

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 51

Day 351. Read Nahum 1.1-3.19; Revelation 8.1-13;
Psalm 136.1-26; and Proverbs 30.7-9.

Nahum: The mightiest world power of the day suddenly, shockingly, destroyed? How can this be? Despite its military might and its economic prosperity, it will be swept away suddenly, as with a flood. This can only be because there is a far greater Power Who is Lord over all the earth. The Lord is a jealous and avenging God who pursues his enemies, even into the darkness. Though he is great in power, he is slow to anger but will not leave the guilty unpunished. Unless, that is, the guilty trust in him. He cares for those who trust in him. He cares even for faithless Israel lying in ruins because of following false gods and appeasing the powers of this world. Nineveh was God's instrument to correct wayward Israel. Now the corrective needs correcting. With an overwhelming flood, the prophet promises, God will make an end to Nineveh, the world power. Nineveh enslaved nations; but when the flood strikes, everyone who hears, everyone who felt her endless cruelty, will clap their hands at Nineveh's fall. Under the prophet, Jonah, Nineveh heard and heeded God's warning...for a time. God is slow to anger...but will not let the guilty go unpunished. The flood is coming, God declares; and though Nineveh multiplied its soldiers and merchants like the stars in the sky, the flood will overwhelm them all.

Questions: 1. How has God demonstrated his patience—his being slow to anger—in my life? 2. Does God's having control over the great events of world politics mean he, also, has control over the events and situations of my personal life? Do I live as though he did? How does his having interest and power over my daily life affect my words and deeds every day? 3. How does it change my attitudes and actions to know that because I trust in Jesus Christ for forgiveness, the 'flood' of God's anger and punishment will not sweep me away in the day of judgment? Am I more forgiving? Do I seek to do justice to everyone more? How does the impartial fairness of God and the fact that he will not let the guilty go unpunished motivate me to insist on justice, while also seeking mercy, even for the unjust?

Revelation: 'Some say the earth will end in fire; some in ice...' Robert Frost wrote. 'It's the end of the world as I know it,' go the lyrics of a pop song, 'and I feel fine.' The world hangs always on the brink of destruction...as do all its inhabitants...wondering whether it will be fire or ice...wondering what, if anything, comes after. When the Lamb who was slain opens the seventh and last seal, there is silence in all of heaven. That silence speaks more eloquently than words of the solemnity of the moment. It is the silence of sorrow

over the lost, as well as the quiet anticipation of what is to be. It is not one minute of silence as we in the world can muster, but thirty minutes, for solemn reflection and meditation. Then the four trumpets begin to peal. In his vision of what is to be, John sees that hail and fire mixed with blood were hurled down on earth. A third of the earth is burned up. A huge mountain is thrown like a meteor into the sea, and a third of the sea turned to blood, all its creatures dying. A great star, blazing like a torch, fell to earth; and a third of the rivers and springs turned poisonous. When the trumpet sounds, the solar system itself is stricken; so a third of the sun, moon, and stars turned black with darkness. An eagle soaring high aloft the earth cried aloud, 'Woe! Woe! Woe to the people of the earth for the trumpet blasts about to be sounded.' Even in bringing the end of the world, God is exercising restraint and holding forth the opportunity to repent. There are four trumpet blasts, after all, with a space of time between them. And even after the four trumpets have sounded, only a third of the earth, the sea, the solar system is stricken. The end is near. Will people see it and repent? **Questions:** 1. How does it change my priorities, my attitudes, and actions to know that all the physical things of this world are temporary and perishing? Does it cause me to hold them more lightly or use them differently than trying to amass or trust in them? 2. Do I reflect God's own patience and forbearance towards me and my sin as I relate to people day by day? Do I extend to them the same extra opportunities for receiving grace like the multiple opportunities God gives me? 3. What warnings and wake up calls has God given me in life? Whom do I know who needs a wake up call to turn and receive God's gift of grace before it's too late?

Prayer: My end is my beginning, Lord. I know that. When I end...when my Self is no longer the center and sole concern...then You can be God finally; and I can begin to be who and what you created me to be. Then I will be who and what you redeemed me to be. Bring me to my end, God; so you can bring me to my beginning, and I can finally bring you the praise and devotion which you deserve, and which I desire to give you. You are my end and my beginning. Amen.

