

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Job 1:1;2:1-10

NRSV

Earlier books speak of humans deviating from God's ways, being punished for their sins, repenting, and being restored to God's favour. But in the wisdom books, another side of God's relationship with people is explored: he has other purposes in his relations with humans. Today's reading sets the scene for Job's story, in which the older way of knowing God is contrasted with the newer. "Job" is a foreigner; he lives in "Uz", south-east of Palestine. As such, he is drawn to God by faith, not ethnic origin. He is "blameless" (perfect in integrity, consistent in character) and "upright" (living according to a moral norm). He has a right relationship with God; he shows him reverence and obedience. He deliberately and consistently chooses to do good. But worthy as he is, Satan suggests to God that his faith be tested (1:6-11): are material success and children, rewards for fidelity, his bonds to God, or is it faith ("for nothing", i.e. in love)? God agrees that Job shall be tested (1:12). ("Satan" here is not the devil; rather he spies on people's misdeeds and reports them to God.) So Job loses his children and all his wealth (1:13-19), grieves (1:20), and accepts his lot before God (1:21). "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong-doing" (1:22). Job passes the first test; he continues to bless God as the origin of all life: it is God's to give and God's to take away.

Now Job is tested again. 2:1 pictures God as a potentate with a court of "heavenly beings" round him. God suggests that Job be tested further (2:3). 2:4 says: people may be prepared to give up wealth to save their *hides* ("skin for skin" is from bartering hides) but (2:5) if God ruins their health then they will turn away from him. Job moves to the garbage (rubbish) dump ("potsherd", "ashes", 2:8); he excludes himself from human society. His wife reacts as Satan expects Job to do, advising him to end his misery and pain (2:9) but Job is reasonable, kindly and wise in his answer (2:10): both he and his wife ("we") have suffered, but even so we are not in a position to tell God which of his gifts we will receive. He sees his suffering as from God, but still maintains his faith in him.

Psalm 26

NRSV

The psalmist seeks delivery from antagonists. He has lived with "integrity", in a godly way; he has trusted in God constantly. Either he has been unjustly accused, or he simply invites God to test his commitment. In vv. 4-5, he protests his innocence with a *negative confession*: he has always avoided those who say they are God's but are not, and those opposed to God. He is even willing to proclaim his innocence publicly in the liturgy ("around your altar", v. 6). God's "glory abides" (v. 8) in the Temple. He prays for help, for deliverance from his ungodly enemies; may his destiny not be the suffering of those who go against God (v. 9). Finally,

he vows to continue to "walk in my integrity" (v. 11), in God's ways. He really is godly, and will honour God in public worship.

Hebrews 1:1-4;2:5-12

NRSV

The author contrasts the old and new ways of God: that of "long ago" and that "in these last days" (1:2), our era, the one between Christ's first and second coming. God spoke then to the ancestors of Israel, our spiritual ancestors; in this era he speaks to us; then he spoke through "prophets" (1:1, including Moses); now he speaks through "a Son" (1:2), the one who is Son. A priest *mediated* and *purified*. Christ shared in (and *mediated*) creation of the "worlds" (in Jewish cosmology, the earth and the heavens) and is "heir" of God. Jesus ("He", 1:3) shows us something of God's greatness, and is an exact image, icon, of God. He continues to sustain all that is created. Jesus *purified* us of our sins through his death; he was then exalted in returning to the Father. Since before time and now he is "much superior to angels" (1:4), to other heavenly beings, being God.

In Judaism, angels controlled the world (2:5), and priests were seen as angels. The quotation in 2:6-8 is Psalm 8:4-6; to the author, who wrote Psalms is immaterial (2:6): the psalm is the word of God. These verses say humans are superior to nature, but here they are used to refer to Jesus, possibly because "human beings" was translated *son of man* in the contemporary translation. All creation is under our control (2:8) but now we only see this in Jesus: he for a time humbled himself in becoming human, so that he might die for the sake of all. Jesus' exaltation ("crowned", 2:9) is a consequence of his death. Then 2:10: it was in accordance with God's plan to save all people that Jesus should complete God's action ("make ... perfect"); Jesus is the forerunner for all of us in being with God forever.

Mark 10:2-16

NRSV

Jesus is now in Judea (or east of the Jordan, in Perea.) Mosaic law permitted a man to divorce his wife (but not a woman her husband) for cause, but the grounds were unclear. The Pharisees were divided re the legality of divorce as well as the grounds for it, so their question is a trap. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 says (in part) that a man may simply "write a certificate of dismissal" (v. 4), without legal proceedings. (That book was seen as Moses' teaching.) In vv. 5-8, Jesus says: Moses allowed divorce as a concession to human weakness, but God's original plan was that marriage be for life: man and wife are "one flesh"; my stance is God's plan, not Mosaic law. In this plan, remarriage is either literally "adultery" (vv. 11-12) or a deviation from God's ways. (Sometimes a wife, in effect, divorced her husband. Elsewhere Jesus accepts that a man may divorce an unfaithful wife.)

Vv. 13-16 tell about the kingdom of God and the kind of people who will be admitted to it. People wish Jesus to "touch" (v. 13) their children, to lay hands on them and *bless them* (v. 16). Jesus is "indignant" (v. 14) at the disciples' inability to understand him and the nature of the Kingdom. Children are *receptive*; a child has no status, makes no claim to power. Whoever is not receptive to God's gifts will not enter the kingdom. There is no place there for human status and power.

