

Lectionary Readings: Job 19: 1-27a or
Sirach/Ecclesiasticus 38: 24-34
Psalm 74: (1-11) 12-17 (18-23)
Hebrews 8: 1-13
Luke 11: 1-13

This week's reading from Job features part of Job's reply to Bildad in the second cycle of speeches – Eliphaz has already spoken (chapter 15) and Job replied (chapters 16-17); Zophar has yet to speak (chapter 20) with Job's reply to him (chapter 21).

The NIV Bible Commentary introduces our passage with these words:

The chapter divides into four logical stanzas. In the first Job shows increasing irritation over his counsellors' shameless attacks and his impatience with their superior claims (vv.2-5).

Then follows Job's feeling of abandonment by God and his perception that God's attack on him is wrong (vv.6-12).

Then he blames God for alienating his kinsmen and household, even his wife (vv.13-20).

In vv.21-27 he ends this lament, to our amazement, with a triumphant expression of faith in the one who will ultimately champion his cause and vindicate him (vv.23-27).

This stanza is bracketed by words to his friends whom Job does not believe will ever have pity (v.21). So he warns them of the dire consequences of their false accusations (vv.28-29 – beyond our reading to verse 27a).

Job 19: 27-29:

²⁷ I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

²⁸ 'If you say, "How we will hound him, since the root of the trouble lies in him,"^[a] ²⁹ you should fear the sword yourselves; for wrath will bring punishment by the sword, and then you will know that there is judgment.^[b]'

Footnotes

a. Job 19:28 Many Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint and Vulgate; most Hebrew manuscripts *me*

b. Job 19:29 Or *sword, / that you may come to know the Almighty*

Turning to Job's triumphant expression of faith I am reminded of the soprano aria that opens part 3 of Handel's Messiah – coming immediately after the Hallelujah Chorus:

I know that my redeemer liveth, (Job 19:25-26)
 and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; (x3)

And though worms destroy this body,
 yet in my flesh shall I see God, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

I know that my redeemer liveth.
 And though worms destroy this body yet in my flesh shall I see God,
 yet in my flesh shall I see God, shall I see God.

I know that my redeemer liveth.

For now is Christ risen from the dead, (1 Corinthians 15:20)
 the first-fruits of them that sleep, of them that sleep,
 the first-fruits of them that sleep,
 for now is Christ risen, for now is Christ risen from the dead,
 the first-fruits of them that sleep.

This aria is followed by the chorus:

Since by man came death,
 by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die,
 even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

The text for 'Messiah' was taken from the Authorised Version, with its reference to worms:

²⁵ For I know *that* my redeemer liveth, and *that* he shall stand at the latter *day* upon the earth:

²⁶ and *though* after my skin *worms* destroy this *body*, yet in my flesh shall I see God:

Most translations make no reference to worms! The NIV has a number of Footnotes in verses 25 and 26:

²⁵ I know that my redeemer^[a] lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth.^[b]

²⁶ And after my skin has been destroyed, yet^[c] in^[d] my flesh I will see God;

Footnotes

a. Job 19:25 Or *vindicator*

b. Job 19:25 Or *on my grave*

c. Job 19:26 Or *And after I awake, / though this body has been destroyed, / then*

d. Job 19:26 Or *destroyed, / apart from*

Verse 25 reminds me, also, of a favourite hymn, loved by my mother (it may well have been top of her list!):

| | |
|---|---|
| I know that my Redeemer lives - What joy the blest assurance gives! He lives, He lives, who once was dead; He lives my everlasting Head. | He lives, and grants me daily breath; He lives, and I shall conquer death; He lives, my mansion to prepare; He lives, to lead me safely there. |
| He lives, to bless me with His love; He lives, to plead for me above; He lives, my hungry soul to feed; He lives, to help in time of need. | He lives, all glory to His name; He lives, my Saviour, still the same; What joy the blest assurance gives, I know that my Redeemer lives! |

