

**GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

**Read the Bible in a Year Challenge**

Week 26

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<b>Monday</b>	Esther 4-6	Psalm 143	2 Corinthians 2
<b>Tuesday</b>	Esther 7-8	Psalm 144	2 Corinthians 3
<b>Wednesday</b>	Esther 9-10	Psalm 145	2 Corinthians 4
<b>Thursday</b>	Job 1-3	Psalm 146	2 Corinthians 5
<b>Friday</b>	Job 4-6	Psalm 147	2 Corinthians 6
<b>Saturday</b>	Job 7-9	Psalm 148	2 Corinthians 7

**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”.*

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**The Esther readings:**

1. See the study summary for week 25 for an introduction to Esther.
2. In chs. 4 and 5, Esther and Mordecai plead for help, and a plot is laid to provide deliverance. There is a dramatic reversal of fortunes in chs. 6 through 8, with the feast of Purim being instituted in ch. 9. Chs. 10 & 11 serve as an epilogue, an interpretation of Mordecai’s dream.
3. Esther emerges as woman who does not need to look to Mordecai for guidance; as one who is fully in charge, and who deploys her own talents.
4. The imagery in the dream includes the two dragons as the two protagonists of the story, symbolizing an eternal struggle between good and evil.

**The Job readings:**

1. The proverb “the patience of Job” is quite inaccurate. The proverb derives from the Epistle of James (King James Version) in an inexact translation of *hypomenē* (steadfastness). Job is not patient, but he does persevere.
  - a. The structure of the book is important to the message. Chs. 1 & 2 form a prologue, which depicts Job as a holy man. In the body of the book he suffers his trials as a holy man. Ch. 42 contains an epilogue.
  - b. The poetic dialogue of chs. 3-31 is focused on the theological problem of the meaning of suffering. It reads as a literary work, rather than as a report of an actual dialogue.
    - i. In chs. 29-31, Job closes the debate in a series of protestations of his innocence of any wrong.
    - ii. In chs. 32-37, Elihu intervenes to speak against Job, arguing, in effect, that he must have done *something*.
    - iii. Chs. 38-41 comprise theophanies of the LORD, in which He speaks to divine knowledge and wisdom beyond human ken. Suffering remains a mystery.

2. The text traditions of Job MSS. are quite varied, and translations in some cases offer educated guesses of the meanings of particular verses. There is a weak consensus that the book is of post-exilic dating, but the reality is that dating is uncertain.
  - a. Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, play the role of defenders of the "traditional" (at the time of writing) view that divine justice is a form of retribution for wrong. Like Job himself (and in keeping with the international character of Wisdom literature), the friends are non-Jews.
    - i. The author does not ridicule the traditional view; he simply depicts it as inadequate.
      1. Job corrects his friends' view, but God must then correct Job's more subtle error.
    - ii. The book is full of irony. It is essential to the author's purpose that Job be depicted as holy, otherwise his afflictions would "make sense".
      1. God is, in effect, put in a "no win" situation by the author. Were God to refuse to test Job, this could signify His apprehension that humans serve Him only for reward (for themselves). On the other hand, the acceptance of Satan's wager places God in the light of being a "bad guy," except to the extent that the LORD trusts those who love Him.
3. The form of the prologue requires attention. Six scenes are depicted that sketch the events giving rise to the problem considered in the dialogue. The style of language is deliberately archaic, as found in Genesis (*e.g.*, in the patriarchal narratives), with rhythmic and repetitive elements. Characters speak a minimum of words, with their psychology being depicted more in actions.
  - a. The opening description of Job, as found in Hebrew, can be compared stylistically with an English form like "Once upon a time ..."
  - b. God is depicted as a monarch with court attendants. Satan is not a proper name, but a description (the "Adversary") of a sort of court prosecutor.
  - c. There follow scenes of the loss of Job's possessions, and then the affliction of his person.
    - i. In the intervening scene in heaven the Adversary is a cynic, but in his cynicism introduces a new concept of individualism expressed not in terms of possessions and family.
  - d. The coming of Job's friends should be understood to follow an interval of weeks and perhaps months.
4. In the first soliloquy of Job, his speech takes the form of a complaint. He never curses God, but he does curse his anniversary (birth) day (3.3-6, 7-10), speaks of the blessing of an early death (3.11, 16), and of how such curses are reasonable (3.13-15, 17-19). This complaint is followed with lament.
5. Eliphaz speaks (4.1-5.27). He is depicted as the oldest and wisest, and is certainly the most courteous.
  - a. Eliphaz is shocked at Job's lament. He intends to help Job examine his conscience.
    - i. Job rejects the approach of Eliphaz, because he has already accepted the retribution doctrine and is now questioning it.
    - ii. Eliphaz concludes by seeking to encourage Job.
6. At ch. 6 the dialogue switches to a response from Job. He does not answer arguments, but develops his own analysis of the situation.
  - a. Job continues his lament, but with more explicit reference to God's hand.

