

Bible Challenge January 18 – 24, 2016

INTRODUCTION. *The glory of the Lord is revealed in the reading of scripture. People stand at attention. People weep. People prostrate themselves in prayer. The unity of the church is another reflection of the glory of God. Most gloriously, the promises of God are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Gather round. Listen up. Glimpse the glory of God.*

FIRST READING: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10

The exiles have returned and rebuilt Jerusalem. Now Ezra, the priest, reads the law of Moses to them in the public square. When they hear it, they weep for their sins and for the long years in exile, but Ezra reminds them that the joy of the Lord is their strength.

Adventure Challenge: Nehemiah 8.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Using some general reference tools, refresh your knowledge of the historical events (the exile and return) that are the background to this reading.

Option B. Research to learn where “the square before the Water Gate” was located and what the city of Jerusalem was like at the time Ezra read from the law.

PSALM: Psalm 19

The teaching of the LORD revives the soul. (Ps. 19:7)

Adventure Challenge: Read two different translations of Psalm 19.

Explorer Challenge: Psalm 19 seems to divide into three parts: the glory of God’s creation; the value of God’s law; the speaker’s concerns. Explore how these three parts are related. (Hint: there are key contrasts--what is obvious vs. what is hidden; voiceless words vs. law, testimony, teaching; things that happen surely vs. things that need help.)

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

The apostle and pastor Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to describe how intimately connected we are in the church. For this struggling congregation in Corinth, Paul delivers a vital message of unity that is a mark of the church today.

Adventure Challenge: 1 Corinthians 12

Explorer Challenge: Since we will be reading more from Corinthians, read an introduction to Corinthians or do research to learn about the congregation at Corinth and the broader issues Paul needed to address in his letters to the people there.

GOSPEL: Luke 4:14-21

Near the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, he visits his hometown of Nazareth. In the words of Isaiah, he states and claims his identity, purpose, and mission.

Adventure Challenge: Luke 4:14-30. (In light of verse 15, are you surprised Jesus’ message has the reaction described in 22-30?)

Explorer Challenge: Read Leviticus 25:8-18 to learn about the Jewish “year of jubilee” or “year of the Lord’s favor.” Might the expectation of jubilee explain the people’s reaction?

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Blessed Lord God, you have caused the Holy Scriptures to be written for the nourishment of your people. Grant that we may hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, comforted by your promises, we may embrace and forever hold fast to the hope of eternal life, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, and to proclaim release to the captives.
(Luke 4:18)