

Proper 22
Cycle B RCL
Revised

Job 1:1; 2:1-10

The Book of Job is a complex assemblage of wisdom writings from several periods of Israel's history. The name occurs twice in Ezekiel 14 along with Noah and Daniel as the name of a righteous man. Ezekiel's Job may or may not be the Job described the Book of Job. Cognates of the name are known in Mesopotamia and Syria from an early time, but the identity of the Land of Uz is unknown, with various traditions putting it alternately in Edom or north in the vicinity of Haran. Our passage is part of a prose narrative (1:1-2:13) that begins the book with the tale of a virtuous Job who encounters injustice through no fault of his own as the result of a heavenly dispute between God and a heavenly being known as "the prosecutor" (*ha-satan*). A short narrative ending (Job 42:7-16) may be a portion of the first narrative or a different one. The English versions are almost certainly correct to translate "curse" here but in Hebrew the *satan* claims that Job will "bless God to his face" (2:5), and Job's wife urges Job to "bless God and die." The word "bless" occurs here to avoid writing the word "curse" with God as the object.

Psalm 26

Laments were prayers offered in the temple in times of trouble, designed to rouse God to defend an individual or even a whole nation from evil or the threat of evil. The worshiper would likely consult with a priest or Levite about the problem to determine which lament would be best suited to the difficulty and whether one should offer a sacrifice along with it. Some laments like Psalm 51 acknowledge that the worshiper's problems stem from sin against God; but others, like the present psalm, insist upon the worshiper's innocence and call for God's vindication because of God's *xesed* or *faithfulness* to the covenant (mistranslated "love" in verse 3).

OR

Genesis 2:18-24

The creation of woman followed failed attempts on the Lord's part to make already existing creatures into helpers for the man. Although the Lord created each animal from the dust of the earth just like the man (2:19), none was suitable for him as a "help." Only a being created from the man's very "essence" (Hebrew *'ecem*: "bone") was finally acceptable. By the way, the derivation of the word *ishshah* ("woman") from *ish* ("man") is a false etymology because the two words come from entirely different Hebrew roots. Researchers (with some exceptions) assign this story to the Yahwist (J), a long pre-history of Israel that narrates Israel's origins from Adam through the Exodus and Wandering. J likely wrote during the 8th century BCE in Judah and comprises the most extensive narrative source in the Pentateuch.

Psalm 8

This *hymn* contains a very high view of human nature. In verse 5, the author marvels that human beings have been made only a little less than the *elohim*, "the gods," a reference to the heavenly beings. (The Greek of this verse translates *elohim* as "angels," thereby confirming *elohim* as a plural.) Like the Priestly Writer (P) of Genesis 1:1-2:4a, our author believes human beings are almost like the gods and have dominion over all of the earthly creation even as the gods have dominion over the heavenly creation.

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

The unknown author of Hebrews opposes a belief system in the early church that understood Christ as belonging to the realm of human beings and responsible only for human salvation. The heavenly

beings, the angels, on the other hand, should belong to a higher order of reality than Christ. These false teachers used Psalm 8 in Greek to support their claim. The “son of man” (Christ) in Psalm 8:5 is “a little lower than the angels (Psalm 8:6).” The author of Hebrews counters that the Greek “a little lower” (*brachu ti*) can also mean “for a little while.” Christ in his redemptive action spent time with us, living for a short time as one who was lower than the angels, but now he is exalted, just as the psalm says (Psalm 8:6; Hebrews 2:7b-8). Christ not only belongs to the heavenly world, he claims, but is the very “reflection” and “stamp” of God’s glory, sustaining the whole universe by his great power (1:3; 2:10). The angels are merely “ministering spirits” for those whom Christ saves (1:14).

Mark 10:2-16

The dispute over divorce was one that separated two Pharisaic schools, that of Hillel and that of Shammai, both older contemporaries of Jesus. Shammai and his students held that divorce and remarriage were not allowable except in the case of unchastity. Hillel and his students held that divorce and remarriage were allowed for any reason whatsoever, even if a man found someone he liked better than his current wife. Although in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:1-9 Jesus supports the position of Shammai, in this passage, Mark has Jesus disagree with both schools, thereby establishing his authority over interpretation of the law. Mark 10:13-16 tells us less about Jesus’ attitude toward little children than it does the early church’s perplexity over the meaning of the saying, “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child does not enter it.” Difficult sayings like this were sometimes enclosed within thin narratives either to promote a certain understanding of a saying or at least to make it memorable.

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