

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Read the Bible in a Year Challenge

Week 34

Monday	Isaiah 43-45	Psalm 39	2 Timothy 3
Tuesday	Isaiah 46-48	Psalm 40	2 Timothy 4
Wednesday	Isaiah 49-51	Psalm 41	Titus 1
Thursday	Isaiah 52-54	Psalm 42	Titus 2
Friday	Isaiah 55-57	Psalm 43	Titus 3
Saturday	Isaiah 58-60	Psalm 44	Philemon

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 Isaiah readings:

1. See the study summary for week 31 for an introduction to Isaiah. See the summary for week 33 for a discussion of the thematic elements in chs. 40-55 (“Second Isaiah”).
2. Prominent in this vein of Isaiah, in addition to the thematic elements discussed in the previous summary (week 33) are the Servant Songs.
 - a. The Servant Songs are four poems, conventionally identified as found at 42.1-7; 49.1-7; 50.4-9; and 52.13-53.12.
 - b. When these songs are studied in the context of the other servant passages found in Isa. 40-66 (*i.e.*, extending into the third section of Isaiah), the complexity of the identity and mission of the servant becomes evident.
 - i. The servant is one beloved and chosen by the LORD.
 - ii. The servant is redeemed by the LORD.
 1. The servant may be equated with Israel: 41.8; 43.10; 44.1,2, 21.
 2. The servant may be equated with Israel under the name of Jacob: 45.4; 48.20.
 3. The servant may be equated with the prophet and his disciples: 42.1; 49:3,6.
 - a. This identity of the servant may be as seen by other Israelites or foreigners: 50.10; 52.13; 53.11.
 - b. This identity of the servant may be as seen by the foreigner Cyrus: 44.26.
 - iii. The servant may also be depicted negatively:
 1. As the people, as deaf, blind and despoiled (42.19), the slave of kings (49.7), and burdened by sins (43.23).
 - iv. The servant may personify the LORD as burdened by the sins of His people (43.23 in a verbal phrase).
 - c. The servant is at times referred to in the plural. This may be a reference to all of Israel, or to the few faithful Israelites (*i.e.*, disciples of the prophet) who remain (54.17; 63.17; 65.6, 9, 14-15; 66.14), or even to foreigners who are called to minister in the Temple (56.6, as a verbal phrase).

- d. The mission of the servant is to be witnessed by Israel, with a new exodus inaugurated by Cyrus, king of Persia, as one anointed by God.
 - i. Suffering unites the servant with all of Israel, and separates him from the sinful (52.13-53.12).
 - ii. Once the servant is called “Israel” (49.3), and yet his mission reaches beyond Israel, to be a “light to the nations [gentiles]” (49.6).
 - 1. Finally, the servant may be those few who are a source of conversion to sinful Israel (63.17).
- e. As can be seen in the multivalency of the depictions of the servant, he can be equated as a type of the Christ, and the Church has always equated the positive identity of the servant with Jesus.

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 7 and 8.

The readings from Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy:

1. See the study summary for week 33 for discussion of the content of 2 Timothy.

The readings from Paul’s Letter to Titus:

1. See the study summary for week 32 for an introduction to the Pastoral Letters. The comments applied to 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy apply, as well, to Titus.
2. The greeting in Titus is disproportionately long, and probably serves as an introduction to the Pastoral Letters as a group.
 - a. Paul describes himself as a servant (or slave) of God. This common title from the Old Testament is limited in usage in the New Testament to individuals with a prophetic mission (Lk. 2.29; Rev. 1.1; Acts 4.29; 16.17).
 - b. Paul’s teaching is described as in continuity with the faith of those chosen by God.
 - c. In his charge to Titus, Paul describes a missionary visit to Crete (1.5). This is the only mention of such a visit, Acts 27.8-12 recording only a brief layover in the harbor at Fair Havens.
 - i. The qualities demanded in an elder may be compared with those described in 1 Tim.
3. The message in Titus is remarkably similar to that found in the other Pastoral Letters, including a similar focus on the danger of false teaching and false teachers.
 - a. Titus also focuses on the duties of church members within the household of God, but articulates the additional reason for these as being God’s saving action (2.11-14).
 - b. Titus differs from the other Pastoral Letters in an increased focus on the duties of the believer in society at large. The same reason (God’s saving action) applies.
 - i. Believers are to be good citizens (subject to the ruling authorities, 3.1).
 - ii. The reason stated uses the “now/then” formula as found at Rom. 6.17-18; 1 Cor. 6.9-11; Col. 3.7-8; and Eph. 2.1-10.

- iii. Titus is to avoid disputes with false teachers (3.9-11). In other words, he is to teach and preach the truth, but not to debate with those who teach falsely!

The readings from Paul's Letter to Philemon:

1. Philemon is the shortest book in the New Testament. This is a personal letter, written by Paul to a young, well-to-do, respected Christian living in the Lycus Valley in Asia Minor. (Philemon probably lived in Colossae. *See* the introduction to Colossians in week 30 for a description of the setting.)
2. The occasion of the letter is that the slave Onesimus has run away, and caused damage to his master (11, 18). Onesimus has come to Paul in prison, and Paul has been served by him.
 - a. The name Onesimus means "useful". Paul puns on this in describing how Onesimus has been useful to him.
 - b. Paul recognizes Philemon's right, and sends the slave back to him. The word used to describe Onesimus is *doulōs*, which can mean slave or servant, but the connotation is clearly of the former.
 - i. This letter was misused, therefore, in defense of new world slavery. This misses the point that Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon to be treated as a beloved brother in Christ.
 1. Paul makes clear to Philemon that he is not to inflict on Onesimus the penalties that the law would allow to him.
 2. Paul does not invoke his apostolic authority, but makes a personal plea to Philemon.
 - a. This private letter was included in the canon probably because of the pastoral concern expressed, and how Paul is not seen to challenge the social order.
 - ii. Onesimus was probably a Colossian (Col. 4.9). He is traditionally identified in the Eastern Church as having been named Bishop of Ephesus (*i.e.*, as a successor to Timothy) by Saint Ignatius of Antioch.
 1. If this was the same person (and this seems likely), then Onesimus was martyred *ca. A.D.* 68 under Domitian (in the persecution directed by Trajan).