

First Reading, 27th to 34th Sundays : Year B, 2021

In Year B, between the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time and the Feast of Christ the King, two readings are taken from the Pentateuch (Genesis, Deuteronomy), one from each of the major prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, two readings from the Book of Daniel, one from the First Book of Kings, and one from the book of Wisdom.

The Feast of Christ the King closes the Church's liturgical year.

Readings for Ordinary Time – Year B

Twenty-seventh Sunday, Genesis 2:18–24

This is the second of the two creation accounts in Genesis. It emphasises relationships, depicting a God whom we can know to be near, in our midst. For creation to achieve its fullness, 'man' requires the creation of 'wo-man'. Each shares in the intimate bond that allows humankind to be in communion, and to move toward a full relationship with God.

Twenty-eighth Sunday, Wisdom 7:7–11

The king (Solomon) speaks of his constant prayer for the gift of Wisdom he received, expressing his esteem for Her and placing Her above the riches and power that humans normally value most highly. Wisdom brings to birth 'all good things', as a mother does.

Twenty-ninth Sunday, Isaiah 53:10–11

In these closing verses of the fourth Servant Song (read in full on Good Friday), the prophet proclaims that the Servant's suffering brings approval and exaltation from the Lord because his suffering and life are offered in atonement for the faults of many.

Thirtieth Sunday, Jeremiah 31:7–9

This hope-filled oracle or hymn calls for celebration among the people returned from exile. Those who are brought back include many who might have traditionally been excluded—'the blind and the lame, women with child, women in labour'. Though the people may weep over what has been lost, they also know they are comforted by the Lord, 'a father to Israel'.

Thirty-first Sunday, Deuteronomy 6:2–6

In God's name, Moses presents a Law for life in this land, described poetically as one 'where milk and honey flow'. At the heart of this Law is love of the Lord across each generation, to the exclusion of all other gods. Love or attachment to the Lord is loyalty that is both profound and exclusive.

Thirty-second Sunday, 1 Kings 17:10–16

In this, the second in a series of stories that demonstrate the Lord's power as shown through his prophet, Elijah, the prophet asks for food and water from a widow who has almost nothing to eat because of the drought (17:1–7). Through her generous response to his invitation the word of the Lord is fulfilled. She and her household then have enough to sustain themselves until the next rains come.

Thirty-third Sunday, Daniel 12:1–3

In this vision, Daniel describes a period of great distress during which Michael, God's messenger, is present and the people of Israel kept safe. We hear the first mention in the Old Testament of the concept of resurrection from the dead, those awakening from sleep 'in the dust of the earth'; and of eternal reward and punishment — 'some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting disgrace'.

Feast of Christ the King, Daniel 7:13–14

In this vision, Daniel describes ‘one like a son of man’ on whom was conferred ‘sovereignty, glory and kingship’, with eternal sovereignty over all peoples. This became a most important text in the New Testament as Jesus made it his own when answering the high priest during his trial before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:62). The Son of Man is both representative of God’s people and the one who inaugurates God’s kingdom.

Background to the Readings

Genesis is the first book in the Bible and first book of the Torah or Pentateuch. Genesis is the story of beginnings: of the universe, of humans, of joys and sorrows, and of the relationship between God and all creation, particularly mankind.

Some scholars divide *Genesis* into three parts: the Primeval Story (Ch. 1–11) on the earliest beginnings of the universe; the Ancestral Story (Ch. 12–36) which introduces ancestors of God’s people like Abraham and Sarah; and the second part of the Ancestral Story (Ch. 37–50) with its focus on Joseph, son of Jacob. The literary genres in Genesis include myths, saga and genealogy, predominantly from two sources but from four strands in total. The key themes of *Genesis* flow through all scripture, especially that divine will or action is behind all that happens.

Wisdom is one of the five Wisdom books in the Old Testament. It 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 text we can isolate 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.

