

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2018

WEEK 1

The Bible Challenge 2018 Intro and the reflections and notes for each week may be found at biblechallenge.pendletonchurch.org

Read 4 chapters per day

January 1st-7th: Genesis chapters 1-28

God brings order out of chaos, a creation that God calls “good.” There is an order to the creation: humanity created in God’s image and given dominion over the rest of the creation. Disobedience on the part of humanity results in the need of God to make changes to prevent humanity from living forever in their sinfulness. Yet, even in expulsion from the garden, there are those among humanity who seek and acknowledge God; and who realize offerings of themselves should be made to God. There seem to be those who choose to move away from relationship with God and those who pursue it by their attitudes and actions.

God seeks to destroy unrighteousness and works through people God calls righteous, such as Noah. Humanity is recognized as having an inclination toward evil, and as being accountable for their actions and relationship with God and others. In this week’s reading of the story of God bringing salvation to fallen humanity there is no Israel, no Jesus, no church. God appears to be willing to relate to anyone who is willing to relate to God. But God does not impose choices upon these people. Which characters respond to God in ways that further relationship and which in ways that cut off relationship? As revealed through the characters so far, what does righteousness look like? Since at this point in time there was no “chosen people,” nor anyone who had the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, how is God bringing salvation about? Does there appear to be any limitation on who God was willing to be in relationship with?

Covenants with God are described in the Scriptures as being everlasting. In a covenant promises and expectations are expressed. What do you think God means when the Scripture tells us the covenant God has made is everlasting? Who does and does not have the promise of an everlasting covenant in this week’s reading? Where do you see these covenants enduring to this day? How are the covenants part of understanding God’s salvation?

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2018

WEEK 2

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Read 4 chapters per day

January 8th-14th: Genesis chapters 29-50; Mark chapters 1-6

In chapter 2 we read that God brought all the animals to the man to see what he would call them. What people call the things in the world identifies and describes them, and gives a sense of mutual relationships. Throughout Genesis we see the characters expressing their understanding of relationship by their naming of God, people, places, and things. God the creator of all is Elohim at the beginning of Genesis and Jehovah (YHWH- Yahweh) Elohim, or Lord God, in chapter 2. In the Bible, whenever you see the word Lord written with lower case capital letters - Lord - it refers to Jehovah (YHWH- Yahweh) the name of God as the self-existent One, without beginning or end, eternal. Jehovah (YHWH- Yahweh) is also used in referring to the redemptive nature of God following the disobedience of the people God had made. Look for this way of naming God throughout the Bible, such as Jehovah- jireh - "the Lord will provide" - in chapter 22.

Later we find God described in other words combined with El (God), such as El Elyon (God Most High - ch. 14), El Shaddai (God Almighty - ch. 17), and El Olam (Eternal God - ch. 21). Adon and Adonai are words that mean master or sovereign. In Genesis chapter 15 Abram addresses God as "Sovereign Lord" Adonai YHWH.

As we continue in this week's reading, look for the ways the combinations of the words God and Lord are used, both in English and where words appear in combination with El. Also observe the naming of people and places, such as the names of Jacob's children, and places where characters have supernatural encounters with God. What does all this tell us about the perceptions the characters of the Bible stories in Genesis had of God. Note that the Bible also refers to people who related to God but are not of the direct line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These people may be relatives in some way, but the writer of Genesis is clear that there is something distinct about God's relationship to Israel (the line that comes from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, who became called Israel). Jesus comes from this genealogy. In all of the circumstances in Genesis, where do you see God working among the people to make redemption/salvation possible?

Why do you think the custom of keeping lists of family names is important enough to be recorded in the Bible? (Think about the reasons there are genealogies in both Matthew's and Luke's Gospels to establish who Jesus of Nazareth is in relationship to Israel.)

Mark's Gospel depicts Jesus as a servant. There is a strong emphasis on miracles and the power of God that manifests in and through Jesus because of Jesus' authority. According to this Gospel Jesus gives such authority to some people. Among the characters in Mark's Gospel what relationships do you observe; what happens between the characters? Why do you think Jesus gives authority to certain people and not others? What do you observe in this Gospel about the need for the continual growth of an individual believer's faith in order to be the servant God expects each of us to be? Do you think the responses/actions of a believer to God's expectations have something to do with whether faith will grow? As you read, how do you find yourself responding to the things you observe Jesus teaching and doing? Observe the warnings Jesus gives the people. How do they apply to life in the 21st century? Do you see a connection between relationships and redemption/salvation expressed by the writer of Mark's Gospel?

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WEEK 3

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Read 4 chapters per day

January 15th-21st: Mark chapters 7-16; Exodus chapters 1-18

As you read Mark's Gospel this week, look for the places where Jesus is requiring a willingness of the people who desire to follow him. For example, one must be willing to cultivate the soil of the heart so it can receive God's seed; and be willing to put the lamp on its stand, not hide it. Do you observe unwillingness described in these chapters?

