

WHY FOUR GOSPELS? THE FOUR-FOLD PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

in
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

ISRAEL'S REJECTION OF HER KING

Matthew 11:1-12:50

In chapters eleven and twelve numerous proofs of Israel's rejection of her Messiah and King are set forth; and we hear the Lord Jesus openly denouncing the religious leaders of the nation. Their eyes were blinded; their hearts were closed to Him and to the kingdom which He had offered them. John the Baptist, the herald of the King, was imprisoned; the King Himself, rejected.

Therefore, Israel's Messiah foretold His coming death and resurrection, and His turning to the Gentiles. The official and final rejection of Christ by the nation of Israel came at His public entry into Jerusalem and His crucifixion soon afterward.

Having sent His disciples into their cities, where mighty works had been done; having even raised the dead; and having found no response from the people, except one of opposition and definite refusal of Him as King, the Lord began to upbraid His rebellious nation and to foretell coming judgment.

First He rebuked them because they had not heeded the preaching of John the Baptist; and because they had falsely accused the Lord Himself in that He was "**a friend of publicans and sinners.**"

Then He "**began to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.**" He pronounced woe and certain judgment upon Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum, comparing their judgment to the mere moderate judgment of Tyre and Sidon and Sodom.

Then it was that the Lord Jesus turned to individuals, bidding them look to Him for personal salvation and discipleship, saying:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (11:28-30).

It was no longer the **“kingdom”** which He was offering to the nation of Israel, or to individuals in that nation; it was rest of heart from sin and rest in His appointed place of service that He offered to all who would go to Him for salvation and for consecration to His work. This is one of the numerous indications in these two chapters of a turning point in His ministry.

Following this call, there is recorded the controversy with the Jewish leaders concerning the use of the Sabbath Day, as He plucked ears of corn and as He healed the man with the withered hand on that seventh day of the week. This controversy was followed by the Pharisees’ council to kill Him (12:14), signifying an open break between the rulers of the Jews and the Lord Jesus.

We cannot here discuss in detail the difference between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Lord’s Day; but let us pause long enough to see why the Lord ministered as He did on that day.

- The Jewish Sabbath was the seventh day of the week; the Lord’s Day is the first.
- The Jewish Sabbath commemorated God’s finished creation; the Christian Lord’s Day commemorates Christ’s finished redemption, in that He rose from the dead on the first day of the week.
- The Jewish Sabbath demanded rest; the Christian Lord’s Day speaks of voluntary worship and service.
- The Jewish Sabbath represented the old covenant of the Law of Moses; the Christian Lord’s Day represents the new covenant of the grace of God, sealed by the shed blood of Christ.

It seems as though the Lord Jesus deliberately ministered on the Sabbath Day, in order to show, not only that He is **“Lord even of the sabbath day”** (Matthew 12:8); but in order to show also that He had come to fulfill the Law of Moses and to set it aside forever, as He ushered in the age of grace at Calvary’s Cross.

Having been rejected by His nation, Israel’s King quoted one of their own prophets to prove that He foreknew this rejection, and His consequent turning to the Gentiles; for Matthew 12:18-21 is a quotation from Isaiah 42:1-4:

“Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles . . . And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.”

Further token of Israel’s rejection of her King is found in the blasphemous accusation the Pharisees made, saying that He cast out demons by Satan, the prince of demons, called here Beelzebub. Again, the Lord openly denounced them for their hypocrisy, and warned against the **“unpardonable sin”** of attributing to Satan the mighty works of the Holy Spirit of God. (See Matthew 12:22-32). He called those **“blind leaders of the blind”** a **“generation of vipers”** (12:34). They were without excuse, for still they refused to heed His warning.

When they asked for “**a sign**,” He warned them again, calling them “**an evil and adulterous generation**,” unfaithful to God. And then it was that He foretold His coming death and resurrection, as prophesied by “**the sign of the prophet Jonas**” (12:39, 40), once more pronouncing judgment upon them because of their unbelief.

We cannot pass by this remarkable prophecy without observing that here Christ stated definitely that Jonah was a real person, and that the much-ridiculed story concerning him is a fact of history. The literal Greek word translated “**whale**” in our English Bible is “*sea-monster*.” And Jonah himself told us that it was “**a great fish**,” “**prepared**” by the Lord to swallow His disobedient servant.

The Hebrew and Greek language do not use the word “**whale**,” although God could have “**prepared**” such a whale if He had seen fit. “**With God all things are possible!**” And we believe His Word! Moreover, Jonah’s three days and three nights in the place of death foreshadowed Christ’s three days and three nights in “**the heart of the earth**”; whereas Jonah’s being cast out of the great fish was typical of Christ’s resurrection from the dead. Our Lord Himself gave us this interpretation in Matthew.

