

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 45

Day 309. Read Ezekiel 12.1-14.11; Hebrews 7.1-17; Psalm 105.37-45; and Proverbs 27.3.

Ezekiel: ‘All talk, no action.’ That’s the way we might paraphrase Israel’s own proverb they directed at Ezekiel’s own prophecies for God: ‘The days pass by and the vision prophesied comes to nothing.’ All talk and no truth. God told Ezekiel, ‘I am putting an end to that proverb.’ Instead, God gives them another word: ‘The time is near when every vision will be fulfilled.’ No more false and flattering visions and prophecies among the people of Israel! What the Lord speaks will be fulfilled without any delay. Ezekiel was made to become a sign personally—to act out the prophecy, so no one could mistake what it meant. In broad daylight he was to pack a few belongings and leave for another place, as if fleeing in exile. Then, at dusk, while the people watch, he was to dig a hole through the wall, drag out his belongings, hoist them on his shoulder and leave, his face covered, as an exile would; so he cannot see the land he must leave. Perhaps God hopes, by such a clear sign, they will understand their rebellion and return to God. But the sad truth is the false prophets lull them to complacency. They cry, ‘peace!’ when there is no peace coming. They are whitewashing the flimsy wall of illusion Israel has built around itself. So God orders Ezekiel to prophesy against the false prophets. They will not belong to the council of leaders; their names will not be listed in the records of Israel, nor will they re-enter the land when God brings his people back from exile. God declares that he himself will tear down the flimsy wall they have created. He will level it to the ground, so the foundation itself is laid bare. Only then can he begin to build again. **Questions:** 1. Has God ever led me through a time of stripping me bare of my own illusions and agendas-back to my faith foundations- so he can build to his own purposes and specifications? How do I receive and react to such chastening and correction from the Lord? 2. What do I do when there isn’t immediate ‘payoff’ from God’s promises, or I experience a ‘dry’ time in my relationship with God? Do I accept such times thankfully and persist, or do I grumble and grow impatient? 3. To whom among the wayward might God be sending me to address with a caring word of warning, lovingly phrased? To whom might God be sending me to speak a word of peace in their trials and troubles?

Hebrews: Who was this mysterious Melchizedek?! His name means ‘king of righteousness.’ He appears suddenly out of nowhere. Even someone as special to God as Abraham gave him a tenth of the property plundered from marauders, as later the people

of Israel were required to tithe their property to the priests. But he is not descended from Levi, like those priests. In a sense, Levi himself—as Abraham’s future descendant—gave his tithe to Melchizedek when Abraham, his ancestor, tithed his goods. Melchizedek is the ancestor of a better high priest. Jesus was descended not from Levi, but Judah. Of him God was speaking when David prophesied of Jesus Christ, his own descendant, in the Psalm, ‘You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.’ Jesus’ priesthood is bestowed by God himself, from whom he is descended. Anyone cleansed by his sacrifice, anyone whom this priest prays for, anyone for whom this priest mediates between God and them, has a high priest they can rely on...forever! **Questions:** 1. Do I trust God and give a tenth to my faith community for God’s work as Abraham did? If not, why not? If not, how can I grow in faith and generosity until I do? 2. How does it change my attitude and actions to know that I have a loving, high priest in Jesus Christ, praying and advocating for me to his Father on my behalf forever? 3. How do I practice my own priesthood of prayer for others, following in Jesus’ footsteps? Who needs my prayer, especially right now?

Prayer: Lord, why do I tend to tell people what they want to hear, instead of what they need to hear in a loving way? And why do I pass by people without hearing at all what their real needs are, their true hopes and hurts? Open my ears to hear and my mouth to speak for you. Open my eyes to really see, and my hands to help the people you put around me every day. Though it takes me into scary and uncertain territory, teach me to pray for others; for you always answer prayer and provide the needed help...if only by sending me to help them for you. Amen.

Day 310. Read Ezekiel 14.12-16.42; Hebrews 7.18-28; Psalm 106.1-12; and Proverbs 27.4-6.

