

# Through The Bible In One Year

## The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

## Daily Devotional Companion

### Week 32

**Day 218.** Read Ezra 3.1-4.24; 1 Corinthians 2.6-3.4;  
Psalm 28.1-9; and Proverbs 20.24-25.

### Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Ezra:** The cry of the spotless victim sacrificed for sin finally rose again amid the ruins of Jerusalem. There was nothing but a slab of solid rock, but the people assembled as one person there to begin again their sacrificial worship to the Lord. Despite the fears they had of the foreign peoples who had been uprooted from their own lands and transplanted to Judah with their strange customs and gods, the exiles whom God had returned to the promised land as he promised began to worship their faithful God by following his word. They began the daily sacrifice even though there was no temple. They celebrated the Feast of Booths commanded by God through Moses to commemorate their living in tents during the forty years of wilderness wandering as God transformed the slaves he freed from Egypt into a new people of God. When they laid the foundation for a new temple, the priests donned their holy vestments and accompanied by the Levites on musical instruments took their places to praise the Lord as David had commanded centuries before, singing ‘He is good; his steadfast love endures forever!’ Shouts of joy and laughter were mingled with tears and crying as older ones in the throng remember the magnificence of Solomon’s original temple that had stood there...and its destruction. The foreign people around heard the commotion and came to discover the meaning. ‘Let us help build’ they asked, ‘for we too have sought to worship you God since deported here.’ God had predicted through his prophets that the nations would be drawn to worship him. Was this the time? Was it fear that caused the people to forbid the foreigners to help in the work or have part in the worship? What would have happened if they had instead opened the door and taught these people to know and worship God truly? The final inclusion of foreigners would await the cry of another sacrificial victim...on a cross outside the city. Angered and hurt, these foreign people conspired to stop the work on the temple, intimidate the workers, and even hire agents to persuade the king to stop the work. Soon the construction ground to a complete stop. It would take another supernatural intervention of God through another worldly king to get it going again. **Questions:** 1. If I were put in a situation where I had to risk my personal safety as well as my family’s to be faithful in following Jesus, what would I do? 2. In what ways do society and the people around me

keep me from following Jesus or living for him completely? Why do I allow that? How can I live fully and freely as a follower of Jesus Christ despite their dampening influences?

**Corinthians:** ‘Secret wisdom’?! Aha! See! The opponents of those who follow Christ are perfectly right when they condemn his followers as exclusive and secretive. But wait a minute! Paul is saying something else entirely. It is all a matter of the spirit within a person. The spirit of this world cannot comprehend the Spirit that created the world. No one can know the deep thoughts of God except the Spirit of God who searches all things, and those to whom the Spirit reveals the thoughts of God. So the wisdom of God is hidden from the world for all the ages, fully and forever, until the revelation is received. Paul and the apostles, the people inspired of God to speak the words of God, teach us not in human words but in words taught by the Spirit. They are expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The person without faith, without the Spirit, does not accept the things of God, in fact, cannot accept them. They make no sense at all. They are literally ‘non-sense.’ The spiritual truths the Spirit teaches don’t even appear on the radar screen of the unspiritual person. The spiritual person makes judgments about all things, able to discern the truth because familiar with God’s truth, but is judged by no one...except God himself. But Paul has been feeding the Corinthians with milk instead of the solid meaty teaching of the truth because so much of the unspiritual still clings to them. Their newborn nature allows only so much. It is time for them to grow up...spiritually. It is time for more solid food, which Paul, the apostle, will now provide. **Questions:** 1. In what sense did I myself not “get it” before I became a Christ-follower? What helped me finally to ‘get it?’ 2. Why are the teachings about Jesus dying on the cross for our sins, or the need for a person to repent and turn their life over totally to God to truly live so hard to accept? Who do I know who has the most trouble accepting the truths of the Bible? How can I help them understand and accept? 3. In what ways am I still feeding on spiritual ‘milk’ instead of ‘meat?’ What is the next step in my spiritual growth in terms of study, knowledge, prayer, worship, giving, fellowship, service or witness that will help me mature spiritually and bear better fruit as Jesus’ disciple?

