

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 46

Day 316. Read Ezekiel 24.1-26.21; Hebrews 11.1-16;
Psalm 110.1-7; and Proverbs 27.14.

Ezekiel: The word comes to Ezekiel at certain times on certain days for certain purposes. God does not speak continually, even to his prophets. Like any person, God speaks when he chooses. In the ninth year of Ezekiel's exile in Babylon, on the tenth day of the tenth month, God's word comes: 'Record this date, for on this day the king of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem.' He is told to put a copper pot on a fire, boil meat chopped into pieces, allow the pot to remain on the fire when the water had boiled away so the pot glows red hot, so its impurities melt away. 'That is what I am doing to the city of bloodshed. I, too, will pile high the wood and kindle the fire until the impurities are burned away.' God will not hold back; God will not relent until all the impurity of his people is gone. Ezekiel himself becomes a sign from God for the people. The word comes again to him: 'With one blow I will take away the delight of your life; yet, do not lament or mourn.' Ezekiel told the prophecy to the people in the morning, and that very night his wife died. Seeing that Ezekiel did not engage in the usual customs and conventions of mourners in their society, they asked him, 'What does this mean for us?' Even as he grieves, Ezekiel faithfully gives them God's word, not only in speech but by his actions. 'God bid me say to you,' Ezekiel tells them, 'I am about to desecrate my sanctuary—the stronghold in which you take pride, the delight of your eyes, which you love; and you will not be able to mourn, just as Ezekiel could not. When this happens to the temple, you will know that I am the Lord.' To Ezekiel, God gives a person word to strengthen his faith: 'On the day when I take away their stronghold, a fugitive will come and tell you. You will speak with him and no longer be silent. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know I am the Lord.' God wants everyone to know he is the Lord. He alone predicts the future, because he causes it to be.

Questions: 1. How does God's Word, the Bible, speak to me in certain ways at certain times, to address the situations I find myself in? 2. Do I hear it proclaimed in the faith community, study it with others, and read frequently enough personally so God speaks to me and my life situations through it? If not, why not? 3. What can I do to better hear God speaking to me, so I accomplish his purposes better?

Hebrews: Being sure of something you cannot see? Is it really possible? Every day? When we drop something under a chair, we reach for it without seeing it, believing it to be there still. If I leave my bicycle leaned against a tree while I go inside briefly, I look for it to be

there when I return...and if it isn't there, I look for the culprit. But what about being sure of something I have never seen...and never will in this lifetime? What about God? Can I believe that the whole universe was created by God's spoken word of command, everything coming from nothing? Would I stake my life on it? Old Sarah and older Abraham did. By faith they obeyed God, leaving their country and kindred for a place they had never seen. In fact, they did not even know where they were going. They closed the door behind them on one life and ventured into another, wholly new life...at the invitation...the promise...of a being they could not see. By faith in the promise, even though beyond childbearing years, they bore the child of promise, Isaac, and became the father and mother of many multitudes of people, countless as the sands of the seashore, the father and mother of all who believe in God with the same faith, in fact. All who listen to, believe, and follow God are looking for the same thing: a better country they can call home, a heavenly one, in point of fact. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God. In point of fact, he calls them his children. And he has prepared the place they long for, for their homecoming. Journey on, believers. Listen for God and follow his leadings in faith. His promise is sure. The road you follow leads to your true home. **Questions:** 1. How do the examples of all the faithful who have come before me, including old Abraham and Sarah, strengthen my courage and confidence for following God today? 2. What kind of example of faithfulness am I creating? 3. To whom am I serving as an example of faith today? What kind of story will be told about my life by those I leave behind?

Prayer: I've always known deep in my heart that this is not my home. I belong to a different world, your world, my glorious God. You beckon me to you, and you promise me the life I truly long for. The journey is long, Lord, and the markers are uncertain. But that is all right. Your promise is sure, because you are true. Lead on, Lord, and I will follow. And let me help others along the way, too. The promise is for all, for you are the Lord of all. Amen.

Day 317. Read Ezekiel 27.1-28.26; Hebrews 11.17-31;
Psalm 111.1-10; and Proverbs 27.15-16.