Day 352. Read Habakkuk 1.1-3.19; Revelation 9.1-21; Psalm 1; and Proverbs 30.10.

Habakkuk: His eyes are too pure even to look on evil. He cannot tolerate wrong. How then can God permit godless people...people whose own strength is their god...the Babylonians... to sweep across the expanse of nations? They are a law to themselves and seek their own honor, not God's. For the violence and destruction they have brought upon the earth, they will drink the bitter cup of God's wrath. All the idols...all the false gods humans create...and especially the false god, Self...are useless. There is no breath in them. They cannot speak...or act. They will fail us; for God's will is that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God's glory, as the waters cover the sea. People will live before God in right relationship only by faith. Habbakuk, the prophet, proclaims the utmost of faith in God: 'Though the fruit trees and crops fail and the fields produce no food, yet will

I rejoice in the Lord and be joyful in God my savior. The Living God is my strength and he makes my feet sure in the twisted pathways of life, like the sure-footed deer on the rugged mountaintops. The righteous shall live...now, every moment, and forever... by faith in God alone. **Questions:** 1. How does the fact that I am saved by faith and not by my works free me up to live life more fruitfully for God now? 2. In what ways do I tend to trust in my own strength and powers rather than trust totally in God and turn my life over to him? How have I (and others around me) suffered because of my attempts to control my own life and get what I want? 3. How much can I say that, even if everything turns against me in life so that even food itself might be scarce, I will still not only trust in God but rejoice in God? How strong is my faith? What will strengthen it further?

Revelation: Like the obnoxious snooze alarm blaring repeatedly on an alarm clock, the fifth trumpet sounds its wake up call. The fifth trumpet blast opens up hell itself. Like a sewer overflowing with filth, the venom, pestilence, and pollution of hell itself spews forth upon the world. From the noxious smoke locusts, with poisonous stings like scorpions, attack, not the grass or crops, but the people who do not have God's sign and seal on their foreheads—the mark of the cross made at their baptism into Christ. So painful was the sting of the locusts that people sought death as a relief, but death fled from them. For six months this went on, until the sixth trumpet sounded. Riders appeared, riding horses whose heads resembled lions and breathed forth fumes of sulfur, and whose tails resembled snakes. A third of humankind died. A third! Still people did not stop worshipping idols or repent of their wrongdoing! God is trying every way he knows to turn people to him and to life. What more can he do? Though people may still not respond, yet he will do more. **Questions:** 1. Am I hard to wake up in the morning, or do I get out of bed and get going right away? How about spiritually? Am I hard to wake up, or do I live with a sense of anticipation and expectancy? 2. Have I consented to be baptized into Christ as my Lord and to be his disciple? 3. Have I received the sign of the cross on my forehead in baptism?

Prayer: God, I have had many gods besides you in my life. Youth. Health. Money and things. Popularity. Pleasures. All the while, the real god I was worshipping was myself. I wanted to control my own destiny and set my own course. Well, that well has dried up. Seeking to draw from it has only made me thirstier. Running down that path has only dried me up all the more. I was dry and dead as a desert, God, till suddenly you found me and restored me. You have the living waters I need, and they are free for the taking. They are free for faith. You alone are God. You alone are my God; and though the waters dry up again and I go through the desert now, I go gladly. For you are ever with me, and your love will never leave nor forsake me. Amen.

Day 353. Read Zephaniah 1.1-3.20; Revelation 10.1-11;
Psalm 138.1-8; and Proverbs 30.11-14.