Samuel Medley

Charles Wesley also penned a 'short' hymn based on this verse in Job:

| | |
|---|--|
| I know that my Redeemer lives, And ever prays for me; A token of His love He gives, A pledge of liberty. | Jesus, I hang upon Thy word; I steadfastly believe Thou wilt return and claim me, Lord, And to Thyself receive. |
| I find Him lifting up my head, He brings salvation near, His presence makes me free indeed, And He will soon appear. | Thy love I soon expect to find In all its depth and height, To comprehend the eternal mind, And grasp the Infinite. |
| He wills that I should holy be; What can withstand His will? The counsel of His grace in me He surely shall fulfil. | When God is mine, and I am His, Of paradise possessed, I taste unutterable bliss And everlasting rest. |

In Sirach/Ecclesiasticus (38:24-39:11) Ben Sira describes “**The Scribal Profession**”.

The Oxford Bible Commentary on the Apocrypha says by way of introduction:

The contrast between the scribe and various professional artisans bears an obvious analogy to an Egyptian composition called the ‘Satire on the Trades’, the *Instruction of Kheti, Son of Duaf* composed in the early second millennium, but copied repeatedly over several centuries. It is derisive towards all kinds of manual work: “the building contractor is dirtier than pigs; the embalmer smells of corpses; the metal worker stinks more than fish”.

Writing some 1500 years later, Ben Sira is much more diplomatic. He acknowledges that every city needs craftsmen, and that they are worthy of respect. None the less, his tone is condescending and his goal is to proclaim the superiority of his own profession. This superiority is reflected in the positions of honour listed (vv.32-33), which are beyond the capacity of an artisan, but for which a scribe is well qualified.

Sirach/Ecclesiasticus 38: 24-34: (NEB)

²⁴ A scholar's wisdom comes of ample leisure; if a man is to be wise he must be relieved of other tasks.

²⁵ How can a man become wise who guides the plough, whose pride is in wielding his goad, who is absorbed in the task of driving oxen, and talk only about cattle?

²⁶ He concentrates on ploughing his furrows, and works late to give the heifers their fodder.

²⁷ So it is with every craftsman or designer who works by night as well as by day, such as those who make engravings on signets, and patiently vary the design; they concentrate on making an exact representation, and sit up late to finish their task.

²⁸ So it is with the smith, sitting by his anvil, intent on his iron-work. The smoke of the fire shrivels his flesh, as he wrestles in the heat of the furnace. The hammer rings again and again in his ears, and his eyes are on the pattern he is copying. He concentrates on completing the task, and stays up late to give it a perfect finish.

²⁹ So it is with potter, sitting at his work, turning the wheel with his feet, always engrossed in the task of making up his tally; ³⁰ he moulds the clay with his arm, crouching forward to apply his strength. He concentrates on finishing the glazing, and stays awake to clean out the furnace.

³¹ All these rely on their hands, and each is skilful at his own craft.

³² Without them a city would have no inhabitants; no settlers or travellers would come to it.

³³ **Yet they are not in demand at public discussions or prominent in the assembly. They do not sit on the judge's bench or understand the decisions of the courts. They cannot expound moral or legal principles and are not ready with maxims.**

³⁴ But they remain the fabric of this world, and their prayers are about their daily work.

(or and their daily work is their prayer)

We admire the skills displayed by experienced artisans, but I wonder if there is advice to each of us in verse 24?

²⁴ A scholar's wisdom comes of ample leisure; **if a man is to be wise he must be relieved of other tasks.**

Are we too involved in “things that must be done” and neglectful of that ‘ample leisure’ when we can spend time with the Lord?

Psalm 74 is the second of eleven psalms attributed to Asaph and found at the beginning of Book III (Psalms 73-89). It is described as a *maskil* of Asaph – there is no direct translation, the most common thought is a literary or musical term.

The NIV Study Bible tells us that “*the Asaphite psalms are dominated by the theme of God’s rule over his people and the nations*”.

