

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 52

Day 358. Read Zechariah 6.1-7.14; Revelation 15.1-8; Psalm 143.1-12; and Proverbs 30.24-28.

Zechariah: When God returns and restores the exiled people of God a new ruler will lead them. His sovereignty will be very different than others kings. The prophet Zechariah is told: make a crown of silver and gold gathered from the exiled people of God. Zechariah is to take the crown he is to make and set it on the head of the...high priest! Priest and king are to be one and the same. This one who is priest and king will be the one to rebuild the temple. He will be clothed with majesty and rule from his throne. He will be called the Branch, because he will 'branch out' from the temple, extending his rule far and wide like a spreading branch. God's people will be drawn from far away to help build the new temple. If both prophet and people diligently obey the Lord, this priestly king, this kingly high priest, will come and all that God prophesied will prove true. But, after several years have passed, another word comes from God through Zechariah. God questions their actions...and their heart. Their actions are religious: they fast...and feast...at the appointed times. 'When you fast...or feast,' God asks, 'is it really for me that you do so? Is it not just for yourselves?' The fasting...and feasting...that God desires is not empty ritual or religion, but right relationship with God and with the people God puts into our lives. 'Administer true justice, show mercy and compassion to one another, and do not oppress the widow, fatherless, foreigner or poor' God bids his people through Zechariah. God's word is the same through all his prophets. To have a right relationship with God, you must seek a right relationship—a just and loving relationship—with the people God puts around you. The coming king who is also high priest, promised will set all things right. **Questions:** 1. How does Jesus fulfill this prophecy about a high priest who will become king? Have I acknowledged him both my Savior (mediator to forgive sins, like a high priest) and Lord (ruler and leader of my whole life and being)? 2. Am I giving to God just ritual and religion by rote? Do my prayers and worship seek a real, personal, loving, obedient relationship with God, or am I just putting in my time? 3. In which of my relationships with other people do I need to show justice (fairness)? Compassion (help in need)? Mercy (forgiveness)? How do I treat people who are suffering, including foreigners (people quite different than me in race, culture, socio-economic class, and so forth)?

Revelation: The war on...not for... earth continues. God is all powerful, and the ultimate victor in the war for possession of earth was never in doubt. Seven angels appear, holding

golden bowls. In the seven bowls are the seven last plagues. They are the last because, with them, the just wrath of God against sin is completed. John sees a stunning sight in heaven: a sea as of glass mixed with fire. Standing beside the sea are all those who had been victorious over the beast through the word of God and their testimony, often to death. They played stringed instruments and praised God in song, the song of Moses and the Lamb: 'Great and marvelous, just and true, are your ways, King of the ages. You alone are holy! All nations will worship before you, for your righteous deeds have been revealed.' In heaven the temple—which is the Tabernacle of the Testimony—was opened. The angels holding the seven golden bowls with the seven last plagues came forth from the temple, which was so filled with smoke from God's glory and power that no one could enter until the seven last plagues was completed. All trace of sin must be removed for the temple to truly be open and for people to see God's glory face to face. **Questions:** 1. How does the fact that, though the battle between evil and God still rages on this earth, God is already victorious in eternity give me courage and strength to struggle on? 2. How does the fact that Christ bore all the punishment for my sins and removed them completely affect my attitudes and actions in life? Does it change my daily interactions with other people? 3. Since the song of the victorious in heaven predicts that all nations will worship God, what am I doing to help other people around me come to faith in Jesus Christ and avoid the punishment that is coming for those who don't trust in him? What am I doing to help 'the nations' (people in other lands around the world) hear about and have life through Jesus?

Prayer: Jesus, you are my High Priest, who offered the sacrifice that frees me from my sin. Be also my Lord, Sovereign over all my life. Though I still rebel and sin, do you be ever faithful to your anointing to be my High Priest and Lord. It is not I who crown you Priest and King, but your Father himself. I for my part will seek always to be your grateful servant and subject, spreading your good news and grace wherever~ and to whomever~ you send me. Amen.