Ezekiel: God is relentless in his insistence on righteousness. Even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in a rebellious, foreign land that sins against God, the land would not be spared, only these righteous people themselves. Sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague will devour them. How much worse will it be when God again sends Jerusalem his destruction! Ezekiel hears this awful message and must deliver it to the rebellious people—his own people. How can a prophet like Ezekiel deliver such a message of doom and destruction to his own people, without going mad? What feelings must have arisen in Ezekiel when told to deliver it...what guilt of being the bearer...what grief for the terrible loss of life that would certainly result? So that it seems sure it is out of God’s concern for Ezekiel personally, God declares, ‘Yet, there will be survivors; and when you see their conduct, you will be consoled. You will be consoled for you will know that I have done nothing without cause...or without causing effective change.’ Judah was like God’s lovely lady who lavished all her favors on anyone who passed by. She even sacrificed her sons and daughters—God’s sons and daughters by her—to be food for idols! Whose pain could be worse than God’s as he saw his children being consumed for the favors of false gods?! So God stretched out his hand against her, his adulterous wife, and gave her over to her false lovers to do with as they will. Stripped bare, left alone, her prostitution will be at an end. Then God’s jealous

anger will turn away. In calm, he will come to her again. There will be survivors. There will be children again, and wait till you see their conduct! **Questions:** 1. How is my relationship with God like the intimacy of marriage? How is my 'marriage' with God going? What can I do to strengthen it from my end? 2. How is my sinning like committing adultery against God? Is he right in his jealousy, to insist on my exclusive love toward him as first and foremost in my life? 3. How does my sinning cause harm to other children of God? When I hurt them, why do I hurt God also?

Hebrews: The law can't make anything perfect; it only shows shortcomings. The law only reveals faults and failings; it will never provide what it demands: perfection. So God, who gave the law, also provided the hope the law could never give: Jesus Christ. God confirmed it with an oath, recorded in Psalms: 'God has sworn and will never break his oath—you, Jesus, are a priest forever!' So Jesus guarantees a better covenant than the covenant of law. Because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood is permanent. He is able to save everyone who comes to him, because he lives forever to intercede for them to his Father. He is the only high priest who truly meets our need: holy, blameless, pure, set apart from the sinful, and exalted in heaven. Unlike all other priests who must first offer sacrifices for their own sins, and must offer them day after day, he sacrificed for the sins of the whole world just once, when he offered himself. The law-appointed people who were weak...who died and could not carry on their prayer and sacrifice for others. Jesus, the Son, appointed by God's own oath, has been made perfect forever. What the law cannot do, he will. He will make perfect all who love and follow him. **Questions:** 1. As I read God's Word, do I listen for God's Law speaking to me, showing me where I fall short and need to change my character and actions? Where is the law (God's word of conviction and correction) telling me I am going wrong these days? 2. When God's convicting and correcting word comes to me, do I tend to despair and give up or get defiant? Or do I run to my gracious high priest, Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself to save me, asking him to pray for me to his Father and change me through his love? 3. Whom do I know who is still defiantly slaving away to try and fulfill the law through their own self-righteousness, rather than relying on the perfection given by grace through the sacrifice of Christ? Whom do I know who has given up in despair and needs to hear that Christ loves them and will provide the righteousness they lack? How are both faith conditions—defiance and despondency—problems for me personally sometimes?

Prayer: O Law, be the good fellow you are. Yes, show me where I fall short and fail. But know that the perfection you seek to find in me, you must find in my Lord. Oh, I know that I need the perfection you tout to stand in God's presence. As he is holy, so must I be, completely pure like him. You, Law, hold up the mirror to me, and show me a scarred, scared being below contempt. But you, O Father, look not on your Law, but on your Love...your Son, sacrificed for me. His sacrifice is sufficient for me...for the whole world...he is so precious...and perfect. Listen not to your Law but to him. For I am freed by his sacrifice to be your child again...to live...and look...just like you again. Perfect. Amen.

Day 311. Read Ezekiel 16.43-17.24; Hebrews 8.1-13; Psalm 106.13-31; and Proverbs 27.7-9.

