

# Through The Bible In One Year

## The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

## Daily Devotional Companion

### Week 50

## Day 344. Read Amos 1.1-3.15; Revelation 2.1-17; Psalm 129.1-8; and Proverbs 29.19-20.

**Amos:** Not bad for a shepherd! Amos was given messages from God to speak to the people of Judah and Israel. He 'saw' things and wrote them down. These message-visions started at a particular period of time: before a bad earthquake, in the reigns of King Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel. For a 'shepherd,' his words are well-written. There is a definite unity and orderliness to the messages, because there is one mind behind them all. God is the one speaking, though the prophet is his instrument in making the message known. The same phrase echoes through a number of the oracles: 'For three sins of....., even for four, I will not turn back my wrath,' God declares through Amos. God begins by chastising the foreign city-states that surrounded and fought against Israel: Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Ammon, and Moab. The message is the same to each: 'For three sins, and for four, I will not turn back my wrath.' Each and all will be destroyed or carried away captive. Still, even these announcements of impending destruction demonstrate the patient love of God. It not for one sin or even two, but three and four sins that God punishes them. God has shown great patience. God gives second chances, and third... and even fourth chances. But God reserves the harshest chastisements-as well as the most-for his own people who have strayed. Even though they are chosen and privileged to have God's Word, Judah and Israel don't escape the prophetic message. 'For three sins of Judah/Israel, and for four, I will not turn back my wrath,' God declares to them. God has been pushed too far. The sins of Judah are 'theological' in nature. Judah has rejected the Word (or Law) of God, because they were led astray by false gods. The sins God reprimands Israel, the northern kingdom based in Samaria, are sins against people. 'They sell needy people as slaves for sandals. They trample the heads of the poor and deny justice to the oppressed. Between them, Judah and Israel cover both tablets of the Ten Commandments in their sin. They violate both their relationship with God and with other people. Amos draws a sobering sight from his shepherding to make the message hit home: 'As a shepherd recovers from a lion's mouth just a bone or two, or an ear, so will the Israelites be saved,' God declares through Amos. Just a small part shall return from exile.

**Questions:** 1. How has God displayed great patience in dealing with my personal sin? 2. How have I sinned 'theologically' by not honoring and following God as God alone in my life? How have I sinned against other people by mistreating them? 3. How does God's sovereignty displayed over all these nations, show by the fact that all these predictions

against these countries came true help strengthen my faith relationship with God? Do they motivate me to follow his Word and ways more?

**Revelation:** Christ's messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor in the New Testament through John show the same careful construction and orderliness as God's messages through Amos in the Old Testament. They all begin 'the words of him who...' followed by a description of Christ suited to the message. Christ is the one who holds the seven stars of the churches in his hand; he is the First and the Last, who died and now lives forevermore; he is the one who has the two-edged sword, the Word of God. Christ says to each church, 'I know' your circumstances. One persevered through many hardships. Another remained true in the very city where Satan had his throne. Still another is the victim of slander, poverty, and afflictions. To most of the churches Christ says, 'yet' or 'nevertheless.' His messages include a corrective, calling his people back on course with him. One church has forsaken him as their first love, and Christ calls them to remember, repent, and do the things they did at first. Another church has been eating food sacrificed to idols. Christ calls them to repent, or else he himself will fight against them with his powerful Word. All his messages conclude with a call and a promise. The call is, "whoever has an ear, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' The present tense Christ uses ('says') and the plural form of the noun ('churches') are purposeful and powerful. The Spirit is still speaking, right now, to the church—and to all churches and all believers everywhere and every-when. The promises of Christ, too, extend far beyond just the seven churches of Asia Minor in the first century after Christ. All are addressed 'to him who overcomes'. To one Christ promises, 'I will give the right to eat from the tree of life,' to another, 'Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life,' and to the third, 'I will give some of the hidden manna, and a white stone with a new name written on it known only to the one who receives it.' The call to improve and the promises are for all churches...and all followers of Christ. **Questions:** 1. How have I fallen from my first love with Christ? How do I need to remember and rekindle again what I once had with Christ? 2. How do Christ's promises encourage me to persevere in following him in the face of his correctives calling me to change my ways? Which of these three promises strikes me most powerfully? Why? 3. How is my life like that of the first century believers Christ is addressing in this passage from revelation? How am I doing persisting in following Christ in the face of resistance and opposition? 4. Who is Christ to me personally? The First and the Last? The Ever Living One? The One with the two-edged sword issuing from his mouth?

