



MATTHEW 21–23; MARK 11; LUKE 19–20

JESUS' TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

As we exam Jesus' last few days of his life in more detail than we did over Easter Week, I want to look closely at the timeline given in the New Testament. The timeline is different in the Synoptic Gospels, because the Synoptic Gospels organized Jesus' mission geographically—they group everything together that happened in Galilee, then things that happened on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, and finally they grouped everything together that happened in Jerusalem. They telescope everything that happened in Jerusalem throughout Jesus' mission into the last few days of His life. In other words, Matthew, Mark and Luke organized their Gospels by location, not time. On the other hand, John's Gospel is more chronological. John describes Jesus traveling back and forth to Jerusalem at least six times during His ministry (including three Passover feasts, thus establishing His three-year ministry). John also includes a timeline for the Passover of Jesus' last week.

The timing is often misunderstood because of their different way of counting. It helps to remember that the Jewish "days" started at 6:00 pm.¹ They also counted a "day," for only a portion of the day. Also remember that all

holy days are “sabbaths.” The year Jesus died, it appears there were two sabbaths in a row—the Passover on Nisan 14 followed by the seventh day of rest or weekly sabbath. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels,² John’s Gospel outlines it thus:

8 Nisan	6 days before Passover <i>Fri. after 6 p.m.–Sat.</i>	Jesus came to Bethany and Mary anoints Him	John 12:1
9 Nisan	5 days before Passover <i>Sat. after 6 p.m.–Sun.</i>	Palm Sunday, Triumphal Entry	John 12:14–19
10 Nisan	4 days before Passover <i>Sun. after 6 p.m.–Mon</i>	Jesus teaches and Passover lambs are chosen	Exodus 12:3
11 Nisan	3 days before Passover <i>Mon after 6 p.m.–Tue.</i>	Jesus teaches at temple and sleeps on the Mount of Olives	
12 Nisan	2 days before Passover <i>Tue. after 6 p.m.–Wed.</i>	Prepare for the Last Supper	John 13:2
13 Nisan	1 day before Passover <i>Wed. after 6 p.m.–Thu.</i>	Gethsemane, trial, crucifixion as lambs killed, death at 3 p.m. In tomb day #1	
14 Nisan	Passover (Leviticus 23:5) <i>Thu. after 6 p.m.– Fri.</i>	Jesus burial completed during Passover meal In tomb night #1, day #2	
15 Nisan	Sabbath and week of unleavened bread begins <i>Fri. after 6 p.m.–Sat.</i>	Jesus organized missionary work in the Spirit World In tomb night #2, day #3	D&C 138
16 Nisan	Resurrection morning <i>Sat. after 6 p.m.–Sun.</i>	At least five visitations on Easter Sunday Risen after three days and three nights.	John 21; Luke 24

This time frame fulfills Jesus’ prophecy that He will fulfill the sign of Jonah with three days and three nights in the tomb (Matthew 12:40; 27:40), and also raise up “this temple” (meaning His body) in three days (Mark 14:58).

In this week’s *Come Follow Me*, we will look at the following events:

	MATT 21-23	MARK 11-12	LUKE 19-20	JOHN 12
5 Days until Passover	Triumphal Entry Cleansing Temple Return Bethany	Triumphal Entry Return Bethany	Triumphal entry Cleansing Temple Return Bethany	Triumphal Entry Teaching
4 days until Passover	Fig tree cursed and withers Teaching	Fig tree cursed Cleansing Temple	Teaching	(no details)
3 days until Passover	Teaching Warnings	Fig tree withered Widow's mite	Teaching Widow's mite	(no details)

JESUS' TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Luke 19:28 “He went before, ascending up to Jerusalem” At that time, no matter where one came from, or from what geographic altitude they started, one always “ascended” to Jerusalem because of its holiness. With the temple and throne of God housed there, it was the highest place on earth to them. Looking back on this time when the temple stood, the Jews recorded “ten degrees of holiness” to emphasize the importance of their sacred space.³

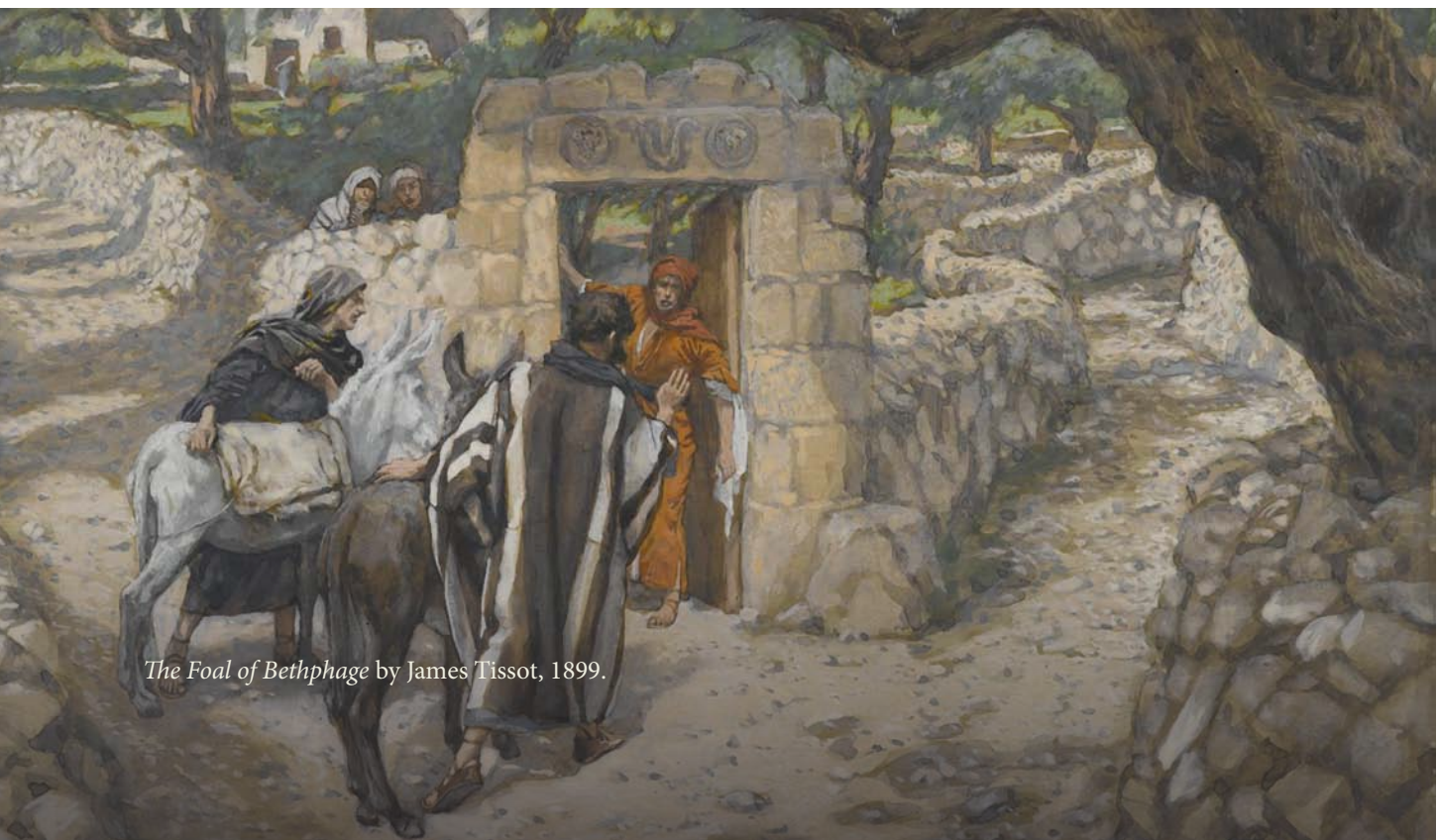
- The land of Israel is holier than all lands ...
- The walled cities [of the Land of Israel] is more holy
- Within the wall [of Jerusalem] is more holy
- The temple Mount is more holy ...
- The rampart is still more holy
- The Court of the Women is still more holy
- The Court of the Israelites is still more holy
- The Court of the Priests is still more holy
- Between the porch and the altar is still more holy than it
- The sanctuary is still more holy than it ...
- The Holy of Holies is still more holy than they all.