Jesus speaks about many of the things that make people "unclean." Clean-ness or unclean-ness has to do with holiness. God is holy. God created everything and called it good. Then humanity chose to disobey God and that broke the relationship. Prior to sin entering the picture, humanity walked with God. Following the introduction of sin into the world, humanity was no longer able to be in the same close relationship because God is holy. In Mark's gospel, the people and their actions are spoken of in terms of community. How does the writer of Mark let us know cleanness and uncleanness impact relationship? Jesus asks what the community is saying about him. He tells them they must not be individualistically centered, but must each must "take up his cross and follow (Jesus)." He speaks of the unbelieving generation, an entire community unable to see who he is. How does Jesus serve and warn the community in these verses? What are the actions Jesus warns against that divide the community, separating themselves from God? What actions does Jesus advocate that serve the best interests of the community? What does all of this tell us about salvation?

Jesus observes and describes the various ways God is not honored, in the temple and in the lives of the people of the community. With the commands of God and the intention of the Sabbath reduced to lists of harsh rules and regulations far removed from being a way of relating to God, it is easy to see why Jesus has been described as trying to restore the essence of worship and Sabbath so that people will genuinely honor God through them. Jesus also points out the emptiness that has come into the people's lives because they have allowed their spirits to starve. How does the church today honor God? Is honoring God in the ways God expects of the church part of your regular practice? Sabbath isn't only about attending church regularly, although that is an important part of it. Sabbath is about taking time to honor God by taking time to rest and pray; to care for the spirit, soul, and body God has given so we can bless others as well as God, so we can move toward holiness. The action of practicing Sabbath is a command of God designed to nurture relationship between humanity and God, and among humanity. Sabbath is not to be neglected or given up for other activities, no matter how "good" those things may seem to be. In what ways can relationships be nurtured through regular Sabbath practice?

In Genesis 50 we saw the Pharaoh allowing Joseph and many of his family members, along with Pharaoh's officials to travel to Canaan to bury Jacob. The Scripture tells us the Canaanites living in area near the burial cave thought all those mourning were Egyptians. Then Joseph and all his brothers returned to Egypt. Although strong in loyalty to his family, Joseph also appears to be entrenched in Egyptian society. Joseph makes a statement about God's intention concerning the re-location of Israel to Egypt. What did Joseph say would happen in the future to fulfill God's promise to their family? Israel's story fast-forwards as we move into Exodus. We find a big change in the way Joseph's family is regarded, and we are introduced to Moses. What similarities and differences do you observe in the way God reveals Himself in comparison to those who encountered God in Genesis? What do you observe about the authority God gives to Moses among the Israelites and the Egyptians? Why do you think God is going through such a long process of dealing with Pharaoh? (11:1b is a key verse - "After that, he will let you go from here, and when he does, he will drive you out completely.")

Notice the Israelites' responses to their changing circumstances. They are discovering being set free is a challenge. In the process of Israel's deliverance out of Egypt many Egyptians died. Did God love them less than the Israelites? Going through the sea, the Israelites experiences a kind of rebirth through the water. But they would continue to face challenges to their faith throughout their history. Everyone who seeks to draw close to God experiences a kind of death; a death of their life of sin. The story of the Exodus is more than an adventure story in which the good people triumph over the bad people because of God's actions in the world. The story goes on to describe the way life among the community would change in terms of provision for needs and order. What Moses learns about delegating authority among the community does not come from an Israelite, but from a Midianite. What does this tell us about the potential for relationship between Israel and those of other nations as they relate to God?

Exodus tells us of the need of death to sin in order to be reborn to new life in God. Think about how the Exodus story relates to what you know about salvation because of God's actions in the world through Jesus Christ.

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2018

WEEK 4

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Read 4 chapters per day

January 22nd-28th: Exodus chapters 19-40: Matthew chapters 1-6

In Exodus 19 we see the people of Israel practicing specific steps in order to be consecrated. Limitations are established for them so that they will be prepared to approach God and receive instructions necessary for their role in history. Israel is an extended family (the family of Jacob, who was renamed Israel, the grandson of Abraham to whom God's promise was made). God called this family to be set apart for a purpose in the world. They are to live as a holy community with the mission of embodying and reflecting God's holiness to the whole world as they live lives of holiness together. God has called them out of Egypt and into a land of promise so they may be the nation through which God blesses all nations as they model God's character of holiness through obedience as a community to God's commandments. Notice that this is not inherently an individual thing, although each individual must participate. The goal is for unity in holiness among the community as they together relate rightly to God. It was God's grace that provided this way for these people to be the model of social responsibility and justice in their world. Grace does not release people from the obligation to obey God.

