am I properly respectful and obedient to those God has put in authority over me, especially in my faith community?

Acts: You want to bring Saul? Saul!? You must be kidding! He wants to join the disciples here in Jerusalem? Why, Saul wanted to throw the disciples in Damascus in prison!. It's a trick. Doubtless, when he has penetrated our circle, he will turn and denounce us all. He is really seeking to destroy us. Barnabas, how could you ever trust him? How could you bring him here among us? Will you vouch for him with your life? Your life could well be forfeit, along with ours, if he is just feigning faith. You say the Lord appeared to him on the Damascus road. You say he then preached Jesus fearlessly there, when he had gone there to imprison Jesus' followers. Well, we will take your word about him, Barnabas. Since you vouch for him, we will let him go in and out among us with full freedom. And just look at him now! He, who persecuted Christ, is proclaiming Christ boldly. Now he, who stood by as Stephen was stoned to death, is himself being hunted to be put to death for preaching Christ. We must send him away where he will be safe. Little did we suspect that by sending him away, we will fulfill Christ's own commission to be his witnesses 'to the ends of the earth.' And little did we know how much Saul would suffer if we sent him away to be safe.

Questions: 1. Am I in a small group, or am I seeking one, as Saul sought to get into the group of disciples in Jerusalem? Do I know someone like Barnabas who is a part of a small group, whom I can ask to introduce me to the group, so I can grow further in Christ? 2. Who is mentoring me to be a better disciple of Jesus? Have I sought out a more mature Christ-follower to help me grow in faith and service to God? 3. Whom have I brought onto God's team, as Barnabas brought Saul? Whom am I mentoring to be a disciple and have impact for Christ?

Prayer: Jesus, I need you, and I need your community. It is through your people and their faith, that I come to know you truly. It is through knowing you through your community that I will come truly alive in you, with you, and for you. Lead me deeper into your community, your body alive and at work in this world. And let me be your instrument to lead others into your body...and into your life. Amen.

Day 166. Read 1 Kings 14.1–15.24; Acts 10.1-23;
Psalm 133.1-3; and Proverbs 17.7-8.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: Both kings, north and south, led their people to worship other gods...which were really no gods. The fate of Israel is sealed. The king of the north sends his wife in disguise to inquire of God through his blind (physically) prophet about his son, heir to his throne, who is gravely ill. He learns more than he bargained for. God, who sees through all deceptions and into the future as well, declares a day of judgment coming upon both kingdoms. Both will be carried away captive to a foreign land. The warning which God gave Israel through Moses, and again through Samuel, will come true. But there is still hope. The king of the south's son, Asa, rises to rule faithfully, following God with his whole heart as his "father David" had done, turning his back on ways of his earthly father. He rids the land of the idols his father had made, expels the shrine prostitutes that were part of the fertility religions, and even removed his grandmother as queen mother because she made an Asherah pole—used in the fertility goddess, Asherah's, worship. How could such a faithful son come from such a faithless father? Spiritually, he is a 'Son of David'. His very being points toward the true Son of David who will restore people to God's kingdom again through his cross and resurrection. **Questions:** 1. Who have been the good, spiritual influences in my life, my true spiritual fathers and mothers, who helped me know and follow Jesus? 2. What influences among my family members, friends, fellow workers, neighbors and other lead me away from God or weaken my witness and service for God? How can I not succumb to their influence, while continuing to care for them and influence them for Christ? 3. What kind of influence am I having on those around me? Am I witnessing clearly and consistently for Christ through my words and actions?

Acts: They are miles apart in many ways. Physically, they were separated by just a few miles. Culturally, they are literally worlds apart. One was a fisherman by trade, the other a seasoned soldier. One was a peasant, the other an important officer wielding much worldly power. One was Jewish, the other Roman. One followed an earthly emperor who wore a golden crown, the other followed the One whose kingdom was not of this world, whose only crown in this world was a crown of thorns. But God was bringing them together. First there were barriers to break down. The Roman centurion must receive his orders from his true King: "Send for Simon, called Peter, at a certain place." The centurion recognizes true power and yields to it. He sends at once. But God must break down a bigger barrier in the fisherman he called to fish for men: the religious rules that kept him apart from the fish. "Don't call anything impure that I call pure," God tells Peter through a vision thrice repeated. Three times repeated for the one who denied three times, to make sure he gets the point. Peter protests and then ponders what it might mean. God gives him a message and a sign. "Three men are coming looking for you. Don't hesitate to go with them, for I sent them." As the message is coming, just then the messenger comes.

Clearly God is in control. All is happening according to God's plan. Peter invites them in to be his guests, these foreign emissaries of the man who before might have been his enemy, they were so far apart. They were foreigners no longer. Now they are Peter's guests. **Questions:** 1. What limits do I put on God in my understanding and actions? What things do I hesitate to do...or avoid doing completely...that God wants me to do? 2. Who is God calling me to look at and treat not as a 'foreigner' but as someone God wants to be a 'guest'? 3. When I pray, do I expect and listen for God's messages in reply? Do I believe that God takes personal interest in me and my circumstances and will use me, as he used Peter and Cornelius?