**Prayer:** God, there is so much I just don’t get about you! I just don’t get how you could give your Son, Jesus, to die on a cross just so I could be restored into relationship with you forever. What kind of ‘higher math’ is that?! To give your most valuable, most precious one for someone like me, who has trouble even giving you the ‘time of day?’ You are so much higher than the highest thoughts I have. I just don’t ‘get it,’ but I do accept it. With my humble, heartfelt thanks, I receive his sacrifice for me. Please pour on me, in me, through me, your Holy Spirit more and more so I ‘get it’ more and more, and so you get more and more of me, as you deserve. Amen.

**Day 219.** Read Ezra 5.1-6.22; 1 Corinthians 3.5-23;  
Psalm 29.1-11; and Proverbs 20.26-27.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Ezra:** Finally, they took matters in their own hands, literally. They started anyway, without the proper permission from the people of power. They just started to rebuild God's temple, helped by the prophets who proclaimed to them God's word. The governor and officials appointed by the foreign king questioned them 'Who authorized you?' and 'What are the names of the people doing the work, which might have quashed less determined people on a less important mission. At the suggestion of the governor and officials, the king made a search of the records and found....God had indeed moved a former king to command rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, with the royal treasury paying the construction costs! The king commanded the governor to keep hands off and not interfere with the work of rebuilding the temple, and even more, to provide money from the royal treasury so the work could progress unhindered. A solemn punishment and curse is invoked on anyone who hinders the work: the center beam of their own house will be pulled out, and their own house collapse, if they hinder building God's house. The work was completed quickly, and on the day of consecration, a hundred bulls, two hundred rams, and four hundred male lambs were sacrificed to purify the priests for service in the temple. After the temple was finished, the exiles celebrated Passover for seven days because the Lord had turned their sorrow to joy by turning the heart of the foreign king of Assyria to assist them in the work, just as long ago God had turned the heart of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, to let the Hebrew slaves go free to worship God in the wilderness. This God rules above all the kings of the earth. **Questions:** 1. When have I had to follow Christ and take initiative in some course of action, without waiting for 'official approval or channels' in order to get things moving? How can God's Word help me to have courage to do so, as well as confidence in knowing I am following God's will and purposes, and not just my own ideas? 2. How have I experienced God's interventions and deliverances in my own life situations? How has God intervened to unravel complicated or impossible situations for me personally? 3. What surprising people has God used as his instruments to help me grow in faith or use my opportunities for God to the fullest, as once God used foreign kings to provide for the building of the temple?

**Corinthians:** Servants. All of us. We are all workers building on someone else's foundation. How will we build? Well? With care, using the costliest and sturdiest of materials, and with the finest craftsmanship we can muster? Poorly? With shoddy skill springing from lackadaisical desire or divided focus? No one lay any other foundation that will endure other than Jesus Christ. All other foundations are sure to crumble because they are unable to bear the weight that they seek to support. Paul planted, another watered, a thirds harvests, but all three alike are servants of the One to whom belongs the field. People are God's crop, and the point of it all is lives touched and transformed to be with God and for God. At the end of the day...the day of judgment ... everything will be tested with fire...and what is built truly upon the foundation of the faith of Jesus Christ will endure. All else will literally go up in smoke. Even now, life is like that: like scenes seen from wildfires out west, or hurricanes that have hit unprotected towns, showing chimneys sticking up amid matchstick ruins. If anyone thinks they are wise by the

standards of the world, better become foolish in the eyes of the world with the wisdom of God, for it alone is what endures. Each person is made to be God's temple...and is, if only the Spirit of God dwells in it. **Questions:** 1. How much of what I think, say and do is founded in faith in Jesus Christ, and done for God's purposes, rather than my own or someone else's idea of what matters? 2. Since God has made me a partner in his world transforming work, what is my part? How am I doing? 3. What kind of a temple of God am I? Do I care for my body physically, emotionally, intellectually, and above all, spiritually, so as to be a holy temple for him?

**Prayer:** Come, be glorified in your temple, Lord. In all my thoughts and words and deeds, be lifted up and exalted. Be praised by what I say, be honored by what I do. Rule in every part of my being, and be sovereign over every aspect of my life day by day. The only thing that will endure on the day of judgment will be what is of you, my God, so form in me the very character of Christ more and more I pray, and in the meantime, for the sake of Christ, forgive my waywardness and see only the faith of Christ through my muddled words and actions as I struggle with the help of your Holy Spirit to live Christ every day. Amen.

