

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Read the Bible in a Year Challenge

Week 43

Monday	Ezekiel 47-48	Psalm 91	Revelation 15
Tuesday	Daniel 1-2	Psalm 92	Revelation 16
Wednesday	Daniel 3-4	Psalm 93	Revelation 17
Thursday	Daniel 5-6	Psalm 94	Revelation 18
Friday	Daniel 7-8	Psalm 95	Revelation 19
Saturday	Daniel 9-10	Psalm 96	Revelation 20

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. *See* the introduction to the third major section of Ezekiel (oracles of restoration, which begin at ch. 33) found in the summary for week 41.
2. Chs. 47-48 are probably an appendix, for the prophet neither speaks in the first person nor is addressed by God. The address is to “you” (plural), to Israel as a whole.
 - a. The end of Ezekiel deals with boundaries and distribution in the restored land.
 - b. The final vision relates not to the land as a whole, but to the holy city of Jerusalem.
 - i. The recurrence of the number 12 is related to the twelve tribes. Just as each tribe received an allotment of the land, so it is assigned a gate in the city.
 1. The 12 tribes listed are different, however, in 48.1-29 and 48.30-35. This probably indicates the presence of different traditions attached to each other.
 - ii. The new name of the city is a pun in Hebrew on the name of Jerusalem. The similar sounding name means “The LORD is there.” The glory of God that had departed has now returned.

The readings from Daniel:

1. Daniel is named not for its author but for its protagonist, who is depicted living during the reigns of the last kings of Babylon, and the early Medean and Persian successors. The name Daniel means “my judge is God”.
 - a. The book as received (there is evidence of much textual variation) can be roughly divided into two parts:
 - i. Chs. 1-6 contain six stories in which the faithfulness of Daniel is held up as an example.
 - ii. Chs. 7-12 contain four visions, in which Daniel is a seer who sees four successive kingdoms in which the Jews live from the time of the fall of Jerusalem until God restores His people.

- c. Daniel's companions only play a central role in the story of the fiery furnace (3.1-97). Otherwise they are minor characters in the food test, or not mentioned at all.
 - d. The lesson of the food test (1.1-21) would have been clear to the Jews who Antiochus Epiphanes IV tried to force to eat pork.
 - e. The story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue (2.1-49) demonstrates the superiority of the wisdom of God, and also contains an apocalyptic vision.
 - i. The statue of four metals parallels the four beasts (kingdoms) found in chs. 7-12.
 - 1. God's will prevails for His faithful, even under persecution.
 - f. The story of the fiery furnace (3.1-97) is only loosely connected with the other elements in the book. The three companions of Daniel are identified using Babylonian names.
 - i. Jewish martyrs under Antiochus Epiphanes IV were sometimes burned to death, an otherwise rare form of execution in the ancient world.
 - g. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great tree (3.98-4.34) is written in the form of an encyclical letter from Nebuchadnezzar, but the narrative breaks to speak of the king in the third person (while he is mad).
 - i. As in the dream of the composite statue, no one but Daniel can interpret the king's dream. This dream concerns not the future but the king's immediate fate. God humbles the proud. To Him alone belongs all glory.
 - h. Belshazzar's feast, and the writing on the wall (5.1-6.1) involves the solving of a riddle, not a vision in a dream, but writing on the wall.
 - i. The king (a different king) does not repent, and his doom is sure. God punishes those who do not glorify Him, but worship idols.
 - ii. Like Belshazzar, Antiochus Epiphanes IV had also profaned the sacred vessels of the Temple (2 Macc. 5.16; 1 Macc. 4.49).
 - i. Daniel in the lion's den (6.2-29) is one of the best known stories in the Bible. The essence of the story is the readiness of a faithful Jew to suffer martyrdom rather than to give up his faith.
4. *Daniel's apocalyptic visions* (chs. 7-12) include four visions. Each forms a distinct unit, with only loose connection to the other visions. The apocalypse in ch. 7 is written in Aramaic; the remaining apocalypses are written in Hebrew.
- a. The first two apocalypses consist of symbolic visions which are explained by an angel. The second two are direct revelations made by an angel without symbolic visions.
 - i. Events from the past are presented as though they are about to happen.
 - 1. Thus, the prediction that the pagan kingdom so hostile to Israel (at the time of writing) will fall is seen as vindicated. God's reign shall be established.
 - b. The four beasts (7.1-28) represent the four successive pagan empires of Babylon, the Medes, the Persians, and the Seleucid Greeks.
 - i. Numerical symbolism is prominent (10 horns = 10 kings), with the message being clear: When the "little horn" (Antiochus Epiphanes IV) is broken, God's kingdom will be established.
 - c. The ram and the he-goat (8.1-27) includes symbolism which is explained by the angel.
 - d. The seventy weeks (9.1-27) is a direct revelation made by the angel Gabriel. It is an answer to Daniels' prayer over why Jeremiah's prophecy of a restoration of Israel after 70 years has not been fulfilled at the time of writing.
 - e. The Hellenistic wars (10-1.12-13) are described in the longest and most elaborate apocalypse in Daniel. Ch. 10 consists of an introduction to the revelation, following which an angel (here unnamed) gives an account of the history of the Seleucid dynasty and of its coming doom.

