

**GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

**Read the Bible in a Year Challenge**

Week 39

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<b>Monday</b>	Lamentations 5	Psalm 69	2 Peter 2
<b>Tuesday</b>	Ezekiel 1-2	Psalm 70	2 Peter 3
<b>Wednesday</b>	Ezekiel 3-4	Psalm 71	1 John 1
<b>Thursday</b>	Ezekiel 5-6	Psalm 72	1 John 2
<b>Friday</b>	Ezekiel 7-8	Psalm 73	1 John 3
<b>Saturday</b>	Ezekiel 9-10	Psalm 74	1 John 4

**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 readings from Lamentations:**

1. See the study summary for week 38 for an introduction to Lamentations.
2. Ch. 5 is the prayer of the people. This chapter stands apart from the balance of the book.
  - a. The literary structure displays more poetic parallelism.
  - b. The meter is different (3 + 3), and although it also has 22 lines, it is not an acrostic.
  - c. The chapter is a prayer, and in the *Vulgate* (Latin translation of the *Septuagint*) it is referred to as “The Prayer of Jeremiah,” as a separate work.
  - d. The community now prays in its own name. When God sees and considers (*cf.* 1.9c, 11c, 20 a; 2.20) there is deliverance (Exod. 2.24; 3.7).
  - e. The prayer (and book) ends with a prayer that the people may repent.

**The readings from Ezekiel:**

1. Ezekiel preached at the worst of times, and the most decisive times in the history of ancient Israel. His writings combine prophetic oracles with legal reflections, detailed historical descriptions, mythological allusions, reflection, visions, sermonizing, and drama. The text is unified, leading to consensus that one person was involved in its composition.
2. Ezekiel’s ministry was exercised during the last days of Judah as an independent state. Ezekiel began his ministry in 593 B.C. among the Judean exiles in Babylon. The date of his latest writing is 571, but no information of his age, or how long he lived, is available.
  - a. It is likely that Ezekiel was among the 8,000 captives brought to Babylon from Jerusalem in 598 (*cf.* 2 Kgs. 24.16).
  - b. The content of his preaching indicates that the majority of his ministry occurred between 593 and 586, during the reign of Zedekiah as a Babylonian puppet, and during the period of devastation that followed the second and final fall (and destruction) of Jerusalem in 586.
    - i. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel resisted the policies of Zedekiah (which led to rebellion). He opposed attempts to overthrow Babylonian control (which he viewed as a chastisement from God), proposing instead a concept of Israel as a faithful,

theocentric community focused on the relationship with the LORD as independent of any political situation.

3. The style of Ezekiel is distinctive. Unique expressions which recur include: “son of man” (which will become prominent in Jesus’ mouth, particularly in Mark’s gospel); “so that you will know that I am the LORD”; “set your face against”; and “I the LORD have spoken”.
  - a. Ezekiel’s oracles are more verbose and repetitive than those of earlier prophets. He employs extensive allegories and imagery. The style of writing betrays its original oral form.
  - b. Ezekiel bears affinity with Jeremiah. The biographical and autobiographical passages found at Jer. 21-45 include many expressions that are repeated in Ezekiel.
  - c. Ezekiel is also concerned with legal and priestly matters, and his speech includes numerous allusions to the “holiness Code” found at Lev. 17-26.
  
4. Ezekiel’s theology is prophetic, *i.e.*, that God punishes infidelity to the covenant by political disaster (*compare* Isa. 10; Jer. 4-6; Ezek. 17). He describes violations of the covenant in terms of adultery and prostitution (*compare* Hos. 2; Jer. 2; Ezek. 16; 23).
  - a. Where Ezekiel differs from the other classical prophets is in his emphasis on and development of the themes of:
    - i. God’s lordship over all nations: This is seen in the prophet’s repeated use of the formula “so that they will know that I am the LORD”.
    - ii. The transcendent holiness of God: Stress is laid on the distance between humanity’s hopes and actions and the divine will. Rather than refer to the “Holy One” (as would Isaiah), Ezekiel lays emphasis on God’s “Name” (20.39; 36.20; 43.7).
      1. To disobey God is to profane His Name.
    - iii. The offenses in public and private life that Ezekiel takes greatest exception to are more cultic than moral, including profaning the sabbath (20.12, 24) and worshipping on high places (*i.e.*, idolatry, *see, e.g.*, 6.13; 20.28).
    - iv. While Ezekiel certainly takes sin seriously, and proclaims the possibility of repentance, his emphasis is on God’s mercy. The LORD does not act on the basis of repentance, but out of His own prior holiness and covenant love (16.53, 60-61; 20.40-44; 34.11; 37.1-14).
  
