

## Bible Challenge: October 23-29, 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 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

*Genuine repentance and pretentious piety stand in stark contrast in the gospel and all around us. All creation stands in need of God's forgiveness. Keep the faith. God's people—"all who have longed for his appearing"—shall be accounted righteous for Jesus' sake. Our God is merciful to sinners. For all this the assembly glorifies God forever.*

### DAY ONE: Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-22

*In a time of drought, the people pray for mercy, repenting of their sins and the sins of their ancestors. They appeal to God to remember the covenant, to show forth God's power, and to heal their land by sending life-giving rain.*

<sup>7</sup>Although our iniquities testify against us,  
act, O LORD, for your name's sake;  
our apostasies indeed are many,  
and we have sinned against you.

<sup>8</sup>O hope of Israel,  
its savior in time of trouble,  
why should you be like a stranger in the land,  
like a traveler turning aside for the night?

<sup>9</sup>Why should you be like someone confused,  
like a mighty warrior who cannot give help?  
Yet you, O LORD, are in the midst of us,  
and we are called by your name;  
do not forsake us!

<sup>10</sup>Thus says the LORD concerning this people:  
Truly they have loved to wander,  
they have not restrained their feet;  
therefore the LORD does not accept them,  
now he will remember their iniquity  
and punish their sins.

<sup>19</sup>Have you completely rejected Judah?  
Does your heart loathe Zion?  
Why have you struck us down  
so that there is no healing for us?  
We look for peace, but find no good;  
for a time of healing, but there is terror instead.

<sup>20</sup>We acknowledge our wickedness, O LORD,  
the iniquity of our ancestors,  
for we have sinned against you.

<sup>21</sup>Do not spurn us, for your name's sake;  
do not dishonor your glorious throne;  
remember and do not break your covenant with us.

<sup>22</sup>Can any idols of the nations bring rain?  
Or can the heavens give showers?  
Is it not you, O LORD our God?  
We set our hope on you,

for it is you who do all this.

**Adventure Challenge:** Jeremiah 14.

**Explorer Challenge:** Read Jeremiah 14:1-6 for a description of the drought that caused this lament and Jeremiah 14:11-12 to hear a surprising (if temporary) reply to the people's cry.

### **DAY TWO: Psalm 84:1-7**

*On a pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem, the psalmist pictures the joy that awaits journey's end, like finding pools of fresh water in a dry landscape.*

<sup>1</sup>How dear to me is your dwelling,  
O LORD of hosts!

<sup>2</sup>My soul has a desire and longing for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.

<sup>3</sup>Even the sparrow has found a home,  
and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young,  
by the side of your altars, O LORD of hosts, my king and my God.

<sup>4</sup>Happy are they who dwell in your house!  
They will always be praising you.

<sup>5</sup>Happy are the people whose strength is in you,  
whose hearts are set on the pilgrims' way.

<sup>6</sup>Those who go through the balsam valley  
will find it a place of springs,  
for the early rains have covered it with pools of water.

<sup>7</sup>They will climb from height to height,  
and the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

**Adventure Challenge:** Psalm 84.

**Explorer Challenge:** The psalmist longs "for the courts of the Lord," thinking how wonderful it will be to arrive at the temple in Jerusalem and how great it would be to actually live there, like the birds who nest in the building. Take a few minutes to reflect on what your soul desires and longs for. Do you picture a place? a situation? A condition?

### **DAY THREE: 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18**

*The conclusion of this letter to a young minister offers a final perspective on life from one who is now facing death. Though others have let him down, Paul is sure of his faith in the Lord, who has stood by him and lent him strength.*

<sup>6</sup>As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup>I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup>From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

<sup>16</sup>At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! <sup>17</sup>But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. <sup>18</sup>The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

**Adventure Challenge:** 2 Timothy 4.

**Explorer Challenge:** Research *libation* (from verse 6). (There is a similar reference in Philippians 2:17.) What is the likely meaning of this image apparently from Jewish culture?

## **DAY FOUR: Luke 18:9-14**

*The coming reign of God will involve unexpected reversals of fortune with judgment rooted in mercy. Jesus tells a parable in which the one who humbles himself is exalted and the one who exalts his own righteousness is humbled.*

<sup>9</sup>[Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: <sup>10</sup>"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' <sup>13</sup>But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' <sup>14</sup>I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

**Adventure Challenge:** Luke 18.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Research *Pharisee* to learn more about their position in Jewish society. Why would a Pharisee be likely to think this way?

*Option B.* Research definitions for the word *justified*. Which would apply best to Jesus' statement that "this man went down to his home justified,"

## **DAY FIVE:**

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Holy God, our righteous judge, daily your mercy surprises us with everlasting forgiveness. Strengthen our hope in you, and grant that all the peoples of the earth may find their glory in you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

### **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted. (*Luke 18:14*)

**Adventure Challenge:** Think of three people you know who might be examples of people who are exalted or humbled. Pray for each of them.