Matthew 21:1; Mark 11:1; Luke 19:29; John 12:12 “they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives”. Bethphage is thought to be on the crest of the western hill or Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. The name means “house of figs,” and it is on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem (where Jesus set the parable of the Good Samaritan). Rabbis referred to a village “with a similar name whose outer wall was the official limit of the city of Jerusalem.”⁴

Matthew 21:2–3; Mark 11:2–3; Luke 19:30–31 “Go into the village and find an ass . . .” The Old Testament is filled with promises, types and shadows of the coming Messiah. At least two Old Testament prophecies and other patterns are being fulfilled, including:

- **Genesis 22:5**, foreshadows Jesus, just as Abraham took Isaac up the Mount Moriah for a sacrifice.
- **Genesis 49:10–11**, is Jacob’s blessing to Judah, “... binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’ colt”
- **Zechariah 9:9**; their promised king will come riding in on a donkey, “Thy king cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”

Only the Gospel of Matthew includes two donkeys—the mother and colt. We assume this because either his interpretation or memory of Zechariah 9:9 was slightly different than the other Gospel writers. (We see this same discrepancy in Matthew at other times as well.⁵) Most of his many citations of the Old Testament are found in a slightly different form than in our scriptures. The scripture used during his day was the Greek Septuagint (LXX). Whatever Matthew remembered as the Old Testament reference, it is different than in Mark, Luke, and John who only mention one donkey.



The Foal of Bethphage by James Tissot, 1899.

Mark 11:4 “colt tied by the door” This is often translated as tied on the “street,” but a textual scholar, Joel Marcus, points out that it is similar to the Greek word for “vine,” connecting the prophecy closely with Jesus’ role as the vine.⁶

Matthew 21:4–5 “all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet” Matthew repeats this verse almost verbatim fourteen times to highlight that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies in the OT.⁷ The fourteen citations demonstrate Matthew’s focus and provide a structure to the text.

John 12:12 “much people” John includes people gathering to see Jesus from different directions and countries, possibly foreshadowing the universality of Jesus’ message. Among the enormous throng of people were some who come to welcome a new prophet, some to worship a new king, and others out of curiosity. The crowd may have been interpreted as a religious and political threat to the establishment, but Jesus’ choice of animals communicates His intent. He did not want to fight the Romans or the Jewish leaders. Horses were the animal of war, but a domestic donkey communicated a peaceful message. Nonetheless, the Jewish leaders were very worried that Jesus’ vast following meant a threat to the theological status quo and their delicate political balance with Rome.

Matthew 21:6–8; Mark 11:7–8; Luke 19:35–36, “threw their cloaks over it, and He sat on it . . . [others] spread their cloaks on the road” Placing cloaks on the back of a donkey implied great respect and honor to the rider. To ride on a white donkey was the privilege of persons of high rank, princes, judges, and prophets. It is a peaceful expression of ruler-ship. Christ doing so attested that He entered the Holy City as its rightful king.

Matthew 21:8; Mark 11:8; John 19:13 “while others spread branches they had cut from the fields” The crowd’s jubilation included waving green branches as part of the festive procession.⁸ The practice of waving branches (or woven palm branches), was familiar to the Jews who participated in the Feast of Tabernacles (or Sukkot) processions.⁹



The Procession on the Mount of Olives by James Tissot, 1899.

Christ's Triumphal Entry Into Jerusalem by William Hole, 1905.



Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:9; John 12:13; “Hosanna!” is a plea for deliverance or used in adoration. It literally means “Save, please!” or “Oh save now.” At that time, it may have lost its original meaning and only meant “praise.”

“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” All four Gospels include the cheering crowd chanting or singing this phrase from Psalm 118:26. (This Psalm is included as part of Passover meal.) The crowd misunderstands Jesus’ intent and hopes that Jesus will become their king. The Gospels each include references of the promised kingship to David’s heirs, from 2 Samuel 7:12–26. Each Gospel includes other additional words of praise from the crowd:

- **Matthew 21:9** “Hosanna to the Son of David! . . . Hosanna in the highest!”
- **Mark 11:9** “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”
- **Luke 19:38** “Blessed is the King . . . Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”
- **John 12:13** “Blessed is the King of Israel!”

Luke 19:39-40 “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples! . . . If they remain silent, the very stones will cry out.” In this rare event as Jesus accepts praise, the leaders who oppose Jesus find fault and denounce Him for it. But Jesus, knowing His past and future, announces that even though the leaders don’t see it, He is their God. Even the stones are willing to testify that He is the Creator.

Luke 19:41 “When he came near, he beheld the city, and wept over it” Luke alone mentions Jesus weeping over Jerusalem because the inhabitants would not repent. He prophesies of the Roman invasion of Jerusalem in AD 68–70 and the destruction of the temple. His claim that the stones would not be left “upon another” seemed impossible. They were enormous blocks and so carefully cut that they did not need mortar. Most were over five tons, and some weighted up to 80 tons.

Synoptic Cleansing of the Temple

Matthew 21:12-16; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-48

Herod’s expansions to the Second Temple were still under construction during Jesus’ lifetime (20 BC–63 AD). Some Jews were upset by the flamboyant extensions and materialistic nature the temple. A group known as Essenes were upset enough that they stopped worshiping at the temple and chose to worship out in the desert. They became the most extreme sect of Judaism in their attempt to worship in a holy manner away from the corruptions they felt had entered into the priesthood.¹⁰ Jesus physically cleansing the temple from the money changers who sold in the court of the Gentiles was a representation of the spiritual cleansing that was also needed.