- b. His lament is intensified into a protest against the false comforts of his friends. Job treats Eliphaz' advice as focused on the disease and not on the patient.
    - i. Job appeals to the bond of friendship (6.28-30) and affirms his own truthfulness. This leads into a soliloquy by him (7.1-10) which does not appear to be addressed to the friends, but to be "thinking aloud".
    - ii. Job then complains to God directly, in the form of a prayer.
7. Bildad now speaks (8.1-22). He is more narrow-minded and less tactful. He is scandalized about how Job speaks to God.
- a. In keeping with the international character of Wisdom literature, the similes (*e.g.*, of papyrus) used by Bildad all have an Egyptian flavoring.
  - b. Bildad comes across as optimistic and complacent. He seems to have convinced himself that he has convinced Job, and so has "consoled" him.
    - i. Job responds in chs. 9 and 10. The themes he focuses on are God's irresistible power and judgment, on arbitrariness, and on his own helplessness.

**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. 143: Traditionally appointed for use at Lauds, one of the three monastic morning prayer offices combined in *The Book of Common Prayer* into Morning Prayer.
    - i. The psalm is an individual lament, the last of seven penitential psalms. The psalm features much repetition.
    - ii. The psalmist's fainting spirit is paralleled by God's good and saving Spirit.
  - b. 144: Appointed for use at vespers on Friday or Saturday. Vespers in Anglicanism is combined with None (ninth hour) to form Evening Prayer.
    - i. The first twelve verses read as a form of royal lament, with vv. 13-16 being different enough that how they relate to the first part of the psalm is unclear.
      1. The latter verses contain a theme of blessing in fertility. Perhaps the verses recite what the LORD'S blessing looks like.
  - c. 145: Appointed for use at Vespers on Saturdays.
    - i. An acrostic hymn with links to Ps. 111.
    - ii. The first half of the psalm is rife with references to speaking (to singing praise, etc.) on the part of the psalmist, with the latter half then reciting the LORD'S righteous character and deeds.
  - d. 146: This is the first of five psalms that provide a doxological conclusion to the entire Psalter. A doxology is a recitation of God's glory, from the Greek word for glory, *doxos*.
    - i. Each of the doxological hymns is framed by the shout of praise, *Alleluia!* ("Praise the LORD").
    - ii. The psalm reads as an individual hymn. It probably is post-exilic in date.
    - iii. The invitation to praise God is stated using Wisdom themes.
    - iv. Given the royal responsibility to protect strangers, widows and orphans (*cf.* Exod. 22.20-21; Deut. 10.18; Jer. 22.1-4), the recitation of this saving action by God can be read also as testifying to God's headship of all kings.
  - e. 147: A communal hymn of praise, probably of post-exilic date. (Note the references to the rebuilding of Jerusalem.) The hymn invites all to praise God, and recites His saving actions.

- f. 148: Appointed for use at Lauds. A communal hymn of praise to God as Creator, which calls upon all creation to offer praise.

### **The readings from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians:**

1. See the study summary for week 25 for an introduction to 2 Corinthians.
2. The bulk of chs. 2 through 6 is focused on Paul's discussion of what is true apostleship.
  - a. What is the apostolate? Theory and practice: 2.14-3.6.
  - b. What is ministry? Old and new models: 3.7-4.6.
  - c. Ministry and life:
    - i. Manifesting Jesus Christ: 4.7-15.
    - ii. Facing the fear of death: 4.16-5.10.
  - d. New creation and reconciliation: 5.11-6.10.
3. In reflecting on his own ministry, Paul is responding to attacks on his authority by those who have highlighted his weakness.
  - a. The development of genuine faith in others is the test of apostolic authenticity.
  - b. The apostle must manifest Jesus Christ ("... we are the aroma of Christ ...," 2.15).
  - c. The word must be presented unadulterated.
  - d. Paul compares his ministry with that of Moses. The dispensation of condemnation (Moses) is exceeded by the dispensation of righteousness (through Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit), which is brought by a genuine apostle.
    - i. Those who are attacking Paul's ministry serve the "god of this age" (4.4), *i.e.*, the world.
  - e. Paul's opponents have interpreted his miseries as contradicting his claim to be an apostle. In reply, Paul insists that suffering is integral to the Christian life and to the authenticity of apostolic ministry. Vv. 4.7-15 recite suffering as an assimilation to Jesus Christ.
4. Paul sums up his discussion of apostleship by reviewing the Christological nature of apostolic ministry. The coming of the Christ brings a new creation, and those who are in Christ are a new creation (5.11).
  - a. Being in Christ is to be in the believing community (the Church). Cf. 1 Cor. 6.15; 8.12; 12.12.
  - b. God's saving love touches individual human lives through the mediation of human agents. This is the reconciling ministry of the Church. 5.18-6.10. Cf. 1 Cor. 3.5-9.
5. Because believers together constitute the temple of the living God, they are not to be mismatched with unbelievers in the community at large (6.14-18).
  - a. This verse is often cited by those who claim that, because of their theology differing from that of another group in the Church, they must separate themselves from those with whom they disagree.
    - i. Paul, however, in speaking of unbelievers, is not speaking of members of the Body. He enjoins cleansing from defilement in terms of the Church cleansing herself from the world.
6. The readings for this week conclude in ch. 7, in which Paul reviews the mission of Titus. The facts of this mission are recalled to Paul's mind on the basis of what he has just said about reconciliation.

- a. It is Titus who has brought Paul news of the effect (in Corinth) of Paul's "sorrowful letter".