

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Read the Bible in a Year Challenge
Week 29

Monday	Proverbs 4-6	Psalm 11	Ephesians 1
Tuesday	Proverbs 7-9	Psalm 12	Ephesians 2
Wednesday	Proverbs 10-12	Psalm 13	Ephesians 3
Thursday	Proverbs 13-15	Psalm 14	Ephesians 4
Friday	Proverbs 16-19	Psalm 15	Ephesians 5
Saturday	Proverbs 20-22	Psalm 16	Ephesians 6

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 Proverbs readings:

1. See the study summary for week 28 for an introduction to Proverbs. Note especially the discussion at week 28 regarding the personification of Wisdom.
2. Ch. 4 comprises an exhortation to acquire Wisdom, and sets forth the classic Wisdom literature doctrine of “Two Ways”.
 - a. The search for Wisdom is portrayed in terms of a parent’s loving guidance and a child’s loving response.
 - i. Wisdom requires a response, but it is Wisdom which first acts, *i.e.*, Wisdom is *revealed* by God, whereas knowledge may be sought by humans.
 - b. The theme set forth at 2.12-15 of the two ways of life (following God or not) is developed, and is reinforced using popular imagery, such as that of the way or pathway, to walk or to stumble, etc.
3. In chs. 5 through 7, warnings are made about adultery. Four interludes are found at 6.1-19, which comprise practical admonitions which bear no connection to what precedes and follows, regarding adultery.
 - a. The warnings are not stated in negative terms alone. For example, 5.15-19 are stated in terms of the value of fidelity as an expression of love and of the completeness of relationship with the beloved.
4. The prologue reaches a climax in ch. 8, in which personified Wisdom speaks to recommend herself and her teaching. She is to be honored for her universal call, her truth, integrity and value, her intellectual gifts, her favors, and her priority (including being present at Creation). Wisdom appeals to be heeded.
 - a. Following this recital of virtues, and appeal, ch. 9 sets forth contrasting invitations to the “banquets” (fellowship with/participation in) Wisdom and Folly. The invitations are interrupted by six sayings which contrast the wise and the scoffer on the basis of teachability.

5. The first collection of proverbs, proper, begins at ch. 10 and continues into ch. 22. 375 proverbs are included.
 - a. Chs. 10-15 are marked by the continual presence of antithetical parallelism, *i.e.* by proverbs stated in terms of contrasts.
 - i. Ch. 11 teaches about justice in business dealings.
 - ii. Ch. 12 introduces the theme of a “woman of worth”. This theme is developed at 31.10-31.
 1. In ch. 14 the identity of Wisdom is blurred using a phrase which can either mean “the wisest women” or “the wisdom of women”. This blurring is probably intentional, and points to ch. 31.
 - a. Note that ch. 14 uses the motif of house-building, which is repeated in ch. 31 of the woman who builds her house.
 - b. Ch. 16 switches to synonymous or synthetic parallelism, in which a truth is repeated in another form.
 - i. Sayings about the LORD and the king are grouped together, leading to the tradition that chs. 10-22 comprise Solomonic wisdom.
 - c. Teachings are found regarding family relationships (ch. 17), the proper use of speech (ch. 18), an about righteousness despite the temptations of poverty (ch. 19).
 - d. In ch. 20 are stated teachings that are not grouped thematically.
 - e. Ch. 21 repeats sayings about the king, as found in ch. 16.
 - f. Ch. 22 focuses on the need to maintain a good name and reputation, and how these outlive the person.
 - i. The second half of ch. 22 is the locus for the switch in form to a series of sayings of the wise. This section bears a strong resemblance to the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope*, dated to the reign of Ramesses II (*i.e.*, the pharaoh at the time of Moses).
 1. The parallelism reflects Wisdom literature as a genre in the ancient Near East, and not as an exclusively Jewish phenomenon.

The psalms: N.B. *In The Bible Challenge the Psalter is read twice (once in each half year). We may all be led into new insights, particularly in focusing on praying each psalm (preferably aloud). See the summary for week 1 for a general introduction.*

1. See the study summaries for weeks 2 and 3.

The readings from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians:

1. Ephesians may be best understood as an encyclical letter, intended for circulation amongst churches in Asia.
 - a. The tradition of Pauline authorship was constant throughout the early Church. In modern scholarship questions have been raised whether Paul wrote this letter, or whether it was written in his name by one of his disciples. The tradition of pseudonymous writing was prominent in the ancient world.
 - i. A rough consensus exists of Deutero-Pauline authorship (authorship by a disciple), or of a Pauline “core” which has been expanded. The questioning about authorship relates to vocabulary, sentence structure, etc., which in many points differs from other letters for which there is no question of authorship.
 - b. More important than issues of language and style is how the teaching in Ephesians relates to other parts of the Pauline corpus.