One of the ways obedience is exemplified is in the various manifestations of the practice of Sabbath. Notice how many ways the idea of Sabbath is used in God's commands to the people. In its essence, Sabbath is a form of holy separation; separation from the cares, demands, and seductions of the broken world. When Sabbath is regularly practiced as part of the rhythm of life, it sets God at the center of life. The regular pattern of Sabbath time requires ordering our lives such that Sabbath can happen, rather than ordering our lives according to other criteria and trying to fit Sabbath in sometimes. It is a very different lifestyle than that which is practiced by most American/Western Christians. Although the Christian Sabbath is traditionally on Sunday rather than sunset Friday to sunset Saturday as it is for our Jewish friends, how many of us in 21st century America devote the entire day to resting in God and nurturing Godly relationships? Such devotion is the essence of Sabbath practice as God is acknowledged at the center of our lives and our lives ordered around God.

Life in today's world is fragmented in terms of community. Many people who do practice some form of Sabbath may need to choose a day that is not a Saturday or Sunday. Nevertheless if the day is devoted to God in relationship to God and others, those practicing will be honoring God in a unique way as well as enriching their own spiritual well being in ways that make us more aware of the need for God's grace, mercy, love, and justice to be done throughout the week. Jesus is quoted in Matthew's Gospel as saying, "Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17, NRSV). Although sometimes accused by Jewish religious officials of breaking the Sabbath by his actions, we will notice as we read on in the Gospel that the only things Jesus did that were wrongly considered breaking the Sabbath were actions that brought healing, restoration, and comfort to those in need. Such things honor God because they bring about rest. How does this relate to salvation?

In the beginning of Matthew's Gospel we find a genealogy that establishes Jesus' relationship to the community, the extended family of Israel. Notice the use of the word "righteous" in describing Joseph, and that Gentile Wise Men were involved in God's plan. Joseph takes his family into Egypt to escape King Herod's massacre of the children who were around Jesus' age. Do you remember why the children of Israel went into Egypt to be saved? As an adult, the writer of Matthew tells about the preparation Jesus endures before beginning his ministry. There is ritual washing in John's baptism, and a time in the wilderness. How are these things similar to the purification requirements of God concerning Israel? How is what Jesus is tempted with related to the commands God gave to Israel through Moses? What are the similarities with regard to salvation between God's requirements of Israel and that of Jesus and Jesus disciples? What does this tell us about the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and what God requires of Jesus' disciples today? If we, like Israel, are to be a model of Godly community to the broken world for the purpose of bringing the good news of salvation, how should we conduct our lives? What should our expectations be? Consider the words of Jesus as he teaches the people in the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7). How are Jesus' expectations of his disciples beyond the requirements of the original commandments? Is it about outward actions, or outward actions motivated by a heart that is in right relationship with God?

Human beings are unable to live according to God's commandments by our own strength. It is only by God's grace that we are able. But as we can see from both Exodus and Matthew, we have a part in not only obedience for our own salvation, but also so we will be able to be models of God's love to others. Although not perfect, we live in the hope of God's grace as God demonstrates through us the realities of the Kingdom of God.

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WEEK 5

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Read 4 chapters per day

Week 5 - January 29-February 4: Matthew chapters 7-28; Leviticus chapters 1-6

We continue in Matthew's Gospel and find Jesus calling disciples, teaching, and healing those in need. Jesus truly acts as a king in the way He both provides leadership and provision for the people. God continues to call people to discipleship today. Notice what Jesus teaches the people and requires of them for salvation in the Kingdom of God. Then Jesus comes into conflict with the religious leaders of the Jewish people. These Jewish leaders are very much interested in their salvation and the salvation of the people they lead. They are under Roman oppression and fear their identity as God's people will be lost among Roman laws and customs if they do not require the people to attend to their own laws and traditions. Their understanding about salvation rests on obedience to God through obedience to the Law. But they are missing something crucial in their practice that Jesus repeatedly points out. Notice the logical arguments Jesus uses when he is questioned; they are based on the Law of God the Jewish leaders know from the Hebrew Scriptures (what we call the Old Testament). How often do you observe the Hebrew Scriptures quoted throughout Matthew's gospel? How important do you think it is for Christians to be able to answer the questions people ask about our faith from a clear, certain knowledge and understanding of what the Bible actually teaches us? Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven and describes what it is like. Is there anything about the kingdom of heaven that you are seeing for the first time in this week's reading? How does your new observation(s) speak to your life? Jesus continues to demonstrate his authority in the earth and gives his disciples authority as he sends them out. What are you discovering in this week's reading about God's expectations of Jesus' disciples who have been given authority? What does Matthew's Gospel tell us that Jesus told his disciples to do? Do Jesus' requirements apply to today's disciples?

Leviticus describes the worship God requires of Israel. The name of the book is taken from the name of Levi, one of Jacob's sons. Back in Genesis we read Jacob's prophecy about Levi (and his brother Simeon) speaking of him as violent and full of cruel fury. Jacob says Levi's people will be scattered and dispersed in Israel. In Exodus we find Moses and his brother Aaron are descendants of Levi. And God's priests in Israel are all from the tribe of Levi; the Levitical Priesthood. In Leviticus we see that God is holy and that there are ways of offering worship to God that are acceptable and unacceptable. What different kinds of offerings do you see described in Leviticus? What are the acceptable procedures for making offerings to God under this system of worship? Are there consequences for worshipping in ways that are unacceptable to God? Do you recall any other incident when an offering was made that was unacceptable? (hint - Genesis). Leviticus speaks to us about the requirement of holiness. God is holy, God's people are expected to be holy. Within the scope of all we learn from Leviticus what do you think it means to be holy according to God's expectations for Israel? What do you think this means for God's people today? How are salvation and holiness related?

