

Bible Challenge May 21-27, 2017

Advent's weekly Bible Challenge is based upon the readings assigned for each Sunday. The Basic challenge is to re-read the texts that were read on Sunday morning and included in the Sunday bulletin. The Adventure and Explorer challenges are suggestions of different ways to deepen your knowledge of the Bible. The challenge is organized as one reading for each of five days, but find a pace or style that fits your schedule.

DAY ONE: Acts 17:22-31

In Athens, Paul faces the challenge of proclaiming the gospel to Greeks who know nothing of either Jewish or Christian tradition. He proclaims that the "unknown god" whom they worship is the true Lord of heaven and earth who will judge the world with justice through Jesus, whom God has raised from the dead.

²²Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way.
²³For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.
²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' ²⁹Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Adventure Challenge: Acts 17 (or Acts 17:16-34).

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Research *Areopagus* or first-century Athens.

Option B. Read Acts 17, contrasting the way Paul is received in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens.

DAY TWO: Psalm 66:8-20

Despite testing and heavy burdens upon our back, God has not withheld his unfailing love. Bless our God; let the sound of praise be heard.

⁸Bless our God, you peoples;
let the sound of praise be heard.
⁹Our God has kept us among the living
and has not allowed our feet to slip.
¹⁰For you, O God, have tested us;
you have tried us just as silver is tried.
¹¹You brought us into the net;
you laid heavy burdens upon our backs.
¹²You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water,
but you brought us out into a place of refreshment.
¹³I will enter your house with burnt offerings
and will pay you my vows—
¹⁴those that I promised with my lips
and spoke with my mouth when I was in trouble.
¹⁵I will offer you burnt offerings of fatlings with the smoke of rams;
I will give you oxen and goats.
¹⁶Come and listen, all you who believe,
and I will tell you what God has done for me.
¹⁷I called out to God with my mouth,

and praised the Lord with my tongue.
¹⁸If I had cherished evil in my heart,
the Lord would not have heard me;
¹⁹but in truth God has heard me
and has attended to the sound of my prayer.
²⁰Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer,
nor withheld unfailing love from me.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 66.

Explorer Challenge: Verse 16a has been translated *Come and hear, all you who fear God*. Scholars explain that the word translated as *fear* is “an all-encompassing term for worship and obedience, the proper relationship to God.” Re-read Psalm 66 with this understanding of *fear God*, as a principle idea of the psalm.

DAY THREE: 1 Peter 3:13-22

Christians have a zeal for doing what is right in God's eyes no matter what the circumstances because in baptism we are saved and made alive. Thus our Christian beliefs and behavior are to be a matter of public record just as our baptism is.

¹³Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? ¹⁴But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, ¹⁵but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; ¹⁶yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. ¹⁸For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. ²¹And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Adventure Challenge: 1 Peter 3.

Explorer Challenge: It has been argued that the phrase *an appeal to God for a good conscience* is better translated *a pledge to God out of a good consciousness* or *awareness of God*. Which of these translations seems to fit best with the rest of this passage?

DAY FOUR: John 14:15-21

In final words to his disciples on the night of his arrest, Jesus encourages obedience to his commandments and speaks of the Spirit, who will be with them forever.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. ¹⁸I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Adventure Challenge: John 14.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Read John 15: 9-15 to learn how Jesus explains *keep my*

commandments.

Option B: Research *paraclete*, the Greek word translated “advocate” in verse 16.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty and ever-living God, you hold together all things in heaven and on earth. In your great mercy receive the prayers of all your children, and give to all the world the Spirit of your truth and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. (*John 14:23*)

Adventure Challenge: Try to envision, concretely, what Jesus meant when he said *we will come to them and make our home with them*. What is it like when God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit make their home with you?