Ezekiel: Like mother, like daughter. God quotes this proverb, comparing Judah to a woman with sisters. Her sisters are the Ammonites and Hittites—the older peoples expelled from the promised land. They are Samaria to the north, and worst of all, Sodom to the south. Like a younger sister imitating her siblings, she has copied their detestable practices of all the nations around her—doing terrible injustice and even sacrificing children to their idols—until, ultimately, she outdid them all in her depravity. ‘Samaria did not commit half the sins that you did!’ God proclaims. So God speaks to the people of Judah the most dreadful words that anyone can hear from his mouth: ‘I will deal with you exactly as you deserve!’ Justice will be theirs. Now impartial judgment will fall. They must bear the consequences of their detestable practices, receiving exactly the destruction they deserve, because they despised God’s vow and broke the covenant bond between them. And yet....God declares, ‘I will remember the covenant I made with you in your younger days and will establish an everlasting covenant with you.’ God declares he himself will make atonement for them for all they have done! God prophesies of a coming king he will raise up, saying he will take a shoot from a giant cedar and plant it on the mountain heights of Israel; and it will grow so tall that every kind of bird in the forest will find shelter in its wings. The justice of God is tempered with mercy. **Questions:** 1. How have I allowed the people around me to influence me in bad ways regarding my relationship with God? With regard to doing justice and acts of love toward others? 2. When I stand before God on judgment day, would I want to hear, ‘I will deal with you exactly as you deserve,’ trusting in my own perfection or rely on the righteousness of Jesus Christ and faith in him? 3. If I don’t want God to treat me as I deserve, why do I insist on treating others as they deserve, getting angry...and even wanting revenge...when they wrong me? Has God’s grace to me made me more gracious to others? Toward whom specifically do I need to be more gracious?

Hebrews: A new covenant. By calling this one new, God made the old covenant obsolete. There was only one thing wrong with the old covenant. The old covenant, with its religious rules and rituals, could never save anyone. It could never put people completely right in relationship with God. Exterior acts could never change the heart, which was the heart of the problem. People were left endlessly reaching after the righteousness that receded further away every time they reached for it. Innocent animals had to be sacrificed over and over, again and again, because people sin again and again, over and over, endlessly. But Christ sat down at the right hand of God after offering the perfect sacrifice—himself. The earthly priests served in an earthly sanctuary built by human hands, but he serves praying for his people in the heavenly sanctuary, of which the earthly one was but a shadowy copy. The new covenant is founded on better promises: God promises, ‘I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.’ No more! Truly this is a new covenant, built on a better promise: the promise of Christ’s own righteousness given us as

a gift. **Questions:** 1. What does it mean to me that there is a new covenant between God and me? 2. How does the new covenant, and Christ who guarantees it with his blood, change my attitude and actions, especially towards others? Does it make any real difference in my life? 3. What is Christ doing in the heavenly sanctuary as my high priest? How does the fact that he continues to minister on my behalf to God every day change my own habits of prayer for others or service to others?

Prayer: God, you deserve better; and I deserve worse. Even my very best is less than you deserve. And even the very least bit of grace you give me is much more than I deserve. And yet, I deserve it because Christ dares to ask it of you. Christ gave himself on the cross for me, the perfect sacrifice for all my sins...forever. I am free. And I choose to use my freedom to submit to you and serve you in obedience, just as your Son does. I want to be your child. Because of your Son, I am your child. Thank you for giving me not what I deserve, but what he deserves. Let me be as gracious to others, as you are to me, never treating them as they deserve but as Christ desires. Amen.

Day 312. Read Ezekiel 18.1-19.14; Hebrews 9.1-10; Psalm 106.32-48; and Proverbs 27.10.