Fresco of Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Photo by Petar Milošević. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Nearly every aspect of the temple was supposed to typify of Christ. The ritual priestly path—including, in part, the washings, anointings, clothing, and sacrificing—represented the way back to the tree of life (represented by the menorah), in order to return to the presence of God cleansed from sin. The high priest vicariously carried the sins of the people before the throne of God to seek for redemption. After the ritualized cleansing on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Holy Place, passed the table of incense, shewbread, and menorah to commune with God at the veil. After several ritualized representations of blood sacrifices, he could enter into the presence of God through the veil into the Holy of Holies once a year (Leviticus 16).

At the time of the Lord, the corruption was not just from money changers, but from the political and financial motives of the leaders. Herod had removed the sacred nature of the role of the high priest who was to be a descendant of Aaron and serve for life, and changed it to a short-term political honor fostering priesthood aristocracy. Chief priests vied for the position and it was changed regularly at Herod's whim.¹¹

The Jews had other temple cleansings in their history. Over a century earlier, the priests who joined the Maccabean Revolt attempted to cleanse the temple from the pollutions caused by the Greek ruler Antiochus IV (2 Maccabaus 10:5). Jesus' cleansing removed the outer courtyard pollutions for a time. Yet, it appears it did not touch the sacred courtyards of the sanctuary (which housed the Holy Place and Holy of Holies). That cleansing took place during Jesus' suffering and death. His sacrifice opened the way into the presence of God for all. As the veil was rent, that inner cleansing took place, and opened a way for all cleansed to enter the presence of God.

Just a reminder, each Gospel records that Jesus only cleanses the temple once. John records it happened at the beginning of His ministry (John 2:13–17), and the others on different days during his last week where they record everything that happened in Jerusalem. John’s timing appears more feasible, because by the last week of Jesus’ life, the local leaders are already planning on killing Him and this could have triggered them to act earlier and put Jesus to death days before the Passover.

Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15; Luke 19:45 “Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold”

The word for “cast out” is elsewhere translated “exorcism” (Mark 1:34, 39; 3:15, 22; etc.). This connects those who profane the temple with the devil’s work. There was a need for travelers to exchange their currency with the temple Tyrian, and purchase unblemished animals, but it appears that the need had gone awry and money making was corrupting the temple.

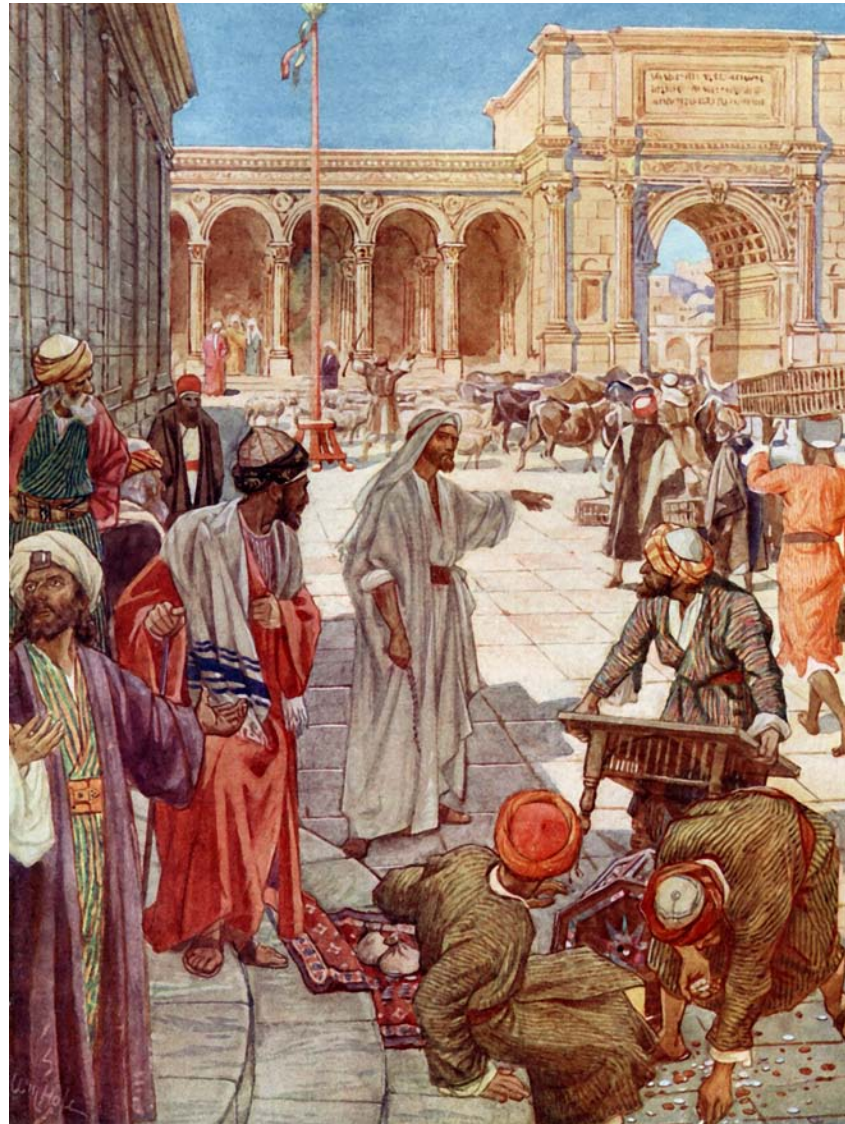
Jesus Purgeth the Temple by William Hole, 1905.

Matthew 21:13–14 “My house shall be called the house of prayer”

To answer His attackers, Jesus quotes his favorite book of scripture—Isaiah 56:7 (3 Nephi 23:1). Jesus quotes Isaiah eight times in the NT, many of which answered attacks from the devil and Pharisees.¹² The cleansing of the temple was a sign of the Promised Messiah. Jesus goes on to mention mentioned that He will also heal the blind and lame—both of which were also understood as Messianic signs (see Malachi 3:1; Jeremiah 7:11, Zechariah 14:21b, Isaiah 35:5).

Matthew 21:16 “Out of the mouth of babes . . . thou hast perfected praise”

This is Psalms 8:2, but in our version the latter end of the Psalm is different: “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.” More than any other book of scripture, Jesus quotes their hymnal, the Psalms, eleven times.¹³



2nd Day: Return to Bethany and the Cursing of the Fig Tree

Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:19; Luke 21:37

Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:19; Luke 21:3 “when even was come he went out of the city” Matthew has Jesus and his traveling companions (apostles and the Galilean women, Luke 8:1–3) going to Bethany, a village on the back side of the Mount of Olives approximately 1 ½ miles east of Jerusalem. Luke has the company sleeping “in the mount” of Olives. The slight discrepancy is a function of either the author’s or editors’ different memories years later, or different ways of saying the same thing.

