

First Reading, 11th to 14th Sundays : Year B, 2021

Between the 11th and 14th Sundays of Ordinary Time, the first readings include two from the prophet Ezekiel and two from the Wisdom literature, from Job and the Book of Wisdom.

Readings for Ordinary Time, Year B

Eleventh Sunday, Ezekiel 17:22–24

In this oracle, Ezekiel presents an ideal, ultimate and lasting restoration of the nation after the Exile. It is the Lord who transplants a branch of the cedar (nation) that then becomes a home for the creatures that seek it. In this action we see and learn the power of God.

Twelfth Sunday, Job 38:1, 8–11

After Job's friend Elihu says that God is inaccessible (Job 37), the Lord responds with a series of questions and assertions that reveal that the God of the storm, the God of creation, is Yahweh, God of Israel.

Thirteenth Sunday, Wisdom 1:13–15, 2:23–24

The Book of Wisdom asserts something new for its time, that death was not a sign of a person being wicked in God's eyes nor the final stage for humankind. On the contrary, 'the world's created things have health in them' and the universe has a positive goal. God has made humans 'in the image of his own nature'.

Fourteenth Sunday, Ezekiel 2:2–5

Ezekiel is a prophet not by choice but by divine command, commencing his mission only when 'the spirit came into me'. During his life as a prophet, his legitimacy in the role was challenged, and the people among whom he is to prophesy were 'defiant and obstinate' and in revolt against God. Nevertheless, Ezekiel will confront these rebels, saying 'The Lord says this'.

Background to the Readings

Like *Isaiah* and *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel* is regarded as one of the major books—and prophets—of the Old Testament. The book contains the oracles of Ezekiel, a priest of Jerusalem who was deported to Babylon in 597 B.C. It was probably written during the exilic period, with later additions, by an author of wide learning. The book has always been of major importance, with the vision in Chapter 1 seen in Christian tradition as a symbol of the Bible itself: the four beings representing the four parts of both the Old and New Testaments, and the four faces representing the gospel writers—Matthew, the angel/human; Mark, the lion; Luke, the ox; John, the eagle. The book's major theme is of God's presence and absence: the defiling effect of sin; God's abandonment of the city; and issues of divine power.

Commonly counted among the Wisdom books, *Job* has its own unique character. In poetry and prose it tells the story of an upright man who suffers greatly, is castigated by his friends, challenges God, and is finally vindicated and restored. It was probably given its final form in the early postexilic period (5th century B.C.). Like other Wisdom books, it starts not with God but with human efforts to live wisely each day. The theological questions flow from this starting point, especially as Job's suffering and plight confront the prevailing idea that faithful living should lead to material blessings.

Wisdom was probably written in Greek-speaking Alexandria, capital of Egypt, within 50–100 years of the life of Jesus. It is strongly influenced by the dominant Greek philosophical movements of the time like Stoicism, Scepticism and Epicureanism. In this complex book we

can note three themes: God's justice rules the world and divine wisdom is required to acquire that insight; God is Lord of the universe, of earth, nature and history; God's wisdom is fully engaged in human history and dwells with the human race. The unknown author adopts the *persona* of Solomon.

Further Reading

Harold A Buetow, *Thirst for Life*, Meditations/homilies for the Weekdays of the Year, Vol 1, St Mark. (notes on Wisdom literature). St Paul's

Harold A Buetow, *The New Out of the Old*, Meditations/homilies for the Weekdays of the Year, Vol 2, St Matthew. (notes on Ezekiel, and the books of Prophecy) St Paul's

Harold A Buetow, *Rejoicing in Hope*, Meditations/homilies for the Weekdays of the Year, Vol 3, St Luke. (notes on Wisdom, Job) St Paul's

Corinne L Carvalho, Paul V Niskanen, *Ezekiel, Daniel*. Vol 16, Old Testament, New Collegeville Bible Commentary. Liturgical Press

Richard J Clifford S.J., *Wisdom*. Vol 20, Old Testament, New Collegeville Bible Commentary. Liturgical Press

David N Freedman (ed.), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Eerdmans

Kathleen M O'Connor, *Job*. Vol 19, Old Testament, New Collegeville Bible Commentary. Liturgical Press

John J Pilch, *The Cultural World of the Prophets*. The First Reading, Year by Year. Year B. Liturgical Press