

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Read the Bible in a Year Challenge
Week 40

Monday	Ezekiel 11-12	Psalm 75	1 John 5
Tuesday	Ezekiel 13-14	Psalm 76	2 John
Wednesday	Ezekiel 15-16	Psalm 77	3 John
Thursday	Ezekiel 17-18	Psalm 78.1-39	Jude
Friday	Ezekiel 19-20	Psalm 78.40-72	Revelation 1
Saturday	Ezekiel 21-22	Psalm 79	Revelation 2

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 readings from Ezekiel:

1. *See* the study summary for week 39 for an introduction to Ezekiel. Ch. 11 is included in that summary.
2. Chs. 12-14 include a series of condemnations, both of the people and of their leaders.
 - a. Exile is coming, and to attempt to escape is futile. The prophet acts out the coming exile and captivity.
 - b. Prophets and prophetesses are condemned as false.
 - i. The prophets are false in that they give a message of hope when destruction is near.
 - ii. The prophetesses are false in that they seek to use divination and magic. These are not the word of God.
 - c. The people are warned that idols are their downfall, that idols are the stumbling block which will bring about destruction.
 - i. None can be saved by the righteousness of another, but must strive for personal righteousness.
3. Chs. 15-19 contain allegories and metaphors of judgment.
 - a. The Allegory of the Vine Wood (15.1-8): A vine stock produces leaves and fruit during growing season, but is otherwise a twisted, barren thing. The vine must be pruned regularly.
 - i. Given the constant references in Scripture to Israel as a vine (*see* Ps. 80.8-15; Hos. 10.1; Jer. 2.21), the contrast is marked, particularly since the prophet compares the people to the cut-off vine branches, which are only good to be burned as fuel.
 - b. Jerusalem as an Unfaithful Wife (16.1-43): This image is common in prophecy (*e.g.*, in all of Hosea), but is generally used for all of the people, and not just for Jerusalem.
 - i. Two distinct oracles occur. The first is of a foster parent saving and raising an orphan (3-7) and the second is of marital infidelity.
 1. The oracles are told as a drama. At any stage the turn for the worse could have been avoided by fidelity.

- ii. The lewdness of the adulteress (Jerusalem) is compared with that of two others cities marked for destruction, Sodom and Samaria.
 - 1. Sodom was destroyed for gross sin (Gen. 18-19), and Samaria for idolatry (2 Kgs. 17.7-18).
 - c. The Allegory of the Eagles (17.1-24): Allegory is here matched with precise historical reference.
 - i. The allegory is structured in three parts: allegory (1-10); interpretation (11-21); further allegory (22-24).
 - 1. The identification of the figures in the allegories is made clear. The riddle lies, therefore, in how God will bring about the promise found at vv. 22-24.
 - a. The historical figures are described, not named.
 - i. The first eagle is Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon.
 - ii. “Lebanon” is an image for Israel (Jer. 22.6; Zech. 11.1-3; Isa. 10.34).
 - iii. The “topmost twig” is Jehoiachin, taken into exile in 598 B.C. (2 Kgs. 24.8-15).
 - iv. The “land of traders” is Babylon, and the “seed of the land” is Zedekiah, named king in place of Jehoiachin (2. Kgs. 24.17-18).
 - v. The second great eagle is Psammetichus II, pharaoh of Egypt, with who Zedekiah had made a treaty in 588 to lift the siege of Jerusalem (Jer. 37.4-11).
 - b. The instrument of God’s wrath will be Nebuchadrezzar.
 - d. Ch. 18 states a law case for individual responsibility. This reflects an important theme in Ezekiel’s thought.
 - e. Ch. 19 includes two laments over Zedekiah. This chapter concludes the catalogue of Israel’s sins announced on the scroll the prophet was to eat (2.10).
4. Chs. 20-24 shift from allegory to indictment and condemnation. These final five chapters of the first part of the book include oracles of judgment.
 - a. The history of Israel’s infidelity is reviewed in ch. 20.
 - i. This is followed by four oracles in which the image of God wielding a sword (of judgment) is prominent (20.45-21.32).
 - b. Legal charges against Jerusalem are enumerated in ch. 22. All classes are guilty (22.23-31).
 - c. Ch. 23 includes the Allegory of the Two Sisters. What is stressed here is the political infidelity of Jerusalem and Samaria in seeking out foreign alliances. (*Compare* ch. 16, which relates to cultic infidelity.)
 - d. Ch. 24 includes the Allegory of the Boiling Pot: The city is so full of impurity that it must be burned up in order to purify it.
 - i. The prophet is prohibited from offering any sign of grief at the death of his wife (24.15-27). The people are not to mourn the loss of Jerusalem, for the city received what she deserved.
 - 1. Vv. 25-27 links this moment back to the moment when the prophet began his mission while speechless (3.24-27), thus marking chs. 4-24 as a unit.