Prayer: Lord, so often my prayers are like bullets I fire at you. I have a long list of things I need or want you to do for me. I set the agenda and call the shots. But at other times I don't even imagine or believe you might want to speak with me. Too often I feel that you really couldn't...or shouldn't...be that interested in me. I am so insignificant. I am so inadequate. Yet, you singled out a fisherman and a fighter because you cared for them. And you used these ordinary men to change the world. You can do anything, and that means caring for me personally and taking special interest in the particulars of my life. Let me listen for you...and to you. Speak, Lord; your servant is listening. Amen.

Day 167. Read 1 Kings 15.25–17.24; Acts 10.23-48; Psalm 134.1-3; and Proverbs 17.9-11.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: The cycle of violence begins to repeat like a badly- broken record. The king of north Israel is treacherously assassinated by an underling wanting to rule. He immediately moves to destroy the whole house of the king he killed, fearing retribution. God had predicted the destruction of the first usurper's, Jeroboam's, whole household as a consequence of his rebellion that first divided Israel, but especially because Jeroboam led the northern tribes to forsake God and worship idols to secure his own rule. Now God predicts through another prophet the destruction of the new king who had become king by treachery. On and on. Round and round. Reap what you sow. The spiral is descending deeper and deeper into degradation, as one king outdoes the previous in evil. Finally Ahab arises, 'Who did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of the kings before him.' He will persecute the prophets of God, through whom God has sought to call Israel back to himself and to break the spiraling cycle of death. God raises up his prophet, Elijah, just for this time, trying, yet one more time, to call Israel back to himself. With unblinking eyes, God watches it all. There is nothing in this world like God's perfect vision, and this cycle of kill and be killed is nothing like the perfect Vision God has for his people. **Questions:** 1. What wrongs do I tend to repeat again and again? Anger? Lust? Coveting possessions?

Greed? Gluttony? Procrastination? Lying? 2. How does God's Word and God's community of faith (real relationships with other believers) help me to recognize these problem areas in my character and life? How does God's Word and community help me receive healing for these? 3. Whom do I know who needs my love, care, and help in breaking a destructive cycle in their life? What is God calling me to do to show them his love and the freedom that can be theirs if they turn to God?

Acts: Whenever one follows God, safety and Self-preservation are not an option. Peter is on a journey with God that will take him not just to a new location in physical space, but to a whole new self. As with every journey, there are dangers. The first is pride, the sense of Self-importance. A Roman centurion grovels before him when Peter enters his home. Imagine the temptation: an officer of the despised occupying army which subjugated your nation now bows before you. Peter passes the test, lifting the centurion up and saying simply, 'I am only a man myself.' Already the radical nature of God's equalizing love is shining forth. It breaks down the barriers of culture and race dividing them. Peter stammers the radical new truth that is rising in his mind and heart like the dawn: "I see now that God shows no favoritism but bestows his favors on all people who trust him and turn to him, seeking to do what is right." He proclaims the love of Christ crucified and risen for all. And the same Holy Spirit that came upon Peter and the other Christ-followers of Jewish descent at Pentecost floods on all who hear the message, the centurion and all his Roman companions. Peter poses a question, as much to himself as to all his Jewish-Christian companions: 'Can anyone forbid Baptism for these foreigners, since they, too, have received the same Spirit, just as we did?' It is God's gift. Who is to deny another of God's gifts—Baptism—to the ones to whom God has given his most basic gift and treasure: forgiveness by unmerited love through faith in Jesus Christ. **Questions:** 1. Where was I in my journey of faith with God ten years ago? Where am I today? 2. What have been some of the key moments or movements of spiritual growth in my relationship with God over the years? Who were God's instruments or catalysts to help make that growth possible? What were the crises that precipitated the growth, and how was God using them to mature me in faith and service? 3. What has surprised me most in my adventure of faith in following Christ? What surprising people has God called me into relationship with, or is God currently calling me to cultivate relationship with, for him?

Prayer: O God, thank you for breaking the cycles of pain in my life—the pain I cause others, and the pain others have caused me. Oh, I still hurt others I love, again and again. Forgive me for that. Free me from that, more and more, I pray. But even more I pray, teach me to forgive, for that is what breaks the cycle and frees both them and me. You surprise me most, when you change me, God, in ways I thought would never change. Oh, I partly didn't believe you could change me...and partly didn't want you to change me. But you have...and you are.... That is what will surprise people around me most, to see me changed to be more like you. It truly surprises me. Please...please...keep surprising me, my most surprising God. Amen.

