



Simon de Vlieger, *Sleeping Peasants near Fields (Parable of the Weeds)*, 1650–1653, oil on canvas, 90.4 x 130.4 cm, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

# MATTHEW 11–12; LUKE 11

## JESUS TEACHES IN GALILEE & HEALS ON THE SABBATH

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***Mt 11:1. “when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.”*** Josephus claimed that Galilee of the Gentiles had 204 small villages. The number is disputed by archeologists, but the area was probably ripe with teaching opportunities.

### **John the Baptist**

*John the Baptist’s disciples’ questions—Mt 11:2–6; Lk 7:18–35*

***Mt 11:2. “When John had heard in the prison.”*** John the Baptist was imprisoned in Herod Antipas’s Dead Sea fortress for speaking out against Herod’s marriage with his brother’s wife, Herodias. Josephus tells us that John the Baptist was imprisoned in Machaerus, “the black fortress” (which is east of the Dead Sea in modern day Jordan).<sup>1</sup>

Table 1. Overview of events in Mt 11–12 and Lk 11

Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Galilean journey	11:1			
Questions and answers	11:2–6		7:18–23	
Jesus on John the Baptist	11:7–19	1:2	7:24–35	
Woe to Galilee’s cities	11:20–24		10:12–15	
Jesus thanks His Father	11:25–27		10:21–24	3:35; 7:29; 10:14–15; 13:3; 17:2, 25
Come find rest	11:28–30			
Picks grain on Sabbath	12:1–8	2:23–28	6:1–5	
Heals hand	12:9–13	3:1–6	6:6–11	
Heals multitude	12:15–21	3:7–12	6:17–19	
The Lord’s Prayer	6:9–13		11:1–4	
Parable of midnight			11:5–8	
Prayer encouraged	7:7–11		11:9–13	14:13; 15:7; 16:24
Beelzebub	12:22–30	3:22–27	11:14–23	7:20; 10:20; 8:48
Evil spirits return	12:43–45		11:24–26	
Jesus’s family	12:46–50	3:31–35	8:19–21	
True blessedness			11:27–28	
Sign of Jonah	12:38–42	8:11–12	11:29–32	
Concerning light	5:15	4:21	11:33	
The sound eye	6:22–23		11:34–36	
Pharisees and lawyers	15:1–9	7:1–9	11:37–54	

**Mt 11:2–3 (Lk 7:19).** “*He sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*” John the Baptist’s distraught followers came to Jesus with questions. All four Gospels tell us that John the Baptist knew Jesus was the Savior and that he came to prepare the way for the Messiah.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps his months in prison had affected his mental state, but the scriptures record that both he and his parents knew who the Messiah was (Lk 1:17, 41–45). It is more likely that the disciples’ question is for their own benefit. Jesus’s answer is filled with praise for His kinsman, which invalidates the idea that the Baptist’s faith wavered. Of course, the trial of imprisonment could not have been easy for him. Perhaps the disciples expect Jesus to miraculously release John the Baptist. We know from an earlier chapter that “*Jesus knew that John was cast into prison; and he sent angels, and behold, they came and ministered unto him*” (JST, Mt 4:11).

**Lk 7:20. “Sent.”** In the parallel account, Luke changes the Greek verb from *pempas* to *sapostelló*, meaning “I send forth (as a messenger or commission).” Luke’s wordplay can refer to Jesus, the Apostles, and John the Baptist.



**Mt 11:3 (JST).** “**Art thou he of whom it is written in the prophets?**” The JST addition is consistent with Matthew’s focus of showing Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Luke and Matthew record the story similarly up to this question. Luke then first adds Jesus acting out His answer to the disciples’ questions about His messiahship.

**Lk 7:21.** “**In that same hour he cured many of their infirmities . . . evil spirits; and . . . blind.**” Luke deviates from Matthew’s text to add *how* Jesus answered their question. Rather than only responding with words, Jesus showed the disciples His messiahship in action. He first demonstrates His divine nature and then asks them to share their witness of what they saw.

**Mt 11:4 (JST; also Lk 7:22).** “**Go and tell John again of those things which ye do hear and see.**” The Lord’s examples include the sign that only the Messiah can perform—healing the blind.

