

Bible Challenge

February 8-14, 2016

INTRODUCTION

The forty days called Lent, which begin Wednesday of this week, are like no other. They are our opportune time to return to the God who rescues; to receive the gifts of God's grace; to believe with the heart and confess with the mouth the wonder of God's love in Jesus; and to resist temptation at every turn. This is no small pilgrimage on which we have just embarked. It is a struggle Jesus knew. It is a struggle Jesus shares. The nearness of the Lord, in bread and wine, water and word, will uphold and sustain us.

FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 26:1-11

The annual harvest festival, called the Feast of Weeks, provides the setting for this reading. This festival celebrates the first fruits of the produce of the land offered back to God in thanks. In this text, worshipers announce God's gracious acts on behalf of Israel.

Adventure Challenge: Deuteronomy 26.

Explorer Challenge: Research *Shavout* or "The Festival of Weeks" to learn the background of this reading and its significance for Jews and Christians. How might today's reading and the festival celebration (including its connections to the Torah and Pentecost) be an important starting point for our observance of Lent?

PSALM: Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

God will give the angels charge over you, to guard you in all your ways. (Ps. 91:11)

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 91.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Psalm 91 mentions worries that might concern people of the time when it was written. Try replacing those worries with the common concerns of today or with the problems that concern you the most.

Option B. Compare Psalm 91 with Psalm 90. Which of these better express where you are as you begin your Lenten journey?

SECOND READING: Romans 10:8b-13

Paul reminds the Christians at Rome of the foundation of their creed, the confession of faith in the risen Christ as Lord.

Adventure Challenge: Romans 9:30 – 10:2.1

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* In Romans 10 Paul is struggling with the question that might be summarized, "How is it that the Jews--by definition **God's chosen people** whom he promised always to care for--not accept Jesus and thus not be included in salvation?" To learn how Paul answers this question, read Roman 9 – 12.

Option B: In the rabbinical tradition of the time, Paul quotes several passages of Jewish scripture in Romans 10 to develop or explain his ideas. Use a reference or study Bible to identify where those quotes come from. Read them in their context and consider their importance.

GOSPEL: Luke 4:1-13

After being filled with the Holy Spirit at his baptism, Jesus is led in the wilderness. Through his responses to the temptations of the devil he defines what it means to be called "the Son of God."

Adventure Challenge: Luke 3:21 – Luke 4:44.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Compare the temptation story in Luke with that in Mark 1:12-13 and Matthew 4:1-13.

Option B. Using a reference or study Bible, look up the passages that Jesus and Satan are quoting. (One is from this week's Psalm.) In your judgment, do the quotations seem to represent important ideas in the passages from which they were taken? Is it important that Satan does not provide a quote in verse 5?

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord God, you led your people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide us now, so that, following your Son, we may walk safely through the wilderness of this world toward the life you alone can give, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Matt. 4:4)