

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 47

Day 323. Read Ezekiel 39.1-40.27; James 2.18-3.18;
Psalm 118.1-18; and Proverbs 28.2.

Ezekiel: Fuel for the home fires. Months' worth! The fuel for the fires of God's people will be the weapons on the enemies that sought to destroy them—their shields, bows and arrows, clubs and spears. When the crucial, culminating battle comes in this seemingly endless war being waged against God's people, God's people won't need to gather wood or cut down trees from the forest for months, so great will be the enemy army—and so complete will be the victory of God. God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the birds and wild animals to gather for the feast—the sacrifice—that is to come when the Day has come. Horses and riders, mighty men and soldiers, even princes and sovereigns, will be their food after the great, conclusive battle. And then God will bring all God's people back from their exile, wherever they have been held captive. They will forget their shame and their unfaithfulness for which they went into captivity. God will show himself holy through them in the sight of all the nations. Then, even the nations will know that he is God alone. For though God sends his children into exile for the wrongs they have done, he will gather them back to their own land, leaving no one behind. Then, according to his promise, he will hide his face from them no more. They shall see him face-to-face, and he will pour out his Spirit on his people. **Questions:** 1. How is Jesus' conquering sin, death, and the devil by his cross and resurrection, God's calling together a new people from all nations, and God's pouring his Holy Spirit upon them all at Pentecost, the fulfillment of this prophecy? How does God's predicting it all strengthen my faith and my resolve to live and work for God in my time and place? 2. How does it affect my attitudes and actions to know that, through the sacrifice of Christ, the shame of my unfaithfulness to God is totally forgiven and forgotten? Have I totally forgiven myself and put my sin behind me, as God has put my sin behind himself? If not, why not; and when will I? 3. How can I 'lay down' or 'burn up' my 'weapons'—the prejudices and preferences that cause division between me and other people? How can I personally help people not like me—'the nations'—to know God as Savior and Lord?

James: Tremble before God? Believe in God? That's certain. One day everyone will. Even the demons believe...in the sense of knowing and acknowledging that God is powerful. They tremble because they know about God. When they think of God they tremble...with foreboding and fear. But there is another way to tremble before the

awesome God who created the universe: trembling with excitement, with anticipation...joy...trembling with love. The truly wise are those who tremble because they know and love God. Theirs is the wisdom that comes from heaven, born of a true trust in the true God: pure, peace-loving, full of mercy, bearing good fruit, fair and impartial, sincere and considerate. Such is God, and such are those who tremble before the God of love because they love him in response for his goodness. Such trust and faith automatically show themselves in godly works. Salvation, like all real relationship with God, shows. Salvation is revealed and worked out in faith-filled works. The unspiritual wisdom of the world leads to envy, selfish ambition, disturbance, and disorder. All people stumble in many ways, but none worse than through faithless speaking. Our hurtful words ravage all the relationships we are in, just as little sparks start forest fires. With the same mouth we praise God and put down people precious to God, so precious, in fact, that he made them in his own image and likeness for relationship with him. That changes...that ultimately comes to an end...in the one who trembles before God, in response for God's trembling on the cross in love for them. **Questions:** 1. Does my faith show in godly works, however imperfectly, or is it just a matter of my mind? 2. Do I still tremble in terror before God, afraid he will reject me for my wrongdoing; or do I trust totally in God's love for me because of the sacrifice of Christ for me? Why do I still vacillate between confidence and fear in my relationship with God? 3. Do I speak graciously to others, just as I would speak to God; or do I let my anger or envy cut others down? What can I do to clean up my act, as regards talking to and about others?

Prayer: My faithful Lord, when I think of all you have said to me and done for me, I tremble in awe before your goodness and greatness. But why do I still doubt and tremble with fear before such love so much of the time? O loving Lord, grow my faith; and let my words and deeds reflect my faith in you more and more. More and more, may my words and deeds speak graciously of you to others, even as yours speak graciously to me. Forgive me...and correct me...whenever I speak to others you made in your image and likeness for relationship with you, as though they don't matter to you or to me. May they always matter to me, as much as they do to you. Amen.

Day 324. Read Ezekiel 40.28-41.26; James 4.1-7;

Psalm 118.19-29; and Proverbs 28.3-5.