**Prayer:** Lord, I fail to honor and listen to you as the only Lord of my life. I fail to love and care for other people as I ought. I forget and fall away from you as my first love. Above all the uproar of life and my waywardness, I hear you calling me to turn to you anew ...and live. You would be perfectly right to punish, but instead you call to me offering great and undeserved promises: fruit from the tree of life, the crown of life, hidden manna. You promise me a new name...a new identity...in you. All this you promise to everyone who overcomes. I shall overcome only in you, and only if I allow

you to overcome me. So come, Lord, and overcome me. Be again my first love...my only love. Amen.

## Day 345. Read Amos 4.1-6.14; Revelation 2.18-3.6; Psalm 130.1-8; and Proverbs 29.21-22.

**Amos:** What can a God do? How can a God call people back from a self-chosen path of destruction? 'I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town,' God declares with dismay through Amos, 'YET YOU HAVE NOT RETURNED TO ME.' 'I withheld rain from you and even sent rain on one town while withholding it from another, so people went searching for something to drink,' God cries, 'YET YOU HAVE NOT RETURNED to me.' God sent plagues on them just as he did on Egypt, and he even overthrew *some of them* as he overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, snatching *some of them* out of the fire as he did Lot and his family from those towns, YET THEY DID NOT RETURN TO HIM. 'Seek me and live,' God cries to his wayward people. 'Seek good, not evil, that you may live,' God cries. Instead, they trample on the poor and deprive them of justice. They lie on beds of ivory and dine on the choicest of dishes, drinking wine by the bowlful. *Instead* of seeking righteousness in a personal relationship with Him as their Lord, they seek religiosity. They have hollow religious festivals and give false offerings. *Instead*, the Lord commands, 'Let justice roll on like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.' Exile awaits all those who wander so far from him. **Questions:** 1. Am I careful to do justice to all those around me? Is there anyone whose rights I am trampling or even just ignoring? 2. How am I helping the poor? How am I helping the people around me who are in need? 3. Am I caught up in religiosity (maintaining the show of a right relationship with God through religious acts) or am I living out a real relationship with God? What's my next step in strengthening my relationship with God and my neighbor in need?

**Revelation:** Ouch! Christ's call to this one church strikes way too close to home for comfort. One church receives an especially sobering message. It has a reputation of being alive, but it actually is dead. To this church...this person...Christ says, 'Wake up!' Strengthen what still remains and is about to die. Remember what you have received and obey it. If you do not wake up, Christ says, 'I will come like a thief; you won't know when to expect me.' The ones who haven't soiled their clothes will walk with him, dressed in white. Everyone who overcomes will be dressed in white, and their names will be written in the book of life, never to be blotted out. Christ himself will acknowledge their names before his Father and all the angels. If you have an ear to hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches...and to you. Wake up! **Questions:** 1. In what areas of my personal relationship and walk with God do I need to wake up? Where have I grown complacent and comfortable in my faith and my following of Jesus? 2. What new areas of service, giving, learning in the Word, forming real relationships with other believers, worshipping, praying, or sharing my faith with those who need to know Christ should I undertake? 3. How does the promises Christ holds out to me, that my name will be

written in the book of life never to be blotted out and that I will be dressed in purity one day with him forever, motivate me to wake up and get to work on my life and work with Christ now? What will be my next step?

**Prayer:** My name, in your book, O Lord? Written? Inscribed? There is the ring of permanence in that, which comforts me, Holy Comforter. Such permanence can have only one source: your limitless, endless love. My name was written there in your blood, bled for me on the cross. Let me cling to your cross so tightly, that it be written on my heart and in my mind forever. Let my inviting words and serving deeds become a book which anyone around me may read, a book about your boundless love. May those who read me come to love you, the Author, and become part of your astounding redemption story, too. Amen.