Ezekiel: The prophecies of punishment against the enemy nations that destroyed God's people flow forth in a steady stream. Tyre. Then Sidon follows, about whom God declares, 'They will know I am the Lord when I inflict punishment and show myself holy within her.' God declares through Ezekiel, an exile, to his people in Babylon, that he will gather the people whom he has scattered together. They will live in safety in their own land again. When God fulfills his promise, God will show himself holy among them in the sight of the nations, and even all their enemies will know that he is the Lord. When the day of judgment comes, everyone will know that God is truly God; and some will live in safety forever, while those who take God as their enemy will regret and know too late that he is the Lord. **Questions:** 1. As God's promise through Ezekiel encouraged the exiles, how does God's promise of gathering all believers together in a place where they will live forever in safety help give me confidence and courage for life in this dangerous world? 2.

How does the fact that justice will be done one day allow me to suffer and endure injustice here and now? 3. How does the fact that many people will be lost for eternity when the day of judgment comes because they lived as enemies of God, now motivate me to reach out to the lost now? Whom do I know that I can serve with God's love personally and invite them to know and follow Jesus Christ?

Hebrews: His only child! He offered-as a burnt sacrifice- the child of promise! The very child through whom-God had promised- all the people of the earth would be blessed! The very child through whom-God had promised- Abraham was to have descendants as numerous as sand at the seashore! Abraham laid out the wood for the fire, bound him, lifted the knife...to offer the child of promise. This awful, incomprehensible offering, by faith! Abraham knew-by faith, not by sight-that God could even raise the dead...and so Abraham received back his only son, the offering, from death in a sense. For all the faithful, all of life is like that: offering the surety of the moment for the promise that lies ahead, following this inscrutable God who promises to bring out all things for good in the end...even when the end seems death itself. So this inscrutable God offered his only Son and received him back from the dead, that he might have children as numerous as grains of sand on all the seashores of all the oceans throughout the world, the faithful God of faithful people. **Questions:** 1. Would I characterize myself as an adventurous risk-taker for God? How do people around me characterize me-adventurous or cautious? 2. Why is it so hard for me to give up the security and safety of the moment-however unhappy that may be-rather than move forward with God to the uncertainty of the future? 3. What is one area of my life where I will lean out and risk something for God, trusting God to provide? What specific step will I take this week to step out in faith with God in that new way?

Prayer: Sacrifice what, Lord? Not that. Anything but that. That's my security...my safety net...or one of them. I want many safety nets. There's that voice inside insisting incessantly, 'You can't have too many safety nets.' You say, 'Sacrifice it for me!' Well, I will, at your bidding. You have promised to catch me...you have promised to catch many if I will leap out trusting in you. Okay, here I go...Okay, here I really will go...okay, I'm still holding onto the safety net. Let go? Let God? Let you be God? Only then will I really know you? Know you really? Okay, here I go...you take care of the rest. Amen.

Day 318. Read Ezekiel 29.1-30.26; Hebrews 11.32-12.13;
Psalm 112.1-10; and Proverbs 27.17.

Ezekiel: God is the God of all the world. No nation is beyond or above the rule of God, not even ancient Egypt, still one of the premier powers in Ezekiel's time. So Ezekiel, God's exile in Babylon, is given prophecies even for Egypt. This mighty power, whose gods seemed to rule the whole world, will itself be conquered and carried into captivity by

Babylon. The gods of Egypt will be seen to be what they really are: no gods at all. But even the destruction of Egypt will be limited by God in his mercy. The remnant will be brought back to reestablish the kingdom of Egypt—now as the least of nations—but a nation, none-the-less. Then they will know I am the Lord, God says. God wants everyone to know him and acknowledge him as King, even the mighty Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

Questions: 1. How do I see God at work in the world today? How is God changing the face of world politics, to throw down the powerful and lift up the lowly? 2. How is the knowledge of God spreading in the world today? What am I doing personally to help that knowledge of God to spread to other parts of the world? 3. How am I influencing my own part of the world for God? Do people see in me my gracious words and my loving actions a 'word' from God for them, just as Egypt received a word from God through Ezekiel in his day?