**Mt 11:6 (JST).** “**blessed is John and whosoever shall not be offended in me.**” The JST adds Jesus’s blessing on His cousin John as well.

### *Jesus’s witness of John the Baptist—Mt 11:7–19; Lk 7:24–35*

**Mt 11:7.** “**What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?**” Jesus spoke of his kinsman as an “Elias, which was for to come.” John the Baptist heralded another dispensation (Mt 11:14). Yet Jesus uses irony and exaggeration to wake up or startle His audience into attention. Basically, Jesus asks John the Baptist’s disciples if they found the prophet common or extraordinary. The word for “wind,” *anemos*, means “something with gusting, storm-like force, like someone bent in a particular direction”<sup>3</sup> Could Jesus’s words have meant “Were you looking to get shaken up or blown away?”

**Mt 11:9.** “**What went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.**” Jesus reminds the Baptist’s disciples that they did not go out to find a nicely dressed king. John the Baptist dressed in camel’s hair with a leather sash and ate desert foods like Elijah did (Mk 1:6). If they sought a prophet, then they should obey God’s servant and accept his witness of God. They also went to the desert seeking the Messiah.

**Mt 11:10 (Lk 7:27).** “**This is he, of whom it is written.**” Jesus cites Mal 3:1 to explain the gap between the forerunner and Himself, the Messiah. All four standard works refer to Malachi’s prophecy.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, at least at this time, John the Baptist’s followers did not move toward accepting Jesus as their promised Messiah. It is as if they accepted the burning match but did not use it to become baptized by fire.

**Mt 11:10 (Lk 7:27).** “**Behold, I send my messenger . . . [to] prepare thy way before thee.**” Jesus teaches the questioners about John the Baptist’s prophetic assignment. Yet, at that time another group known as “desert sectaries” claimed to be in the desert to “prepare the way.”<sup>5</sup>

**Mt 11:11 (Lk 7:28).** “**there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.**” Jesus offered remarkable praise of John the Baptist. One wonders, was Jesus referring to those living at that time or to all in mortal history?<sup>6</sup> The Prophet Joseph Smith elaborated this statement by pointing out that John the Baptist (1) had the mission to prepare the way for Jesus, (2) baptized Jesus, and (3) acted as the legal administrator in the affairs of the kingdom by receiving and passing on the priesthood keys.<sup>7</sup>

**Mt 11:11. “least in the kingdom of heaven.”** This phrase is used three times in the New Testament, but the Greek words behind “least” are different. In Mt 5:19 *elachistos* means “smallest in size, amount, rank, or authority.” Here, in Mt 11:11, *micros* refers to smallness, age, or time. When “least” is used in the Sermon on the Mount, it does not refer to Jesus, but here in Mt 11:11 it may.

Table 2. Comparison of Mt 5:19 and Mt 11:11

Mt 5:19	Mt 11:11
Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.	Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

**Mt 11:12. “suffereth violence.”** The Gospel of Luke stops paralleling Matthew, who continues on for four verses on the suffering that will come. Jesus prophesies that the kingdom of heaven will be violently attacked.

**Mt 11:13–14 (JST).** “**but the days will come when the violent shall have no power . . . Yea, as many as have prophesied have foretold of these days.**” The JST adds the joyful message that the violence will end during the promised future time (or Millennium).

**Mt 11:14 (JST).** “**if ye will receive it, verily, he was the Elias, who was for to come and prepare all things.**” Matthew’s Gospel alone references the expectation of Elijah from Mal 4:5.

**Mt 11:15. “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”** The NIV is more accurate, changing “him” to “whoever.” This describes Jesus’s inclusivity and speaks of His audience. Jesus’s admonition to hear is repeated eight times in the Synoptic Gospels and sixteen times across the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> Hearing the Spirit is something all can do. Additional spiritual blessings of receiving the Spirit’s promptings are available to confirmed and endowed members of the Church who live their covenants. Jesus invites these initiates with ears to hear—including John’s disciples—to become fully initiated into higher covenants and ordinances. This knowledge is properly guarded by those who not only hear but also do as the Spirit directs. The parallel account of Lk 7:30 adds that “the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God . . . being not baptized.”

