

Mattityahu Levi

Matthew's Account

Part Two



Sh'ma! Chazak! Bible Studies

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Let thy house be a meeting-place for the wise; powder thyself in the dust of their feet, and drink their words with eagerness.

Yose ben Yoezer

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.

Yeshua (Luke 6:40)

Study Overview

Beloved, we are continuing our study of the book of Matthew together. Remember that our goal is to see it through the writer's eyes. We are continuing to try to recapture the historical context; the language; and the theology of the time when Mattityahu Levi wrote the book of Matthew.

Contextual and Analytical Format

We will continue studying a chapter of the book of Matthew in each lesson. If you did not do *Mattityahu Part One*, you need to know that each lesson will have a historical context section to set the stage for our study. The historical context will use archeological data, historical documents, and extra-Biblical texts to help us establish the frame for each lesson.

After setting the context, we will then dig into the text and examine it, examine it, and then reexamine it. We will look at original languages and many cross-references. We will try to analyze the book of Matthew and establish its purpose, and discover why it truly does belong at the head of the Apostolic Scriptures. Don't be afraid or intimidated by any of this – we are all learning together. None of His first *talmidim* [disciples] were scholars – but He taught them unsearchable truths – and so it has been with all of His disciples. The requisite is simply to follow Him.

Remember, that what makes this kind of study important is to hopefully see our Master in a way that compels us not to only know His words, but to live by His life. This should not be simply an intellectual exercise, but a practical one.

We will not use archeological data, or other extra-Biblical sources to establish authority – that can only come through Scripture. Rather, we will simply use them help us to gain context for what we are reading. As well, the use of an extra-Biblical text **will not be an endorsement** of these texts, because many historical sources do not have the same view of Scripture that we do.

Likewise, we will never diminish the simplicity of the text. We know that God is not the author of confusion; but rather, He speaks and His people hear His voice – in whatever language they need.

Word and Language Conventions

We will strive toward making Biblical things more clear, but also to be more correctly understood. Because of that, we will use certain word and language conventions. Sometimes a word will be used in this study that is unfamiliar to the average reader, in which case it will be explained or footnoted. A glossary is also included at the back of the workbook.

Sometimes a word that has lost its meaning or original idea in English will be systematically replaced in this study with a different word. This is not meant to confuse, but rather to bring renewed emphasis on original meaning. Following are some common words and names, how they will be represented in this study, and the reasoning behind this usage.

- x ***Name of God:*** The use of circumlocution (using a substitute for God’s holy Name) is encouraged. We will use the generalized word “God” in place of His most holy Name, this is similar to using “LORD, “ADONAI”, or “HaShem” in place of the Tetragrammaton (four letter Name of God). **Please treat this book with care, as it contains references to Him and His Name.**
- x ***Name of Yeshua:*** We will use the Hebrew Name “Yeshua.” The Etymology of this Name in English is convoluted – making excursions from Greek to Latin and even to German – in addition, for some the English name reminds of the horrific persecution that was wickedly done “in the name of ‘Jesus’ to those of Jewish descent. And of course, we know His first disciples called Him by His Hebrew Name “Yeshua”.
- x ***Law, Pentateuch:*** We will use the Hebrew word “Torah”. As well, the word “Torah” can apply to any Scripture, but it will normally focus upon the first five books of the Bible. Although many believers can read the word “Law” and reflect upon the beauty spoke of God’s Law in the Psalms; a significant portion of believers of the past fifty years have been taught profound bias against God’s Law. Hence, the use of the word “Torah” although not removed of some bias itself, helps to minimize those preconceptions. The word “Torah” is the word used over 200 times in the Hebrew Scriptures and is incorrectly translated “Law” in modern English usage. It is more correctly seen as “Instruction” – coming from the root verb *yarah* which is closer to “shoot”, “direct”, “point out”, or “aim”.
- x ***Disciples:*** We will use word “*talmidim*”. For most believers, this has fairly positive implications – but we are not very good at personalizing this in our thinking and actions. The “Twelve Disciples” often replaces this in our minds. For this reason, the words “*talmidim*” [disciples, plural] and “*talmid*” [disciple, singular] will be used.
- x ***Messiah, Messiah:*** We will use the English transliteration “Messiah”. The Greek language takes the Hebrew word “*mashiach*” [messiah] and translates it into the Greek word “*Christos*.” English, then borrows and transliterates both the Hebrew and the Greek. Hence, there are two options that translators have in rendering “Anointed One” – the Greek word “*Christos*” and the Hebrew word “*Mashiach*.” Although “Christ” is the more common English word, it is often treated by believers as a type of surname of Yeshua, rather than the significant title that it is. It is a title that should always draw us

back to the Promise of a Redeemer, Priest, and King given to the Ancients. Using “Messiah” aids in that reminder.

- ⌘ **Old Testament, Hebrew Scriptures:** We will use the acronym “TaNaKh” (Torah, Nevi'im, K'tuvim = Torah, Prophets, Writings), The implication in “old” is that it is something that has been done away with – which the “New Testament” says has not been done. This was the Scripture of First Century believers.
- ⌘ **New Testament, Greek Scriptures:** We will use the term “Apostolic Scriptures”. Clearly, it is not “new” nor is it a “testament”. God spoke through His Holy Spirit and men were moved to write. By using terms like “New” and “Old Testament”, we may begin to place more validity on the “new” – which is contrary to the very teaching found in the “New Testament”.

My prayer for you and I as we begin this study is that we will hear our Master speak, and upon hearing Him, we will obey. He is calling us beloved, let's go up the mountain and sit at His feet as His *talmidim* – and let us hear as He opens His mouth and teaches us... again.

Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion the Torah shall go forth, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Micah 4:2

What We Previously Learned

Whether you are just beginning this study now, or have completed Part One, it is important for us to go over what we learned in Part One. The “Gospel” accounts are so detailed and so full of information we can sometimes be overwhelmed with the details – and miss the big picture. The big picture in Matthew can be summed up with the “Gospel message” (Kingdom message). It is repeated throughout the book, and it is the frame into which everything else must be placed. The “Gospel” message is this:

“Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

We have seen that one phrase, beginning with John the Baptizer – then with Yeshua – then with the disciples sent out, carried with it a powerful message (paraphrased):

“Return to God’s ways, because the King is here.”