Isaiah is one of the longest and certainly one of the most important books of the Old Testament. Many gospel themes are foreshadowed in the ‘fifth gospel’ as it has been called. In addition to the reading of the Servant Songs in Holy Week, it is used frequently during the year, and in Advent and Christmas seasons. Isaiah was an eight-century prophet, but the book was written over several centuries and probably took its final form between the 4th and 2nd centuries B.C. Scholars typically divide it into three parts which they call First Isaiah (Ch. 1–23, 28–39), Second or Deutero-Isaiah (Ch. 40–55), and Third or Trito-Isaiah (Ch. 56–66). A further component, probably no later than the 4th century, is found in Chapters 24–27.

The book of **Jeremiah** dates the era of the prophet and priest Jeremiah quite precisely in 626 B.C., with Jeremiah active until the early stages of the Exile in 587 B.C. The book contains poetic oracles, stories about the prophet and many rhetorical questions, plus additions from those who compiled the various sources over the following centuries. Jeremiah comes across as a man of great passion and strong, sometimes shocking language, a man who suffered at the hands of the authorities for his preaching, especially against those who continued to worship other gods at various shrines. He is a model of unswerving commitment to the Lord, to his people, and to the principles of righteousness and justice.

The book of **Deuteronomy** is the fifth of the five books of the Torah. Deuteronomy is organised as a series of addresses by Moses to the people of Israel. The book includes the death of Moses and the commissioning of Joshua as the next leader. Its great theme is that God has saved the people whom God loves; the people are to remember this, and love and obey God as people of the covenant with God. Deuteronomic theology and perspective had an influence well beyond this book, and shaped the development of early Judaism with its

focus on observance of the Law as the way of life for God's people. Authorship remains a mystery though many scholars favour a date in the 7th century B.C.

The two books of *Kings* give a retrospective history of Israel from the birth of Samuel to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. The books report the achievements of the kings in the northern and southern kingdoms, especially their fidelity to Yahweh.

The main focus of *1 Kings* is the attitude of Israel's kings toward the observance of the Deuteronomic law. In fact, the loyalty of the whole nation is assessed on the basis of royal behaviour. The reign of King Solomon takes up chapters 1–11, before the book moves on to tell the story of the two independent kingdoms as well as the start of Elijah's ministry as prophet, and the commissioning of Elisha after Elijah's death. The history of the book's composition remains hotly debated among scholars but it may have reached a final form sometime after the mid 6th century B.C.

The book of *Daniel* is the main example of apocalyptic literature in the Old Testament. In the Christian scriptures it is grouped with the three great books of prophecy but in the Jewish bible it is in the collection of writings. The general purpose of apocalyptic literature was to encourage people to seek a right relationship with God, particularly in a time of persecution. The book's hero, Daniel, is revealed as one of the Hebrews involved in the Babylonian captivity even though the book was written centuries later in the period of the Maccabean wars, possibly around 165 B.C. In this dark time, the book reaffirms God's care for the people and God's ultimate lordship over history, despite the persecutions under Antiochus IV. The book includes histories and folk tales as well as symbolic visions. It heavily influenced the New Testament, including Jesus' self-designation as 'Son of Man' and the coming glory of the 'kingdom of God', and the book of Revelation. Scholars believe it was written in three languages—Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek—making its composition quite complex. Despite that, the central message is a consistent one: how to remain faithful to the Lord in a world in which Israel is not autonomous but is subject to foreign kings and powers.

Further Reading

Harold A Buetow, *Thirst for Life*, Meditations/homilies for the Weekdays of the Year, Vol 1, St Mark. (for notes on Genesis, the Pentateuch, 1 Kings, 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. (for notes on Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Jeremiah, 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. (for notes on Daniel, Wisdom) 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

Joan E Cook, S.C., *Genesis*. Vol 2, Old Testament, New Collegeville Bible Commentary. Liturgical Press

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

Leslie J Hoppe O.F.M., *Isaiah*. Vol 13, Old Testament, New Collegeville Bible Commentary. Liturgical Press

Alice L Laffey, *First and Second Kings*. Vol 9, Old Testament, New Collegeville Bible Commentary. Liturgical Press

J Edward Owens OSsT, *Deuteronomy*. Vol 6, 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

Pauline A Viviano, *Jeremiah, Baruch*. Vol 14, Old Testament, New Collegeville Bible Commentary. Liturgical Press