## Day 346. Read Amos 7.1-9.15; Revelation 3.7-22; Psalm 131:1-3; and Proverbs 29.23.

**Amos:** The priest of the rival temple, where calf-idols were worshipped instead of the living God, accused Amos of conspiracy to the king, saying land could not bear his words. Amos was declaring that the king would die a violent death and the people would go into exile. 'Go back to the southern kingdom, Judah, where you come from and prophesy there. This is the northern kingdom, the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.' Amos protests, 'I was a shepherd and took care of sycamore-fig trees, when the Lord took me from following the flock and commanded me to go and prophesy to his people, Israel. And what a prophet Amos turned out to be...not just for God but for the people God sent him to warn. Prophetic messages of doom and destruction came from the Lord. God showed Amos a basket of ripe fruit in a vision, and declared to Amos, 'the time is ripe, and I will spare my people, Israel, no longer.' In a vision Amos saw the Lord standing by a wall with a plumb line used to measure whether the wall was true and square; then the Lord said to him, 'I am setting a plumb line among my people and will spare them no longer.' But even though Amos was from Judah and worshipped the living God at the temple in Jerusalem, not false gods as they did in the northern kingdom of Israel, when God showed locusts devouring all the harvest, or when God called for judgment by fire, he cried out on Israel's behalf: 'Sovereign Lord, I beg you, stop or how can Israel survive?!' And God relented of sending those punishments that would utterly destroy Israel. Though he was considered a foreigner, and even accused of conspiracy, though he faced possible death in proclaiming to Israel the Word of God, Amos still intervened for Israel with God. Amos is in good company. Jesus would do the same one day, even praying from the cross for Israel and the Roman foreigners crucifying him, 'Father, forgive them...' And as God listens to his Son, so he listens to Amos' pleas. And relents. 'I will shake the nations,' God declares through Amos, 'and plant the exiles of Israel in their own land again, never to be uprooted.' **Questions:** 1. How can God use me, even though I feel unqualified or incapable, just as Amos did, for God's work today? In what ways is God calling me to work in his kingdom? 2. Whom do I know that I need to intercede to God in prayer for, as

Amos prayed for wayward Israel? Will I agree with God to pray for them every day for a solid month? More? 3. Is God's Word the 'plumb line' of my life? Do I 'square' all my thoughts, decisions, and actions on what will honor and please God? In what areas do I need to do so better?

**Revelation:** The Lord holds the key. The door the Lord opens, no one can shut. The door the Lord closes, no one can open. Christ commends the church in Philadelphia for their patient endurance in the face of trials. Hold on to what you have, he challenges them, so no one will take your crown. To those who overcome, he promises he will make them a pillar in the temple, never again to leave it. He promises to write on the one who overcomes the name of God and Christ's own new name. The door will be forever opened to intimate 'first name' relationship with God! To the church in Laodicea, Christ identifies himself as the Amen—the final word, which used in prayer means 'Let it be so!' He is the faithful and true witness, the ruler of all God's creation. 'I know your deeds,' he tells them, 'that you are neither hot or cold.' He is about to close the door on them, but he still chooses to make one more effort to spark new life in them. Those he loves, he disciplines. 'You think you are rich;' he warns them, 'while, in fact, you are pitiful, poor, blind and naked.' He counsels them to 'buy' from him the true riches—'gold refined in the fire'—so they can be truly rich. The door is still open for them! And then Christ, the One who holds the key, who opens doors that no one can close and closes doors that no one can open, proclaims for this lukewarm group of Christians, with a mistaken estimation of themselves, perhaps the greatest promise of the whole Bible: 'If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them and they with me.' All a person needs to do to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, to 'buy gold refined in the fire,' is to open the door to him. He will come in. And then he will open all the doors to get you to get you to the place you truly want to be: beside him forever. **Questions:** 1. How realistic is my self-understanding of my faith and following of Jesus Christ? Am I lukewarm? 2. How wide have I opened the door to Jesus in my life? Are there areas of my life I keep locked from him? 3. When and how has Jesus shown his love by rebuking me, by bringing me up short? When has Jesus closed doors in my life, only to open other doors that led me into a different, often better, situation? When I meet closed doors in my life, do I look on them as opportunities, expecting God to open other doors to get me where I need to be?