Day 359. Read Zechariah 8.1-23; Revelation 16.1-21; Psalm 144.1-15; and Proverbs 30.29-31.

Zechariah : God burning with... *jealousy*? Not anger? Not wrath, nor retribution? Yes, he burns with jealousy, not for his honor wronged, nor for himself treated unjustly. God is jealous...*for his people*. "I will return to Zion" God says to and through Zechariah 'and will dwell in Jerusalem.' God yearns for his Jerusalem to be call the City of Truth again, and for the temple mountain on which he founded the templ to be call the Holy Mountain. God longs for his community to be filled with people, for it to be a place where old men and women can sit talking along the streets while boys and girls play in those bustling streets. Though it seem marvelous to the people in exile who are now scattered, a mere remnant, it is not too much for the Almighty. 'I will bring them back,' God declares 'and they will be my people and I, their God, will be righteous and faithful to them.' The time is coming, God declares, that he will not deal with the remnant as he had to deal with their

ancestors in the past. The seed will grow well, the fields will produce bountiful crops, the vine will yield its grapes for wine, and the heavens will drop their life-giving rains. No longer will God's people be an object of cursing or ridicule. They will be a blessing. 'Do not be afraid,' God says, 'but let your hands be strong and your hearts intrepid.' Just as God determined in the past to punish in order to propel them back into the way of life, now God has determined to do good to Jerusalem. Their part? They are to respond in a very simple way: become more like the One who is so jealous for them that he forgives and gives them a fresh start. Their part: simply speak the truth to each other, and render true judgment to their neighbors. When this happens—when God again blesses God's people and they put all falsehood aside forever, then something amazing will occur: many people and powerful nations will come and seek the Lord, to entreat him. They will take hold of God's people and say 'Let us go with you, for we have heard God is with you!' **Questions:**

1. How does it change my attitude and actions—and my very sense of how valuable I am to God to know he longed for me (was so 'jealous' for me personally) to be with him so much he sacrificed his Son for me personally?
2. How well am I consciously attempting to speak the truth to my neighbors and render true judgments toward them in all my dealing with the people God puts around me? With whom do I need to work most on improving this?
3. Am I living in a way that people look at me and say 'Let me go with you, for God is with you'? How could I do so better?

Revelation: The end is hastening. The curtain is coming down on the last act. The seven last plagues, so reminiscent of the plagues with which God struck Egypt to make the false pharaoh-god release God's people—have begun. Sores break out on the people who worshipped the beast, all those who bowed before the false god of this world. Their pain is a gift intended to propel them to repent. The sea turned to blood, and the rivers and springs with them. This was so fitting, since the blood of God's prophets and people have been shed in rivers through the centuries. The sun scorched people with searing heat. Rather than repent, when in these last moments, they cursed the name of God. Evil spirits like frogs arise from the river Euphrates, their sole task to be gathering the kings of the world to battle against God at a place called Armageddon. A warning sounds from God once again: 'I come like a thief in the night, so stay alert and have your clothes with you—the covering of Christ's righteousness—so your nakedness won't be exposed when I suddenly come.' God wants everyone to be ready to stand before him...to live with him. As the seventh angel pours out the seventh plague from the seventh golden bowl, a loud voice from the throne in the temple cries out: 'It is finished!' With flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, and an earthquake, the earthly counterfeit of heavenly Jerusalem, Babylon, collapsed in on itself. Deadly hailstones fell upon the people, and they cursed God because of the plague, rather than repented. As with the plagues of Egypt, each one more severe than the previous, so that people might repent and live, these seven last plagues grow more severe until the final one. Pharaoh of Egypt relented. Will people repent in these last times? Will they never learn? **Questions:**

1. How does God's use of these end time plagues reflect the 'severe grace' or 'tough love' of God?
2. How has God's severe grace or tough love been effective in my life? How has God used difficulties and trials to lead me back to him and back to life?
3. Who is the most resistant person I know

who refuses to acknowledge God or turn their life over to God? What can I do to build (or strengthen) a trusting relationship between us so that I can talk to them for God and extend his offer of life to them?

