

Proper 26
Cycle C RCL

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

Installed as a vassal prince by the Egyptian king Necho, Jehoiakim (609-598 BCE) switched his loyalties from Egypt to Babylon after the defeat of the Egyptian army at Carchemish. In this dialogue between the prophet and God, Habakkuk responds to the new situation by complaining about the injustice and violence of the Babylonians (Chaldeans). God replies in 1:5-11 that the Babylonians will indeed be as vicious as Habakkuk claims (1:5-10) but that their worship of their own might will ultimately be their downfall (1:11). The prophet then proposes that God is too holy to countenance the savage behavior of the Chaldeans (1:12-2:1). God's answer (2:2-5) is that God indeed does not countenance evil and that ultimately the faithful will live because of their faith, a reply that applies equally to Babylon and Jerusalem. Writing the prophecy on tablets (2:2) is a way of preserving it against the coming destruction.

Psalms 119:137-144

This unusually long psalm (176 verses) is an *acrostic* psalm. The other acrostic psalms in the Bible usually begin each verse with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, but in Psalm 119 each strophe has each line begin with the same Hebrew letter and then the following strophe has each line begin with the next Hebrew letter, *etc.* The eight verses of Psalm 119:137-144 all begin with the letter *tsade*. Although commentators have noticed connections between Psalm 119 and the laments and trust psalms, the prominent place given to righteousness through the study of the Torah makes it, along with Psalm 1 and 19B, a Torah song (Kraus), a kind of wisdom psalm, whose date is probably post-exilic. Verses 137-144 compare favorably with laments of innocence in comparing the psalmist's righteousness to the wickedness of his enemies, but the use of wisdom language to express this righteousness is different from the laments.

OR

Isaiah 1:10-20

Isaiah of Jerusalem was an unofficial court prophet from “the year that King Uzziah died” (6:1; 742 BCE) until after Sennacherib’s unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem (701 BCE). The setting of his call to prophetic ministry (6:1-13) suggests that he may also have been a priest. If he was a priest, then to put this condemnation of the Temple’s worship on his lips underscores the degree to which Judah has become estranged from its Lord. Although God ordinarily enjoys the smell of the sacrifices and the sound of his people in solemn assembly, Jerusalem’s wickedness, which approaches the legendary wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, makes all worship in the Temple repugnant to God.

Psalms 32:1-8

Laments often promise to announce God’s salvation or to instruct others in God’s way if God answers the psalmist’s plea. See, for instance, Psalm 51:14-16. The fulfillment of this promise took the form of a *thanksgiving* psalm. In general, a thanksgiving summarizes the original lament (32:5) and then proceeds to tell everyone who will listen of God’s faithfulness to those who keep the divine commandments. In this particular case the lament in question was a lament of guilt, and the psalmist addresses those who, like him, are sinners.

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians is the earliest letter we have from Paul, and 2 Thessalonians, if Pauline, was probably written shortly thereafter. Some investigators believe that the teaching about the end of the world and the importance of right doctrine in 2 Thessalonians 2 reflect a period later than Paul's lifetime, while others consider the second letter genuine. The first letter is addressed to a young congregation experiencing serious questions about the faith, and 2 Thessalonians continues instruction in the same matters.

Luke 19:1-10

The story of Zacchaeus, whose name in Hebrew ironically means "innocent," relates to one of the most outrageous aspects of the Roman system of government. Tax collectors were wealthy individuals who bid for the right to collect taxes, paid the taxes bid, and then had the benefit of police enforcement to collect what they could from the residents of the district. That a Jew should exploit other Jews in this way was particularly galling to most. Convinced of his guilt in the matter of taxes by Jesus' act of honoring his household with a visit, Zacchaeus decides to devote half of his goods to the poor and to repay those he has cheated with a restitution that is double the usual restitution for theft or misappropriation of goods. (See, for instance, Exodus 22:9.) Fourfold restitution is the usual restitution for theft of a sheep. (See Exodus 22:1.) These extraordinary payments reflect the degree of Zacchaeus' conviction.

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