



WEEK OF MARCH 24, 2024
(COVERS READINGS FROM MARCH 24-30)

Overview

The following information is provided as a basic orientation to reading the Bible. Feel free to add to it and use it in any way that is helpful for your group. Also, feel free to make copies of these pages for members of your group!

2 Corinthians 4-6:2 continues the apostle Paul's discussion of the trials and resilience of his ministry, emphasizing that the treasure of the gospel is held in "jars of clay" to show that the surpassing power belongs to God (2 Corinthians 4:7). He speaks of the hope in resurrection and the eternal glory that outweighs temporary afflictions (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). Paul also introduces the concept of God's new creation being defined by reconciliation through Christ, calling believers to be ambassadors of this reconciliation in Christ's name (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). This segment culminates with the appeal not to receive God's grace in vain but to live as new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17, 6:1-2), highlighting themes of suffering, endurance, and the transformative power of the gospel.

Traditionally attributed to Peter the Apostle, 1 Peter was written to encourage Christians dispersed across Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) around A.D. 60-65. It addresses the challenges of persecution, calling for steadfast faith and holy living as God's chosen people in a hostile environment. Chapter 1 addresses believers facing persecution, reminding them of their living hope through Christ's resurrection and their inheritance that is imperishable (1 Peter 1:3-4). He encourages them to live holy lives, set apart by their faith amid suffering (1 Peter 1:13-16), and to embrace their identity as a chosen people and a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). This identity calls for a lifestyle that abstains from sinful desires and conducts honorably among unbelievers (1 Peter 2:11-12), reinforcing the call to witness and endure through trials.

In the epistle bearing his name, James speaks to the scattered tribes, focusing on the testing of faith through trials, which produces steadfastness (James 1:2-4). The author emphasizes practical Christianity, highlighting the importance of being doers of the word, not hearers only (James 1:22). James confronts the issue of favoritism within the community, advocating for a faith that is active in love and good works (James 2:14-26), underscoring the integral relationship between faith and actions.

The epistle of 1 John elaborates on the foundational Christian commandment to love one another, contrasting the love of God with the world's hatred (1 John 3:11-15). The author defines love through the sacrifice of Jesus and calls believers to love in truth and action (1 John 3:16-18). John also warns against false prophets and tests for discerning the Spirit of truth from the spirit of deception (1 John 4:1-6). The passage

culminates in the assertion that God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God (1 John 4:16). Love, as the ultimate Christian ethic, is presented as both a testimony to and a requirement for fellowship with God.

The book of Revelation opens with identification of its author John, traditionally identified as the Apostle, while in exile on Patmos, likely around AD 95. John's vision introduces the revelation – that is, apocalypse – of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1). Jesus appears in a vision, commissioning John to write to the seven churches in Asia (Revelation 1:9-20). The letters to the churches in chapters 2 and 3 address specific commendations, criticisms, and promises, reflecting the spiritual condition of each church and providing timeless counsel for faithfulness amidst trials. The use of symbolic language, like lampstands for churches and stars for angels (Revelation 1:20), reflects the apocalyptic genre common in Jewish and early Christian writings, often used to convey spiritual truths and future events in coded terms for readers in oppressive contexts.

Revelation 4-7 depict heavenly worship around the throne of God, introducing the scroll sealed with seven seals only the Lamb can open (Revelation 4-5). The opening of the seals (Revelation 6) unleashes a series of judgments and events on earth, culminating in the sealing of God's servants for protection and a glimpse of a great multitude in heaven worshipping God (Revelation 7), all symbolizing deep spiritual realities and divine actions in a way that would resonate with and encourage persecuted Christians.

Revelation 19-20 moves towards the climax with the celebration of the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9) and the defeat of the beast and the false prophet (Revelation 19:20). Satan is bound for a thousand years, followed by the final judgment (Revelation 20:1-15), depicting the ultimate triumph of God over evil and the establishment of divine justice.

The final chapters of Revelation present the new heaven and new earth, where God dwells with humanity, wiping away every tear (Revelation 21:1-4). The New Jerusalem is described in detail as a place of unparalleled beauty and harmony (Revelation 21:9-27). The river of life and the tree of life in the new creation (Revelation 22:1-5) symbolize eternal life and fellowship with God. The book concludes with an invitation to come to the saving waters of life and a warning to keep the words of prophecy (Revelation 22:17, 18-19), offering hope and a call to faithfulness.

General Discussion Questions

Use any or all of the following questions, depending how much time you have:

- How familiar were you with this week's readings? Was there anything that surprised you?
- What do you learn about God from these readings? What do you learn about humanity, or about human nature? How did the authors of these writings understand their relationship with God?
- What passages or aspects of these readings give you comfort or assurance? What passages or aspects of these readings do you find difficult to accept?
- Are there any particular passages that you want to study in-depth?

This Week's Discussion Questions

2 Corinthians 4 | Paul describes believers as 'jars of clay' holding a great treasure (2 Corinthians 4:7). How does this imagery impact your understanding of personal worth, vulnerability, and the role of God's power in your life? In what ways can this perspective influence how we view and support each other within our community?

Revelation 21 | The vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22 presents a picture of complete restoration and harmony. How does this vision of a renewed creation inspire our understanding and pursuit

of justice, peace, and reconciliation in the world today? What practical actions can we take to reflect this future hope in our current reality?

Closing Prayer

Mighty and tender God,
voice of the voiceless,
power of the powerless:
we praise you for your vision
of a community of wholeness,
a realm of peace,
in which all who hunger and thirst are nourished,
in which the stranger is welcomed,
the hurting are healed,
and the captive is set free.
Guide us by your truth and love
until we and all your people
make manifest your reign of justice and compassion.
We pray in the name of your anointed one, our servant-king,
to whom with you and the Spirit, one Holy God,
be honor, glory, and blessing,
this day and forever. Amen.