We saw that this consistent message was not always heeded – and that the mission of John, Yeshua, and His disciples was not always evident to those around them. We saw that the Kingdom message was first only given to Israel.

Chapter One

We saw the genealogy of Yeshua, and His birth. The focus was His miraculous birth as the Promised One – the Messiah. We saw that as the “Son of David”, He was to be known as King Messiah. We saw that as “Immanuel” [“God with us”], Yeshua’s reign as King Messiah was to be seen as a return of the Throne of Israel (and the world) to God.

Chapter Two

We saw the continued presentation of Yeshua as “Prophet, Priest, and King”. Allusions to Moses, King David, and the Tabernacle priests were clearly seen.

Chapter Three

We saw the “baptism” of Yeshua. We saw that *t’vilah* [immersion] was not something new, but something very much a part of their lives in the First Century. We saw that *t’vilah* [immersion] represents a “change in status”. Our introduction to it showed a direct connection to repentance, and the Kingdom message.

Chapter Four

The temptation of Yeshua was seen as an attack upon the Person of God – and repeated offers of shortcuts to the mission of Messiah. Yeshua answered each temptation with quotes from Torah. Each time, using the phrase, “it is written”.

Chapter Five

We saw that Yeshua began His ministry by choosing *talmidim* [disciples] – and then as every good master does, He taught them about Torah. This “sermon on the mount” was focused not on how one “gets into” the Kingdom of God – but upon how Kingdom people look, and how they

live. Yeshua made it clear to His *talmidim* [disciples] that He was not abolishing the Torah and the Prophets – but rather making them stand by His teaching. We saw that Yeshua took common sayings of others – and compared and contrasted them to what Torah truly said and meant. We saw that the correct view of Torah was as not a list of rules and regulations – but instructions regarding relationships: relationships with God, and with each other.

Chapter Six

We saw that in Yeshua's continuation of the “sermon on the mount”, He focused upon the externals of religion. His focus was to show that Kingdom people were not only to be visibly righteous in their lives, but that such living came from hearts that had been turned back to God – and were seeking His Kingdom.

Chapter Seven

We saw that fruit is an important element for Kingdom people. We saw first that we were not to judge without using God's judgment and mercy – and that to turn a blind eye to our neighbor's sin was not love at all. We also saw that it is by actions (fruit) that the true character of a person is revealed. We were told that the Kingdom was made up of the wise – the ones who hear Yeshua's words and do them. We saw that Yeshua did not make “new law” – but that He reminded His *talmidim* to obey God's Torah.

Chapter Eight

In the miracles of chapter eight and nine, we saw that they were not simply signs and wonders, but specifically chosen for what they meant. We saw the repeated picture of Yeshua reaching into the world of people who were *tamei* [unclean] by God's standards – and because of that separated from the public fellowship with God at the Temple. We saw this as a powerful image of His overall mission – to take that which was separated from God and others, bringing it not only into relationship, but into nearness to God Himself.

Chapter Nine

We saw Yeshua healing and forgiving sin. This action was seen as a claim to Deity, and so it became a division between Yeshua and some of the religious leaders of the day. We saw that Yeshua had not chosen the wise and learned men to be His *talmidim* [disciples], not the scholars – and He did not make them scholars. Because they had been with Him, they would be shown to be the wisest of men.

Chapter Ten

Yeshua intended His *talmidim* [disciples] to be imitators of Him. To speak what He spoke. To act like He acted. To pray like He prayed. He expected them to preach His Kingdom message the same as He did. We saw that He sent them out to do just that – but only to the people of Israel. He sent them in groups of two to act as witnesses to either the acceptance, or rejection of Yeshua's Kingdom message. To turn either to God's ways and see the Kingdom – or to reject God's rule in their lives. The choice was offered – the *talmidim* were sent to be witnesses of their decisions.

Lesson One – Chapter Eleven

As You Begin

- ⌘ Ask your Heavenly Father to continue to add to the things He has shown you in the earlier chapters – and that He will multiply the blessings for those who heed His word. We have been challenged and confronted not only with a volume of information – we have had *Yeshua* [Yeshua] speak to us – and have heard Him with ears that are learning to hear His voice. Ask God to open your ears and your heart to His Voice.
- ⌘ As you begin this new section of the study of the book of Matthew, commit once again to strive to follow Yeshua, as a faithful *talmid* [disciple], remembering His admonition in Luke 6:40,

A *talmid* [disciple] is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.

- ⌘ Read chapter eleven.
- ⌘ Read chapter eleven again and look for the one occurrence of a phrase that indicates something was a fulfillment to prophecy. Mark it in your Bible with a green colored pencil – and then add it to the chart in the Appendix titled, “Prophecies Fulfilled in Yeshua.”
- ⌘ Find any references in chapter eleven to the word “Kingdom”. Mark them in your Bible with a blue pencil.

Historical Context

The Popularity of John the Baptizer

As remarkable as it may seem, Josephus records that in the time of Yeshua's ministry, John the Baptizer [*Yochanan HaMatvil*] was far more popular than Yeshua. Scripture records how Herod feared the popularity of John. After considerable provocation, he finally imprisoned him. John was seen as a truly pious man, and lived a strict ascetic lifestyle. He did not mix with the people – they came to him at the edge of the wilderness. John preached repentance – a return to God's standards, and God's commandments. Many followed John's message, and did repent. Scripture records this as does Josephus; but a majority did not repent, and certainly all Israel did not. That was the issue in Matthew chapter eleven.

Yeshua came and preached the same Kingdom message that John had preached – but their appearance, and lifestyles were different. Although both observant of Torah, John had the lifestyle of a ascetic. Yeshua on the other hand, mixed with the people as He taught. John, the forerunner, preached repentance – and the nation did not respond. Yeshua, the Messiah preached repentance – would the nation respond to Him?