Prayer: God, most of the time I think troubles are....well, just trouble. Help me to realize that troubles are permitted by you and provide the way back to you when I might otherwise stray and be lost. Help me to find you...and find peace thereby...in the midst of troubles. And what is more, help be to be a blessing to others who are experiencing troubles and need as well. Bless them, as you have already blessed me. Amen.

Day 360. Read Zechariah 9.1-17; Revelation 17.1-18; Psalm 145.1-21; and Proverbs 30.32.

Zechariah: Judgment and mercy. Complete holiness together with perfect compassion. The Word of God comes to Zechariah the prophet and it brings both judgment and mercy. The nations surrounding Israel will feel the judgment of the Holy God, and then experience his surprising, surpassing compassion. Syria, and its capital Damascus, along with the Philistines and their major cities, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gaza and Ashdod, will fall. Just then, as they are being destroyed, these foreigners that fought against God will experience God's mercy. 'Those who are left will belong to God' Zechariah prophesies in a shocking turnaround. The enemies of God will become God's friends. They will even become leaders among God's people in the new Jerusalem God will create. 'Never again will invaders conquer my people' God declares, 'for now I am keeping watch over them.' God promises a time when a new king will arise to rule over God's people, a king diametrically different than any they have had or can imagine. This king will come to them riding, not a warhorse, but a donkey. He will come not as a conqueror, but as a servant. He will bring not battlefield victories but righteousness and salvation. He will proclaim peace to people of all nations, and his rule will extend to the ends of the earth. God has not forgotten—God cannot forget—the blood of the covenant, his promise sealed ultimately with his own Son's blood. He will set the prisoners free, all who hope and trust in Him. The redeemed will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown. His people are his crown! **Questions:** 1. How does it increase my love for God and joy in God to know I am redeemed by his own Son, and that in his eyes I sparkle? How does his love for me change my attitudes toward my self and my actions toward others? 2. How does the prophecy of the King coming to God's people riding on a donkey, fulfilled as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey at the beginning of the week when he was crucified to bring people ultimate peace, strengthen my faith in Jesus? 3. Since everyone is precious to God, including those who are far away from God and even fight against God, who do I need to be loving and serving for God so they can be included in God's new community and life? What is my next step with them?

Revelation: The judgment has come. Babylon, the quintessence of all that leads people away from God to destruction, depicted as a drunken prostitute who lures others astray,

will herself be destroyed itself. In words addressed directly to the reader, John adds ‘This calls for wisdom.’ The seven heads of the beast Babylon rides in the vision ‘are seven hills on which the woman sits.’ The reference is clearly to Rome, situated on seven hills. The seven heads are veiled references to the Roman emperors who ruled the known world...and persecuted God’s people. The ten horns are ten kings who will rise up against Rome, and who will also make war against the Lamb who was slain and his followers. The hideous beast, despite all its heads and horns, will be overcome by the Lamb, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings. The Lamb is stronger than the beast. **Questions:** 1. How does the certainty of the final conquest of evil by the Lamb who was slain, Jesus Christ, give me courage and confidence to carry on as I await the fulfillment? 2. As King of kings, and Lord of lords, is completely Jesus Lord over my life? Are there areas of my character, thought processes, and actions that still evade his Lordship? 3. What influences of evil does God want me to fight against in my home, community, workplace, nation and the world? How can I, through God’s power, help overcome evil with good here and now as I await the final consummation?

Prayer: God, you have said that, in your eyes, I sparkle like a jewel in your crown. Can it truly be that I am so precious in your sight? Can it be that I can give you such joy and pleasure? The world, the Evil One, and my own sinful self say otherwise. They shout loud and long that I am worse than nothing to you. How can that be, if the Lamb, your perfect Son, was sacrificed for me? I will believe you above all others, even my own hurtful heart that will not believe. I will believe you because of Christ, your humble servant Son who loved me so much as to lay down his life for me. And I will do the same, Lord... I will lay down my life for those you love, because of his love for me, and for all are so precious to you,. Amen.