Ezekiel: Who can imagine the Mind, the Architect, who imagined the Temple? Every detail is carefully and perfectly planned and proportioned. In a vision, Ezekiel is taken on a tour of the temple. Great care is taken to point out every detail to him, even in the inner sanctuary, the Most Holy Place. It is a perfect square. Every aspect of the temple is examined and measured so Ezekiel can see how it fits together with every other aspect, down to the double-pronged hooks a hand-breadth long, hung on the wall around the room appointed for the sacrifices. Carved images of angelic beings, the cherubim, decorate the walls of the inner and outer sanctuary at regular intervals, along with palms carved between them. The same Mind that designed the temple designed the awesome cherubim, who have two faces, one of a man and the other of a lion. The same Mind imagined the

Milky Way and scattered out the stars like sand on the seashore. The same Architect designed all humans beings, including Ezekiel, the man...to be in the image and likeness of God...to be temples of the living God. They are designed down to the least detail by the same Mind, built by the same Architect, fearfully and wonderfully made. **Questions:** 1. Do I really believe and act as though God is interested in every aspect and detail of my life? How does knowing that I matter that much to him—and that he has the wisdom and power to attend to every detail of my life personally—change my attitudes and actions in life? 2. Do I pay attention to the details of my life as ways to glorify and worship God, so that the most menial or insignificant actions are offered up as sacrifices of praise to him? 3. How can I so live that I become a temple of praise to God and my life is unceasing worship to him?

James: Where do quarrels and conflicts come from? Between nations, or between neighbors next door, there is no difference. I want something and don't get it, so my frustrated self-love lashes out. I covet and 'kill' with thoughts or words, or sometimes literally with wounds, when I don't get what I desire. The amazing truth is: I don't get what I want because I don't ask. I ask but don't receive, because I don't really ask—I demand what I want. I try to turn God into a dispenser of what I want, what I think I need but really do not. I seek friendship with the world while also seeking friendship with God. If I truly ask God...which means to ask truly...then I do not demand but instead request what he knows I need. The promise is true: If I draw near to God, he will draw near to me. If I hold onto the world...or onto my Self, so it means the world to me...I cannot hold onto God. That Self is a mist that appears for a little while and vanishes when the sun get high and hot. That Self makes its plans as though it were in complete control and calling all the shots; when, in reality, it can't even know what tomorrow will bring. God lifts up those who kneel before him. Submit your Self to God. Resist the Evil One, and he will flee. Submit to God, and he will draw near to you. **Questions:** 1. How has this truth that quarrels and conflict come from my own frustrated, controlling Self played out in my life? What havoc has this self-centered focus on 'I-Me-Mine' wrought among my relationships? 2. How have I compromised with the world, at the expense of my relationship with God? In what ways do I seek 'friendship with the world,' at the expense of following God? 3. To whom do I need to make amends for the conflict and quarrels I have caused, or at least contributed to? What will I do to ask forgiveness and make amends?

Prayer: God, it is true; I am a mere mist that is here for such a little while and then disappears. But this is not the whole story. You have made me for you. I am designed for relationship with you, and I am complete only when I am completely yours. Forgive my mistakes. Forgive me when I seek fulfillment through others loves, longing for the things of this world, falling prey to the tricks of the evil one who lures me with false promises that seem so pleasing. They are not to blame; I am. God, break the cycle of self-centered desiring that keeps me in bondage. I cannot free myself. I cling to your promise: drawing near to you, you will draw near to me. Here I am, right now, such as

I am, drawing near to you. Ah....there you are now, drawing near to me...always good to your Word! I am yours; unholy as I am, I am wholly yours. Amen.

Day 325. Read Ezekiel 42.1-43.27; James 5.1-20; Psalm 119.1-16; and Proverbs 28.6-7.