The Oak and the Reed

Yeshua said of John, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ¹ From this He used a known idiom to the First Century hearer – the fable of “The Oak and the Reed.”² In this story, it appears that the mighty oak would be most likely to withstand a strong wind. Appearances do not hold true however – it was the reed that bent with the wind that proved more likely to stand. John was not like the reed that bent. John’s message could not be compromised – he was like the oak. Like the oak, John was unbending and was thus broken off by the wicked King Herod.

Now, the Messiah is here – will He bend – or will He too be cut off?

We Played the Flute for You, and You Did Not Dance

Continuing His discourse about the relationship between John’s ministry and His own, Yeshua said:

But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying:
 ‘We played the flute for you,
 And you did not dance;
 We mourned to you,
 And you did not lament.’³

Brad Young, (citing David Flusser), explains this passage in this way:

Yeshua seems to have been acquainted with a version of the fable of the “Fisherman with the Flute.” The fisherman invites the fish to hear the tune of his flute and dance. But as the fisherman plays the flute, the fish refuse to dance. When he catches them in the net, however, then they dance. Yeshua speaks about the generation that did not dance to the music. They did not realize the time had come. He warns them concerning their failure to heed the prophetic message of John the Baptist. He satirizes their behavior: “They are like children setting in the market place and calling to one another, ‘We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep.’ In the fable of “The Fisherman with the Flute,” the fish ignore the music of the flute. They are free and arrogant. After they are caught in the net, by way of contrast, the fish dance as they squirm this way and that without hearing the fisherman’s tune. “Dance now without the music” the fisherman tells the fish; “it would have been better for you to have danced some time ago when I was supplying music for the dance.” As Flusser has demonstrated, the saying of Yeshua is an echo of some version of this fable, which was widely circulated. The people should have listened to John the Baptist and responded to his prophetic appeal. Though John and Yeshua had different approaches to ministry – one came eating and drinking with outcasts, and the other withdrew from society – both were prophets. As the prophet, John the Baptist is like the fisherman who played his flute. Many did not respond. At the final judgment, they will dance.⁴

¹ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 11:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² Young, Brad H. *The Parables* (citing Flusser). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998. p.20

³ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 11:16-17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ Young, Brad H. *The Parables*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998. p.20-21.

Wisdom Justified by Her Children

Sometimes the Hebrew idioms in Scripture almost make sense in English – or at least they sound wise. In Matthew 11:19, when Yeshua said, “wisdom is justified by her children” – it seems to make sense. This idiom is very ironic in Hebrew and could be paraphrased as Biven and Blizzard have done:

“You can tell whether wisdom is real wisdom or stupidity by the consistency or inconsistency of its arguments. Since your arguments are so inconsistent, it is a clear indication of your stupidity.”⁵

The Breach Maker

Matthew 11:12-15 have proven to be very difficult to understand in both English and Greek.

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the Torah prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive *it*, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!⁶

David Flusser and the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research have made great progress in restoring our understanding of the Hebrew idioms and language of the Gospels. Flusser has helped us better understand this passage by connecting the Greek word *biazo* [suffers violence] to the Hebrew word *haporetz* [breach-maker]. He cites its use in Micah 2:12-13:

I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together like sheep of the fold, like a flock in the midst of their pasture; they shall make a loud noise because of *so many* people. The one who breaks open [*haporetz*] will come up before them; they will break out, pass through the gate, and go out by it; their king will pass before them, with the LORD at their head.⁷

This is a common Messianic passage. A *midrash* [interpretation method] of this passage names Elijah as the one who will break open the sheep pen. This “breach maker” will provide an opening for the sheep, which are pressed up against the Shepherd (Messiah) and ready to pour out of the pen behind the Shepherd through the hole in the stone wall. This not only explains the difficult Greek of this passage, it shows that John was a principle prophetic object in the Prophets and Torah to prepare the way for King Messiah.

Some of the sages of Israel anticipated an event regarding “Elijah” and the coming Messiah around the time of the Hebrew year 4,000 (the time of John the Baptizer as “Elijah” seems very similar). The so-called “School of Elijah” is credited with this teaching which is recorded in the *Bavli*:

The world is to exist six thousand years. In the first two thousand there was desolation; two thousand years the Torah flourished; and the next two thousand years is the Messianic era, but through our many iniquities all these years have been lost....⁸

⁵ Biven, David, and Roy Blizzard. *Understanding the Difficult Words of Yeshua*. Arcadia: Makor Foundation, 1983. p.60.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 11:12-16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *Ibid* (Mic 2:12-13).

⁸ *Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 97a-b*, Soncino Edition

Hebrew scholars have seen a relationship between repentance, Elijah, and Messiah from ancient times. Deuteronomy 30:1-6 connects repentance and Messiah – and as we have seen, the mission of John the Baptizer was one of preparing the way – by calling for repentance.

Analyzing Chapter Eleven

Go and Tell John...

The book of Matthew presents the Kingdom message as a choice. Repeatedly, we are presented with the message “Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand”, and see that when the message is rejected, the Messengers (whether Yeshua or His disciples) move on to the next region or village. This chapter has several of these “opportunities for choosing” in it.

We have seen many times in the preceding chapters where Yeshua told people not to disclose Who He was. We have seen that all the teaching, and all of the miracles were done explicitly for establishing Who He was – but not with plain words. Because of this, we see that John the Baptizer needed, and was given, proof of Yeshua's Messiahship .

John the Baptizer knew Yeshua's teaching. He knew that Yeshua's Kingdom message was the same that He had preached (“Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand”) – what he was asking in Matthew 11:2-3 was not so much whether Yeshua was the Messiah – but “if He was Messiah, when would He reveal Himself a such?” What Yeshua offered for an answer in verses 4-6 provides an important aspect to our understanding of the mission and message of Yeshua during this time:

Yeshua answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: *The* blind see and *the* lame walk; *the* lepers are cleansed and *the* deaf hear; *the* dead are raised up and *the* poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”⁹

Yeshua was drawing from well-known Messianic passages in Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 61. Read Isaiah 35:3-8 and answer the questions that follow.

To those who are weak, and fearful – what message should they hear from God?