Zephaniah: What will the day of the Lord...the judgment day...be like? God will take a lamp and search Jerusalem...the seat of his temple and the center of his people...to punish those who are complacent, the ones who say, 'God will do nothing either good or bad.' He will seek out...and punish...those who 'never cross the threshold'—who literally never darken the doorstep of the temple to worship and inquire of God—and cut off those who instead bowed down on their roofs to worship the gods of the stars or who swear by the god, Molech. Those who turned back from following the Lord and no longer seek him will be destroyed. That day will be a day of wrath, distress, darkness. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed; and all the people who live in the earth will suddenly be brought to their end. 'I will sweep away everything and will cut off people from the face of the earth,' God promises. And yet... the prophet urges the people, 'Seek the Lord...seek righteousness,...seek humility...and *perhaps* you will be sheltered...be saved...on the day of the Lord's anger. *Perhaps?!* No 'perhaps' about it. While it is appropriate for the prophet, speaking as a person to other people to say 'perhaps' because the decision belongs to God who is sovereign and free, God takes away all doubt by giving a great promise. To Jerusalem and the remnant of his people he promises, 'I will leave within you the humble and meek who trust in the name of the Lord.' The prophet cries out in response to God's promise, 'Sing, O daughter of Zion, and rejoice, O daughter of Jerusalem; for the Lord has taken away your punishment, and he has turned back your enemy. The Lord is with you and nothing will ever harm you again. Doesn't that make you want to sing?! **Questions:** 1. When did my trust in God's promise of forgiveness move from 'perhaps' I might be saved to flat-out singing for joy, that I am saved by his grace? Do I live a life of joy as someone redeemed and set right with God, or do I still tend to doubt my salvation and live in fear? 2. What does it mean for me to seek humility? Have I ever humbly declared God's Lordship over me? Have I asked God to take total control of my entire life and every aspect of it? 3. When the day of the Lord comes, will I be swept away or able to stand and sing with joy? How does trust in God's promise of salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ, give me confidence for that day?

Revelation: The sight is staggering. God is invading his world. The advance party is an awesome angel, face shining like the sun, who plants one foot on the land and the other on the sea. As he roars like a lion, seven thunders spoke; but their messages were sealed until the time of the end, when the mysterious plan of God will be accomplished. John is told to eat, not his own words, but His words. The little scroll he is told to eat tastes sweet as honey in his mouth, but it makes his stomach bitter. John then receives his assignment: he must prophesy about many peoples, powerful and plain. So it is with all who follow God and are part of God's people: first take God's Word inside yourself; then take God's Word to others. First God wants to invade a person; then he invades the person's world, as the person proclaims God's Word to the people around. **Questions:** 1. What does this image of the angel, so powerful and terrible in appearance, do to my understanding of these spiritual beings? Do I tend to think of angels as tame and quiet? 2. Have I 'eaten' the Word of God? That is, have I really taken it inside me so that it nourishes my life and I draw my life from it, as my physical body draws life from its food? 3. To whom is God

sending me to proclaim his Word? To whom is God sending me in my time, as God sent John in his time?

Prayer: God, change my appetite for your Word. Increase my hunger for your Word. I confess, all too often I only nibble at it. I taste it and put it down again. Give me a hearty hunger for your Word, so that I long for it and look forward to it every day. And once this hunger is raised, let it never be satisfied. Let me always hunger for it and hunger to share it with everyone I know. May they also have this hunger in their hearts and hope as I hope, never to be satisfied. Amen.

Day 354. Read Haggai 1.1-2.23; Revelation 11.1-19; Psalm 139.1-24; and Proverbs 30.15-16.

Haggai: God's got a building project in mind but...who will accomplish it for him? The building project God has in mind is unbelievable...literally beyond comprehending in its magnitude. The timing is all wrong. It is the second year of King Darius, the Persian sovereign who ruled all the Middle East, including captive, exiled Israel. Why would he allow a building project that glorifies another God than his own? Worse, there is just a remnant of God's people who could do the work...if they chose to....but they have no fire for the work. See how helpless the God who created heaven and earth is willing to become by creating human beings who can choose. Like him, human beings are persons, which means, centers of choice. In that unlikely situation comes the word of God to Haggai to the governor of Judah and the high priest: 'Go up into the mountains and haul down timber to build the temple, so I might take pleasure in it and be honored.' They are to rebuild the temple; but they are saying, 'the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house.' Fearfully trying to survive, they have missed the path entirely. They plant much but harvest little. They eat but never have enough. They put on clothes, but they are too thin to keep them warm. They earn money; but it vanishes away without a trace, as if they put it in purses that have holes in them. They are so busy trying to build their own houses, they have no place for God in their lives. God's call for them to build him a house is really a call for them to put their priorities straight, so they can experience the blessings God wants to shower upon them. He wants them to have homes, have food, have clothing, but they will never have enough...never fulfill the deepest desires of their hearts, unless they first create space...a preeminent place...for God in their lives. So God speaks to them...and the result is...they hear and heed him! So God speaks again through Haggai saying, 'Be strong, people of the land, and work; for I am with you, and my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.' The real temple God seeks to build is the human heart totally turned to him, trusting him. **Questions:** 1. When and where in my life have I got my priorities wrong and sought to 'build my own house' without any care for God's honor or work? Am I doing so now in certain areas of my life, holding them back from God's control? 2. What am I saying, 'it's not time' to in my life that God wants me to do? Inviting someone to come to know God? Tithing my money to God's work? Drawing closer to God in prayer, worship, or Bible devotions? Getting deeper into real, spiritual relationships with others in