Hebrews: God is treating his people as sons and daughters. That's good news! That's 'bad' news? That means he cheers us...and challenges us. Like a loving parent watching a precious child in a running race, he cheers us on. God surrounds us with a great cloud of witnesses...faithful people...who cheer us on as we run the race set before us. God's encouragement, expressed for him by his faithful people, helps us to run with perseverance the race before us, pushing through the pain for the prize that lies ahead. He is treating us as sons and daughters, but remember how he treated his only Son and how his Son responded. Fix your eyes on Jesus and keep them there. God set before him the cross, and his Son scorned its shame and pain to sit down, finally, at home again at God's right hand. As sons and daughters we are to endure hardship as discipline... training...for God is treating us the way he treats he own Child. Like training for a race, like correction from a father's hand, all discipline is painful at the moment. Later it produces a harvest of good for those who are trained by it. Endure the difficulties of your race whatever they may be, knowing that God is treating you as his child. You are God's child now! **Questions:** 1. What hardships am I facing right now? Am I receiving them as discipline—training—from my Father, or am I grumbling about them? 2. What does it do to my attitudes and the way I act to see hardships as opportunities given me by God to grow? 3. How do hardships change my character? Do they help me to fix my eyes on Christ, who suffered, and grow more Christ-like? Or do I respond by becoming more self-centered and sorrowful?

Prayer: My God, sometimes the race is just too tough. The hills are too steep...the days are too hot...I am tired and thirsty...and I want to give up. In fact, I do give up, feeling sorry for myself and wanting the pain simply to cease. But just then, when I am about to give up—and even when I have despaired—just then you encourage me. I see Jesus. You show me Jesus, your Son, in someone suffering; and I realize, in these troubles I face, you are just treating me as you would any child of yours. He endured the cross for you...and for me. I am content, Father. The sufferings of this time are also a gift from you. In them you are showing me I am your true child, for you are treating me just like your true Child, Jesus. Be glorified in the race I run today, Father, and every day, whatever betide. Amen.

Day 319. Read Ezekiel 31.1-32.32; Hebrews 12.14-29; Psalm 113.1-114.8; and Proverbs 27.18-20.

Ezekiel: God of all nations, God even laments over Assyria, the nation he appointed to punish and correct his people. The stunning news is that God himself raised up Assyria. Like a gardener watering a tender sapling and lavishing special attention on it so it grows taller than all other trees, God nourished and cared for Assyria until it became the world power it became. All the nations of the world lived in its shade—under its influence. But then God cast it down, and all the nations came out from under its shade. When it fell, all the nations trembled at its falling and took note. God is the God of the whole world. All the nations belong to him. What nations will rise to power and rule the world next? Listen and mark well the story of Assyria, the tallest tree in the forest...that fell the furthest.

Questions: 1. How does it help me to live with courage and confidence in the ever-changing world to know that God is sovereign over all events, even when they may seem devastating? 2. In what ways might I be trying to create my own 'empire' and 'rule' over people around me in my own sphere of influence—my home, where I work, my community, my community of faith? Do I seek to rule or serve? 3. When has God humbled me in life through events or people? How did I receive being 'cut down to size'? In a gracious, godly manner? With self-pity and resentment?

Hebrews: How ought people redeemed by Christ's sacrifice to live? Graciously. They are so to live that no one misses out on the grace of God. The redeemed will make every effort to live in peace with all people and to be holy. They strain to see that no bitter root springs up in them to trouble and defile others. They have this advantage in their calling: they do not come under the old covenant of law, made on Mount Sinai, which was burning with fire and dark with storm, attested by the trumpet blast and the Voice that made them beg that God speak to them no more. Those redeemed through Christ have come to a different mountain, Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the church of the first born whose names are written in heaven. They have come not to Moses but to Jesus, God's new mediator of a new covenant, whose blood shed to seal the new covenant speaks louder even than the blood of Abel, which cried out to God from the earth when he was murdered by his own brother, Cain. They live in such a way that they accept and do not refuse him who speaks to them, not only by his blood but by his Word. The time of the end is coming when God will shake the earth, removing all that can be shaken, so that only what cannot be shaken will remain. They live so as to be part of a kingdom that cannot be shaken, worshipping God, 'who is a consuming fire,' with reverence and awe. **Questions:** 1. How graciously do I live? Do people around me experience the gracious love of God through me consistently? If not, why not? 2. Since Christ has freed me from the impossible task of perfectly fulfilling the law, how does his love and the freedom he has given me help me to live according to the law now? 3. What areas of my life are still a problem, such that people around me do not see Christ in me in those areas? What next step will I take to set right the most critical areas still not reflecting Christ?