**Mt 11:16–17 (Lk 7:32).** “**Like . . . children sitting in the markets, . . . saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.**” On one level, those who do not hear have ignored Jesus and John the Baptist, like adults sometimes ignore children performing. Allegorically, Jesus invites listeners to His wedding feast and His death (flute players would traditionally be hired for both events), but the Pharisees and lawyers would not receive His invitation (Lk 7:30). They refused to join the group, nor would they mourn with Him for the sins of the world.

In the apocryphal *Acts of John*, the Lord says, “Grace is dancing I would pipe, dance all of you! Amen. I would mourn, lament all of you! Amen.”<sup>9</sup> The connection with the New Testament is clear. It is the Lord’s grace that allows all to join the group. A complementary additional interpretation comes from Hugh Nibley’s studies on prayer circles:

We made a circle and surrounded him and he said, “I am in your midst in the manner of these little children. . .,” he added, “Gather to me, O holy members of my body, and when I recite the hymn, you say Amen.” The central act of the prayer circle was prayer, and it was “as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Lk 11:1–2).<sup>10</sup>

Nibley also wrote, “He that does not move in the circle knows not what is happening. Amen.”<sup>11</sup>

**Mt 11:18–19 (Lk 7:33–35).** “*eating nor drinking . . . a devil . . . gluttonous.*” While John the Baptist is described as an Old Testament prophet look-alike,<sup>12</sup> the Lord, on the other hand, is condemned for living a normal Jewish life—eating and drinking as directed by the law of Moses.

*Woes to Galilean cities—Mt 11:20–24; Lk 10:12–15*

**Mt 11:21 (Luke 10:13).** “*Woe.*” Jesus calls three towns and cities around the Sea of Galilee to repentance. The meaning of *repentance* varies across cultures and languages. In Greek it denotes “heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins.” In Hebrew, “to [re]turn;” in Chinese, “to change your heart every day.” Restored scriptures give us the most information and the broadest definitions for *repentance*.

<sup>13</sup>It has always been at the core of coming unto Christ.

**Mt 11:21 (Lk 10:13).** “*If the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done . . .*” Jesus calls three Galilean cities to repent and compares them to some of the most wicked cities described in the Old Testament:

- Chorazin was two miles north of Capernaum in a hilly area now totally covered with black basalt rock.
- Bethsaida was the small fishing village where Peter, Andrew, James, and John were born.
- Tyre and Sidon were strong Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean coast in Joshua’s time.
- Capernaum, a city on the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee and a major Roman road, was known for its wealth, synagogue, and Roman tax collection.
- Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for their wickedness during Abraham’s and Lot’s lifetimes two millennia earlier.

*Jesus thanked His Father—Mt 11:25–27; Lk 10:21–22*

**Mt 11:25 (Lk 10:21).** “*Revealed . . . to babes.*” Jesus thanked His Father for keeping precious truths for the innocent. The flow of these passages doesn’t seem to quite fit together in Matthew. Fortunately, the JST additions clarifies it: “*There came a voice from heaven, and Jesus answered . . .*”



**Mt 11:27 (JST).** “**they to whom the Son will reveal himself; they shall see the Father also.**”

These are powerful doctrinal additions. This understanding is important part of the Restoration that started with Joseph Smith’s First Vision (see D&C 93:1).

*Come unto Christ and find rest—Mt 11:28–30; Lk 10:21–24*

**Mt 11:28.** “**Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest.**” This invitation outlines Jesus’s call and the purpose of His Church. The Lord’s rest is defined in the Book of Mormon as entering into God’s presence—or the sanctification that comes to those worthy to live with Him.<sup>14</sup> President Russell M. Nelson taught:

Covenant keepers are entitled to a special kind of *rest* that comes to them through their covenantal relationship with God. . . .

. . . Despite the distractions and distortions that swirl around us, you can find true *rest*—meaning relief and peace—even amid your most vexing problems. . . .

My plea to you this morning is to find *rest* from the intensity, uncertainty, and anguish of this world by *overcoming* the world through your covenants with God.<sup>15</sup>

We also better understand the Sabbath as a day of rest when we think of entering into God’s presence or striving to receive the fullness of His glory (D&C 84:24).