Ezekiel: To see the glory of God. To hear his voice. Who can imagine such a sight, such a sound? Ezekiel is given this gift. God approaches the temple as Ezekiel, in a vision, is standing beside it. The Voice was like the rushing roar of many rivers. His glory made the land radiant. What can any human being do before such glory? Ezekiel, called the son of man by God when God spoke to him, did what every human being will do in God's presence: he fell face down before him. The Spirit lifted him up again and brought him into the inner court, as the glory of the Lord filled the whole temple. That is the Spirit's work: to lift up the believer and lead them into the very presence of God. A man speaks to Ezekiel saying, 'Son of man, this is the place of my throne, where I will live among the people of Israel forever. Tell the people the plan of the temple; describe it in perfect detail, so they may be ashamed of all their wrongdoing. Let them consider the plan..put aside all faithlessness...and be faithful to its design and follow its regulations.' The temple that was destroyed because of their sinfulness and infidelity to God is to be rebuilt. It is to be purified with sacrifices of atonement for seven days; and then on the eighth day the priests are to present burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, for God will again accept his people...on the eighth day. **Questions:** 1. The Gospels record that Jesus said, 'Destroy this temple (referring to his body), and in three days I will build another not made by human hands' and that he rose on the eighth day, Sunday, following the Sabbath or seventh day of the week, earning acceptance before God for all who believe. How does Jesus, here speaking to Ezekiel, who later fulfills this promise and prediction in his own actions, strengthen my faith in God's Word? 2. How does it affect my attitudes and actions to know that one day I will see Jesus Christ face-to-face as Ezekiel did? When I try to imagine what that meeting will be like, how do I imagine I will respond on that day? 3. Have I bowed in complete submission to God, so the Holy Spirit can lift me up and lead me into the inner court of God's living, loving presence? What's stopping me? How about right now?!

James: Yes, the Lord has ears. I know that because cries have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. Cries against me. Cries against me living in luxury at the expense of others. Not paying fair wages for the work of others I benefit from. Indulging my Self while other selves languish. Why hoard wealth in the last days...as the end is about to break out over the whole world? Until the Lord's coming, let us be patient...and produce justice. No need to mince words or make pretty promises. Let your words be simply 'yes' or 'no.' If I am in trouble, pray. If happy? Sing praises! If sick? Call for the leaders of the church to pray over me and anoint me with oil for healing. If sinning, confess my sins to other believers and pray for one another, and experience God's forgiveness. The prayer of a faithful person is powerful and effective. You will be healed...and you will be an

instrument of God's healing for others. If anyone wanders from the truth, I should bring them back; for, by so doing, I will save them from death and cover a multitude of sins, just as Jesus saved me from death and covered my multitude of sins. **Questions:** 1. When I suffer from physical sickness or from sin-sickness, do I turn to trustworthy, faithful people for prayers and help in healing, or do I try to go it alone? If I don't have a mature, trustworthy, confidential spiritual friend to rely on, with whom can I cultivate a spiritual friendship so we can care for one another spiritually? 2. Are there ways I am benefiting unjustly from the labors of others? Am I giving others their just rewards for their labors and even being generous besides? 3. Believing that helping someone who has wandered away from God to come back to God is to save them from death, whom do I know who has wandered and whom I could serve with God's love to lead them back into a saving relationship with God? Will I try? When and how?

Prayer: God, as I look over my life, I see so many ways I have benefited from the work of others without giving them their due. Every day I benefit from the labor of others whom I don't thank or reward as they deserve. Every day I benefit spiritually from the care you send me through others...even to the point of my knowing your Son and having the forgiveness of sins and salvation that comes from him alone...without thanking or rewarding them as they deserve. Most of all, it is from your Son that I have benefited most, at his expense. And still I don't thank and reward him as he deserves. I can't reward him, I know, but this I can do and will: I will seek to give him what he wants most. I will seek to bring back someone who has wandered away, someone whom he came to seek at the cost of his life...someone like me. Amen.

Day 326. Read Ezekiel 44.1-45.12; 1 Peter 1.1-12; Psalm 119.17-32; and Proverbs 28.8-10.

Ezekiel: Everything connected with God must be absolutely perfect. The profane has nothing in common with God and must be separated from God in his absolute essence, or it would be destroyed by coming into direct contact with his perfect holiness. The eastern gate leading into the temple must be kept closed. No one may enter by it. It is only for the Lord, the King of the universe, to enter by. The prince-the person appointed by God to rule over the people-alone may sit inside the gate and even eat the fellowship sacrifice there. So that everything might be perfect in God's presence, the priests are to wear nothing made of wool, which might make them sweat, but only linen clothes. When they go out from ministering before God into the outer courtyard, they must take off their special clothing and don street clothing. They have to keep the hair of their heads trimmed and not drink wine when serving in the inner court. If a priest touches a dead person, he must be ritually cleansed and then wait seven days before serving again. When God gathers his people from exile where he scattered them, it will be like a new Exodus. When they return to the promised land, they will again have to redistribute the land. A sacred district is to be set aside for the temple and for the priests to live. Next to the sacred district is to be the land for the city, only half as large. On either side of the sacred land