Ezekiel: Injustice and falsehood are ingrained in their very language. They quote the proverb, 'The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are on edge.' Does God really punish people for others' sins, as they imply in this proverb? Is God unjust and unfair? Angrily rejecting the accusation, God declares this proverb must never be used among God's people again. But make no mistake: 'every living soul belongs to me,' God says. Every person is completely responsible to God who created them. God will judge each person according to her or his own ways. 'The soul that sins will die.' The father will not be judged for the son's misdeeds or the son for the father's. The sad reality is that every soul sins...and, therefore, must die. Unless... 'Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked?' God cries. 'Am I not pleased when they turn from their wrong ways and live?' God pleads with people through his prophet, Ezekiel: 'Repent and turn away from all your wrongdoing, so sin will not be your downfall. Get a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, for I do not take pleasure in anyone's death? Repent and live!' **Questions:** 1. Do I truly believe that I belong to God, 'body and soul?' Is that demonstrated truly and consistently in the way I speak and act? 2. What sinful acts or character traits do I still need to repent of? 3. How does God's caring about me and wanting me to live with him forever motivate me to display more the 'new heart and new spirit' of Christ God has given me, when he restored me into relationship with him through Christ's cross and resurrection?

Hebrews: Every part and parcel of the tabernacle—the moveable tent of meeting—had a purpose and meaning. Every action commanded had significance. Behind the second curtain was concealed the Most Holy Place, which held the ark—and above the ark was the throne for God himself. Only the high priest entered that inner room and did so only

once a year, with blood offered for his own sins and the sins of the people. In these symbols and symbolic actions, the Holy Spirit was revealing the way to God that God would provide through his own Son, who offered himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the people and not his own (for he never sinned). The Spirit was revealing that the true way to clear the conscience completely was coming, the way to God through faith in Christ Jesus, God's Son. All the others rites and rituals—symbolic as they were—were only external regulations applying only until the time of fulfillment, as a blueprint is useful until the building is completed. Live in the building, not the blueprint. **Questions:** 1. Do I really live in the building and not the blueprint? Am I living the freedom, responsibility, and joy of belonging to the family of God; or am I still struggling to make my own way? 2. Is my conscience completely clear? That is, do I really believe—and act like—I am truly forgiven of my sins because my High Priest, Jesus, has atoned to the Father for me? 3. How does God foreshadowing through the tabernacle and temple rules and rituals the salvation that God would bestow on believers through his Son strengthen my faith? How is it like prophecy and fulfillment in the Bible, which also strengthens my faith?

Prayer: God, you must really want me to live with you to pay such a high cost for me. As the singers once said, truly, 'If God made heaven, then he wants you in it.' You didn't want me to die but to turn to you and live. You wanted to give me a new heart and a new spirit. And you have. When you gave your Son for me, you gave your Son to me. His heart and Spirit are mine now. Praise be to your unfathomable love that gives me, not what I deserve, but what you desire for me. Lord, I know I am now like a building under construction by your hands. Hammer as you see fit. Cut as you know best. But make me to be who I already am in your mind, your child, like your Son. Amen.

Day 313. Read Ezekiel 20.1-49; Hebrews 9.11-28; Psalm 107.1-43; and Proverbs 27.11.

Ezekiel: I want to be just like everyone else; that's all I want to be, say God's people. To which God responds: 'No way!' That will never happen! Rather than let that happen, God will rule over those people who settle for less than they are worth with 'a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.' God will not let anyone settle for less than life with him, life as it is truly meant to be, without trying every way he knows to turn them to him. That includes the darker way of dreadful consequences—his mighty hand and outstretched arm. But then, after the arm is outstretched in wrath and anger, his arm is outstretched to encourage and embrace. God will lead them back into the desert, rekindling the intimate, loving relationship they shared when he delivered them from slavery in Egypt. They will know him...intimately as the Biblical word 'know' means...when he gathers his people from the nations where his anger scattered them and brings them back to live in the land where they belong, the place God promised them. 'You will know I am the Lord,' he declares, not when you suffer his outstretched arm to convict and correct you, but 'when I deal with

you for my name's sake and not according to your evil ways and corrupt practices.' To know God, you must not only know the law, you must know...believe and trust...his grace. His love rules over his justice. **Questions:** 1. Why do I still sometimes long that I could just live like everybody else and not follow Jesus Christ? How does that lingering desire still show in my life? 2. If I tell the truth, am I still sometimes angry that God won't just give up trying to change me? That I find God inconvenient, because knowing him places demands on my life that I resent? 3. How does God's relentless grace even take care of these lingering desires to be like non-believers and go about life according to my own desires? What does it say about God and his grace that he even will forgive that in me, while working to change it in me?

