

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Read the Bible in a Year Challenge

Week 24

Monday	2 Chronicles 32-34	Psalm 131	1 Corinthians 6
Tuesday	2 Chronicles 35-36	Psalm 132	1 Corinthians 7
Wednesday	Ezra 1-3	Psalm 133	1 Corinthians 8
Thursday	Ezra 4-6	Psalm 134	1 Corinthians 9
Friday	Ezra 7-9	Psalm 135	1 Corinthians 10
Saturday	Ezra 10	Psalm 136	1 Corinthians 11

Sunday: *Enjoy the lessons from Scripture as they are read aloud in Sunday worship. The Bible study summary for each Sunday of the year is found as a separate document on the parish website, under "Adult Education, Bible Study".*

The 2 Chronicles readings:

1. See the weekly summary for week 22 for an introduction to 2 Chronicles.
2. Ch. 32 describes an attempt at ecumenism by Hezekiah, which seeks to incorporate the Samaritans as separated brethren.
 - a. Cf. 2 Kgs. 18.14; 19.1,6, for a parallel (and less favorable) depiction of Hezekiah's actions in dealing with the Assyrian invasion under Sennacherib (*ca.* 701 B.C.)
 - i. Hezekiah's reforms of altars is, in part, a repudiation of the political commitments of his predecessor.
 - b. Judah survives as a discrete entity, albeit at great cost. This survival increases the prestige of Hezekiah.
 - i. The tunnel referred to at 32.30 is still in use as a water route today.
3. Manasseh is depicted as an evil king (*cf.* 2 Kgs. 21.2-9), but the writer of Chronicles walks a fine line, in that the king has a long and successful reign, which is in contradiction to the theology expressed by the chronicler, that this would be a reward for faithfulness.
 - a. The "Prayer of Manasseh" is found as a Cantic 14, the *Kyrie Pantokrator*, at *BCP* 90. This prayer formed an appendix to the Vulgate (Latin) version of the Bible, but it probably dates from the time of the chronicler.
4. Josiah became king as a child. However, the pivotal event described for his reign is the finding of the book of the Law. By the time Josiah was an adult (26), the decline of Assyria had become irreparable, and the king embarked on a celebrated liturgical reform described in chs. 34 and 35 (*cf.* 2 Kgs. 22-23; Deut. 12.11).
5. Ch. 36 summarizes the last 58 verses of 2 Kgs. in 12 verses, and then adds 12 more, to describe the last kings as puppets of Babylon. Not listening to God culminates in the evil of captivity, which will last 70 years, in fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer. 25.12).
 - a. Nonetheless, the final two verses (which are also Ezra 1.1-3) end the Hebrew canon on a note of optimism.

The Ezra readings:

1. Ezra is a continuation of the historical project undertaken in 1 and 2 Chronicles, and together with Nehemiah may be seen to be part of one extended narrative.
 - a. Ezra is not, however, fully within the same narrative of 1 and 2 Chronicles, and displays evidence of another author.
 - b. Just as 1 and 2 Chronicles seem to have been written to vindicate the definitiveness of David's covenant over Sinai, Ezra reflects a prophetic exegesis on history.
2. Ezra is described as a Levite who returns to Jerusalem from Babylon in the fifth century B.C. It is not clear, however, that there is a close correspondence between the dates described and the date of writing, which may be later.
 - a. Evidence in Ezra of an anti-Samaritan bias points to later composition, closer to the Maccabean era (*i.e.*, second century B.C.), following the importation of foreign people to Samaria by the Seleucid rulers of the area.
 - i. 1 Esdras (as named in the Apocrypha to the Revised Standard Version of the Bible), also known as Esdras A in the *Septuagint* and 3 Esdras in the Vulgate, contains the whole of Ezra, plus additions from Nehemiah and from 2 Chronicles, along with added material.
 1. This second text tradition (with 1 Esdras written in Greek), points to the possibility of Ezra being a later Hebrew translation of a Greek original.
3. Chs. 1 through 6 of Ezra are concerned with the events surrounding the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem, under the reign of the Persian emperor Cyrus, and of the rebuilding of the Temple (*i.e.*, the building of the second Temple).
 - a. The book begins with a quotation of 2 Chr. 36.22-23. The two works were probably both part of one scroll.
 - b. The account of Zerubbabel (2.1-70) is a repetition, word for word, of Nehemiah 7.6-73.
 - c. Following months of red tape in Babylon, and travel to Jerusalem, the cornerstone of the Temple is laid in Jerusalem. This schedule compresses, however, a period of time of up to 18 years from when Sheshbazzar is described as beginning building.
 - d. Ch. 4 describes interference with the project by Samaritans. These seem to have been Persian bureaucrats of Judean origin (perhaps part of the pre-exile remnant) functioning for the Persian province of Samaria, to which Judah has been made humiliatingly subordinate.
 - e. The project is nudged to completion by prophetic intervention (5.1-6.22).
 - i. Haggai blasts Zerubbabel for self-indulgent inertia, and includes in his words an indictment of the priest Joshua.
 1. Upon the accession of a third monarch in 522 B.C., the barriers begin to fall.
4. Ezra's return and the reaffirmation of Torah are described in chs. 7 through 10.
 - a. The chronology points to Ezra's ministry occurring between the Temple dedication in 515 and Nehemiah's arrival in 445.
 - b. Ezra serves as an editor of Torah.
 - c. Ezra's procession from Babylon includes 1,511 men plus their dependents, and names twelve families (eleven of whom are named in the genealogies in Ezra 2).
 - i. The twelve families are to be thought of as representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel.
 - ii. In Jerusalem, Torah is formally promulgated.

