

Revised Common Lectionary readings for **February 24** in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand - read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: **God the Creator of heaven and earth - and man in His image**

Genesis 2:4-9, 15-25 – The creation of man and woman in Eden

Luke 8:22-25 – Jesus takes authority over a storm on the lake

Revelation 4:1-11 – Jesus shows John the praise and worship of heaven

Also: Psalm 65

Genesis 2:4-9, 15-25 – The creation of man and woman in Eden

Man is created out of the dust of the ground and woman is formed from man.

4 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

"This is the account" – introduces the story of the creation of man, followed by the curses resulting from man's independence from God.

"The Lord God" – Yahweh Elohim, the I AM of Exodus 3:14 together with Elohim, the Creator's power and majesty.

5-6 Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.

7 Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

"A man from... the ground" – wordplay between adam, a man, and adamah, ground.

8 Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there He put the man He had formed.

"In the east... Eden" – eastwards, the author looking to where the Tigris and Euphrates meet in present-day southern Iraq. Eden has the meaning of bliss or delight.

9 The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

"Tree of life" – showing God's intention for Adam and Eve to have access to life.

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

"Put him" – literally "caused him to rest" (and his work would be part of that) in the Garden (also v.8).

"Work it... take care of it" – prepare and tend, abar, and keep or guard, shamar. The same words are used of priests and Levites serving in the tabernacle, Numbers 3:7-8.

16-17 And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

18 The Lord God said, "It is not good for

• **For further study**, Exod. 19:16-19, Ps. 18:12-15.

6 Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the centre, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.

"Four living creatures" – similar to the cherubim of Ezekiel 1 and seraphim of Isaiah 6. The four creatures symbolise the best of creation, wild animals (lion), domestic animals (ox), humanity (face like a man) and birds (eagle).

"Lay their crowns" – the twenty-four, who are the most exalted among the throng of worshippers, submit to God's supreme authority and worship ("fall down") while praising God "You are worthy", simply for who He is, all-powerful Creator.

7-8 The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and

IN PRACTICE We are used to images on our TV screens from cameras which go everywhere - to battlefields under bombardment, into audiences with dictators, and bringing us the experience of tornadoes. What John was permitted to see was too bright, too holy and too great to scale down to a mere living room screen. Yet this is the place we are permitted to enter because of Jesus. When we accepted Him as our personal Lord and Saviour, a transaction took place and we became clothed in His righteousness. Still on earth, we might be on the outside of the throng, but we can still draw near - and God draws near to us. John's vision, passed on to us, is a picture for us to follow: submission in worship together with praise for God's character, as all-powerful Creator.

QUESTION *How easy or difficult is it for you to join in the praise "You are worthy!" as one admitted to be one of the heavenly worshippers?*

PRAYER Almighty Majestic Creator God, as one whose life is hidden in Your Son, Christ Jesus, I am so grateful that I can draw near to You as my Father. I praise You for your greatness, unmitigated goodness, mercy and truth. Truly, You are worthy of all praise as the One who is over all things, from the beginning and through eternity - and the One who sent His Son to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. I give my heart to You in worship. Amen.

night they never stop saying:

" 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,' who was, and is, and is to come."

"Holy, holy, holy" – as Isaiah 6:3. The triple expression makes it the ultimate emphasis. "Who was, and is, and is to come" – expands the name I AM, Exodus 3:14-15, to eternity past and future.

9-10 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being."

"You are worthy" – heaven praises Almighty God simply for who He is.

the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

"Not good" – in God's perfect creation man still lacked a "helper" (also used of God as the Helper for Israel, Isaiah 49:25).

19-20 Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

20-22 But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man,

and He brought her to the man.

"Rib" – elsewhere translated "side".

23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

"Woman" – he calls her 'ishshah, the feminine of 'ish, man, suggesting an equal and a partner.

24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

"United... one flesh" – The marriage covenant is a picture of the covenant relationships between God and Israel, Hosea 2:14-23, and Christ and the Church, Ephesians 5:22-32.

25 Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame..

"No shame" – shame will enter the world as a result of sin, Gen. 3:7.

IN PRACTICE Being taken back to 'first principles' and the account of the Creator and His creation reminds us of who we worship. He is the God who created the universe, but importantly, wanted to create man in His likeness for fellowship. When we get too rational and scientific – as can easily happen – we tend to lose sight of God who is able: able to create. Some years ago an author proposed in a book title "Your God Is Too Small" – pointing out that we try to 'make God in our image' and reduce Him to our size and capability. We are the created ones and our creator's capability is, literally, infinite.

QUESTION *In what ways have you slipped into making God too small?*

Luke 8:22-25 – Jesus takes authority over a storm on the lake

He prepares the disciples to exercise their own faith.

22 One day Jesus said to His disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. *Introducing the first of three miracles that show Jesus' power and authority before He confers on the disciples spiritual authority over demons and diseases, Luke 9:1-9.*

23 As they sailed, He fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that

the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

"A squall came down" – common on Lake Galilee.

24 The disciples went and woke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm.

"He... rebuked" – took authority over. Jesus had rebuked diseases and demons, Luke 4:39-41. Now

He revealed His origins in showing His authority over nature.

• **For further study**, see Psalms 65:7, 89:9, 104:6-9; 107:23-32.

25 "Where is your faith?" He asked His disciples.

"Your faith? – the time was near for them to do what Jesus had shown them.

IN PRACTICE The disciples had seen Jesus heal the sick and confront demonic bondage, but to take authority over wind and waves was another thing altogether. They knew from Scripture that only God Almighty could do that. So when Jesus did, and saved them from being swamped in a boat with no buoyancy, something clicked on for them. They still had to make the mental transition from being in a storm with Jesus doing the rebuking, to being sent out in His name to make a start on the same kinds of works they had seen Him do. If we are in Christ Jesus, and He is in us, the same challenge faces us. "Where is your faith?" Will we use the faith we have, and grow it?

QUESTION *What should the disciples have been doing, as well as bailing? How does the lesson for them relate to us and our world?*

Revelation 4:1-11 – John's vision of the praise and worship of heaven

Those surrounding the throne lead in submission as well as praise.

1 After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

"Door standing open in heaven" – similar to other visions, Ezekiel 1:1, Matt 3:16, Acts 10:11.

"The voice... like a trumpet" – following insight into the seven typical churches on earth, Jesus summons John "in the Spirit" to see into the throne room of heaven.

2-3 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.

"Appearance of jasper and ruby" – Almighty God is

In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him."

"Fear and amazement" – realisation dawning, provoking them to ask: "Who is this, who even has power over nature?"

One "whom no one has seen or can see", 1 Tim. 6:16, here described in a roundabout way, as the reflected brightness of precious stones.

4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.

"Twenty-four elders" – an exalted order of angels reflecting the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles and so representative of the whole company of believers in heaven.

5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.

"Lightning... thunder" – as elsewhere in Revelation, a call to attention, symbolic of the awesome majesty of God. "Seven lamps" – symbolises full intensity of the Spirit of God.