

Messianic Kingdom Hopes Doubted

Matthew 11 Lesson 23

The Last Great Campaign of the Kingdom Gospel before the Tribulation

Little did the newly commissioned Apostles know that their first mission was actually the beginning of the final campaign of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God/Heaven. The official rejection of Jesus by the Jewish religious leadership on the grounds of blasphemy as recorded in Matthew chapter 12 would go all the way to the “Supreme Court” of Judaism in Jerusalem, the *Sanhedrin*. It was these religious leaders who brought the charge of blasphemy against Jesus only to have it tossed out by Pilate. (John 18:31) (Luke 23:6-12). The Sanhedrin reframed the charge as treason against Rome. As a result, the message of the physical return of God's kingdom will not be preached until the end times, during a period of tribulation referred to as "Jacob's Trouble." This will be heralded by two witnesses and 144,000 Jewish witnesses. (Matthew 24:14; Revelation 7:1-9; 11:1-12; 14:4-6)

We established the definition of the *Kingdom of God/Heaven* and the *Gospel of the Kingdom* in Lesson 2 of Rediscovering Jesus in the Jewish Gospels. It is simply the literal global Kingdom of Israel, ruled by the Messiah, son of David from Jerusalem as all the prophets foresaw and proclaimed. Remember the content of Jesus post-resurrection teachings: “being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the **kingdom of God**,” and the last question asked by the Apostles to Jesus before He ascended: “Lord, wilt thou at this time **restore again the kingdom to Israel?**” (Acts 1:6). He didn’t correct them and redefine Kingdom as “the Church.” He just said the timing of the Kingdom of God/Heaven being restored to Israel was now in the Father’s hands. Meanwhile, they were to be Spirit-filled witnesses of salvation through faith in Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection.

In Matthew 10 we saw the selection and sending of the twelve to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Jesus gave them clear instructions regarding their finances, lodging, and message. He warned them to expect persecution and about how to respond. They were assured of God’s provision, protection, and reward. No sooner were they sent on their way with the message that the Messiah King is coming, than Jesus began to follow them “to teach and preach in their cities.” (11:1). The imminent expectancy of their message “the Kingdom of God is at Hand,” was evidenced by Jesus’ immediate arrival “on their heels” in those very cities performing miracles. As John the Baptist was his prophesied forerunner, the Apostles were his immediate front-men. John the Baptist's disciples were very much aware that some former followers of John had been chosen as Jesus' footmen.

Miraculous Signs Abounded

Here we must insert a detail referred to by Jesus and recorded in Luke 7:21. “And in that same hour he cured many of *their* infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many *that were* blind he gave sight.” Jesus also notes the raising of the dead son of the widow of Nain just prior to this (Luke 7:11-17).

Messianic Inquiry by John the Baptist

In Matthew 11:4 we easily read over a word that has a clue as to John’s puzzling doubt; “shew John again.” Luke records that John’s disciples had already “showed him all these things” (Luke 7:18). The key is found in the phrase “which ye do hear and see.” Possibly they had only given John a second-hand report but now had been personally sent by John to report back with what they had seen first-hand. Jesus amended their report to include that “the poor have the Gospel (of the kingdom) preached unto them.” Why then did John’s doubts plunge him to the depths of questioning the prophetic identity of Jesus? “Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another” (11:2,3)? A couple of

considerations come to mind regarding John's doubts. No one felt more alone and possibly abandoned than John and it seems like he was wondering if he was mistaken and had misdirected his followers. After all, he had declared Jesus the "Lamb of God." John's follower Andrew left him and alerted Peter, James, and John to consider following Jesus. Now Jesus had commissioned His own forerunners/Apostles. Why? Was John reconsidering that he was not the Elijah to announce the arrival of Christ/Messiah? Was Jesus the Elijah announcing the Messiah yet to come? The possibility is not all that far-fetched according to the conclusion of the multitudes in Luke 7:16. "And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people." Some people were identifying Jesus as just a prophet, but not the Messiah. "He that should come" is a definite reference to the One that John had been proclaiming. This is a clear Messianic reference. "he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire: Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:11,12). Jesus' comforting words in verse 6 are said to encourage the bewildered John. "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me."

