

# Through The Bible In One Year

## The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

### Daily Scripture Selection

#### Week 44

**Day 302.** Read Lamentations 1.1-2.19; Philemon 1.1-25; Psalm 101.1-8; and Proverbs 26.20.

### Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Lamentations:** The queen has become a slave. The city that was so full of people, a deserted ghost town. Jeremiah surveys with unspeakable sorrow the scene after Jerusalem has been captured, and the people of Judah taken captive into exile. Her foes had become her masters. No one came to the appointed festivals to worship God. The Lord had brought grief on her because of her sins. Her fall was astonishing, and there was no one to comfort her. Her hungry people barter their family treasures...their heirlooms...for food, trying to keep themselves alive. Now Jeremiah, the prophet sent by God to warn them away from the impending doom their sinfulness decreed for them, lifts up a lament to God on her behalf. He steps in the breach between and cries out to God for her...inspired by God to do! It is God lifting up a lament for her...God crying out to God through his prophet...for the deliverance of his desecrated, devastated beloved. 'See, O Lord, and mark; for I am despised...and destroyed.' He speaks for his people, and he speaks for God who still longs to be reconciled with his sinful beloved. Even as he describes what Judah is feeling, that God himself 'like an enemy, strung his bow and poured out his anger on them.' He rejected the temple and abandoned his sanctuary. Worst of all, the law—God's Word—was no more; and God no longer gave visions to her prophets. Describing the incurable wound of the people, and his own heart, and the heart of God, Jeremiah laments, "My eyes fail from crying; and my heart is in torment within me, because my people are destroyed." God weeps for his people...and longs to have them back.

**Questions:** 1. When in my life have I felt that God had abandoned me, or at least left me on my own in a difficult situation? 2. Why does God allow 'bad' things to happen to good people? To me? To the people I know or love? 3. Have I ever really comprehended the depth of anguish God experienced because of my sin, or what it cost God to bring me back to him?

**Philemon:** To a dear friend and fellow worker...and the church that meets in their home. A church in their *home!*? Paul blesses them all with the same words he used to other churches that were probably larger in numbers, as well as other 'house churches': 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' Grace and peace..the

same blessings of God, though they meet in Philemon's home. It's not the size of the body that matters; it's the size of the God they worship. They are led by a loving shepherd, to be sure. Paul begins his brief letter by sharing how he gives thanks to God because he hears continually about Philemon's faith in the Lord and his love for all the believers. But Paul writes with a special purpose: to appeal to Philemon to receive back his runaway slave, Onesimus. Paul, an old man and a prisoner now, has received much comfort from him—not as a slave or even as a servant—but as one who became 'my true son while I was in chains.' What is more, Paul wants Philemon to accept Onesimus back, not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ. Paul himself names Onesimus not 'slave' or servant, but 'a brother in the Lord.' In the Lord there are no distinctions between slave and free, but all are one in Christ Jesus. Paul could command Philemon as an apostle. He could order him, because he is the one to whom Philemon owes his very life spiritually. Paul was the one through whom God set Philemon himself free. If the runaway slave—now a brother in Christ—has done anything wrong, charge it to my account, Paul says. Just deduct it from the deposit I made into your life, since you owe me your very life! Paul simply asks the slave owner to set free the slave saying, 'refresh my heart in Christ.' At the end of this brief letter, Paul asks Philemon to prepare a guest room for him, because he hopes to come to him soon. Philemon opened his home for the church to meet and to show hospitality for Paul, the wandering apostle. Would he open his heart for a new brother no longer a slave? The best way to refresh the heart...or prepare a place... for Paul...or any of God's followers...or for God himself...is to set someone free from their bondage. **Questions:**

1. Do I meet regularly with a small group, perhaps even in people's homes, to experience and share the blessing of God that comes from close, Christian community? If not, what steps will I take to get involved in one?
2. Do I have real, strong, spiritual friendships like Paul had with Philemon and Onesimus, whom he calls 'brother' and 'true son' in Christ? How can I cultivate such friendships or strengthen the spiritual friendships I do have?
3. Have I ever intervened with someone I know on behalf of another? Have I ever challenged another Christ-follower to greater action for God, as Paul lovingly challenges Philemon? How can I be alert for God's leading and for opportunities to do so?

