

Proper 12
Cycle A RCL

Genesis 29:15-28

It is difficult to assign authorship to these verses, though some would assign verses 24 and 29 to the Priestly author. If one reads verse 31 as an editor's sewing together of two traditions, the fact that verses 31-35 are clearly J might argue for our passage coming from E. In any event, there is in our passage a rough justice for Jacob's deception of his father (27:18-29) in Laban's deception of his future son-in-law. Jacob's love for Rachel and his disdain for Leah motivate the plot as both women attempt to outdo each other in providing children to Jacob through their own wombs and through the wombs of their maidservants. This prepares us for the account in chapter 30 of the births of the "sons of Israel (Jacob)" or "children of Israel," as modern translations prefer.

Psalms 105:1-11, 45b

This is a *hymn* sung during a national festival in the Jerusalem temple. Hymns most often deal with the Lord's creation of and control of the natural world; but on occasions of national celebration, the hymns made reference to the saving events and personages of Israel's history. The major historical event in this psalm is the Exodus from Egypt (verses 12-45a). Verses 1-11 are a call to worship before this long synopsis of the Exodus. Although a mighty thanksgiving *hallelujah* concludes the recitation of God's saving acts in verse 45b, the lectionary has inappropriately inserted the *hallelujah* after the call to worship and before the recital of the events for which God is receiving praise.

or

Psalms 128

The *wisdom psalms* functioned to inculcate in young men the habits of a sober and righteous life. "Fear of the Lord" (verse 1) in the Bible always means keeping the commandments. Mention of Zion/Jerusalem in verse 5 is unusual for a wisdom psalm, but there is still no known use for this psalm form in the temple liturgy.

OR

1 Kings 3:5-12

Modern *al-Jib*, some 3 miles northwest of Jerusalem's suburbs is most likely the ancient site of biblical Gibeon. In his excavations of 1956-1962, J. B. Pritchard discovered remains of occupations at *al-Jib* from the Early Bronze Age through the Roman period. Although the Ark of the Covenant was located in the tabernacle at Jerusalem, the Deuteronomist (Dtr) calls Gibeon "the principal high place" (1 Kings 3:4; Hebrew: *ha-bamah ha-gdolah*), and the Chronicler several times mentions that there was a tabernacle to the Lord in that place. This worship at a shrine other than the one in Jerusalem is mentioned by Dtr with disdain in 1 Kings 3:3 and his disapproval colors the subsequent narrative. Solomon's cultivation of wisdom led to his establishment of a wisdom school in the Jerusalem court in which he was the chief scholar (See 1 Kings 4:29-34).

Psalms 119:129-136

In this long acrostic *wisdom psalm* each strophe begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The current selections comprise the verses for the letter *pe* (129-136). Wisdom psalms did not grow up in the Jerusalem Temple but in the wisdom schools of Jerusalem and later in the Babylonian Exile. Their function was to help the young courtier learn the customs and values of

Israel. The arrangement of the material was designed to facilitate memorization, not for the systematic development of any one theme.

Romans 8:26-39

Perhaps the most remarkable claim of early Christians (next to their confession of Jesus as Messiah) was their insistence that the Holy Spirit had returned to Israel. Jews believed that the Spirit had departed from Israel when Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the Temple and would not return until the Age to Come. The various gifts of the Spirit, from speaking in tongues to wondrous healings, were interpreted by some Christians as proof of their inclusion in the Kingdom, and Paul had to remind his readers that signs of the Spirit belonged to God's ultimate control of all history and that their inclusion into Christ derived from God's pre-ordained good favor, not their various spiritual abilities. As a Pharisee, Paul had probably learned to reconcile predestination and freedom in the way expressed by the famous saying of Rabbi Aqiva (died 135 CE): "Everything is foreseen and authority (*reshut* = "free will") is given."

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

The parable of the mustard seed (13:31-33) is a curious combination of Mark 4:30-32 and the Q-document. (See Luke 13:18-19.) The twin parables of great treasure (13:44-46) and of the fish net (13:47-50) are found only in Matthew but reappear later in the Coptic Gospel of Thomas 20, 8. These short parables bring Matthew's third great discourse of Jesus in Matthew to an end. Jesus closes by asking his students whether they understood all of the teachings, to which they reply "Yes" (13:51). The chapter then concludes with the story of Jesus' rejection in his hometown (13:54-57), contrasting the misunderstanding of his hometown neighbors with the comprehension of his students.

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