Historic Messianic Fervor

There is much evidence in the Dead Sea Scrolls that there was a great Messianic expectancy leading up to the first century. (Dead Sea Scroll: Cave 4, Qumran, 19524Q174-4Q florilegium, column 1-5, lines 1-19) "4Q174 identifies the seed of David as the "Branch of David," a figure once again derived from Jeremiah 23:5; 35:15, who is also expected to stand at the end of days. 4Q174's exegesis of 2 Samuel 7:14 specifies that this "Branch of David" means "the son of God" (line 11). Because the Branch of David is also called the "Messiah of Righteousness" (משיח הצדק) in 4Q252, this figure in 4Q174 is certainly a Davidic Messiah. 4Q174's exposition of 2 Samuel 7:14 therefore demonstrates that the title "Son of God" is easily understood as an additional epitaph for the Davidic Messiah."ⁱⁱ

Rabbinic Messianic Examination

The policy of the first-century Sanhedrin was to vet any self-proclaimed Messiah. There were two official phases in this process. First, they were to send a delegation to observe and report the teachings and actions of the messianic candidate. "And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?" (Matthew 9:4). Even John's disciples had at first employed this observation phase and reported to John what they had heard. Secondly, they were to send a delegation to interrogate the messianic candidate as we see beginning in the next chapter. "But when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day." (Matthew 12:2; 12:38; 15:1,2) The interrogation would increase steadily until Jesus stood arrested before the Council. The mounting opposition among the Jewish leadership had to have been known to John from his disciples. John had already dealt with the "many Pharisees and Sadducees" coming to observe his preaching and baptisms. He had called them out as "vipers." He had told them they could not hide behind their Jewish ancestry from Abraham. He taunted them that God didn't need them but could raise up children unto Abraham from the stones beneath their feet if He so chose. John basically said the axe is laid to the root of their tree and he cared not how the chips fell. It is entirely within the realm of possibility that it was those offended Sadducees and Pharisees who had reported to Herod about John's rebuke of his adultery (Mark 6:17-20). Now Jesus was offending them and the tide was beginning to turn against Him also. Rather than rebuking John's doubt, Jesus pronounced a *brucha* or blessing on all who would not be offended "in me" (11:6). It was a message for John to keep the faith and not to prematurely draw the wrong conclusion in the depths of his isolation and persecution. With that encouragement, the disciples of John returned to John with Jesus' reply.

High Praise of John the Baptist

Evidently, this inquiry and answer was as it were, an open press conference before the multitudes (11:7). Jesus asked the same rhetorical question from three different angles to the listening crowd, "But what ye out for to see?" Was John just another reed shaking in the wind? Was John just another "suit" in fine garments? Or, was John a prophet? "Yea,"

indicated that answer #3 was the obvious correct conclusion of all present. Then Jesus magnified the prophet John above all previous prophets. "More than a prophet" indicated a peculiar distinction. Jesus went on to elaborate by

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referencing Malachi 3:1, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts." He was the prophet chosen to personally present the Messiah to Israel.

The Messianic Indicator of Elijah's end times ministry

John was not wrong to be downhearted. The Sadducees and Pharisees had totally missed this historic fulfillment of the forerunner of the long-anticipated Messiah. This rejection of John the Baptist, as the Messiah's forerunner was the beginning of the end of Israel's Kingdom offer. It was a harbinger of their rejection of Jesus. John was way ahead of these disciples in detecting the seismic shift in the tectonic plates of prophecy. In verse 13 John's proclamation is declared to be the culmination of all that was prophesied in the Law and Prophets. Jesus then spells out that for those who received John's message, it was the message of "Elias/Elijah, which was for to come"(11:14). Not everyone that had ears were willing to hear this as being fulfilled in John. Jesus is referencing Malachi 4:5 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD." John was pronounced thus by the angel to Zacharias regarding the birth of John, "he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias" (Luke 1:17).