**Prayer:** Oh, God, you have set me free to be real and really alive. Let me not rest contented in my freedom, forgetful of others, but let me work for the freedom of others. You want all people to be free...free for life...with you and one another. I am not free until everyone is. So let me work to free everyone I know, to know you and the life you alone can give. Amen.

**Day 303.** Read Lamentations 2.20-3.66; Hebrews 1.1-14; Psalm 102.28; and Proverbs 26.21-22.

**Lamentations:** He feels like one dragged off and mauled by a bear or lion—one God has used for target practice with his arrows. It was like a doubly-deep wound. For God, he became the laughingstock of his people. For God, he proclaimed their destruction if they

would not turn. Now his own heart was wounded for this people so near to annihilation, that he cries out to God for them. He cannot erase the memories, nor does he want to. Instead, he remembers and marks them—his affliction and sufferings—even though his soul is cast down within him by mulling over them. Yet, he calls to mind some undeniable truths about God that bring hope to him. Because of his love, he has not annihilated his people. His compassions never fail, being renewed every morning. God is good to all who hope and trust in him, to everyone who seeks him. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion; because God does not willingly afflict or grieve any of his children. So Jeremiah cries out confidently, ‘Let us reflect on our ways and test them. Let us lift up our hands in prayer to God and say to God, ‘We have sinned and rebelled,’ and let us return to the Lord. Jeremiah bears testimony to his personal story to comfort and give hope to all Israel: ‘I was drowning, about to die, and called on your name from the depths, O Lord; and you came near when I called and said, ‘Do not fear.’ Just as you were to Jeremiah, so you are to everyone. You always draw near to all who lift up their hands and call upon your name, Lord. **Questions:** 1. When have I ever borne the brunt of standing up for God with others like Jeremiah? If I haven’t, why haven’t I? 2. How have the memories of difficult times and sufferings—though they remain in my memory—been changed or transformed by God’s presence and promises in my life? 3. Why is it important for me not to forget the tough situations God’s pulled me through? How am I better for them? How can they be of service to others if I remember and make them available to other sufferers?

**Hebrews:** God’s voice echoes through the corridors of the centuries. Long ago, his voice sounded through the prophets...one Voice through many voices at many different times. But then...God spoke through his Son. What better...clearer...voice could God speak in than the God-man, Jesus Christ. As God, he was God’s agent to create the whole universe. As a man, he was part of that creation and could lift prayers on behalf of it to his Father. As Son, he is the exact image of God’s hidden being. As the God-man, when he had died on the cross and risen, he ascended to sit beside God on his throne to intercede for his brothers and sisters with God. He speaks to people for God, and to God for his people. In these last days...the dying days of this temporary universe—God spoke to us through his Son. And now in eternity, his Son speaks to God for us. What a wonderful plan, far beyond any human imagining! **Questions:** 1. Do I expect and attend to God’s speaking to me through his Word as I ought? How could I listen for and actually come to hear God’s leadings to me even better than I do now? 2. When scriptures says, “When he had provided purification for sins’ it means my sins are totally atoned for by Christ’s sacrifice already. How does this change my attitude and actions, knowing I am already forgiven and saved because of Christ’s cross? 3. How does it affect my attitudes and actions to know that Jesus is alive forevermore and praying to the Father for me continually? How does this affect my own prayers, especially my prayers for others?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, forgive me this moment as I interrupt you as you speak. You are speaking with the Father right now, I know; for your word tells me so. You are speaking with God for me...and for all in this world you created and love so. I just wanted to

thank you. I just wanted to tell you I love you and long to be like you. Teach me to be as you are, one who intercedes for others and not for myself. In that, you are just like your Father, who seeks only the good of everyone, even those who turn away from him. Let me be just like you...which is just like him. Right now I pray for all the people you have put in relationship with me. May they come to you, so you can bring them to your Father. That is the desire of his heart...and yours...and now mine, because of your love for me. Amen.