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 13 and 14.

The readings from the First Letter of John:

1. See the study summary for week 39 for an introduction to 1 John, and a discussion of the content of ch. 5.

The Second and Third Letters of John:

1. Unlike 1 John, which takes the form of a general address to a community, and serves as a framework in which to better understand the Gospel of John, 2 & 3 John are short letters from a person called the “presbyter” (the elder) to other communities, *i.e.*, not to the unified Johannine community which is the recipient of 1 John.
 - a. 2 John prohibits association between members of the Church and a separatist group of Johannine Christians.
 - b. 3 John seeks to procure hospitality for missionaries, after this has been refused in another community.
 - i. 3 John could have been written at any time during the period in which a unified Johannine community was breaking up, but 2 John is only intelligible in light of the crisis in the community which is depicted in 1 John. (*See, e.g.*, the severity of the condemnation of dissidents found at 2 Jn. 10-11.)
 - c. Both 1 John and 2 John refer to persons who had been part of the community but have now separated themselves.
 - i. Their failure to remain a part of the community is linked with their failure to confess the truth about Jesus Christ.
 1. This failure in confession is equated with the dissidents being antichrists and deceivers who must be overcome.
 - a. 1 John is cast in a positive light—the community will overcome deceivers. In contrast 2 John issues a strong warning that believers are not even to associate with dissidents. This sharper tone might indicate that the situation became more serious.
 - i. What the dissidents believed is not clear, but if what is argued against in 1 John serves as any clue, it seems to have been a universalism in which individual sin was considered to be of no real consequence to one saved, *i.e.*, that salvation is universal and atonement once “for all”. (*This is a popular argument made in the many corners of the modern Church!*)

The Letter of Jude:

1. Jude does not appear in the Sunday lectionary. The letter is quoted almost in its entirety in 2 Peter (*see* the study summary for week 39.)
2. The author is identified as Jude “the brother of James”. This is thought to be James “the brother of the Lord” (Gal. 1.19), leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts. 15.13-21).

- a. Jude is not the apostle Jude (Luke 6.16).
- b. The letter is considered pseudonymous for the following reasons:
 - i. The letter (v. 17) speaks of “the apostles of our Lord,” treating them as figures of a distant past.
 - ii. The idea that the faith has been formalized, as one “handed on once for all,” indicates writing after most of the canon, and is characteristic of “early catholic” writing (*i.e.*, writing undertaken once the Church has spread).
 - iii. The letter is written in excellent Greek, not indicative of a Jewish writer.
 - iv. In the early Church it was common to validate a later writing by attributing it to an earlier figure.
- c. The occasion for the letter is to correct error. Scoffers contest such central doctrines as God’s authority (v. 4), with their bad theology leading to immorality.
- d. Jude refers to many diverse materials, including documents and traditions. The author betrays knowledge both of Greek thinking and of Jewish lore. This suggests a sophisticated church rich in source materials, in the process of regularizing and affirming the “faith once delivered”.

