

# Matthew 11-12


February 4, 2024

HPC Trinity  
Class




## “SO, WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?” (MT 11:7)

When John the Baptist heard of the many fetes and wonders Jesus had performed he had been in prison for some time, possibly a year. John wondered, could this man from Nazareth be THE ONE whom he had been proclaiming as the coming Messiah? Maybe, maybe not.

Maybe  : In Jesus' own words, [READ MATTHEW 11:4-5]. Notice how he couches the language of Isaiah into the middle to give his words more legitimacy.

[READ ISAIAH 35:5-6]

Maybe  : Some expected a great military leader to be their savior from the Romans. This would be a righteous warrior riding a white stallion. Other believers looked for a holy priest to come and restore the faithful of Moses to its original purity.

“Although the belief in a Messiah was to become the foundation of Christianity...its roots in the OT are tenuous. It is nowhere to be found in the Pentateuch.... This idea lay dormant in Jewish writing until the Hasmonean age [140-37 B.C.] and flowered only during the turbulent years of Roman rule which followed the death of Herod [the Great] in 4 B.C.”<sup>1</sup>

**Who took power in this region after Herod the Great?**

- v. 7---John's disciples were now on their way back to John's prison at the fortress of Machaerus but were probably within earshot of Jesus' upcoming speech.
- v. 9---The Baptist is “more than a prophet.” No meaningful prophet had appeared for centuries. All of the sudden, here's John. He was...
  - in the mode of the OT prophets (humble, fasting, self-sacrificing, committed to God);
  - walking in the shoes of the great prophet Elijah (Malachi 3:1)

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<sup>1</sup> *Interpreter's* Supplementary volume. “Messiah, Jewish.” pg. 588.

- The gospels of Mark and Luke deal with John the Baptist differently than Matthew. To these two gospel writers John is more like Elijah incognito.<sup>2</sup> The fourth gospel treats him like a voice or an invisible presence directing all to Christ. Yet none of the four gospels refer to John as “Elijah” except Matthew.<sup>3</sup>

v. 10---a quote from Malachi 3:1, which was about 400 years earlier. This is John the Baptist.

v. 12---This verse is confusing. The problem is with the Greek word *biazeti*, which means “is forcefully advancing.” This is the only place we find this word in the NT, and in other ancient Greek literature *biazeti* is always used in the negative sense. One solution: the kingdom of heaven is advancing rapidly, but just as rapidly you will find strong, evil men chasing it for their materialistic desires.

v. 16-17---Jesus compares the people of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine with children who play in the marketplace. Many of Jesus’ parables used comparisons-- for example, “The kingdom of heaven is like...”

- “We (*JESUS*) played the flute for you,  
and you did not dance;  
we (*JOHN THE BAPTIST*) sang a dirge,  
and you did not mourn.”



In other words:  
Jesus’ ministry was one of celebration but  
most did not listen;  
  
John called upon the people to mourn, but  
most did not repent.

v. 18-19---“Jesus says in effect: ‘But all you do is give orders and criticize. For you the Baptist is a madman because he fasts, while you want to make merry; me you reproach because I eat with publicans, while you insist on strict separation from sinners. You hate the preaching of repentance, and you hate the proclamation of the Gospel. So you play your childish game with God’s messengers while Rome burns!’”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, “John the Baptist.” pg. 488.

<sup>3</sup> Luke comes close: “he [John] will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah....” (LK 1:17)

<sup>4</sup> Carson, pg. 270, citing Jeremias’ *Parables*.



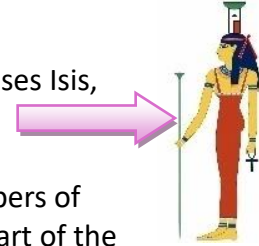
Basically, these verses prove the old adage, “You’re danged if you do and danged if you don’t.”

## PROFESSIONAL MOURNERS

- ✓ Officially called moirologists. Almost always women.
- ✓ Still in use today, especially in China and India.
- ✓ Their job is to attend the funeral and mourn the unknown deceased person.
- ✓ Having many paid mourners was a great honor and implied a high social status, even in some countries today.

