

Divergence on the Lectionary - Proper 9, Year B (track one)

First Reading

2 Samuel 5:1–5, 9-10 (omitted verses in italics)

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the LORD said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.’” So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, “You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off”—thinking, “David cannot come in here.” Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. And David said on that day, “Whoever would strike the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack ‘the lame and the blind,’ who are hated by David’s soul.” Therefore it is said, “The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.”

And David lived in the stronghold and called it the city of David. And David built the city all around from the Millo inward. And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him. (ESV)

Second Reading

2 Corinthians 12:2–10

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses—though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with

the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (ESV)

Gospel Text

Mark 6:1–13

He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.” And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief.

And he went about among the villages teaching.

And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts—but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them. (ESV)

Comments and Questions for Discussion

First Reading

There are some very important verses omitted from this week’s reading from 2 Samuel. You may not want to read them aloud on Sunday, but for the sake of the study of this passage, I urge you to include them. The omitted verses make up a carefully crafted unit that comments on both the collapse of the reign of Saul and the eventual collapse of the house of David, even as he assumes the throne.

It begins with an insult from the Jebusites, claiming that even the blind and the lame could repel an attack by David's forces. David throws this back in their faces when he sets up his plan of attack. But then we have this strange explanation of the origin of the saying, "The blind and the lame shall not come into the house."

The choice of "lame" and "blind" here are deliberate and meaningful. Both refer to someone who is, by reason of lameness or blindness, unfit to enter the "house," that is, the palace, to reign as king. Keeping in mind that all of this was written after the Babylonian conquest and the end of the monarchy, we see the author of 2 Samuel first describing Saul's son Mephibosheth (whose lameness is described in chapter 4) as unfit to reign though he might otherwise have been considered an heir to the throne. The author goes on to refer to the end of Zedekiah's reign with his defeat by the Babylonians, when his eyes were put out before he was taken in captivity to Babylon (In 2 Kings). His blindness puts an end to David's line and to the monarchy, as he is now equally unfit to "enter the house."

This commentary on the end of both houses and the monarchy entirely is further emphasized by the sad end of both Saul's and Zedekiah's sons. David invites Mephibosheth to dine at his table, and Jehoiachin, Zedekiah's son, dines regularly at the table of the King of Babylon.

We may read these verses on Sunday without the omitted text, but to study them victoriously, without understanding the pall that is cast over the monarchy from the very outset, would be to do ourselves and the text a grave disservice.

[Here's a link to the article that opened up all this to me.](#) Short and worth reading!

Second Reading

In this fascinating text from 2 Corinthians Paul describes (obliquely) his own ascent into "paradise" where he heard things that are not to be told. Scholars seem to be largely in agreement that this depiction represents Paul's own experience of "*merkabah*" mysticism. This mystical tradition finds reflections elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures, in Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7, and Isaiah 6. But it is most fully developed in the Talmudic tradition, in the *Song of Songs Rabah*, the *Hekhalot Rabah*, and the *Zutarti Rabah*.

These texts include fairly detailed instructions for the methods by which one would enter this ecstatic state and come to view "paradise." They also contain warnings against talking about (or at least writing down) what one experiences while in that place, so as to avoid misunderstanding by others, to avoid heresy.

This then is the background of Paul's vision described in 2 Corinthians 12. It explains why he will not describe what he heard while in paradise, as well as some of his reluctance to speak of it at all. The rest of his reluctance seems surely to be the awareness that by "boasting" of his ecstatic experience he is resorting to precisely the thing for which he criticizes the "super-apostles." He had hoped that his own apostolate would have been sufficiently confirmed by the "signs of a true apostle", "signs and wonders and mighty works." (2 Cor 12:12), but these signs have proven inadequate, and so he resorts to telling the Corinthians of experiences he's had comparable (superior?) to those of his opponents.

This tells me two new things about Paul. First that he was well acquainted with Jewish mystical tradition. This may be important as I continue to study Paul. It may provide background elsewhere. Second, it seems likely to provide more information about Paul's "trance," reported in Acts 22, wherein he is given his commission to the Gentiles. Many commentators treat that story in Acts as a Lukan composition, but it may have some roots in the experience Paul relates here in 2 Corinthians 12.

What I've compressed for you here is much more exhaustively (!) described in two good articles by C. R. A. Morray-Jones. Here are links to them.

[Paradise Revisited \(2 Cor 12:1-12\): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate. Part 1: The Jewish Sources](#)

[Paradise Revisited \(2 Cor 12:1-12\): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate. Part 2: Paul's Heavenly Ascent and Its Significance](#)

The Gospel Text

Our reading from Mark this week begins with Jesus' return to His "hometown." It seems closely akin to Luke's portrayal of Jesus' first sermon in Nazareth, but it's emphasis is quite different. In Luke, the people's objections are to the *content* of Jesus' preaching, His "words of grace." In Mark they object to his presumption. He comes from humble background, He has no ordination as a rabbi, He has no place speaking with such wisdom. I personally think that Mark's choice to represent this conflict in this way is meant to encourage those in Mark's community who will likely encounter similar criticism.

This then may also speak to the Markan Christian's difficulty in seeing healing within communities that know and reject them. There is something about familiarity that seems to hinder healing ministry. Randy Clark (one of my mentors in healing ministry

and the founder of Global Awakening) says it this way, “It often seems easier to get healing outside the church than inside!”

Jesus then sends out the Twelve. They are given authority over unclean spirits and then go out and preach repentance. That is, they share the Good News and encourage people in light of the coming of Jesus and the Kingdom, to “change their thinking,” the meaning of “repent,” of *metanoeo*. And alongside this preaching, they “cast out many demons” and heal many of the sick. This harkens back for me to Paul’s reliance on “signs and wonders and mighty works” as indicators of the truth and power of his message.

I would like to go a bit off track to conclude this particular divergence. In Luke’s version of Jesus’ rejection in Nazareth, Jesus gets up to read Isaiah, preaches a *very* short little homily, and every translation I’ve ever read says the people “spoke well of Him.” And yet it doesn’t say that at all, it just says they “testified” Him. “Him” is in the dative, so it means “to,” but it can also mean “against,” (dative of disadvantage) and that is how it should be translated. Jeremias noted this way back in the 50’s and still no one will give it up.

The reason I note this here is that we have the same formulation in Jesus’ instructions to the Twelve, when He tells them to shake the dust off their feet as a “testimony” them. Them being in the dative, so it could be read as “testimony to them” but here it’s read correctly as the “dative of disadvantage” as it should be in Luke 4. I wonder when any translators will have the courage to change that phrase in Luke. Or at least put in a footnote.