Incidentally, the phrase “be strong” or the word “strengthen” in verses 3 and 4 is the Hebrew word “Chazak” which is in the name of this Bible study series. “Chazak” is the response that God expects from His people, having heard His word, and determined to obey at all costs – “be strong!”

Have you seen anything so far in Matthew that would indicate that Yeshua's message is one that includes God coming with vengeance? If so, where (be specific)?

⁹*The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 11:4-6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

What is the “Gospel” that Yeshua said is preached to the poor (Matthew 11:5)?

List the Messianic signs from Isaiah 35:3-8 that Yeshua alluded to in His answer to John:

What is the road in verse 8 called, and why?

Isaiah 61:1 makes a specific reference to Messiah. It uses the verb *mashach* [anoint] to give purpose and mission to the Person of Messiah. He is Messiah *in order to...*

Read Isaiah 61:1-2 and answer the following questions.

The “good news” that was preached in verse 1 uses the same word that Yeshua would have used in Matthew 11:5 for “Gospel”. List the six things from verses 1 and 2 that seem associated with the “anointing” (i.e. the things He is anointed to do):

In Luke 4:18-21, Yeshua quoted from this passage in Isaiah as well. Traditionally, this has been seen as Yeshua's declaration that He had come to free the poor (and others) from the bondage of the “Law”. From what you have learned about what the “Gospel” (the Kingdom message), do you think that this is the correct explanation of this passage (read 1John 5:2-3 before answering)?

What bondage, and what “spiritual blindness” did He offer freedom from, and how does this relate to His message to John about His Messiahship?

How do you think John understood the report from his disciples about what Yeshua had said? If John's question was "When is the Kingdom to be realized", explain what you think John's understanding of Yeshua's reply would have been. Try to remember in your answer, John was in prison, apparently at the end of his life and ministry.

The importance of the "forerunner" of Messiah is often missed in the traditional understanding of the book of Matthew. Historically, we know that John the Baptizer's ministry had a profound effect upon the people in the Land of Israel in the First Century. John led many to repentance and back to Torah during his ministry. John's ministry was vital in "making the way straight". Let's explore what Scripture says about this, and how the hearers of the First Century would have heard Yeshua's words from Matthew 11:7-18.

Read and comment on how Isaiah 40:3-4 relates to John the Baptizer (what was the name of that road again from Isaiah 35:8?):

Read and comment on how Malachi 3:1-7 relates to John and the message of repentance (i.e. the "Gospel" or the "Kingdom message"):

Read Malachi 4:4-6 and summarize what John's mission was in preparing the people to meet their King Messiah:

The Yoke of Messiah, Ancient Paths, the Way

‘Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.’¹⁰

The phrase “take a yoke” was a familiar phrase to the First Century hearers. They understood the yoke to refer to the duty of Torah and God’s commands. Their agrarian society did not denigrate the yoke – they did not see the yoke as slavery, but a sign of purpose. To “take up a yoke” was to fulfill your purpose. In Matthew 11:28-30, Yeshua offered the ultimate invitation, and in doing so He once again invoked a prophetic passage (Jeremiah 6:16). Read and comment on the following passages and how they relate to the yoke that Yeshua offered, and continues to offer, to His own:

Jeremiah 6:16 (an invitation to ancient paths – or a new way?)

Hebrews 4:1-7:

1John 5:2-3:

In the Jeremiah and Hebrew passages above it is sad that there were those who refused to hear the message of repentance – to walk in God’s ancient paths – and because of their disobedience did not enter into rest. The walk of obedience, in faith, leads to an easy burden – and His ultimate rest.

Read Genesis 18:18-19 and comment on how the “way of the LORD” relates to the “good way” from Jeremiah 6:16 (the word in both cases is the Hebrew word *derek* = path):

¹⁰ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 11:28-29). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

In Acts 9:2, the believers of Yeshua were called “of the Way”. This word, “*hodos*” [way] is the same word that Yeshua uses in John 14:6 where Yeshua says, “I am the way”. Comment on the relationship in Genesis 18:18-19; Matthew 11:28-30; Jeremiah 6:16; and Acts 9:2.

May His rest be ours now – and may we enter into His rest in the World to Come. Amen.

As You Finish

- ✠ Sit quietly and examine your life for a few minutes. Have you heeded Yeshua's call for repentance? Have you rejected His Kingdom demands upon you? Tell your Master that you want to take up His yoke, and to learn from Him.
- ✠ Go to your King in prayer and thank Him that He always warns His people. Thank Him for the warnings in His Word He continues to give you personally. Thank Him for His easy yoke – and for the rest He gives. Thank Him that He is such a gentle King and Master.
- ✠ Now, let us go up the mountain and learn from Him!

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion the Torah shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Micah 4:1-2

Lesson Two – Chapter Twelve

As You Begin

- x Are you often dry? Are you often tired of the monotony of life – or maybe the tragedies of life? Beloved, there is rest in Him. Go to your Heavenly Father in prayer and ask to be “refreshed” – and then trust Him for it.
- x Read chapter twelve.
- x Read chapter twelve again and look for the one occurrence of the phrase that indicates something was a fulfillment to prophecy. Mark it in your Bible with a green colored pencil – and then add it to the chart in the Appendix titled, “Prophecies Fulfilled in Yeshua.”
- x Find any references in chapter twelve to the word “Kingdom”. Mark them in your Bible with a blue pencil.
- x Add any miracles in chapter twelve to the chart in the Appendix titled, “Miracles of Yeshua.”

Historical Context

Sabbath Burden, Sabbath Delight

In the Torah, God gave specific instructions regarding the Sabbath [*Shabbat*]. Primarily, there were the two positive commands to “remember” and to “keep” from Exodus 20:8, which says, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy”. The “remember” [*zakar*] is more than a mental exercise. In a Hebraic understanding. It was to rehearse a truth. Likewise, the phrase, “keep it holy” [*kadash*] does not simply speak of thinking of the Sabbath as separate, distinct, and sanctified – it is to act accordingly.

