

Study Guide for the Week of April 16, 2006

Christianity and the Religions of the World—Part 1

Questions Thinking People Ask

This study guide is designed to help you to become more familiar with the Bible. Study these passages on your own, with a friend, or with a group. If you or someone you know needs a Bible, please take one from under a chair in the Worship Center. They are there for you to take home and use! Sermon manuscripts are available at www.saintpauls-umc.com.

Monday – Read Matthew 2:1-23. Matthew’s gospel was written for Jews, and Jewish Christians, to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah. Yet at the very beginning of this gospel the first to come and worship Jesus are foreign non-Jews. Matthew included this story most intentionally to make a point. Why do you think Matthew felt it important to include this story? Note that Herod, who claimed to be the king of the Jews, who claimed to be a follower of Judaism, is killing babies, while the priests of another faith have come to honor Jesus. What do you learn about God from this entire chapter?

Tuesday – Today let’s take a look at the Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus birth. **Read Isaiah 60:1-6.** It was from reading verse three that the tradition developed that the Magi were kings, hence the carol, “We Three Kings” and their traditional portrayal. But the Magi in Matthew’s gospel were not kings, but perhaps the emissaries of kings. Notice two of the three gifts of the wise men are mentioned in verse six. All of chapter sixty is a promise given to the Israelites who had returned from exile to find their homeland laid waste – it is a promise of a future day of glory for the nation. Yet some of the imagery, metaphorical though it is, could not be fulfilled except in the second coming of Christ. **Read Isaiah 60:19-22.** Now notice how Revelation picks up this theme regarding the second coming of Christ as you **Read Revelation 22:5 and 21:2-4.** How are these words of promise meant to affect us as we live our lives in anticipation of their fulfillment? How do they speak to us when we are facing tragedy or difficulty or pain?

Wednesday – The story of Jonah is a wonderful story that has often been seen as a children’s tale. But Jonah is no child’s tale. Unlike the other prophetic books, which are collections of sayings of the prophets, in Jonah the prophetic message is the story itself – like the parables that Jesus tells in order to teach about the Kingdom of God. The book itself likely was written during a time when the Israelites were becoming more and more intolerant of people of other faiths and ethnicities. Some believe this happened after the Jews returned from exile and “circled the wagons” in order to remain pure from contact with non-Jews. Jonah himself lived in the eighth century. Assyria was modern day Iraq. Read this story and look for God’s perspective and work with people of other faiths. **Read Jonah chapter 1.** What do we learn about Jonah, who was a believer? What do we learn about the sailors who were not believers? Do you ever resist doing what God is calling you to do? Rededicate your heart and life to pursuing his will as you pray.

Thursday and Friday – Read Jonah chapters 2-4. The book is in part about being obedient to God. It is in part about being willing to bear God’s light to others. But it is also, in part, a picture of God’s concern for those who are non-believers and those who worship other gods. **Read Jonah 4:11 again** – what do we learn about God’s heart from this passage?