## Day 304. Read Lamentations 4.1-5.22; Hebrews 2.1-18; Psalm 103.1-22; and Proverbs 26.23.

**Lamentations:** With their own hands, compassionate mothers cooked their own children, so hungry were they in the siege...or the destruction after the conquest of the country. God's people became heartless. The punishment God heaped on them was greater even than Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment. The consequences of their sins lingered longer. People killed swiftly with the sword are better off than those who starve slowly, wasting away. The Lord himself scattered the people. They looked in vain for any nation that would save them. In the midst of the destruction, Jeremiah proclaims, 'O Daughter of Zion, your punishment will end; for God will not prolong your captivity or lengthen your exile.' To God Jeremiah cries on behalf of the remnant surviving. 'Look God! We have become orphans, buying the water we must drink to live, brought so low that slaves rule over us with no one to set us free.' Joy is dried up like the streams. Gone is dancing; it has turned to mourning. Jeremiah, who cried out against them, now cries for them. He has become their advocate...their mediator with God. 'Why do you forsake us, O God?' he cries out. 'Why do you forget us?' 'Restore us to yourself, O God,' he pleads, 'unless you have utterly rejected us, because you are angry beyond measure!' God is not angry beyond measure. God has not utterly rejected anyone. It is he who inspires Jeremiah to cry out to God on behalf of the people, just as his Son will cry out from the cross. **Questions:** 1. How does Jeremiah's message in Lamentation teach me that no one is beyond the hope and help of God, at least from God's point of view? How does that affect my attitudes and actions toward others, especially those I might think unredeemable or undeserving? 2. Whom do I intercede with God in prayer for now? Whom should I be praying for that I don't (or don't want to) now? 3. As Jeremiah knew what to pray for in the lives of others by sharing their experiences, how can I enter lovingly and prayerfully into the lives of others, to be a better intercessor for them?

**Hebrews:** God made him perfect—the perfect Savior—through suffering. Children share the same flesh and blood—the same DNA—with one another. Just so, Jesus shared our full humanity, so that he could taste death for everyone. By his death he destroyed death and the power of the evil one who holds the power of death, and he freed us from enslavement to fear of death. Though the human mind could never conceive of such a thing, his lowly birth as a human being had to happen. He had to be like the people he saves in every way,

so he could become their savior. He was tempted like every person, and so he is able to help everyone who is tempted...which is everyone. He is a merciful mediator—a high priest faithful both to God and to the people he sacrifices for—in the service of God and humankind. The birth...the temptations...the death...all in the body so he might help all bound in the body of death by the evil one and his conspirators, guilt and fear. **Questions:** 1. How does fear of death stunt and restrict my life? How would my life be better if I had no fear of what comes after death, but only had certain assurance of my salvation in Christ? What keeps me from living in that freedom and joy? 2. How am I like Christ and is Christ like me? How is Christ different from me, and I different from Christ? 3. Do I pray to God through my mediator and high Priest, Jesus Christ? Do I pray for others, as he does for me?

**Prayer:** For me, your birth in the body? That means for me, also then, your death in the body. To be born is to die in this world. And so, you came into this world, to share my life and lot, in every way like me—save one. You alone sinless, yet dying for my sin, you save me. My merciful, God-man, high priest. All praise to God for you. Now set me to my work, praying for others as one of your people all redeemed to be priests. I am more like them than you, for I sin like them. Let me not add this sin to the rest, that I think myself better than any other, or forget to pray for even those who harm me. Amen.