As we saw in *Mattityahu Part One*, the positive commands of God have precedence over the negative commands. The primary focus upon the Sabbath commands were of a positive nature: “Remember and Keep”. In the vein of “to keep” there were a very few instructions of what “not to do”. These negative commands fell into the broad category of “common work”. Scripture does very little to define common work except by example. For instance, carrying burdens into a city for commerce was shown to be common work. Gathering enough food for a day’s eating was shown to be common work. Selling and buying were shown to be common work.

As is typical of man, over the years many traditions came together to create a detailed list of what constituted common work. By the First Century, upwards of thirty-nine categories, each with an accompanying list, defined what one could, and could not do on the Sabbath. This day of rest and joy had become a burden.

The Sabbath examples in Matthew 12 have special significance, and also tell us much about Yeshua's treatment of the Sabbath, and the way He dealt with the traditions. For example, the fact that His *talmidim* [disciples] were plucking heads of grain while walking through a field was explicitly permitted in the list of permitted Sabbath activities.

...and he may break [it] with his hand and eat [thereof], provided that he does not break it with a utensil. And he may crush it and eat, provided that he does not crush a large quantity with a utensil... He may crush [it] with the tips of his fingers and eat, provided, however, that he does not crush a large quantity with his hands in the [same] way as he does on weekdays.¹

In this example, it is speaking of caring for and feeding of animals, but it does refer to the caregiver eating the grain.

Some have suggested that possibly the Pharisees were more upset about Yeshua's *talmidim* not washing their hands before eating. This was another tradition. By the text, that seems less likely. Regardless, Yeshua uses the opportunity to make a completely different point – that He represented the Tabernacle (Temple) itself – and that He was Adonai and the embodiment of the Sabbath.

The *Bavli* also deals with caring for animals who are mired in a dyke or pit. Yeshua makes the point that healing a man on the Sabbath was far more fitting than caring for a animal, which they made provision for in their traditions.

[The avoidance of] suffering of dumb animals is a Biblical [law], so the Biblical law comes and supersedes the [interdict] of the Rabbis.²

The Pharisees themselves saw David's actions in allowing his men to eat the Bread of the Presence as permissible. Preserving life was seen by them as a set of positive commands, which took precedence over most negative commands or prohibitions.

The "showbread" is literally called the "Bread of the Face" or the "Bread of the Presence". It was baked each week before the Sabbath began, and then the previous week's bread was replaced on the Table of Showbread. The bread was laid out in two piles of six each. Frankincense was poured between them. The bread stayed fresh for the entire week, and when the old loaves were retired each Sabbath, they were given to the priests to eat. The High Priest was allowed to take up to six of the large loaves for himself. Scripture does not contain any direct prohibition against others eating the bread – only the positive command that it was to be food for "Aaron and his sons". Certainly, by context, most understood that it was to be food only for "Aaron and his sons" – and yet giving food to the hungry (David's men) was something that motivated the priest Ahimelech.

Casting Out Demons

The Pharisees were well-established as exorcists. They followed a somewhat scripted method that included asking the name of the demon(s). They believed that their authority over a demon came by asking the demon's name, and then using this name to command the demon to depart.

¹ *Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 128a*

² *Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 128b*

We have seen that on occasion Yeshua did this as well. Matthew 12:22 presents us with a new picture:

Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw.³

Casting out the demon of a mute man? In the Pharisees' minds, this was impossible! Their knowledge of exorcism did not fathom being able to cast out demons without knowing the demon's name! There was only one conclusion in their thinking: Yeshua must have "inside information" – in other words, He must be able to do this by demonic and magical abilities. Their immediate response reflects this:

Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."⁴

Yeshua of course, has authority far beyond what the Pharisees exercised over demonic activities. He does not need a demon's name. The crowd that had witnessed this was likewise stunned – "Could this be the Son of David?" They knew full well that this was beyond what they had observed any other man do.

Yeshua challenged the Pharisees' understanding in an interesting way. First, He showed them that their logic was faulty (i.e. "a house divided cannot stand"). Then He challenged them on their knowledge of exorcism, which was limited to their understanding and experiences only. In the Luke account of this occurrence, He mentioned the "finger of God". This had a specific meaning to the Pharisees. Here is what Yeshua said in Luke 11:20:

"But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you."

This was the phrase that the magicians of Pharaoh's court used when they could not duplicate the miracle of the plague of lice that came from the dust. In other words, if it was beyond their understanding and ability – then it must be the "finger of God". Yeshua was telling the Pharisees that if they did not understand how He had cast a demon out of a mute man, then they should understand that instead of Him being associated with the prince of demons, the opposite was true – they should know that it was by the "finger of God" – it was proof of the presence of the Spirit of God in their midst – and that His Kingdom had arrived!

Analyzing Chapter Twelve

Sabbath, the Realm of Messiah

Beloved, it is a sad thing that so many people allow the man-made paragraph headings in their Bibles to define for them the context of what they are reading. It is especially sad that Matthew 12 often has descriptions along the lines of, "Yeshua Breaks the Sabbath" – because not only does this seem illogical, just a simple investigation reveals quickly that what Yeshua does in the

³ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 12:22). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 12:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

two “Sabbath” events is most certainly not forbidden on the Sabbath. One might be able to argue that a description of the first thirteen verses of Matthew chapter twelve could be, “Yeshua Violates the Pharisees’ Sabbath Tradition,” but even that might be stretching it. As we have seen, the Pharisees were well acquainted with Yeshua's logical response to them. One can imagine that Yeshua was toying with them in a way – in order to make a more important point about what one may (or may not do) on the Sabbath according to their rules.

To best observe what is truly happening in these verses, we should always keep in mind how Yeshua described His relationship to the Sabbath in Matthew 12:8:

“For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

Some have tried to make this say, “Lord **over** the Sabbath”, which carries with it those same error-prone assumptions about Yeshua being against the Torah. Beloved, the meaning is quite clear – it is that the Sabbath is Yeshua's Realm. The Greek carries the force of this, where it literally says, “The Son of Man is God **and** Sabbath.” The word *kurios* is used for “Lord” here, which in the Septuagint is the word used to stand in for God’s holy four-letter Name (the Tetragrammaton = Yod-Hay-Vav-Hay).

Let’s take a deeper look at the Sabbath in the TaNaKh. Read the following passages and note what was forbidden on the Sabbath – and the reason why if stated. Also, comment on the purpose of the Sabbath.

