

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Read the Bible in a Year Challenge

Week 47

Monday	Amos 9	Psalm 115	Matthew 17
Tuesday	Obadiah	Psalm 116	Matthew 18
Wednesday	Jonah 1	Psalm 117	Matthew 19
Thursday	Jonah 2	Psalm 118	Matthew 20
Friday	Jonah 3	Psalm 119:1-32	Matthew 21
Saturday	Jonah 4	Psalm 119:33-72	Matthew 22

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 Amos:

1. See the study summary for week 45 for an introduction to Amos, and week 46 for a concluding discussion.

The readings from Obadiah:

1. Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament. The prophet’s name means “worshipper of the LORD,” but the book contains no information about the person.
 - a. The book is a prophesy against Edom and the Edomites.
 - i. The treachery of Edom can be viewed against the background of Jer. 27. Edom had allied with other cities against Babylon. When this rebellion failed, Edom acted to aid Babylon in the destruction of Jerusalem.
 1. The memory of this treachery is reflected graphically in Ps. 137.
 - b. Obadiah prophesies the destruction of Edom. In this context the prophet goes on to prophesy the coming day of the LORD, the judgment of all nations.
 - i. The book thus represents a transition from history to eschatology. The first part of the message is addressed to Edom, the second (following v. 6) is addressed to Judah.
 1. The cup of God’s wrath is passed to all nations. The day of the LORD is a day of destruction.

The readings from Jonah:

1. The divergence of scholarly opinion over Jonah is wide. Scant consensus exists regarding dating, literary form, purpose. To the extent that agreement exists the following observations can be made:
 - a. The book probably is post-exilic, and the name Jonah is a reference to the prophet identified at 2 Kgs. 14.25 (Jonah son of Amittai), from the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (786-746, B.C.).

- i. As made in a post-exilic work, therefore, the reference to the prophet is a reference to a figure from a time much earlier in the history of Israel, *i.e.*, the reference is in the nature of folk tale about a “legendary” character, with parallels to the type of stories told of Elijah in 1 Kgs.
 - b. The literary genre of Jonah is closest to parable, with elements of satire present.
 - i. The book is concerned with the question of God’s justice and the need for and possibility of repentance. This focus coincides well with the post-exilic experience of Israel, which included stern separatist tendencies (as seen in Ezra and Nehemiah), as well as questions about justice in light of the experience of exile.
 - ii. The book may involve satire in its caricature of a prophet.
 - 1. This element itself may reflect a shift in the role of a prophet from one who announced what God would do to one who spoke more of the possibility and desirability of repentance.
 - 2. The prophet is portrayed as a real person, who struggles to reconcile the concept of a just God with the reality of God’s mercy.
 - a. That God’s mercy is free and unmerited is a new element, and the prophet’s distress at this may reflect a reaction against a rigid deuteronomistic doctrine of retribution.
- 2. Jonah’s name, which means “dove,” suggests both flight and passivity. These characteristics are seen in Jonah’s reaction to the LORD’S call and commission.
 - a. The fact that the prophet is “son of Amittai” (Amittai = “trustworthy”) points to satire. Jonah shirks his responsibility and flees.
 - b. The sailors first “fear” the storm (1.5). This becomes “great fear” (v. 10) when they discern the source of the storm, and then “fear” (awe) in acknowledging their deliverance by God (v.16).
 - i. In other words, pagans (the sailors), recognize the role of God, while the prophet called by Him flees, and Jonah’s downward trajectory is complete in his descent into the sea.
 - ii. God intervenes (just as He did with the storm) in appointing a great fish to swallow the prophet. A creature is used to carry out God’s will.
 - 1. Ch. 2 is a psalm of thanksgiving.
- 3. The prophet now proceeds to his commission, and is vexed that the people of Nineveh heed his oracle. Once again, pagans respond to God.
 - a. Literary exaggeration is present in the description of the size of the city, of its sudden conversion, and in the animals donning sack cloth. Satire and folk tale overlap.
- 4. Throughout, the author has used questions (*cf.* 1.6, 8, 10, 11; 3.9). Now, the prophet being vexed, the LORD is the questioner. The scene is one in which God seeks to convert Jonah to an understanding of His nature, His mercy.
 - a. At 4.2 it becomes clear that the prophet had fled because he feared that the Ninevites would repent. He wanted nothing to do with extending mercy to people whom he considered to be hateful.
 - i. God’s mercy and love may override every other consideration. The prophet, however, now wants to disassociate himself from a God who would act in such mercy. He pleads that he may lose his life (4.3).

1. Elijah had requested death because his preaching had no effect (1 Kgs. 19.4). Now Jonah requests death because his preaching has. The irony may be a commentary on the nature of prophecy.
- ii. Jonah not having responded to God's question about whether the prophet's anger is justified, the LORD responds to this sullen silence with another act of kindness (the castor oil plant at 4.6). The prophet's joy over this minor comfort contrasts with his callous anger at God's mercy to the Ninevites.
 1. When the plant is removed, once again the prophet prays for death at *his* will, his idea of justice, being frustrated.
 - a. God backs Jonah into a corner with His questions, *e.g.*, "Do you do well to be angry ...?" (4.9). The prophet must admit that he is wrong to question the LORD'S sovereign will to deal with Nineveh as He chooses.
 - i. God seizes on this response: "May I not have pity ... ?" (4.11).
 - ii. The reference to those "who do not know their right hand from their left" (v. 11) is a reference to children. This, included with the reference to animals, makes clearer that God's mercy has a wider, cosmic scope in His plan of creation. The reference to the animals ("and also much cattle") ends the book on a note which recalls the satirical elements, and therefore may point back to the possibility that Jonah is in part a reaction to a stern theology of retribution.

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 20 and 21.

The Gospel according to St. Matthew:

1. *See* the study summaries for weeks 1, 3 and 4 for a discussion of the readings from Matthew.