Day 168. Read 1 Kings 18.1-46; Acts 11.1-30; Psalm 138.1-21; and Proverbs 17.12-13.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: The drought has been severe. No, that's wrong. Not the drought, not singular. Two droughts. A lack of physical water, but what is worse, a lack of God's life-giving Word, which another of God's prophets will liken to the rain and the snow coming down from heaven. For three years the skies have been empty of rain. For three years, the prophet Elijah has hidden for his life beyond the boundaries of Israel in a foreign land. Now the Word came to him to go back, to confront Ahab and promise him rain, as a show of God's power...the power of God's Word which the king hates and fears. But first another display, to make his point. A competition...between prophets. At Elijah's bidding, Ahab brings together all the prophets of Baal, his god, to offer sacrifice. Elijah stands alone against them all, as the sole prophet of God. The rules of the competition are rigorous. Both are to build an altar, prepare wood for the fire, slay the sacrificial animal, and put in on the wood and wait...praying for their god/God to send fire. The prophets of Baal pray morning to noon, putting on quite a show, cutting themselves in their fervor, as is their custom. They are quite sincere...but sincerely wrong in placing their trust in a god who is not real and cannot act. Elijah taunts them, and then adds another unnecessary restriction on himself and his sacrifice to humiliate them further. Pour on water! Three times! Lots of water, until the wood is wet, and the trench dug around the altar filled to overflowing. Eliah prays a simple prayer of two sentences, asking God to turn the hearts of the people back to him, the true God. Lightning strikes, consuming the sacrifice, the altar, and even the water in the trench. The competition concludes with the destruction of the false prophets who, by their false teaching, have destroyed the nation spiritually. Then God sends rain. Ahab sees the power of God at work...but won't change his ways.

Questions: 1. What other religions or faith claims are active in my community or among the people I am in relationship with? How can I be faithful to the one God while relating with and ministering to them? 2. When given opportunities to talk about God and my faith with those who don't share it, do I change the subject or try to speak truthfully and lovingly about God? 3. How can I remain loving and listening to others while at the same time not compromise the truth that there is only one God, the God of the Bible?

Acts: Criticism comes quickly to Peter, not from without but from within: 'You were a guest in the home of foreigners and even had meal fellowship with them,' Peter's own companions accuse him. It is a violation of the rules they had been brought up with, the religion they knew before they knew Jesus Christ. Peter simply tells the story of what God had revealed...and done. The Voice from heaven had said, three times to make sure Peter got the message, 'Do not call anyone impure that God has made clean.' The exact prediction of three people coming was confirmed as the message was being given. As he proclaimed the salvation by grace through faith in Jesus to the foreigners, the Holy Spirit

came upon them, just as on the Jewish believers at Pentecost. The same Spirit! His accusers are stunned...and silenced...at God's goodness: 'Repentance unto life has even been granted to foreigners by God!' The floodgates have been opened by God, and the flood is made faster by the very persecution that sought to contain it. Christ-followers shared the good news of life through faith in Christ as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, Cyrene, and Antioch. More workers are needed to disciple the new believers; so Barnabas seeks out Saul, and together they teach great numbers. And there in Antioch the followers of Jesus, previously called The Way, are first given the name 'Christians,' which means 'little christs.' They became known as little christs because they reflected Christ in their giving and serving the needs of others. **Questions:** 1. When did I first truly understand and accept the 'repentance unto life' through faith in Jesus? Have I yet, or do I still need to? What am I waiting for, if I haven't yet? 2. Would the people around me where I work and live characterize me as a 'little christ' because my words and actions reflect Christ? Why, or why not? 3. Have I ever been questioned or been criticized by other believers for being 'out there'—that is, for doing something that my faith and following of God led me to do? Why, or why not?

Prayer: God, help me to stand tall, speaking the truth in love, against both criticism and compromise in following you. You are the true God. There is no other. Let me say that...and show that...in loving words and serving actions that reflect my Lord, Jesus Christ. May the people around me see you in me and through me. Cleanse and wash the window that I am meant to be, more and more; so I am more and more transparent, and people see you more and more clearly. And God, forgive the dirt and the flaws that are mine. May my openness to admit them to others, to own my mistakes and failings, be one of the ways you are seen most clearly as who you truly are: the God who loves...and forgives. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 24

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): 1 Kings 18.21-39

Psalm: 130.1-8

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Acts 11.1-18 .

Theme: The Inclusive Exclusivity of God (And Christians)

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 24:

The amazing message of the Bible is there is only one God, and that this God is a personal being. All other gods are apparitions. Furthermore, there is only one way to come into relationship with this God and, therefore, to receive true life: his way. The Christian faith is, in this sense, very exclusive. But another amazing message of the Bible and the Christian faith is that this one way to this one God is open to everyone, simply through faith in Jesus Christ. No striving after worthiness is necessary, nor is it effective. Everyone can come to 'repentance unto life' as the early Christians responded when Peter described how God had chosen and called the Roman centurion, Cornelius. Cornelius received the same Holy Spirit as the Jewish believers. God had broken down the dividing walls between people, so that it is clearly seen that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is acceptable to God. The world puts forward many gods which people are called to serve. In Elijah's time, the people of Israel were led astray to worship the god, Baal, and forsake the living God. In a mighty competition, Elijah demonstrates the fallacy of following false gods and the reality of the living God who answers prayer and acts in history. Only the God of the Bible will truly satisfy the desire of all people for real life, because only that God is real. The God who is One loves each person he has created and wants all to come to him to have life. God's people follow God in loving everyone, in hopes to lead all to the One, so they might have life.