Matthew 21:18–20; Mark 11:12–14 “seeing a fig tree afar off . . . he found nothing but leaves” Matthew and Mark record the fig tree stories slightly differently—Mark spreads this incident over 2 days, Matthew all at once. We assume the story was included for more reasons than to show Jesus’ disappointment. We see full leaves yet lack of fruit as symbolizing hypocrites, those people who have an outward appearance of being whole, yet they are not producing good fruits. The story also speaks of the prophecy in Jeremiah 8:13 of no figs. Furthermore, in modern scripture, D&C 35:16, the Lord revealed that it foreshadows an eschatological sign, “And they shall learn the parable of the fig-tree, for even now already summer is nigh” (also see Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:38; Isaiah 34:4).

Image of Fig Tree by Thomas Hoang via Pixabay.



The LDS Reference Library includes an account from the nineteenth century German biblical scholar, Alfred Ederseim, who went to Israel and “looked for a fig tree. Finding one, he reached into the branches, and drew out his hand, and found he had a few leaves from the previous autumn, and some round grey substances. They looked like lozenges. Edersheim sought out several pedestrians until he found one that could speak German. He was told that the little grey objects were edible. That travelers used them to postpone hunger until they could reach an inn. ‘Unless you find those on the tree branches in the spring,’ he was told, ‘the tree will not bear fruit in the summer.’”

Matthew 21:21; Mark 11:20–23 “if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go’” (NIV) Jesus finds another chance to teach faith. If disciples can develop their faith, they will find it more powerful than natural laws.

Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24 “whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, in faith believing, ye shall receive” (JST). We learn that God hears every prayer, but to answer our prayers, we must believe. The addition of “in faith” by the JST, is also included by Jesus when He visits the Nephites as a qualification needed for God to answer prayers. From that text we find one more requirement to petitioning the Lord. We must have belief, ask in faith, and ask for that “which is right” (3 Nephi 18:20). With the combination of these three (plus humility and patience), we trust that God will answer our prayers and work His miracles.

Chief Priests Question Jesus' Authority

Matthew 21:23–27; Mark 11:27–33; Luke 20:1–8

Matthew 21:23; Mark 11:27; Luke 20:1 “chief priests” Within the temple precincts, it is appropriate that we find the chief priests questioning Jesus. During the late Second Temple period, the chief priests came from priestly families who administered over the temple buildings, treasures, heads of the 24 priestly classes, and the like. The selection process for these positions had become corrupt (In the records, we find financial extortion, etc.).¹⁴

“Elders” is a translation of *presbuteros*. Nearly half of the 70 times we find it in the NT, it refers to leaders of the Jews. This could include leaders in the synagogue, Sanhedrin, or even priests.

“Scribes” were more than men who copied documents, clerks, or secretaries. They were legally trained and drafted legal documents, including marriage and divorce contracts, inheritance, loans, and land sales. They were also professional theologians. Every village needed at least one.

“By what authority . . .” It appears that these leading men have devised a scheme to discredit Jesus. They hope to trap Him on the issue of authority to teach and act as He does. The Jewish nation was built on the Law of Moses and grew into the rabbinic interpretations known as the oral laws of Moses. All teaching needed to follow these traditions. Outside of the Aaronic and Levitical blood lines, a teacher gained authority from his master teacher. After years of education, one was ordained to the office of rabbi, elder, or judge.

Matthew 21:24–27; Mark 11:29–33; Luke 20:3–7 “I will also ask you one thing . . . Was the baptism of John from heaven or man?” (JST) Jesus turns the tables, and asks His accusers a question instead. The answer to His question becomes their answer. Yet they see Jesus’ question as a trap and refuse to answer. Jesus answers them with the next three parables as recorded in Matthew 21:28–22:14 (or one parable in Mark and Luke). The stories allow Him to teach on several levels in a way that helps them (and us) really understand His authority.

Parable of the Two Sons

Matthew 21:28-32

As this parable is translated into English it loses a large part of its meaning. In English it sounds like a lesson on giving action, not just one's voice, to serve and follow God. Jesus then ties the story back to John the Baptist showing how the prophet testified of Jesus' authority. Jesus applies the condemnation of only giving lip service to God, to his questioners. The Greek text has a deeper message that allows us to better see how this parable answers the question of "where" Jesus received authority, and "who" gave Him authority.

Matthew 21:28 "a man had two sons . . ." There is another way to read this parable, dealing more specifically with the question asked. The Greek text can be interpreted as the pre-mortal life when Jesus received authority from God. John W. Welch finds an alternative translation of Matthew 21:29-30 by seeing that Jesus answers the question of where and who gave Him authority.

Matthew 21:29 "I will not" or "I do not want to, I will it not . . .but afterwards . . . reconciled himself to the task"¹⁵ The first son's answer can be understood, "Not my will," or "Not as I will," but he reconciled himself and went (rather than the KJV phrase, "I will not").

Matthew 21:30 "the second . . . said, I" The second son is literally called, "the other," and represents the opposition. In the Greek text, there is no word "go"—it says simply, "I / ego," as in, "my way." By applying the context



The Parable of the Two Sons by Andrey Miranov, 2012, oil on canvas. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