and the city, the prince is to have land to live off. The princes are to stop dispossessing the people and oppressing them. The land apportioned to the tribes of Israel will be their own, and the princes are not to have them. God is to be at the center; and everything is to be perfect, even as he is perfect. From the prince to the common person, God's people are to be holy, even as he is holy. **Questions:** 1. Why is it important that my comparison point and standard of conduct be not other people, but God's perfect holiness? 2. Do I really try to be 'My Utmost for His Highest,' as the title of Oswald Chambers' outstanding daily devotional suggests? Or do I compromise and let myself become complacent in my spiritual development and my service for God? 3. How can I support and strengthen my faith community or church to reflect more the justice, mercy, and holiness of God?

Peter: A new birth into a living hope! Just when we were going down and dying, along comes God to give us a new birth into a living hope and an inheritance that can never perish. All this through faith in God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. What can be our response but to overflow, as Peter does, with joy: 'Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has done this for us!' What are our current sufferings and trials, compared with the new birth and the imperishable inheritance that are ours? All those trials do is refine the gold we've been given—our faith—as gold is refined in the fire. That is the nature of faith. Even though we have never seen him before and do not see him now; yet, we love him, believe in him, and are filled because of him with an inexpressible joy—a foretaste of the end of our faith: joy! Trials? What are they? All who believe have been reborn with God as their Father. An imperishable inheritance is ours. Living hope! Joy! Praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Praise to God, our Father, and the Father of our brother, Jesus Christ. **Questions:** 1. How 'living' in me right now is the 'living hope' that belongs to all who believe? How alive am I really in my faith and following? Though I have never seen him, do I live as though he is truly real and actually the main thing in my life? 2. Do I demonstrate in my actions the joy of someone who has been reborn as God's child, and so has an imperishable inheritance awaiting them? 3. What trials am I facing because of my faith in Christ? If I don't have any, is that because I am inactive or complacent about the living hope I have been given as a gift? If I do have trials, do they just serve to refine (purify and strengthen) my faith, or are they shaking my faith?

Prayer: Sometimes, Lord, my living hope is living on the edge, in danger of failing. How can this be, since in Christ you have given me, through faith, the biggest blessing and best inheritance anyone in this world can be given? It won't fail, but I can. Lord of life, give life to my hope. Let it lift not just me, but people all around me, as your hope living in me and through me gives hope to all around me. The inheritance you give is imperishable, and that means never disappearing. No, the more I give it away, the more there is; for this living hope that makes life worth living, despite all trials, knows no limits. How could it? This hope comes from you, our ever-Living Hope. Amen.

Day 327. Read Ezekiel 45.46.24; 1 Peter 1.13-2.10;

Psalm 119.33-48; and Proverbs 28.11.

Ezekiel: When God's people come back from exile and the temple is rebuilt, on the first day of the first month they are to take a young bull without defect and purify the sanctuary. The priest is to take some of the blood of the sacrifice for sin and put it on the doorposts of the temple, the corners of the altar and on the gateposts of the inner court. Everything must be perfect and holy for the Lord. On the fourteenth day of that first month they are to celebrate Passover, in remembrance of God's delivering them from slavery in Egypt to come to the Promised Land. The prince himself is to provide the special offerings and worship at the threshold of the gate, standing by the gatepost. Every Sabbath and every new moon, the people are to worship before the Lord. In this way the whole cycle of the year, all of time, and every moment of the life of every child of God are encompassed in worship. In this way the whole nation is to be dedicated and oriented toward God perpetually, from the leaders to the lowest person. In the midst of all the important instructions, one very strange one is included. When the people come to worship, they are to exit from the temple by a different gate than the one by which they entered. If they come in by the north gate, they must go out by the south gate. There is no turning back; and though they are to remember and celebrate the past, the way to go with God is forward, always forward. God never repeats the past. By redeeming them from exile, God has done a new thing. What will he do next? Walk with him and you will find out!

