

The Book of Matthew Study Guide

Matthew 21-22

21:1-11

Yeshua and the disciples completed their journey from the Galilee by traveling west from Jericho up through the hills until they reached the Mt of Olives, where two villages existed on the south slope – Bethphage and Bethany (Mk 11:1). John tells us in His Gospel (12:1) that this took place six days before Passover, and that they stayed overnight in Bethany at the home of Mary and Martha. That would have been Shabbat because they would not have traveled from Jericho on the Sabbath, nor would the multitudes would have come out on that day, as reported in the following verses. So that places the events beginning in Mat 21:2 on the first day of the week.

Yeshua demonstrates His divinity by knowing that a donkey and its colt are tied up in the village of Bethphage without actually having seen it. And He instructs two disciples to tell the owner that the Lord (*Kurios*) needs to use them. Kings using the property of others was a commonly accepted practice in the Ancient Near East.

v. 5 – Yeshua quotes from two passages from the Prophets to show that this act is a prophetic fulfillment:

Isa 62:11 – this is a *remez* (hint) type of application. Yeshua only quotes part of the verse: “Say to the daughter of Zion...” You would have to know the rest of the verse to understand the hint: “Lo, your salvation comes...” The word translated as “salvation” (*yishek*) shares the same root (*yeshah*) as the name Yeshua that means “Salvation.” Isaiah prophesies that salvation would literally come to Jerusalem, not just take place there in some mysterious way. And in vv. 6-7 he emphasizes the importance of watching for the day when God would bring this about, thus making Jerusalem a praise in the earth. So the hint by Isaiah was woven into this term for salvation and that it would literally come to Jerusalem. And that is exactly what happened when Yeshua came to the city.

The second passage is Zech 9:9. Yeshua does not quote the first part of the verse (although it is similar to the portion from Isa 62:11) – “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! “ And then Zechariah declared: “Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” This verse presented a paradox for the ancient Jewish sages. They recognized that it was Messianic because it stated that it was about their coming king. But other prophecies about the Messiah as king depict Him coming in power and majesty, like Dan 7:13 – “I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming...” So the ancient rabbis came up with a few explanations:

- Some said that there would be two Messiahs – one, known as *Mashiach ben Yosef*, who would suffer and die, and a different one, called *Mashiach ben David*, who would reign over the earth.
- Another solution was that if the people of Israel were righteous at the time, He would come on the clouds of heaven, but if they were unrighteous, He would come on a donkey (*Talmud, Sanhedrin 98a*).

- The third possibility was that one Messiah would come twice, first humbly and then die, and later He would return in glory (reflected in Apocryphal works – 2 Esdras and Psalms of Solomon).
- Practically speaking, however, the most popular interpretation involved focusing exclusively on the glorious advent of Messiah and completely ignoring Him coming to suffer and die. This was true in Yeshua’s day, and continues on into modern times.

As mentioned above, using the property of others was an act of a king. But kings don’t normally ride donkeys; that is the mode of transportation for common people. ? But what does that say about this particular king? He came first to be king of our hearts and souls before becoming king of the entire earth. This is consistent with His teaching that the kingdom of heaven is present, yet still to come.

vv. 8-11 – The multitude responds to His arrival by employing some themes from Psalm 118 that is included in the worship liturgy of the feasts of Passover and *Sukkot* (Tabernacles). They took their garments and cut branches and lined the path before Him, as a symbol of their recognition that Yeshua is the King of Israel. Some of the people in the multitude were probably reserving judgment and were just seeking to find out if He would satisfy their perception of the king. John 12:12 also tells us that they had palm branches, which was consistent with the waving of *lulavim* on *Sukkot*. And they quote from Ps 118:25-26 – “O LORD, do save, we beseech You; O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD...” Hosanna is the transliteration of the Heb. *hoshia na*, meaning, “do save” or “save now.” Those words from Ps 118 served as the primary text for the culmination of the week-long observance of *Sukkot*. The final day was called *Hoshanah Rabbah* – the Great Hosanna, when the people would call out to God for salvation. So it is no coincidence that Yeshua, whose name means salvation, was born on *Sukkot*, and He was coming to do just as the people were calling out—to bring salvation. His arrival, then, was in a setting marked by the common characteristics held by two feasts—*Sukkot*, representing the beginning of His life and Passover, when His life would come to an end.

21:12-17

Yeshua’s first stop was at the Temple, where He is confronted by the sight of commerce taking place there. People who traveled long distances could buy animals for sacrifice and they could exchange their common currency, which was Roman and had pagan symbolism engraved upon it, for shekels that they could use for offerings. In v. 13 Yeshua disrupts their business and cites Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 as the basis for His displeasure.

