

Proper 13
Cycle B RCL
Revised

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

The LORD may well have been seated on the Ark of the Covenant at Rabbah (1 Samuel 11:11); but the LORD nevertheless knew of David's wickedness in Jerusalem: "And the matter (*i. e.* David's rape of Bathsheba and his subsequent murder of her husband) was bad in the LORD's eyes (11:24)." The LORD then sent the prophet Nathan, who had prophesied David's eternal dynasty in 2 Samuel 7, to convict the king with a riddle, a *mashal*, out of the king's own mouth. The "riddle" or "parable" was a favorite mode of scholarly (wisdom) instruction in the ancient near east and is well known in the Hebrew Bible. In fact, the wise woman of Tekoa will use a *mashal* on David again in 2 Samuel 14. When David realized that the *mashal* was about his rape of Bathsheba, he admitted his wrongdoing but received a threefold punishment: (1) evil to arise from within his own family, (2) public humiliation as his wives would be subjected to public intercourse by a "neighbor," and (3) death of the son Bathsheba bore. As the ensuing story makes clear, each consequence occurred exactly as predicted.

Psalm 51:1-13

This is a *lament of guilt*. The psalmist makes it clear, however, that his offense is against God only and not against his neighbors (51:4), lest God be made a party to the psalmist's offenses against the neighbors by forgiving them without restitution. The Hebrews believed that God kept a record of human actions by recording them in a great book. So the request to "blot out my offenses" (51:1) is none other than a request to erase the misdeed from God's book of memory. Although 51:6 has been taken traditionally in the west to refer to original sin, most commentators now agree that the psalmist here is actually pleading his own particular circumstances. If God should choose to save the psalmist, the promise is that the psalmist will tell others of God's deliverance and thereby enhance God's public reputation or "name." The last two verses of the psalm (omitted in this lection) were added during the Babylonian Exile.

OR

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15

The Priestly Writer, who wrote after the Exile (after 539 BC), has taken the story of the quails written hundreds of years earlier (found in its earlier form in Numbers 11:31-35) and inserted it here. In Numbers 11, God provided the quail because the manna had become insufficient for the wandering Israelites. In this version, God provided the quail as a supplement to the diet of manna. The term "fleshpot" (Hebrew: *sir ha-basar*) refers to a cooking vessel. Since quail are normally associated only with the north Sinai, some scholars argue that the Exodus wandering cannot be set in southern Sinai around the traditional site of Mt. Sinai (*jebel musa*). Both the Exodus account and the Numbers account see the episode as a rebellion of Israel against the faithful God who has led them out of Egypt.

Psalm 78:23-29

This long psalm does not belong to any of the recognized forms and can only be compared with other historical psalms like Psalms 105-106. The principal theme is Israel's faithlessness as compared to God's faithfulness in history. Because of the instructional nature of the psalm it may

belong with the *wisdom psalms* and may derive ultimately from the Babylonian Exile during which the Jewish captives had to reconsider completely their relationship to God.

Ephesians 4:1-16

The author's warning in 4:14 not to be "blown about by every wind of doctrine" envisions the readers as part of a structure, the church, established on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (2:20). For our author the danger facing his readers is false teaching that leads to disunity and loss of mission. In the writer's view, the Spirit functions in the church principally to create and support the orders of ministry that will build up the community (4:12) rather than as the presence of the risen Christ in power as in the authentic letters of Paul. To this end, the author uses Paul's language about the variety of gifts (1 Corinthians 12:6-8, Romans 12:6-8) to good effect though with a new emphasis.

John 6:24-35

Whereas the first three Gospels treat the miraculous feedings as demonstrations of God's power in Christ, the Fourth Gospel understands the feeding of five thousand as a "sign" (Greek: *semeion* [6:14]) or figure of Jesus' entire ministry. Jesus reinterprets the story of the manna in the wilderness that fed the wandering Hebrews to represent God's sending him [*sc.* Jesus] into the world. Jesus is the new manna that will sustain his followers to the end of the age. This understanding derives from the Stoic idea of the *logos spermatikos*, the seminal word that spreads out throughout the whole cosmos.

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