**Day 220.** Read Ezra 7.1-8.20; 1 Corinthians 4.1-21;  
Psalm 30.1-12; and Proverbs 20.28-30.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Ezra:** Straight back by right descent to the first high priest, Aaron. The pedigree of this high priest, Ezra, is impeccable. The work of building the temple might be completed, but the spiritual work of rebuilding was just beginning. The building might be finished, but what would the building be if they truth were not taught in it? An empty shell. A tomb instead of a temple. A monument to another major mistake. Ezra had prepared himself for service like this. He devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law. Even more, he devoted himself to teaching the Law in Israel. What is more, the Assyrian king granted him everything he asked for, because the hand of God was on him, quite literally on him. The effect of a life lived in God's word so impressed the king that Ezra's very character and actions showed it. So the king even gave Ezra a letter appointing him to appoint judges and officials to administer justice in the region and to teach all the laws of God to the people. It is not until the seventh chapter of the book that Ezra begins his first person narrative relating directly the history of the events directly. For just such a time and just such a place, Ezra had been created and crafted and called of God. In just such a way, God calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies all his people. **Questions:** 1. If I trace back the line of faith of the people who helped me know, love and follow God personally, who would be in that line? Who have I helped to know, love, and follow God? 2. With what gifts, character traits, experiences, learning, deep seated passions to serve, and such has God equipped me for serving him at the point and place in history? What is my calling

from God today? 3. How content am I with maintaining just the minimal 'externals' of faith (rituals or activities) rather than growing forward the more intangible or internal spiritual aspects (learning in the word, devotions, prayer)? How can I keep growing in both so I am balanced and healthy in faith and life for God?

**Corinthians:** To be gifted means to be given an accountability that ultimately frees us. Whenever someone is entrusted by someone with something, it is assumed they must be faithful and prove worthy of the trust by using it in ways that honor the Giver. Everyone has been so entrusted...and the Giver is...God himself. So everyone also has a master who will judge...the very same master and judge in fact... God himself. All judgment belongs to God and not to us, for all things and everyone belong to God. We are all servants entrusted by God with what belongs to God, not us. We judge no one, in the sense of condemning anyone. No one is ultimately accountable to us, and we are accountable to no one, except God alone...ultimately accountable. Everyone is alike in that everything we have, we have received from God himself. It is not ours but his. The Corinthian Christ-followers have fallen for the oldest illusion of them all, mixing up the importance of the gift and the importance of the Giver. As one given apostleship, Paul intends to come and exercise the gift he was given by God to help others learn to use their gifts in God honoring ways rather than ways that honor themselves. **Questions:** 1. What are my gifts? In what ways am I tempted to think more highly of them (and myself because of them) than I ought? In what ways do I allow my own false humility ('I am not good or gifted enough to do that') or the criticisms of others to restrict the use of my God-given gifts in service to glorify him? 3. Where does the tendency in me to criticize and complain about other servants of God come from? What is Paul saying to me personally in this passage when he talks about not passing judgment on others, or even judging myself?

**Prayer:** God, why am I so super-critical of others, and so complacent when it comes to my own faults and failings? This is not the Spirit of Christ who prayed from the cross for the very people crucifying him 'Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing.' I admit it God, I don't know what I am doing, whenever I am doing that. When I criticize others, I crucify your Son anew, who died so they could be reconciled to you. And they are reconciled...just as I am...when we believe in you...faults, failings, fallings and all. Thank you for not condemning me but releasing me for free, full life in Christ's cross. Now release me from myself! Amen.

**Day 221.** Read Ezra 8.21-9.15; 1 Corinthians 5.1-13;  
Psalm 31.1-8; and Proverbs 21.1-2.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Ezra:** A tantalizing option arose right at the beginning of the mission: should he request soldiers and horsemen from the king to protect them on the dangerous journey to do what

