

**Proper 18**  
**Cycle B RCL**  
**Revised**

**Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23**

The poetry in Proverbs 22 has now departed from the almost singsong opposing couplets that predominated in Proverbs 10-21:23. The word “name” in the Bible almost always means “public reputation,” and so the teacher counsels currying favor with rich and poor alike in order to gain such a good reputation (vss 1-2) Verses 8-9 follow much the same thought. Sharing bread with the weak will also gain the blessings of a good name. Proverbs 22:17-24:22 shares 19 or more aphorisms with an Egyptian book of wisdom from a teacher named Amen-em-opet. This is the only place in Proverbs where such direct influence from another nation’s wisdom teaching shows through so clearly.

**Psalm 125**

This psalm is a *psalm of trust* and as such should be compared with psalms like Psalm 23 and 46. This kind of psalm is very difficult to set within the worship life of ancient Israel. Some interpreters take the reference to the “scepter of wickedness” in vs. 3a to refer to a period after the Babylonian exile when foreign kings ruled Palestine, but the reference, especially when coupled with the assurances of Zion’s immovability in vs. 1 could equally well derive from the so-called “Zion theology” that proclaimed Jerusalem to be ultimately safe from all enemies, a theology that no longer "worked" after the Babylonian conquests of Jerusalem.

**OR**

**Isaiah 35:4-7a**

This oracle once belonged to the collection of poems we call the “Second Isaiah” (Isaiah 40-55); but the final editor of the Book of Isaiah scattered oracles from Second Isaiah within the text of the First Isaiah (1-39) and Third Isaiah (56-66) as a way of linking the three collections together. Despite the many sins that brought Judah into exile in 597 BCE and 586 BCE, God will act to save the exiles and restore them to Zion (35:4). After a long period, Judah’s blindness and deafness to God will end (verse 5; see Isaiah 6:10).

**Psalm 146**

Psalms 146-150 are all *hymns* that begin with the expression *hallelu-jah!* (“Praise the LORD!”) and may be part of a larger collection of hymns. Hymns typically celebrate the presence of the LORD in the temple and ordinarily focus upon some particular aspect of God’s power and goodness. Here, however, the focus is upon God’s defense of the poor and disenfranchised.

**James 2:1-10, (11-13) 14-17**

Unfortunately, many Christians at the end of the first century misunderstood St. Paul to have been teaching that we receive salvation only by an act of the mind (*pistis*). Although Paul’s understanding of faith was much greater than this misconception, his name came to be associated with the viewpoint that Christian faith was a matter of believing the right things. The author of James, on the other hand, holds that faith and works go together and that a faith that would allow

one to ignore or demean a needy brother or sister was no faith at all. Both Jesus and his older contemporary Hillel understood love of God and neighbor as the fullness of the law, but our author believes love of neighbor covers the whole law. Love of neighbor is the “royal law (2:8).”

### **Mark 7:24-37**

The story (vss. 24-30) of the gentile woman who argued with Jesus about dealings with gentiles is an example of a story often found in the Bible in which a wise or clever woman either says something or does something profound to solve a difficulty. The books of Esther and Judith are devoted to this theme, but we meet also wise women in the persons of the Hebrew midwives who successfully hid Hebrew male infants from the pharaoh (Exodus 1:15-22), the wise woman of Tekoa (2 Samuel 14), and the heroism of Jael in slaying Sisera (Judges 4:17-22). The unexpected action of these women shows the presence and power of God in the circumstances. Here the act of “getting the better of” Jesus shows that inclusion of the gentiles is God’s will.

By setting some of Jesus’ ministry in the Lebanon (Tyre and Sidon), the author asserts Jesus’ lordship over all the world, not just the Jewish world. Also, to tell us that the Sea of Galilee belongs in the region of the Decapolis (7:31) emphasizes the same point. The Decapolis (Greek: “ten cities”) consisted of the ten leading Roman-Hellenistic cities around the Sea of Galilee, most of which lay outside of traditionally Jewish territory. A curiosity of the healing of the deaf man with a speech impediment (vss.31-37) involves the use of the Aramaic word *effatha* which is masculine singular, addressed to “ears” which in Aramaic are feminine dual. Similarly, the Aramaic injunction to the little girl in 5:41 is masculine singular. I have suggested elsewhere that the author of Mark added both Aramaic formulas for effect.

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