The psalms: *The psalm numbering and versification system used throughout these study summaries is that found in The Book of Common Prayer (1979).*

1. The psalms encountered this week can include:
 - a. 131: A psalm of trust, notable for the beauty of its language.
 - b. 132: Appointed in the western monastic office for use at Vespers at Christmas. A royal psalm which celebrates the Zion tradition of the LORD'S election of Zion, and of David's royal line. Cf. Ps. 89.20-38. In the earlier psalm God's promise is unconditional; here it is premised on obedience to the covenant.
 - c. 133: This psalm is difficult to classify, but has elements of a pilgrimage song, and of wisdom literature.
 - d. 134: Appointed for use at Compline. The last of the "songs of ascent," the psalm concludes with a blessing upon the pilgrim to Jerusalem, and thus may be part of a liturgy.
 - e. 135: A hymn of praise which incorporates historical elements. Cf. Ps. 115 and Ps. 136.
 - f. 136: A hymn of praise with historical elements. As in the Pentateuch, the role of the LORD as creator is expressed in His saving deeds for Israel.

The readings from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians:

1. See the weekly summary for week 23 for an introduction to 1 Corinthians.
2. Ch. 6 continues the discussion (begun in 5) of the importance of the Body, of the worshipping community as incarnating the love of God.
3. In chs. 7 through 14, Paul is answering questions posed by the Corinthians. The *peri de* ("now concerning") construction points to this.
 - a. Ch. 7 focuses on problems in social status, including discussion of sexual relations and marriage, marriage and divorce, changes in social status, and changes in sexual status.
 - i. Paul's counsel that marriage may be delayed, and that remaining celibate is better, is written in expectation of an imminent return of Jesus Christ.
 - b. Paul switches his focus to the problems encountered by the Corinthians by living in a pagan environment.
 - i. When he writes about food offered to idols (8.1-13), he is writing in the context that in the ancient world the only meat available is that of animals which have been offered in sacrifice.
 - ii. In ch. 9 Paul renounces his rights as an apostle. This is a "teaching moment" directed to the Corinthians who speak from pride.
 1. The pagan world is one of a "honor culture," where worldly status is of preeminent importance. Paul instructs that this is incompatible with the life of the Body.
 - iii. Paul discussed the dangers of over-confidence (10.1-13) and the significance of social gestures (10.14-22), and how these relate to the scruples of the weak (10.23-11.1).
 1. Those whom Paul refers to as weak or those who believe they must be scrupulous in avoiding anything associated with paganism. The strong are those who believe that paganism is false, and thus not something that need be worried about.

4. Ch. 11 begins an argument (which will extend to 14.40) about the conduct of liturgical assemblies.
 - a. Paul is concerned about how people gather in worship, and that they do not focus on their own privileges.
 - b. He is concerned, as well, that Holy Eucharist be received worthily, *i.e.*, by one who perceives the presence of the Lord, in order to participate in this presence.
 - i. Paul warns that those who do not receive eucharist worthily (*i.e.*, those in serious sin, and the unbaptized) “eat and drink judgment on themselves” (11.29).
 1. This reality is why confession and absolution should normally precede the participation in eucharist.
 2. This is why communion of the unbaptized is not act of charity!
 - c. Paul speaks of the institution of the eucharist as what he has “received” (11.23). This is written more than a decade prior to the writing of the first gospel, *i.e.*, it testifies to a teaching current in the Church from the very beginning.