small groups? Serving in the church or community using my gifts? 3. How does God's promise, 'I am with you' when I obey his work and get involved in his work give me the courage and confidence of a joyous, blessed life right now, as I obey?

Revelation: This is the story of two temples. John is given a measuring line and told to measure the temple...on earth. But he is not to measure the outer court that belongs to the gentiles, for these foreigners will trample on the holy city and destroy the earthly temple. Two faithful witnesses will rise for God, and no one will be able to stand against the words of their mouths. But when they have finished their testimony, they will be caught and killed...but rise again and be called up to heaven. Terror will seize all who see them! As the people are shaken by what God does through his witnesses, an earthquake shall strike the city of Jerusalem; and the people who dwell there will be so shaken they will give glory to the God of heaven. God's purpose in sending woes has always been just that, to turn people back to him, so they might have life. The seventh angel sounds his final trumpet, and loud voices declare to the One who is and was and is to come, 'The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of God and of his Christ!' The time of the end...and the beginning...has come. The time for judging the dead and rewarding the faithful has come. The time for destroying those who destroy God's world has come. John sees the temple in heaven opened and the ark of the covenant...God's throne and living presence...along with flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, earthquake and storm. God is coming forth from his temple. No measuring this temple...nor the power of his might.

Questions: 1. How does the awesome reality of coming judgment affect me, my thoughts, and my actions? Does it motivate me to greater work for God, particularly sharing God's love in service or inviting others to follow Jesus, so they can stand before God at the judgment? 2. How does the promise of the ultimate reward God will give to all the faithful affect my words and deeds every day? 3. How does this depiction of God's awesome power and perfect holiness change my heart, mind, and actions? Have I made my heart the temple of his Holy Spirit, so his power and holiness can live in me and work through me?

Prayer: God I spend almost all my time working my own agenda and never getting around to yours. I will work overtime building my own house and forget to build yours...your temple. I don't pray, or read your word for me, or worship with my whole heart, or get together with your faithful people for real, spiritual relationships or serve using my gifts. I certainly don't invite others to know you as I could...or should. Thanks, God, for calling me back. I know what you want - to bless me with life - and that can only happen as I keep intimately connected to you and allow you to work through me. It can only happen if I build your house first. What do you want me to do next? I will obey. I am ready to get to work. Amen.

Day 355. Read Zechariah 1.1-21; Revelation 12.1-13.1a;
Psalm 140.1-13; and Proverbs 30.17.

Zechariah: God speaks to whomever he speaks whenever he wants to. About the same time he first speaks to Haggai, God also speaks to Zechariah. The message is the same, because God's character from which his words spring never changes. 'Return to me,' God promises, 'and I will return to you.' Don't be like the people before you, God pleads. He held out the offer to turn and be healed to them as well. They would not listen, and so there came upon them the consequences of their sins God had predicted. Only then did the people repent. Then they had to declare humbly that God had only done to them what their deeds deserved. Don't be like them, God pleaded. Learn from them. Turn before those consequences come upon you. A month after the first revelation he received, another word comes to Zechariah; and it, too, has a familiar ring...the ring of grace: 'I am jealous for Jerusalem and my people. I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and my house will be rebuilt.' Haggai, the prophet, also promised. God gives Zechariah mysterious visions of horsemen riding different-colored horses, of horns, and of craftsmen at work. What is God doing? Completely mystified, Zechariah asks, 'What are these?' God is the one with the plan. We cannot know exactly what God is about; but if we ask, he will sometimes reveal to us glimpses of the greater plan. It is not necessary that we know what will happen or where our actions will lead. It is only necessary that we trust and obey the One who has the plan, the one who invites us to turn to him with the promise that he will turn to us. **Questions:** 1. How can I live with courage and confidence, even though I don't know what will happen in the future? How can I go on working for God effectively, even though I do not know all of his designs and purposes? 2. How do I 'return to God' so he will return to me, as he promises? How can I grow closer to God? What will my next step be? 3. How does God's consistent promise of gracious love and forgiveness to all who return to him, consistently proclaimed by all the prophets, give me hope, courage, and confidence for life now? How does it give me courage to share his love and invitation to people who haven't yet returned to God?