Hebrews: Christ entered the Holy of Holies—into the glory of the Presence—with his own blood, not the blood of mere animals. In olden times, the sprinkled blood of animals cleansed people of sin outwardly...but only outwardly. The deadly danger still survived inside, like a cancer addressed with band-aid remedies. How much more does the blood of Christ Jesus, who as God's Son is the truly, spotless sacrifice, cleanse inwardly and completely of sin. Through him we are freed, living to serve the Living God. Just so, Christ did not enter an earthly sanctuary when he ascended to the Father, but a heavenly one, to appear in God's very presence. He does not need to offer himself year after year, either; for once suffices forever. Because, as the Son, he is such a valuable sacrifice, once suffices for all...forever! And now, just as mortals in this world live only once and then appear before God for judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of all who believe in him. He will appear here a second time, not to suffer and sacrifice himself for sin again, but to bestow the final and perfected salvation to those who trust and live in him. **Questions:** 1. How valuable am I to God? What does his sacrificing his Son for me say about that? 2. How do I value Christ? If that question were asked of the people around me who know me, my words and my actions, how would they answer that question? 3. What do I honestly think and believe about the Judgment Day and Christ coming again? Do I look forward to them or fear them? What more can God do to increase my trust and faith in the salvation he freely gives me through faith in Christ?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I have a problem. In my mind and spirit I want to be like you, but there is a part of me—no, there is another me—that wants to be like everyone else but you. That Self wants, like everyone else, to be in control of its own destiny, deciding what it wants to do and avoiding whatever it doesn't want to do. You have shown me a much better way to be...the way of love. Come, Lord Jesus, rule over me now. By your love, increase my love. When you come at the end of time, whether that be in my lifetime or when I am lying in the grave, on the Day of Judgment, I will stand only in your grace. That is sufficient for me...and many more besides. It is sufficient for the whole world. Amen.

Day 314. Read Ezekiel 21.1-22.31; Hebrews 10.1-17; Psalm 108.1-13; and Proverbs 27.12.

Ezekiel: The whole nation stands at a crossroads spiritually. What will it take to make people listen? What will it take to reach just one person, so they turn and stand with God? God's prophet is bidden to proclaim God's Word, not just through his speech but with actions that speak louder than words. He is told to groan wordlessly in public before the people, so they sense his broken heart and bitter grief. They will see and hear him and ask, 'Why?' In the very act of asking, they open themselves to God speaking to them. Ezekiel is told to make a sign for the king of Babylon and put it at special crossroads, pointing the way to Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, and Rabbah, the capital of the Ammonite's country. This is to signify he is coming to capture and destroy them. These prophecies in actions put the punctuation point to the message the prophet speaks from God: because of their injustice and bloodshed, because of their forsaking God and creating idols for themselves, destruction is coming. The sign post points the way for the destroyer. The prophet groans out of bitter grief for the destruction and desolation that is relentlessly approaching for his people. Not only the people, but even the leaders do injustice at every turn. The prophets whitewash their wrongful actions, proclaiming false visions and lying prophecies. Therefore, God declares, as people gather metals to melt them in a fiery furnace, God will gather the people in Jerusalem and blow on them with his fiery wrath. God looks for one person among them who would build up the wall and stand before him in the gap—the one person who would stand with God and do right—so he would not have to destroy the city. He found none. And so the judgment comes. The groans will be heard. The destroyer will soon stand at the signpost that God's put at the crossroads to point the way.

Questions: 1. Who among the people I know has ever asked me why I do what I do because of my loving actions for them, so that I then have an opportunity to tell them about God? Who most needs me to serve them lovingly for God, so they might ask why I am doing it? 2. What were the signposts (the difficult situations and loving actions of others that spoke louder than words) in my life that helped me turn to God? 3. How is God calling me to 'build up the wall and stand in the gap' today? In what situation or area of my life is God looking for me to 'stand tall' for him right now?

