

Bible Challenge August 27 – September 2, 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.

INTRODUCTION

In Isaiah the people are bid to look to their spiritual ancestors as the rock from which they were hewn. Jesus declares that the church will be built on the rock of Peter's bold confession of faith. God's word of reconciliation and mercy are keys to the church's mission. Paul urges us to not be conformed to this world, but to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, using our individual gifts to build up the body of Christ. From the table we go forth to offer our spiritual worship through word and deed.

DAY ONE: Isaiah 51:1-6

Just as God had called Abraham and Sarah and given them many descendants, so now God offers comfort to Zion. God's deliverance will come soon and will never end.

¹Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the LORD. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. ²Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many. ³For the LORD will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. ⁴Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples. ⁵I will bring near my deliverance swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope. ⁶Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

Adventure Challenge: Isaiah 51. (Notice how each section of this chapter begins with a call to *listen, awake, or rouse yourself.*)

Explorer Challenge: This passage was probably written to Jews in exile wondering what they had done wrong and how they could get back into God's favor; what assurances and recommendations does it make to them?

DAY TWO: Psalm 138

O LORD, when I called, you answered me; you increased my strength within me.

¹I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with my whole heart;
before the gods I will sing your praise.

²I will bow down toward your holy temple and praise your name,
because of your steadfast love and faithfulness;
for you have glorified your name and your word
above all things.

³When I called, you answered me;
you increased my strength within me.

⁴All the rulers of the earth will praise you, O LORD,
when they have heard the words of your mouth.

⁵They will sing of the ways of the LORD,
that great is the glory of the LORD.

⁶The LORD is high, yet cares for the lowly,
perceiving the haughty from afar.

⁷Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe;
you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies;

your right hand shall save me.

⁸You will make good your purpose for me;
O LORD, your steadfast love endures forever;
do not abandon the works of your hands.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 138. (For a sharp contrast, also read Psalm 137.)

Explorer Challenge: Verse 1 refers to *gods*; use reference works to learn what this phrase means or about when and how monotheism emerged in Judaism.

DAY THREE: Romans 12:1-8

In response to God's merciful activity, we are to worship by living holistic, God-pleasing lives. Our values and viewpoints are not molded by this age, but are transformed by the Spirit's renewing work. God's grace empowers different forms of service among Christians, but all forms of ministry function to build up the body of Christ.

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. ³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Adventure Challenge: Romans 12.

Explorer Challenge: Typically, in Old Testament sacrifices the animal is killed; consider what Paul means by saying the body is to be a “living sacrifice.”

DAY FOUR: Matthew 16:13-20

At a climactic point in Jesus' ministry, God reveals to Peter that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the living God," and Jesus responds with the promise of a church that will overcome the very gates of Hades.

¹³Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." ²⁰Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 16. (Note what comes before and after this important passage.)

Explorer Challenge: Research what the term *messiah* likely meant for Peter, a first-century Jew.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, with all your faithful followers of every age, we praise you, the rock of our life. Be our strong foundation and form us into the body of your Son, that we may gladly minister to all the world, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. (*Matt. 16:16*)

Challenge: Jesus uses the idea of building on a foundation, an image common to the people of his day to explain the importance of Peter's declaration of faith. Consider a modern image that he might use today to make the same point; for example, does the idea of creating a robot, a computer network, a service station, or a restaurant chain help make the idea vivid to you?