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2018

WEEK 6

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Read 4 chapters per day

Week 6 - February 5-11: Leviticus chapters 7-27; Hebrews chapters 1-7

In Leviticus we see God establishing requirements of the people that are meant to draw them together as a community, each with his or her own purpose in relationship to the community and to God. The further we get into the Scriptures, the more we see that salvation is not a solitary thing. Salvation comes from God through God's people for all creation because all creation is broken and God love's it all and desires to redeem it all. While each individual must make the choice to obey God, it is the community that holds each individual, and the community as a whole, accountable for obedience to God. Ideally everyone in the community chooses to consistently live up to God's expectations, but as part of broken creation we are not perfect and so cannot live perfectly. So God provided ways to atone for sin.

There is a purpose and meaning assigned by God to each offering. There is a purpose and meaning assigned by God to the community as a whole. The purpose is holiness that leads to salvation and demonstrates God's love to those within and outside the community. In what areas of life is Israel expected to live out holiness based on God's standards? There is an emphasis on shedding and applying blood in the sacrificial offerings as the people worship. Think about what you have read so far in Genesis and Exodus concerning relationships between God and people, and among people. What does the significance of blood seem to be?

There is also an emphasis on bathing, cleansing. The people seem to constantly be in need of cleansing, sometimes due to situations or encounters they choose and other times because of things over which they have no control. Their living spaces and the things they use in daily life must also be clean according to the specifications established by the Lord. The people and their environment were to be holy. The high priest, who was permitted to minister in God's holy presence, did not have access to the Most Holy Place any time he wanted and even when permitted he had to bathe, put on special clothing, and make an offering. The need of constant cleansing was because the sins of the people were never taken away. The offerings were a form of Atonement that was necessary for the people to be in a position of holiness in relationship to God. In the Hebrew Bible, the words we translate as atonement mean cover, coverings, or to cover. The offerings made by the priests for the people were a covering for the people's sins. Even the scapegoat described in chapter 16 did not save the people from their sins. While the Scripture tells us the sins of the people for that year were carried out from among the people by the banished goat, the people continued to sin and each year needed to repeat the ritual. Where else in your reading so far have you encountered instances of God providing a covering for people's sins? How was each covering provided?

The book of Hebrews was written primarily to Jewish people who believed in Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. Not all Jewish people believed this in the days of the early Church, and even today many Jewish people do not believe that the Messiah for whom they wait has already come in the person of Jesus Christ. Hebrews shows us that the ways in which the Jewish people had related to God as we saw in Leviticus had ended, because the whole purpose of the Jewish Law had been fulfilled in Christ. Comparing and contrasting the old and new covenants, we see the writer's point of view is that Christ is superior to the Law. Think of the gospel accounts you have read so far about Jesus' life and death. What did these tell you about Jesus participating in ritual cleansing and shedding of blood? Jesus fulfilled the legal requirements God had established for Israel. How is your life better as you hold on to your faith in Jesus Christ? The writer of Hebrews also tells of the need to move on to maturity in faith. Salvation is both a present reality for those who call on and trust in God to save, and an ongoing process of sanctification toward holiness that we must continue in for the rest of our lives. We must continue to grow and change into Christ-likeness. How have you observed yourself continuing to move on in developing Christian maturity? How are Christians cleansed and kept holy in Christ?

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2018

WEEK 7

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Read 4 chapters per day

Week 7 - February 12-18: Hebrews chapters 8-13; Joshua chapters 1-22

Continuing in Hebrews we see a comparing and contrasting between the Old and New Covenants God has made with people for the purpose of establishing right relationship and making salvation possible. What images of Old Testament worship described in the text remind you of images of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice? What reasons do you find described in Hebrews for the claim of Christian faith that Christ's sacrifice was the last one necessary, and that it is available to all people? The book goes on to describe a life that demonstrates faithfulness to God. Observe the examples of faithful people. (We have met some of them already and will meet the others as our Hebrew Bible reading continues.) Were they perfect in all they said and did? Why do you think they are held up as examples of faith in the Bible? In terms of the way human beings are known to be and act, how do the lives of those listed as faithful compare to our lives in today's world? The last chapter of Hebrews contains reminders of what God expects of Christ's disciples. Has anything changed in comparison with the Law God gave the people of Israel through Moses? What does Hebrews teach us that God expects of Christians?

At this point our Old Testament reading jumps past Numbers and Deuteronomy and picks up with Joshua. We have seen in Leviticus the Law of God as presented to Israel through Moses. After Moses' death, we read that God spoke directly to Joshua, instructing him to lead the people into the Promised Land. When you think of the idea of a "Promised Land" how does it relate to what you think of when you consider the idea of "being saved"? For the people of Israel was salvation merely their deliverance out of slavery in Egypt; or was there more to it as they continued on? What about salvation for the Christian? Is it only that we know our position as people God regards as redeemed that matters; or is there more to the process of salvation as we continue living out our faith?