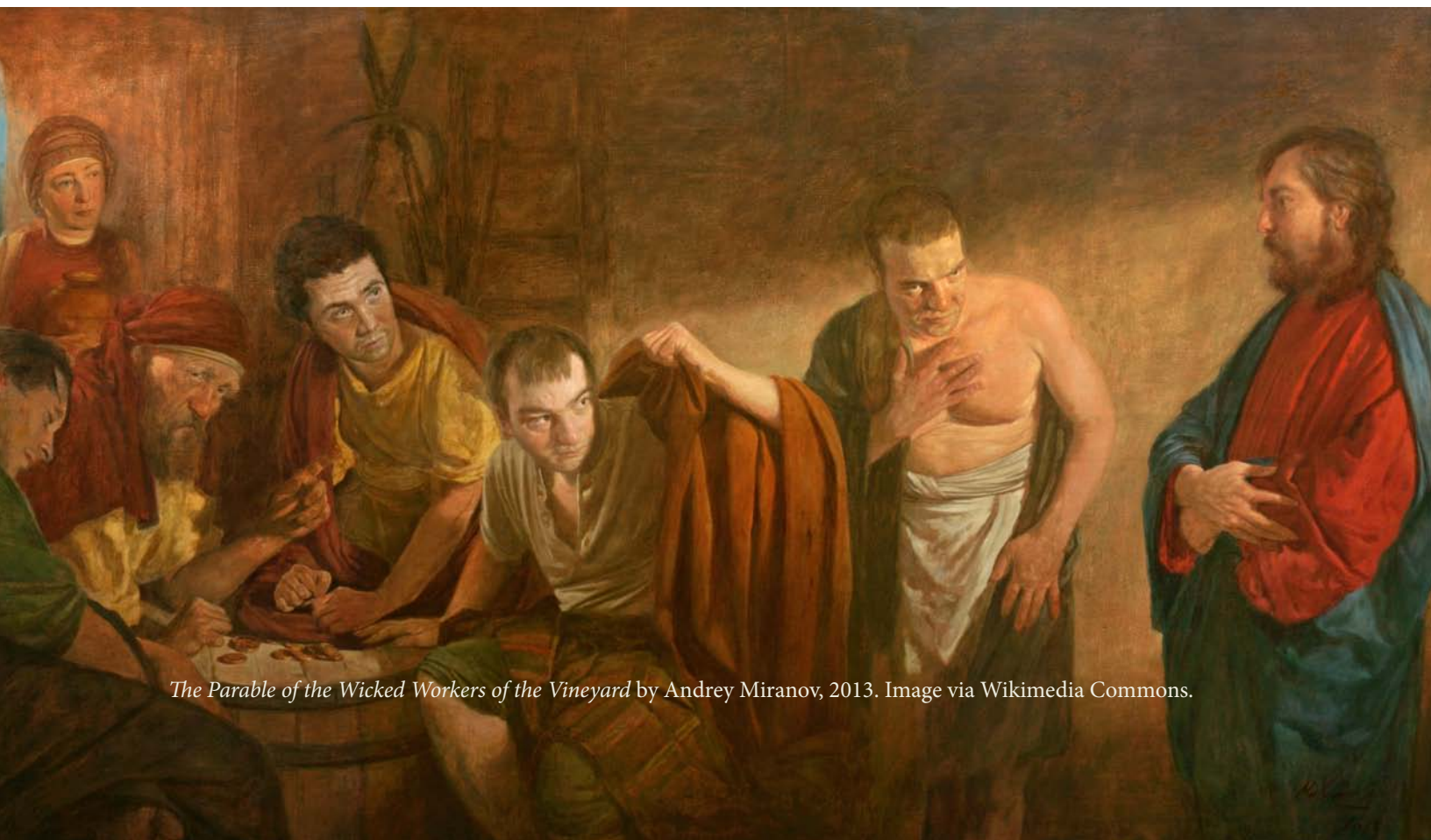
offered in Moses 4:1–2, we learn that pre-mortally, the Father asked Jehovah and Lucifer to help Him with this earth, but only Jehovah submitted to the Father’s will. This premortal counsel is where Jesus received His authority.

Mathew 21:32 “**John came . . . and bore record of me. and ye believed him not**” (JST) Jesus’ dialogue returns to His question that asked about John the Baptist’s heaven-sent authority. The JST addition testifies that when John the Baptist prepared the way of righteousness, it referred to Jesus. His challenge suggests that by rejecting the prophet John the Baptist’s authority, they also rejected their Messiah. They rejected the message, authority, and salvation. The Book of Mormon taught the same message about rejecting the prophet —the “words” of the prophets represent authority to speak for God (1 Nephi 3:18; 7:14; Jacob 6:8; etc.). 2 Nephi 25:18–19, also prophesied that the Jews would reject their Messiah.

Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen¹⁶

Matthew 21:33–46; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19

Matthew 21:33; Mark 12:1; Luke 20:9 “**A man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it**” (JST Mark). Jesus begins with a familiar story from Isaiah 5:2–7 about a good farmer who carefully planted a vineyard. (It also sounds like Jacob 5:3.) We see evidence that Zenos’ allegory of the olive tree was known in the Jewish world.¹⁷ Isaiah 5:2–7 and Jacob 5 helps us understand the symbolism of “digged” and “hedged it round about,” as a demonstration of divine nurturing. The vineyard of the Lord, becomes the House of Israel.



The Parable of the Wicked Workers of the Vineyard by Andrey Miranov, 2013. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Matthew 21:34–39; Mark 12:2–8; Luke 20:10–15; “He sent His servants” God’s servants include His prophets. The husbandmen or workhands abuse the owner’s servants. Their cruel and exaggerated measures sound extreme, but Jesus fills His parables with shocking details and hyperbole. It keeps his audience engaged, which opens new ways to learn. In this parable, Jesus answers the question about His authority by introducing the “heir.” In the parable, the murdering of the heir, foreshadows Jesus’ arrest in Gethsemane and death in Golgotha.

Matthew 21:41; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:16 “destroy those wicked men” When the Jewish leaders condemned the wicked husbandmen, they pass judgment on themselves.

Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17 “Did you never read in the scriptures . . .” Jesus quotes a very well-known passage from Psalm 118. It was part of the “Hallel,” which Jews regularly recite in their ceremonies.¹⁸ Jews had a tradition that a stone first rejected by the builders later becomes the chief cornerstone. The “Head of the Corner” meant the stone used at the building corner to bear the weight or stress of two walls. It functioned like a capstone. It was a crucial stone to the whole structure. Other OT scriptures also describe important stones, typologically referring to Jesus who was most likely a stone mason (Daniel 2:34–35, 44–45; and Isaiah 8:14–15).

Matthew 21:44; Luke 20:18, “ground to powder” This description is the definition of the word “contrite.” We must become broken hearted and contrite to follow in Christ’s footsteps.

Matthew 21:46 “I am the stone:” (JST) The JST addition gives a long dialogue between Jesus and his disciples explaining the parable.

Parable of the Marriage of the King's Son

Matthew 22:1–14

In Matthew’s Gospel, this is the third parable answering the question about Jesus’ authority. He tells a story about those who were given authority but do not live up to its requirements, and are killed for their wickedness. In turn, all are invited to God’s banquet, but only those willing to be washed and clothed as God directs will be allowed to have a place at the feast. Jesus’ authority was not just given, but earned. Likewise, His disciples must earn authority by obedience to the King.

The description of a wedding feast is similar to the parable of the ten virgins: Those not prepared will not be given a place at God’s banquet or heavenly kingdom. Across scripture we find wedding images to describe God’s relationship with his people (Isaiah 49:18; 51:1; 61:10; 62:5; Jeremiah 2:32; 3:8; 33:11; Hosea 3:3; 4:15; etc.). The banquet represents the joys of God’s kingdom. A few troublesome verses will be highlighted.

Matthew 22:7 “when the king heard that his servants were dead, he was wroth” (JST) The chosen guests act disrespectfully, ignore their King’s invitation, and even kill His servants. Their wickedness is punished. The message of accountability here can seem harsh. Jesus always taught the need for repentance to avoid punishment. Within the context of our Savior’s love, God’s punishment will actually open the way for the wicked to stop sinning, possibly see their folly, and repent in the next life.

Matthew 22:9–10 “Go into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage . . . both evil and good” God’s graciousness is stretched out to all. His mercy is extended to everyone. It is the individual who chooses to accept or reject His invitation to His banquet. He emphasizes the importance of agency again at the end of the parable (Matthew 21:14).

