

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 27

Day 183. Read 2 Kings 20.1-22.2; Acts 21.17-36;
Psalm 150.1-6; and Proverbs 18.9-10.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: 'Put your house in order; you are going to die.' If that word were delivered from God's messenger, as it was from the prophet, Isaiah, to King Hezekiah of Judah, how would you respond? Get depressed, perhaps? Protest? Pray? Hezekiah did all three. He turned his face to the wall, prayed a prayer of angry protest, and wept bitterly. Would such a prayer, raised in such emotions, have any effect at all on the sovereign God of the universe? Before Isaiah gets out of the building after delivering the message, God stops him in his tracks and sends him back with another message: 'I have heard your prayer and seen your tears...request granted!' God promised to heal him...and did. He added fifteen years to his life. Oh, the power of prayer. Perhaps it was because God knew who...and what...would come after Hezekiah, who had been so faithful to God. His son, Manasseh, was twelve when he became king, ruled fifty-five years, and 'did what was evil in the sight of the Lord' all throughout his reign.' The good that Hezekiah did was undone by his son. He rebuilt the pagan shrines on the hills and even put altars to idols in the temple dedicated to God in Jerusalem. He consulted mediums and spiritists, dabbling in the occult. He shed much innocent blood. He undid all the good his father had done, including the good his heavenly Father had done for them. Led by Manasseh, the people of Israel did more evil than even the people God drove out from the Promised Land to give it to them. After Manasseh dies, Hezekiah's grandson reigns...for just two years before he is assassinated. Because they wouldn't put their house in order, God will see it is done through the powerful political foes and forces around Israel. But just when the darkness appears deepest, a star is rising on the horizon. A new king of Judah, Josiah. What will he be like? Will he deepen the darkness....or kindle the light? **Questions:** 1. Am I building up or undoing the heritage of faith given to me? How? 2. When I pray, do I put on airs, using guarded words, or am I just totally honest and free to express my true thoughts and feelings as Hezekiah did? 3. How strong and personal is my relationship with God? How good am I at listening to his will and doing it, or am I more inclined to do my own will and go my own way? More like Isaiah and Hezekiah, or like Manasseh?

Acts: Rumor and gossip has painted a false picture of Paul. The word is going around that he teaches the Jewish Christians to forgo circumcision for their sons and not follow the customs of the Old Testament faith. Nothing is further from the truth; and in order to prove it, Paul himself is to lead some young believers in the customary purification rites. In the temple, Paul is accused wrongly that, 'The man who teaches all people against our people, the scriptures, and the temple has brought foreigners into the temple and defiled it!' Such an uproar follows that the Romans bring out the guard, seize Paul, and seek to find out why the riot began. Accusations flew about like birds, none agreeing; so the commander took Paul into the barracks, while the mob—in echoes of another mistrial and the crucifixion that followed it—cried, 'Away with him!' In following Christ, the servant is never above the Master. What the Master suffered, so the servant can expect. **Questions:** 1. Have I ever been painted falsely by rumor or gossip for trying to follow Christ? If not, is it because I haven't been risking anything for Christ, by reaching out to others who are different from normal 'church folk,' for instance? 2. How- or what - do I suffer for Christ, specifically because I bear his name and seek to follow him?

Prayer: Lord, thank you for all the faithful who have come before me, and because of whom I have this living faith in Jesus. God, use me to build on what they have built for you, extending your kingdom and glory. Forgive me when, through neglect or busyness, I weaken what you have done or prevent what you want to do. Give me strength, courage, and above all, love, to follow you in all things, not counting the consequences or being deflected from following you. Amen.