Revelation: All heaven and all earth are caught up in a great conflagration. A woman appears, clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head. Who is this woman? She is pregnant with a child and cries out in pain, about to give birth. An enormous red dragon with seven heads, each bearing a crown, and with ten horns sought to devour her child the moment it was born. But her child was snatched up to God and his throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God. There was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels. The great dragon and his host lost their foothold in heaven and were cast down. The woman is God's church, his bride, the mother of his Son. The great dragon is the devil, Satan, who leads the whole world astray. As he is thrown down, a great voice in heaven declared, 'Now salvation and the kingdom of God have come; for the accusers of our brothers have been hurled down.' They overcame him not by their own actions, but by the blood of the Lamb slain for their sin and by the word of their testimony—their faith declared in word and deeds—even though that testimony cost them their lives. But though it is good news that the kingdom of God is about to dawn, the darkness is truly deepest just before the dawn. Woe to the earth because the devil has gone down to you, filled with fury and desperate because the time remaining to him is short. Hurlled from heaven to earth,

the dragon did the worst thing he could do to wreak the most destruction in the time left to him. He pursued the woman, but she fled to the wilderness where she would be taken care of. So the dragon made war instead against the rest of her offspring...all who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. **Questions:** 1. How does the fact that I live in the last stage of a universal war change the way that I understand my role and how I approach my daily life? 2. How does the reality that I am under attack personally by Satan and his forces change the way I think and act? 3. How can I overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and my 'testimony' (words and actions)? Do my words and actions give testimony to God's salvation through faith in Jesus Christ consistently? What could I do better or more to give more effective testimony?

Prayer: God, your world...and your people...are under attack. It's foolish of me to remind you, my General, of what you already know. You have given me the weapons I need to respond to the onslaught I face every day. The blood of the Lamb, your Son slain for me, wards off the accusations of the evil one, the guilt and shame he hurls at me reminding me of my sin. My testimony overcomes him, too. But here Lord, my weapon is most weak. Your forgiveness in the cross of Christ is unshakeable. My witness waxes and wanes like the phases of the moon. Make my testimony stronger, Lord. Make my serving deeds of love and my inviting words so shine with the life and love of Christ that others may get a glimpse of Christ, find hope and home in him. Order me, my Commander and master, I am ready for the fray; for you promise to stand beside me. You cast the evil one from heaven; now cast him from your world...and mine. Amen.

Day 356. Read Zechariah 2.1-3.10; Revelation 13.1b-18; Psalm 141.1-10; and Proverbs 30.18-20.

Zechariah: Some tasks are totally impossible. Measuring line in hand, a man suddenly appears before Zechariah in his vision. He is going to measure Jerusalem. The angel who has been escorting John gives John a mission and a message. There is urgency. Zechariah is ordered to run with the message. The message that is so important he must run to share it? The new Jerusalem God is making will be a city without walls! The man is seeking to do something impossible, if he is seeking the city limits. This city will have no limits. The new Jerusalem God is making will not have walls, because so many people will live there; walls would limit life, not protect it. Most important of all, God himself will be the protective wall—*of fire!*—around the new Jerusalem; and he will be the glory within the city. He will be the city's center, and he will be the wall around it to protect its people. God promises through Zechariah that he will bring forth a Servant, the Branch, and will remove the sins of the land in a single day. In that day, the people of God will invite their neighbors to join them under his vine. Want to measure the forgiving love of God? Want to find the limits of his mercy and forgiveness? You are seeking the impossible. Look at the cross of Christ, the Branch of Jesse. In a single day he removed the sins of the world so that all who believe in him are forgiven and freed to live in the city of God forever. All are

welcome within the city that has no walls. **Questions:** 1. Whom do I know whom I need to invite into the community of God? Which 'neighbors' of mine (people in my workplace, extended family, neighborhood and community groups) do I need to invite to be part of God's faith community? 2. Are there ways I think God's love is limited, perhaps being for certain people and not for others? What does God saying his community doesn't have walls to exclude people suggest about my human tendency to think some people are acceptable and others not? 3. How does my faith community create walls that exclude some people? What will I do to see that everyone is included in God's community?

