

**GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

**Read the Bible in a Year Challenge**

Week 35

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| <b>Monday</b>    | Isaiah 61-63   | Psalm 45 | Hebrews 1 |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | Isaiah 64-66   | Psalm 46 | Hebrews 2 |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Jeremiah 1-3   | Psalm 47 | Hebrews 3 |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Jeremiah 4-6   | Psalm 48 | Hebrews 4 |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Jeremiah 7-9   | Psalm 49 | Hebrews 5 |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Jeremiah 10-12 | Psalm 50 | Hebrews 6 |

**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 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”), and the summary for week 34 for a discussion of the figure of the servant.
2. The closing chapters are part of a unit thought of as a “Third Isaiah” (chs. 56-66), in which the overall message relates to the struggle to establish a new Temple and new leadership. At ch. 60 a subunit concerned with the oracle of a glorious new Zion begins.
  - a. The opening verse of Isaiah 61 is quoted by Jesus in His announcement that the messianic era has come (Luke 4.16-21). In Isaiah’s immediate context, the reference is to the prophet being anointed to speak God’s message of peace to His people.
  - b. The prophet, thus anointed, sings of Zion emerging from her ashes. This process of emergence is accompanied by lament.
3. To pray in the devastated Jerusalem (ch. 64) was a protestation against despair, a recognition of God’s redeeming power.
  - a. A personal appearance of God (a “theophany”) is prayed for.
  - b. God is to manifest Himself in fire (*cf.* Exod. 19.18), here symbolic of divine anger (42.25).
  - c. Characteristically for a prophet, Isaiah calls for justice.
    - i. The prophet laments that the LORD has abandoned Israel to her sins, and the people have become unclean.
      1. “[F]ilthy cloth” in v. 5 connotes ritual uncleanness. *Cf.* Lev. 15.19-24.
    - ii. And yet despite this feeling of abandonment, the prophet implores God: “[Y]ou are our Father ... Now consider, we are all your people” (vv. 8-9).
      1. In Hebrew the words “you” and “now” play off each other phonetically throughout the passage, as a prayer acknowledging God’s prayed-for presence as real already.
4. The oracle progresses beyond lament to one of establishment of the new Temple. The prophet is focused on spiritual worship as opposed to formalism, and it is in this context that the ending of

Isaiah, on a note of inclusion of foreigners in Temple worship, must be seen as an oracle of the fulfillment of the messianic identity of Israel.

### The Jeremiah readings:

1. Jeremiah must be read in the context of his having lived during a period of turmoil throughout the ancient Near East, including the fall of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of Babylon.
  - a. Judah, the southern kingdom, was a vassal state of Assyria, and this status brought about a resurgence of idolatry and syncretism. The cult of the LORD was cleansed under Josiah (640-609 B.C.), but the rise of Babylon led to further backsliding under threat.
  - b. It was in the midst of widespread international political convulsions that the prophet received his call from the LORD.
    - i. The prophet's ministry lasted near to 40 years (*cf.* 1.1-3), and his book records his numerous interventions in public life.
      1. The first part of the prophet's ministry was from the year of his call (*ca.* 627) to the reforms under Josiah (*ca.* 621; *see* 11.1-4 for the prophet's reaction to the king's actions). The oracles of these years are summarized in chs. 1-6.
      2. Upon the accession of Jehoiakim the land returned to idolatry, and the second phase of Jeremiah's mission began.
        - a. In 605 Babylon defeated Egypt, and the prophet now knew who would invade. His oracles of this period (chs. 7-20) speak of downfall due to idolatry and apostasy.
2. The text of Jeremiah is problematical in provenance. Much of the text is disputed, with scholars arguing for different sources. Nonetheless, a Jeremian core exists in all sections, and for purposes of study it is useful to think of the text as originating in the prophet.
  - a. There is a large number of doublets (repetitions, out of order) in the text, indicating a series of revisions and editing.
  - b. The Greek (*Septuagint*, or LXX) version of the text is about one-eighth shorter than the Hebrew (Masoretic) text, and in a different order. The LXX cannot really be understood as an abbreviation. Available evidence (*e.g.*, from fragments of Jeremiah found in the Dead Sea Scrolls) points to the LXX version being older.
3. The chapters encountered this week may be outlined as follows:
  - a. The Prophet's Call, and Oracles against Judah and Jerusalem: 1.4-25.13b.
    - i. The call, dialogue and visions: 1.4-1.16.
    - ii. Oracles under Josiah: 2.1-6.30.
      1. A lawsuit against Israel: 2.1-37.
      2. The apostate must return: 31.-4.2.
      3. The evil in Judah is paired with the evil of war: 4.3-6.30.
    - iii. Ministry under Jehoiakim: 7.1-20.18.
      1. The false covenant: 7.1-10.25.
        - a. Oracles concerning the Temple: 7.1-8.3.
        - b. Sayings concerning what is old and what is new" 8.4-10.25.
      2. The broken covenant: 11.1-13.27.
        - a. The prophet's relation to the covenant, and the plot against the prophet: 11.1-12.17.