Day 184. Read 2 Kings 22.3-23.30; Acts 21.37–22.16;
Psalm 1.1-6; and Proverbs 18.11-12.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: Josiah wants to restore the temple building and ends by restoring the faith relationship with God himself, all by discovering the vital connection with God: his Word. At first, the lower official who finds the book passes it through the chain to his superior, who hesitates before deciding to show it to the king. When he does, he simply reports, "The priest gave me a book," saying nothing about its contents...or Source. The news it includes is not good, like the lab test that comes back 'Cancer.' A basic rule when working with royalty is never be the bearer of bad news. There is justification. The king tears his royal robe in mourning; he is so upset by what he learns. He sends his trusted assistant to inquire of God about what the scriptures say. Hulda, the prophetess, brings God's message: every disaster warned about in the book will come true because God's people have forsaken God to worship idols their own hands have made. But because the king mourned and humbled himself, the disaster would not fall in his lifetime. Whew! Now the king can rest content, at least that the trouble will not affect him in his days. But Josiah doesn't rest contented. He calls together all the priests, prophets, and people in

Jerusalem, and *reads the book to them aloud himself!* Josiah renews the covenant relationship with God, so long forgotten and so often broken. The spiritual renewal sweeps the capital city to the hilltop shrines in the backwoods' byways. He removed the male, shrine prostitutes who made their home in the temple of God while serving the fertility gods and goddesses that desecrated it. He desecrated the place near Jerusalem where parents sacrificed their children by fire to Molech, burning them alive. He removed all the 'high places'—the hill top shrines to all the foreign gods and goddesses that Solomon had built when he forsook God to please his foreign wives and concubines. The King gave the order to celebrate the festival of God's delivering them from slavery—the Passover—with a faithfulness never before seen. Nevertheless, the consequences have already been set in motion; and God will not prevent them from coming. Josiah, himself, falls fighting the Pharaoh of Egypt, caught between him and the other superpower, Assyria. Only the King of kings will finally be able to deliver God's people and turn them back into real relationship with him again. **Questions:** 1. Do I use my Bible, or is it shelved somewhere out of sight and mind? 2. When I read God's Word, do I allow it to change my life? Do I listen when it challenges me? Do I put into practice what I read there, even if it costs me my comfort, time, or resources? 3. What can I do to deepen my relationship with God? What needs to go in my calendar and activities, to provide more time with and for God? What new things do I need to do that I am not doing now?

Acts: Two languages! Paul first addresses the Roman commander in Greek, then speaks to the crowd in Aramaic. When they hear a familiar language being spoken, they listen. Paul also speaks the language of all humans: a story. He shares his personal story. He shares the story of how God's story intersected his individual story. How he persecuted the followers of the Way (that is, the one who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, Jesus Christ) to their death. How God knocked him out of the saddle, quite literally, with a blinding light, blinded him in order to help him see. How God sent him to proclaim the very faith he had persecuted. Incredible story...literally unbelievable...unless the supernatural power of God is at work in such a one as Paul, the persecutor and killer. No wonder they listen! To the Story. Paul's story...and His story—the story with a capital 'S.' Shall we call it HiStory? **Questions:** 1. What is my personal story (my spiritual autobiography) of what God has done in and for me, that I can share with others so they can become part of God's story? 2. Am I ready at a moment's notice, like Paul, to share my story? 3. How can I listen to the stories (experiences and needs) of others, so I can better share with them God's story?

Prayer: God, my love for you...and service for you...changes like the phases of the moon, sometimes bright and sometimes nowhere to be seen. Forgive me and renew me when I wander from you or am forgetful of you. Make me more alive in you, and in the wonder of your love for me, shown most of all in the death and resurrection of your Son for me. Let me share my story with others, however much it might shame me; so you will shine all the brighter for them, and they may come to be part of your great story of redemption. Amen.