Day 361. Read Zechariah 10.1-11.17; Revelation 18.1-24; Psalm 146.1-10; and Proverbs 30.33.

Zechariah: The people wander like sheep, oppressed for the lack of a shepherd. Diviners see lying visions and share false dreams. ‘Ask the Lord for the life-giving rain’ Zechariah urges the people, ‘He is the one who makes the rain clouds to people and the plants of the field. ‘My anger burns against the shepherds’ God declares, ‘I will punish the leaders, for the Lord cares for his flock.’ God is the Good Shepherd. Though he scattered the people for their unfaithfulness, he will signal for them among the peoples and they will return. The sheep will know the shepherds voice and will follow it. But first, judgment must come. God directs Zechariah to take up two shepherd’s staff, one to be named Favor and the other Union. Zechariah breaks Favor, showing God’s disfavor of the flock that detested him. He breaks Union, severing the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. Then God directs Zechariah to take up the equipment of a foolish shepherd, to show that God will allow a shepherd to rule over the land who will not care for the lost, seek the young, heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will instead feed off the sheep. The Good Shepherd will shine all the brighter by the complete contrast when he lays down his life for

the sheep. **Questions:** 1. When I am in a leadership role, be it in my family, community, or faith community, am I a good shepherd caring for the well being of the people entrusted to my leadership on behalf of God? 2. How can I better show forth the character of Christ in my leadership roles, putting the well being of others ahead of my own? 3. Who are the lost and injured sheep God wants me to care for on his behalf? What will I do to help them discover the kind of life God wants them to enjoy with him?

Revelation: An angel so resplendent that the whole earth is illuminated by his splendor, cries out ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!’ Nevertheless, some will be still be sad by the downfall. The kings of neighboring lands that shared Rome’s luxury. The merchants that made a fortune in trade because of her. They will weep and mourn, terrified at her torment. By her magic spell all the nations were led astray. The lure of wealth and ease casts a spell that entralls and leads to destruction. Some will never be free of it, though God sends the downfall to set people free. ‘Was there ever a city like this?’ some will cry as they mourn its passing. The evil spell is strong, and some will succumb—of their own will—forever. **Questions:** 1. How does the world try to pull me away from God? 2. Why is it so easy for me to ‘go with the flow’ of the world rather than hear God’s voice and follow God’s way? 3. Who do I know who has come under the spell of the world, whom I can love, serve and witness to for God to break the spell? What will be my next step with them?

Prayer: God, the enchantment of the world is so strong. It’s incantations sound so often louder in my ears than your still, small voice that I can barely hear you amidst the roar around me. Let me listen only for you voice. Let me hear and heed only your call to me. In all I say, think or do, be Lord, and be glorified. Amen.

Day 362. Read Zechariah 12.1-13.9; Revelation 19.1-21; Psalm 147.1-20; and Proverbs 31.1-7.

Zechariah: The prophecies that await fulfillment flow from God through Zechariah. ‘They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and will mourn bitterly as one grieves for a firstborn son, as for an only child’ Zechariah writes. ‘Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered’ he adds. The Good Shepherd will be struck down, nailed to a cross, stabbed by a spear, and the his followers will be scattered like sheep as it happens. All this will happen that another prophecy given through Zechariah can also be fulfilled: ‘On that day the Lord will deliver all who live in Jerusalem, so the weakest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God.’ When the Good Shepherd is pierced for the sheep, God’s people will be made whole again, strong like David, a person whom scripture calls ‘a man after God’s own heart.’ **Questions:** 1. How do these prophecies, given centuries before Jesus was even born, strengthen and confirm my faith? 2. Do I make time to meditate on Jesus being ‘pierced’ to free me from my bondage to sin and death because he loves me so? How does that change my attitudes and actions in every day life? 3. How does it change my self image to know that God desires I be as strong as

David, the mighty person of God who was so beloved of God? How does it change the way I will think, speak and act in my life?