21:18-22

It is now the morning of the second day of the week (Monday). Yeshua curses a fig tree for having no fruit. This might appear to be a impulsive abuse of power like a temper tantrum or something you would read about in a myth. But this is merely a teaching method of acting out a parable. He is continuing to teach on the importance of genuine righteousness. So, like a fig tree that bears no fruit, the rabbinic leaders had not been practicing righteousness and would never do so in the future. In contrast, true spiritual fruitfulness was found in the message of the kingdom of heaven, which Yeshua was inaugurating.

There is a *remez* (hint) that supports this acted-out parable in the meaning of the name of the

village where the entry into Jerusalem all started. Bethphage means “house of unripe figs.” The ripeness or fulfillment of the kingdom was not yet complete, but it was coming. This is in contrast to the barren tree that had not nor ever would produce fruit. The disciples then ask about how Yeshua performed this acted-out parable. He replies that it is a matter of faith, and then He uses that as another teachable moment about the importance of having total faith.

21:23-32

This marks the beginning of the inspection of Yeshua by the chief priests and elders that parallels the four days of inspection of Passover lambs from the 10th to the 13th of the month of Nisan in order to make sure they are without spot or blemish. When asked the source of His authority (*s'mikeh*), He doesn't answer directly. But He does make it clear that He and John shared the same authority. And He puts the chief priests in a difficult situation. His response was a challenge to the validity of their authority. For if it was of God, then they ought to have the conviction to take a stand one way or another. He then gives the parable of the two sons that illustrates their disobedience.

21:33-46

Yeshua follows up with a second parable, this one on a vineyard. The landowner represents God, the vineyard is Israel (Isa 5:1-7), the tenants are the religious leaders, the two sets of servants sent to work in the vineyard are the early and late prophets, and the son is Yeshua. The chief priests didn't realize that they were being compared to the tenants of the vineyard because they readily stated that the tenants should be severely punished. But then they realize it when in v. 42 Yeshua quotes once again from Ps 118 (vv. 22-23), the primary liturgical text of the season. Yeshua is likened to a cornerstone that sets the directions and boundaries of a building. And just as a builder might reject a particular cornerstone because it does not fit their desired structure, the leaders rejected Yeshua because He did not fit their religious structure..

22:1-14

The third parable is identified as being about the kingdom of heaven. So we have to consider it in the context of previous teachings and parables about the kingdom. The King is God and the son is Yeshua. The people of Israel are the ones who were invited to the wedding feast. The servants represent two sets of the prophets who were sent to call the people to the feast. And the late prophets, like John, were killed when giving their call. So a third set of servants, representing the followers of Yeshua, go out and invite people outside of the original guest list, which would include Gentiles. The kingdom of heaven, then represents everyone who answers the call.

But what about the man who was improperly dressed? What does he represent? As shown in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Mat 13:24-30,36-42), evil is present in the kingdom of heaven (the community of the faithful) until the end of the age when they will be identified and judged. And that happens in this parable as well (v. 13). The message here is that it is not good enough to go to church or to identify ourselves as being part of the body of Messiah, we have to given the finest spiritual garments that are only allowed for those are saved. As we are told in Isa 61:10

“I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

22:15-22

Next comes another trap from the Pharisees. They want Him either to denounce paying a Roman poll-tax (KJV – tribute, a census tax) and thus get Him in trouble with Rome, or to affirm paying it and thus upset those who believed that Israel should have no authority over them except Adonai, resulting in division among the followers of Yeshua and a weakening of His position. So Yeshua escapes the trap by rejecting it as an either/or proposition. He affirms respecting civil authority and also being responsible to the things of God.

22:23-33

Then the Sadducees take their turn at inspecting and trying to trap Yeshua. They pose a scenario based on the principle of levirate marriage in the Torah. Deut 25:5-10 instructed that if a married man dies without an heir, his brother was obligated to marry the widow and thus preserve the heritage. But that is not the real issue here. It is about the resurrection. They assume that relationships are the same in heaven as on earth., but as He alone would know, “they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (v. 30).

Yeshua then turns it into another teachable moment by addressing the position of the Sadducees that denies the validity of the resurrection. Recalling our discussion back in chapter 3, the Sadducees were the religious party that was founded by the priests who returned from Babylonian captivity. As priests, their emphasis was on the Torah and temple worship, and as such, their beliefs were limited to what was established in Torah, not in the Prophets or Writings of the *Tanakh*. And the concept of the resurrection was primarily developed in the Prophets and the Writings. If Yeshua had then referred to passages that clearly affirm the resurrection, like Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2 or Job 19:26, that would not have carried much weight with the Sadducees. So instead He referred to the Torah (Exod 3:6), using simple reasoning that God spoke to Moses in the present tense, that He is still the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, even though they had died about 400 years earlier.

22:34-46

Yeshua is tested yet again about the Torah. And He responds in a similar way to the manner in which he dealt with the rich young man in chapter 19. It’s all about loving God and loving our neighbor. And then, when asked about the nature of Messiah being the son of David, Yeshua refers to Ps 110:1, and that the Son is identified as being Adonai.