**Mt 11:30.** “**my yoke.**” The Lord introduces a powerful Christian image to describe His desired relationship with us. His yoke is easy, or light. Jesus asks us to put on His yoke to walk beside Him, to really conform to His direction. In this analogy, our human loads are easier because Jesus shares our load through a yoke. His commandments may feel constricting like a burdensome yoke. Yet, walking beside Him makes life easier and happier. A yoke is only difficult if we do not want to go where our yokefellow or master is leading us.

Carrying the image further, when yokefellows work together to pull their load, both grow stronger and more work can be accomplished. A yoke allows the trainer to teach the trainee side by side. This allows the trainer and trainee to strengthen their relationship as well as their power. When both yokefellows pull the load, the pair achieves mutuality, teamwork, and accomplishment. “Christ’s Gospel is not a ‘do-it-yourself program,’ but rather it is a do-it-with-Christ program.”<sup>16</sup>

## **The Sabbath**

*Lord of the Sabbath—Mt 12:1–8; Mk 2:23–28; Lk 6:1–5*

**Matthew 12:1 (BLB; also Lk 6:1).** “**on the Sabbaths . . . His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck the heads of grain and to eat them.**” Jesus and His disciples practiced the Mosaic law of gleaning. This law required farmers to leave a little food to provide for the poor or travelers (Lev 23:22). The Pharisees who observed Jesus’s traveling band were upset that the group gleaned on the Sabbath and were highly offended by this behavior. Over the centuries Jews became obsessed with Sabbath

*oral laws* and had hundreds of specific regulations. The micromanagement of the Sabbath was highly offensive to Jesus as it destroyed the purpose of the Sabbath as a day to rest from one’s own labor and serve God with all one’s time and energy. The word *sabbath* is used fifty-nine times in the New Testament, with nearly half the usages (twenty-seven instances) in Luke’s two books.

***Jewish oral laws.*** The oral laws on the Sabbath began after the Babylonian captivity (approximately 600 BC) to ensure the Jews would avoid falling short of living God’s laws. Jewish leaders tried to build a fence around their commandments.<sup>17</sup> Scribes systematized the commandment to remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy (Ex 20:8 BSB). They split “work” into thirty-nine categories. To protect the people from breaking the Sabbath, leaders forbade different types of work. A few examples include:

sowing	baking	tying a knot	cutting an animal up
plowing	shearing wool	loosening a knot	writing two letters
reaping	washing	sewing two stitches	erasing to write two letters
binding sheaves	beating	tearing	building
threshing	dyeing	hunting a gazelle	pulling down
winnowing	spinning	slaughtering	putting out fire
cleansing crops	weaving	flaying	lighting fire
grinding	making two loops	salting	striking with a hammer
sifting	weaving two threads	curing an animal’s skin	transporting something
kneading	separating two threads	scraping an animal’s skin	

During the Intertestamental period, rabbis elaborated further on these thirty-nine banned labors to include hundreds of oral laws that detailed appropriate Sabbath activities. For example, the Mishnah records that you could not carry a handful of straw, a dried fig’s bulk of foodstuff, or a piece of leather. You could use a needle, just not for sewing. To protect against plowing or cultivating the ground on the Sabbath, the laws forbade spitting in the dirt—spitting was only allowed on a rock.<sup>18</sup>

Healing was also outlawed on the Sabbath. If someone dislocated a joint or broke a bone on the Sabbath, oral laws forbade setting the fracture or relocating the joint because once in place, the victim’s body would work to heal itself.<sup>19</sup> One could take out a thorn with a sewing needle as long as the needle was not used for sewing.<sup>20</sup> Certain foods, like Greek hyssop, were often used for medicinal purposes, so the Pharisees made a law to not cook with them on the Sabbath in case they might stimulate the body to heal.<sup>21</sup> Ironically, Rabbi Meir gave permission to use superstitious cures on the Sabbath: “a nail of one that was crucified” to cure a festering wound, or a locust’s egg to cure an earache, or a jackal’s tooth to cure sleepiness (if the jackal were still alive) and sleeplessness (if the jackal were dead).<sup>22</sup> The Jewish oral laws became codified as the Mishnah in the third century.