5. Chs. 1-10 are part of a larger section (1-24) comprised of three collections of messages of judgment.
  - a. Chs. 1-3 include descriptions of the call of the prophet, including the prophet’s visions (*e.g.*, the famous vision of the chariot found at 1.4-28a).
    - i. The fact that the prophet has a vision of God on His throne, while the prophet and the people are in foreign captivity, speaks to the protective presence of the LORD over His people in all places.
    - ii. The chariot visions combines elements of storm (*cf.* Pss. 18 & 29) and that of a war god (*e.g.*, a charioteer).
  - b. Chs. 4-7 comprise three symbolic actions (4.1-54) and three oracles of judgment (5.5-7.27).
    - i. The actions and the oracles do not relate to each other on a one-to-one basis.
  - c. Chs. 8-11 describe the vision of the end of the Temple. 8.1-3 and 11.22-25 form an *inclusio* indicating these chapters to be a unit. In each section which brackets the unit, the prophet is with elders, God’s hand falls upon him (or is taken from him), the vision appears or disappears.
    - i. Temple abominations (ch. 8).

- ii. Angels of judgment (ch. 9).
- iii. The return of the cherubim throne (ch. 10).
- iv. The oracle of the destruction of the city (ch. 11).

**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 12 and 13.

**The readings from the Second Letter of Peter:**

1. See the study summary for week 38 for an introduction to 2 Peter.

2. 2 Peter may be outlined as follows:

- a. Introduction: 1.1-11. The sender identifies himself as Simon Peter, rehearses the benefits God has given to believers, and exhorts them to righteous actions as evidence of their faith.
  - i. The letter contrasts those who act in faith and those who do not (vv. 8-11), using a description of “two ways” that echoes the Wisdom tradition.
- b. Testament: 1.12-15. The letter is characterized as Peter’s testament, given in mind of his impending death. This was a popular genre of literature in the ancient world.
  - i. Characterizing a testament as a “reminder” (as at 1.15) is also a feature of this genre.
- c. Prophecy of the *Parousia* (second coming): 1.16-21.
  - i. The claim of eyewitness testimony is made (1.16). The reference to the Transfiguration of Jesus is contrasted to myth-making.
    1. At Mark 9.1, Jesus stated that there were some present who would not die before they saw the kingdom of heaven. The Church Fathers always read this verse with those immediately following (describing the Transfiguration), as including a reference to Peter’s witness of the Transfiguration.
      - a. Peter, therefore, is speaking of his own impending death as well, as part of a prophecy .
    - ii. The interpretation of Scripture must be inspired (1.20-21). Peter speaks against those who preach “peace and security” when Jesus comes, in contrast to what our Lord Himself warns (*compare* 1 Thess. 5.2-4).
- d. Polemic against heretics: 2.1-22. This section includes most of the generalized polemic found in Jude. It reads as an attack on adversaries, rather than as an examination and refutation of their ideas.
- e. The coming end of the world: 3.1-7. Here Peter addresses the objections of scoffers, especially how they have objected to the prediction of the end of the world.
  - i. The reference to a second letter (at 3.1) is evidence of the author’s knowledge of 1 Pet. The present letter is therefore focused on recalling into the recipients’ minds the prophecies written earlier.
    1. The scoffers are decried for their doctrine having come from impure motives. They are accused of culpable ignorance.
- f. The delay in the *parousia* is a gift of God: 3.8-9.
- g. Ethical conduct must be understood and undertaken in the context of end times: 3.10-13.
  - i. Jesus’ warning the judgment will come as a thief in the night is repeated (3.10). *Compare* Mtt. 24.43-44; 1 Thess. 5.1; Rev. 3.3.

- ii. Conduct must reflect belief in God's judgment (3.11-13).
- iii. Peter and Paul agree (3.14-16). Believers are zealous to be blameless because they expect imminent judgment.
- iv. The letter closes with warnings of future difficulties (3.17-18).