Joshua is the first of the books of the Hebrew Bible that is classified as Historical. The first five books, three of which we have read, are classified as books of the Law, the Jewish Torah. We will also find books of poetry and prophecy in the Hebrew Bible. We will be reading through the history books for the next 5-6 weeks; observing God's chosen people as over and over they obey, turn away from, and return to God's Laws. We will then resume our New Testament reading. As you read Joshua, what do you notice about the preparations the people must make to enter the Promised Land? When are the people successful in overcoming and when are they unsuccessful? What do you see as the reasons for their successes and failures? As you read through the allocation of the land to the various tribes, try not to become discouraged as you try to pronounce all the names. Remember, each name represents family history, in much the same way that we remember our own family histories when we remember the names of the people in our families. Look for similarities and differences in the land allotments. Consult a map of the region and try to follow where each of the tribes was to establish their homes.

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2018

WEEK 8

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Read 4 chapters per day

February 19-25: Joshua chapters 23-24; Judges chapters 1-21; 1 Samuel chapters 1-5

In the final two chapters of Joshua, there is a review of all the expectations God has established for the people. The book states that Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and beyond. As we move into the book of Judges we will see this change. So, before returning to the New Testament, we now continue into the Biblical history of Israel in the Promised Land.

The book called Judges describes a cycle of living that is common in Israel's history. Having moved into the Promised Land, and into each of their allotted territories, the people fall into rebellion. After a time, they experience retribution. Then they repent and are restored. God raises up Judges to lead them through these times, even a female judge is named. Some of the stories of the Judges will be familiar to you and some not. This is a Biblical book full of violence and scenarios that may make us wonder where God is in the midst of these events. Where in Judges do you observe God interacting with people? What characters in this book do you recall being described in Hebrews chapter 11 as among God's faithful? What practical truths do you see in Judges that can encourage you in your Christian walk?

The last verse of the book of Judges states, "In those day Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." Israel had no king prior to entering the Promised Land, either. They had Moses who, under God's direction, lead them out of Egypt and gave them God's Laws. Then they had Joshua, who completed the task of getting the people settled in the Promised Land. In the first verse of Judges we read, "After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the Lord,..." Given that they had God's Laws, their territories assigned, the Priesthood established, and the understanding that they should ask God for discernment and wisdom in dealing with life; what do you think lead to the terrible decline we see in Judges that culminated in a civil war? Do you think God intended Israel to need a human king? Are there places in the world today where atrocities similar to those we see in Judges occur?

According to John Wesley's teaching on God and humanity, human beings were created in God's image and with free will. Think about the implications of that. If humanity truly possess free will, to what degree can God rightly interfere in the lives of human beings who do not want God's interference? If God makes people behave in certain ways to keep bad things from happening, are human beings truly free? To go one step further, the very nature of God is love. Can human beings truly be said to have love if their expression of love is not according to their free choice, but rather something we are made or coerced into doing? What are the implications of all this in terms of salvation?

First Samuel connects the time of the Judges with the time of the Kings in Israel. Samuel was a priest and prophet who served as a judge over Israel. You will read about priests and about Saul and his family, and David and his family. As you read, look for the relationships between God and the various characters. Who is close to God and receives God's favor? Why do they receive God's favor? Who falls under God's judgment? Why?

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2018

WEEK 9

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Read 4 chapters per day

February 26-March 4: 1 Samuel chapters 6-31; 2 Samuel chapters 1-2

Continue to observe the ways God deals with various characters in 1 Samuel. Are there some who began in the story as being people God blessed and later the relationship changed? Why do you think this happened? What does God warn the people about with regard to being under the rule of a human king? Can a human king save them? If so, in what ways? What about eternal salvation? As leaders of large groups of people, do Biblical kings have the power to influence whether or not the people they rule follow God's Law?

Judaism considers Samuel to have been the last of Israel's judges and the first of the Major Prophets to prophesy to the people of Israel. Ancient histories, such as we are reading in the Hebrew Bible, were not necessarily written for the purpose of providing an accurate account of events as they actually happened, but were intended to teach people to live as good citizens and lead their religious lives properly; how to conduct their relationships with other people and with God. The ancient stories remind people of God's expectations of them. Remember, even the New Testament writers refer to Hebrew Bible stories as they connect Jesus' acts and teachings to bringing people into the Kingdom of God. Samuel connects the period of the Judges, in which there was no ruler over Israel, to the institution of the kings of Israel. This relates historically to the shift of societies from family-based, tribal units connected to one another for mutual benefit, to nations made up of many families/tribes under central leadership. What does the story told in I Samuel tell us about God's expectations of the relationship between national leadership and the people being lead? What about the relationship between the leader and God? Why would the prophet/priest Samuel warn the people about having a central leader? Why does the writer of I Samuel tell us God allowed the people to have a king? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this kind of leadership according to the events in the story?

