

Bible Challenge April 24 – 30, 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

Easter initiates a new day. It anticipates a new heaven and a new earth. The risen Lord is making all things new. In the mystery of holy baptism God has made new people of us. Today the Lord Jesus invites us to see everyone in a new light—through the lens of love.

DAY 1: Acts 11:1-18

In defense of his earlier baptism of pagan believers, Peter demonstrates to the members of the Jerusalem church that God's intention to love Gentiles as well as Jews is revealed in Jesus' own testimony. In this way the mission to the Gentiles is officially authorized.

¹Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. ²So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, ³saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" ⁴Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, ⁵I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. ⁶As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. ⁷I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' ⁸But I replied, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' ⁹But a second time the voice answered from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' ¹⁰This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. ¹¹At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. ¹²The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; ¹⁴he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.' ¹⁵And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" ¹⁸When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."

Adventure Challenge: Acts 10 – Acts 11:18. (Acts 10 relates the incidents that Peter re-tells in his defense. The repetition in Acts of these events suggests they are very important.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Read Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14: 3-21 to learn why Peter does not want to eat certain animals.

Option B. Read Acts 15:29 and Colossians 2:21 to learn of the persisting importance dietary laws had for some of the early Christians.

DAY 2: Psalm 148.

This Psalm is a call to all the parts of creation to praise the Creator.

¹Hallelujah! Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise God in the heights.

²**Praise the LORD, all you angels;
sing praise, all you hosts of heaven.**

³Praise the LORD, sun and moon;

sing praise, all you shining stars.
**4Praise the LORD, heaven of heavens,
 and you waters above the heavens.**
⁵Let them praise the name of the LORD,
 who commanded, and they were created,
**6who made them stand fast forever and ever,
 giving them a law that shall not pass away.**
⁷Praise the LORD from the earth,
 you sea monsters and all deeps;
**8fire and hail, snow and fog,
 tempestuous wind, doing God's will;**
⁹mountains and all hills,
 fruit trees and all cedars;
**10wild beasts and all cattle,
 creeping things and flying birds;**
¹¹sovereigns of the earth and all peoples,
 princes and all rulers of the world;
**12young men and maidens,
 old and young together.**
¹³Let them praise the name of the LORD,
 whose name only is exalted, whose splendor is over earth and heaven.
**14The LORD has raised up strength for the people
 and praise for all faithful servants,
 the children of Israel, a people who are near the LORD. Hallelujah!**

Adventure Challenge: Compare Psalm 148 with either Psalm 147 or with Psalm 149.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research any phrase that might be unfamiliar or unclear; examples: "hosts of heaven," "waters above the heavens," and "sea monsters."

Option B. Compare the sequence of created beings presented in this Psalm with the sequence of creation in Genesis 1. How does the final verse fit into the sequence?

DAY 3: Revelation 21:1-6

John's vision shows us that in the resurrection the new age has dawned; God dwells with us already. Yet we wait for the time when the tears that cloud our vision will be wiped away. Then we will see the new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem.

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

"See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

⁴he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away."

⁵And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

Adventure Challenge: Revelation 21.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Compare the vision in Revelations with Isaiah 65 (especially verses 17-25.

Option B. Consider if it is significant that the assigned reading does not include verse 8?

DAY 4: John 13:31-35

After washing the disciples' feet, predicting his betrayal, and then revealing his betrayer, Jesus speaks of his glorification on the cross. This deep complicated love of Jesus, even to death on the cross, will be the distinctive mark of Jesus' community.

³¹When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Adventure Challenge: John 13.

Explorer Challenge: The "new commandment" appears in all four Gospels. Read Mark 12:28-34, Matthew 5:43-48, and Luke 6:27-36 to compare how the command is presented in the other gospels. Look also in Leviticus 19:18 to see how it is presented in the Torah.

DAY 5: PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord God, you teach us that without love, our actions gain nothing. Pour into our hearts your most excellent gift of love, that, made alive by your Spirit, we may know goodness and peace, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. (John 13:35)