Matthew 22:11–13 “Not dressed in wedding clothes” This sounds similar to the Old Testament account from Zechariah 3:3–4. The high priest has a vision of an angel, but the priest “was dressed in filthy garments as he stood before the Angel.” The angel then explains to the high priest, “See, I have removed your iniquity, and I will clothe you with splendid robes” (BSB; or “pure vestments” in ESV). Once he is clothed, the angel puts a “mitre upon his head” (KJV), or “a pure diadem” (ISV), or “a clean priestly turban” (CEV). Finally, the high priest is dressed appropriately to be in the presence of angels.



The Parable of the Wedding Feast by Andrey Miranov, 2014, oil on canvas. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

In this parable the reader is not told the historical context, but it helps to understand it. In the ancient world, when people were invited to a special event, even to a kingly meal, they must dress appropriately.¹⁹ In the parable, it appears that some guests accept the king's invitation, but they are not willing to comply or follow the royal protocol for dress. Jesus teaches that being invited to enter into the kingdom of God is not enough. Guests must follow His rules in order to become true disciples. The heavenly dress or robes are described in scripture as the robes of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10; 2 Nephi 9:14; D&C 29:12; 109:76; etc.). Yet the parable is not about clothing, but rather about the importance of putting on godly attributes. The parable warns those who reject Jesus' invitation to come unto Him, or those who do not come on His terms. As John Welch explained, "These are cautionary tales to all disciples: look to your own life and behaviors."²⁰

Matthew 22:14 "Many are called but few are chosen" Jesus' warning does not speak of a God who predestines some to be chosen. On the contrary, He often speaks of stewardships, responsibility, choice, and agency. Jesus is denouncing those who expect a free ride on their birthright who do not develop into godly traits. The Lord revealed as part of the restoration that we can choose to be chosen: ". . . few are chosen, and why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—that the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the power of heaven and that the power of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness . . ." (D&C 121:34–36). We choose to be chosen when we obey the principles of righteousness—gentleness, meekness, and love.

Tribute to Caesar

Matthew 22:15–22; Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:20–26)

Matthew 22:15–17; Mark 12:13–14; Luke 20–22 "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?" A group of men who belong to two opposing parties, the Herodian and Pharisee, usually do not work together on anything. Herodians are relatives who hope to maintain power among the family of Herod; they have done everything they can (sold their souls) to Rome in hopes of maintaining power in their family. The two diametrically opposed groups are mentioned to show how desperate they want to ensnare Jesus. They want to find a reason to kill Him. The men begin with flattery and then ask about the volatile issue of Roman taxes.

Matthew 22:18–19; Mark 12:15; Luke 20:23 "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute money" Jesus saw through their pretended sincerity and taught an important lesson. Temptations come from those doing Satan's bidding too.

Matthew 22:20–22; Mark 12:15–17; Luke 20:24–26 "Whose image is this . . . render to God the things which are God's" (JST). Jesus has no problem paying taxes, but He uses this opportunity to teach an important lesson. In the ancient world, some people even put an image of their god on their forehead. Genesis 1:26–27 teaches



Tribute to Caesar by Bartolomeo Manfredi, ca. 1610, oil on canvas. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

that humanity is created in the image of God—both male and female. The Lord asks for children and servants of God to put on His image. Alma taught a similar message, “Have ye received his **image** in your countenances?” (Alma 5:14).

Marriage after the Resurrection

Matthew 22:23–33; Mark 12:18–27; Luke 20:27–39

Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27 “**Then came to him certain of the Sadducees**” Now that Jesus stumped the Jerusalem Herodians and Pharisees, another opposing party steps up to try. The Sadducees focused on the temple and believed that only the first five books of Moses were scripture.²¹ As a result, when the temple is destroyed in AD 70, few of their sect and writings survive (one of which is in the Apocrypha, *Ecclesiasticus* or *Sirach*). They filled most of the seats for chief priests.

Matthew 22:24–28; Mark 12:19–23; Luke 20:28–33 “. . . in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven?” Generally, Sadducees did not believe in life after death, but felt that “one is survived by one’s good reputation and by one’s children.”²² So the silly example was not a sincere question, but a common practice of Jewish debate of the law. They are trying to find fault. The story describes an exaggerated example of a “Levite marriage” where a woman married seven brothers. Deuteronomy 25:5–10 describes the practice which was given to make

sure families took care of widows and kept their property within the family. (We see examples of it in Genesis 38:6–11 and Ruth).

Matthew 22:29–30; Mark 12:24–27; Luke 20:34–39 “**ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God**” Jesus focuses on the resurrection and quotes Exodus 6:3, which silences the Sadducees. He does not give a full explanation of the higher law of eternal marriage, probably because the audience is not ready to learn. He points out that their misunderstanding of the resurrection and a non-eternal nature of Levirate marriage comes from a misreading of the scriptures and a disbelief in God’s power. You can also interpret His response as saying that if the marriage is not sealed on earth, it has no eternal nature. Given the argumentative attitude of the Sadducees, it is not surprising that this is not in the right time or place to teach celestial marriage as He does elsewhere.

Jesus did teach the high law of eternal sealings to His apostles. They received authority and power so that “whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven” (Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18). Also in Matthew 19:4–7, He taught a different audience that marriages are to last. “For this cause shall a man . . . cleave to his wife . . . Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder.” We know the Lord revealed the higher ordinances of sealings because Peter mentions “calling and election made sure,” which can only be received by a husband and wife sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise (2 Peter 2:1–10; D&C 53:1; 128:14; 132:19; 1 Corinthians 15:29; etc.).

Lawyer Asks about the Great Commandment

Matthew 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34

Matthew 22:34–38; Mark 12:28–30 “**Which is the great commandment in the law?**” The different antagonistic groups gathered at the temple continue to confront Jesus. The Pharisees saw that He silenced their rivals, so they ask about one of their favorite topics: the commandments. In addition to recording and interpreting the law, scribes also did legal work and were trained in the law, so it is not a problem to have Matthew 22:35 have a lawyer asking Jesus the question, while Mark 12:28 records a scribe is the voice—it is probably the same person.

The Pharisees are known for their strict interpretation of the Law of Moses. After the Jews were taken to Babylon, in an attempt to protect the Law of Moses, rabbis built a “fence around The Law.”²³ They counted 613 commandments in the first five books of Moses.²⁴ They claimed that it was living the Law that would save them. To protect their beloved Laws, they added ten thousand additional commandments as a buffer zone and called them the “oral laws” or oral Torah. Pharisees systematized these “oral laws” to govern a pious life. However, throughout Jesus’ mission He attacks and deliberately broke these oral laws (i.e. “pick up thy bed . . . he spat in the dirt . . . is it right to do good on the Sabbath?”).

“**thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all they heart . . .**” Jesus answers the Pharisee’s question by going back to the basics. He cites a Deuteronomy 6:5. This verse was very well known by all Jews at the time. It is one of the verses in the *shema*, which was repeated daily by Jews in their homes, temples, and synagogue, and written on their door posts and inside their phylacteries (Deuteronomy 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Numbers 15:37–41).

