

Bible Challenge November 27 – December 3, 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

The new church year begins with a wake-up call: Christ is coming soon! In today's readings both Paul and Jesus challenge us to wake from sleep, for we know neither the day nor hour of the Lord's coming. Isaiah proclaims the day when God will gather all people on the holy mountain and there will be no more war or suffering. Though we vigilantly watch for the promised day of salvation, we wait for what we already have: Christ comes among us this day as the word and meal that strengthens our faith in the promises of God.

DAY ONE: Isaiah 2:1-5

The visionary message presented in this reading focuses on a future day when God establishes a universal reign of peace. Divine decisions will make war obsolete, and the worshipping community responds: "Let us walk in that light of that Lord now!"

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ²In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. ³Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. ⁵O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Adventure Challenge: Isaiah 2.

Explorer Challenge: Compare this passage in Isaiah 2 with a very similar oracle in Micah 4, that has a somewhat different conclusion.

DAY TWO: Psalm 122

Pray that Jerusalem will prosper as a place of justice and peace.

¹I was glad when they said to me,

"Let us go to the house¹ of the LORD."

²Now our feet are standing

within your gates, O Jerusalem.

³Jerusalem is built as a city

that is at unity with itself;

⁴to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD,

the assembly of Israel, to praise the name of the LORD.

⁵For there are the thrones of judgment,

the thrones of the house of David.

⁶Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:

"May they prosper who love you.
⁷Peace be within your walls
and quietness within your towers.
⁸For the sake of my kindred and companions,
I pray for your prosperity.
⁹Because of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek to do you good."

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 122. (Option: Compare this psalm with Psalm 121.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Psalm 122 is one of the Psalms of Ascent; research what this term means.

Option B. Here are alternate translations for verse three: "Jerusalem –built as a city that is bound firmly together." "Jerusalem, built as a city in one united whole." "Jerusalem a city solidly restored." "Jerusalem a city that is one in fellowship." Which of these seems to best fit with the rest of the psalm or with your vision of the New Jerusalem?

DAY THREE: Romans 13:11-14

Paul compares the advent of Christ to the coming of dawn. We live our lives today in light of Christ's coming in the future.

¹¹Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹²the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Adventure Challenge: Romans 13:8 --14:12

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research what the world *flesh* meant for Paul. (Note: at the outset, focus on known, reliable sources; this is a word that has generated debate and confusion.)

Option B. In verse 13, Paul lists examples of "works of the darkness." Read the passages immediately before and after the reading for examples of how to "live honorably as in the day."

DAY FOUR: Matthew 24:36-44

Jesus describes his second coming as a sudden, unexpected event that will bring salvation or judgment upon people caught up in the usual affairs of daily life. He urges people to be alert and expectant.

[Jesus said to the disciples,] ³⁶"About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be

grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 24.

Explorer Challenge: We know that Christmas day will be December 25, and probably have a good idea of what will happen. How does this reading (about not knowing the time or manner of Christ's coming) apply to your 2016 Advent preparations?

DAY FOUR:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection save us from the threatening dangers of our sins, and enlighten our walk in the way of your salvation, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation. (*Ps. 85:7*)

Adventure Challenge: As you begin or continue your Advent preparations, consider how they fit into a "walk in the way of salvation" or putting on "the armor of Light."