Christ’s final denunciation of Israel in these two chapters is that wherein He likened the Pharisees to a man out of whom a demon had been cast, later to return with seven other demons “**more wicked than himself**.” No self-righteousness of the Pharisee, no self-reformation, no ceremonial observance of religious rites, could save the soul. It is an indictment against the “self-cleansed moralist.”

As if He would leave no doubt about His purpose to turn to the Gentiles, setting His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem and the cross, the Lord then began to speak of the new relationship in the household of faith.

His own Jewish “**brethren**” had rejected Him, as a nation; now “**whosoever**” would do the will of His Father in heaven, He said would be included in the family of God — His “**brother, and sister and mother**” (Matthew 12:46-50). He was thinking in terms of believers in this age of grace, Jew or Gentile, who would accept Him as Saviour and Lord.

In passing, we might note that there is nothing here to indicate that our Lord would have Mary set apart from other believers, as the Roman Catholic Church does in praying to her, in claiming that she was born without sin, or that she always remained a virgin. Indeed, this is but one of other passages which prove that she did marry Joseph and had other sons, as the words of our text prove, referring to “. . . **his mother and his brethren**” (12:46).

The Jewish character of the book is seen in the many quotations from and references to the Old Testament, often with no explanation of names or places because none was needed.

Matthew was writing particularly to Jews, to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was their Messiah and King. They were familiar with their Old Testament Scriptures, and needed not that historical references be explained.

In these two chapters alone we find recorded the two-fold quotation concerning John the Baptist (Matthew 11:10, 14; cf. Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1; 4:5); and Isaiah's prophecy of Christ's turning to the Gentiles (Matthew 12:17-21; cf. Isaiah 42:1-4).

Then in these two chapters we read John's reference to Him who according to the Hebrew prophets "**should come**" into the world. We read of references to Tyre and Sidon and Sodom and Nineveh; to David, the priests, Jonah, Solomon, and the queen of Sheba. Matthew tells us that "**the people**" asked concerning Christ, "**Is not this the Son of David?**" (12:23). But Mark and Luke, referring to the same incident, do not use this typically Jewish name.

There is at least one more illustration of the Jewish character of the book, which we must not pass over; it has to do with our Lord's statement concerning John the Baptist; recorded in 11:11, "**Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of woman there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**"

By "**the kingdom of heaven**" Christ referred to the rule of the heavens over the earth in the Person of God's appointed King, even Jesus, the Son of David. In that day of His millennial glory He will sit upon David's throne; but more than that, He will rule over the whole earth as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Now John the Baptist was morally "**great**," even as Christ said in the words just quoted; but John's position in that coming day of Christ's earthly kingdom will not be as great as "**the least in the kingdom of heaven.**" John did not live to see Christ's earthly kingdom established. Luke is the only other evangelist who tells this story; and it is significant that he omits this reference to "**the kingdom of heaven**," as well as the commendation of John, and the two Old Testament quotations concerning the coming of John into the world. Luke was writing to Gentiles; Matthew, to Jews!

At the same time we need to remember that, while Matthew proves that Jesus is Israel's promised Messiah and King, he also proves that He is the faithful Servant of the Lord, the sinless Son of Man, and the eternal Son of God. In this connection, the eleventh and twelfth chapters of Matthew abundantly prove our Lord's deity.

Here we read His declaration to the disciples of John that He was Israel's promised King; His words of authority in denouncing the Christ-rejecting nation of Israel; His prayer to the Father, recorded in 11:25-27, the last verse of which is a striking assertion of His deity:

"All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."

Again, we see His claim to be the Saviour in His call to personal discipleship and rest of heart and entrance into the household of faith.

We hear His voice of authority in applying Old Testament prophecies to Himself; in declaring that His miracles were wrought in the power of His own Holy Spirit; in His foreknowledge of His approaching death and of judgment to come upon the wicked.

The very forcefulness with which He taught these things but emphasized the awful responsibility of the Jewish leaders who turned from Him in bitter hatred.

And it is highly significant that, from this time on, we read no reference in Matthew's Gospel concerning the preaching of "**the gospel of the kingdom**," except in the Lord's Olivet discourse, recorded in chapters twenty-four and twenty-five; and there He plainly states that, during the "**time of Jacob's trouble**," "**the gospel of the kingdom**" will be preached once more.

Meanwhile, this entire church age intervenes.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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