

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2018

WEEK 51

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

December 17-23: Revelation 9-22; Romans 1-14

In Revelation we read of struggles and suffering that God's people will go through. There are descriptions of who will and will not be with God when the end of the world as we know it finally comes. What specific references do you find that clearly state the differences between these two groups? All four Gospels tell us of these differences. Words to look for include: deception and patient endurance; adultery and prostitution contrasted with a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. Why does God pour out His wrath? Look for answers in Revelation as you read. What does this tell us about the relationships among God, humanity, and the rest of creation? And how does Revelation drive home the necessity of accepting, worshipping, and loving God as God is, rather than as we would have Him be based on our own human experiences and biases? What does God expect of people?

In Romans we find that all human beings are guilty of sin, but that redemption from sin and ultimate salvation are available to all. We truly can be among those included in the New Jerusalem, inheriting eternal life! Praise God as you reflect on the meaning of salvation, and on the gift of eternal life. We see God's mercy, love, and grace offered to all. Paul emphasizes the spiritual relationship between human beings and God, and among people, using the gifts and graces we have received from God to serve one another in this world. Paul speaks of the ways in which our faith/spiritual life impacts our behaviors as we consider how others see us living out our faith. This is an indication of true faith in God through Jesus Christ. The proof of a person's faith in Jesus Christ is a life of continuing, progressive transformation into Christ-likeness.

Paul's letter to the church in Rome is a thorough explanation of the foundations of Christian faith. He knows the grace God has granted him and that it is available to all people, Jews and Gentiles. We can see in this letter that God has imparted to Paul great understanding of God's grace; that it is by grace we are saved, through faith, as a gift of God. (Paul considers himself as having received God's grace in a mighty way as he had so violently persecuted the Christ-followers prior to his conversion.) In this letter we see the Gospel message. As you read, look for Paul's explanation of why people need to be saved, how people are saved and what the benefits of salvation are in this life. Romans also tells of the struggles of this life and how to overcome them by God's power. At the end of chapter 11, Paul quotes from the Hebrew Bible books Isaiah and Job. What do these verses, Romans 11:33-36, say to us about our relationship to God? Do you think we should take care in expressing our opinions concerning how God chooses to relate to those God has created?

Romans chapter 12 begins with Paul's exhortation to the church concerning transformation. Clearly the church is to be different from the world. The first two verses tell us that if we offer ourselves to God in worship we will be transformed and our minds will be renewed so God's will for our lives will become known to us. Paul goes on to present his take on the Christian's relationship to others in the church and the wider world. Be sure to take note of when Paul is talking about the Christian in relationship to each of these two groups. There is a difference. How does Paul tell the Christians in Rome that they are to relate to each other? To other Christians and Jewish believers? To unbelievers? How do Paul's instructions work together with the instructions Jesus left his disciples and also those he gave Paul in Acts on the Damascus Road? Where is the balance between developing our own faith and personal relationship with God, and the works God calls each and every Christian to do in sharing the Gospel message in our words and deeds?