Day 185. Read 2 Kings 23.32-25.30; Acts 22.17-23.10; Psalm 2.1-12; and Proverbs 18.13.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: Three months is not much time to rule a kingdom. That's all Josiah's son is given before the Pharaoh of Egypt takes him away in chains, imposes tribute on Judah, and places his own person on the throne as superpowers like to do. The new king rebels against Egypt when Babylon sends its army and then rebels against Babylon. He is a political opportunist. His son surrenders when Babylon comes to reassert its primary role of power and is carried away to vanish out of sight in a Babylonian prison. For the first time, the privileged, professional people of Judah are carried away to a foreign land, leaving only the poorest people of the land. They suffered the same fate as the northern, ten tribes of Israel had more than a century earlier, without learning anything from history. Babylon puts its own puppet on the throne, who himself rebels after just a few years. It's never nice to sport with a superpower. Babylon comes bent on revenge and exacts it by killing the king's sons in his sight before blinding his eyes, imprisoning him in darkness and dreadful memories, before imprisoning him, physically, to die in Babylon. A governor is appointed to rule the land for Babylon, but he is assassinated by patriots as a traitor. The few remaining people of Israel flee to Egypt for refuge, fearing Babylonian retribution. But in Babylon, the king of Judah so long imprisoned—for thirty seven years in fact—is released from his captivity, is clothed with royal robes and is seated at the Babylonian king's own banquet table, above the other kings invited there. The captive is set free. The humble one is lifted up. The God who works wonders is stirring. The stage has been set for the true King who is coming. **Questions:** 1. With whom do I tend to vacillate and change my decisions or plans, simply because it's them? Why do I do that? Is it for good, or does it cause trouble? 2. When and how has God humbled me to bring me closer to him or caused me to heed him better? When, and how, has he lifted me up and blessed me, as he did the captive king of Judah? Do I receive both equally from God's hands? 3. Who is captive to something whom I can help to free for life with God? What can I do to help lift them up to true freedom with God?

Acts: When he gets to the part of the story about being sent to foreigners, his hearers have had enough. They don't like the story. If it were a movie, they might have demanded their money back; but since it's a live performance, they simply call for him to be killed. Just barely, the Roman commander rescues Paul from 'certain death.' He orders Paul to be flogged and questioned—that is tortured to tell—why people are crying for his death. As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul plays his trump card. "Is it lawful," he asks "to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been tried, much less found guilty?" Paul is a Roman, too. That gets results. When you mess with Roman citizens, you mess with Rome itself, and Rome doesn't like its power being messed with. That's one of the reasons they killed Jesus. He said he was a king, and people said he said not to pay taxes to Rome. Paul

is spared 'examination' and even allowed to address the ruling council of Judea. Here he plays another trump card...the resurrection! 'I am on trial,' he shouts, 'because I believe in the resurrection!' The council is thrown into an uproar, because the leading leaders—the High Priests and priests—teach that there is no resurrection or spirits, while the majority believe there are. From one uproar to another, there is Paul at the center. And in each uproar he sees...and seizes...the opportunity to proclaim the truth: Jesus Christ crucified and risen. **Questions:** 1. What is the toughest 'scrape' I have ever been in for following Jesus Christ? 2. When it comes to recognizing and using opportunities God gives me to share my faith with others, how am I? Alert and willing? Surprised and unready? 3. What can I do to be more alert and better prepared for opportunities to share the love and faith of Christ with others around me?

Prayer: God, how many times today have I let slip by opportunities to serve you by serving others and sharing your love with others? How many did I yesterday? How many will I tomorrow? I can't count them. You don't count them, and won't, because you love me. But because you love them—the people I overlook in the opportunities I miss—do whatever it takes to open my eyes to see them, my hands to help them, my lips to speak to them of your love for them. Whatever it takes. Amen.

Day 186. Read 1 Chronicles 1.1-2.17; Acts 23.11-35;
Psalm 3.1-8; and Proverbs 18.14-15.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: Is there anything duller than genealogy? Long lists of dead people? But look closer. Look who appears in this long list of relatives: the progenitors of foreign lands like Egypt (Ham), Canaan, and Edom—often the sworn enemies of Israel. There they appear, right beside faithful people like Adam, Noah, and Abraham. Look who is not there—most of the mothers and sisters—are not mentioned, though they are essential to the long line continuing. But a few women are mentioned...bold women...strong women with surprising stories: Tamar, Zeruiah and Abigail. The branches of the tree are being followed from the root in Adam to the branch of Abraham and on to the smaller branches—narrowing down to just one family and one son: David. God's plan is to focus finally on one person, the Son of David; and by focusing on this One, to include the whole human race, women as well as men, in life with him forever. In him a new human race will come into being, restored in right relationship with God as sons and daughters again. **Questions:** 1. Who are my physical family from whom I am physically descended? Do I honor my roots? 2. Who are my spiritual parents and grandparents, my faith fathers and mothers, my spiritual grandmothers and grandfathers, through whom God gave me this saving faith relationship with him through Jesus Christ? Do I thank them and thank God for them? 3. For whom am I being a spiritual parent to 'bring them to life' in Christ?