Throughout 1 Samuel we see contrasts between David and Saul. Although both have experienced hearing directly from God, they behave and treat one another differently. Observe the differences and consider each one's motivations. Observe David's choices concerning who and when to attack and kill, in contrast with those whose lives David preserves. How are these different from Saul's choices? What reasons do you see for David's choices? David is not alone. He has many people with him, strong fighting men and their families. Why do you think these people stick with him, even when he goes to live among the Philistines? David's ability as a leader has been firmly established by the end of 1 Samuel. How would you describe his leadership?

The last four chapters of 1 Samuel concludes Saul's reign as king in Israel. Although David had long ago been anointed king, at this point in the story he appears to be allied with the Philistines. The prophet, Samuel, to whom both David and Saul turned for counsel, had died. What brought about the troubles Saul had as king? What qualities do you see in David that would make him a good king for Israel?

2 Samuel is a continuation of the story in 1 Samuel. In Bibles read by Jewish people these two books are not separated. What is David's response to the deaths of Saul and Jonathan? Is this the kind of response you would have expected from David? Why? Think about yourself; if you were in David's shoes how would you have responded? In chapter two we see David accepted as king by the portion of God's people called Judah, but the Israelite tribes in the north accept Saul's son, Ish-Bosheth, as their king. Why do you think this has happened? Now we see another civil war among the people of Israel. Begin to notice the relationships among the characters and think about how those relationships motivate their actions.

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2018

WEEK 10

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Read 4 chapters per day

March 5-11: 2 Samuel chapters 3-24; 1 Kings chapters 1-6

This week we see David in the beginning of his reign over all Israel. Look for the details you may not have previously noticed in the stories familiar to you; as well as the stories you are not familiar with. Where is God in all this? How are the characters relating to God and fulfilling or rejecting God's expectations according to God's Law, which we've read about previously? All the characters exhibit sin in their lives. And there seems to be some form of consequences in all cases. What specific differences do you observe between those sinners the stories depict as being ultimately rejected by God and those who are ultimately reconciled to God? Do you see any long lasting ramifications of sin through family lines? What do you think this means?

Notice the role of the prophet, Nathan, in David's life. Observe his response to David's desire to serve God by building the Temple; then God's intervention and the responses of both Nathan and David. Why was there a difference between Nathan's initial advice to David and the message Nathan received from God? What does this tell you about the need to seek God before making decisions or giving advice?

Another interaction between David and the prophet, Nathan involves the incidents with Bathsheba and Uriah. Nathan delivers the word of rebuke that brings David to repentance. We see in 2 Samuel 12 some important principles about David's relationship with God. David sinned. When he repented God took his sin away. But there were consequences. And at the end of the chapter we see that God continued to speak to David through the prophet, Nathan. Think about the way we regard the severity of David's sins in this situation. How does this speak to your relationship with God? Remember that as Christians we are aware that all sin separates us from God; interferes with our relationship with God. The "Nathans" in our lives help us realize our sin and hold us accountable in our relationships with them, other people, and God. Who are the Nathans in your life? Who has God touched through you in ways similar to the ways Nathan touched David's life? How do the Nathans, whether it's us being or receiving from a Nathan, point us toward salvation?

The story moves to David's relationships with his sons. Observe David's heart as circumstances unfold; as he discovers who are his allies and enemies. How does he pray that God will move to overcome his enemies? Do you think David always acts wisely? David must fight against the forces assembled by his own son, Absalom, who is trying to take over the kingdom God has given David. It seems David has spent much of his life fighting for and defending the kingdom. Look again for David's acts of mercy and of judgment. Has your love for someone ever adversely affected your ability to think clearly about them and their behavior? How does God respond to us when we make ungodly choices in our own lives? How do God's responses to us draw us into ways of life that lead to salvation?

Like 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings were originally one book. These books are about the kings of Judah and Israel following King David's reign. As we read about King Solomon and his reign we will find much writing dedicated to the wisdom that is traditionally attributed to him. The Bible gives us a reason for Solomon's wisdom. Look for it as you read in 1 Kings. Observe the way David's successor was established. Notice which characters were allied with Solomon and which were not. What does David tell Solomon about the importance of keeping God's Law and of passing it on to his descendants? What does this tell us about the relationship between keeping the Law and right relationship to God and others? Solomon prays for wisdom from God and receives it, but he also makes some unwise choices with regard to his personal conduct. Why would a man with such wisdom from God make unwise decisions? Why do any of God's children? How can we guard against making unwise choices as Christians?