**Prayer:** My loving Lord, Jesus, even my 'hottest' is lukewarm compared to your burning desire for a deeper relationship with me—and every person I know. I tend to imagine I am doing so well, when really I am just rationalizing and justifying my lukewarmness. Yet, you still put up with me. You still stand patiently at the door of my heart, knocking, knocking, knocking. I pray you will never quit. Holy Spirit, breath of God, fan the embers of my lukewarm love with the very breath of God and raise this cold clay of mine to life again. May I never outlive my love for You, my loving Lord and God. Amen.

## Day 347. Read Obadiah 1.1-21; Revelation 4.1-11; Psalm 132.1-18; and Proverbs 29.24-25.

**Obadiah:** The day of the Lord is near...for all nations. God is sovereign over all the earth and just in all his ways. 'As you have done, so will it be done to you,' God declares. 'Your own deeds will come back upon you.' The nation of Edom, who were kindred of Israel, descended as they were from Israel's brother, Esau, watched with glee as Israel was conquered and carried away into exile. They stood aloof from-and even rejoiced over- their own kindred's misfortune. Worse, they even cut down their kindred who sought to flee to them for refuge, and they turned over survivors of the destruction to captivity. God is sovereign over the whole world. God is just in all his ways. Our deeds will come back upon our own heads, unless we heed God's Word and show mercy to the misfortunate, even though they be our enemy. **Questions:** 1. When someone around me experiences trouble, do I tend to stay aloof and apart, or get involved in helping? 2. Have I ever rejoiced in someone else's misfortune, even if they actually deserved it? Why does this trait in people (and me) anger God so? 2. Whom have I failed to help in their time of trouble that I really could have helped? Why does God treat 'sins of omission' (failing to do the good we could do) the same as 'sins of commission' (doing bad things)?

**Revelation:** Who left the door standing open in heaven? It must have been God himself. And why? God is about to reveal to John what is to come. But first, God wants to reveal to John what already is. What true reality is now...and ever will be. John is invited in through the open door. 'Come on up here,' the Voice says to John, 'and I will show you what must happen.' But what he first sees is what always has been, what is...and what always will be. Before him was a throne, with a half-circle of shimmering colors like a rainbow around it. The One seated on it shone like precious gemstones. Twenty-four thrones were arrayed around the Throne, with twenty four elders sitting on them. From the Throne came flashes, as of lightning and peals, as of thunder. Before the Throne was a sea of crystal clear glass. Four six-winged celestial creatures, covered with eyes, in form like an ox, a lion, an eagle and a man, were flying around the throne, singing the same song Isaiah heard in his vision of the Throne. 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God almighty, who was, and is and is to come!' When those creatures worshipped the One who sits on the throne, the elders would cast their crowns before the One who lives for ever. They sing, 'You are worthy to receive all glory, honor, and power!' This is the true reality: God is God. He is sovereign over all, seated on his throne forever. And our true calling, the point and purpose of our life, like the elders on their thrones and all the celestial beings before God is to worship him in holiness! **Questions:** 1. How is my understanding of Jesus at this point in my life still way too limited to comprehend the reality of his awesome being? 2. What do I imagine I will think and feel when I, too, finally see Jesus Christ in all his glory face to face? What will I say to him? 3. How will I show my love to Jesus for all his magnificent qualities and his love for me? What will my worship be like then? What stops me from pouring forth my perfect love for him now in my personal prayers and worship?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for opening the door to heaven for me. It would be forever closed...and locked...if you hadn't taken on yourself opening the way for me. I worship you. I love you. I desire nothing more or else than to love you forever. Holy Spirit, help me walk through the open door. Draw me closer to Christ, who drew so close to me as to become fully human and die on a cross as a condemned criminal, so I might walk through the door he opened. Thank you, Lord, for walking out of the tomb alive forever more, so one day I might walk into your presence, alive forevermore. Then I will worship you as I ought. In the meantime, accept, please, my worship I am able to give you. You deserve more. Accept it as more, until I am able to give you all you deserve: my perfect love forever. Amen.