The reading from this psalm has two optional sections (vv.1-11 and vv.18-23) with **the middle section (vv.12-17) being the set reading for today.**

The psalm is headed, in the NIV Bible Commentary, “**The Destruction of the Temple**”:

God’s people in exile weep over the destruction of the temple (586 B.C.), the symbol of the presence and protection of God. In this *community lament* the godly nevertheless affirm the creative and redemptive powers of their covenant God as the ground for their petition to be redeemed.

The commentators identify six sections within the psalm.

| | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Prayer for Remembrance | (vv.1-3) | |
| Destruction of the Temple | (vv.4-8) | |
| Feeling of Abandonment | (vv.9-11) | |
| God’s Past Involvements | (vv.12-17) | the ‘set’ reading |
| Prayer for Remembrance | (vv.18-21) | |
| Destruction of God’s Enemies | (vv.22-23) | |

Returning to an introduction to the psalm, this time in the NIV Study Bible:

A prayer for God to come to the aid of His people and defend His cause in the face of the mocking of the enemies – the Lord’s relationship to His people is like that of a king to his nation.

The psalm dates from the time of the exile when Israel had been destroyed as a nation, the Promised Land devastated and the temple reduced to ruins. Because of the text in verse 9 its relationship to the ministries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (prophets in the exile) is uncertain.

Thematically the psalm divides into two halves of 11 verses each, with verse 12 (the centre line) highlighting the primary thematic element that unifies the prayer.

¹² But God is my King from long ago; he brings salvation on the earth.

Verses 1-11 are framed by the “Whys” of the people’s complaint; the whole psalm is framed by pleas to God to “remember”. Note also that the “theys” of verses 4-8 have their counterpoint in the “yous” of verses 13-17 (highlighted in the Hebrew by seven emphatic pronouns) – the mighty acts of God are appealed to against the destructive and haughty deeds of the enemies.

Our reading comes from Hebrews chapter 8 but if we turn back to the previous chapter we read a complex passage, clearly written for a Hebrew readership:

Jesus like Melchizedek

¹¹ If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood – and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood – why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?

¹² For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also. ¹³ He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. ¹⁵ And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, ¹⁶ one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is declared:

‘You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek.’^(a)

¹⁸ The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

²⁰ And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, ²¹ but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him:

‘The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: You are a priest for ever.’^(b)

²² Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant.

²³ Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; ²⁴ but because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely^(c) those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

²⁶ Such a high priest truly meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect for ever.

Footnotes

a. [Hebrews 7:17](#) Psalm 110:4

b. [Hebrews 7:21](#) Psalm 110:4

c. [Hebrews 7:25](#) Or for ever

Jesus is described as “*a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek*” (Psalm 110:4). We know very little about this character! After the rescue of Lot by Abram (Genesis 14) we read:

¹⁷ After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley).

¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine.

He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹ and he blessed Abram, saying,

‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.

²⁰ And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.’

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Two things have been pointed out, over the years, regarding this encounter – a blessing is offered by the greater to the lesser individual and it is the lesser that tithes to the greater.

Who was Melchizedek? – King of Salem, probably a king-priest as was common among the tribes at the time. He clearly had considerable, if perhaps imperfect, knowledge of the Lord.

These verses in Genesis record the only appearance of Melchizedek in Scripture. There is the reference to him in Psalm 110 and the writer to the Hebrews refers to him on eight occasions in chapters 5-7.

Moving into chapter 8 and our reading today, the writer emphasises Jesus as “**The High Priest of a New Covenant**”:

¹ Now the main point of what we are saying is this: we do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ² and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

He goes on to point out that every high priest offers gifts and sacrifices as prescribed by the Law. The Tabernacle or the Temple had to be constructed exactly as laid out to Moses.