**Day 305.** Read Ezekiel 1.1-3.15; Hebrews 3.1-19; Psalm 104.1-23; and Proverbs 26.24-25.

**Ezekiel:** On a specific day, at a specific time, eternity intruded into time. Two totally different dimensions of being—time and eternity—intersected. In the thirtieth year of exile, in the fourth month, on the fifth day, the heavens were opened; and Ezekiel saw visions of God. He saw fearsome, angelic beings beyond description in words. Above and beyond them he saw a sapphire-like throne, and above it a figure like that of a man, also beyond description, so awesome and beautiful was he. The radiance around him was like a rainbow, colorful and sparkling as the sunshine refracted through raindrops. Ezekiel did what you and I would do...what anyone in fact does do...when in the presence of God: fell facedown. And he heard the Voice. The Voice spoke to him in irresistible, unmistakable words: ‘Stand up, and I will speak to you.’ And as he spoke...in the very act of his speaking...the Spirit comes into him, and he can stand. Mark that, stand...in God’s presence! The Son of Man gives this particular son of man, Ezekiel, a mission. ‘I am sending you to the people of Israel, a rebellious nation, obstinate and stubborn.’ Whether they listen or refuse to heed, they will know God’s messenger has been among them. And the Son of Man tells this son of man not to be afraid. ‘You must listen to me,’ he commands, ‘and you must speak my words to them whether they listen or not.’ Ezekiel literally took his words to heart...as he ate the words written on a scroll. And they tasted sweet as honey. The people are obstinate...but God will make his messenger harder still,

harder than flint. And so he is sent to his countrymen in exile, to say, “This is what the Sovereign Lord says...” The Lord speaks to him to speak to others. So God does to all his people. In their lives, too, eternity touches time as he speaks with them and sends them to speak with others. **Questions:** 1. How does God speak with me today? Through his Word spoken and read? Through others believers and followers of Christ? Through the thoughts he puts in my mind as I pray or open myself to him in reading or hearing his word? 2. How, in addition to reading and studying his word faithfully to compare my thoughts with his word, can I be sure my thoughts are in line with God’s will? What mature, spiritual counselors and companions do I have to help discern? 3. Do I believe that God wants to speak to me personally? That God wants to commission and send me personally to share his love with others? If not, why not? How does it change my attitudes and actions to believe that God wants to speak with me and send me on a mission personally?

**Hebrews:** Fix your thoughts on the apostle and high priest whom we acknowledge before the world, even Jesus. Jesus Christ was faithful as a Son over God’s house—he faithfully kept care over all that is God’s—this whole creation and every person in it. We are his house, the writer of Hebrews proclaims, if we hold on to that very courage and hope in which we boast. We must watch that none of us allows our unbelieving hearts to wander and turn away from the living God. Every day, as long as it is Today, encourage one another; so that no one becomes hardened by sin and so fall away. We have come to share Christ, and our task is to hold firmly to the end the confidence we experienced when we first came to know the salvation gift of God in Christ. The people of Israel, though delivered from slavery in Egypt by God himself, hardened their hearts in the wilderness as they traveled to the promised land...and fell in the wilderness. Therefore, holy brothers and sisters who share in the heavenly calling through Christ, fix your thoughts on Christ. **Questions:** 1. Which of these activities help me fix my thoughts of Christ best: \_\_\_ Reading the Word \_\_\_ Worshipping weekly \_\_\_ Spiritual friendships & small groups with other believers \_\_\_ serving using my gifts \_\_\_ Giving generously of the money God gives me \_\_\_ Inviting others to know Jesus. 2. Which of these activities do I need to develop most? 3. Why is it that alone I am more susceptible to falling away from faith and following Jesus than when involved in the faith community? How can I strengthen my ties to my faith community?

**Prayer:** Fix my thoughts on you!! Lord, you know best of all how my thoughts are always wandering. Like birds they flutter in every direction, to scatter at any noise or the hint of fear. But Jesus, unafraid, you fixed your thoughts on me. For me you endured the cross. Endure my flighty thoughts as well, my frequent wanderings, and train me more and more, to fix my mind on you until the time comes when your thoughts are my thoughts, and your ways are my ways. Amen.

