

Proper 18  
Year C RCL

Jeremiah 18:1-11

The omission of the final verse (18:12) of this oracle in our reading omits the decision of Judah to follow its own way despite the fact that God would repent of the evil intended for the nation if it would give up its stubbornness against the divine will. This verse is important for dating the narrative to the time of the exile or thereafter because the author knows exactly how unfaithfully Judah responded to Jeremiah's challenge. Destruction was not inevitable. Judah brought it upon itself. The figure of God as potter occurs in Genesis 2:7 Isaiah 29:16; 64:8; Sirach 33:13. St. Paul uses the metaphor of God as potter in Romans 9:21 to describe God's freedom to punish or bless.

Psalms 139:1-5, 13-17

Verses 19–24 suggest that the psalm was used as a *personal lament*, seeking God's redemption from wicked enemies. The psalm is unusual, however, in its long, hymn-like meditation on God's universal knowledge and, specifically, knowledge of the petitioner. Even in the underworld (Hebrew: *Sheol*) or in the depths of the sea, traditionally places unvisited by Yahweh, the psalmist would not be able to escape from God's presence (139:7–12).

Deuteronomy 30:15–20

Deuteronomy consists principally of three farewell speeches of Moses to the Israelites, encamped on the Plain of Moab and poised to enter the Promised Land. This is the conclusion of the third and shortest of the speeches and was added to Deuteronomy after Judah's exile to Babylon in 586 BCE. Moses' warning to the Israelites in Moab to obey the commandments of God, especially those against idolatry, served also as a warning to the exiled Israelites in Babylon that successful tenure in the land of promise would depend upon faithfulness to their God.

Psalms 1

*Wisdom psalms* were composed by the scholars of the royal court's school in Jerusalem to help young pupils understand and apply the fundamentals of honesty, modesty, and right-dealing to every aspect of their lives. Although these songs were not composed for the Temple, as were the other psalms of the Psalter, they came to be part of Israel's treasury of sacred songs during the exile in Babylon when the Temple stood in ruins.

Philemon 1–21

The slave Onesimus fled the house of Philemon in Colossae and encountered Paul, who languished under house arrest in an undisclosed location. In fulfilling the letter of the Roman law which required free subjects to return runaway slaves, Paul sought nevertheless to subvert the reality of Onesimus' servitude by encouraging Philemon to receive Onesimus, not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ.

Luke 14:25–33

In the first century, itinerant teachers like Jesus would address large groups of people in an effort to recruit new students (disciples), who, usually for a modest tuition, would become part of the teacher's retinue or school. Here Jesus makes it clear that the cost of tuition for those who would be his students is anything but modest. It amounts to the renunciation of everything they hold dear, even life itself; and he advises his listeners to evaluate carefully whether they wish to pay that price.