### Ancient:

- ✓ The Bible has many references to professional mourners, including 2 Chronicles 35:25, Ecclesiastes 12:5, Jeremiah 9:17, 2 Samuel 14. A good example from the New Testament is Matthew 9:23.
- ✓ Ancient Egypt had strict regulations:
  - only women who were childless. (It was socially unacceptable for a man to weep in public. The same is true today in China.)
  - Mourners’ body hair was shaved.
  - Their shoulders were tattooed with images of the goddesses Isis, representing birth, and Nephthys, the goddess of death.
- ✓ China has had pro mourners for 2000+ years.
- ✓ Ancient Roman funerals for the wealthy incorporated large numbers of professional mourners, which at times made up a large part of the procession.
- ✓ Mourners were expected “to go to the burial crying and wailing loudly, ripping out their hair, tearing their clothes, and scratching their faces.”<sup>5</sup>



### Modern:

- ✓ Today some “pro-mo” funerals are more like theatrical performances. One well-known mourner in China cries, wails, then crawls to the coffin begging the deceased to return. She is widely sought after and is well paid.
- ✓ England continues the Victorian practice of having professional mourners, especially for affluent families. The demand for such mourners is increasing, with pay scales of @\$58 (£45) per hour. Some families pay as high as \$500/hr./mourner.
  - In Essex one can employ a group of mourners through Rent-A-Mourner. (NO JOKE!)

<sup>5</sup> Mendoza citing <http://www.ancient.eu/article/96>.

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In vss 20-24 Jesus condemns the cities of non-believers.  
In vss 25-30 he praises those who have believed.

Unrepentant cities [READ MT 11:20-24]

Matthew tells us that Jesus “denounced” certain cities: those cities that would have had excellent chances for repentance...if they had only listened to him and believed. The word “denounced” is rarely used by Matthew. It’s a strong, negative verb which implies indignation, disgust, and reproach. The towns of Korazin<sup>6</sup>, Bethsaida, and Capernaum are singled out because these were where Jesus performed “most of his miracles” (v. 20).

What IS “sackcloth?” (v.21)

[READ MT 11:25-26]

v. 25--- Notice how Jesus talks to God, addressing him intimately as “Father” (πατήρ). This is one of only four occurrences in the Book of Matthew where God is referred to as Father.<sup>7</sup>

??? “wise and learned” = \_\_\_\_\_

??? “little children” or “babes” = \_\_\_\_\_.

[READ MT 11:27] **Did Jesus really say this?** Until the mid-1950s a number of scholars argued that this could not have been spoken by Jesus. They believed that it came from the author of the Gospel of John, which was written about 60 years after Jesus’ death. Someone, they believed, had then inserted it into Matthew’s story. Their logic was that, except for John’s gospel, the absolute expression “the Son,” meaning God’s own son, is very rare. **HOWEVER,**

- both MT 24:36 and 28:19 speak of “the Son” of God as being Jesus.
- discoveries in the caves at Qumran prove that “the Branch” of David mentioned in 2 Samuel will be the Son of God.<sup>8</sup>

[READ MT 11:28-30]---this is only found in MT.

Matthew stresses the gentleness of being a follower of Jesus. His contemporaries in Palestine knew the harsh, demanding meaning of a

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<sup>6</sup> Korazin is only mentioned once in the NT. (A parallel verse is in LK 10:13.) It’s exact location is unknown, but it was probably northwest of Capernaum.

<sup>7</sup> Referring to God as “Father” was almost unheard of in the OT, though it was sometimes used in analogies—i.e., “The Lord is like a father to his children,...” (Ps 103:13). In the NT gospels we find it 24 times.

<sup>8</sup> Carson, pg. 276.

common rabbinic expression, “the yoke of the Law.” So instead, take Jesus’ yoke instead and be given “rest for your souls.”

## Chapter 12

### Lord of the Sabbath

[READ MT12:1-2]

“At that time”---Almost every Bible version begins chapter 12 with this phrase. *Kairos* does mean time, but it also often means the “fitting season.” When we see the rest of this paragraph we know that “at the fitting season” (i.e., harvest time) makes good sense.

Jesus and his (twelve?) disciples are picking grain in the fields as they traveled. The season (*kairos*) was summer. We know this because heads of grain appear when the stalk is ripe. If it was May or June these holy travelers would have munched on barley or wheat; if it was April or May the fields would have been ripe with barley. We don’t know which grain they ate, but it’s beside the point.

The Pharisees followed an extremely strict and confusing set of rules, as laid out in the Mishnah (a compilation of Jewish oral tradition which became part of the Talmud). To make it more confusing, the Mishnah was still just in oral form; it was not written down until @200 A.D.



#### **Was walking through the field on the Sabbath a sin?**

Walking more than @7/10 mile on the Sabbath was forbidden.

**Or....**

#### **Was it both the eating and walking?**

Remember, there were no fences. Boundaries were marked only by landmark stones, so one was obligated to walk through fields.

