

Bible Challenge July 23-29, 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

It is an age-old question: why is there evil in the world? In the parable of the wheat and the weeds Jesus suggests that both grow together until the harvest. With Paul, we long for the day that all creation will be set free from bondage and suffering. Having both weeds and wheat within us, we humbly place our hope in the promises of God, and from the Lord's table we go forth to bear the fruit of justice and mercy.

DAY ONE: Isaiah 44:6-8

God claims the right to sole rule, because God announces things that actually do happen, while supposed divine opponents remain silent. God is Israel's redeemer, that is, the best brother or sister they ever had.

⁶Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. ⁷Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be. ⁸Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one.

Adventure Challenge: Isaiah 44. (Verses 9-20 are a satiric description of those who make idols.)

Explorer Challenge: Option A. Research *the Lord of hosts*. **Option B.** Scholars generally identify three authors for the book of Isaiah; which Isaiah is identified with this passage and what are the historical or social conditions which the writer was addressing?

DAY TWO: Psalm 86:11-17

Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth. You have helped me and comforted me.

¹¹Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

¹²I will thank you, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
and glorify your name forevermore.

¹³For great is your love toward me;
you have delivered me from the pit of death.

¹⁴The arrogant rise up against me, O God,
and a band of violent people seeks my life;
they have not set you before their eyes.

¹⁵But you, O Lord, are gracious and full of compassion,
slow to anger, and full of kindness and truth.

¹⁶Turn to me and have mercy on me;
give your strength to your servant,
and save the child of your handmaid.

¹⁷Show me a sign of your favor, so that those who hate me
may see it and be put to shame;
because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 86.

Explorer Challenge: Option A. What is Sheol (translated here as *the pit of death*) and early Jewish ideas concerning death? Check Wikipedia or another research source. **Option B.** Review the psalm to learn as much as you can about the speaker. Do you identify with her/him? What answer does this psalmist imply for the question: Why is there evil in the world?

DAY THREE: Romans 8:12-25

For Paul, true spirituality means that we experience the reality of the Spirit, which enables us to pray as God's children, keeps us in solidarity with creation, and gives us unseen hope that God will liberate us and creation from bondage to death and decay.

¹²So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—¹³for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. ¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?

²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Adventure Challenge: Romans 8. (We re-read a key chapter in Paul's explanation of salvation.)

Explorer Challenge: Trace the sequence of actions in this passage: What has happened (in the past)? What is happening (now)? What will happen (in the future)? Is anything happening both now and in the past or future?

DAY FOUR: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus tells a parable about the co-existence of good and evil in this world. God's judgment will remove all evildoers and causes of sin, but not until the end of human history.

²⁴[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' ²⁸He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" ³⁶Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." ³⁷He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 13: 24 – 43 (or Matthew 13).

Explorer Challenge: We often use images (streets paved with gold) to describe heaven or *the kingdom of heaven*? Note how that phrase is used differently in this passage (as in Matthew 13:44, 45, 47, and 52).

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Faithful God, most merciful judge, you care for your children with firmness and compassion. By your Spirit nurture us who live in your kingdom, that we may be rooted in the way of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

My word shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (*Isa. 55:11*)

Adventure and Explorer Challenge: Paul writes: *In hope we are saved*. Consider what you hope for. Is it rooted *in the way of Jesus*?