

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Read the Bible in a Year Challenge

Week 41

Monday	Ezekiel 23-24	Psalm 80	Revelation 3
Tuesday	Ezekiel 25-26	Psalm 81	Revelation 4
Wednesday	Ezekiel 27-28	Psalm 82	Revelation 5
Thursday	Ezekiel 29-30	Psalm 83	Revelation 6
Friday	Ezekiel 31-32	Psalm 84	Revelation 7
Saturday	Ezekiel 33-34	Psalm 85	Revelation 8

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.
 - a. Chs. 23-24 were included in the week 40 summary, as part of the discussion of a unit of the prophet's text.
2. Chs. 25-32 are comprised of a series of oracles against foreign nations. These form the middle section of a tripartite arrangement of oracles in Ezekiel, in which chs. 1-24 are oracles of judgment that relate particularly to Israel, 25-32 relating to foreign nations, with chs. 33-39 being oracles of restoration of Israel.
 - a. The balance of Ezekiel follows his description of the restoration of Israel to come. Chs. 40-48 include visions of the new temple and the new cult of the LORD.
3. The words uttered against Ammon, Moab, Edom, Tyre and Sidon must be viewed against the record found at Jer. 27.3, of these cities conspiring with Judah to revolt against Nebuchadnezzar. The first three named, together with Philistia, took advantage of Judah's defeat in 586 to despoil her (switching to become sudden allies of Babylon). *Compare* 2 Kgs. 24 for further historical detail.
 - a. The oracles form words of assurance of future well-being, composed after the defeat of Jerusalem.
4. Chs. 26-28 include oracles directed against Tyre, using the imagery of the sea and of a siege. The great city is compared to a fully laden cargo ship, pride of the fleet, which is wrecked.
 - a. The oracle is stated in the form of a lament over the fall of the mighty, but its tone is mocking and sarcastic.
 - b. The oracle against Tyre is followed by a short oracle against her fellow leading city of Phoenicia, Sidon.
5. At chs. 29-32 the focus shifts to Egypt. Of the seven oracles stated, all but one is dated, with the date range including 587 to 585 B.C. (A single reference at 29.17 is to an event in 571.)

- a. The oracles respond to specific historical event, centered around the attempted intervention into Judah by the new pharaoh, Hophra. Hophra not only incited Zedekiah to revolt against Babylon, but sent an army in 587 to attack the Babylonian army. The Egyptians were defeated handily.
 - i. The prophet condemns, therefore, the hubris of pharaoh. The reference to the arm of pharaoh being broken (30.20-26) is one to the defeat of his army.
 - b. The final oracle (32.17-32) against Egypt is cast in the form of a lament over a hero who must descend to Sheol. It continues the theme that downfall is occasioned by pharaoh's false pride.
6. At ch. 33 the third section of oracles begins, those of restoration. The chapter serves as a turning point in the prophet's mission.
- a. The original commission given to the prophet in ch. 3 is paralleled and changed by the recurrent themes of watchman (vv. 1-9) and of individual responsibility (vv. 10-20).
 - b. The third section (vv. 21-33) also links to the commission found at 3.22-27. The prophet is to confront the exiles.
7. Ch. 34 introduces the image of the good shepherd. The bad rulers who have shepherded Israel badly are denounced (vv. 1-10), and God's plan to shepherd the sheep Himself, and to appoint a new David over the people, is announced (vv. 11-31).
- a. The reference to a ruler as shepherd is ancient, dating back to Sumer in the third millennium B.C. *Compare* Jer. 2.8; 10.21; 25-34-36; Zech. 11.4-17.
 - i. The lost, wounded, and strayed sheep are Israel.
 - b. The tradition of God as shepherd is not one which arises first in Ezekiel. It is older. *See, e.g.,* Ps. 23; Isa. 40.11; Jer. 31.10. *Compare* John 10.1-18.
 - i. God as shepherd not only reverses the bad done by evil rulers, but also acts as provider and as the defender of justice and upholder of the weak.
 - 1. The flock, however, has both good and bad sheep, and these must be separated. Jesus' judgment upon the nations, found at Mtt. 25.31-46, may depend on this passage in Ezekiel.
 - c. The establishment of a Davidic king looks ahead to 37.24-28 (the people restored). David will not be brought back from the dead, but a king from his dynasty will be chosen according to the divine promise found at 2 Sam. 7.
 - i. Upon this restoration, Israel will prosper under the covenant as envisioned at Lev. 26.3-12 and Jer. 33.14-33.

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 14 and 15.

The Revelation to John (The Apocalypse):

- 1. *See* the study summary for week 40 for an introduction to Revelation. Note particularly the discussion of how symbolism is used in apocalyptic literature.
 - a. Ch. 3 is discussed in the summary for week 40.