**Mt 12:3 (Mk 2:25; Lk 6:3).** *“Have ye not read what David did.”* Jesus answered the Pharisees’ questions by appealing to scriptures—just as He responded to Satan’s temptations. He began with a story of King David from 1 Sam 21:3–6.

**Mt 12:5.** *“have ye not read in the law.”* Luke and Mark end their parallel accounts, but Matthew includes scriptural references to priests working (Num 28:9–10) and to the need for mercy more than sacrifice (Hos 6:6). As a master teacher, Jesus asks the Pharisees to read and think more.

**Mt 12:6.** *“one greater than the temple.”* Jesus rightly equated Himself with the temple. He is the meeting place between heaven and earth and God and humanity. His body is the house of God. He is how all may be washed for spiritual cleansing. He is the *Messiah*, or Anointed One, who can sanctify all who touch Him. His sacrifice is the real unblemished vicarious offering. His blood is shed to carry sin. His at-one-ment is the most merciful of all. As the God of the Old Testament, He revealed the tabernacle to teach His people of Him. Later, Paul explained that the law acted as “a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Gal 3:24). Much of the law deals with the temple, hence the temple also teaches of Christ.

The whole high priest’s experience on the Day of Atonement foreshadows the Redeemer’s life and mission, starting with the high priest’s selecting the scapegoat to carry Israel’s sins and taking it through the veil and onto the mercy seat and ark and the covenant (Lev 16). The path to the holy place was the way back to the tree of life (represented by the menorah), where covenanters partake of its fruit without sins and from there pass through the veil into the Holy of Holies. Each of these rituals depicts aspects of Christ’s Atonement. He is the only real high priest who goes through the veil to enter God’s presence without sin. Every aspect of the Mosaic temple spoke of our Creator who took on flesh as Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus understated Himself when He said, “In this place is one greater than the temple.”

**Mk 2:27.** *“The sabbath was made for man.”* Mark leaves us this gem, made clearer by the JST addition: *“Wherefore the Sabbath was given unto man for a day of rest; and also, that man should glorify God. . . . For the Son of Man, made the Sabbath day; therefore, the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath.”* Jesus reoriented the Jews to honor the Sabbath as a day of worship, rest, healing, and doing good.

**Mt 12:8 (Lk 6:5; Mk 2:28).** *“the Son of Man is Lord even of the sabbath day.”* All three Synoptic Gospels cite the Lord making this powerful declaration of His identification as the premortal Jehovah. This phrase was recorded as an announcement of Jesus’s divinity. As the Creator of the world, He knows what is best for His creations. To some it was revolutionarily clear, and to others, preposterously offensive.

*Jesus healed a withered hand on the Sabbath—Mt 12:9–24; Mk 3:1–6; Lk 6:6–11*

**Mt 12:10.** *“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”* Each of the Synoptic Gospels emphasizes that Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath. Jesus was in the synagogue and deliberately attacked the pharisaic misunderstanding of the Sabbath. Luke especially highlights this—he points out Jesus’s healings were done on the Sabbath in one-third of the twenty-six healings he includes. Jesus directly confronts the



pharisaic traditions that claimed healing was prohibited on the Sabbath as work. He directly attacks the false issues of the day even though many were offended by those attacks.

**Mt 12:10 (Lk 6:6; Mk 3:1).** *“his right hand was withered.”* Jesus entered a synagogue on the Sabbath and saw a man with a withered hand. Of the Evangelists, only the physician, Luke, included that it was the man’s *right* hand that was withered. All ritually clean functions were carried out with the right hand, and ritually unclean work was done with the left hand. A withered right hand was unclean. According to Jewish traditions, whatever the unclean or withered hand touched would be unclean. This man had two unclean hands. He was probably ostracized for this.

**Lk 6:8.** *“he knew their thoughts.”* Luke alone highlights that Jesus knows our thoughts.

**Mt 12:12 (Mk 3:4; Lk 6:9).** *“do well on the Sabbath days.”* The Gospels repeatedly highlight the Lord doing good on the Sabbath. Jesus deliberately broke the Jewish oral Sabbath laws to counterattack the social norm. Yet it appears that He lived the Mosaic laws completely.