## **Day 306.** Read Ezekiel 3.16-6.14; Hebrews 4.1-16; Psalm 104.24-35; and Proverbs 26.27.

**Ezekiel:** Son of man, prophesy! God holds him accountable for the lives of the others to whom he is sent, in one specific way: whether he conveys the message God gives him to the people to whom God sends him. God has appointed him a watchman for Israel. Ezekiel's task is first to listen to what God says and then speak the warning God is giving them through his prophet. 'If you do not warn them, they will die for their sin..and I will hold you accountable for their blood,' God decrees. Ezekiel listened to the Lord, and did just what God commanded. And God commanded what seemed to be strange, symbolic actions meant to warn the people through more than words. Take a clay tablet, draw a picture of Jerusalem on it, and lay siege to it. Put an iron pan between the tablet and you, and turn your face toward it. This is a sign for Israel: I have set my face like iron against Israel to besiege it. He is to lie on his left side bearing the sin of Israel on himself—for 390 days!—one day for each of the years they have sinned through idolatry against God. Then on his right side for forty days for Judah. During all that time he is to eat bread cooked over dung and to drink only water—all carefully measured out, as if by one conserving food under siege. He has been made a human sign, to warn people and win people back to God. God will do anything—and everything—he can to warn and win people back to him, which means back to life. **Questions:** 1. What surprising things has God asked me to do for his glory and the good of people, things which I would not have dreamed of doing on my own? 2. For whom will I be accountable for speaking to before God? Will I do 'whatever it takes' to give everyone I know an opportunity to turn and come to God, just as Ezekiel did? 3. What is the message he wants me to carry to all the people with whom he has put me in relationship? What can I say to help draw people back to God or closer to God, if they have begun to believe?

**Hebrews:** Like an open door, the promise of entering his rest still stands. Some refused to go in...go through the door...but some will enter his rest. The ones who have believed enter that rest. And it is God's rest, the same rest he enjoys since he ceased creating the world on the sixth day. Faith itself is a foretaste of that rest. Because we have Christ as our high priest, who without sin has shared our nature and so sympathizes with our weakness; and because he ascended through the heavens to sit at God's right hand, we now may approach the throne of grace with confidence to receive mercy. From him, we can experience his love which will strengthen us in our times of need. The door to complete confidence for this life and forever is open. God is the one who opened it. **Questions:** 1. Do I approach God with confidence because of what Christ has done for me, or do I still hang back for fear I won't be received by God? How confident am I that I can approach God with confidence? 2. During times of need, do I face the situations with confidence that comes from knowing Jesus is 'in my corner?' Or do I tend to get agitated and worried? What would help me be at peace more? 3. Whom do I know who needs to walk through the open door into God's peace? How can I help them to take that step of faith?

Prayer: Thank for the peace you have given me. It calms all the storms which rage in my life. You put me here, in this place and time, to make a difference in someone's life for you. You put me with the people I know to influence them for you...to influence them to come to you. Make me a sign of your peace for others. Make me an instrument of your peace. Let my words and servant deeds reflect the peace that comes from knowing you. Help me hold the hands of those around me and walk them through the door you have opened to your peace: faith in your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Day 307.** Read Ezekiel 7.1-9-11; Hebrews 5.1-14; Psalm 105.1-15; and Proverbs 26.28.

**Ezekiel:** The end has come! The Day is here! How many times...in how many ways...must God's prophet say that message? The end has come for Judah and Israel, but it is not the end of God's warnings which might turn his people back to him. Again on a certain day—the fifth day of the sixth month of the sixth year—as he sat among the elders in exile, Ezekiel was given a vision by God. A human like being, from the waist down fire and above the waist like glowing metal, seized him by the hair of his head. The Spirit lifted him between earth and heaven, and in visions God took him to Jerusalem, into the temple itself. There he witnessed the idols and even the elders worshipping them. Women were performing rites of mourning for the god, Tamnuz; and men were worshipping the sun as it rose in the east. He saw all the things that provoked God to jealousy. To all this they add yet another charge: they fill the land with violence. Bloodshed and injustice are everywhere. Therefore, God declares he will deal with them in anger, without pity, not listening to them; although they shout in his ears. The end has come. The Day is here. And, yet, the Lord called to a man with a writing table, 'Go throughout the city and put a mark on the forehead of everyone who grieves over all the terrible things that are being done.' To the destroyers he called, 'Go through the city killing without pity everyone, but do not touch anyone who has the mark.' Even in the land completely filled with violence, injustice and idolatry, God saves a remnant. **Questions:** 1. In the Revelation of John, John also talks about believers having a mark on their foreheads, which many believe to be the sign of the cross received at Baptism. Am I baptized into Christ and signed with his cross? Do I try to live such that all my words and deeds are signed with Christ's cross? 2. Where has religion gone wrong in today? How have we wandered from real relationship with God that is demonstrated in our just actions, as well as our worship? 3. When the Day comes, will I be ready?