Questions: 1. How does my weekly worship among the people of God help to consecrate and dedicate all my week to God? 2. How often in my daily routine do I turn to God in quiet moments of prayer, scripture reading, or meditation to consecrate the time to God? 3. How would each day be like if I begin thinking of each day as a new adventure I will share together with God? Do I take a few moments each morning to dedicate the day to God and ask to walk with God all day?

Peter: Peter tells believers to 'Live lives as strangers here.' Once we belonged here, but now we don't. Once we were like everyone else here, self-centered, seeking our own well-being, at the expense of others...and so we fit in perfectly with everyone else. Now that God has called us, we are different. So we seek to root out all that is not of God in us, to rid ourselves of all those common human traits—malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander and more. As newborns we now crave a different food—having tasted the goodness of the Lord—so we might grow mature in our salvation. All who follow Jesus as Lord, together are being built like living stones into a spiritual house—a temple—to offer our lives as sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Once we were not a people; we were isolated and separated from one another by self-centeredness and sin. Now, through Jesus Christ, we are God's people, a holy nation, to declare the praises of the One who brought us out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once we were under condemnation, like everyone who has not come to life in Christ. Now we have received mercy...and more. We are God's people, consecrated to God's purposes. **Questions:** 1. What was my life when I didn't know or follow Jesus Christ—or what is it like now if I don't yet follow him as my Lord? How was (am) I like everyone else that doesn't know God personally in that regard? 2. If my purpose is to 'proclaim the wonderful deeds of the One who called me out of darkness

into his marvelous light,' whom does God want me personally to tell about him? 3. Am I, like a living stone, being built into a spiritual house for God—that is, an active part of a community of faith, using my gifts, time and energy together with others to accomplish God's purposes? If not, why not? How can I better be part of my community of faith?

Prayer: God, sometimes I think you haven't done me any favors. I mean, I used to feel I was basically at home here among all the people I know; but now that I've come to know you, I feel we're not exactly following the same trajectory anymore. I don't like to do all the things I used to do. I'm not the same person. I feel like this world really isn't my home, at least the way it is now. I feel like a stranger here, a stranger in a strange land. Lord Jesus Christ, you were a stranger here, too, in the very world you created. Though it belonged to you, you didn't belong to it. But you suffered as a stranger here, so I could belong to you...and have an eternal home with your Father and mine. You were in this world but never of this world. You are Lord of the world I want to live in. I would rather walk with you as a stranger through this world, than belong here because I fit in so comfortably. Lead on. I will follow. Amen.

Day 328. Read Ezekiel 47.1-48.35; 1 Peter 2.11-3.7;
Psalm 119.49-64; and Proverbs 28.12-13.

Ezekiel: In the arid climate, there was water flowing out under the eastern threshold of the temple, just south of the altar. In Ezekiel's spiritual vision, the man showing him the temple walked eastward about a quarter mile and measured the stream. It was ankle deep. He walked off another quarter mile and made another measurement. The water was up to a person's waist. After another quarter mile, the river was so deep, Ezekiel could not cross. It was deep enough to swim in; and no one could cross it, it was so wide. Swarms of living things thrived wherever the river flowed. On either side of the river there were all kinds of trees bearing fruit every month, their fruit good for food and their leaves good for healing. Ezekiel is instructed on how to divide the land equally among God's people coming back from exile in the foreign lands where God scattered them for a time. This will be the new Promised Land. This new country will be watered by the river of God's grace that deepens the farther it flows, and everywhere it goes, life abounds. The River, the Land, the fruit and the healing are for anyone who answers God's call when he gathers them from the nations to which they have been scattered. **Questions:** 1. How does it change my attitude and actions to know I am immersed in God's great river of grace, flowing from Christ's sacrifice on the cross through my faith in him? 2. How does that new life get expressed in my daily life? When and how have I experienced the healing that comes from God? 3. How am I being fed by God with the fruit of the tree that brings life—Christ's cross-receiving his body and blood in the holy communion? Every month? More often? Less often? How can I receive Christ more often or, what is more important, more faithfully?