## **Day 348.** Read Jonah 1.1-4.11; Revelation 5.1-14; Psalm 133.1-3; and Proverbs 29.26-27.

**Jonah:** Finally, a prophet I can relate to personally! When the call comes from God, Jonah jumps on a ship headed in the opposite direction. He heard correctly; he just would not heed it. The call was to go to Nineveh, the capital city of the country that conquered his own. The mission was to warn them about the imminent destruction they faced because of their wrongdoing. What made him turn tail and run? Was it the difficulty of the task? What it hatred of his foes? Was it fear for his life? The riddle remains mostly unsolved to this day. This much is sure: God's will will be done, one way or another. A storm strikes the ship so severely, it is about to sink. The foreign sailors who worship false gods seek through casting lots to find whether someone has done something so wrong the divine powers are punishing the people on the ship. The lot falls to...Jonah. 'Throw me overboard,' he declares, 'and the storm will stop.' These 'godless heathens' (actually they had plenty of gods—too many, since there really is only One—and goddesses, to boot), were more godly than Jonah himself. Instead of throwing him overboard, they work harder to save the ship. Finally, reluctantly, they do what they must. The storm stops...but not Jonah's adventure. The ship is still bound the wrong way, but a big fish that 'happens' to be passing by 'happens' to be heading toward Nineveh, in the north. Three days in the belly of the fish, and Jonah suddenly sings a different tune: Prayer and praise. He goes straight to Nineveh now and gets to work. He hasn't even finished walking through the city when those dirty, lousy, low-life godless heathen (actually they had too many gods and goddesses) repented! They turned away from their sin and prayed for God's forgiveness, in the nasty, rough clothing called sack-cloth (we call it burlap) even! They changed, so God changed...his mind, that is...and spared them! Now the real reason Jonah ran away is revealed at last: he knew God was forgiving and would forgive even the dirty, lousy, low-life godless (you know what I mean) Ninevites if they just asked him, too, and turned their lives around. Jonah knew God would forgive even his enemies, and it almost made him an enemy of God! Good thing God forgives even his enemies, for he even forgives Jonah...and me! **Questions:** 1 Whom do I think (or maybe even wish) is beyond God's power to save and his love? How can I show them God's love in caring words and loving

service, so they at least get an opportunity to turn to God? What will I do this week to start? 2. When in my life have I gone another direction than the way God wanted me to take? How did God get me back on track? Who were his instruments to help me find the right way to the life I truly want? 3. How have the tough times in my life affected my relationship with God? Have they brought me closer to God in prayer and obedience, or pulled me farther away? What is the key in life so even the toughest times will draw me closer to God and not away from him?

**Revelation:** The script is written. The story is already complete, even though the last act of the drama has not yet begun. John can see it. The scroll is written on both sides. But it is sealed, not once only, but with seven seals. Who is worthy to open it and read it? John wept because there was no one in heaven, or earth, or under the earth, who could open it, let alone read it. He wept! Then he saw the Lamb...the one looking as though it had been slain. He is worthy! He is able to open the scroll. He came; and when he took it, the twenty four elders and the four celestial creatures knelt down in worship and proclaimed, 'You are worthy, because with your blood you redeemed for God people of every tribe, tongue and race, and made them a Kingdom and priests to serve God forever. 24 plus 4 is not enough. The numbers should be...and are...so much more. Myriads and myriads of people, millions upon millions, more than anyone can count, joined the heavenly song saying, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain! Power, wealth, wisdom and might be his forever!' Millions are still too miniscule to sing this One's honor and glory. John says, 'I heard every creature...every creature...in heaven and on earth, under the earth and in the seas, singing, 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise, honor, glory and power always and forever!' That is the end of the script. That is the culmination of the story: All creation and everyone united in praising this glorious God who loves us so as to die so we might live. **Questions:** 1. Do I personally tell Jesus how worthy and wonderful he is? How often? How fervently? 2. When I gather with my community of faith to worship, how focused and concentrated am I on loving and worshipping God? What factors distract or detract me from pouring myself out in worship and love for God? 3. How can I overflow more...and more often...with praise and love to God?