Matthew 22:39–40; Mark 12:31–34 “the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”

Jesus next quotes verbatim, the very center of the Torah, Leviticus 19:18. The central message is often the most important message in ancient structure, especially in chiasmas. Jesus points to two foundational laws that were well known, but it appears they were underappreciated. We see these two as the roots of the ten commandments received by Moses too. The first four commandments speak of how to love God, and the second half how love one’s neighbor and self.

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me
2. Thou shalt [have no] . . . graven images
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain
4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy
5. Honour thy father and thy mother
6. Thou shalt not kill
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery
8. Thou shalt not steal
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness
10. Thou shalt not covet

Love God

Love Neighbors
as Self

Jesus’ Question

Matthew 22:41–46; Mark 12:34–37; Luke 20:40–43

Matthew 22:41–46; Mark 12:34–37; Luke 20:40–43 “What think ye of Christ?” Jesus now asks those surrounding Him in the temple courtyard a question (Matthew 21:23). Just like when He was a twelve-year-old young man, Jesus joined in the popular Jewish tradition of questioning, debate and discussion, in the Court of the Women in the temple. The word “Christ” is the Greek word for, “anointed one,” or “Messiah” in Hebrew. Jesus’ question is not only to His contemporaries but for each reader to respond.

Mark 12:37 “. . . but the high priest and the elders were offended at him” (JST) Jesus did not shy away from addressing confrontational topics. He defended truth even when it was rejected. But those who disagreed with Him could not reconcile His attacks of their beliefs. They were so offended by the current cultural issues, that they could not see His miraculous signs and miracles as fulfilling the messianic prophecies.

Jesus Warns against Hypocrisy and Pride

Matthew 23:1-12; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47

Matthew 23:1-2; Mark 12:38; Luke 20:45-46 “Moses’ seat” After answering several questions, Jesus remains in the temple courtyard and begins to teach. He warns His listeners to beware of scribes and those who sit in “Moses seat,” or a seat of judgement (Exodus 18:16). As this phrase is only mentioned here in the NT, extra scriptural texts help us identify that it was the name given to the seat in the synagogue where one gave a discourse or interpretation of the scriptures and Law, or the place of judgements.

Matthew 23:3 “they will make you observe and do; for they are ministers of the law, and they make themselves your judges” (JST). Jesus’ agrees that it is important to follow all council to live the Law, but He denounces the hypocritical example given by the same leaders or scribes. Jesus encourages them to live the law of Moses, even though He is come to fulfill it. (We see the same in 2 Nephi 25:24 “we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled; also see Alma 25:15; 30:3.)

Matthew 23:4 “Their works they do to be seen of men” (JST) Jesus warns that our motives matter. He wants us to serve and act out of love of God and our fellow humans, not to for selfish reasons. Ironically, the Pharisees and scribes inadvertently made the Law of Moses into an idol that they worshiped. They surrounded the Law by minutiae and endlessly debate. They neglected “love” which was the sum or purpose of the Law.

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God [is] one LORD. And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates . . . it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my command -ments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul

Matthew 23:5 “. . . **phylacteries**” The phylacteries were texts of the Law written on sheep skin, enclosed on small containers and tied with leather strips one’s forehead and/or left forearm (to be over the heart) while praying. Archeologists have found numbers of these at Qumran. This is the only reference to phylacteries in the New Testament.²⁵ The text was enclosed in small cases and included: Exodus 13:1–10, 11–16 and Deuteronomy 6:4–9.

The phylacteries “were thought to have power, like amulets, to avert various evils and to drive away demons. The Pharisees were accustomed to widen, make broad, their phylacteries, that they might render them more conspicuous and show themselves to be more eager than the majority to be reminded of the law of God.”²⁶ The “boarders of the garments” are mentioned in Numbers 15:38; Deuteronomy 22:12.

Matthew 23:6–7; Mark 12:39; Luke 20:46 “**long robes . . . chief rooms . . . highest seats**” Jesus condemns vain glory and putting on heirs. Places of honor and social station were offensive to Him. He wanted to teach masters how to serve. He combats this social protocol in the next few verses.



©JewishEncyclopedia.com

Matthew 23:8 “**One is your master**” Jesus teaches that our master should be our God. Jesus also despises dress and social position that elevate some above others. The Anchor Bible related examples from Jewish literature of Jesus’ day where disciples were obliged to follow a recognized teacher without question. A disciple was to afford his teacher the highest honor. They had rules for how disciples should walk behind their teacher—never beside him.²⁷ Even Jesus did not seek a position of honor, but lead by serving and ministering. He also did not ask for blind obedience.

Matthew 23:9–10 “**One is your creator and heavenly Father, even he who is in heaven**” (JST) Matthew prefers using “Father” in reference to Heavenly Father (41 times), rather than God (23 times). Matthew’s usage speaks of the message or theology he wants pass on that he learned from Jesus.

Matthew 23:11 “**Greatest shall be your servant**” This repeats a favorite theme of Jesus—see Matthew 18–19. It also describes Jesus role as the one who comes to serve others with His healing, teaching, ministering, and even washing feet. Jesus’ refers to Himself here as His life was spent serving His fellowmen and yet He is the greatest ever to live on earth

Jesus Delivers Eight Woes

Matthew 23:13-31

Matthew listed “**8 Woes**” or denunciations which seem to share ideas from Jesus’ **8 Beatitudes** (JST)

8 WOES

- 1 Matt 23:13 If reject Christ and living revelations “shut up the kingdom of heaven”
- 2 Matt 23:14 Greed under a cloak of piety
- 3 Matt 23:15 Missionaries of false faiths
- 4 Matt 23:16 Oaths without meaning
- 5 Matt 23:23 Emphasized minutia and omitted the weightier matters of the Law like mercy
- 6 Matt 23:25 Excessive ritual washings-cleanliness That only clean the body, not the spirit
- 7 Matt 23:27 “Whited sepulchers” when outside ceremonially clean, but within are filthy
- 8 Matt 23:29 Honoring or venerating the graves of prophets without following their teachings.

8 BEATITUDES

- Matt 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit who come unto me for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”
- Matt 5:6 “Blessed . . .hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.”
- Matt 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.”
- Matt 5:7 “Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.”
- Matt 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God”
- Matt 5:12 “Great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets”

Matthew 23:29 “Woe unto you . . . because ye build the tombs of the prophets” The custom of venerating the prophets by paying honor to their grave sites was well established in Jesus’ day. Pious men’s graves were adorned

with sepulchral monuments from the Second Temple period.²⁸

Matthew 23:33 “Ye serpents . . .” This is a strong denunciation! Serpents in Hebrew lore were animals that injured without gain for itself. The serpent grew stronger with age. Its venom built up in the lymph tissues then slowly destroyed cells and ruptured capillaries causing death by internal hemorrhage. The venom doesn’t necessarily cause intense pain, rather one may feel better for a time while the internal destruction continues—the parallels to sin and Satan are obvious.