How many spiritual children and grandchildren will I have listed in God's genealogy book? Who is my next 'child'?

Acts: God appears and speaks to Paul in the prison at night. He encourages Paul in a surprising way. 'Take heart,' he says, 'but he doesn't say 'because I am going to set you free.' 'No,' he says 'Take heart; for you will testify about me in Rome, just as you have here in Jerusalem.' The plan is working, God says; so work the plan. It's time to move on to the big show. Prime time. All that came before has been preparation. Now you will go to the very heart and center of the whole Roman empire to....proclaim me. No sightseeing tour. No vacation. There will be pitfalls and problems before you get there. Forty men take an oath not to eat food again before they have killed Paul. I wonder if they starved to death. Paul gets wind of the plot and tells the commander, who moves him to safety...on up the chain of command to the region's headquarters...and head official. Paul is on his way to Rome. On his way to do what he wants to do more than anything: proclaim God's love for all people, in the death and resurrection of God's Son, Jesus Christ. The plan is working. Everywhere Paul proclaims, people - people precious to God— come to life. God cares even about Rome, the chief persecutor of Christ's body. They need to hear the good news. They will hear the good news. God's plan works, so work God's plan. **Questions:** 1. Where (or who) is my "Rome," the 'foreign' person or group that's not with God in faith yet and needs to experience God's love and hear the good news from me? My coworkers? My sports team? My neighbors? 2. What do I believe is my part in God's plan to redeem the world? Who (like a spiritual companion) or what (like studying God's word with a small group) can help me discern that plan? 3. How am I doing in following the plan God has for me?

Prayer: God, most of the time, I admit, it's simply incredible to me that I could have any part in your plan at all, let alone a crucial part. But just so were the nameless women whose existence was only implied—not mentioned—in the genealogies that led to Jesus Christ. Though I am nameless to history, I am not to you. No one is. You know me by name. I matter to you. Every person does matter to you, literally, each and every one. Let them matter to me as they do to you. Give me a heart for them, an eye for them, a voice for them, and hands eager for serving them. Use me to expand and extend your great family of faith, your new humanity born by the death and resurrection of Christ, your new Adam. Amen.

Day 187. Read 1 Chronicles 2.18-4.4; Acts 24.1-27;
Psalm 4.1-8; and Proverbs 18.16-18

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: Suddenly, the long line ends. The genealogy of David's descendants stops suddenly like a stream in the desert that simply vanishes into the dry sand. It ends with a segment bearing the heading 'the descendants of Jehoichin the captive...' Captive? He was carried to Babylon, imprisoned, and ultimately exalted to sit at the Babylonian king's own banquet table. He is the last true king descended from David to sit on the throne of Israel. What has become of the promise of God to David that 'a descendant of yours will sit on the throne forever?' Again like the stream in the desert, God's promise goes 'underground' as the last king is carried away, captive. It is transformed into a hope for the future...even an expectation. The promise must be fulfilled. The day will come...must surely come...when a descendant of David will sit on the throne, governing God's people forever. Above history, behind history, in history, God is working. God will not be deflected from his promise—and purpose—is fulfilled. **Questions:** 1. How does the promise of Christ's coming again influence my life? Does it show in my attitudes and actions every day? 2. What am I to be doing while I wait for Christ's coming? Simply holding on or working toward the coming of his kingdom? Why do so many Christians simply 'hold on' as they await Christ's coming, rather than work hard to prepare his coming?

