

Bible Challenge November 20 - 26, 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

November 20 is Christ the King Sunday. Jeremiah's promise of the execution of "justice and righteousness in the land" finds ironic fulfillment in the execution of Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. It appears so utterly contradictory that the king should be crucified with the criminal. This victory appears for all the world as ignominious defeat. Yet through the gate of death our Lord opens the door to paradise.

DAY ONE: Jeremiah 23:1-6

Today's reading builds on the common ancient Near Eastern metaphor of the king as shepherd. Judah's unjust rulers have caused their people, their "flock," to be scattered. Nevertheless, the Lord will raise up a new and righteous shepherd who will rule a restored Judah.

¹Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. ²Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. ³Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. ⁴I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

⁵The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Adventure Challenge: Jeremiah 23:1-22 (or all of Jeremiah 23, to read more judgment and condemnation).

Explorer Challenge: *Option 1.* Research *shepherd* or *shepherding* to learn more about this profession that is so important in Biblical times and a frequent Biblical image.

Option 2. Google *the Lord is our righteousness* to explore what this Hebrew name means or implies.

DAY TWO: Psalm 46

We may face overwhelming problems, but God remains our refuge.

¹God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved,
and though the mountains shake in the depths of the sea;
³though its waters rage and foam,
and though the mountains tremble with its tumult.
⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
⁵God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be shaken;
God shall help it at the break of day.
⁶The nations rage, and the kingdoms shake;
God speaks, and the earth melts away.
⁷The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

⁸Come now, regard the works of the LORD,
what desolations God has brought upon the earth;
⁹behold the one who makes war to cease in all the world;
who breaks the bow, and shatters the spear,
and burns the shields with fire.
¹⁰"Be still, then, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations;
I will be exalted in the earth."
¹¹The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 46. (Option: choose one or two verses to memorize.)

Explorer Challenge: List all the problems (fears) the Psalmist describes. What fears (cancer, economic collapse, terrorism?) do you have that you would add to the list? Re-read the psalm inserting your own fears.

DAY THREE: Colossians 1:11-20

An early Christian hymn praises the mystery of the political, personal, and mystical Christ, the one who was present at creation and is eternally reigning with God.

¹¹May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Adventure Challenge: Colossians 1. (If you have time, read all four chapters of Colossians.)

Explorer Challenge: Colossians 1:15-20 is probably from an early Christian hymn. Some of the poetic language has generated considerable analysis. Explore some of this discussion by researching an interesting phrase like *the image of the invisible God* or *the first born of all creation*. (Google is a great place to start.)

DAY FOUR: Luke 23:33-43

Amid scoffing and slander from those who sarcastically call him Messiah and king, Jesus reveals that to be Messiah and king is to give one's life for others. Here he uses his power to welcome a despised sinner to paradise but puts his own death into God's hands.

³³When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" ⁴¹And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴²Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into

your kingdom." ⁴³He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Adventure Challenge: Luke 23:1-12 and 33-43.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* The concept of a *king* has evolved over time. Research the development of this concept and determine which meaning(s) seems most appropriate when we call Christ the king of kings.

Option B. Research the meaning of the word *messiah*, to learn more about what *messiah of God* means.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, our true life, to serve you is freedom, and to know you is unending joy. We worship you, we glorify you, we give thanks to you for your great glory. Abide with us, reign in us, and make this world into a fit habitation for your divine majesty, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David.
(*Mark 11:9*)

Adventure Challenge: Mediate on each phrase in the Prayer of the Day and how that phrase is true for you individually.