- i. The historical detail for this account can be compared with the details of the contemporary wars found in 1 & 2 Maccabees.

5. Chs. 13 and 14 are not found in most bibles, except as separate books in the apocrypha. (In Roman Catholic bibles, such as the New American Bible and the Jerusalem Bible, these chapters are included in Daniel.) Only Greek texts exist, although they betray evidence of having been translated from Aramaic. The stories are haggadic folk tales.

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 17 and 18.

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.
2. Ch. 15 continues the second cycle of visions. A vision of seven bowls is described (15.1-19.10).
 - a. A separate vision of conquerors before the eternal throne is found at 15.2-4.
 - b. Whereas persecution was the dominant theme in the previous cycle of visions (12.1-15.4), now the theme of divine judgment upon the earth and the wicked obtains. This elaborates the judgments announced by the three angels at 14.6-13, clarifying the fall of “Babylon” (Rome) announced at 14.8.
 - c. The seven bowls series recapitulates the series of seven seals and of seven trumpets. In each case the subject matter is the same (*i.e.*, the events of the end of time), here described from a different perspective.
 - i. The themes of justice and vindication are prominent (*cf.* the seven seals).
 - ii. As seen in the seven trumpets, motifs from Exodus and images from natural phenomena are present.
 1. The bowls differ from the trumpets in specifying who the adversaries of God are.
 2. The type of bowl described is the type used in Temple offerings.
 3. The first four bowls are associated with natural elements: earth, the sea, the fresh waters, and the sun. These elements (with the sun as a heavenly body) make up the traditional Jewish cosmology.
 4. The changes in elements echo the plagues of Egypt (*e.g.*, the Nile turned to blood) found in Exodus.
 - a. As God delivered the Hebrews from Egypt, so will He deliver the faithful from the power of Rome.
 - iii. The last three bowls (16.10-21) reflect historical and political connotations.
 1. The dragon (Satan) had given the beast (Rome and the emperor) power and authority (*cf.* 13.2). Now, echoing the ninth Egyptian plague (Exod. 10.21-29), darkness and pain descend on this realm.
 2. The second bowl refers to the Euphrates, like the sixth trumpet (9.13-21). There the angels were unbound, and military and demonic imagery of vengeance dominated. This is repeated in a more explicit form, referring to

war in the East.

3. The nature and fall of “Babylon” is elaborated at 17.1-19.10. Judgment is described upon the beast, its followers, and Babylon. Revelation repeats three themes of persecution, judgment, and salvation.
 - a. Here an angel interprets the visions for John. (Cf. Dan. 7.16 and Zech. 1.9 for examples of angelic interpreters.)
 - i. The great prostitute (Babylon) signifies not only the city of Rome, but what Rome stands for, as the goddess Roma who claims dominion over all the earth, and who uses violence in enforcing Roman sovereignty over believers. This claim and enforcement, combined with inequities in the Roman economic system, manifest that Rome’s claims to divinity and eternity are misplaced.
 1. The reference to “many waters” is an historical reference to Babylon (in Mesopotamia).
 2. The color of the beast links this image with the dragon described in ch. 12. The blasphemous names link it with the beast in ch. 13.
 3. The inscription on the woman’s forehead (17.5) echoes the practice of Roman prostitutes being tattooed on their foreheads.
 - ii. The beast is a counterfeit image of God (*cf.* 1.8 and 13.3). The antichrist is modeled on Nero.
 1. Nero was (he ruled Rome); he is not (he is dead); and he will be (he will return from the underworld to regain power). This reflects the fact that when Nero realized he could no longer rule, he contemplated fleeing to Parthia (Suetonius, *Nero* 47). After his death a legend arose in Rome that he would return with Parthian allies (*i.e.*, horsemen from the East).
 - a. This Roman legend of “Nero revivendus” included Nero and his eastern allies destroying Rome and reestablishing eastern hegemony over the Mediterranean world.
 - b. Babylon is to be destroyed with her merchant systems (18.1-24). There follows rejoicing in heaven (19.1-10).
 - i. Upon this rejoicing the last series of visions (of last things, 19.11-22.5) commences.
 1. 19.11-16 describes the second coming of Christ. Jesus is exalted as the judge of the world. Jesus is referred to as “the Word of God” (*cf.* John 1.1).
 2. Christ’s epiphany as triumphant judge leads to an invitation to the heavenly banquet for the blessed (19.17-18).
 - a. The banquet involves heavenly, sacrificial slaughter, echoing visions at Ezek. 39.17-20 and Isa. 34.1-7.
 3. The final battle (19.19-21) precedes the millennial reign of Christ. This event is hinted at by the fifth and sixth trumpets.
 - a. The beast (the false prophet) is consigned to a place of eternal punishment.