Prayer: God, by your grace through Christ, your Son, I have come to Mt. Zion, your heavenly kingdom; and I am part of the new covenant made through the blood of Christ shed for me on the cross. My name is written in heaven. When I come to you in judgment, I will come through the mediator you have made for me, through Jesus, pleading not my perfect life but his perfect sacrifice. My life is far from perfect; but his blood, believed in, speaks louder than all my sins. You are a consuming fire, God; and I pray that your all-consuming love for me that sent your Son to the cross will now consume all that is earthly in me. Let me so live that those you have placed around me might see Christ in my thoughts, words, and especially my actions. You want them on Mt. Zion, in the heavenly Jerusalem, with you and me forever. Amen.

Day 320. Read Ezekiel 33.1-34.31; Hebrews 13.1-25; Psalm 115.1-18; and Proverbs 27.21-22.

Ezekiel: A watchmen is meant to warn the people of impending disaster so they can take effective, preventive action. The watchman cries in the night to rouse people to respond. God appointed Ezekiel, whom he addressed as 'son of man,' to be a watchman. God is really the Watchman. His message to people through Ezekiel, as through all his prophets, is 'Turn and live!' 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked,' God declares, 'but rather that they turn from their destructive ways and live.' The people responded by saying God's ways were unjust; but really, it was their deeds that were unjust that provided the opportunity for God's word of warning. Ezekiel spoke God's word of warning to them and they heard him...but didn't listen. They did not put into practice what they heard. Instead of a watchman with a warning, he was more like one who sings love songs beautifully to the accompaniment of an instrument. They listened as to one giving an artistic performance...they even appreciated....but did not change their practices. The leaders were worst of all. Like bad shepherds, they took care of themselves and let the sheep wander. So God promised to attend to these 'shepherds' himself. He would remove them, personally, and replace them...personally. He himself would search for his sheep and rescue them. He himself would come and save his flock. He himself will break the bars of the yoke that holds them in slavery and rescue them. Then they will dwell in safety, with one shepherd over them. There will be one flock and one Shepherd. **Questions:** 1. Who are the 'watchmen' God has put in my life? Do I listen to (not just hear) these 'watchmen' God has put in my life to tell me when I am going astray or doing wrong, or do I tend to blow them off and go my own way? 2. Do I allow the appointed leaders of my faith community the right to tell me things that convict me, challenge me, or call me to change; or do I only want them to speak only pleasing things to me? Do I support and even thank them when they do? 3. How is God's prophesy about coming himself to shepherd God's people personally fulfilled in Jesus declaring, 'I am the Good Shepherd?' How does that literal fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy strengthen my faith and following of Jesus Christ as my Shepherd?

Hebrews: People of the New Covenant—the eternal covenant of grace sealed by the blood of Christ—are free from the law and the slavery to guilt and shame it leads to. Out of love—the new nature that is theirs in Christ—they now freely do what the law commanded and which they failed to do. They keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. They practice hospitality, especially to strangers. They honor marriage and keep sexually pure. They live unencumbered by love of money, content with what they have. They honor and support their spiritual leaders who spoke the saving Word to them, imitating their faith, obeying and submitting to their authority. They don't get carried away by false teachings; because, knowing what grace truly means, they do not get trapped by religious rituals or enslaved to customs. That would be to climb on the treadmill of the law again, trying endlessly to earn through their actions what God gives them by grace. They open themselves to God's equipping them with everything good to do his will, so God may work in them what is pleasing to him, and not just what pleases them. For them, life is all about God, and not about themselves. **Questions:** 1. Because I am a paradox in my own being—both saintly and sinful at the same time, as Martin Luther taught—why does God's law still apply to me, while at the same time God's grace frees me from the sting of the law? How are both law and Gospel effective in my life? 2. To what degree do I consider what pleases God in my decisions and actions? Am I living more to please myself or to please God? Why? 3. What areas of my life and actions most need God's law to correct right now? How is God's still loving me, despite those areas, a sign of his grace? Do I extend grace to others, as God has extended grace to me?