**Lk 6:8.** *“stand forth.”* Jesus got everyone’s attention by having the disabled man stand in the middle of the synagogue to receive his healing.

**Mt 12:12 (Mk 3:4; Lk 6:9).** *“it is lawful to do well.”* Jesus’s benchmark for appropriate Sabbath activities is to do good. On a spectrum of Sabbath observance, Pharisees and our generation lie on opposite ends of the spectrum. Modern prophets continue to call us to keep the Sabbath day holy. We can fine-tune our Sabbath activities by asking whether what we are doing is a “good, better, or best” thing to do on the Sabbath.<sup>23</sup>

**Mt 12:14.** *“the Pharisees went out, and held a council . . . how they might destroy him.”* The first plot against Jesus’s life started with King Herod in Mt 2:16. These satanic efforts continue through the Pharisees, whom Jesus offended with His Sabbath healings.

## Healings

*Jesus healed multitudes—Mt 12:15–21; Mk 3:7–12; Lk 6:17–19*

Jesus’s audience changes again and is now a “great multitude” in Galilee. In Mark, the multitude is at the seaside, and in Luke, in a valley. The multitudes included seekers from Jerusalem, Judea, and the Mediterranean.

**Mt 12:17–18.** *“That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet . . . my servant, whom I have chosen.”* Jesus is the Chosen One prophesied in Isa 42:1–3. This is the ninth out of fourteen times that Matthew draws attention to Jesus fulfilling messianic prophecies.

*Jesus healed a blind and dumb man—Mt 12:22–30, Mk 3:22–27, Lk 11:14–18*

**Mt 12:22 (Lk 11:14).** *“one possessed.”* The social and medical understanding of birth defects and other abnormal behavior disorders were often to label the person as one “possessed with a devil.” We see evidence that the hosts of Satan were clearly working at the time of Jesus, but they were more likely

in the hearts and minds of those who attacked Jesus rather than in those with disabilities. The healing of the blind and dumb man was placed in the category of casting out a devil. (Luke describes the man as dumb only.)

Because life with blindness was so challenging in the ancient world, blind infants were often killed. Later in the Jewish world, the cause of blindness was attached to “punishment for specific sins—such as the taking of bribes, feigning blindness, negligence in feeding the poor, improper behavior during cohabitation, and faulty education for one’s son or pupil.”<sup>24</sup>

**Mt 12:23 (JST).** **“Son of David.”** An onlooker sees Jesus healing the blind as evidence that He is the promised Messiah, or Son of David (as prophesied in Isa 35:5).

**Mt 12:24 (Mk 3:22; Lk 11:15).** **“Beelzebub.”** Even though this is a name used for Satan in the New Testament, it first referred to the god of Ekron, Baalzebub, meaning “the lord of flies” or “the lord of dung.” Jesus pointed out the Pharisees’ faulty logic and tried to teach them with an example of a parable of a divided house.

**Mt 12:28 (JST).** **“For they also cast out devils by the Spirit of God, for unto them is given power over devils.”** The JST clarifies that casting out evil spirits is a gift that God shares through His Spirit. It is not limited to those who have been baptized or ordained to the priesthood. The Lord explained later that He shares His power with “those who love me and keep all my commandments, and him that seeketh so to do; that all may be benefited that seek or that ask of me . . . [everyone] is given a gift by the Spirit of God. To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby” (D&C 46:9, 11–12). This later point of benefiting others is repeated five times.

**Mt 12:29 (Mk 3:27; Lk 11:21).** **“the strong man.”** Jesus announces that even though the devil is strong, He is stronger. Satan reigns over many demons who opposed Jesus in events recorded in the Bible and modern scripture, but Jesus and His legions are stronger. They will bind and overcome the enemy of wickedness.

*Forgiveness and repentance—Mt 12:31–37; Mk 3:28–30; Lk 12:10*

**Mk 3:28 (JST).** **“when they repent, [they] shall be forgiven them, for I came to preach repentance unto the sons of men. . . . [They] shall be forgiven them that come unto me and do the works which they see me do.”** Likewise, the JST of the parallel verse in Mt 12:31 adds that sins “shall be forgiven unto men *who receive me and repent.*” Both qualifiers teach that repentance is the important condition for forgiveness.