Revelation: So many voices sound, that it sounds like a roar. A great multitude in heaven shouts ‘Salvation, glory, and power belong to our God!’ The end has come. The world which led people astray and the Evil One are vanquished forever. The twenty four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God, seated on his throne. A voice came from the throne, saying ‘Praise our God, all you who are his servants, small and great alike.’ At that, as incredible as the sound was, it grew louder, like the roar of rushing waters and loud peals of thunder as all joined in the praise: ‘Hallelujah, for our Lord God Almighty reigns!’ The wedding of the Lamb has come. His bride is ready, dressed in white, bright and clean. An angel announces ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding celebration of the Lamb!’ Then the Lamb who was slain came forth, the conqueror, riding a white horse. His eyes were like blazing fire. On his head were many crowns. His name is the Word of God, for from his mouth comes the sharp two edged sword of God’s Word. On his splendid white linen robe was written his name: King of kings and Lord of lords. The armies of the beast and the kings of the earth sought to make war against this Rider and his army. They were cast alive into the lake of burning sulfur, their defeat complete. The Lamb who was slain has conquered, and rules forever as King.

Questions: 1. What does the way of Jesus—stooping to suffer, giving his life, to conquer and reign thereby—suggest about what my way in life should be like? 2. How does it change my self understanding and my sense of purpose in life to see myself as part of God’s army bent on freeing people and a world held in bondage? 3. Who do I know in bondage that needs God’s love through me?

Prayer: Lord, you were pierced, so I might be made whole. You were stricken for me, so I might be set free. Count me as one redeemed by your blood. Count me as one who proclaims you King of kings and Lord of lords. Count me as one who will follow you, my King, seeking always to live and love, just as you do. Come, Lord Jesus, rule in me and extend your rule through me, so everyone around me might find the freedom and life you alone can give. Amen.

Day 363. Read Zechariah 14.1-21; Revelation 20.1-15; Psalm 148.1-14; and Proverbs 31.8-9.

Zechariah: Zechariah prophesies: the Lord himself will go out and fight for you. His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. The Lord will come, and all the holy ones with him. It is a Day known only to the Lord. On that Day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, just as Daniel saw. On that Day, the Lord will be king over the whole earth. Then the Lord will strike all the nations that fought against his rule and waged war against his people. But afterwards, the survivors of those very nations will worship the King, the Lord Almighty. Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah—even the most common—will be holy to the Lord and a vessel for his glory. **Questions:** 1. How does the approaching end of the world

affect my thoughts and actions? Does it urge me to joyful and fruitful activity, or weaken me with foreboding? Why? 2. If every pot—and every person—in God’s new Jerusalem is a holy vessel, fit for God’s work and glory, how does that change the way I will view myself and my capabilities? 3. In what ways can (will) I glorify God today?

Revelation: It must have been a strong chain the angel held, which John saw in the vision God gave him. With the chain the angel bound Satan himself and through him in the Abyss. With a key, the angel locked and sealed the Abyss for a thousand years, when he would be set free for a brief time. All the faithful who had suffered martyrdom for Jesus and the word of God came to life again and reigned with Jesus a thousand years, which is the first resurrection. The second death—the eternal dying which is eternal life apart from God—will never touch them, nor any of God’s faithful people. When the thousand years have passed, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out again to deceive the nations and gather them for battle. The army the evil one raises will be like the sand on the seashore. It will surround God’s people, but fire will come down from heaven and consume them, and the devil will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur forever. Then John saw a great white throne and the One seated on it. Earth and sky both fled from his presence. All the dead, both great and small, rose and stood before the throne, at the great resurrection. Even the sea gave up its dead, whose bodies had been feared forever lost. All death and Hades itself gave up their dead. Books were opened. Everyone was judged according to what they had done. Death and Hades were themselves judges and thrown into the lake of fire forever. Whoever’s name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death. Life after this life—Eternal life—without God for eternity is the real death to fear. **Questions:** 1. How does the fact that, because of Jesus’ sacrifice for me, my name is written in God’s Book of Life give me joy and confidence for life now? 2. Do I demonstrate that joy and confidence in Jesus in my words and actions on a daily basis? 3. How does the fact that one day Satan and death will be bound forever strengthen me for my work for God’s kingdom now? 4. Who do I know whose name may not be written the Book of Life, so I can be looking for opportunities to love and lead them to trust in Jesus?