Acts: Why should the judge believe Paul? Powerful people, including the High Priest himself, are his accusers. When given a chance to defend himself, Paul first explains the reason why they should believe him. 'I have the same hope in God as these men,' Paul responds, 'that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked, so I strive to keep my conscience clear before God and people.' The resurrection? He should be believed because of his faith that there is life after this life? He should be believed because of his faith in the God who resurrects the dead? That is Paul's claim. One day everyone will stand before God and be judged, and the judgment given will stand for all eternity. Anyone so believing must tell the truth, if he hopes to live with God in eternity or fears being forever excluded from his presence. To such a believer, keeping your conscience clean before God and people is of paramount importance. His earthly judge is impressed with Paul's testimony. His Roman name means 'happy' or even 'blessed' in the Latin language, which he truly is to hear what he hears from Paul's lips. He listened to Paul eagerly...and often...but not because he hoped to share the same reward Paul anticipates for himself. No, he is looking for another reward, one more immediate and much more practical: money. So Paul sat in prison...and proclaimed his message at every opportunity...for two whole years. When Felix is rotated away, he leaves Paul in prison...to do a favor to his accusers...undoubtedly hoping for some reward from them. **Questions:** 1. How does my faith in the resurrection and the coming judgment change the way I speak and act? 2. Do people around me experience me as a credible witness for God because my character and actions are above board? 3. What in my character or actions compromises my witness and work for God?

Prayer: God, when I stand before you one day, I want to be standing right next to Christ, my crucified and risen Lord. Let him speak for me. Let him plead for me. There is nothing I could say in my defense except let him speak for me. And in the time you have given me here on this earth in this life, let my words and actions be worthy of

him. Let them witness to his truth and tender mercy. Let me in all things strive to have a clear conscience before you; and when it is stained by my sin, clear it again with the forgiveness that flows from Christ alone. Amen.

Day 188. Read 1 Chronicles 4.5-5.17; Acts 25.1-27;
Psalm 5.1-12; and Proverbs 18.19.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: Like long strands of seaweed in the swirling currents along the seashore, the genealogies weave their way through the nations and times which surround them. The backdrop of the divided kingdom is remembered when the scripture says the genealogical records were recorded ‘during the reigns of Jotham, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, king of Israel.’ Two kings for two kingdoms, kindred redeemed from slavery by the one God, divided by faithlessness. An otherwise insignificant (by worldly standards) man is mentioned as one whom the king of Assyria took into exile. The consequences came because of the faithlessness of the people. Still, in the midst of the swirling currents of history the long line of life goes on...and each person is known by...and precious to...God. He knows everyone’s name. **Questions:** 1. What does it do for me and to me to know that the God who created the universe and raised Jesus from the dead knows me by name? 2. Why has God located me at this time and this place in history? What is my purpose for God? 3. How am I intended to influence my time and community for God?

Acts: Some choices in life are not choices. Paul is given such a choice: ‘Would you like to be returned to Jerusalem and stand trial there?’ his new Roman judge asks him. The choice seems so reasonable, but behind it is a plot to kill him. Instead, Paul appeals to Caesar. As a Roman citizen, it is his right. The judge is relieved to pass the responsibility of passing sentence on. ‘You have appealed to Rome; to Rome you shall go!’ he declares. And in this ruling, God’s sovereign rule even over Rome is being demonstrated, for he told Paul long ago he would be God’s witness in Rome. A king and queen receive an opportunity to hear Paul’s testimony before he is sent to Rome. Soon it will be Caesar’s capital city itself that will hear the testimony of God’s prisoner. **Questions:** 1. Who are the seekers around me who have intellectual questions about God that I could help to answer? 2. How can I be ready and able to respond to the questions seekers or critics might have about faith in Jesus? 3. If it were a crime to be a follower of Jesus Christ in my setting, would there be enough evidence to convict me?

Prayer: God, we have a game we play here. We scan one another to find fault first, before even hearing what the other says. It is a deadly, disastrous game. I am a master at this game. Lord, make me loving to others, as you are. Convince me, and remind me often, I am not anyone’s judge. And when others judge me, let me respond with

respect, with words and in ways that honor and please you. May all my words and deeds witness to you. You alone are my judge. You alone are the Judge of all people. Thank you for that! Amen.