God had appointed them to do: travel to Jerusalem and renew the temple worship? They would carry silver and gold, becoming a tempting target for any marauders along the route. And there were many. To request a military escort was well within the king's command, but Ezra decided against the common sense approach: to do so suggested they mistrusted whether God could provide protection himself. A deeper problem...with darker consequences...awaited him when he arrived. The people of God had intermingled in marriage with the foreign peoples with foreign gods around them, until they were a jumble mass of religions and rituals, including the very horrific customs for which the original peoples had been removed by God from the Promised Land. It was because of this very compromise and acculturation that calamity had come upon God's people in the first place. Well versed in the word and therefore well aware of the danger, Ezra tore his robes in a sign of mourning and repentance. Immediately, he turned in prayer to God asking forgiveness for yet another failure, invoking God's steadfast love and forgiveness. 'You have punished us less than we deserve and have given us a remnant to rebuild with. Here we are before you in our guilt .' What will God do...destroy or forgive? What will the people do...turn or continue down the course they have chosen? **Questions:** 1. When I am caught in an inconsistency in my following of Jesus, do I tend to go on anyway, or admit my mistake and turn back to God's way? Why? What strengthens me in doing right? 2. How am I tempted or challenged to 'intermingle' with un-Christian thoughts or actions in my workplace, school, neighborhood, community? What helps me follow Christ when I am so tempted to compromise? 3. When I pray, do I make sure to intercede (pray on behalf of) people other than myself, and especially for non-believers and people who are following ways contrary to the way of life God has given? Who especially needs my prayer right now?

**Corinthians:** The counterfeit is most obvious when laid right next to the real. Faults in Christ-followers and the Christian community are all the more striking because the standard of the true is present. So Paul is scandalized by the reports of sexual immorality among the Christians at Corinth that out-pagans the pagans. A man has taken his father's wife, sullyng his memory (if the father has actually expired—the worse possibility is that he is sleeping with the woman who is his step mother—and the community of faith is proud of it. Instead, he should be 'handed over to Satan,' turned over to fend for himself spiritually, so he may be moved to turn from his way and choose life. Referring to the Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorating freedom from slavery in Egypt and the custom commanded of cleansing the home of yeast before the festival, Paul calls on Christ-followers to root out the old yeast—the old nature and its actions—that clings even to Christians. But even in this warning, Paul must be quite careful. In saying 'have nothing to do with evildoers' he does not mean people who don't know God, but those who do, the ones who willfully continue despite choosing to follow Christ. The people of this world act the way they do because they have no higher standard. They only know the old nature, not the new nature that belongs to all who believe, love and follow Christ. We are not to judge those outside the faith community, that belongs to God. We are to judge those within the faith community, in the sense of discerning whether they are following God will and acting in ways that builds up the body, and acting to bring them back, if they

are not. **Questions:** 1. In what ways do my actions bring dishonor on Christ and make harder his mission to reach people? What areas of my life do I need to turn over to God's control still? 2. Do I do my part in 'speaking the truth in love' to those in the community of faith who are causing difficulty for people coming to Christ or living Christ-like ways as disciples of Jesus? Are there people I am avoiding talking with? How can I approach them and speak with them in a loving way to help them discover the better way?

**Prayer:** God, I compromise with the world at almost every turn. I want to get along with others. I want to travel the easy way, the smooth way, without bumps and bothers. If the truth be told totally, I want my own way...what I want, when I want it, in the way I want it...rather than your way many times. Why then am I so eager to find fault in others when they go another way than my way? Why then am I so eager to overlook it when others who know you go their own way, even as I do? I am a conspirator with them. Father, judge me...in Christ only I pray. And let me never judge others, leaving that to you, except to speak to them in loving words and caring actions that will help them come back to you. Amen.

**Day 222.** Read Ezra 10.1-44; 1 Corinthians 6.1-20;  
Psalm 31.9-18; and Proverbs 21.3.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Ezra:** Why is the high priest weeping and wailing. A crowd gathers at the spectacle of it. And they weep with him. At the very beginning...when God has given yet another new opportunity for a fresh start to the small remnant of people who have survived the destruction of the temple and the deportation to a foreign land...at the moment when God has given them a new opportunity...they repeated the old mistake. How many times can the music student make the same mistake when starting to play until the master teacher says 'Enough!' and calls a permanent stop to the madness? The large crowd of men, women and children confesses to God 'We have been unfaithful' but urges Ezra to take heart: 'Now let us make a new covenant before God to separate from these spouses who lead us away from God, just as it says in the Law.' 'Get up and do it' they urge Ezra, 'and we will support you in the work.' Decisive action was taken: A proclamation was issued for everyone in Israel to assemble in three days. The whole community was scoured and all identified who married foreign wives. **Questions:** 1. Do I set aside special times to do a spiritual inventory of myself and my actions, holding them up to the standard of God's word (what is sometimes called an 'Examination of Conscience')? Who is a spiritual mature believer, knowledgeable in God's word, who can help me with that task? 2. How can I be careful to follow God's will and ways, and yet not separate myself out of contact with the world or other believers so I don't become useless to God either because I have compromised my values or removed myself from meaningful relationships with non-

believers or other believers? 3. Do I support the leadership of my faith community when they do the tough work of spiritual discipline toward members? How can I be better prepared and able to support my faith community in self-discipline?