Prayer: God, you have the power over death itself. All who die faithful to you will live forever with you. Lord, thank you that my name is written in your Book of Life by the blood of Jesus, the Lamb who was slain for the sins of the world. Lord, let the joy, the courage, the confidence of that faith shine through all my servant acts and inviting words so people around me see Christ, love Christ and live with Christ forever. Amen.

Day 364. Read Malachi 1.1-2.17; Revelation 21.1-27;
Psalm 149.1-9; and Proverbs 31.10-24.

Malachi: What shall we offer God? Half-hearted worship? Through his prophet Malachi, God chides his people. ‘You place defiled food on my altar’ he accuses. When they brought blind or crippled or diseased animals as sacrifices for God, was that not actually

showing contempt for the Lord's table? 'Try offering that food to your earthly ruler, your boss, and see if she or he would be pleased with you!' God declares. Even the priests fail in their duty. 'The lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge,' God chides 'and people should seek instruction from a priest because a priest is a messenger of the Lord.' But the priests of Malachi's time had turned from God's way. Their teaching caused many to stumble instead. God's people had broken faith with God. They had fallen in love with other gods, who were not God. The people were weeping before God in the temple and wondering why God no longer paid any attention to their offerings. Religion and ritual had replaced right relationship. Worst of all, their wandering from God was reflected in the most intimate of human relationships. Men were divorcing the wives of their youth, breaking the marriage covenant, even though it was the Lord who made them one. They are calling evil good. God's word to the people through his prophet Malachi is: guard your spirit and do not break faith...with God or with the people God has put in your life. **Questions:** 1. When and how do I offer God 'half-hearted' worship? Why is it so hard for me to give my whole self to God? 2. What part does broken relationships play in weakening my relationship with God? Is there someone I have broken faith with and need to ask forgiveness from? How can I help mend those broken relationships? 3. How does God's forgiveness for my lukewarm-ness and breaking of relationships strengthen my love for God and ability to maintain right relationships?

Revelation A new heaven and a new earth! The sight is breathtaking! The old things have passed away, and the world is finally as God intends it to be. Some things are mission, though no one will miss them. Tears of sorrow...pain...death...will be no more. God is making all things new. God himself will dwell with people...as God has always longed to do. He will wipe away every tear. How could anyone weep...unless for joy...in the presence of the loving God who redeemed them at such cost? John sees the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, sparkling like a bride adorned for her wedding day. 'It is accomplished!' the One seated on the throne declares. Because God is the beginning and the end of all, God's promise is sure: 'To the thirsty I will give to drink from the wellspring of the water of life as my child!' But the cowardly or unbelieving, the violent and the sexually immoral, those enthralled with the occult, those who lie and deceive, their place will be the lake of fire. They will live apart from God, which is the second death, endlessly dying, as they have chosen. One of the angels invites John 'Come and I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb who was slain.' John is shown the Holy City, new Jerusalem, the community of God's redeemed people, shining with the glory of God. It's high wall had twelve gates fashioned out of pearl, always open day and night, because there was no longer any enemy to attack. Two things were mission: a temple and lights. It needed no temple, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple, God's living presence. It needed no lights, for God and the Lamb are its light, so bring is the splendor of their glory. The city of God is twelve thousand miles long and wide and high, so the multitudes redeemed—all whose names are written in the book of life—might all live their together. God's plan is fulfilled finally, as the glory of the nations—as people of all races and languages on earth—is brought into the city of God. **Questions:** 1. What do I imagine it will be like to live in the city of God with all the redeemed? What do I imagine I will do

or say when I finally see Jesus face to face and can talk with him in person? 2. How does that promise from God help improve my life and work for God here and now? 3. How can I help those I know personally, and people around the world, who are still bound by unbelief so they can come to life with Christ? Who can I help to bring into the city of God?