**Prayer:** How can this corrupted creature rightly worship you, my Creator? How can this dying soul thank you, my Redeemer and Savior? I cannot...and so will not... worship you as I ought, but I shall worship you as I am able. I hope I shall always worship you. I will return to you all the love of which my heart is capable, for as long as I am able, at every time I am able..., and still long to give you more. Receive the longing of my heart...to love you more...as the fullness it one day will be when I am with you forever, renewed and restored by your grace. You alone are holy. All power and wisdom belong to you alone. You alone are most giving, most gracious, and forgiving. You alone are my God. To you alone I give all my love. Though the throne be so plain and the sanctuary be sullied, be enthroned, my Lord, on the praises of my heart, in the sanctuary of my soul, now and forever! Amen.

## Day 349. Read Micah 1.1-4.13; Revelation 6.1-17; Psalm 134.1-3; and Proverbs 30.1-4.

**Micah:** The people are walking blithely down dead-end paths. The false prophets are leading the people astray. If someone feeds them, these prophets will proclaim a good word—‘peace’—from God for them; but if someone won’t fill their stomachs, they will wage war on them. Since they spread darkness, the sun will set for those prophets, night will come without visions and darkness without divination. But Amos is filled with the power and Spirit of the Lord, with justice and might, to proclaim to the people their waywardness—he tells them their sin—without wanting or worrying to be fed. The leaders of the country render their judgments based on bribes; the priests teach for a price, even the prophets tell fortunes for pay. Therefore, Zion will be plowed like a field—everything overturned—and Jerusalem will be rubble. The temple hill—the pride of the nation—will become a bare mound, overgrown with briars. A loving God tells his people what they need to hear, not what they want to hear, through his true prophets. And yet, ultimately, this harsh-seeming word is exactly what they want to hear; because this Word alone lands them where they want to end. Having pronounced their waywardness and impending destruction their deeds are bringing upon them, God surprisingly...mourns...instead of gloating. Like a husband inconsolable at the prospect of losing his beloved wife, God says: ‘I will weep and wail, howl like a jackal and moan like an owl, because her wound is incurable!’ God’s grace and forgiveness is already active in his grief over our sin and the suffering we incur because of it. They must go to Babylon, but God promises he will rescue and redeem them. And God proclaims a coming time of true peace, when people will beat their swords into plows and spears into pruning hooks, when everyone will rest in the shade of their own tree; and no one will make them afraid again. Then the peoples of the world will all say, ‘Let us go to the mountain of the Lord; and he will teach us his ways, so we can walk in his paths.’ Then the Word of God will go forth from his people to all the world. That is where we all want to end up. That is where the world will end up, because of this gracious God. **Questions:** 1. How does my own self-interest, my own likings and dislikings, influence the way I filter God’s Word? How do I tend to hear only what I want to hear from his Word and disregard what is difficult or challenging? 2. Have I ever reflected deeply on the grief and pain I have caused God by my sin? How have I added to that grief by ‘waging war’ against other people precious to God whom I have wronged or hurt? 3. How does the promise of God that one day we will be perfectly at peace with God and one another give me hope, confidence, and endurance for my walk with and for God now?

**Revelation:** The end has come. The curtain is coming down upon the world which has been the stage of God’s great drama of redemption. The Lamb who alone is worthy opens the seven seals, opening the scroll and unleashing the pronouncements it has held secret until the appointed time. The first seal broken unleashes warfare, a crowned rider on a white horse seeking world conquest. The second seal unleashes a sword-wielding rider on a fiery red horse who has the power to take peace from the earth and set people against one