- b. It is most important to understand that the visions described in Revelation are visions which are intended to be conveyed to the seven churches addressed in chs. 2-3. John is to relate to *these churches* what he sees, *i.e.*, the message relates to the admonitions found in chs. 2-3. This understanding of Revelation is reflected, in fact, in the collect prayed on All Saints’:

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

- 2. The balance of the readings this week (chs. 4-8) include the scroll with seven seals (4.1-8.5) and the vision of trumpets (8.2-12).
 - a. These visions are included in the first part of the revelatory experience, which extends to 11.19.
- 3. 4.1-5.14 comprise *Visions of the Heavenly Court: The One Enthroned and the Lamb*: Just as John knows the situation of the seven churches in Asia, simultaneously he sees what is happening in heaven as part of his understanding of “what must take place after this”.
 - a. Earth and heaven are interwoven in one reality.
 - b. The imagery of precious gems (as opposed to anthropomorphic features) is used to describe God, following the epiphany imagery found at Ezek. 1.26-28.
 - i. The imagery of the four living creatures echoes that of the cherubim found at Ezek. 1.4-13; 10.18-22.
 - ii. The 24 elders may represent two groups of 12, the old and the new Israel. This number is not otherwise found in apocalyptic literature.
 - iii. The hymn of praise echoes the threefold “Holy” of the seraphim, found at Isa. 6.3.
 - c. The vision of the Lamb in ch. 5 follows. The Lamb opens the scroll with seven seals. The Lamb stands as though slain, but in this posture is identified with the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, who has conquered.
 - i. A hymn is sung to Jesus as the victorious Davidic Messiah, including a refrain reference to worthiness, in language that is similar to the hymn to God recorded in ch. 4.
 - 1. God and the Lamb are placed on the same plane, with one hailed as creator and one as redeemer.
- 4. *Seven Seals* (ch. 6.1-8.1): The Lamb opens the first four seals (6.1-8)—four different colored horses which are ridden by the (infamous) four horsemen of the Apocalypse (conquest, bloody strife, famine, and pestilence).
 - a. The colored horse imagery echoes Zech. 1.8-11; 6.1-7.
 - b. The description of the horsemen, and the description of disasters, may have been shaped by contemporary circumstances, *e.g.*, the attacks by Parthian horsemen (armed with bow—*see* Rev. 6.2) upon the empire.
 - c. The fifth seal (6.9-11) depicts souls of martyrs (perhaps those killed under the persecution of Nero in the 60’s) under the heavenly altar, as a counterpart to the Jerusalem Temple altar of holocausts (*cf.* 11.1).
 - d. The sixth seal (6.12-17) describes cosmic disturbances as part of God’s judgment. Despite the efforts of many to see these images in contemporary events (throughout history), it is

important that these images not be taken literally. They represent traditional imagery found repeatedly in apocalyptic literature.

5. The description of the seventh seal is postponed to ch. 8, with ch. 7 serving as an interlude, a vision in which angels who hold back the four winds (an image found in the deuterocanonical apocalyptic *I Enoch* 76) are instructed not to wreak harm until God's servant are sealed on their foreheads to indicate that they belong to God.
 - a. The imagery recalls, in part, the Passover of the Hebrews from the final plague in Egypt.
 - b. A distinction is made between 144,000 (12,000 from each tribe of Israel) and an innumerable multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue.
 - i. The former group may be the first fruits of martyrdom (*cf.* 14.1-5).
 - ii. The symbolism of the two groups is unclear, but may relate to the Church on earth and in heaven.
 - c. The chapter closes with a description of the peace of the presence of God.
6. When the seventh seal is opened (8.1), it follows that now the scroll can be read, and the judgment of the world revealed. However, a further puzzle is revealed. At 8.2 there begins a vision involving seven angels with seven trumpets (this will extend to 11.19).
 - a. The trumpet blasts follow period of silence. There follows a "liturgical" sequence (8.3-5) involving the offering of incense and prayer being accompanied by thunder, lightning, and earthquake.
 - b. The seven trumpets are grouped as were the seven seals, in an initial group of four (hail, sea turned to blood, a star called "Wormwood," and a darkening of the heavenly bodies).
 - i. The imagery is that found in the plagues of Egypt, described in Exodus.
 1. In the Exodus account, the plagues prepared for the deliverance of God's people. The plagues described in Revelation prepare for the deliverance of God's chosen (who have been sealed, as in Exodus).
 - c. Whereas at 4.8 the four living creatures cried out triple "Holy," at 8.13 the eagle cries out a triple woe. These woes anticipate the last three trumpet blasts, those of judgment.