Prayer: God, all too often I give you my half-hearted attention and devotion. I wander through my days forgetful of you and wonder why nothing seems to go right. I break faith with others and bruise our relationships and wonder why my relationship with you isn't more alive. Forgive me, God, and give me a new heart and a new mind, the heart and mind of Christ, your true child. I am thirsty Lord, so give me to drink of your flowing Spirit. I look forward to...I long for...your perfect world where I will be together with you and be one with all others, finally and forever. Until then, Lord, lead me deeper into your loving ways right now, so I love and serve as you would have me do, that others can get a glimpse of—and hunger for—the city of God, too. Amen.

Day 365. Read Malachi 3.1-4.6; Revelation 22.1-21; Psalm 150.1-6; and Proverbs 31.25-31.

Malachi: Robbing God? Even the thought is audacious, harder than robbing Fort Knox. But how can anyone rob God? In tithes and offerings. The whole land and people were under a curse because they were robbing God. They brought only a pittance of the full tithe—the ten percent of the blessings God had given them which God had commanded them to return to his house for his work. And because they didn't trust his providing and kept some back, they were under a curse. Fearful and stingy, life became mere survival, eking out existence rather than really living. 'Test me!' God challenged them. 'Bring the whole tithe' God promises them, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you won't be able to handle it all!' God's deepest desire is to bless people, but the basis of the blessing is total trust in God. God longs to pour out blessing on all people so much that he seizes the situation in his own hands and takes the initiative to restore trust. 'I will send my messenger to prepare my way before me, and suddenly the Lord will come to his temple!' God promises. 'I will send Elijah before that great and dreadful day when the Lord comes, and he will turn the hearts of parents toward their children and of children toward their parents, reversing the curse that divides people. Centuries later, in the fullness of time, one like Elijah prepared the way, and the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life came and stood in the temple, fulfilling this prophecy and turning the hearts of the children back to their Father. **Questions:** 1. Do I 'rob' God by not trusting him to provide my needs and by not giving his work the whole tithe offering he asks for from me? 2. How does my lack of trusting God to provide weaken the blessing I receive from God, and the blessing I can be to others for God? 3. How does the fact that God loves me even so and still took the initiative to redeem me through the death and resurrection of Jesus, his Son, give me courage and confidence to trust more in God's providing and become more generous and giving in life?

Revelation: The river of the water of life flows...not from some mountain spring...but from the throne of God and the Lamb...right down the middle of the main street of the city of God! On either side of the crystal clear river grew the tree of life, bearing fruit every month. The power of life is so strong in the tree of life that even the leaves have healing powers. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city and everyone will see his face. His name will be on their foreheads, for they belong to him. They will reign forever and ever with God and the Lamb. 'I am coming soon' the Lord promises 'and I will give to everyone according to what they have done. Blessed are those who have washed their robes that they may have the right to eat of the tree of life and dwell in the city of God.' John is told not to seal up the words of prophecy in the book, for the time of fulfillment is near. People need to know. Don't add to the prophecy...or take from it. People need to know 'I am coming soon.' Whoever is thirsty may come, and whoever desires let them take the free gift of the water of life. Though many may refuse, it is available free to all. The Spirit and the bride of the Lamb, God's faithful people, together say 'Come, Lord Jesus!'

