

Bible Challenge May 8 - 14, 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 presented Sunday morning (included below). 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

It is possible to hear in Jesus' high priestly prayer, a prayer he offered shortly before his death, the petitions of the ascended Lord for his own throughout history — to our day — and beyond. Jesus prays for us. In holy baptism we become believers in God, have our robes washed in the flood of Christ's forgiveness, and receive the gift of life forever with all the saints.

DAY ONE: Acts 16:16-34

The owners of a slave-girl who used her powers to tell fortunes threw Paul and Silas into jail for "healing" her and, consequently, ruining their business. In prison, Paul and Silas bring the good news of the gospel to the jailer and his family.

¹⁶One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. ¹⁷While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation." ¹⁸She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

¹⁹But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. ²⁰When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews ²¹and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." ²²The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. ²³After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. ²⁷When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³²They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. ³⁴He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

Adventure Challenge: Acts 17. (Last week's Adventure Challenge was Acts 16 which, if you missed it, you could read this week.)

Explorer Challenge: The phrase "spirit of divination" is literally "a spirit of the Python." Using standard reference materials, research "python" in mythology and how the phrase "spirit of Python" has been used in modern culture.

DAY TWO: Psalm 97

This psalm belongs to a group known as "enthronement psalms," likely used in festivals at a point when God was recognized as king.

¹The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice;
let the multitude of the isles be glad.

²Clouds and darkness surround the LORD,
 righteousness and justice are the foundations of God's throne.

³Fire goes before the LORD,
 burning up enemies on every side.

⁴Lightnings light up the world;
 the earth sees and trembles.

⁵The mountains melt like wax
 before the Lord of all the earth.

⁶The heavens declare your righteousness, O LORD,
 and all the peoples see your glory.

⁷Confounded be all who worship carved images and delight in false gods!
 Bow down before the LORD, all you gods.

⁸Zion hears and is glad, and the cities of Judah rejoice,
 because of your judgments, O LORD.

⁹For you are the LORD, most high over all the earth;
 you are exalted far above all gods.

¹⁰You who love the LORD, hate evil!
 God guards the lives of the saints
 and rescues them from the hand of the wicked.

¹¹Light dawns for the righteous,
 and joy for the honest of heart.

¹²Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous,
 and give thanks to God's holy name.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 97. (For comparison. Read Psalm 93.)

Explorer Challenge: Research “enthronement psalms.”

DAY THREE: Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

The ascended Christ, hidden from our sight, promises to come again. We eagerly pray, "Come, Lord Jesus," with all who respond to this invitation.

¹²See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. ¹³I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

¹⁴Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. ¹⁶It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

¹⁷The Spirit and the bride say, "Come."
 And let everyone who hears say, "Come."
 And let everyone who is thirsty come.

Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift."

²⁰The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! ²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

Adventure Challenge: Revelation 22.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Identify phrases or ideas that are repeated in Revelations 22; try to determine why are these appropriate to the last chapter of this book and the Bible.

Option B. Using a dictionary or reference tool, review the definitions of the word *blessed*; then read the seven pronouncements of “blessed” in the book of Revelation. (1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, and 22:14.)

DAY FOUR: John 17:20-26

Jesus prays that the life of his followers will be characterized by an intimate unity of identity with God. To be so

identified with God means also to share in God's mission: to proclaim the word that will bring others into this same unity.

[Jesus prayed:] ²⁰"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

²⁵Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Adventure Challenge: John 17 (This is Jesus' final prayer before his crucifixion.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* This passage assumes a sharp distinction between "the world" and the believers. Read an Introduction to John to learn why John's audience might have shared this perspective. Why might they have felt separated from "the world"?

Option B. Two key words in this prayer are *know* and *one*. Both words seem simple but appear to have a rich meaning. Try to write an explanation of what either of these words mean in a way that a non-Christian might understand.

DAY 5:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, form the minds of your faithful people into your one will. Make us love what you command and desire what you promise, that, amid all the changes of this world, our hearts may be fixed where true joy is found, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

I will not leave you orphaned, says the Lord. I am coming to you. (*John 14:18*)