Hebrews: It is impossible. The law, though good, cannot do it. The law is only a shadow cast by the thing itself—the thing it points toward, almost promises, but can in no way deliver. That thing is perfect life. That thing is perfect righteousness. The two—perfect righteousness and perfect life—are one and the same thing. The law cannot make anyone perfect; it can only point toward the perfection and show how much people fall short of it. For this reason, the animal sacrifices for sins prescribed by the law had to be repeated year after year, endlessly. If the law could bring perfection, animal sacrifice would suffice and the sacrifices would stop. Instead, even the sacrifices that were meant to remove sins became reminders of the relentless sinning that required them. God does not desire sacrifices. He desires perfect righteousness, perfect life for people. So Christ Jesus, his Son, took a body that he might sacrifice himself...once, for all. Once. For all! By one

sacrifice he has made perfect forever those whom God is making holy through faith and following. Though always works in progress in this world, all people of faith in Jesus Christ have already been made perfect forever through his sacrifice. **Questions:** 1. How does it give me joy, courage and confidence for life to know that, in Christ, I have already been made perfect forever through his sacrifice for me? 2. How valuable must Christ be if his single sacrifice removes the sins of the whole world—of all people who believe in him, past, present or future, including me? 3. Why do I still need the law since I have been fully forgiven in Christ? Why is the law still absolutely necessary and even helpful for me, even though I have been saved by grace through faith already?

Prayer: God, I am so glad one person did stand in the gap. Your Son did. He stood in the gap for me...for everyone I know...for this whole world and everyone who will ever live in it. You spared this world because of one righteous person, Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself freely and fully out of perfect obedience to you. The Perfect One was sacrificed for the impoverished one. What an exchange: impoverishment for perfection. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for loving me, so that you made this exchange: your perfection for my poverty. Now let me live to your credit, for you have totally paid my debt. Amen.

Day 315. Read Ezekiel 23.1-49; Hebrews 10.18-39; Psalm 109.1-31; and Proverbs 27.13.

Ezekiel: What pain God must feel to see his people turn away! God tells a story with a painful point—a parable—through Ezekiel. Two daughters of the same mother became prostitutes in the land of their birth, Egypt. Yet, someone married them both. The oldest lusted after other lovers when she was already married to another. Her false lovers stripped her naked, took her sons and daughters, and killed them. Even so, the younger sister followed her ways. She lusted after the very same lovers...and even more from far away, even though those same, false lovers would bring the same destruction on her. The story has a sad ending. The sisters are Samaria and Judah, the twelve tribes of Israel, the chosen people God redeemed from idolatry and slavery in Egypt. The someone who married them is really Someone—God himself, who loves his people as a bridegroom loves his bride. The false lovers were the nations around Israel, from whom they drew their idols to worship, instead giving God their total devotion. They committed adultery with their idols and even sacrificed God's children as food to them. There is blood on their hands. 'Since you have forgotten me and put me out of sight,' God says to them, 'you must bear the consequences of your actions.' Then they will know that God is God, and no one and no thing else. **Questions:** 1. If God were to tell a story about me, what would he say? 2. How does my sin cause God pain? How am I paining God most now through my actions or omissions—the bad things I do or the good things I omit to do? 3. As God brought consequences on Israel, so that ultimately they would come to know him in a right relationship again, how is God's showing me my sin a good thing for me? How is God

working to change my heart and character to be more like his, so my actions are aligned with his will?