And as far as plucking grain? — [READ DEUTERONOMY 23:24-25]

**Or...**

#### **Was it a combination of all these, plus the rising opposition to Jesus’ ministry from religious leaders? <sup>9</sup>**

[READ MT 12:3-8] Jesus is questioning the Pharisees’ understanding of the Law.

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<sup>9</sup> Answer: The Pharisees were accusing Jesus and the disciples of “reaping,” which is one of the 39 kinds of work forbidden on the Sabbath. Decades later a revision (the Gemara) was made to the Law which allowed the picking of grain, but not cutting it.

12:3-4—Jesus is referring to the story found in 1 Samuel 21:6.

A common debate tactic used by rabbis was to use a counter-question (“Have you read...”) followed by an appeal to Scripture. Jesus does this flawlessly here.

12:5-6--- This story is not in Luke or Mark.

**Why not? (Clue: Who is your reader?)**

The priests broke the Law every Sabbath because they were required to change the consecrated bread in the Temple (Lev. 24:8) and make a burnt offering (Num. 28:9-10). Why weren’t they condemned for “working” on the Sabbath? Because Jewish law said that if something was greater than the Sabbath itself, an exception may be made. The Temple and its duties, therefore, were deemed to be greater than the Law.

12:6—Jesus also claims precedence over the Law and rebukes the Jewish leaders for misinterpreting it.

12:7---Moral law takes priority over ritual law.

12:8---This is definitely a messianic claim. Jesus is pointing to himself, because who has sovereignty over God’s Law but God himself. All three Synoptics say the Son of Man is David’s son, Jesus. As we know, though, few people would recognize this until after his death and resurrection.



Healing on the Sabbath [READ MT 12:9-14]

12:9---Now it’s Jesus’ action that draws the Pharisees’ wrath.

12:11—“Yes” is the presumed answer. (Members of the strictest of the Jewish sects, the Qumran community, would have insisted that the animal must get itself out of the pit.)

12:14---The Pharisees wanted Jesus eliminated, not because he “broke” the Sabbath laws, but because he thinks he is God, or at least the Son of God.

[READ MT 12:15-17]

12:18-21---“The Suffering Servant”

Jesus moves on but many of the faithful follow him and were healed.

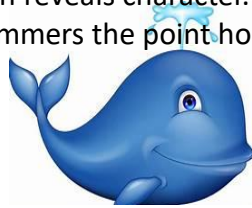
**Why did he insist on “warning them not to tell who he was?”**



Answer: “to show that Jesus is not presenting himself as a mere wonder worker who can be pressured into messiahship by crowds whose messianic views are materialistic and political.”<sup>10</sup>

Jesus and Beelzebub      **[READ MT 12:22-28]**

- 12:23---“astonished” or “amazed.” MT uses the word *existanto* only once. (MK uses it four times; LK three.)
- 12:24---Beelzebub, aka Satan, the prince of demons.<sup>11</sup> This is a major insult to Jesus.
- 12:25-28---The message is clear: Any nation, state, city, or household that has internal strife will destroy itself. Those who drive out demons in God’s Spirit will have God’s kingdom fall upon you.
- 12:29—Jesus is the one who ties up the strong man, tying up the devil, who had previously controlled the people.
- 12:30---With Jesus there is no neutrality: are you with me or against me? (This is the inverse of Mark 9:40: “for whoever is not against us is for us.”)
- 12:31, 32—Jesus is declaring that speaking against the Holy Spirit “will not be forgiven.
- 12:33---One’s speech reveals character.
- 12:34-37---Jesus hammers the point home: it is the mouth that is in the heart.



The Sign of Jonah

- 12-38---Teachers of the Law = scribes (*grammateus*). A miraculous “sign” was usually some amazing token to be fulfilled quickly which would confirm a prophecy. These Pharisees and scribes want it done now!
- 12:39---The Pharisees still demand a sign, even after Jesus’ many miracles. The only kind of sign they will receive is “the sign of Jonah,” i.e., Jesus’ death and resurrection.
- 12:42 is the queen of Sheba. (For ancient Israelites, the southern tip of Arabia was the end of the world.)
- 12:43-45---When demons come into a person’s life they often have a clean slate with which to work. Unless we are diligent, this demon will

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<sup>10</sup>Carson, pg. 199, et. al.

<sup>11</sup> The correct title is “Baal-Zebul,” meaning “lord of life.” In 2 Kings 1:2 we find that the Hebrews mockingly changed the name of this Philistine pagan deity to “Baal-Zebub, which translates to “Lord of the Flies.”



multiply and take control of our soul. Only those who become true disciples of Jesus can avoid being infested by even more demons.

12:46-49---“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” The believer who follows Christ becomes a member of a new extended spiritual family.

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