Prayer: Turn and live?! It seems to me I live to turn. I go wrong and need to turn around all the time, Lord. It is discouraging to say the least, that I don't turn my life around more easily. What's that? That's your job? I am to open myself to your grace more and more, as much as I am able, and you will do the transforming? What's that you say? It is your grace—your love for me—that allows me to open myself to your transforming love? All right then! Only, could you speed up the process a little? I languish here...and I long to be like you. Have your way in me, Lord; and let your good and gracious will be done in me...and through me...today...and every day. I turn to you to live and will live to turn...into your true child. Amen.

Day 321. Read Ezekiel 35.1-36.38; James 1.1-18;
Psalm 116.1-19; and Proverbs 27.23-27.

Ezekiel: God's prophecy is not for people alone. The whole world and everything in it draws its life and very being from God's Word. The ravaged mountains and hills, the plundered valleys and ravines of Israel are given a message from God through Ezekiel: God will look on you with favor again; and you will be plowed and sown to bear fruit and food for his people, that he will soon bring home. The dead, dry, stony ground will burst forth with life again. Deserted towns, empty ruins, will be rebuilt and inhabited again. He will multiply the people and make prosperous the land, even more than before. Before, when the people lived in the land, they made it unclean by shedding blood in the land and

defiled it by filling it with idols; so God scattered the people among many countries. But when he did so, God's name was profaned among the nations because it was said, 'These are the Lord's people; yet, they had to leave his land.' Out of concern for his holy name, that he should be known as God throughout the nations, God will gather the people once more and prosper the land again. But he will do much, much more. Out of concern for his holy name and that the nations might know that God alone is Lord, God will cleanse the people of their impurity and remove from them all the false gods they have chased. 'I will remove your heart of stone and give you a new heart of flesh, and I will give you a new spirit—I will put my Spirit within you.' With a new heart they will carefully follow his will and ways, living in the land long before bestowed on their ancestors. Once again God will be their God, and they will be God's people. Only then, from the high vantage point of God's gracious redemption will they truly understand the depths to which they had fallen, despising themselves and their actions. Only then, when cleansed by God and restored in relationship with him will they truly comprehend their degradation and the greatness of God's love in redeeming them. Truly, then he will be their God; and they will be his people. But first must come the destruction and the dispersal, before the ruins can be rebuilt. First, the heart of stone must be pulverized before the new heart can become the home of God's Spirit. **Questions:** 1. In what ways has God had to batter my stony heart so he could then give me a heart after his own? 2. Since God's plan (and promise!) is not just to reform my fallen heart and spoiled spirit but actually to give me a totally new heart and new Spirit—that of Christ, his Son—how well is that new heart and Spirit of Christ showing in my life? How is the fruit of the Spirit showing in my thoughts, words and actions, so that God's name is glorified through me? 3. How has my understanding of my sinfulness grown and deepened the longer I have known God's love and salvation in Christ? How has that deepening sense of my own sinfulness led me to be more understanding and forgiving of others (which is a sign of the new heart and Spirit of God within me)?

James: Consider it joy? 'Pure' joy? To face trials and testing? Trials and testing of faith develops perseverance, and it takes perseverance to make someone mature and complete. Life is all about character development—about practicing faith in the presence of conflicting circumstances that test and try faith. Temptations come, but no one is tempted by God. The true source of my trouble is my own evil desire, which allows me to be enticed and dragged away by temptations. The endless cycle is really a downward spiral: the desire conceives the thought, the thought gives birth to the act (the actual sin), and the act of sin, at full maturity, brings forth the fruit of sin, death. Every good and perfect gift comes instead from God, the Father of heavenly lights. He chose to give birth, through the word of truth, a people who might be a kind of firstfruits now in this world where sin and death are rampant still. It's all about character development—developing the character of a child of God. Trials and testing of faith develops the character of Christ within...and without, in our actions; so everyone can see faith and find Christ. Consider it pure joy to face trials and testing. Pure joy! **Questions:** 1. How 'pure' is my joy when I face trials or tests of my faith? Why does it seem I always face trials and testing with considerably less than pure joy? 2. If I look honestly at my life of faith, which times were characterized by

the most growth and maturing: the easy or the difficult? What did the difficult times contribute that the easy ones could not? 3. How does the cycle of evil desire leading to sinful thought leading to sinful action leading to spirit-deadening guilt play itself out in my life particularly? Practically speaking, how can turning to God early, when the desire starts or the thought begins, break the cycle before it really gets rolling and out of control?