Revelation: In John's vision, a beast arose from the sea. It had all the vicious, voracious nature of a leopard, bear, and lion rolled into one. The dragon gave this beast his power and authority. The whole world was astonished and followed it, saying, 'Who can war against it?' But with the rising of the beast (Rome and its emperors) rises a greater mystery. The beast was given power to make war on the faithful and even to conquer them. This power...this permission...came from God and not the devil. Whatever is God doing in permitting the deaths of his people? In hideous mimicry of God's own Son to whom God gave all authority in heaven and on earth, the dragon gives all authority over the people of the world to the beast to make them worship the beast... all that is except the people whose names were written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb, who was slain from the creation of the world. From before the beginning of time, it was already God's plan to redeem the world through the sacrificial death of his Son. Even so, the Lamb's people are given over to be sacrificed like the Lamb himself. They are to point the way to the Lamb who was sacrificed by being sacrificed themselves and bearing it as he did. Believers listen: if anyone is to go into captivity—or even be killed—it will happen. All lies in the mysterious permission and plan of God. Be prepared. Following Christ calls for patient endurance and faithfulness...to the end. **Questions:** 1. Am I prepared to suffer, or even die, for following Christ? If suffering for following Christ were my lot, would I accept it patiently and faithfully as coming from God and in his plan? 2. How does society seek to get me to compromise my faith and follow its ways rather than Christ? In what ways do I tend to conform to society and people around me rather than living from Christ's values and ways? 3. How does it give me courage, confidence, and energy to serve Christ, even in the midst of suffering, to know my name is written in the book of life? How does it help to know that Jesus Christ, the Lamb, was slain in God's plan to redeem me from death and suffering?

Prayer: God, I am not into suffering. I don't want to suffer. I would rather not suffer, and so sometimes I lay low, keeping a low profile, hoping I don't stand out and draw any attention. Maybe I won't suffer then. Yet, suffering for you seems to come simply from following you. Following you means I can't...and won't...follow the ways of people who surround me every day. It means standing out...at least at crucial times...to show forth your loving presence and power in my words and actions. God, if I don't, how shall they be brought to your community of healing and help? If it takes suffering...if it takes dying, either to myself or physically...let your will be done. May my life complete the

sufferings of Christ, if it must, so others may live in him and through him forever.
Amen.

Day 357. Read Zechariah 4.1-5.11; Revelation 14.1-20; Psalm 142.1-7; and Proverbs 30.21-23.

Zechariah: Take on the impossible?! How can I accomplish a mighty act for God, like completely rebuilding his temple? How can I accomplish anything at all for God, even the slightest thing? 'Not by might or power, but by my Spirit,' declares God through his prophet, Zechariah. Zechariah is told to tell Zerubbabel that his very hands which laid the foundation for the new temple would also complete it. Not by his might or power, but by the Spirit of God, who will empower him. I will not be able to do the impossible task for God in my own strength. I don't need to be able. It is by his Spirit that I shall be able to do whatever God asks of me. By his Spirit I can even build...even become...a temple in which he may live and be glorified. **Questions:** 1. When and how have I tried to act in my own power and might, without waiting for the Spirit of God to direct and empower the action? What were the consequences? 2. How can I through prayer, devotion, Bible reading, worshipping, giving, serving and telling others discern the leading of the Spirit and walk in his power and might, not my own? 3. How can I open myself more to the Spirit and power of God so that God can use me to build up his 'house' (his community of faith of which I am a part)?