**Corinthians:** Already defeated! And, worst of all, their defeat is evident before the eyes of the world. The Christ-followers at Corinth aimed lawsuits at one another. They turn to outsiders—to people who don't know or follow Jesus—to settle thorny disputes among them. Paul is astounded. How can this possibly be? How can it be that there are no mature people of faith among them with the gift of discernment to settle disputes? Paul is no prude. He is not surprised that disputes arise, because he knows that as long as we live in the body here in this world, believers remain sinful and therefore sources of dispute, causes of conflict. He is amazed that Christ-followers would not rather suffer the wrong or be cheated rather than bring dishonor and ridicule on Christ by turning to non-believers for redress of wrongs. 'Don't you realize' Paul asks in amazement, 'that one day the saints will judge the whole world?' The lawsuits are a sign that they are still spiritually immature, that the old nature is still strong in them. 'You are not your own, you were bought with a price' Paul declares. They still insist on their right to themselves, when in reality, to know and follow Jesus means to surrender all right to ourselves: 'You were washed, sanctified, justified in the name of Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God!' Paul proclaims. He lists a lengthy catalog of 'sinners', from the sexual to slanderer and even the common swindler. It is far from an exhaustive list, but he asserts 'this is what some of you were.' Past tense. For those who come to faith and following of Jesus Christ, that is in the past. Now they have been washed, sanctified, justified in Christ. Sexual sin must be avoided most of all to be avoided, because those who sin sexually sin against their own bodies, and they are not part of Christ's body. 'Do you not know' Paul asks in disbelief, 'that your bodies are members of Jesus Christ himself?!' Whoever unites with the Lord is one with him "Honor God with your body" Paul says simply. **Questions:** 1. What do I do when disputes or conflicts arise with other believers? Who are the mature believers in my faith community I can call upon to mediate disputes? 2. Do I honor God completely with my body? In what areas of my physical and spiritual being do I need improvement in honoring God? 3. How does my insisting on my own right to myself, my own will and way, still get in the way of God's working in and through me? How am I sometimes the cause of conflict? What do I still need to surrender to God?

**Prayer:** I have been bought with a price. A price way beyond anything I can imagine, let alone pay, myself. Your Son, crucified. I am yours, because you loved me so. Such love deserves, though it never demands, complete surrender. I cannot even accomplish that, Lord. I cannot even surrender to you the way I want, because the old nature in me wants to live and reign forever. By your grace you have saved me. I have been washed, and sanctified and justified...set free for life with you. In your eyes I am priceless, because bought at such a price. Have your way, Lord, fully, finally, I surrender myself to you such as I am, for you have paid the price and your way of love is what I want. Amen.

## Day 223. Read Nehemiah 1.1-3.14; 1 Corinthians 7.1-24; Psalm 31.19-24; and Proverbs 21.4.

### Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Nehemiah:** Outrageous! As cupbearer to the king, one who literally stood at the right hand of the sovereign in his citadel, he had prestige and privilege and possessions and even a certain amount of power beyond most. In one daring, dangerous role of the dice, Nehemiah risked it all. He dared to appear sad in the presence of the king. One of his brothers had come back from Jerusalem and he questioned him about the plight of the remnant that had resettled there. Their state was dire, filled with trouble and disgrace. God's call and claim came upon him. A vision of what he was called to do began to take shape in his mind and heart: rebuild the protective walls around Jerusalem, so it might be a city prosperous and safe again. Before he acted on it, he prepared in prayer, asking God to grant him favor in the presence of 'this man.' The king's critical moment came at once as the king noticed his sorrow. Would the king expel him, or worse, execute him, for daring to bring 'rain on his parade.' Middle Eastern despots delighted in that. Instead, the king's heart is moved to compassion. 'What is troubling your heart' he asks instead. He spills out the reason. The city of his fathers has been destroyed by fire, and would the king send him there so he could rebuild it? And the king consented! Arriving in Jerusalem, he went secretly by night to survey the devastation...and lay his plans. He formulated the plans without involving even the leaders and officials, so secret were they. The vision must first be fully enfolded. Then he invited them in: "Come let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and we will no longer be in disgrace.' And the leaders and people caught fire to the vision: 'Let us start rebuilding.' Enemies arose at once, but when they insinuated this was rebellion against the king, Nehemiah answered 'The God of heaven will give us success, but you will have no part in the work.' His plan was perfect, as specific leaders were given specific sections to rebuild with the help of their comrades and relatives. It is a stunning study in what God can and will accomplish through anyone if they will be obedient to the vision God gives. **Questions:** 1. If I had no restrictions and could do anything I wanted for God's glory and the good of people, what would it be? In other words, what is God's vision and purpose for my life? 2. What obstacles are there to my living fully and freely for God? What part does my fear play in keeping me from living fully and freely for God? 3. How am I involved in the bigger story of what God is doing today? Am I a part of a great vision for God? Why or why not? What is my part in the vision and bringing it to reality?