Matthew 23:35; Luke 11:49–51, “upon you may come all the . . . blood of Zacharias son of Barachias” Jesus refers here to the sixth century high priest who the wicked slew in the Temple before the Babylonian captivity, as if it were currently happening by His generation. Luke 11:49–51 and Matthew both quote Jesus saying this. Matthew adds an extra phrase giving Zachariah’s heritage—but Matthew mixes up two famous Zechariah’s. That is understandable as it is the most common name mentioned in the Bible (~40 people over the 10 centuries, with slightly different spelling). Matthew confuses the heritage for the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah with a high priest Zechariah son of Jehoiada who lived three hundred years earlier. For the sake of clarification, I will just list some of the scriptural clarifications to help you not confuse Zacharias:



Photo by Alfonso Castro on Unsplash

1. In Matthew 23:35 mentions to “Zacharias son of **Barachias**.” This man is the last of the minor prophets in our Old Testament from the 6th century, “Zechariah the son of **Berechiah**” (Zechariah 1:1). But Matthew mixes up the story and name. The story belongs to the 9th century high priest.
2. 2 Chronicles 24:20–21 mentions a 9th century high priest, “son of **Jehoiada**.” He was stoned to death in the Temple court at the end of the ninth century. Luke identifies this Zachariah without mistaking his father (Luke 11:51)
3. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, in Luke 1:5 is a priest of **Abia** (not the high priest).

The problem with this mix-up is that Christian literature, including our church manuals, have mixed up John the Baptist’s father with the high priest Zachariah who was slain in the temple nine hundred years earlier.²⁹



Jesus Laments Over Jerusalem

Matthew 23:36–39

Matthew 23:36 “How often would I have gathered . . .” Jesus laments that He has called, but His people will not gather. The JST footnote that expounds on how accountability spans generations. “. . . *Behold your father did it through ignorance, but ye do not; wherefore, their sins shall be upon your heads.*”

Matthew 23:37–38 “. . . a hen gathers her chicks” Hens gather their chicks for feeding by a guttural sound, known as a brooding call. With danger the sound changes to an alarm call and the chicks run to her. If the danger persists, she fluffs out her feathers to further hide her chicks and scare the intruder away. The hen also attacks with her beak. The Lord’s protective symbol is very maternal. He wants to help; but His calls go unheeded. The sad result is that the Judaic homeland would become desolate.

Above: The Murder of Zechariah by William Hoel, 1905.

Header Image Photo of palm fronds by Pexels via Pixabay.

ENDNOTES

1. The Jewish day started at night, because the creation started with darkness before light.
2. Mark's Gospel outline of the timing is problematic because of Mark 14:1 and 12. It either gives an extra day or two with nothing recorded between "two days before" and "on the first day," or the author/editor uses words for days that differ from the Leviticus 23:5-6 calendaring of "Passover" (which is eaten in the evening on the 14th), and "Feast of Unleavened Bread" (which begins on the 15th day of the first month). In any case, the timing is no longer understood. This apparent mistake does not allow two or three days and nights in the tomb.

Sunday	Mark 11:1-11	Triumphal Entry
Monday	Mark 11:12, 19	"next day" Cleansing Temple "even was come"
Tuesday	Mark 11:20, 14:1	"in the morning" Debate authority, Parables, discourse, "two days before Passover", Supper in Bethany
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday	Mark 14:12	"on the first day of unleavened bread" Last Supper
Saturday	Mark 15:1	"early in the morning", Trial, Death
Sunday	Mark 16:2	"very early in the morning, on the first day of the week" Resurrection

3. *Mishnah, Kelim*, 1:6-9.
4. Joel Marcus, *The Anchor Yale Bible: Mark 8-16* (New Haven, CT: The Anchor Yale Bible, 2009), 771.
5. Matthew quotes over fourteen Old Testament portions in his Gospel. Most are consistent with texts we now have, but some are not. This may be because he was quoting them for memory, or perhaps because the text he cited was different than currently available. Most Jewish villages had only a few scripture scrolls (most frequently the first five books of Moses or Torah, and the Psalms). If the town had enough people and money, the next most frequently found scripture scroll discovered is Isaiah. Only larger more wealthy communities of Jews (i.e. Magdala, Jerusalem) had a fuller set of Writings and the Prophets. These scrolls were kept in a communal location for their study and Sabbath worship. As very few people had access to them daily, memorization was often used more. It appears Matthew's memory was different as see when compare Matthew 23:35 with Luke 11:50-51 too.
6. Marcus, *Mark*, 773.
7. Matthew's fourteen fulfillment prophecies include: Matthew 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9. This use of fourteen points to his Davidic roots as discussed in *Come Follow Me #2*, for Matthew 1-2.
8. Only John 12:13 mentions palm branches which may have been brought from the disciple's journey from Jericho. The current thought is that Jerusalem did not grow palm trees, but imported them from either the coast or near the Jordan River for the feast of the Tabernacles in the fall.

9. Marcus, *Mark*, 774.
10. Josephus, *War* 2.119–61.
11. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.230. Josephus records 83 high priests from Aaron to the temple's destruction in AD.
12. Isaiah 5:1; 6:9; 29:13; 53:23; 54:13; 56:7; 61:1–2.
13. Psalms 8:2; 22:1; 31:5; 25:19; 41:9; 69:4; 78:24; 82:6; 110:1; 118:22–23, and 26.
14. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem at the Time of Jesus* (Göttingen, 1958), 38.
15. John and Jeannie Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 45.
16. My discussion on this parable is copied from the early commentary for Come Follow Me, Easter Week. The JST adds substantial portions to Matthew 21:33 and 46. The text transitions from one parable to another in the JST by defending John the Baptist again and explaining that the audience is receiving parables because of their unbelief.
17. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, ed. *Allegory of the Olive Tree* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1994), 290-304.
18. *Hillel* consisted of Psalms 113–118. It is chanted at Passover, Feast of the Tabernacles, Hanukah, in synagogue worship, and at many other times and places.
19. Kent Jackson and Robert Millet, *Studies in Scripture: The Gospels* (Salt Lake City, UT: Desert Book, 1974), 380-382.
20. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus*, 145.
21. David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5.892.
22. Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin, *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45.
23. *Mishnah, Avoth*, 1:1.
24. Macy Nulman, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 220. By the Middle Ages, prayer shawls incorporated 613 threads for the commandments; “According to the Talmud, wearing *tzitzit* is equal in merit with observing the entire Torah. The numerical value of the word *tzitzit* equals 613, the number of precepts in the Torah.”
25. Albright, *Anchor Bible: Matthew*, 279.
26. Bible Dictionary.
27. Albright, *Anchor Bible: Matthew*, 279.
28. *Ibid.*, 282.
29. Lynne Hilton Wilson, “The Confusing Case of Zacharias,” *Religious Educator*, 14, no. 2 (2013) 107-123. <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/re-14-no-2-2013/confusing-case-zacharias>