another. The third seal sees a black horse whose rider is famine. The fourth seal reveals a pale horse with a pale rider who is Death himself. They ride horses because their power is loosed to prowl the world, moving with the speed of the wind. When the fifth seal is broken, the scene shifts from earth to heaven, where God gives us a glimpse of all who suffered martyrdom because of the Word of God and their testimony to its truth to the point of death. Each is given a white robe and told to wait a little longer until the number of the martyrs was complete. More must still die for the Word of God and the testimony. As the sixth seal...the next to the last seal...is broken, the sun turned black; the stars began to rain to the earth, and the sky receded like a scroll rolling up. Every person in the world, from the most powerful and privileged to the poorest tried to hide. They called to the mountains to fall on them and hide them from the face of the One who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. Who can stand on that great day, the day of judgment? When the seventh seal is broken, and what is to be is revealed, it will be shone who can stand in God's presence. **Questions:** 1. How does it change my attitudes and actions to know that until God re-creates the perfect world at the end of time, life will be characterized by struggle and difficulty? How does that realistic word from God give me courage and confidence to face these difficult times, rather than discourage and dishearten me? 2. How does the awareness that judgment is coming change my words and actions toward others? Does it motivate and move me to greater activity for others so they might stand at the judgment? Why, or why not? 3. Do I share my personal story about what God has done for me...and for everyone...in Christ with others? Have I ever experienced criticism, ridicule, or even rejection for giving my testimony about God to others? If not, why not?

**Prayer:** God, you are sovereign over all times, both the best and the bleakest. All wisdom, grace, and power are yours. As difficult or dangerous that life might become, the best still lies ahead for all who believe, because you are their future...forever. God, give me courage and compassion to tell others who need to hear that all may have hope in you. Help me to proclaim in my serving actions as well as my inviting words that the best still lies ahead for all who believe in you, because the future will find us with you forever. Every day, every minute, draws us closer to the Day we long for, when we shall see you face to face. Until that Day, let me do the work you have given me to do: share my testimony so many might stand before you on the Day and live with you forever. Amen.

**Day 350.** Read Micah 5.1-7.20; Revelation 7.1-17;  
Psalms 135.1-21; and Proverbs 30.5-6.

**Micah:** How shall I come before the Lord? How can I ever hope to worship in his presence as I ought? Will many sacrifices suffice? Could countless, expensive offerings make me fit for his presence? Should I seek to offer as a sacrifice my most precious 'possession' in the world, even my own child, for the sin of my soul so I can come before the just Judge who shows no partiality? No, there is no need to offer such sacrifices; for

God is solving the problem of sin. Through his prophet, Micah, God promises to provide the solution: 'From you, Bethlehem, though you are smallest of all the clans of Judah, shall come a ruler whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.' The solution—the sacrifice for sin—is not your son or daughter, but his Son, born in Bethlehem. Seeing far into the future, though dimly, Micah proclaims with amazement: 'Who is a God like you, who forgives sin, who relents of anger, and delights to show mercy?' God will tread the sins of his people underfoot, as he does the serpent in the triumph of the cross and empty tomb. He will cast our sins into the depths of the sea. So what does God require of you, O person, in the meantime as you watch and await his salvation? Act justly in your relationships with others. Show compassion and freely give forgiveness. Walk humbly with God. Moment by moment remain close by his side. This is what God longs for in you...in everyone. This is what God invites you to do: walk with him in an intimate conversation all the days of your life...until you receive the Life he promises. **Questions:** 1. How does God's prophecy of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem through Micah centuries before it occurred strengthen my faith and trust in God's sovereignty and power? 2. How does it help my life with God to understand it as a 'walk' with him? Do I truly believe, live, and speak with him as though he does, indeed, want that kind of personal relationship with me? 3. How am I at the other aspect of a right relationship with God—treating others justly and compassionately? Where do I need to grow most? What is my next step? Who needs my attention most, and how will I seek to show God's caring for them?