**Hebrews:** High priests are selected from among people and appointed to represent them to God. Such high priests should deal gently with the people they represent to God, for they share the same weakness and failings. Because they are human and sinful, they have to offer sacrifices first for their own sins, as well as sacrifices for the sins of the people. No one dares take the role of priest upon themselves. They are appointed. But in the Old Testament story, a mysterious figure appears from nowhere—a high priest named

Melchizedek. Melchizedek blesses Abraham and receives a tithe from him as his gift of worship. Jesus himself was also appointed high priest—not of the temple order, but of the order of Melchizedek, the mysterious, high priest who appears from nowhere. Although he was a Son, he was made perfect by his suffering and became the source of everlasting salvation for all who obey him. This mystery deserves deeper description, but the people to whom the letter is addressed are still in elementary school. Like children instead of adults, they need milk and not meat. Solid food is for those who by constant practice have trained themselves. It is high time they grew up and moved on to solid food. The plan is for them to grow up and become teachers, to help others discover the love of God for them in Christ. **Questions:** 1. Who helped me have the ‘milk’ by which I first came to know and serve Jesus Christ? Who has helped me mature most in my spirit? What kind of spiritual food am I ready for right now? 2. Am I teaching others, or am I still an infant in faith? To whom am I teaching the faith? 3. Since Christ became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, what am I doing to commend Christ to others, so they can have eternal life?

**Prayer:** God, I still love the milk. ‘Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.’ How cool and refreshing it is on the hot, dry days that are all too common. May I always love the milk. But don’t let me rest there. The spirit cannot grow strong...and won’t bear fruit...on a steady diet of it. Lead me deeper, though there be dangers in the depths. Teach me to know you more and more, though it means suffering; and then teach me to teach others to know you. The milk is good; but it’s meat I need now, so I will grow strong, mature, and more fruitful for you. Amen.

**Day 308.** Read Ezekiel 10.1-11.25; Hebrews 6.1-20; Psalm 105.16-36; and Proverbs 27.1-2.

**Ezekiel:** As he was prophesying, one of the very leaders he prophesied against died. Ezekiel fell face down and cried, ‘Sovereign Lord, will you completely destroy the remnant of Israel?’ His intercession evokes compassion from God. Though he sent them far away and scattered them among the nations, even there God has been a sanctuary for them. And what is more, he will gather them from all the nations to which they have been scattered and give them back the land of Israel. They will return and remove all the idols. He will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them. In a heart surgery that only God could accomplish, he will remove their stony hearts and give them hearts of flesh, so they will follow God’s Word and ways. They will be his people and...he promises...he will be their God. The idolaters will fall because of their sin, but the remnant will return and be restored. The vision went up from Ezekiel, and he found himself where he had started...among the exiles in Babylon. So he told the exiles everything the Lord had shown him, the words of warning...and the words of promise. **Questions:** 1. As in this passage from Ezekiel, God’s Word to people always comes as both law and gospel, with convicting force and consoling compassion. Am I careful to

heed his correction and not just look for his consolation ? 2. How has God done 'heart surgery' on me, changing my hardened heart for a more compassionate one? 3. What is the condition of my heart right now toward all the people God's put around me, especially the most troublesome ones? Towards whom am I hard-hearted? What will I do about that?

