

Bible Challenge - June 26 – July 2, 2016

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 are 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.

INTRODUCTION

We have no good apart from God. That makes our Lord's call to follow him an invitation to freedom. This is freedom to revel in the Spirit's fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, and the like. This is the path of life.

DAY ONE: 1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21

In the story preceding today's reading, the prophet Elijah flees for his life to the security of God's mountain. There the Lord reveals to Elijah that there are still other faithful people in Israel and commissions him to anoint new leaders, including his own successor, Elisha.

¹⁵Then the LORD said to [Elijah,] "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. ¹⁶Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. ¹⁹So he set out from there, and found Elisha son of Shaphat, who was plowing. There were twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him. ²⁰He left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." Then Elijah said to him, "Go back again; for what have I done to you?" ²¹He returned from following him, took the yoke of oxen, and slaughtered them; using the equipment from the oxen, he boiled their flesh, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

Adventure Challenge: Isaiah 19.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research who is Jehu and the importance of anointing him as king. (The story of Jehu is in 2 Kings 9-10.)

Option B. Use a Bible commentary or other references to discover the possible significance of the actions described in this rather strange exchange between Elijah and Elisha.

DAY TWO: Psalm 16.

A song celebrating the joy that comes from trusting in God.

- ¹Protect me, O God, for I take refuge in you;
I have said to the LORD, "You are my Lord, my good above all other."
²All my delight is in the godly that are in the land,
upon those who are noble among the people.
³But those who run after other gods
shall have their troubles multiplied.
⁴I will not pour out drink offerings to such gods,
never take their names upon my lips.
⁵O LORD, you are my portion and my cup;
it is you who uphold my lot.
⁶My boundaries enclose a pleasant land;
indeed, I have a rich inheritance.
⁷I will bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
my heart teaches me night after night.
⁸I have set the LORD always before me;
because God is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.
⁹My heart, therefore, is glad, and my spirit rejoices;
my body also shall rest in hope.

¹⁰For you will not abandon me to the grave,
nor let your holy one see the pit.
¹¹You will show me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy,
and in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Adventure Challenge: Compare this Psalm with the opening lines (1-11) of Psalm 22, the psalm we read last week.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research definitions for “Sheol” (translated “the grave” in v. 10) and “the pit.” At the time that this Psalm was written, what were Jewish attitudes about death and what happened after death?

Option B. Some believe that lines 5 – 8 were spoken by a Levite who, according to Jewish tradition, did not actually receive any portion of the Promised Land” and could not inherit property. How does this information influence our understanding of this psalm?

DAY THREE: Galatians 5:1, 13-25

For Paul, the freedom Christ gives is not permission to do whatever we want. It is the invitation to be what we could not be otherwise. The power and guidance of Christ's Holy Spirit produce a different kind of life, one marked by the fruit of this Holy Spirit.

¹For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

¹³For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. ¹⁴For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

¹⁶Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Adventure Challenge: Galatians 5. (If you have time, start your reading at Galatians 4:8, where we left off last week.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research the different meanings for the word *flesh*. Using the examples listed in v. 19, how do you think Paul would define the word? Does it seem to have the same meaning when he uses the same word in 1 Corinthians 3:3?

Option B. In Chapter 5, Paul contrasts freedom and slavery. Although he tells the Corinthians they were “called to freedom,” he also asks them to become slaves. How can Paul have it both ways?

DAY FOUR: Luke 9:51-62

Jesus is unwavering in his commitment to his mission in Jerusalem and will not be swayed by pettiness. In a series of striking cases in point, he calls his disciples to a similar single-mindedness.

⁵¹When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. ⁵²And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; ⁵³but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

⁵⁵But he turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶Then they went on to another village.

⁵⁷As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." ⁵⁹To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ⁶⁰But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." ⁶²Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Adventure Challenge: Luke 9.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* After describing how Jesus foretells his own death (Luke 9:44), Luke relates a series of seemingly unrelated incidents. What conclusion(s) do you think Luke wanted his readers to draw from them? Are they in any ways related?

Option B. Research how plowing was done in Jesus' time; why would it be inappropriate to "look back" when plowing?

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY: Sovereign God, ruler of all hearts, you call us to obey you, and you favor us with true freedom. Keep us faithful to the ways of your Son, that, leaving behind all that hinders us, we may steadfastly follow your paths, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION: Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. (John 6:68)

Explorer Challenge: June 28 has been designated as the Feast of Irenaeus. Do some research to find out who he was.