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2018

WEEK 11

The Bible Challenge 2018 Intro and the reflections and notes for each week may be found at biblechallenge.pendletonchurch.org

Read 4 chapters per day

March 12-18: 1 Kings chapters 7-22; 2 Kings chapters 1-12

Chapter 7 of 1 Kings describes the building of Solomon's Temple. Try to envision the grandeur of this amazing structure. Notice the construction of twelve of this and twelve of that. How does this remind you of the Tabernacle we read about in previous weeks? What happens in chapter 8 when the Ark of the Covenant is brought into the temple and with it the presence of God in a powerful way? God appears to Solomon more than once and speaks directly to him. How do you experience God's presence and power in your life? Have you ever experienced God's presence in a powerful way during a church worship service, or other Christian worship setting? If so, how did you respond to God? Did your relationship with God grow as a result of your experience(s)? What do you think God's purpose would be in allowing people to experience God's presence in powerful ways?

Following Solomon's reign the kingdom becomes divided. What does the Scripture tell us about why this happened? From this point on, you will be reading about God's people in terms of two nations: Israel and Judah. Try to keep track of which kings were descendants of David. Notice the differences in the lifestyles among the people of each nation, as described by the writer.

Contained in Kings are stories about prophets who attempt to bring correction to God's people who have turned away from God's Law. Elijah is primary. Observe the ways God works through Elijah in his dealings with various other characters. What other prophets are named and how did God work through them? How are the words and actions of God's prophets part of God's work of bringing salvation to the people? Do you see any similarities between the work of God through the prophets and the Christian salvation story?

In 2 Kings, Elisha inherits Elijah's ministry. What similarities and differences do you see between them in their ministries among the people? In these books we see miracles similar to the miracles we read about in the Gospels; miracles that Jesus performed. What similarities do you see? What examples of returning to God after periods of rebellion against God do you see throughout these books? In chapter 5 we see the story of Naaman the Aramean and his encounter with Elisha. Remember that the Arameans were people David had fought because they were enemies. What example of God's work in people's lives do you see here that is also in the Gospels? Who is God reaching out to? Only the people of Israel and Judah?

2 Kings shows us the lines of kings of Judah and Israel. Remember, God's people Israel had split into two kingdoms. Throughout the history of these kings we see times of great evil and times of reviving the practice of God's Law. Note the circumstances surrounding both kinds of situations. Other prophets besides Elijah and Elisha are introduced, such as Isaiah. Later this year we will read the book of Isaiah's experiences and writings as God's prophet. Take note of the interactions Isaiah has with God's people so you will remember when you read further. Also notice the other prophets. Some of them are present in other books we will read. You may want to remember them as well. What kings described in these books do you especially notice and take an interest in? Why?

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2018

WEEK 12

The Bible Challenge 2018 Intro and the reflections and notes for each week may be found at biblechallenge.pendletonchurch.org

Read 4 chapters per day

March 19-25: 2 Kings chapters 13-25; Ezra chapters 1-10; Luke chapters 1-5

By the end of 2 Kings we find both Judah and Israel defeated and taken captive. Where has God been in all the happenings of this period of God's peoples' history? Is there hope of salvation for the people of Judah and Israel?

Ezra was a man who had studied God's Law and was a teacher. He was from the line of the Aaronic Priesthood and we see him enter this story in the 7th chapter. As you read the preceding 6 chapters observe the work being done to restore the people to their land and to proper worship. There is a gap of many years from the time of the exile to that of Ezra's writing that is evident through the first 6 chapters. What do you think would happen to your faith and the faith of your family if you were far away from a place where you could worship freely and live out your life according to God's expectations?

There are a number of genealogies in the book of Ezra, necessary to determine who was a descendant of Aaron and had authority to serve as priests. In chapter 3, verses 62-63, we see that certain people were claiming they were among the priests, but unable to produce the records to prove it. They were excluded from serving as priests. Later, we find temple worship has been restored, along with practices of fasting and prayer for God's blessings and protection. But by chapter 9 it is pointed out that God's people had not remained separated from people who worshipped other gods. They worshipped in ways that the one true God did not accept.

The idea that God has specific standards for the behaviors of the people God has created is evident throughout the Hebrew Bible. The Bible teaches us that God chose to separate out of humanity a group of people, Israel, through whom God would express those expectations. But even Israel failed to live up to God's expectations. How do you think separation from ungodly influences impacts on one's ability to maintain God's standard of behavior for people? Consider all the times in our lives when we have to encounter and relate to people who do not share our Christian beliefs. Are there limitations we should respect with regard to our relationships with them? If so, what are those limitations? Why? As the church it is up to us to share God's love, as expressed in Christ, to people throughout the world so they may become Jesus' disciples. How would limitations on our relationships with others help and/or hinder that mission?

Returning to the New Testament, we have seen that the writer of Mark depicts Jesus as a servant, and Matthew as a King. Luke's Gospel, the third of the three synoptic Gospels, presents Jesus as a human being. Luke's Gospel is written for fairly well educated early Christians who spoke Greek. It is addressed to Theophilus, whose name means "Lover of God." There were Greek Jews as well as Gentiles who had become followers of Jesus' teaching. Many of the people exiled from Israel and Judah never did return to their land. Yet they held onto God's Law as they were able to even though they were far from Jerusalem. Now their descendants, along with the Gentiles they lived among, had the opportunity to hear of salvation through God's Son, Jesus Christ. Not all received this Good News, but it was offered.

