

Proper 4
Cycle B RCL
Revised

1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)

This story forms part of the so-called “Late Source” in 1 Samuel, a collection of narratives that regard the establishment of monarchy with suspicion and represent the prophets as resisting the many abuses of royal power. An editor during the Exile combined this Late Source with an Early Source that supported the institution of monarchy to form the book we now read. The present narrative is a *call narrative*, the explanation of how a particular prophet received the power to prophesy. See, for instance, the call narrative in Isaiah 6:1-13.

Psalms 139:1-5, 12-17

Verses 19–24 of this psalm suggest that we should label it a *personal lament*, seeking God’s redemption from wicked enemies. The psalm is unusual, however, in its long, hymn-like meditation on God’s universal knowledge and, specifically, knowledge of the petitioner.

OR

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

The Ten Commandments stand as a preface to the first major legal section of Deuteronomy (5:1-12:1) and are substantially the same as those in Exodus 20:2-17 with the major difference being the justification for the Sabbath commandment (5:12-15; Exodus 20:8-11). The Commandments describe broad prohibitions without temporal sanctions for disobedience. For instance, we find stealing prohibited (5:19), but without any specific punishment for stealing. This seeming omission derives from the function of these commandments, which guaranteed the individual tribes that the courts of Israel and the court of the king would hear and decide cases like those cited in the Commandments. As such, they function much like a constitution.

Psalms 81:1-10

Formally classified a *hymn*, this psalm comprises part of a liturgy many believe Israelites used during the fall harvest festival of *Sukkot* (“booths”). Verses 9-10 contain allusions to the first words of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21), and treat the rebellion of Israel in the desert after leaving Egypt as a violation of the first commandment. Verses 13-16 suggest that repentance and submission to God’s Law constitute the principal requirements for Israel to continue to live fruitfully in the Land of Promise.

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Both First and Second Corinthians document a long dispute between Paul and the Christians of Corinth over the Corinthians’ belief that they had already experienced the resurrection and, consequently, were no longer subject either to the powers of this world order or to that world’s moral conventions. Second Corinthians contains fragments of at least four letters Paul wrote in the course of this controversy, and the present passage derives from a large letter fragment (2:14-7:4) some interpreters call the *apologia*. Paul builds his argument here that faith in Christ is not a matter of attaining some esoteric spiritual knowledge and taking pride in that attainment. Faith, rather, amounts to the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord (*kyrios*), a confession that contrasted with the patriotic pledge *kyrios kaisar*, “Caesar is Lord.”

Mark 2:24-3:6

This lesson contains two stories. The first is a *controversy dialogue* (2:23-38), designed to show Jesus' authority to interpret the Law. Jesus does not claim blanket authority for him or for his students to violate the Law but makes his first argument (2:26-26) with reference to an event in the life of David, who was to become the first messianic king. Jesus grounds his authority to do as he did in his role as Messiah. The NRSV translation of 2:27 obscures the play on the word "man" in the second argument (2:27-28). Following the teaching of the contemporary Pharisee Hillel, Jesus declares that the Sabbath regulations were made for the sake of "man." He then goes beyond Hillel to interpret "man" to refer to the "Son of Man" and so argues for his authority as the Son of Man to arbitrate the Sabbath regulations. So both as Messiah (Son of God) and as divine Son of Man, Jesus has final authority over the Sabbath, and, by extension, over the entire Law of God. According to 1 Samuel 21:1-6, the priest to whom David fled was Ahimelech, not Abiathar as in Mark 2:26.

The second story (3:1-6) is an *apophthegm* that uses its narrative about a Sabbath healing to highlight Jesus' question to the onlookers: "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" It was a well established principle in Judaism that "danger to life lifts the Sabbath regulations," so the saying is not really about healing on the Sabbath. Zechariah 1:12 makes doing "good and evil" a test for God's ability to act. The question is whether it is lawful for God to act on the Sabbath.

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