

Odd Parallels: Beelzebub, Jonah, and the Mission of God

Notes for 11 Jun

Catherine Taylor

Background

Subject	Matt	Mark	Luke	John
Beelzebub; the Sign of Jonah	12:22-42		11:14-33	

Discussion

I cannot do tangible jigsaw puzzles. I have learned to graciously demur from excited invitations to have an evening - or a week - of putting together a 1500 piece picture of Starry Night. I wouldn't say doing them is torture...not quite.

I do however, love seeing, in my brain, metaphoric photos of concepts and watching them float by until, sometimes of a sudden moment, they coalesce to become a complete picture. Thinking about this lesson has been that process for me. Thanks for coming along on the journey.

I very much appreciate being asked to think about these two incidents. I wouldn't have thought about their similarities otherwise.

What I am going to do here is layout a collection of "puzzle pieces", share some questions and have us see what kind of picture we put together in this Sabbath's discussion.

The puzzle pieces are tidbits to, perhaps, help us see and hear the way the people in the two stories would hear them.

The puzzle pieces will include: the authors of the story, the audience for the story, meanings of names, the concept of irony, the character of God, the histories of the stories, the Mesopotamian notion of war on two planes, the notion of expelling (Judges to Revelation), rescues by God, the grace of God.

Matthew and Luke

I passed along a couple of short articles about each of them (see 'Resources', below). My synopsis: Matthew was a retired (well, change of career) Jewish tax collector. His skill set was methodical collection of materials (money or stories). I believe he was writing to Jews who had become followers of The Way. He used stories from their known history to help illustrate lessons that connected them to Jesus. Luke was, by most accounts I have read, a physician. His training was in healing. His Greek was erudite. He wrote in story form. It seems to me that Luke was writing to convince Jews (and probably anyone else who would listen) that God is a God who heals, who very much wants us to allow ourselves to be healed, and wants the salvation of the Jews.

First Audience

Matthew: Jews or Jewish followers of Jesus. Matthew wants these people to see evidence of why Jesus is the Messiah.

Luke: It seems to me that he wrote to anyone who needed to know more about God's redeeming character, Jesus' mission, God's love for the Jews, and God's ultimate power, and God's methods.

Names

In Hebrew culture names are often used to designate character or function or wishes for the named being.

Beelzebub or Beelzebubul - Baal (or lord) of the flies. A name derived from a Philistine god worshipped in Ekron. Later a name used by some Abrahamic faiths to mean the chief of demons or the adversary.

Ekron - barrenness, torn away

Jesus - Hellenic derived from Hebrew Joshua - Rescuer

War

In Mesopotamian cultures there was frequently the belief that what happened in a battle on Earth was a parallel of what was simultaneously going on in the heavens. If Israel won or lost it would indicate that Yahweh won or lost.

Object Lessons

Hebrew is a concrete language that used actions, people, places, stories or events to represent conceptual ideas.

Stories

Beelzebub/Ekron and Israel/Yahweh

1. Joshua 13: 1-7 - God will deliver (cast out). Israel to occupy
2. I Samuel 5:10 - Ekron, in fear, sends the ark home.
3. 2 Kings 1 - Ahaziah, Elijah, Baal Zebub
4. The Curses
 - . Amos 1:8 - I will turn my hand against Ekron
 - a. Zephaniah 2:1 - Ekron will be emptied, uprooted
 - b. Zechariah 9:5 - Ekron will writhe in agony

Matthew 12:22-31/Luke 11:14

The confrontation. The expelling (rescue). The denial of the priests.

Jonah

There were parallels here I didn't expect.

- 1:4,5 - God in charge of storm. The other deities are of no help.
- 2:1 - God rescues Jonah into and out of the large fish
- 3:00 - God offers grace to Nineveh - they accept. They are saved... But then, as in the Matthew and Luke stories, God's "representative" complains, and yet still becomes an object lesson of the 3 days.

Questions for us

1. If we think in terms of Kohlberg's states of moral development what stage/s do you think the original audiences lived? Note: Obviously there are other wonderful models of this concept. In my experience Kohlberg is one of the best known.
 - . Obedience and punishment
 - a. Self-interest/quid pro quo
 - b. Interpersonal accord and conformity
 - c. Maintaining social order
 - d. Social contract
 - e. Universal ethical principles
2. How are we the same or different that the "first" audience (s)?
3. Given the varying ways the people in our lives live, how would we share these stories or our understanding of them?
4. Can we put ourselves in the place of the Pharisees and understand some of the complexity of their motives? (I, by the way, have a very difficult time doing this.)
5. What are the ways you see God's grace in these stories?

6. Of the stories in our texts or their origin tales which is your favorite? Why do you like it?
7. What parts of these stories are "teachings" or encouragement for you?