

Proper 11
Cycle C RCL

Amos 8:1-12

The long reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (786–746 BCE) was that country's most pleasant and peaceful time. The prophet Amos, however, who was a native of the southern kingdom of Judah, exposed the seamy side of Jeroboam's reign, aiming his barbs primarily at the petty corruptions of everyday life. Here Amos directs his wrath at merchants who are impatient with the new moon and sabbath rests because of their desire to return quickly to their dishonest trade. The passage begins with a word play. The Lord shows Amos a "basket of summer fruit" (*keluv qayic*). This means, the Lord tells the prophet that "the end has come" (*ba' ha-qec*) upon Israel.

Psalm 52

The author of the ascription before Psalm 52 fitted the words of the instructional piece (*maskil*) to the acts of Doeg, the chief herdsman of Saul, who told King Saul about the priests of Nob helping David escape Saul's clutches. (1 Samuel 21:7; 22:8-19). It is clear that the object of the psalm's derision is not a king but a "mighty warrior" (*gibbor*), a term one might hesitate to apply to a shepherd whose only bloodshed in war was the blood of the priests and their families. But it is also not particularly appropriate for Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus II, or Herod the Great. Attempts, therefore, assigning the psalm to the time of the destruction in 586 BCE or the liberation from Babylon or the kingship of Herod the Great never works out cleanly for the interpreter. The form of the psalm is also a difficulty, and opinions have vacillated from community lament to communal instruction. An instructional psalm for a second-temple wisdom school might not be far off the mark.

Genesis 18:1-10a

Although the Yahwistic story (J, 8th century BCE) begins by telling us that the Lord appeared to Abraham (18:1), we quickly learn that there are three visitors who come to see Abraham (18:2). By Genesis 19:1 the number of men has become two, and the Elohist author (E, 7th century BCE) identifies them now as "angels." Abraham's gracious reception of the three strangers at Mamre near Hebron parallels their warm reception in Lot's house in Sodom but contrasts sharply with their reception at the hands of the Sodomites. Indeed, this lack of hospitality is the real "sin of Sodom" in Genesis. The promise of a son to the aged Sarah causes her to laugh (*vatticxaq*, verse 12), a play on words that anticipates the name of the child Isaac (*yicxaq*).

Psalm 15

This is a *pilgrimage psalm*, in particular, a liturgy for admission to the Temple in Jerusalem much like Psalm 24, expressed here (temporary) residence on Mount Zion—perhaps for a festival—since the verbs in Psalm 15:1 (*yagur* and *yishkon*) do not suggest a permanent move. Although the psalmist's image is that of the Davidic tent cultus on Mt. Zion, it is most likely that "tent" has become a synonym for the temple. Would our psalmist refer to Solomon's temple in verse 1 as a "your tent" (*'aholexa*, perhaps misleadingly translated as "your tabernacle" in *BCEP*)? Yes. See, for instance, Psalm 27:4-6, 61:5, *etc.* So the reference does not help us with a date. Although priestly law set rigid standards of physical purity for admission to the Temple, the entrance liturgies of the Psalter do not. They stress personal righteousness instead.

Colossians 1:15-29

Colossians 1:15-20 is a hymn to Christ that is not in the style of Paul or even that of Colossians. In

particular, to call Christ the “image of the invisible God,” (*eikon tou theou aoratou*, verse 15) is much more like that the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews or the thought of the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo than it is like anything of Paul’s. Although the hymn is about the cosmic glory of Christ, our author uses the hymn to show what a great savior Christ is because he died for his readers and reconciled them to God. The Gospel of this “cosmic Christ” is for “every creature under heaven (verse 23).” The pseudonymous Paul of Colossians has also suffered for the readers (verses 24, 28), and through that suffering he bears witness to the hidden mystery of Christ (verse 26). This mystery does not come through Gnostic speculation, as the author’s opponents would contend, but through suffering in the cause of Christ.

Luke 10:38-42

This *controversy dialogue* is unique to Luke and very interesting because it represents Jesus as overstepping the conventions of his day to enter into meaningful discussion with women. Although the author takes special pains to show that Jesus does not treat Mary as one of his students (verse 39). Students, after all, stand while their master teaches them from a seated position. Nevertheless, the scene construes women as having a meaningful role to play in the understanding and transmission of the Gospel and offers an insight into the workings of the Christian community in which the Third Gospel took shape. The knowledge of Christ in this Gospel is more important than what the society considers “woman's work.”

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