**Revelation:** Do you like crowds? If not now, you will like this one...and want to stand in the midst of it. John is given a vision of them: the great multitude from every nation, people, and language on earth, standing before the throne in front of the Lamb, whom no one can count. They are from every nation and people: for everyone who believes is acceptable to God. They stand before the throne, because they have been made worthy by the One who made them so, the Lamb who was slain. Their old 'work clothes,' dirty and worn have given way to spotless, white robes. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and they have come out—not hopelessly stained—but completely clean. They are forever finished with the tribulation and trauma of this world. They will never again hunger or thirst. The sun won't scorch them. The Lamb who was slain will be their Good Shepherd. Who could be more compassionate, who provide better pasture, than a Lamb who has become the Shepherd? God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And they will praise him. They will sing, 'Praise and glory, wisdom and honor, thanks and power be to God forever and ever!' They have passed from the world of suffering to the world of song. **Questions:** 1. How does this vision of the multitudes of people in heaven give me courage and hope for my life of challenge in this world? 2. Because all nations, peoples, and languages are included among the multitudes of heaven, what am I personally doing to try to include others in Christ's redemption, especially people who are different from me? Does my faith community actively seek to reach the lost, including people quite different from us? 3. Have I 'washed my robe in the blood of the Lamb?' Have I confessed my sinfulness to God and received the assurance and confidence that comes from his forgiving my sin, so I can live as God's child now and with him in heaven forever?

Prayer: God, all peoples...and every person...is precious to you. You want to multiply until they are without number the people who will live with you and one another in eternity. By your limitless love in Christ, your crucified Son, you have numbered me among them. Lord, make me better at my numbers. Open my eyes to see those around me, as well as the opportunities you put right before me to serve and invite them for you. Let me have this much in common with you now: let my heart yearn as yours does that everyone stand before you arrayed in white, with praises on their lips and love in the hearts forever. Use me to add to the number who cannot be numbered! Amen.

## Through The Bible In One Year: Week 50 Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Micah 6.6-8

Psalm: 131.1-3

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Revelation 3.14-21

Theme: Running On Pilot Light? Add The Fuel & Fan The Flame!

### Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 50:

The relentless, meaningless routines of our modern world make life arid and lead to spiritual death. Even faith in Jesus Christ and following him knows times of deadness or dryness. How can we not only endure but actually grow through these dead, dry times? Not through throwing ourselves with renewed vigor into religious activities! No, by trying to do harder, better, more of what we have already done. The prophet, Micah, asks the essential question: 'With what shall I come before the Lord?' Offerings? Activities? The only things required are quite simple really: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. The key is quietly returning to the Source by focusing on our personal relationship with God and living from that center every day. In Revelation, Jesus gives a message to a church that is neither on fire nor dead—just dead in the water. They are maintaining but not growing. Though they think they are rich, they are really impoverished spiritually. He urges them to 'buy from me true gold refined in the fire.' Jesus gives one of the greatest promises in the Bible: 'If anyone opens the door to me, I will come in and eat with them.' Jesus hungers for deeper relationship with each person, and the key is to hunger for him.

Alternate Readings & Themes:

1. **“The Absolute Worst Case Scenario: A Wordless World”** Words are what make us human. We think, remember, imagine with words. Most importantly, we are relational beings who communicate through speech. That’s because we are made in the image and likeness of God, a personal, spiritual being who speaks. God’s Word is powerful and gives life. The prophet Amos speaks for God a sobering message: because of his people’s wrongdoing, God will send a famine, not of food, but of God’s Word. They will search for his Word but not find it. In the New Testament, John is given a message from Jesus Christ for a church in his day. They, too, have wandered and should come back to God. Even when we wander, God still speaks his Word to win us back to him. The most important thing we can do in life is have-and maintain- a close personal relationship with God through his Word, in which he reveals his mind, will and, above all, heart for us! Is your world Wordless?  
**Amos 8.11-14, 9:8-15; Psalm 135.13-21; Revelation 3.14-22**
  
2. **“Our Tender, Tough God”;** God allows...and sometimes even causes...difficult consequences to come for people who have strayed into the way of death. God is not really the angry, vengeful, or capricious God as some skeptics argue. God is completely loving, while also completely just. Such consequences are a sign of God’s tough love at work to redeem people. A good parent knows that sometimes love must be tough to save the child from what ultimately would mean more hurt and harm. The ultimate expression of the loving tenderness of God is ‘the Lamb who was slain’ that John describes in the Bible passage from Revelation. He was slain for lost people, that all might be won back to God and life eternal with all the redeemed. In our relationships we, too, need to love completely...with tenderness and with toughness when required. **Amos 4.6-10, 5.1-6; Psalm 130.1-8; Revelation 5.1-14.**