It was important that Jesus would make an offering – something different and special. In verses 6-7 we read:

⁶ But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

⁷ **For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.**

I am reminded of a piece of ‘drama’ seen at a Kingdom Faith Bible Camp some years ago. Two characters standing on the edge of the platform, holding a conversation that ran along the lines it was time for Plan B to be put into action as Plan A had clearly failed. The two characters were, of course, Jesus and His Father, ‘looking down’ on earth, their creation.

As we read on to the end of chapter 8:

⁸ But God found fault with the people and said^[a]:

‘The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

¹⁰ This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord.

I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts.

I will be their God, and they will be my people.

¹¹ No longer will they teach their neighbours, or say to one another, “Know the Lord,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

¹² For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.^[b]

¹³ **By calling this covenant ‘new’, he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.**

Footnotes

a. [Hebrews 8:8](#) Some manuscripts may be translated *fault and said to the people*.

b. [Hebrews 8:12](#) Jer. 31:31-34

In the Luke passage for today we find one of the disciples asking Jesus to teach them how to pray – apparently John the Baptist had done this for his disciples:

¹ One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’

² He said to them, ‘When you pray, say:

“‘Father,^[a]

hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.^[b]

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.^[c]

And lead us not into temptation.”^[d]

Footnotes

a. [Luke 11:2](#) Some manuscripts *Our Father in heaven*

b. [Luke 11:2](#) Some manuscripts *come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

c. [Luke 11:4](#) Greek *everyone who is indebted to us*

d. [Luke 11:4](#) Some manuscripts *temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*

The Gospels of Mark and John do not record Jesus teaching the “Pater Noster” -“The Lord’ Prayer”; but there is a ‘longer’ version in Matthew: (Chapter 6)

¹Be careful not to practise your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.
If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Prayer

⁵And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.
Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us today our daily bread.

¹²**And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

¹³And lead us not into temptation,^[a]
but deliver us from the evil one.^{[b]”}

¹⁴**For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.**

¹⁵**But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**

Footnotes

a. [Matthew 6:13](#) The Greek for *temptation* can also mean *testing*.

b. [Matthew 6:13](#) Or *from evil*; some late manuscripts *one, / for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen.*

An ‘old’ quote from Wikipedia (if it can be trusted!):

*“The Lord’s Prayer is one of the best loved and most spoken prayers on the planet.
On Easter Sunday 2007, it is thought that over 2 billion people worldwide recited this prayer.”*

We are used to reciting the prayer, out loud, as part of our congregational worship. Have you ever stopped to listen to the words which should flow together but which are separated with a ‘huge’ breath after each phrase? Chief among these are the lines about having our debts forgiven **as we have forgiven our debtors**.

Jesus makes it very clear in verses 14-15 that our heavenly Father will not forgive us if we do not forgive those who have wronged us.

We call this the pattern prayer – I have known members of congregations being very upset if the Lord’s Prayer has not been recited in the service. Prayers offered may have conformed to “the pattern” – praise and adoration; praying for the Kingdom to come; laying our needs before the Lord; praying for forgiveness and the ability to forgive those who wrong us; praying that we will be protected from the spiritual powers of the world – but there is still complaint if the prayer itself has not been recited.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus concludes his teaching on prayer in this way:

⁹So I say to you: ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

¹¹Which of you fathers, if your son asks for^[a] a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹²Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

¹³If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Footnotes

a. [Luke 11:11](#) Some manuscripts *for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for*

Pray, without ceasing, pray,
Your captain gives the word;
His summons cheerfully obey,
and call upon the Lord:
To God your every want
In instant prayer display;
Pray always; pray, and never faint;
Pray, without ceasing, pray!

In fellowship, alone,
To God with faith draw near,
Approach His courts, besiege His throne
With all the powers of prayer:
Go to His temple, go,
Nor from His altar move;
Let every house His worship know,
And every heart His love.

Pour out your souls to God,
And bow them with your knees,
And spread your hearts and hands abroad,
And pray for Zion’s peace;
Your guides and kindred bear
For ever on your mind;
Extend the arms of mighty prayer,
And grasp all humankind.

Charles Wesley