

Good Friday RCL
Cycles ABC
Revised

Isaiah 52:13—53:12

Most of the so-called “Second Isaiah” (Isaiah 40-55) appeared in Babylon during the captivity of the Jews in that city between the deportations to Babylon (596 BCE, first deportation; 586 BCE, second deportation) and 539 BCE when the Persian, Cyrus II, defeated the Babylonians and annexed Babylon to the Persian Empire. Within this corpus are four remarkable songs (42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-11, and 52:13-53:12), called the Servant Songs that deal with a “servant” who will redeem Israel. Many believe these poems to have comprised a written source the Second Isaiah included in his composition. Most interpreters believe that the “servant” in all of these songs must be the exiled, suffering Israel itself.

Psalm 22

Most Christians would recognize the first verse of this long *lament* as Jesus’s cry of dereliction from the cross (Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46). A full lament, however, consists of more than a cry of anguish (complaint) and a plea for deliverance; it also promises an act of thanksgiving in the Temple if God fulfills the psalmist’s request. Verses 18-20 comprise the plea for deliverance. Verses 21-27 contain the promise: a general promise to offer a thanksgiving in the temple (verse 21) and the content of that thanksgiving (vs. 22-29a). The final, unusual promise obligates the psalmist’s descendants to continue to offer that thanksgiving (29b-30).

Hebrews 10:16-25

or

Hebrews 10:11-14 (15-18) 19-25

Having shown that the blood of bulls and goats—the sacrifices of the law—cannot take away sins (Hebrews 10:1-10), the author now turns to the argument that Christ’s single sacrifice, followed by his exultation, can bring us atonement. The writer alludes to Psalm 110:1 and quotes Jeremiah 31:31 (Hebrews 10:16-17) to remind the reader that Jeremiah’s prophecy finds its validation through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:15). God will no longer remember our sins, so there is no need for additional sacrifice (Hebrews 10:17).

Entrance into the sanctuary through Jesus’ blood, even into the holiest part of the temple, the dwelling of God behind the curtain, ought to result from “confidence” or “freedom” (*parresia*). The way we achieve that freedom is obedience to the commandments, both commandments about purity and faith (verses 22-23) and commandments about mutual affection and regular assembly (verses 24-25).

OR

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

The Epistle to the Hebrews alternately holds the reader over the fires of perdition and within the highest courts of heaven. Those who lose heart, who are faithless in their Christian commitment, cannot hide from the awful judgment of the divine word (vss. 12-

13); but those who persevere in their Christian lives, despite all of the temptations to fall away, know that their own “great high priest” experienced the same temptations they experienced and yet managed to avoid unfaithfulness (vss.14-16).

Hebrews 5 examines Christ’s qualifications to be a high priest. Unlike other high priests in Israel’s history, who had bribed their way into the office or appointed themselves to it, God appointed Christ to the high priestly office. To support this claim, the author quotes the single verse from Jewish scripture that describes the messianic king as a priest, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4).” So who is this Melchizedek? In addition to the other mention of Melchizedek in Jewish Scripture (Genesis 14:18), we have a fragmentary text among the Dead Sea Scrolls that portrays Melchizedek not as an earthly king but as a heavenly redeemer. By the second century we find evidence of a sect of “Melchizedekians” in Rome that believed Christ came to save humans, while Melchizedek came to save the fallen angels. As a final qualification, all human priests have to learn human suffering and sin through personal experience. Christ too learned the requisite sympathy through his own suffering and temptation. Christ is qualified in every respect to be the high priest.

John 18:1—19:42

John's Passion Narrative comes to us in three major blocks: (1) arrest and priestly investigation of Jesus (18:1-27), (2) Roman trial of Jesus (18:28-19:16a); execution and burial (19:16b-42). Although there we can find many similarities between John's account and those of the first three gospels (especially Luke), investigators have been unable to conclude that the author used any of the synoptic (Matthew, Mark, Luke) accounts or that he shared a traditional source with them. John has so invested his Passion Narrative with his distinctive understanding of Jesus as the word made flesh that it obscures the contours of his sources. So, for instance, Jesus does not agonize about his coming execution in the garden before his arrest (18:1), and he does not cry out on the cross that God has forsaken him, as he does in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34.

Of particular interest in John's Passion Narrative is the identification of "the Jews" (63 times). In some places, the expression refers the reader to specific practices or institutions of Palestinian Jews. Sometimes, it refers generally to the Jewish population of a certain area. In John's Passion Narrative, "the Jews" are most often the representatives of the priests who accuse Jesus before Pilate, but we also find several references to Jewish customs (19:14, 31, 38, 40). Only in the dispute over the placard placed on the cross of Jesus (19:19-20) do we find "the Jews" used as a possible designation for all of the Jewish people. Since "King of the Jews" was not an historical title of the Messiah, most commentators take this appellation to be a way for the Romans to mock the Jews. John shows no interest in blaming Jews for the death of Jesus since in his view the death of Jesus led to the salvation of the Jewish nation (John 11:50; 18:14).