**Corinthians:** Because we are embodied relational beings, each one of us a miniature image of the trinity comprised of body, mind and spirit, all human relationships are important. Marriage is the most sacred of all relationships because it brings into intimate lifelong relation two unique beings who together form a unity also in the image of God. Husband and wife are not their own, but belong to one another. The wife's body does not belong to

her alone, nor does the husbands to himself alone. He belongs to her and she belongs to him in a mutual interrelationship that has its foundations not in nature, but in the nature of God who is such an intimate inner relationship as Trinity. Paul urges all people not already married to remain as he is: free for complete dedication to God. But to remain single in complete dedication to God's service is a spiritual gift from God, Paul teaches. As with other such gifts from God, it is not for everyone, but for those to whom God gives it. What is more, the enemy seeks constantly to trip us up by exploiting our weaknesses. He uses our nature as relational and sexual beings to divide and destroy. So Paul reminds the married of the command of the Lord: they must not separate from one another, but if they do, they should remain chaste or be reconciled to one another. Paul then takes up the question about believers being married to unbelievers. Are they free to separate from them? Should they, when there is such a difficult spiritual divide and disparity between them? Wouldn't it be preferable? Wouldn't it solve so many problems? If the unbeliever leaves, Paul says, let them, because the believer is not bound in such circumstances. God has called us to live in peace, not disruption. However, if the unbelieving spouse wants to remain in the relationship, Paul encourages the believer to as well. You might just be God's instrument to save your husband or wife. Each one should remain in the situation they were in when called, because that is their very area of service in which to glorify God with their lives. **Questions:** 1. How do I deal with the spiritual disparity in the relationships I am a part of in my family, marriage or dating, workplace, neighborhood, and community? Do I exercise the love of Christ even toward those with significantly different values and actions? Am I overbearing and judgmental? 2. Am I being God's instrument for saving those he's put me in relationship with? 3. How at peace with God am I in the midst of all the relationships I am a part of? Is God still first and foundational in them all?

**Prayer:** Lord, I long for the peace which passes understanding to be the thing I stand on all the time. I know that, if I had my way, I would separate myself and run away from all the relationships you have put me in, pretending that what would result was peace. The absence of trouble and turmoil is not peace. You are. Lord, you be at the center of all I am, and of all I do. Let me abide in you and the peace you are as I live out all the relationships you have given me. Let me be an instrument of your peace for all to whom you have sent me. May they come to know you, the God of peace, through the turmoil that surrounds us. Amen.