Prayer: It happened again, God. Again! That same old thought came, and then the act followed, and then the shame. I've been had again. Angry thoughts leading to angry words. Desiring something, leading to acquiring something I don't need, becoming encumbered and burdened down even more. Even though I know better. Lord, I wish your school of character had another course to take...something easier than trial and testing. You formed my nature to desire and think and then act. I will tell you honestly, I hate the times when I am tried and tested. But I will tell you honestly, too, those are the times I most realize how much I need you. So, keep me in school until I become the kind of character you want me to be: your true child. Keep me after school if you have to, or give me detention, whatever it takes, just so I can have the character of Christ and show it. Amen.

Day 322. Read Ezekiel 37.1-38.23; James 1.19-2.17; Psalm 117.1-2; and Proverbs 28.1.

Ezekiel: Bones. Nothing but bones...dead and dry, scattered and scorched in the sun. 'Can these bones live?' God asks Ezekiel. Ezekiel shows wisdom when he responds, 'You know, God.' He himself does not know. Can the dead be brought back to life? Can people who have gone so deep into the ways of death, so far way away from God that they can't find him again, be redeemed? 'Prophecy to the bones,' God bids him. Talk to the dead. Proclaim not the word of man but the word of God, who says, 'These bones will live.' He did, and the bones came back together. But there was still no breath in them. They still weren't alive again. 'Prophecy to the breath,' God bids Ezekiel. Command the wind. So he did, and the breath came into them; and the people stood on their feet. Alive again! God's exiled children said they were as good as dead. And they were. Because of their sin, death was their end. Their hope had dried up like a heap of old bones. But God said, 'I am going to open their graves, bring you up from them, and bring you into the promised land. I am going to put my Spirit in you, and you will live...truly live....live truly the life I intend for you. You will know I have spoken and have done it when it happens.' God's exiled people experienced it when he fulfilled Ezekiel's prophecy and brought them back from Babylon. The world learned it when God brought back Christ from the tomb. Can dead bones live? Even the driest...deadest...bones?! Just listen to God, and have hope.

Questions: 1. When have I felt most hopeless in my life? Why did I feel there was no hope? 2. How did God give me hope? How does the Gospel- his power over death and his word of promise in Christ-give me hope, courage, and confidence to face and overcome the most desperate situations? 3. Who needs me to speak a word of hope to them for

God? To whom is God sending me to be his instrument and messenger of hope, just as Ezekiel was sent to bring hope to exiled Israel? What is my next step to bring them hope?

James: My anger does not work God's righteousness. Let me, therefore, be quick to listen to others and slow to speak to them. Perhaps in the gap...in the delay...between listening and speaking the tragic word, that destroys a relationship, could die a silent death. In listening there is hope, for at the center of listening is silence...and openness. Listen especially to the Word. Listen and don't just hear it. Heart it...yes, take it to heart. Heed and don't just hear it. Otherwise, you are just someone who looks in a mirror, sees something that needs correcting, but who turns away, forgets, and goes about all day with everyone seeing the problem but you. The blessing comes not in the hearing of the Word but in the doing. Faith without works is dead faith. It is no faith at all. The only religion God accepts is real relationship with him, shown forth in our changed character and actions. It feeds the widow and comforts the orphan. It keeps the doer from being polluted by the world through false being and even falser doing. There is no room for favoritism, preferring one person over the other, doing good only to those who can do good to you in return. God chose the poor and despised in the world to be accepted and rich in faith. How can those who have heard and heeded God's Word, who put it into practice, practice the ways of the world which endlessly show such preference for the well-to-do and put down the poor? Love others, putting them first, as you naturally love yourself, and you have fulfilled the royal law found in scripture. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged, because judgment without mercy will be given to those who are not merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. God's mercy over God's judgment, in Christ. Your mercy—the mercy you give to others because of your faith in Christ—triumphs over your own personal judgment before God. **Questions:** 1. How well do I not only hear but heed—put into practice—God's Word? In what areas of my life am I refusing or reluctantly listening to God and changing? 2. In terms of my relationships with others, am I quicker to listen or quicker to speak? What effects has that had on my relationships? 3. How do I show an unholy preference for people I like or people like me? Who are the people who really need my loving, Christian service and care most? What am I doing to serve their real needs on Christ's behalf?