Thy Kingdom Coup d'état

A violent assault against God's literal Kingdom of Heaven by Israel had just begun with the rejection of John. "The violent take it by force," was not a prescription for His disciples as shallow unstudied critics have accused when Jesus said in the previous chapter, "I am come to bring a sword." Rather it was a description of the satanic struggle first identified in the garden when God cursed the serpent and prophesied that Satan like a serpent would bite the heel of the future redeeming son born from the seed of a virgin. (Genesis 3:15) This was later illuminated by John's revelation of Satan the dragon attacking Jesus the son of the woman Israel. (Rev. 12:13-17) The violent one is identified as none other than Satan. The violent ones to the Kingdom of Heaven and to the One who will rule in that earthly Kingdom are clearly those who do Satan's bidding. Seeing that he is a liar and the Father of all lies is it any wonder that before Satan marshals his forces to arrest and murder Jesus, he would first build a false case; a lying accusation of blasphemy and treason against Jesus from the highest religious leaders in Israel? The Apostle Paul identifies this age-old struggle as being against "spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). Satan is the Viceroy of Violence defending his realm.

Pointed Parable

At this point, Jesus gives an analogy of those rejecting John's message and His message. He likened them to jaded apathetic children in the marketplace who will neither dance to music nor show compassion toward those who mourn the deceased. The apathy toward the joy of those healed by Jesus' manifold miracles and hardness of heart toward the sinners whom Jesus dined with showed no mercy nor forgiveness to fellow mankind. Jesus had recently said that God desired mercy rather than sacrifice. John came as a *Nazarite* who would not even drink wine nor attend their feasting and they accused him of having a devil. Jesus came eating with publicans and sinners and was accused of being a glutton and winebibber. "Wisdom is justified of her children," is an idiom. When you can't please them either way we might hear it said, "You are darned if you do and you are darned if you don't." A.T. Robertson in his *Word Pictures of the New Testament* of this verse said the Greek tense is in the aorist passive tense. Wisdom is "set right" by her children. Literally justified means vindicated. He points out that Luke states "by all her children." Foolish fickle children of the market-place would compare themselves both to the joyful and the mourning and dislike the one on the basis that he is not like the other one and vice-versa. Robertson went on to say "They exaggerate. John did not have a demon and Jesus was not a glutton or a winebibber...the plan of God is justified by results." He quotes F.F. Bruce, in his *Expositors Commentary* "a malicious nickname at first, it is now a name of honor: the sinner's lover."ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus now turns his rebuke

from those religious leaders who rejected John and are now turning against Him.

Sodom Cedes To Capernaum as Number On The Cursed Scale

Jesus warns the Jewish citizens of the triumvirate of cities; Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, where He performed P 3

70% of His ministry. Therefore, these citizens had a greater responsibility to the power and the preaching of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of David, Son of God. "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not."(11:20) The Greek words used for "His very many mighty works." here are *dunamis* often rendered "Power," "wonders" which often accompanies the word "signs" from *samion*.



Historic Examples of Divine Destruction at Tyre and Sidon and at Sodom and Gomorrah

The Sins of Tyre "Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thine heart *is* lifted up, and thou hast said, I *am* a God, I sit *in* the seat of God, in the midst of the seas" (Ezekiel 28:1-6).

The Sin of Sidon "there shall be no more a pricking brier unto the house of Israel, nor *any* grieving thorn of all *that are* round about them." (Ezekiel 28:24) In verse 12 and following Ezekiel predicts that "they" will lay the stones and building material of Tyre in the "midst of the waters." "Apparently, the Tyrians considered their island refuge virtually impregnable, with war machines covering the walls, and rapidly moving water acting as an effective barrier from land attack, they refused Alexander's request. Upon receiving their refusal, he set upon the task of building a land bridge or causeway (Siculus calls it a "mole") from the mainland city of Tyre to the island city. Siculus stated: "Immediately he demolished what was called Old Tyre and set many tens of thousands of men to work carrying stones to construct a (crossway)" (17.40). Curtius Rufus noted: "Large quantities of rock were available, furnished by old Tyre" (4.2.18). This unprecedented action took the Tyrians by complete surprise. (p. 56). And yet, even though this action was unprecedented militarily, it was exactly what one might expect from the description of the destruction of Tyre given by Ezekiel hundreds of years prior to Alexander's actions. The mainland city was demolished and all her stones, timber, and

soil were thrown into the midst of the sea.”ⁱⁱⁱ In short, God’s prophesied judgment came to pass in two parts centuries apart. (Ezekiel 26:2-12; Isaiah 23:1-13)