Revelation: Now that is a choir, to be sure. One hundred and forty-four thousand voices. John sees them standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion. The Lamb's name and the name of his Father were written on their foreheads. They sang a new song before the throne, a special song. No one could learn the song but them, these who had kept themselves pure for God alone. No lie was found in their mouths. They are blameless. They accompany the Lamb wherever he goes, as song should. John next sees another angel flying in mid-air, carrying the eternal gospel to proclaim it to all the people of earth. Everyone can understand and learn it. People of every language, tribe, and nation. One more time. One last chance. 'Fear God! Give him glory! Worship the One who made heaven and earth!' The judgment has come at last. Another angel flies by, proclaiming as a herald, 'Babylon the Great is fallen!' announcing the destruction of the beast. Yet another angel herald warns, 'If anyone worships the beast (Rome and its emperors) or even receives the mark of allegiance to it, they, too, will drink the cup of judgment and share the beasts' torment forever. But a voice in heaven proclaims, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for their deeds will follow them; and they will rest from their labors.' And then, yet another angel called to one seated on a cloud, bearing a sickle, 'Take your sickle and reap!' With one sweep of his sickle, the whole earth was harvested. Another angel called to him again, 'Take your sickle and reap and gather the grapes.' The grapes were gathered for God's winepress of God's wrath. For miles and miles the river of bitter wine of judgment flowed. The judgment has come. **Questions:** 1. What will it mean for me to 'die in the Lord?' How can I be faithful to the Lord unto death? 2. How does it comfort me to know

that the bitter wine of God's wrath won't be mine to drink, because Christ drained that cup of suffering for me on the cross? How does it change my life now, my actions, as well as my attitudes? 3. How can I help others to hear and receive the eternal gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? Whom can I help to hear it through my serving actions and inviting words this week?

Prayer: The eternal gospel. For all people. God, I thank you that many people have helped me to hear it. What comfort it gives to know I need not drink the bitter cup of judgment and punishment, because your Son drained it for me by his suffering on the cross. What joy and hope it gives me, this everlasting news. Use me to proclaim this eternal gospel to the people you have put around me; for they are eternal, too, to live with or without you forever. God, I want everyone to know the eternal gospel...and you, the eternal God. Use me to reach them. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 51

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Nahum 1.1-9

Psalm: 136.1-11

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Revelation 8.1-13

Theme: The End Is Coming

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 51:

Many people believe that the world goes on forever, if they even think about it at all. The Bible proclaims that the world will end one day, dissolved in fire. Everything here in this world is temporary, except people. All people will be judged according to what they have done, and especially whether they have had a personal relationship of trust and love with God. The prophet, Nahum, predicted the destruction of Babylon, the mightiest power on earth, because it was not trusting and following God but only seeking its own glory, power, and wealth. But all people will be saved who trust in God; for God is a refuge to all who trust in him. In the New Testament, John paints a picture of the destruction of the world. But those people who don't succumb to disbelief or trust in worldly things, even if it costs them their life now, will live with God forever. God will make a new heaven and a new earth, in which people who trusted in God will live with God and one another forever in a perfect community. Knowing the world will end strengthens our motivation to live life to the fullest now, which means maintaining a close personal relationship with God and working for the salvation of everyone on earth. You

and everyone you know or ever will know really want to share the new world and endless life with God!

Alternate Readings & Themes:

1. **“Singing Along With God (God’s Singing Over You, So Sing Back!”** How does God feel about you personally? Angry? Judgmental? Condemning? Most people believe the lie that God is critical and condemning of them. The prophet, Zephaniah, paints an entirely different picture. God sings over his people with rejoicing! Like a proud, loving parent, God delights in his people and sings over them! In the New Testament lesson, John hears a wonderful sound in heaven: the singing of God’s people. They express their love and praise for God in song. Just as God sings over us, so God’s people surround God with the sounds of their love and joy. Join the song now, knowing that right now God is singing over you! **Zephaniah 3.8-17; Psalm 138.17; Revelation 14.1-11**
2. **“More Life Than You Can Imagine,” (If You’re Saved By Grace Through Faith Alone)** We work hard to ‘make it’ in life or just to make ends meet. By extension, we think we must work hard to make it in eternal life. The amazing truth is: we are saved by grace through faith alone. Faith means totally trusting God for everything. Faith is not passive or complacent, though. Faith is trust...stepping out on the bridge, believing it will hold your weight. Faith means stepping out in life with God; and it leads to a vital, active life, filled with purpose and power. Joy awaits those who risk the problems and step out on the bridge who is God. **Habakkuk 2.2-4, 18-20; Psalm 138.1-8;. Revelation 9.1-6, 20-21.**