Exodus 16:13-31 (verse 23 is the first use of the noun *Shabbat* = “Sabbath”):

Note that the first four references to the noun “Shabbat” **precede** the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai (and remember that the verb, and the principle itself, go all the way back to the Creation account, and God's example).

Exodus 20:8-11:

Exodus 31:12-18:

Leviticus 23:1-3:

Numbers 15:32-36:

Nehemiah 10:31; 13:16-17:

Isaiah 58:13-14:

Jeremiah 17:21-22:

Ezekiel 20:1:

Beloved, the “*Shabbat*” [Sabbath] was supposed to be a delight to God's people. They were to cease their labors and to rest. There were not many rules defining what “work” was. The Sabbath-rest was supposed to be not only for the family, but for servants, slaves, and even the beasts-of-burden. This meant they were not to buy or sell, since doing so was to cause someone to serve them with the work which employed them. Because there were not many “rules” defining “work”, there developed a long list of things which were “work” by tradition. The focus upon the minutia made God's simple command to rest, and His desire that His people delight in such rest, seem a far cry from the “Sabbath laws” of the First Century. These man-made laws had robbed the people of God of the joy of the Sabbath as God had designed it. These man-made rules denied the fact that the Sabbath was to be a sign between God and His people – if the rules associated with it were man-made and not God-given. Yeshua rightly showed that plucking the heads of grain and eating was not “harvesting”, not “work” and was not forbidden by God – and He also showed something even more important in His answer.

What is often missed by what Yeshua did, is how He made a comparison between Himself and David – between His disciples and David's men – and more importantly between Himself and the Tabernacle/Temple. In Matthew 12:3-6, Yeshua was using the interpretative method called *kal v'chomer*, which is comparing “light vs. heavy”. If David could allow his men to eat the Bread of the Presence because of their hunger, how much more could the Author of the Sabbath (Yeshua) minimize **their rules** of the Sabbath in providing for His disciples? Of course, the Pharisees were caught in their own logic, knowing full well that both the plucking of the heads of

grain, and the actions of David's men were considered permissible by their own leaders. Let's look at what Yeshua was referring to with regard to David and the Bread of the Presence.

Read 1Samuel 21:1-6 and answer the following questions:

What did David ask the priest Ahimelech for? (Note: *Ahimelech* means, "brother of the king")

What did Ahimelech suggest? Why?

What requirements did Ahimelech stipulate for the bread to be eaten by David's men?

On what day of the week did this occur (i.e. exchanging of loaves)?

Yeshua did not say that what David did was a transgression of the "Law" per se. The word used is the word *exesti* [literally "not to be"] which simply denotes that the bread was not for David or his men, but for the priests. It appears from the account, that the priest Ahimelech was himself a literal reader of Scripture, considering that it was his idea to give the bread to David and his men and that providing for the "anointed one's" men and their hunger was a greater command.

List the parallels between the account of David and his men and Yeshua and His disciples:

The Pharisees, we have seen, also forbade some sorts of healing on the Sabbath, even though Scripture never does. Yeshua sums up what is permitted on the Sabbath by saying,

"Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift *it* out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."⁵

⁵*The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 12:11-13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Tell No One

And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all. Yet He warned them not to make Him known. *Matthew 12:15b-16*

We have seen a number of times that Yeshua went to specific efforts to “conceal” His identity from some. This flies in the face of our modern sensibilities and what we think Yeshua came to do. Immediately, after this verse we are given a “that it might be fulfilled” phrase and a quote from Isaiah 42. Read Isaiah 42:1-6 and answer the following questions.

Verse 1 refers to bringing justice to the Gentiles. At this point in His ministry had Yeshua included the Gentiles in His preaching? Think back how He instructed His *talmidim* when He sent them out in chapter 10. Were Gentiles hearing Yeshua's message at this point in Matthew?

What do you think verse 2 means when it says, “...Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.”

Verse 4 says, “He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His Torah.” Do you think that this describes a process that is longer than the 3 year period of Yeshua's ministry?

This quote from Isaiah 42 seems to be disconnected from the issue of telling people not to reveal Who He was. It seems that something very important is being told to us – what is it? Read Romans 11:1-36 and then write your thoughts on how Isaiah 42 fits with Yeshua's instructions not to reveal His identity.

The following table shows where Yeshua told some not to tell what had happened to them. The similar accounts from the other Gospel accounts are grouped together.

“Concealing” His Identity
Matthew 8:4: "And Yeshua said to him [the leper], 'See that you tell no one ; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.'"
Mark 1:43-44: "And He strictly warned him [the leper] and sent him away at once, and said to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone ; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.'"
Luke 5:14: "And He charged him to tell no one , 'But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.'"
Matthew 9:29-30: "Then He touched their [two blind men] eyes, saying, 'According to your faith let it be to you.' And their eyes were opened. And Yeshua sternly warned them, saying, ' See that no one knows it. '"
Matthew 12:15-16: "But when Yeshua knew it, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all. Yet He warned them not to make Him known. "
Matthew 16:20: "Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Yeshua the Messiah."
Mark 8:29-30: "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered and said to Him, 'You are the Messiah.' Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him."
Luke 9:2-21: "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered and said, 'The Messiah of God.' And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one. "
Matthew 17:9: "Now as they came down from the mountain [of Transfiguration], Yeshua commanded them, saying, ' Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.'"
Mark 9:9: "Now as they came down from the mountain [of Transfiguration], He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen , till the Son of Man had risen from the dead."
Mark 3:11-12: "And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, 'You are the Son of God.' But He sternly warned them that they should not make Him known. "
Mark 5:42-43: "Immediately the girl [that had been dead] arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement. But He commanded them strictly that no one should know it , and said that something should be given her to eat."
Luke 8:55-56: "Then her [the dead girl] spirit returned, and she arose immediately. And He commanded that she be given something to eat. And her parents were astonished, but He charged them to tell no one what had happened. "
Mark 7:35-36: "Immediately his [the deaf mute] ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. Then He commanded them that they should tell no one ; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it."
Luke 4:32-35a: "Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Yeshua of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are— the Holy One of God!' But Yeshua rebuked him, saying, ' Be quiet , and come out of him!'"

