

Proper 24
Cycle C

Jeremiah 31:27-34

Jeremiah 30:1-33:26 has claimed the monikers “Jeremiah's 'Little Book of Comfort,’” or “Book of Consolation.” In professional circles these chapters bear the name “The Book of Restoration.” Both the popular names for this section and the academic point to the element of comfort and hope God expresses to the prophet. Although the collection of oracles came to completion only after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, the preaching within it seems to be a message of hope for reuniting the kingdoms of Israel and Judah as the Assyrian empire became quickly and progressively weak in the years after the emperor Assurbanipal's death (627 BCE). Our passage consists of two short parts. In verses 27-30 we find the Lord commenting on a popular proverb (31:29), assuring the hearers that they will not have to pay for their forbears' wrongs in the new kingdom. Verses 31-34 contain the promise of a new covenant between God and Israel.)

The difference between the old covenant and the new covenant which God promises to make (Hebrew “cut”) with Israel is not one of content but of mode. God will write the new covenant “on their hearts (31:3)” unlike the first covenant which had to be passed down and explained from generation to generation. In the Bible the heart is the organ of reason, memory, and will. To have the covenant inscribed upon their hearts means that Israelites in the new age will know God's covenant from memory and will not require others to explain it to them.

Psalms 119:97-104

This unusually long psalm (176 verses) is an *acrostic* psalm. The other acrostic psalms in the Bible usually begin each verse with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, but in Psalm 119 each strophe has each line begin with the same Hebrew letter and then the following strophe has each line begin with the next Hebrew letter, *etc.* The eight verses of Psalm 119:97-104 all begin with the letter *mem*. Besides being an acrostic in format, the psalm is also a *wisdom psalm*, a kind of psalm not written for worship in the temple but for recitation in the court schools. There is no denying the insolent tone of verses 99-100. Gerstenberger thinks these verses comprise a ritual boasting. We have here an exaggerated comparison between the knowledge the law provides and the knowledge human wisdom imparts.

OR

Genesis 32:22–31

The story of Jacob's wrestling match is a *hieros logos*, a local legend that explains the origin of an ancient shrine, in this case Peniel on the Jabbok River in the Transjordan. It was at this place that Jacob fought with a divine being all night and so is a place where the divine dwells. The Yahwistic author has used this local tale as the occasion for renaming Jacob with the national eponym, Israel.

Psalms 121

This *pilgrimage psalm* may be a dialogue between worshiper and priest as the worshiper prepares to depart from the mountain sanctuary in Jerusalem. The priest expresses the hope that the local gods to which the worshiper is now returning will protect the pilgrim as well as the Lord of Zion protects Israel. In support of this is the negative form *al yiten* in verse 3 which should not be translated “he will not let” but, rather, “may he not let.” Others have pointed out that the psalm makes no mention of Jerusalem and that it could be words of assurance for

pilgrims leaving their home town for a shrine or, indeed, for any journey. H. Schmidt even includes it in the category of “greetings and good wishes.”

2 Timothy 3:14–4:5

Many Gnostic Christians denied the value of the Jewish scriptures for the life of the church, claiming that they portrayed an inferior God, a God of wrath and justice, as opposed to the God of love revealed by Jesus. The author commends Timothy for being a student of the scriptures since childhood and commends them as useful for instruction. Interestingly, they are not recommended for their prophetic power. The scriptures in question are more or less those we recognize today as the Septuagint (LXX), the Alexandrian collection of Jewish books that Jews of that city read as scripture.

(Luke 18:1–8)

This is an argument *qal va-xomer* ("from the simple to the complex"), recognized by the Rabbis as one of the most effective methods of reasoning. If the persistent entreaties of a widow can make even an unrighteous judge do justice, how much more effective will the constant prayers of the faithful to the righteous judge of heaven be?

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