Peter: The world is waging war on my soul. No wonder. I am an alien and stranger in this world, and the world always rejects those who are different. Everyone who believes in God and follows Jesus Christ lives 'against the grain' in this world. It is as though we are swimming upstream, while others simply 'go with flow,' acquiescing in compromise with the world. For those who follow Jesus, the sinful desires have to go. For the Lord's sake-so his name is respected-I submit myself to every authority instituted among people, even though spiritually I may be above them. In the workplace, where I may be little more than a slave, I submit to the leaders whether they are likeable or not, so they see Christ at work in me. I love and care for my spouse in a godly way. I seek to live this way because Christ bore my sins in his body on the cross, so I might die to sin and display in all my actions the right relationship with God he has won for me. By doing good because of Christ, even people who don't know God personally or yet believe will be speechless, unable to accuse Christ of any wrong. **Questions:** 1. Do I live and act differently than others because I follow Christ, or am I indistinguishable from non-believers in my words and actions? 2. How does the truth that Jesus bore my sins on the cross so I might live a new life motivate me to live a new, Christ-like life now? Have I recently thanked him for bearing my sins and giving me new life? Today? 3. What areas of my life are hardest for me to reflect the new Christ-nature God is forming in me: _____ marriage _____ family _____ neighborhood _____ job _____ community of faith/church _____ other (_____). How can I get help or learn to turn those areas over to God's control, so those areas of my life commend God to others as well?

Prayer: God, thank you for the grace that surrounds me and supports me like a river. How can I so easily forget that I am swimming in the river of life flowing from your Son sacrificed on the cross? Lord God, let me always revel in your grace; and let me live so I reveal your grace to others around me by my words and actions. Every day, every moment, help me so to act and speak that those around me see your grace sparkling, as the sunlight dances on the waters of a deep-flowing river. Amen.

Day 329. Read Daniel 1.1-2.23; 1 Peter 3.8-4.6; Psalm 119.65-80; and Proverbs 28.14.

Daniel: It was leadership training, Babylonian style. The king of Babylon commanded that some young exiles from Israel be selected and instructed in the culture of their captives to enter the king's own service. They could not have any defect whatsoever but had to be handsome, healthy, and intelligent. The king even gave them Babylonian names, so they would not be different from anyone else. These four, young men were on the fast track. Without doubt, if only they made it through the probationary period, they would rise to positions of prominence. There was only one problem. Because they followed God's laws, they could not eat meat sacrificed to idols. The instructor placed in charge of them was going to force them; but Daniel, the spokesman for the group, proposed an experiment: allow the four to eat only vegetables for one month and see whether they stood up to others being trained who ate the rich food and meat of the king as well. So he did, and

they did: in fact, they outshone all the others. The king himself talked to them all and found none equal to the four. God gave these young men knowledge and understanding of all kinds of learning. To Daniel, he even gave the gift of understanding visions and dreams. Good thing! The king had a lot of dreams...strange dreams. After he had one particularly strange dream, he ordered his astrologers to tell him the interpretation of the dream, with only one complicating factor: they had first to tell him what he had dreamed, before they interpreted it! 'Only the gods can do that,' his astrologers protested, 'no human can!' The king was so mad he ordered all the wise men of Babylon to be executed...including Daniel! Daniel stopped the official ordered to execute the wise men. He went in to the king and asked for time, so he might interpret the dream. Then he gathered his three friends and asked for their help. He didn't ask for their help in discovering the dream, nor even less in interpreting it. He asked for their help in prayer. He asked them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven. That very night God revealed the dream to him. And Daniel's first act was not to inform the king but to praise God, who 'gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning, revealing deep and hidden things.' **Questions:** 1. In what ways has God gifted me to bring glory to his name by using my gifts in service to others? 2. What challenges in life have I faced that I absolutely had to rely on God's wisdom and power, because the challenge was so far beyond anything I can understand or do? How did God come through? 3. When I face such challenges, do I have a small group of mature believers to turn to for support and guidance, as Daniel turned to his spiritual friends in his challenge? If not, why not? With whom can I cultivate such a spiritual friendship, so we can mutually strengthen and support one another?