### The readings from the First Letter of John:

1. 1 John must be read in conjunction with all of the Johannine letters, and with the Gospel of John.
  - a. The letter serves as a framework in which to understand the Gospel of John, in how the Gospel incorporates the religious understanding and traditions of the Johannine community.
    - i. The letter is probably from about ten years after the writing of the gospel, *i.e.*, it is probably from a time when the community is coming to better understand itself (and have dissension) in an era (the late 90's and turn of the second century) when state persecution of Christians comes to the fore.
  - b. The letter does not read as a letter following the literary conventions of this form, but as a treatise similar to Hebrews or James. Unlike Hebrews and James, however, 1 John seems to have been written in response to specific positions advocated by dissident members of the community.
  - c. The letter echoes but does not quote from the gospel. Imagery is similar but not identical.
    - i. It is possible that the form of the letter may mirror that of the gospel.
      1. Following a prologue (1.1-4) which echoes the gospel, the first major section of the letter (1.5-3.10) enjoins that disciples are to "walk in the light," reflecting John 1-12 (the "book of signs," *see* the study summary for week 12), with the second section (3.11-5.12)—in which the obligation of mutual love is enjoined—reflecting "the book of glory" (John 13-21).
        - a. Note, for example the parallels between the prologue to the letter and that of the gospel, and between the injunctions to mutual love and Jesus' farewell discourses in John 13-17.
2. *Community*: Whether we refer to John or the "Johannine community," the tradition in Johannine theology dates from the beginning of Christianity, being traced to the "beloved disciple". (There is no scholarly consensus that the John of the Gospel so attributed, and the John of the letters is the same person, although Church Tradition has identified the author as the same person.)
  - a. Upon separation (from the synagogue), John's theology became more developed in terms of christology, and of a primacy of love over authority.
    - i. This led to the open expression of some hostility to Judaism.
  - b. John was in close contact with Hellenistic thought. He therefore used much Hellenistic imagery in his writing (*e.g.*, of light and darkness), perhaps in part as a response to Gnostic attacks on the faith.
    - i. John co-opted some Gnostic imagery to use against Gnostic influences.
3. 1 John may be outlined as follows:
  - a. Prologue: 1.1-4. This essentially parallels elements of John 1.1-18.
  - b. Walking in the light: 1.5-2.29. One must live in accord with the revealed attributes of God, the source of all to the community.
    - i. The contrast between light and darkness reflects the division between those who live according to God's commandments and those who do not. (*Does this echo John 14.15?*) God is light.

1. Living in sin (darkness) is “not liv[ing] according to the truth” (1.6)(*perhaps echoing the theme introduced at John 14.16-17?*) No darkness is associated with God. Therefore, Christians must free their lives of sin (1.6-2.2).
  - a. John refers to Jesus Christ as advocate, using the term *paracletos* (paraclete), which word Jesus uses at John 14.16 to refer to the Holy Spirit. Jesus, however, refers to the Spirit as *another* advocate/ counselor.
    - i. The letter is written as from one who knew the earthly Jesus. He therefore recalls Jesus as the advocate in their midst, who has now assumed this role in heaven, sending the Spirit to be in their midst.
2. Keeping the commandments (2.3-11): Recall, again, the language at John 14.15. The biblical view is that to “know God” is to keep His commandments.
  - a. This section refutes three misunderstandings of what the knowledge of God is. One cannot know God and not behave rightly; one must follow the life of Jesus; one must love his brother in order to truly “walk in the light”.
    - i. Knowledge of God (salvation) cannot be separated from conduct. Such knowledge is not an abstraction, a principal, but must be reflected in the reality of how one lives.
    - ii. The love commandment (John 13.34) is repeated (1 John 2.7).
  - ii. 2.12-14 reflects a Wisdom exhortation to the knowledge of God, followed by the admonition that the world must be rejected (2.15-17).
  - iii. Antichrists are to be rejected (2.18-19). These are the dissidents in the community, who teach false doctrine.
    1. Division within the Church is a sign of end times.
    2. Those who are anointed, and live in love with each other, may have confidence at the judgment (2.20-29).
- c. Love as the mark of being a child of God: 3.1-24. The believer is begotten of God (in baptism, *see* John 3.5). This section contrasts those who are born of God and those who are born of the devil.
  - i. Christians experience adoption as children of God now (3.1-10).
  - ii. Therefore, Christians must love one another (3.11-18).
  - iii. Living in this love, as children of God, believers may have confidence before God (3.19-24).
    1. God abides in those who keep His commandments (3.23-24).
- d. Commandments to love and believe: 4.1-5.12. Sections regarding love frame the final exhortation to love, making the commandments to believe in Jesus and to love to become the concluding message.
  - i. Oppositions between truth and error reflect opposition between the Spirit of truth (John 14.17) and the “prince of this world” (John 16.11), the devil.
    1. Those who do not confess Jesus as the Christ are antichrists.
    2. Believers have overcome the world, being of God (4.4-6).
  - ii. God is love (4.7). This is the most famous verse in 1 John, and one of the best known in all of the Bible.
    1. Love distinguishes a person who knows God.
    2. Jesus has shown us God’s love, and this love is revealed in the Christian community (4.9-10). Love is God’s initiative (4.10).

3. God's love is known and experienced through the Spirit (4.12-16a).
- iii. Obedience to the love command, belief in Jesus, and conviction that Jesus' death for sin brings the believer to eternal life are brought together in the final section, which focuses on belief in Jesus Christ (5.1-12).
    1. Faith overcomes the world (5.1-5).
    2. Jesus came in water and blood (5.6-12). This is witnessed to by the Spirit.
- e. Conclusion: 5.13-21. The Christian must have confidence in prayer, and must remain focused on God.