**Day 224.** Read Nehemiah 3.15-5.13; 1 Corinthians 7.25-40; Psalm 32.1-11; and Proverbs 21.5-7.

**Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:**

**Nehemiah:** The priests made repairs, each in front of his own home. Next to them, others rebuild the fallen wall opposite their houses or living quarters. Whatever their positions in life, whether temple servants, goldsmiths, or merchants, they all share in the work together. The protective wall of Jerusalem is rebuilt as a whole as each person takes responsibility for the work that lies right in front of them. Working effectively together they raise the wall...and animosity in their enemies who don't want a strong community of faith to grow there. Sanballat, feeling his personal power and privilege threatened, ridicules the work to his foreign sidekick, Tobiah: 'What are those feeble Jews doing, restoring their wall? What will they do next, offer sacrifices?' Tobiah joins in the ridicule: 'If a fox climbed on the wall it would tumble down!' Truth is, the construction progresses quickly and well, for people respond when given an important task as well as the tools and the motivation they need to complete it. The scripture says 'the people worked with all their heart.' Seeing their seriousness, their enemies begin to take them seriously, too. They plot to attack them and stop the work. Nehemiah, good leader that he is, stations armed guards from among the workers own families to watch over them while they work. Nehemiah himself is very visible at the work, giving encouragement to all, saying 'Remember the Lord who is great and awesome and fight for your sons and daughters, wives and homes.' From that time on, half the men worked on the wall while the other half guarded, and each of the builders wore a sword at his side as he worked. Because the work was so extensive and widespread, a special signal was developed. Whenever a trumpet was sounded, everyone who heard it was to respond and help in the fight. But then the worst danger of all arose, that threatened to defeat them and stop the work: inner division. The wealthy were lending the workers money to buy food at steep interest, since they couldn't earn income but worked on the wall. Nehemiah challenged them for exploiting their own countrymen. He ordered them to stop charging interest...and to give back what they had taken in foreclosure. God worked a great miracle...overcoming their greed, they agreed to stop charging interest and give back what they had taken. They had to tear down a wall, to put up a wall. **Questions:** 1. Where has my own fallen nature gotten in the way of God's work, causing trouble for others to come to Christ or follow him? 2. Do I go about my day armed for battle (see Ephesians 6.10-17) as I go about my business and relationships? Am I aware of and prepared for the onslaughts of my spiritual enemy, the devil? 3. How can I be better prepared for my spiritual warfare as I go about the mission and work God has given me to do for his kingdom?

**Corinthians:** Paul says there are areas he has no 'command' from the Lord, so he offers carefully considered advice with much humility, leaving it up to the discernment and decision of the reader. If the Lord has spoken on any issue, that decides it. Otherwise, the Christian seeks to apply the other teachings of the Lord as they fit to discern the proper course. Remain in whatever state you are in—married or unmarried—Paul bids believers...but with a difference. Paul says to live in light of the 'present crisis' which means the imminent return of Jesus.. 'The time is short' Paul says, believing that Christ stands in eternity just outside the door into time. When he steps through again, the world as we know it will end. Believers should live as though imminently expecting the one who loves them most to appear every instant:. Believers are to live in undivided devotion to the

Lord who loves them and longs for them to share life together forever. **Questions:** 1. How would it increase my devotion and joy in life if I lived every day anticipating that this might be the day Jesus returns? 2. Why do life's mundane activities and routines lead to the dampening of my devotion to God? What can I do so that the routine daily activities I must do are transformed into opportunities for deeper devotion with God? 3. How can I make God more a part of my daily life now?

**Prayer:** Lord, I know you are coming back. You gave you word, and that is enough for me. When, please? No, don't answer that prayer. You know best, and your word says you don't even know, that the time of that appointment is known only to the Father. Well, if you are content with that, so will I be. But help me with this: help me keep continually longing and looking for you to come. Come into my ruts and routines, my daily round of working, eating, sleeping, talking...let me do everything as if you were present, listening, loving. For you are. You are present, just as you have promised. Your presence transforms everything, so come, transform all my moments to be moments with you. Amen.

## Through The Bible In One Year: Week 32

### Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Nehemiah 1.1-4, 8-2.5  
Psalm: 30.1-12  
Second (New Testament) Lesson: 1 Corinthians 3.5-17

Theme: The Power of Godly Vision

#### Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 32:

Nehemiah, moved by the suffering of the people of Jerusalem, is captured by a vision: rebuilding the protective wall around the city, so people might live in safety and worship God in freedom. Faced with many dangers and difficulties, he first prepares in prayer and then gets to work. He dares to present the proposal to the foreign king he serves, who might see it as disloyalty or even rebellion. He secretly surveys the fallen wall to plan the work. He shares the vision with the leaders of the people, who join in wholeheartedly. The power of a godly vision is to unite and empower people to achieve great things together for God, so that everyone benefits. In the New Testament lesson, Paul similarly talks about how people are 'God's field,' the focus of God's purposes on earth. Paul planted faith, while others watered and cultivated it, being partners in the work. The important thing is God who works in all and through all to accomplish his purposes. People experience the newness and fullness of life with God as they are caught up into his vision for them. Their lives discover meaning and purpose and power...the power of a godly vision.