**Mt 12:31 (Mk 3:29).** **“blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.”** This is the one unforgiveable sin. This is not as simple as ignoring a prompting or denying a witness of the Spirit. In our dispensation the Lord elaborated on this sin in scripture and through the Prophet Joseph. From D&C 132:27, we learn that “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost . . . shall not be forgiven in the world nor out of the world” (see

also Jac 7:19; Alm 39:6). The prophet Joseph Smith further explained, “To commit the unpardonable sin . . . he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened to him, and to deny the Plan of Salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it.”<sup>25</sup>

**Mt 12:34. “generation of vipers.”** Three times Matthew elicits the image of a snake from Eden, likening the wicked in Jesus’s audience to followers of the devil (see Mt 3:7; 23:33).

**Mt 12:36. “every idle word.”** *Argos*, the Greek behind “idle,” is also translated as “empty,” “careless,” and “thoughtless” (NIV, ESV, ISV). It also means “lazy, unprofitable, injurious.” Jesus as our judge warns us that our words will condemn us. How we use language is important to Jesus.

*Sign of Jonah—Mt 12:38–42; Lk 11:16, 29–32*

**Lk 11:29 (Mt 12:39). “sign of Jonas.”** The Gospels of Matthew and Luke use Jesus’s statement here differently. Matthew refers to a sign of Jesus’s Resurrection: “For Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be” (Mt 12:40, and He repeats it in Mt 16:4). In Luke, the sign of Jonah points to repentance. The Assyrians repented after Jonah’s preaching; thus they will condemn those who heard Jesus and did not repent. Notice how Luke repeatedly highlights the Gentiles as the precursors to change in Christianity.<sup>26</sup>

**Mt 12:42 (Lk 11:31). “queen of the South.”** This refers to another Gentile, the Queen of Sheba, who wisely came to honor Solomon (1 Kng 10:11–10).

*Return of the evil spirit—Mt 12:43–45, Lk 11:24–26*

**Mt 12:43 (JST). “Some of the scribes and said unto him, Master, it is written that every sin shall be forgiven; but ye say, Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven.”** The JST connects Matthew’s account of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost with being possessed with evil spirits. Jesus emphasizes Satan’s power and teaches humans to take personal responsibility to keep evil influences away. The JST adds Jesus’s explanation that even after one has been freed from a demonic possession, demons may still return. Even after a person has had the heavens open to them, if they sin Satan can tempt them again. Humans must fill their souls with goodness and their lives with good habits to keep Satan at bay.

**Mt 12:44 (JST). “But when a man speaketh against the Holy Ghost, then [Satan] saith, I will return.”** The JST warns that those who have received an inner cleansing from God (and, as Joseph Smith later taught, a sure witness of God) can again be vulnerable to Satan’s influence and possession if they sin.

**Mt 12:45. “seven other spirits more wicked.”** The devils want to take over or influence good people. The number seven represents a complete takeover or whole possession. Devils continue to tempt and derail pure people, even those with good intentions. The gift of discernment is always needed.



*Jesus's spiritual kindred—Mt 12:46–50; Mk 3:31–35; Lk 8:19–21*

**Mt 12:46 (Mk 3:32; Lk 8:20).** “*his mother and his brethren.*” We are told in Mt 13:55 and Mk 6:3 that Joseph and Mary had at least four other sons and daughters as well. At least part of the family came to see Jesus here, but because of the crowd they could not see Him. Joseph is not present during Jesus's ministry or Passion in any of the Gospels. This leads us to question whether he were still living. The Gospel of John hints that Jesus's half-siblings did not believe in His divine identity and calling—yet. This may have prompted Jesus's statement. Additionally, Jesus taught that family extends beyond blood lines to include those who follow Him.

**Lk 8:21 (Mt 12:50; Mk 3:35).** “*My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.*” We find a similar message in the early Christian church across the world: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”<sup>27</sup> With the Spirit as our guide, we can follow God's will.

