

Bible Reading Challenge 41: MESSIAH – The Lamb of God

Remember what John the Baptist said when he first saw Jesus? “Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!” John himself probably didn’t know exactly what that meant, even while the Holy Spirit inspired him to say it. And most likely Peter didn’t know what it meant to say “You are the Christ, the son of the living God,” when Jesus asked the disciples who they thought he was. They haven’t understood much of what he’s told them—remember what Luke says about their reaction to his plain predictions of what would happen to him in Jerusalem: “But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said” (Luke 18:34). They must have been so happy and excited when he rode into Jerusalem with everybody cheering and waving palm branches—it looked like Jesus was finally ready to claim his kingdom!

But what if he had? What if Jesus had marched right into the temple, called on the angels to stand behind him, and proclaimed that the Kingdom of Heaven was hereby established on earth? If that had happened, the kingdom would consist of one person: himself. Only Jesus was qualified to be a citizen. The temple doors would slam shut behind him, leaving everyone else outside. There would be no way for anyone to come in, because all the sacrifices in the world could not make them clean enough to be in the presence of God.

The devil makes a return now. Do you remember, after he tried and failed to tempt Jesus in the desert, the devil left “until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13)? Well, he’s back. Recall how Jesus said, in John 12:31, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” In the reading this week, we’ll three people subject to Satan’s temptation: Judas, Peter, and probably Jesus himself. The devil might have thought he won this round. But we’ll see how even Satan was used by God to accomplish His great purpose. God prophesied it way back in Genesis 3:15: “He will crush your (Satan’s) head, and you will bruise his heel.”

The disciples don’t know all that. By the end of the week, the worst thing that they could ever imagine was happening. And they were right: it was the worst thing that ever happened. But it became the best.

Reading for this week: Mark 14:26-65, Matthew 27:1-26; Luke 22:44-23:16, John 18-19

Further references: Ps. 22, Is. 53, Hebrews 5:7, 10:7

Key verse: [Jesus] said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30)

1. This week we’re reading all four gospel accounts of Jesus’ death. Name at least one detail you see in each that is not found in the others.
2. What does Jesus mean by “this cup” in Mark 14:36 and Luke 22:42? What is the meaning of “cup” in Is. 51:17, Jer. 25:15 and Ez. 23:31-33? What kind of cup does Jesus offer his followers at the last supper? What makes the difference? (see Matt. 26:27-28)
3. How did Judas and Peter respond to their guilt? What made the difference?
4. What lies were told about Jesus during and after his trial? (see Luke 23:2, Mark 14:55-58, John 19:7,12)
5. What did Jesus mean by “It is finished”? (see John 4:32, 9:14)
6. What does it mean that the curtain of the temple that walled off the Most Holy Place was split in two? (see Hebrews 9:12, 24; 10:19-20)

Activities:

- Find a map of Jerusalem and locate the Mount of Olives, Gethsemane, Golgotha, and “the Pavement.”
- Add the words **atonement** and **propitiation** to your vocabulary cards.
- Imagine you are a priest serving in the temple at the third hour of “good Friday” and write about the moment when the temple curtain was torn in two. Be sure to include sights, sounds, and smells.