

Bible Challenge October 22 - 28, 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. You may want to recall how the passages were incorporated into the sermon. The Adventure and Explorer challenges are suggestions 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 today's first reading God uses the Gentile ruler Cyrus to accomplish divine purposes. When the Pharisees try to trap Jesus, he tells them to give the emperor what belongs to him and to God what belongs to God. To gather for worship reminds us that our ultimate allegiance is to God rather than to any earthly authority. Created in the image of God, we offer our entire selves in the service of God and for the sake of the world.

DAY ONE: Isaiah 45:1-7

The prophet announces that Cyrus the Persian emperor is the one the Lord has anointed to end Israel's exile. The Lord makes this choice so that the whole world will recognize this Lord as the only God. Persia had a god of light and a god of darkness; the Lord claims sovereignty over both light and darkness.

¹Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him—and the gates shall not be closed: ²I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, ³I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. ⁴For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me. ⁵I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me, ⁶so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. ⁷I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the LORD do all these things.

Adventure Challenge: Isaiah 45 (or Isaiah 45:1-17).

Explorer Challenge: *Option A* - Research *Cyrus*, founder of the Persian Empire. *Option B* - Research the Babylonian captivity and the Edict of Cyrus, the historical incidents that surround this prophesy. *Option C* - Consider the likely impact of Isaiah's declaration—that Cyrus, a non-Israelite who did not know God, was nevertheless “anointed” by God—on traditional Jewish understanding of God and how God acts.

DAY TWO: Psalm 96

A call to recognize the LORD's wonder, power and justice from day to day throughout all creation.

- ¹Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- ²Sing to the LORD, bless the name of the LORD;
proclaim God's salvation from day to day.
- ³Declare God's glory among the nations
and God's wonders among all peoples.
- ⁴For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised,
more to be feared than all gods.
- ⁵As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols;
but you, O LORD, have made the heavens.
- ⁶Majesty and magnificence are in your presence;
power and splendor are in your sanctuary.
- ⁷Ascribe to the LORD, you families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD honor and power.
- ⁸Ascribe to the LORD the honor due the holy name;
bring offerings and enter the courts of the LORD.

- ⁹Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness;
tremble before the LORD, all the earth.
- ¹⁰Tell it out among the nations: "The LORD is king!
The one who made the world so firm that it cannot be moved
will judge the peoples with equity."
- ¹¹Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
let the sea thunder and all that is in it;
let the field be joyful and all that is therein.
- ¹²Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy at your coming, O LORD,
for you come to judge the earth.
- ¹³You will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with your truth.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 96. (Option compare Psalm 93.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A* - Research *idol* and *idolatry*. *Option B* - Research the phrase: *Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness*.

DAY THREE: Thessalonians 1:1-10

Most likely this letter is the first written by Paul. Paul is giving pastoral encouragement and reassurances to new Christians living in an antagonistic pagan environment. Their commitment of faith, love, and hope makes them a model for other new Christian communities.

¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. ²We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly ³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. ⁹For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Adventure Challenge: Thessalonians 1.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A* - Read an introduction to or summary of Thessalonians. *Option B* - Research Thessaloniki, Achaia, and Macedonia; or Silvanus and Timothy.

DAY FOUR: Matthew 22:15-22

After Jesus begins teaching in the temple, religious leaders try to trap him with questions. First they ask if God's people should pay taxes to an earthly tyrant like Caesar.

¹⁵The Pharisees went and plotted to entrap [Jesus] in what he said. ¹⁶So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" ²¹They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." ²²When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 22.

Explorer Challenge: Read a commentary on this passage to learn why, in the social and political situation of the times, the question was particularly difficult for a Jew to answer. What difficult questions are asked today to entrap political or religious leaders?

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Sovereign God, raise your throne in our hearts. Created by you, let us live in your image; created for you, let us act for your glory; redeemed by you, let us give you what is yours, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Shine like stars in the world, holding fast to the word of life. (*Phil. 2:15, 16*)

Adventure Challenge: Meditate on the four petitions in the Prayer of the Day and what it means when God answers this prayer.

Explorer Challenge: Read Philippians 2:1-18.