**Lk 11:5–13.** See my discussion of Mt 7:7–11 for more on the parable of the pleading friend at midnight and on prayer.

**Lk 11:51.** See my discussion of Mt 23:35 for an explanation on the various Zachariahs.<sup>28</sup>

**Lk 11:33.** “*lighted a candle, . . . on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light.*” Luke talks about lampstands twice. The symbol invokes the temple's sacred space and also speaks of sacred things. Luke mentions lampstands often.<sup>29</sup> Jesus's light is visible. (For more, see my discussion of Mt 5:15–16.)

## Notes

- 1 Josephus, *Antiquity of the Jews*, 18.119 (116–119). Machaerus is also spelled Macherus.
- 2 Mt 3:11–17; Mk 1:9–11; Lk 3:15–22. See also 1 Ne 11:27.
- 3 “Anemos,” *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/417.htm>.
- 4 Mal 3:1 is quoted in 3 Ne 24:1; Mt 11:1; Mk 1:2; Lk 7:27; JS–H 1:36, and it is referenced in D&C 45:29. Malachi is also quoted in D&C 110; 138. The Septuagint of Exodus 23:20 is also similar to Malachi's promise.
- 5 Hugh Nibley, “The Early Christian Prayer Circle,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1987): 49–50.
- 6 A similar generalization about Joseph Smith was written at his passing and is recorded in D&C 135:3.
- 7 “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1458, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/101>.
- 8 Mt 13:9, 43; Mk 4:9, 23; 7:16; Lk 8:8; 14:35.
- 9 Bernhard Pick, *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul, Peter, John, and Thomas* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1909), 181.

10 Nibley, “The Early Christian Prayer Circle,” 50. Nibley cites the Kasr el-Wazz, and the quote continues: “In exactly the same situation in the Book of Mormon the resurrected Lord blesses the little children ‘one by one,’ but he begins his discourse to the Nephites by telling them three times that no one can approach him except as a little child. (See 3 Ne. 9:22, 11:37) The prayer circle is the nearest approach to the Lord that men make on earth—and they can approach him only ‘as little children.’”

11 Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987), 55.

12 As described earlier, John the Baptist ate the ritually clean foods from Lev 11:22, and Lk 1:15 says that he drank “neither wine nor strong drink.”

13 See 4:11–12, 26; Alm 34:15–19; 36:18–21; 3 Ne 9:13–14, 19–22; Moro 8:11, 16, 22; D&C 19:16–17; and so forth. Also when comparing word counts on the subject of repentance across the standard works we find:

	Old Testament (610,303 words)	New Testament (180,565 words)	Book of Mormon (266,944 words)	D&C / PGP (165,166 words)
<b>Repent</b>	22	24	205	97
<b>Repentance</b>	1	25	99	36
<b>Repent-ed, -s, -eth, -ing</b>	21	27	55	22
<b>TOTAL</b>	44	66	359	155
<b>Ratio per 10k words</b>	7.21	36.5	134.5	79.42

14 Alm 12:36; 13:12, 16, 29–30; 16:17; 60:13; Moro 7:3; D&C 84:24; and so forth.

15 Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” October 2022 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

16 James Harris, “The ‘I Am’ Passages in the Gospels and in 3 Nephi,” in *The New Testament and the Latter-day Saints: The 16th Sperry Symposium*, ed. John Carmack (Orem, UT: Randall, 1987), 94.

17 Mishnah, Avoth 1:1: “Raise up many disciples, and make a fence around The Law.”

18 Mishnah, Shabbath 7:2–4; 8:3. The Jewish oral laws later became codified as the Mishnah.

19 Mishnah, Shabbath 22:6.

20 Mishnah, Shabbath 17:2.

21 Mishnah, Shabbath 14:3.

22 Mishnah, Shabbath 6:10.

23 Dallin Oaks, “Good, Better, Best,” October 2007 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

24 Avraham Steinberg, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 1:106–107. The “improper behavior” included keeping one’s eyes open during conception.

25 “Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff,” p. [138], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/6>.

26 See, for example, Lk 4:24–27; 8:26–39; 10:1–8; 11:31.

27 Rom 8:14; see also 3 Ne 9:7; Moro 7:26, 48.

28 See also Lynne H. Wilson, “The Confusing Case of Zacharias,” in *Religious Educator* 14, no. 2 (2013): 107–123.

29 See Lk 8:16; 12:35; 15:8.