Do you see any common relationship in these (compare them to what Yeshua said to John in Matthew 11:4-5)? If so, summarize what you see in the space that follows:

Show Us a Sign

In Matthew 12:38, some Scribes and Pharisees said to Yeshua, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” How ironic that the chapter begins with the issues of the Sabbath – which God gave as a sign that He was the One Who sanctifies His people (Exodus 31:13), and now ends with these asking for another sign. Let’s look at a few “signs” given in Scripture to understand why Yeshua answered the way He did. Read the following passages and note the sign and the purpose for it if it is stated:

Genesis 9:11-14:

Genesis 17:11:

Exodus 31:13:

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 (a sign must be accompanied by teaching God’s instructions):

Isaiah 7:10-14:

1Corinthians 1:22:

Beloved, what was the message Jonah took to Nineveh? Was it not a warning of judgment, and a call to repentance? Why do you think Yeshua related the sign of Jonah (three days in the belly of a fish) to the sign He would show them (three days in the ground)? Why Jonah?

As You Finish

- x Beloved, has the Word given you a fresh perspective? Has God renewed your mind? Go to Him in prayer and thank Him for it. Let's all take the steps in our lives to make our deeds and our lifestyle reflect that perspective.

- x In the space that follows, write a prayer of commitment to do what God has shown you:

Lesson Three – Chapter Thirteen

As You Begin

- x Beloved, if you are like me, then you are often overwhelmed with the complexities and depth of Scripture. One reason many seek the “easy outs” in spiritual matters is because we know we need to be fed, but cannot easily find where to start. Yeshua had the answer for us back in Matthew 11:28-30 when He said,

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Beloved, Yeshua's parables are not to be seen as “head-scratchers” – but His gentle teachings about “His yoke.” Go to God today in prayer and ask Him to open your eyes, that you will see His Word with clear eyes, and that you will hear His voice plainly.

- x Read chapter thirteen.
- x Read chapter thirteen again and look for the two occurrences of a phrase that indicates something was a fulfillment to prophecy. Mark them in your Bible with a green colored pencil – and then add them to the chart in the Appendix titled, “Prophecies Fulfilled in Yeshua.”
- x Find any references in chapter thirteen to the word “Kingdom”. Mark them in your Bible with a blue pencil.

Historical Context

Parables, a Rabbinic Teaching Tool

Much is made of Yeshua's use of parables, but little comparison is made between this teaching style and the history of parables among the ancient sages of Israel. There are many historical connections between the “Gospels” and other early Jewish writings – and yet some of the very things that show Yeshua's Hebraic style, and even His Torah message are twisted in the modern mind to mean that Yeshua was the consummate rebel to Jewish ways of the First Century. He was not; and we have seen that although His Kingdom message of repentance and faith was an offense to those who believed that they were in no need of repentance – Yeshua looked and acted like a Jewish Rabbi. We know that in His case however, it was not because He was emulating anyone else, but because He knew the source of wisdom itself – because He

was the Author of Scripture, and the Framer of the Jewish people. The Christian historian, Brad Young, from Oral Roberts University, sums it up this way,

The historical setting of the parables, however attest to the Jewish roots of Yeshua's message. The Yeshua of the parables would blend in much more harmoniously with a band of Pharisees arguing matters of Torah learning than with a symposium of modern Christian theologians. In faith and prayer, Yeshua shares much in common with the old Jewish Chasidim like Choni the Circle Drawer or Chanina ben Dosa... Through the pens of church fathers and later interpreters, the Gospel parables have been recast into theological treatises dealing with Christology and ecclesiastical doctrine. Allegory has served church theologians well, while muffling the voice of the Jewish theologian Yeshua... Often Yeshua spoke of Torah and its proper interpretation for living a life pleasing to God, but his words became too distorted to be comprehended in that way. In the light of Jewish traditions, the Gospel parables form an inextricable link between Yeshua and the Jewish people, a bridge of solidarity that cannot be collapsed by time and history, nor by prejudice and tendentious theology.¹

Enormous volumes of Jewish parabolic teaching exist. They come from a rich oral tradition that passed the sayings of the sages down to each generation, word-for-word. These sayings then were written down.

The purpose for the Hebraic parable as a teaching tool was not exactly the same as the “sermon illustration” that many are familiar with today – although similar. The parable [*mashal*] was used by rabbis and teachers to explain a point in a short and succinct way. This gave a teacher's *talmidim* [disciples] a easier way to memorize and pass a complex teaching on to subsequent generations of students.

A *mashal* [parable] was often paired with another *mashal* to make the point more clear. Here is an important distinction in the Hebraic *mashal* – it was not used as an allegory for something, where every detail of the story could be construed to have a hidden meaning; constructing an “alternate reality”. There was usually one or two points to make in the story – and that is all. By pairing a *mashal* with another, it made it easier to get the common point. This one thing to remember regarding Yeshua's use of parables is very important. Although it is true that every word of Scripture has meaning, to use Yeshua's parables to teach hidden allegories is a destructive misunderstanding of Hebraic parables.

Although we often see in the Gospel accounts, the disciples scratching their heads about the meaning of a parable, that is not to mean that the meanings of Yeshua's parables are complex. They are not. Remember, parables were used to teach complex things in simple language. Instead, the problem was that Yeshua's parables had messages that were too simple and more importantly, too challenging. Hence, the average hearer then (or reader now) wanted to hear something more “deep”. Beloved, Yeshua's Kingdom message was a message that required a **decision**. His parables, likewise, required a **decision** – because of that, the unrepentant hearer was deaf to their message. The same is true today for those who look beyond the sharp and concise teaching in His parables.

The rabbinic introduction to a parable usually began with the phrase, “to what can this be compared? It can be compared to ...” We see a “similitude” nature (e.g. “this is like this”) in

¹ Young, Brad H. *The Parables, Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998). p298.

