

Proper 16
Cycle B RCL
Revised

1 Kings 8:(1, 6, 10-11), 22-30

Chapter 8 describes the dedication of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. Solomon had required the help of the king of Tyre and his chief builder Hiram to construct the Yahweh temple in Jerusalem because no Israelite knew how to build such a temple. Israel had heretofore served Yahweh with a moveable tent cultus, not a permanent temple in wood and stone. The function of the main temple in a near eastern capital city was twofold: (1) to serve as the dwelling place for the national divinity, and (2) to serve as the treasury of the realm. Our passage deals with both aspects. The priests bring into the holy of holies the Ark of the Covenant, the very throne of the invisible Yahweh, so that Yahweh was now Yahweh of Zion, the local divinity of a local cult. Solomon winced at the idea in verse 27 even as he enabled it. Since Israelite kings were not priests, the king's relationship with the temple was always political. So Solomon was quick to remind the LORD (and anyone else listening) that the LORD had promised David an eternal throne in Jerusalem (verses 22-26): In other words, the kingship should be as permanent as the temple. God's public reputation ("name") will be enhanced by the stories of non-Israelites who prayed toward this temple and had their petitions answered (verses 41-43).

Psalm 84

Like the Apostrophe to Zion from the Dead Sea Psalm Scroll (11QPs^a), this poem is addressed to Zion herself. It is a song sung by pilgrims to a major celebration in Jerusalem. The location of *Baca* (84:6) is unknown.

OR

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-25

The story of Israel's subscription to the covenant with God at Shechem is a self-contained tradition the author placed here as a fitting end to Joshua's farewell address (Joshua 23). The ruins of ancient Shechem stand within the city limits of the modern town of Nablus in the West Bank. It controlled a major north-south trade route through the central highlands and for that reason needed to be in Israelite hands if the conquest was to be successful. Deuteronomy 27 describes a similar covenant subscription shouted between Israelites assembled on Mt. Gerizim and those assembled on Mt. Ebal. Shechem lies in the valley between the two peaks.

Psalm 34:15-22

This extended *thanksgiving* would be uttered aloud in the temple to fulfill a vow made to God when praying for deliverance in a *lament*. The psalm recalls that the psalmist called upon the LORD in the midst of terror (vs. 4) and was delivered from trouble. Laments often include a promise to teach the congregation about God's faithfulness. (See, for instance Psalm 51:13.) This psalm fulfills just such a promise.

Ephesians 6:10-20

The apocalyptic eschatology (end-of-the-world teaching) is more cosmic in Ephesians and Colossians than in the authentic letters of Paul. Here the description of heavenly warfare reminds us

of the Book of Revelation, not Paul. In Revelation, however, Christians assist in the cosmic battle by their constancy in suffering. In our passage, Christians take on the powers of the universe by their active righteousness, their “armor.” Several commentators have noted the similarities between the military images here and those of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

John 6:59-69

The teaching about bread from heaven is so important that the author makes it a major point of division among the disciples. From this point on, many of his students desert him (John 6:66) because they, like the crowd, misunderstand Jesus. As always in John, Jesus replies that only God can bring human beings to know the Christ, and he recognizes that some will not believe. The “flesh,” meaning the world of human beings apart from God, cannot create this understanding, *i.e.* those who do not believe cannot make themselves believe. This division in his following leaves only the twelve as his retinue of loyal students.

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