

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Read the Bible in a Year Challenge
Week 45

Monday	Hosea 11-12	Psalm 103	Matthew 5
Tuesday	Hosea 13-14	Psalm 104	Matthew 6
Wednesday	Joel 1-2	Psalm 105	Matthew 7
Thursday	Joel 3	Psalm 106	Matthew 8
Friday	Amos 1	Psalm 107	Matthew 9
Saturday	Amos 2	Psalm 108	Matthew 10

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 Hosea:

1. See the study summary for week 44 for an introduction to Hosea.
2. In ch. 11 the LORD makes clear that love overcomes ingratitude. God addresses His people as “son”. Punishment is not God’s last word (v. 8).
3. Ch. 12 is really more of a collection of sayings than a text with a logical sequence. The recurrent theme is one of perfidy and infidelity, with Israel and Judah being contrasted. Israel (the northern kingdom) is depicted as treacherous, and Judah (the southern kingdom) as faithful.
 - a. The image of empty, pointless activity is present (e.g., of herding the wind). To not obey God is to engage in activity that reinforces the barrenness of His absence.
 - b. Israel is enjoined to return (repent), “by the help of your God” (v. 6)—an early example of the biblical truth that it is by God’s Spirit that the faithful may repent.
 - i. God’s salvation is contrasted with the empty promise of wealth (v. 8).
4. Ch. 13 is comprised of a collection of sayings about judgment. Included are typical judgment oracles, a mocking condemnation of the monarch (13. 9-11), and the pronouncement of sentence on all of the people.
5. Ch. 14 serves as an epilogue. The prophecy closes on the note of hope, that God loves His people.
 - a. The prophet summons the people to return to the LORD, and God speaks an answering promise of love.
 - i. Forgiveness being pronounced through the prophet, the epilogue takes the form of a penitential liturgy.

The readings from Joel:

1. The name Joel means “the LORD is God”. No biographical information is given about the author. The use throughout the book of cultic terminology may indicate Joel to have been one who served in the Temple.

- a. The dating of Joel is a matter of considerable debate. The majority of scholars place the book in the post-exilic period. The fact that Joel never refers to a king or to the court reinforces the probability of this conclusion.
 - b. Joel speaks of hope built upon experience. Despite the devastation of Israel by locusts and drought, the LORD removes this disaster, as a sign that He is in the midst of His people.
 - i. This reversal of fortune leads to prophecy of final vindication for God's chosen people.
 1. Joel reads like a narrow, nationalistic work, and yet Peter quotes 2.28-32 in preaching on the Pentecost event (Acts 2) and Paul makes Joel 2.32 the heart of his gospel (Rom. 10.13).
 2. The penitential nature of Joel is recognized in the use of 2.12-19 on Ash Wednesday.
2. The book divides into two sections: The locust plague (1.1-2.7) and the prophet's interpretation of the plague (2.18-3.21).
- a. A devastating plague of locusts, accompanied with persistent drought, gives rise to the oracles of Joel. The description in these chapters moves from an actual description to a hyperbolic, metaphorical description of an attacking army, to the Day of the LORD (*e.g.*, of judgment).
 - i. It is possible to envisage a liturgical setting for these oracles.
 - b. The attack is followed by calls to lament (1.5-14) addressed to all sectors of society.
 - c. Calls to lament are followed by a general lament for the Day of the LORD (1.15-18) and prayer (1.19-20).
 - d. The attack then is made on the city, and in this section (2.1-17) a military metaphor is used, with the locusts attacking as an army of horsemen.
 - i. When the prophet enjoins "Blow the trumpet in Zion" (2.1) he is referring to the *shofar*, the ram's horn used for summoning troops to battle, and to warn of attack.
 - e. In the face of attack, the people are called to repent (2.12-17). God calls for repentance when the hour is literally darkest.
3. The book "pivots" at 2.18. God answers His people's prayers, and bestows new wine, grain and oil (the staples which the locusts had destroyed).
- a. The promise at 2.20 to remove the "northerner" is a reference to the direction from which attack has traditionally come (*cf.* Jer. 1.13-16; 4.6).
 - b. The removal of the locusts, and the advent of saving rains, are not inevitable phenomena in the rhythm of nature. They are saving acts of God, and evidence that He dwells in the midst of His people (2.27).
 - i. The effects of the LORD's presence are detailed in the balance of the book.
 1. God's presence brings about an outpouring of His Spirit, in a series of changes in the spirit of the people, leading to renewal (2.28-32). This is the passage referred to by Peter.
 2. The fortune of the people is reversed, and God performs great wonders (3.1-21).
 - a. God will avenge His people, and judges the nations (3.1-3).
 - b. The peaceful images of swords beaten into plowshares (Isa. 2.4; Mic. 4.3) are reversed. The people are to be warriors, and Israel will be vindicated.

- i. This narrative closes with the image of the LORD dwelling in the people's midst.

The readings from Amos:

1. Amos is the earliest of the classical prophets. He was a Judahite from the small town of Tekoa, in the hill country of Judah just south of the border with Israel, prophesying during the reigns of Uzziah of Judah (783-742 B.C.) and Jeroboam II of Israel (786-746). Amos prophesied mainly at Bethel, a major cult center for the northern kingdom.
 - a. Amos was a livestock breeder (1.1; 7.4) and also a tender of figs (7.14). The latter work would have brought him from Tekoa, which was too high to support such growth.
2. Four themes are of central importance in Amos.
 - a. *Judgment*: Amos is the least hopeful of the classical prophets. He prophesies the destruction of Israel as certain, for the people have abused their privilege of being covenanted with God (3.1-2).
 - i. The LORD has in fact become Israel's enemy, for He has dissolved the covenant.
 1. Amos' judgment is general, but directed most harshly against the king (7.10-11), the priests (7.16-17), and the upper classes (4.1-3; 6.1).
 - b. *Social justice*: The prophet is concerned that the quality of one's relationship with his neighbor reflects the quality of his relationship with God in the covenant.
 - i. The prophet expresses God's distress at the treatment of the disadvantaged by the ruling classes (2.7; 4.1; 5.7, 11, 24; 8.4-6).
 - c. *The cult*: The separation of cultic practice from the love of neighbor is condemned. The prophet condemns this hypocrisy (*see, e.g., 4.4-5*).
 - d. *The word of God*: The rejection of the message of the prophet is a rejection of the word of God, a grave offense constituting rejection of the LORD Himself. The consequence of this would be the loss of the guiding word of God (8.11-12).
3. The book opens, following a superscription and opening that identifies what follows as words of God by His prophet, with a series of oracles against the nations.
 - a. The nations listed are members of the Davidic-Solomonic empire. God is Lord of these nations because He is the God of their overlord, the unified Israel. Therefore, any affront to Israel is an affront to God.
 - i. The LORD declares that these rebellious nations will be destroyed.
 1. However, Judah is included, and this sets up the real point, that Israel will be destroyed.
 - a. God will no more take Israel back as His vassal, any more than He will take back the rebellious vassal states.
 - i. Throughout this section (*and see 8.4*) the prophet condemns oppression using language related to cultic practices.
 1. As the people relate to God, so they relate to each other, and *vice versa*. (Cf. the "Great Commandment" at Mtt. 22.34-40; Mk. 12.29-31; Lk. 10.25-28.)

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 18 and 19.

The Gospel according to St. Matthew:

1. See the study summaries for weeks 1 and 2 for a discussion of the readings from Matthew.