Hebrews: How shall we go in? The door is open! It was blocked once. Shut tight and locked. A new way has opened up for us to enter where we really need...and desire...to be: in the Most Holy Place. It was opened through the blood...though the body... of Jesus, our great high priest. Why not go in? But how? Head hung in shame? Slowly, cautiously creeping inside, like slaves, trying to be unseen in the shadows? No! Like sons and daughters entering the home of their loving father, with confidence, with sincere hearts in full assurance of faith. How do people move and act whose hearts have been completely cleansed from guilty consciences? They swagger again. They are overflowing with hope, for the Father is faithful to his promises. No more do we dwell on ourselves, stuck, wallowing in our guilt and shame. As we enter to the Father, we depart from our compulsive fixation on our selves. We consider others—how to spur one another on to love and good deeds, just like our Father does. We meet together with others and encourage others, just as God encourages us to come to him. What is the point of turning away after you enter the door? What is to be gained? Actually, all is lost to turn away and leave home again after regaining it. The blood no longer avails. Then there is only the prospect of falling, not into the arms of the Father, but into the hands of the Living God who judges all impartially. The people to whom Hebrews is written were faithful people. They had entered the door. They had suffered persecution for following the Lord. All that was needed now was persevering. They had entered into the Holy of Holies. Would they turn and leave home again? **Questions:** 1. What tempts me to turn from God? 2. Have I truly experienced the confidence and full assurance of faith, so that I go to God joyfully, free of guilt and shame, as God intends me to? 3. Am I living the confidence and freedom fully as God intends, making a point to meet with other believers for mutual encouragement and growth in the community of faith? What can I do to strengthen my relationships with others in the community of faith?

Prayer: Father, forgive me for coming to you more often as a slave than as a son—as who I am in Christ, your child brought home again by his blood. You want me to come to you boldly, clean of conscience and full of love, because of his complete sacrifice for me. Let me truly be who I am in your sight because of him, clean and pure. Let me live as who I am in Christ—your child, showing your resemblance in my words and actions. Let me live the joyful encouragement and hope I know in Christ for others around me every day. As you have opened the door to you, let me help others through to find you. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 45

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Ezekiel 16.32-42

Psalm: 107.1-9

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Hebrews 7.18-19, 23—8.2

Theme: Our Jealous, Loving God

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 45:

Whenever we go our own self-centered way, we break our relationship with God, who is the very source of our life. God loves us too much to let us go the way of death easily, without putting up a fight to win us back to him and back to life. Israel followed false gods, borrowing ways from the nations surrounding her. The bond between God and his people is even closer and more intimate than the most intimate of human relationships, marriage. God, in seeking to win his people back to him and back to the path that leads to life, speaks to them through his prophet, Ezekiel, using the words a heartbroken husband might use toward his adulterous wife. The terrible consequences that come upon Israel for their unfaithfulness to God are like the broken life and sufferings of a spouse who committed adultery and broke the marriage bond. Yet, the end result is God promises his jealous anger will subside and pass away. In love, he will embrace his people-his bride-again. In the New Testament Bible passage from Hebrews, we see the very way in which God makes it possible to remove the sin that separates God and people, so they can be reconciled with God: his Son, Jesus Christ. The external rules, rituals, and commandments could not remove the guilt or reestablish the broken relationship. They only worsened the breach. They could only show how far short we all fall. The Son of God offers himself as the perfect sacrifice that frees everyone who believes in him from sin. Because of the sacrifice of Christ, the righteous anger of the God who was wronged has passed away forever. We are freed for life with God again, life the way it was meant to be, as God's beloved.

Alternate Readings & Themes:

1. **“New Life Now”** All people are precious to God. All people are eternal beings; because after we die, God will resurrect us for an eternal life, either together with or separated from God for eternity. God doesn't desire anyone to die. Anyone! In the Ezekiel passage, he pleads for people to turn to him and live. Turn And Live! To show how serious he is, God repeats his plea twice (repetition is how the Bible emphasizes

the importance of a saying)! The writer of Hebrews tells how Christ Jesus came by a new and living way that opened up new life with God. We can approach God—and life—with confidence and courage. Through faith in him, we are made part of a new community. We can encourage others, spurring one another on to love and good deeds until the Day of Christ's coming. **Ezekiel 19.20-32; Psalm 106.1-12; Hebrews 10.19-27.**

2. **'Stand In The Gap'** God looked long and longingly for someone to intervene to save people from destruction. Through his prophet, Ezekiel, he reveals how he looked for someone righteous to rise among the leaders of his people, but not one did. Hebrews describes how finally that person came—the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who intervened himself—his very life—in the gap between sinful people and the righteous God, and reconciled all who believe to God again. In Christ, we are called to 'stand in the gap' and work to reconcile people to God as Christ did, sharing both his nature and mission. **Ezekiel 22.23-31; Psalm 108.1-13; Hebrews 9.11-15, 24-28**