Peter: In your heart, set apart Christ as Lord...apart from and above everything else, so he stands alone as Lord. Then be prepared. Be ready at any moment, because you never know when you will be called to reply to someone who doubts or questions the hope that wells up perpetually from deep within you. Give your ready response not with wrangling or by rote. Respond instead with gentleness and respect, just as a spring of refreshing water bubbles up quietly and gently from the earth. Then those who have criticized your good and hope-filled behavior in Christ will be stymied. Salvation is assured you, so you can be gentle and compassionate. Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous One for unrighteous you (and all the unrighteous everywhere). Who would want to live any longer for the evil desires? The one who has been redeemed seeks to live for the will of God. Others will not understand why you no longer plunge with them into the flood of dissipation and wrongdoing. They will ridicule you...and reject you. But since Christ suffered in the body, be prepared with the same attitude he had. Be ready to give an account to anyone who questions you about the living hope that wells up inside of you irresistibly. The day of judgment will sort out all the rest. And giving your answer, explaining the source of your hope—Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the new nature he gives that leads to eternal life—someone may stand with Christ at the judgment, who otherwise would have fallen. **Questions:** 1. How ready am I at any moment to respond to those who question or want to know about my faith and hope in Jesus Christ? Do I look for and cultivate opportunities to share Christ's story and love with others? 2. If I were to write out in a brief paragraph how God has changed my life for the better, what would I

say? What is stopping me from writing out briefly the story of God changing my life, so I can be better equipped to share it with someone when God gives me the opportunity? 3. Have I consciously and intentionally told Jesus Christ he is not just my Savior, but Lord and leader of my life? Have I set apart Christ as Lord on the throne of my heart, so that nothing and no one else even comes close? If not, what is stopping me?

Prayer: My sweet savior, Jesus Christ, I love you. But there is more. You are more than Savior. And so, right now, I set you apart as my Lord. Ascend the throne set in the center of my soul, and rule over this part of your creation. You are rightful Lord of all creation, including this little corner of it I call myself and have kept for myself. No longer. Lord, let me always and everywhere be ready to acknowledge your loving lordship in my life. Let my word and deeds reflect your own graciousness, so that through them the people around me may experience your love for them, acknowledge your Lordship over them, and live as you live... forever. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 47

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Ezekiel 47.1-12

Psalm: 118.19-29

Second (New Testament) Lesson: 1 Peter 3.15-4.5

Theme: Jump In The River! (God's Great River of Grace)

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 47:

“Who loves you, baby?” the tough cop, Kojac, used to ask the criminals he arrested on the old TV show. It’s really a question we all ask ourselves all the time. All people naturally long to be loved, because God made us to be fulfilled in loving relationships. The problem is we do not experience the love we long for from others, and we no longer know how to love others as we ought. It all begins with God. Many, if not most, people fear that God is angry with them because of the wrong they have done to him and others. Ezekiel, the prophet, was given an extraordinary vision of the heavenly temple: water flowing from the altar, shallow at first, deepening until it became a deep river. It is the river of grace—of God’s forgiving love—that cleanses and restores to life. Like the river St. John saw flowing from the throne in the heavenly Jerusalem in the book of Revelation, trees which bring healing and bear fruit every month grow on either side of the river. Peter talks

about the waters of life in Holy Baptism by which people are saved by being joined to Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. By passing through the river of life-Baptism into Christ-believers are saved from the flood of sins that would otherwise drown them.

Alternate Readings & Themes:

1. **“The Living Dead Or The Dead Who Are Living?”**. Faith without works is dead, James declares. Sadly, many who bear the title of Christian only mimic faith. They are actually dead in spirit, and their lives do not evidence a living faith. God does not really impact their life; and, as a result, they have no impact in the world for God. In Ezekiel, God promises to bring his people back from captivity, shine his face on them, and pour out his Spirit on them, bringing them back from death to life as it were. Believers are called to a living faith, active in works, that demonstrates the living presence of God. **Ezekiel 39.21-29; Psalm 118.1-9; James 2.18-26.**
2. **“Me, A Priest of the Living God? No Sweat!”** Peter proclaims the amazing truth: all who believe in Jesus Christ are together a royal priesthood, consecrated to proclaim the saving acts of God who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. Ezekiel receives from God instructions about how priests are to be and function in the new temple God promises to create: holy, even as God is holy. They aren't even supposed to sweat in their service of God, so perfect are they to be. Christ's sacrifice has fulfilled the prophecy, creating a holy priesthood of people redeemed through forgiveness and faith in him. Everyone can share in the crucial role, finding meaning and purpose for their life as they serve God by serving people for God. **Ezekiel 44.17–28; Psalm 119.73-80; 1 Peter 2.1-10.**