**Hebrews:** Time to leave elementary school and move on to maturity. No need to keep practicing the alphabet or the multiplication tables. You need to move forward...or you will fall away. That was the danger in which the people, to whom Hebrews was written, stood. They stood still. Land that drinks in the rain falling on it produces a rich harvest, useful to all. But land that brings forth only thorns and thistles is worthless, one fit to be burned finally. God is not unjust, the writer goes on, confident of better things for them; because God will not forget the good work and the love shown him as they helped and still help his people. Their soil is still fruitful. Only show the same diligence to the very end, sealing your hope surely. God made the unchanging nature of his purpose—to save all who believe and obey—sure, by sealing it with an oath, swearing by himself since there is none greater to swear by. God cannot lie and will not go back on his word of promise. And so our hope is anchored in him and his promise, firm and secure. To make the assurance even stronger, the writer uses an image drawn from the temple worship. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the people's sins. Just so, Christ went before his people, passing through the curtain into the inner sanctuary and the very presence of God, our great, high priest who offers atonement for us. Our sins are surely forgiven, and the salvation promise by God surely ours, for all who believe and follow Christ. **Questions:** 1. Am I still in elementary school in my faith relationship with God, or am I moving on to the more advanced education? 2. How have I matured in faith over the years? What areas of my character, actions and relationships with others still need maturing? How will I work toward growing in those areas? 3. How does knowing that God's love is assured me through faith in Jesus Christ affect me? Does it motivate me even more to become like him and work for him, or does it make me complacent and self-contented?

**Prayer:** Father, build a strong foundation of faith in me—the love and knowledge of you and your ways. Then build on that foundation whatever you want. Fashion me more and more into a mature follower of Jesus Christ, so I will bear more fruit for you, as your instrument, touching and transforming everyone around me with your love. It's all about love and my relationship with you. I am learning. May I always be learning and growing. Let me never rest contented, as if I ever could comprehend You completely or love you as you deserve. Amen.

# Through The Bible In One Year: Week 44

## Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Lamentations 3.19-33

Psalm: 102.1-11

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Hebrews 2.14-18

Theme: The Chore God Really Hates To Do (The Alien Work of God)

### Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 44:

Why do bad things happen to people? The one ultimately responsible is God, and we should not let him off the hook. Is God arbitrary? Or worse, does God actually like afflicting people? Since God is all-powerful, God at least allows bad things to happen. God's Old Testament people, Israel, went their own way and suffered the harsh consequences through the destruction of their land and their deportation to live practically as slaves in the land of the conquerors. Yet, despite all the contradictory evidence, in the midst of all the destruction and desperation, Jeremiah proclaims the counterintuitive truth that God does not willingly afflict anyone. The writer of Hebrews proclaims the reason believers can affirm God's goodness with complete certainty: God sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to become like us and to suffer everything we suffer, in order to free us from suffering and slavery to the fear of death. Not only does God not willingly afflict anyone or delight in peoples' suffering, God has taken the ultimate step to free people from suffering: he has taken it upon himself, in order to take it away.

### Alternate Readings & Themes:

1. **“You’ve Got To Free Your Slaves”** With our self-centered and manipulative ways, people today still seek to bend people to our will and make them serve us. Jeremiah describes the way that the Old Testament people of God, Israel, had essentially become slaves themselves, because they sinned and enslaved others. Centuries later Paul writes to Philemon about his slave, Onesimus. Paul asks and urges him not only to free him but to receive him as a brother in Christ. The radical event of Christ's cross and the very nature of Christ breaks the power of our self-centeredness. The love and faith of Jesus breaks down all barriers between people, freeing us to set others free by renouncing our claims over ourselves and our need to bend them to our will and well-being. **Lamentations 1.1-5; Psalm 103.1-12; Philemon 1.4-16.**

2. **“The Word of God”** After a stunning vision of the awesome angels of heaven, Ezekiel sees the Son of Man. When he speaks, Ezekiel falls at his feet as one dead, overcome by the glory and power. The Son of Man calls him and gives him a mission to take his word to a rebellious people. Whether or not they receive it, they will know that a prophet of God has spoken among them; for God’s word carries the power of the One who speaks it. Centuries later, the writer of Hebrews calls that same Word a sharp, two-edged sword that pierces between the soul and the spirit—that penetrates right to the center of our being. This word is Jesus Christ, who expresses the very heart and mind of God for people, that they might have life together with God through him. **Ezekiel 1.24-2.5; Psalm 105.1-11; Hebrews 4.12-16.**