4. The prophet has a personal dialogue with the LORD in which he is informed of his call, and of how God has formed him for this. In response to this Jeremiah preaches for reform of the cult, using the figure of God bring a charge (a lawsuit) against His people. Judah must be punished for her sins, and this punishment will be effected by foreign invasion.
5. In speaking of the Temple and the cult the prophet is focused on how the true worship of God has been polluted by the toleration of foreign practices and deities, *e.g.*, of the fertility goddess Astarte.
  - a. Jeremiah inveighs against the practice of making open-air offerings, for Astarte was an astral goddess, and thus offerings were made on open terraces.
  - b. In speaking of what is old and what is new, Jeremiah introduces the figure of the vineyard (8.13-17). The fruitlessness of the vine is an image that will recur throughout Scripture.
  - c. Jeremiah focuses on faithfulness (and thus fruitfulness) being the result of fidelity to the covenant. By reason of his call to cultic purity, plots are made against his life.

**The psalms: N.B.** *In The Bible Challenge the Psalter is read twice (once in each half year). In reviewing the Psalter a second time, the study summaries will not necessarily be identical. 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 8 and 9.

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

1. Hebrews was probably written in the period of *A.D.* mid-60's-80's, with a later date being more probable. The author is unknown. The traditional ascription of the letter to Paul was questioned as early as the second century, and no scholar would now assign this work to Paul.
  - a. The letter is written in a style, and including thematic elements, that point toward the author being a Hellenistic Jewish Christian. Where this person wrote from is not clear, although greetings are included in the letter from those "in Italy".
  - b. The letter is written to unknown addressees. Content would indicate the addressees to be Christians who are attracted to the Jewish cult, possibly in Jerusalem, more likely in Rome.
    - i. Note that this analysis is contrary to a common misperception of Hebrews as being a polemic addressed to Jews who question the Christian faith. The opposite is more nearly true. The letter is an apology for the Christian faith as a successor to Judaism to those who would be tempted to "go back to the source".
  - c. The letter reflects a Middle Platonic philosophical worldview, of a contrast between heavenly and earthly realities, with linguistic parallels to the writings of the Alexandrian philosopher Philo. Nonetheless, no one would argue Philo to be the author; it is that the letter was written in the same thought milieu.
    - i. A minority (including Martin Luther) would argue the author to be Apollos, given the identity of the author as a Hellenist with literary talent and a familiarity with Greek rhetoric.
  - d. The letter is a theological treatise, but not theology stated for its own sake. Rather, the purpose of the author is to ward off apostasy (a danger he sees as real in his addressees).
2. The readings encountered this week may be outlined as follows:
  - a. Introduction: 1.1-4.
  - b. The Son is superior to the angels: 1.5-2.18.
    - i. The Son is enthroned in heaven: 1.5-14.

- ii. Believers are to be faithful to the Son: 2.1-4.
  - iii. Jesus was exalted in His abasement: 2.5-18.
- c. Jesus is the perfect—the merciful and faith—high priest: 3.1-5.10.
  - i. Jesus, as the faithful Son, is superior to Moses, the lawgiver: 3.1-6.
  - ii. Believers must be warned by the example of Israel's infidelity: 3.7-4.13.
  - iii. Jesus is the merciful intercessor: 4.14-5.10.
- d. Jesus' priesthood and His sacrifice are eternal: 5.11-10.39.
  - i. Believers are exhorted to spiritual renewal: 5.11-6.20.