Luke's gospel shows us Christ's concern and compassion for humanity in many ways. Compare the accounts in Matthew and Luke regarding Jesus' lineage and coming to earth. Is there anything you read in the story of Jesus birth in Luke's Gospel that you hadn't noticed in the story before? According to Luke, Jesus is baptized, tempted in the wilderness, and begins His ministry of teaching, healing, and deliverance before He calls His first disciples. Jesus was already ministering on his own in the region. How do you think this might have impacted on His choice of disciples? How do you think it influenced the decision of those called to follow Him? How do the miracles of healing and deliverance in this portion of the Gospel demonstrate Jesus' compassion? What do you observe about the relationship between Jesus and His disciples? How is Jesus teaching them about God's love and the hope of salvation?

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2018

WEEK 13

The Bible Challenge 2018 Intro and the reflections and notes for each week may be found at biblechallenge.pendletonchurch.org

Read 4 chapters per day

March 26-April 1: Luke chapters 6-24; Acts chapters 1-9

Imagine yourself in the region where Jesus was teaching and healing people. Imagine that you knew that what Jesus was doing by healing on the Sabbath was considered wrong by the standards of the religious leaders of your community. Really try to put yourself into the shoes of the people who devoutly believed what the Pharisees had been teaching. They represented a popular interpretation of God's Holy Law in that time and place. What might have been going through your mind as you heard about what Jesus was doing, or even if you happened to witness it yourself? Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, called the people to repent of their sins and be baptized. Jesus related to anyone who would take the time to hear his words, even Pharisees. He took women along with him on his journeys and at one point chose his followers over his own family. And at the end of chapter 9 it sounds like he expects others to forsake all their ties to family and community to be his followers. How do you think such a story would be told in today's news media? Would you have followed Jesus?

In chapter 10 of Luke's Gospel, Jesus appoints and sends 72 disciples out to towns where He plans to go. They are sent ahead of Him and are given specific instructions as to what they should take with them and how they should conduct themselves when they arrive. What are the differences you observe between the way the 72 are told to respond to those who welcome them, in comparison with those who do not? Notice all that Jesus communicates to people through His teaching and actions. Do you observe a difference in the way Jesus responds to those who receive His message and actions versus those who do not? Is this similar to the instructions He gave the 72? Where in the Gospel do you observe Jesus communicating that it is necessary, for people who know and welcome Him and His message, to tell others who do not? What does any of this say to us as Christians today about our relationship to others?

In Luke 10:20, Jesus tells the disciples what they should be rejoicing about. What does it mean to have one's name written in heaven? It sounds as if the disciples' names are already there. What does this tell us about salvation? As the reading continues Jesus tells an expert in the Law that if he knows and does the Law he will live. Then Jesus tells him that he should have mercy and attend to the real, immediate needs of someone who neither a priest nor a Levite would go near. Mary and Martha were in conflict concerning their differing responses to Jesus' presence in their home; and Jesus responded in an unexpected way. Luke's gospel tells us of the good things God has for all people if they will ask with repentant hearts and live out actions of love and mercy. Jesus the human being speaks to the necessity of obedience to God within the context of mutual human relationship that desires for all to find joy in obedience to God's Law. Caring for one another in all kinds of ways goes a long way toward salvation according to the writer of Luke. In Luke 24:27 the Scripture states that beginning with Moses and all the Prophets Jesus explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself. What does that statement say to you about the importance of the Hebrew Bible for us to develop a greater understanding of God?

The Gospel of Luke and the Book of the Acts of the Apostles are attributed to the same author. Acts continues where Luke left off. At the end of Luke, what did Jesus promise and require of His disciples? What did the disciples do to prepare for this ministry? How do you think you would have responded to Peter's message if you had been present on that day and did not yet know Jesus as your Savior and Lord?

Last week we looked at the preparation God required of the disciples before beginning their ministry sharing the Gospel. They needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and the promise of Acts chapter 2 is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy which spoke of people having visions, dreams, and prophesying. As you read, see whether Acts tell us their preparation was a once for all time thing, or if they needed to continually be preparing for what God called them to do? Was their journey for Christ easy? Were they always well received? What does this speak to you about the need for growth and development in your own Christian journey?

It seems people at this time were experiencing God, through being filled with the Holy Spirit, in very powerful ways. And this was usually the result of hearing the Gospel message. But notice the pattern is not always the same. Notice also the reasons the people needed the Holy Spirit's power, it was not just for their personal experience and enjoyment, but so they could share the message effectively and minister to others, as well as having discernment and protection for themselves. Observe the specific examples. Then notice the way God reached Saul. Remember that he had heard the message over and over, and was present and witnessed Stephen's experience. God worked many things together to enable Paul's ministry. Notice the name change. Remember when we observed name changes among God's people in some of the Hebrew Bible stories. Have you ever experienced the Holy Spirit in your life in similar ways as you compare your ministry with that of these disciples? What does Acts tell us about the necessity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers to make them/us part of the Christian church?