The Revelation to John (The Apocalypse):

1. In order to approach Revelation it is first necessary to understand the literary genre of apocalyptic. *Apocalyptic literature*: “Apocalypse” (*apokalypsis*) means “revelation” in Greek, in the sense of a curtain being pulled aside.
 - a. Revelation is unique in the New Testament, but apocalyptic visions are found in Ezekiel, and in Daniel and some postexilic prophets.¹ The “message” in apocalyptic is the revelation of secrets.
 - b. Revelation refers to itself as prophecy (1.2; 22.7), in the sense of revealing what is “to come,” but it is paramount to remember that a vision of an eternal truth is a vision of something *independent of time*.
 - i. Apocalyptic may, therefore, be prophecy of what is to come, but not necessarily in the sense of something that will happen at a particular time in this world.
2. *Authorship*: The case to assign authorship to John, son of Zebedee, is not very strong, although this position has been maintained from the first century (Justin Martyr), and affirmed by Hippolytus, Irenaeus and Origen.
 - a. Stylistic differences from the fourth Gospel are significant.
 - b. The book probably dates from A.D. 92-96, at the end of Domitian’s reign (*i.e.*, at the time of the first serious, empire-wide persecution of Christians).
3. *Structure*: The book is structured as follows:
 - a. Prologue (1.1-3).
 - b. Letters to seven churches in Asia (1.4-3.22).
 - c. Part I of the revelation (4.1-11-19). The first cycle of visions.
 - d. Part II of the revelation (12.1-22.5). The second cycle of visions.
 - e. Epilogue with concluding blessing (22.6-21). Isolated sayings regarding the book and end times.

¹ *1 Enoch*, a non-canonical prophetic work from the second century B.C., is the most fully-developed example of apocalyptic literature from the Old Testament era. New Testament era works include *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (1 C. Egyptian).

4. *Symbolism*: Apocalyptic literature uses symbolism widely. For example, in Revelation visions occur in cycles of seven. The interpretation of individual symbols and visions is a task fraught with dangers, but it is safe to comment that the intent of the author is clear that symbols are to be interpreted rather than accepted as a literal truth
 - a. Apocalyptic literature arose at times of persecution. The overarching theme of all apocalyptic is that a truth exists beyond and above the current persecution, and that God will save and vindicate those who trust in Him.

5. The book begins with the words “The revelation of Jesus Christ”. The word “revelation” expresses the idea that God, through Jesus Christ, John, and this written text, unveils secrets (truth) about heaven and earth, past, present and future.
 - a. Great care is required in considering the revelation to be that of future truth in the sense of prophecy. The book does refer to itself as prophecy (1.3; 22.7, 10, 18-19).
 - i. Eternity is timeless. Therefore, the revelation of what is true is timeless. It is not necessary that something *will* happen, but that it *happens* in the timelessness of God.
 1. This “present tense” of timelessness is reflected in part in the epistolary addresses made to the seven churches, found in chs. 2-3.
 - a. Note that John is instructed by the voice to “write what you *see*” (1.11).

6. Ch. 1 includes a prologue in which the book is described, and in which a beatitude is stated regarding the reception of the book (1.1-3). This is followed by a prescript (1.4-6) addressing the seven churches, two prophetic sayings (1.7-9), and the report of the revelatory experience (which begins at v. 10).
 - a. There follows a cycle of visions which begins at 1.10b, as an epiphany of Christ to John.
 - i. The Lord reveals Himself to impart specific messages (beginning in ch. 2):
 1. Issues of discipline, obedience, faithfulness in worship, worldliness, immorality, toleration of idolatry and false teaching, and the loss of love for the Lord are raised.
 - a. With the exception of the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia (who are praised for faithfulness and steadfastness in the face of persecution), the other churches are warned, in effect, to “wake up” and return to their first love.