

TODAY'S READINGS IN CONTEXT
DECEMBER 24, 2017

2 Samuel 7:1-11,16

The Book of Samuel is part of the “Deuteronomistic History” that includes the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. These books are a “didactic history” that covers the period from the time just before the entry into the Promised Land (c. 1220 BCE, if the account is historical) to the beginning of Babylonian Captivity (586 BCE). The books were written in the period from 650 BCE to 550 BCE and continued to be revised even after that.

The Deuteronomists emphasized that YHWH controls history, and when the people (and their kings) worshiped YHWH properly, good things would happen to them. When they worshiped false gods, however, bad events would overtake them.

Today's reading is set in the early part of the Reign of King David (1005 to 965 BCE).

These verses and the omitted verses (vv.12-15) were central to the Deuteronomists' belief that even if the kings and people strayed, over the long term, YHWH's steadfast love would be unwavering (v.15) and the line/house of David would be “established forever” (v.16). YHWH's unconditional promises “explained” (in retrospect) the Judeans' independent survival after the Assyrians conquered the Northern 10 tribes in 722 BCE.

The Babylonian Captivity (587 to 539 BCE), however, presented a major theological disconnect for the Judeans. How were they to explain the loss of the land promised by YHWH to Abraham and the end of the Davidic line in 587 BCE? During and after the Exile, the prophets (especially Second Isaiah and Ezekiel) began to resolve this disconnect by affirming that YHWH's promises were still in force but had been temporarily suspended because of the failure of the Judeans to uphold their part of the covenant with YHWH – to worship YHWH faithfully and to live justly.

Continuing to the First Century (and even for some Jews today), one of the characteristics of the awaited Messiah would be that the Messiah would come from the Davidic line.

Romans 16:25-27

Paul's letter to the Romans is his longest, last and most complex letter. It was written in the late 50s or early 60s (CE) to a Jesus Follower community that Paul did not establish. Among other messages in the letter, Paul sought to encourage respectful and supportive relationships between the Gentile Jesus Followers and the Jewish Jesus Followers in Rome.

Nero's predecessor (Claudius) expelled the Jews from Rome in 49 CE. During Nero's reign (54-68 CE), he allowed Jews (including Jewish Jesus Followers) to return. Their return created tensions within the Jesus Follower Community. (Jesus Followers were not called “Christians” until the 80's.)

Today's verses are the concluding blessing in the letter. Some ancient manuscripts of Paul's letter do not contain these verses.

TODAY'S READINGS IN CONTEXT
DECEMBER 25, 2015

Isaiah 62:6-12

The Book of Isaiah is a composite of writings from three distinct periods in Israel's history. Chapters 1-39 are called "First Isaiah" and were written in the 20 years before Jerusalem was under direct siege by the Assyrians in 701 BCE. "Second Isaiah" is Chapters 40 to 55 and brings hope to the Judeans during the time of the Exile in Babylon (587 to 539 BCE) by telling them they have suffered enough and will return to Jerusalem. "Third Isaiah" is Chapters 56 to 66 and gives encouragement to the Judeans who returned to Jerusalem after the Exile. In today's reading, the prophet assures the Judeans that Yahweh will be their protector and that sentinels (prophets who speak for Yahweh) will guard over them.

Titus 3:4-7

Although Titus is not mentioned in the extensive descriptions of Paul's journeys in the last half of Acts of the Apostles, he is mentioned in two of Paul's authentic epistles – Galatians and Corinthians. Titus was Paul's co-worker and envoy, and this letter is crafted as a reminder for Titus to serve the large Jewish Jesus Follower Community in Crete. The Letter to Titus is one of the so-called "Pastoral Letters" (the others are 1 and 2 Timothy) which contain substantial amounts of advice to Paul's co-workers. Most scholars conclude that the Pastoral Letters were written in Paul's name by some of Paul's disciples after Paul's death in Rome in 63 CE. In today's reading, the author presents succinct creed-like statements about key understandings of the meaning of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, and the continuing work of the Spirit.