

**GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

**Read the Bible in a Year Challenge**  
Week 37

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<b>Monday</b>	Jeremiah 31-33	Psalm 57	Hebrews 13
<b>Tuesday</b>	Jeremiah 34-35	Psalm 58	James 1
<b>Wednesday</b>	Jeremiah 36-38	Psalm 59	James 2
<b>Thursday</b>	Jeremiah 39-41	Psalm 60	James 3
<b>Friday</b>	Jeremiah 42-43	Psalm 61	James 4
<b>Saturday</b>	Jeremiah 44-45	Psalm 62	James 5

**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 Jeremiah readings:**

1. See the study summary for week 35 for an introduction to Jeremiah.
2. Ch. 31 begins with an oracle of the restoration of Israel, with the process to begin in the north.
  - a. The triumphal march of the exiles returning through the desert is to be a cause of great joy both to the repatriates and to foreigners.
    - i. The theme is one of a new exodus.
    - ii. The captives return from Assyria, described in v. 8 as the “north country”.
  - b. The northern kingdom is personified as Rachel (*cf.* Gen. 30.24; 35.16ff.)
  - c. It is in this context of return, and of the then novel idea of personal (as opposed to collective) responsibility (31.29.30) that the prophet speaks of a “new covenant” (31.31-34), in a passage that is justly famous for referring to the covenant being written on “hearts” as opposed to stone.
    - i. The heart as writing material is a Jeremian creation (*cf.* 17.1, *but compare also* Deut. 6.6; 11.18; 30.14).
3. Chs. 32-33 refer to the restoration of Judah (the southern kingdom). The oracle is centered on an event in the prophet’s life, as an example of “acted prophecy”.
  - a. The prophet purchases land under occupation, as an oracle of the future restoration of the land.
  - b. This section contains the first mention of Baruch, the prophet’s friend and secretary.
  - c. Three incidents (chs. 34-35) are related from Baruch’s memoirs, as the conclusion to the description of restoration. The prophet speaks of the conditions necessary to restoration.
4. The balance of the readings this week (chs. 36-45) comprise an homogenous narrative of the martyrdom of the prophet. Where his prophecy had once been recognized and vindicated, he is now progressively rejected.
  - a. The uniformity in style in this section is attributed to it having been recorded by Baruch.
    - i. The progression narrated includes:

1. The reading of a scroll of the prophet's oracles in the Temple (ch. 36). The scroll contained the prophets oracles against Jerusalem, of downfall to Babylon.
2. The encounters between Jeremiah and King Zedekiah (ch. 37). These encounters include Jeremiah's imprisonment in a cistern.
3. The fall of Jerusalem (chs. 38 and 39).
4. The prophet after the fall (chs. 40 and 41).
  - a. Pilgrims from the cultic centers in the north come to the ruins of the Temple to present offerings, and are slaughtered (41.4-10).
    - i. Mourning rites continued throughout the exile in the ruins of Jerusalem and of the Temple (Lam. 1 Isa. 63.7-64.12).
5. The prophet warns against flight to Egypt (the assassinations in chs. 40 and 41 would have been viewed in Babylon as rebellion), and is forcibly carried there. There he issues an oracle against the nations, and denounces the persistent idolatry of the people.

**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 10 and 11.

#### **The readings from The Letter to the Hebrews:**

1. See the summary for week 35 for an introduction to Hebrews.
2. The final chapter in Hebrews is on of exhortations, blessing and greetings.
  - a. Cf. Gen. 18.1-8 for a prefiguring of what is described in v. 2
  - b. The exhortations are to purity of life.
  - c. The former leaders in the community, whose faith is to be imitated, have died, but Jesus Christ remains high priest forever.
  - d. The references to not being led astray by "foods" (v. 9) are not clear, but most likely refer to ascetical practices that may presage early Gnosticism.
    - i. The following references to being inside and outside the "tent" (tabernacle) can be considered as polemic against the temptation to return to the Temple cult.
  - e. V. 20 contains the only explicit reference in Hebrews to the resurrection.

#### **The readings from the Letter to the James:**

1. The letter of James is thought to have been written by James, the brother of the Lord, and the head of the Church in Jerusalem.
  - a. A minority of scholars believe the letter to have been written by James, son of Alphaeus.
  - b. Regardless, the apostolic origin of the letter has never been questioned. The letter is dated to about the sixth decade of the first century, *i.e.*, about thirty years after the death of Jesus and roughly contemporaneous with the writing of the Gospel of Mark.
    - i. The entire letter is written as a sermon, a series of exhortations.
  - c. James represents the "Jewish Church" in Jerusalem, in distinction from the Gentile Church arising first from the mission work of Peter, and then particularly from the missionary efforts of Paul and Barnabas.

- i. James (unlike Paul) makes no distinction between Law and Gospel.
  - ii. He speaks of the “perfect law of liberty” (v. 25), and equates law with the word of God.
    - 1. This is a parallel to the concept of Law set forth by Jesus at Matt. 5.17.
  - iii. To label James as a legalist is thus most misguided.
    - 1. His focus on law is a focus on conduct for the common good, of a lively faith being expressed in acts.
  
- 2. James is written as a sermon, as a long series of exhortations. Most of these exhortations are brief, and they are not necessarily connected thematically.
  - a. Notwithstanding this “loose” organization, the letter is connected by the common emphases that the faith of its recipients not be theoretical or abstract, but a faith translated into action, implemented in every part of their lives.
  - b. The recipients would seem to be a group of Jewish-Christian communities outside of Palestine, but living in an area where James (*i.e.*, the church in Jerusalem) would have had authority.
  - c. The letter likely dates from the 60’s of the first century, *i.e.*, after Paul’s teaching on faith and works but before the destruction of the Temple in *A.D.* 70.
    - i. If this dating is correct, the letter was probably written from Jerusalem. If a later date is allowed, the letter may have been written from Antioch or Alexandria.
  
- 3. The letter may be outlined as follows:
  - a. Greeting and opening exhortation: 1.1-18:
    - i. Believers may experience joy in suffering: 1.2-4.
    - ii. Believers must not waver in praying for wisdom: 1.5-8.
    - iii. The attitudes of lowly and rich are contrasted: 1.9-11.
    - iv. Endurance produces triumph: 1.12.
    - v. The origins of sin and death: 1.13-15.
  - b. An active faith (“doers of the word”): 1.19-27.
  - c. The dangers of partiality: 2.1-13:
    - i. The principal, example, and arguments.
  - d. Faith without works is dead: 2.14-26.
    - i. Thesis and argument; examples.
  - e. The dangers of intemperate speech: 3.1-12.
  - f. The qualities of wisdom: 3.13-18.
  - g. Causes of strife in the community; remedies: 4.1-12.
  - h. Boasting about tomorrow: 4.13-17.
  - i. Warnings to rich oppressors: 5.1-6.
  - j. Awaiting the coming of the Lord with patience: 5.7-11.
  - k. The prayer of faith and reliance upon faith: 5.12-20.