

The Power of the Prophets

Worksheet for Week 7

Jesus and the Resurrection of Israel

Last week, we looked at Israel's return from exile and the beginning of its 'life after death.' This was a time of great hope and promise. The Jews returned to the land given them by God. They set about the reconstruction of the temple and the reordering of their religious life. But still . . . something seemed very wrong.

Israel's Disappointment

As the decades passed, even after the dedication of the rebuilt temple (515BC), the reading of the law, and the rebuilding of the walls, Judah (actually a Persian province, Yehud) bore little resemblance to the imaginative pictures painted by Isaiah. The temple was a shadow of the temple built by Solomon. The city was poor and much of it still ruined. The Jews had no king. They were just one more servant state in the Persian Empire. Even as Alexander the Great rolled over the Persians, God's people simply traded one oppressor for another. And this is how it would be for centuries . . . the Persians gave way to the Greek, who gave way to the Egyptians, who gave way to the Syrians, and so on. For a brief time (about 160BC), it seemed that perhaps the Jews would finally cast off the yoke of oppression as the Maccabees¹ (the Hasmonean family) led them to independence from Syria. Perhaps this was the time of Israel's full vindication. But these hopes were dashed. The Hasmoneans were not from the house of David and proved to be a corrupt disappointment. Pompey led the Romans into Jerusalem in 63BC.

Resurrection!!

When Jesus of Nazareth rises in his hometown synagogue to read from the scroll of Isaiah, he reads from Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives . . ." Surely, Jesus is tapping into the Jewish belief that perhaps the exile was never really ended, that the journey from Babylon nearly 600 years before had been a bit of a sham, that Israel's sins had never really been forgiven, that the fulfillment of the great promises brought by Isaiah, Micah, and the other prophets still lay ahead. When would all the nations stream to Mt. Zion and give her Israel her due? When would a rightful king be restored to David's throne?

In Mark's gospel, Jesus' very first words spell out his own prophetic ministry: "The time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent! And believe the Good News!" Jesus comes as a prophet, an apocalyptic prophet (we'll talk about that in class), bringing the news that the wait is over, that God is doing great things, that God's kingdom is at hand, that the Day of the Lord has come . . . that the exile is about to end and that Israel's sins will be forgiven. All of this ~ this overpowering climax to Israel's story ~ is breaking in upon Israel through the ministry of Jesus.

For the Jews of Jesus' day, led by the Pharisees, the coming of the Day of the Lord meant the resurrection, the bodily resurrection, of all God's people. This would be a concrete enactment of Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones. This is why the Jews practiced two-stage burial. A body would be laid out in a tomb and then a year later relatives would return to put the bones in a small box, called an ossuary. The bone box would then be kept in a crypt of sorts with the ossuaries of family members. Most Jews believed that on the Day of the Lord, all God's people would rise from their graves, physically transformed and ready to live in right relationship with God upon a renewed world.

During his relatively brief ministry, much that Jesus did can be seen as "prophetic drama." He was *enacting*, in often dramatic ways, the coming of God's kingdom. For example, even though ten of Israel's twelve tribes had been "lost" more than 700 years before, Jesus gathered around him twelve disciples. Jesus was enacting God's gathering together of his scattered people. Jesus ate with tax collectors and other disreputable types, enacting God's great Messianic banquet, a banquet to which all would be invited - even 'obvious' sinners. As Jeremiah had done, Jesus charged into the temple, enacting God's judgment on the worship of the priests. All this was the work of a prophet and it is no surprise that Jesus was seen as a prophet, perhaps even a prophet like the prophets of old! But Jesus did more than simply enact these dramas, Jesus engaged in actions that seemed to say Jesus was the very *embodiment* of Israel's God! Jesus forgave sins . . . who could forgive sins except God. He was not simply a new Moses; Jesus gave new instructions on his own authority. Loyalty to God would now become loyalty to Jesus . . . "follow me" he said, not "follow YHWH."

¹Judas Maccabeus ('maccabeus' is Aramaic for 'hammer') led a successful revolt against the hated desecrator of the temple, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, King of Syria. Antiochus had forced the construction of a pagan shrine in the temple in Jerusalem. Hanukkah celebrates the rededication of the temple after Judas took back Jerusalem, ending three years of sacrilege.

Bible Readings for Week 7

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Day 1 Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30 Jesus heals the daughter of a Canaanite</p>	<p>Day 2 Luke 19:1-20 Jesus and Zacchaeus</p>
<p>Day 3 Mark 11:15-17 (see Jeremiah 7) Jesus cleanses the temple</p>	<p>Day 4 Luke 22:15-20 The last supper</p>
<p>Day 5 1 Corinthians 15:1-34 The resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead [Remember that this was written before any of the Gospels were written.]</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>