Questions: 1. What do I imagine it will be like to drink of that crystal clear stream of the water of life, or eat from the tree of life, in heaven? How is Holy Communion (the Lord's Supper) like a foretaste now of eating and drinking in heaven? 2. As I await the Lord's coming at the end of time, do I make the most of the ways he comes to people now through his Word, his Supper, his community, giving generously, serving others in their needs, and sharing the faith with others? 3. Do I long and thirst for his coming, crying 'Come Lord Jesus!?' Do I love the Lord that much that I can't wait to meet him in person?

Prayer: Come Lord Jesus. Hasten the time when we will see you face to face, and all be one with you as you are one with the Father. Holy Spirit, increase my thirst for my Lord's coming. Let my love burn so hot and so deep that I long most of all in life to see my Lord and lavish my love upon him. And until he comes, Holy Spirit, let me love him by loving and serving others for him, for he has promised that whenever I serve even the least among us, I serve him. Come Lord Jesus in my neighbor's need, until you come for this needy soul and fill me with your fullness forever. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 52

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Zechariah 9.9-17

Psalm: 145.3-12

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Revelation 21.1-8

Theme: The End Is The Beginning

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 52:

The world will end, and the World-the-way-God-intends-it will begin. Throughout the Bible, God has foretold the coming day when this fallen world will end and the perfect new world God intends for his people to enjoy forever will begin. The prophet Zechariah foretells the key event in God creating that new world: the coming of the Messiah who will come humbly to his people riding on a donkey instead of a warhorse like a conqueror. He will proclaim peace to all nations and peoples. In the New Testament, John writes down the vision God revealed to him of the new heaven and earth that one day would be. God's promises are sure and true. You can count on God keeping this one, so live life now with faith and trust in God, with courage and confidence, and with love and compassion as one of God's people awaiting the certain fulfillment of God's Word. Be and act like a beacon in the darkness, a lighthouse in the storms, for everyone around you, because a new heaven and a new earth are coming. The best is yet to be!

Alternate Readings & Themes:

1. **“Revering God, Or Robbing Him?”** Can someone actually rob God? Who would dare such a thing? And yet, it happens all the time, by most people, whenever we live in a way that goes against God's will and the way of life for everyone, we take away from God his due. Malachi provides one example from God's own people: failing to bring God their tithes (the 10% thank offering God asks of his people to his work in the world). Malachi also suggests that their refusal is really the reason life does not go as well as the people expect. Because they don't trust God to provide, they withhold their gifts. Life becomes a worrisome, miserly existence. God pleads with them to put him to the test and see if he will not provide everything they need if they tithe. In Revelation, John is given a vision of the new heaven and new earth God will one day create for those who trust in him to enjoy forever with him. Not everyone will, though, because outside are those who would not trust in God and whose lives and actions showed their basic mistrust of God and lack of faith. Revere God, don't rob him! Trust him totally and live a glad, generous life now...and forever. Go ahead, put God to the test. He will prove it to you! **Malachi 3.8-18; Psalm 143.1-10; Revelation 21.1-8.**
2. **“The King of Kings, Your King of Kings?”**; Who is your leader in life? Is he or she worthy? How can you even tell? Is he or she leading you to have a better life...an eternal life? Jesus Christ is the King of Kings, as the Bible attests. He is the premier ruler, deserving to be Lord of our whole lives. The Old Testament prophet, Zechariah, prophesied his coming centuries before his triumphal ride into Jerusalem...on a donkey, and not a warhorse, because he came to bring peace to all people. Jesus

came in obedience to God as a servant, to give life to all who believe and trust in him by his death on the cross. In Revelation, the last book of the Bible, John wrote down his vision of the King of Kings. All of heaven and earth joins in the celebration of the wedding of the Lamb who was slain as the sacrifice that reconciles all who believe with God. They are the Bride, and will enjoy his love forever. Written on his robe are the words King of King and Lord of Lords. You don't want to miss that sight...or the marriage supper of the Lamb who is King of Kings. You are a guest of honor. You are...or can be...the bride! Accept his leadership over your life now. You won't find one better or who loves you more than he does right now! **Zechariah 14.6-9; Psalm 147.1-11; Revelation 19.6-16.**