Prayer: Quick to listen, slow to speak. Quick to listen, slow to speak. Quick to...speak, and slow to listen. That's what I actually am most of the time. Why am I always so quick to speak and so slow to listen? Angry words flow fast from me, almost as fast as the angry thoughts that birth them. Flippant words, too, not worth speaking. Why am I so slow to listen even to your Word? I mean, really listen, Lord, so that I actually hear and take it to heart, become changed inside, in my character and nature by your Word. And why am I so slow to speak to others for you, a word of forgiveness, or hope, or invitation. Slow to speak, slow to listen, when it comes to you, but quick to speak and slow to listen when it comes to others. Slow me down so I listen...to you and to others...and not to my own incessant self-interest. Speed me up so I listen to others...and speak more readily, after I have listened to them and heard their true need, a word of love and invitation from you. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 46

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Ezekiel 37.1-14

Psalm: 111.1-10

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Hebrews 11.1-3, 7-16

Theme: Is There Life After Death?! How About Life in This Life?

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 46:

How can people live with courage and confidence knowing that death lies ahead? The real problem is that the fear of death keeps people from living. Can and will God really raise the dead and give life eternal to us? God gave Ezekiel a word to the people of Israel who were in exile and in danger of total destruction, promising he would open their graves, give them new life, and gather them together in their own land. He was speaking both about Israel in their current condition but, also, opening the door wider on our understanding of life after this life. The writer of Hebrews describes faith being the assurance of things hoped for. Faith in God...and in the resurrection he promises because of Christ's death and resurrection—provides the courage and confidence we need to live right now...and after this life, the true life we long for. The choice is simple: live with fear, which is not living, or live with faith, which is to be fully alive now...and forever.

Alternate Readings & Themes:

1. **“Leadership 101”** The leaders of Israel sought their own well-being and did not care for the needs of the people. Therefore, God promised he himself would come and lead his people. This promise and prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus Christ, God's Son, came into the world. The writer of Hebrews says that, surrounded by a great cloud of faithful people ('witnesses') who led us to know Christ, believers today should run with perseverance the race set before us, following Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. He is the true leader, who cares for his people, so much so that he even endured the cross for them. The way to exercise Christian leadership is to follow him. **Ezekiel 34.1-6, 11-16; Psalm 118.1-9; Hebrews 12.1-13.**

2. **“Kingdoms That Can Be Shaken, Or One That Can’t?”** How can we live in this world where, if we search deep within our hearts, we discover we don’t belong here? Is there nothing here that will endure, that by involving our lives in we can know that our life matters, that the dangers and difficulties we face are worth the struggle? Life here and now is not life, really. Life in this world is characterized by all manner of problems and troubles, most of which seem pointless. The source of all problems is pride—the self-centeredness that gnaws at all relationships and societies. Everything we do is built on a broken foundation and destined to fall. Ezekiel is given a word from God to Egypt, one of the greatest human civilizations the world has ever known, and one of the most formidable powers of the world at that time. The message is for Pharaoh to consider Assyria, another great and powerful civilization that was brought to ruin because of its pride in its own power and magnificence. All efforts based only on human wisdom and strength will fail and fall, ultimately. But the writer of Hebrews talks instead about the possibility of receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. The heavens and earth themselves will pass away, but not this kingdom. The way to receive the kingdom is to come to Jesus in faith, for he is the mediator of a new covenant relationship with God, sealed with his own blood. The world will end one day, but his kingdom will never end. **Ezekiel 31.1-6, 10-14; Psalm 118.1-9; Hebrews 12.18-29.**