From Chosen City of Christ to Target of Caesar

Jesus repeated this phrase “It shall be more tolerable...in the day of Judgment” “thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.”(Matthew 11:23) “it seems likely that this humble synagogue was
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destroyed by the Romans during “The Great Revolt between Jews and Romans begun in the Galilee, in the year 66 AD. In an attempt to protect the people of Arbela, (Mt. Arbel), overlooking Magdala, Galilee commander Yoseph ben Matityahu: “*built walls about the caves near the lake of Gennesar.*” (Galilee) (*Wars of the Jews*) The historian who wrote these words was Matityahu himself: he surrendered to the Romans during the revolt, renamed himself Josephus Flavius, and authored several extremely important books that document Jewish history.”^{iv} This means the synagogue dates to the time when the Second Temple (Herod’s Temple) was still standing. In a sister Synagogue in nearby Magdala, archaeological discovery has yielded around 2,500 coins, mainly bronze from the 1st century. There is much evidence of 1st-century military destruction.”^v The white synagogue seen today was built after the great earthquake of 363 BC.

Feeble Sheep Face Fierce Wolves with a Mighty Shepherd

Jesus ends this terrible pronouncement of judgment of the Galileans and turns to comfort his new band of Apostles. These trembling sheep being launched against the fangs and claws of wolves certainly needed the calming voice of their Great Shepherd. First, he audibly prayed assuring them of the Father’s plan and protection (11:25-28), then invited them to take comfort for their fearful and weary souls in his presence.

Matthew 11:25-30 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.

He was not sending them into opposition alone but was literally leading the way as would be seen in his persecution, trial, beatings and crucifixion. Only a suffering shepherd could speak *nefesh be nefesh* soul to soul of *shalom be nefesh* rest for their souls.

There is no more appropriate message of assurance of atonement for the Jewish soul on the eve of Yom Kippur, The Day of Atonement. For there to be a shalom soul rest of assurance that one’s name is in the Book of Life and that a resurrection of eternal bliss is guaranteed there must be the assurance that one’s sins have been atoned for according to the manner that God prescribed to Moses. Ezekiel 18:20 says “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” “When I say unto the wicked, O wicked *man*, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity...if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity.” Ezekiel 33:8,9 Who are the wicked? Solomon answered, “For *there is* not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” David said, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Ecclesiastes 7:20 God’s only prescription was and still is: “For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it *is* the blood *that* maketh an atonement for the soul.” Leviticus 17:11 Only a blood atonement provided by God in flesh as the Lamb of God can take away man’s sin. Rabbinic assurances to the Jews that *mitzvot* – good deeds, prayers – *tefillin*, and gifts to charity – *tzedeka* are the new atonement for the soul are not biblically based and contradict Leviticus 17:11. First only God can provide atonement not man. “I have given it to you.” The prescribed good deeds above are provided by man. Second it must be a blood atonement. “It *is* the blood *that* maketh an atonement for the soul.”

Thirdly the writer of Hebrews declares the necessity of the blood of the Messiah Son of God as the Lamb of God.

“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions *that were* under the first

testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.” Hebrews 9:12-15

ⁱ (Journal of Biblical Literature, Volume 118, p457, 1999 AD)

ⁱⁱ Word Pictures of the New Testament, The Gospel of Matthew, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2004, P 101

ⁱⁱⁱ Tyre in Prophecy - Apologetics Press

^{iv} Caves of Arbela: The ultimate hiding place | The Times of Israel

^v https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_11:23