- i. In other Pauline letters the Church is described in terms of local community. In Ephesians the Church is described as a universal phenomenon of cosmic extent, embodying creation (1.21-23; 3.9-11).
 1. The Church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets”. This would argue for some distance in time from the time of Paul’s life. Cf. as well 1 Cor. 3.11, in which Jesus is the only foundation of the Church.
 2. Significantly, Ephesians develops the understanding of the Church as Christ’s Body, made up of members.
 - a. This may represent an extension of the teaching found at 1 Cor. 12.31 and Rom. 12.4-8.
 3. The concern expressed in earlier letters about the relationship between Gentile converts and Jews is absent. In Ephesians, Gentile and Jew are described as “reconciled to God in one body through the cross” (2.16).
 - a. This difference may be no more than a development in thought, reflecting later composition.
 4. Significantly, Ephesians is not concerned with the second coming of Jesus, but with present day living as sharing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Believers have been “made alive” (2.5-6), and a long future for them in the Church is envisaged (2.7; 3.21).
 5. Ephesians is similar in some linguistic aspects to Colossians (which most scholars assign to Paul), but the emphases are different. The focus in Colossians is on christology; in Ephesians on ecclesiology (the theology of what the Church is).
 6. The description of the Church as the bride of Christ, and the exalted view of marriage, may be contrasted to the discussion of marriage found at 1 Cor. 7.8-9, 25-40.
 - ii. Regardless of these points of difference and similarity, the teaching in Ephesians is to be accepted as genuinely Pauline, whether written by his hand or not.
 1. The reliance on other Pauline letters, and the relationship to Colossians, suggests a later composition date (A.D. 80–100?)
 - a. Scholars therefore consider Ephesians to be a remembrance of Paul’s teaching in the believing community.
 - i. Believers consider this teaching to be divinely-inspired, in continuity with the teaching found in Paul.
2. Ephesians is less a letter and more a theological discourse, written in the context of thought which includes combat with early Gnostic beliefs, with the Hellenistic Judaism and Second Temple Judaism (*i.e.*, a Judaism more focused on cosmogony than on rules of living) as found in the Dead Sea Scrolls community, and the philosophical speculations of Neo-Platonism (*e.g.*, as found in the writings of Philo of Alexandria).
 3. Ephesians is structured into a first half (1.3-3.21) which is an extended prayer of intercession for believers.
 - a. The structure parallels that found in Jewish and early Christian devotional literature: blessing–thanksgiving–prayer of intercession–concluding doxology.
 - b. The second half (4.1-6-20) is a series of exhortations for Christians to behave in keeping with their exalted status as children of light and members of the Church, *i.e.*, as members of the household of God and the bride of Christ.
 - c. Structure can be followed by message points:

- i. Address and greetings: 1.1-2.
- ii. God's plan revealed and accomplished: 1.3-14.
- iii. Thanksgiving and prayer of intercession: 1.15-23.
- iv. Believers were once dead, but now live in Christ: 2.1-10.
- v. Jews and Gentiles are united in Christ: 2.11-22.
- vi. Paul is the interpreter of the mystery revealed by God: 3.1-13.
- vii. Prayer and doxology: 3.14-21.
- viii. Exhortation to unity in the Church: 4.1-16. Cf. Col. 3.12-15.
- ix. Christian and non-Christian conduct contrasted: 4.17-5.20.
- x. Code of conduct for the household of God: 5.21-6.9.
 - 1. Household codes are found in the New Testament in 1 Peter and in the letters which scholars consider Deutero-Pauline. Such codes reflect Greco-Roman social teaching, and thus depict the Christian household (and the Church) as a hierarchically structured social unit.
 - a. Such codes may represent apologetic against pagan accusations that Christianity undermined the public order.
- xi. Christian life as warfare with evil: 6.10-20.
- xii. Conclusion and blessing: 6.21-24.