Day 189. Read 1 Chronicles 5.18-6.81; Acts 26.1-32;
Psalm 6.1-10; and Proverbs 18.20-21.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: The main attention in the long, genealogical line is given to the descendants of Levi. To serve as priest or even helper in the tabernacles and later, the temple, you had to prove your physical descent from Levi. All the important, religious professionals of tabernacle and temple traced their descent from Levi - the priests, the musicians, the singers. But the list narrows to one clan within the lineage— the most important ones, the priests who alone could make atonement, were descended from Aaron. The writer of Chronicles specifies all the priests' towns and properties apportioned to them; they are considered so important. Interspersed throughout the genealogy and the historical census information is the subtle message all this mattered, 'until the exile.' After the enemy destroyed the temple and carried away into exile the few surviving people, who can make atonement now? How can their sins be atoned for? How can they be right with God again? **Questions:** 1. How does the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who is both the sacrifice and the High Priest who offers the sacrifice for atonement, give me courage and confidence that my sins are forgiven; and I am restored into relationship with God again? 2. Why is it important that my salvation be dependent not on trust in human beings, but on God's Son himself? 3. What does it mean for my life and purpose in the world that I am descended in faith from Jesus Christ, and therefore a prophet, priest, and king following him in his line?

Acts: It doesn't seem the most sensible way to respond to your judges: 'I wish you were as crazy as me!' But that is what Paul the prisoner does when he tells them, "I pray that not you only but everyone listening will become what I am, except for these shackles." They respond to his testimony telling about God's saving acts through Jesus Christ in his life by saying, 'You're out of your mind! Your great learning has driven you mad!' 'I am not crazy,' he responds, 'what I say is reasonable and true.' He has simply repeated the story of scripture and the eyewitness of the apostles he talked with personally. The evidence is...overwhelming, to say the least. The king stammers, 'Do you really think you can make me a Christian in such a short time?' Paul responds, whether short or long, whether it takes a lifetime or a minute, 'I pray to God that you and everyone who will listen may become like me.' Like him? Like the prisoner who stands in shackles before them? That is not Paul. Paul is the freest person in the room, filled with his judges and jailers. Paul wants everyone to be free...like him...through faith in Jesus. **Questions:** 1. Do people

think I am crazy in the way I love and serve Jesus Christ? Why, or why not? 2. How much do I share Paul's burning passion that everyone around me become followers of Jesus and experience true freedom? How can I share it more? 3. Whom am I intentionally working on right now to help know and believe in Jesus Christ? Who is next?

Prayer: God, people judge me all the time. That's okay. History will judge me also, but it will mostly be wrong. It doesn't understand me or even know me really. The only one who matters is you, and you both know and understand me. Thank you. I wish everyone I know would know you. Make my wish more than a wish. Make it a burning passion in me that everyone I know know you. For then my heart will be more like yours, which is aflame for me. You made that obvious in Christ crucified. For me. For all. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 27

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): 2 Kings 22.14--23.4

Psalm: 4

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Acts 26.19-29.

Theme: Crazy With God

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 27:

Josiah discovers in God's Word how far he and his people have wandered from the way of life, which is the will of God for us. Undoubtedly many said he went 'crazy.' He initiated a sweeping renewal that changed the face of the religion of his day. He overturned the rituals and rules that humans had invented, just as he overturned the idols, false gods people had even placed in the temple of God. He led the people in restoring their close, covenant relationship with the true and living God. No other king in Israel before or after him was as zealous as he. Similarly, when Paul stands on trial for his life, he testifies to the truth of Christ crucified and risen, God's plan to redeem this dying world and everyone in it, he is called crazy. Paul pleads with his judges to 'become like I am, except for these chains.' He stands before them on trial for his life, but actually he is the

only truly free and alive person there. Paul's heart, like Josiah's centuries before him, burns that people might truly know the true God and have life with him. Just so, everyone who knows God burns with the overriding desire that everyone they know come to know God and the life he alone can give.