

Second Sunday in Lent
Cycle B RCL
Revised

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

The whole of Genesis 17 derives from the Priestly writer (P) who wrote during the time of Exile (586 BCE-538 BCE). This specific covenant, whose sign is circumcision, parallels the covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:8-17), whose sign was the rainbow. The lectionary's omission of verses 8-14 conceals this important parallel. Egyptians and some of the Semitic peoples bordering Israel practiced circumcision, but we know the history neither of their practices nor their meaning. Although the Hebrews may have been circumcising their sons long before anyone made a connection between circumcision and God's law, the command to circumcise here tells the reader why Hebrews practice this act.

The names Abram/Abraham and Sarai/Sarah are dialect pairs with essentially the same meaning for both: "Father of many" or "Great father" (Abram/Abraham) and "princess" (Sarai/Sarah). A "covenant" in the near east represented a legal arrangement—usually between two nations—imposed by a stronger party on a weaker party. Entering into a covenant with God was not a matter of negotiation or something Abram might rationally refuse to do. Nevertheless, once the covenant is in place, God in God's freedom becomes subject to certain legal requirements, as does the freedom of the people with whom God made the covenant.

Psalm 22:22-30

This lament is most familiar to Christians by its first verse, "My God, my God, why have you left me?" (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34). Verses 22-30, however, sound more like a *hymn* or *thanksgiving* than a lament. Laments, however, often contain expressions of trust in God's ability to save and the psalmist's confidence in God's willingness to do so. This selection from Psalm 22 is an extended statement of trust quite appropriate for a long lament.

Romans 4:13-25

Converts to Judaism have no genealogy from Israel. Therefore, Pharisaic teaching gave them an artificial genealogy as children of Abraham, the first "convert" to the faith. In the present chapter Paul has just argued (4:1-12) that Abraham received God's justification because of his faith (Genesis 15:6) before he received the command to be circumcised (Genesis 17:10). Thus, faith came before the command (law). The way in which the Gentiles share in the lineage of Abraham, therefore, is through faith, not through circumcision. In verses 23-25 Paul draws attention to the fact that Abraham, who lived before the law appeared, was still able to gain righteousness through faith. Since Abraham lived before the giving of the law, his offspring (Christian converts) like him can and will be justified by their faith.

Mark 8:31-38

This is the first of three predictions in Mark in which Jesus foretells his suffering, death, and resurrection (8:31-38, 9:30-32; and 10:32-34). Although it was not contrary to Jewish expectation that the messianic king should die, it was difficult for Jesus' students to understand how he could be King Messiah without at least taking the reins of office in Jerusalem for a time before his death. Yet in Mark, the death and resurrection of Jesus is the single most important act of the Messiah, an act that has saving power for the whole world. So Peter's understandable resistance to the idea (8:32) in this context is a testing of Satan to be rejected by Jesus (8:33).