Hebraic parables. This is the way we should view a parable. He often used two parables (called “couplets”) so that the relationships are more obvious, and the main point more clear. Dr. Brad Young explains,

The parables are designed to portray a reality. In a world of metaphorical redescription, the reality behind the parable is dramatized in word-pictures. One must carefully consider the relationship between the picture and the reality while recognizing the metaphor and the object are not one and the same. The parables give only a pictorial representation. We discover the points of contact between the reality being portrayed and the picture... In some ways, these points resemble feathers that guide an arrow. A parable of haggadah [story-telling] may have multiple points of comparison between the picture and the reality, but it has one purpose... Because of the feathers the arrow flies steadily toward a specific destination in the same way that a parable is told to make one point. It communicates a single message, which usually requires a decision... The parable is designed to elicit a response, a decision.²

To summarize this approach to reading and correctly interpreting Hebraic parables:

- x The parable is a description of a reality using **word pictures**.
- x There are often **multiple points of relationship** between the word pictures and the reality. These act like feathers on an arrow – directing it to make **a single point**.
- x The word pictures and the reality are **not the same thing**.
- x Once the “arrow” of the parable arrives at the target, making a single point – it requires a response, **a decision**, from the hearer.

Let's see how this works in a Jewish parable told by Rabbi Meir. The sages had pondered the meaning of God's instructions in Deuteronomy 21:22-23 where God instructed that a person that is put to death for a crime should afterward be publicly hung. In the debates that followed, the rabbis wondered why God would command such a thing. Equally curious, why was the dead person to be taken down from this type of hanging before sunset?

Rabbi Meir said: ‘A parable was stated, to what is this matter comparable? To two twin brothers [who lived] in one city; one was appointed king, and the other took to highway robbery. At the king's command they hanged him [the twin who was a robber]. But all who saw him exclaimed, "The king is hanged!" whereupon the king issued a command and he was taken down.³

Twin brothers = One bearing the other's image

King = God

Robber = a wicked man

Singular point = man, though punished in accordance with Torah, is still created in God's image.

In a simple and beautiful way, Rabbi Meir showed that the twin who was a robber, even though he was a twin to the king, had to be punished for disobedience publicly. But because the robber looked like the king, the king did not want his “image” hanging publicly for too long. The parable, in a concise and simple way helps us to see a reason for God's commands in Deuteronomy 21:22-23.

² Ibid, p14

³ *Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 46b*, Soncino Edition

Analyzing Chapter Thirteen

Parables

And the disciples came and said to Him, ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’ He answered and said to them, ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. *Matthew 13:10-13*

Chapter thirteen begins the fourth teaching section of the book of Matthew. This section contains the “Kingdom Parables” and contains many Hebrew idioms. The fact that Yeshua speaks in parables does much to show the Hebraic nature of Yeshua's message. Yeshua's own explanation of why He spoke in parables is not so clear. Some scholars have held the view that since other rabbis spoke in parables in order to make complex subjects understandable, that Yeshua was doing it for the same reasons. They have argued that Yeshua's words in Matthew 13:10 indicate that His *talmidim* [disciples] did not need parables since they had been given insight into the Kingdom – but the common people did not have that insight, so parables were necessary. Let's explore this question, because it will have an effect on how we view Yeshua's message (i.e. “Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand!”), and His overall ministry during those three necessary years.

Matthew 13:14-15 is drawn from Isaiah 6:9-10. Read Isaiah 6:1-13 and answer the following questions:

What is Isaiah's response when he sees God in all of His holiness?

Isaiah recognizes that he is *tamei* [unclean, fragmented]. How is this dealt with?

What is Isaiah's response to having his sin purged?

List what Isaiah was to tell the people that he was sent to:

How long was he to preach this message?

Beloved, did God send a prophet to **dull the hearing** of people? This is troubling to many people's theology, but God's Word contains at least part of the answer to that question – and it will help us understand what Yeshua meant when He answered the question about His use of parables. Read Isaiah 29:9-14 and answer the following questions:

What kind of blindness or consciousness is apparently being referred to in verses 9 and 10 - and who is "asleep" and "drunk"?

Do verses 11 and 12 appear similar to "keep on hearing, but do not understand" (Isaiah 6)?

What is the problem with the people in verse 6? What exactly were they doing?

What is God's response – what will He do because of what the "blind" ones do?

Beloved, if you can accept it, this speaks much to the Kingdom message. As we have previously seen in Isaiah 40:6 – "all flesh is grass" and the time for our response to God's invitation is **now**. If people are unwilling to turn to the ways of God and to trust in His provision in true repentance, then they can expect only a hardening of their hearts, a spiritual blindness – and the **dulling of their hearing**. However, the dullness and blindness among those to whom Yeshua first came is not the last word on the matter. Romans 11:8 quotes from Isaiah 29:10.

From Romans 11:7-15, who is it that was blind and deaf?

Are they blind and deaf forever?

What is going to bring about a change?

Summarize what you have learned about why Yeshua spoke in the common rabbinic teaching method of parables – and yet explained things to His *talmidim* [disciples]. Use Scripture in your explanation.

Yeshua's "Kingdom parables" in chapter thirteen were given to make mostly singular points. In the chart that follows, briefly deal with each parable in chapter thirteen. Make the parallel connections, and try to determine the singular point. When dealing with Yeshua's parables, never look beyond His own explanation if He gives one, and always look for a companion parable. If one exists, it will help you discover the points of comparison. Don't get frustrated, simply do your best to find the simple comparisons, and singular point for each. The first one is completed for you.

Parable of the Sower		
Reference	Points of comparison	Singular point
Matt 13:3-9 & 18-23	<p>Seed = the Kingdom message (Repent, the Kingdom is now)</p> <p>Birds = the wicked one</p> <p>The wayside, the path = the one who will not receive the message, or does not understand it.</p> <p>Stony ground = the one who begins to repent, but when difficulties arise, gives up.</p> <p>Thorny ground = the one who begins to repent, but because the cares and distractions of life, gives up.</p> <p>Good ground = the one who repents and submits to the rule of God in his life.</p> <p>Bountiful crop = good deeds; righteous acts (i.e. fruit)</p>	The ones who truly obey the Kingdom message will be the ones that endure and will produce fruit in the Kingdom of God.

Parable of the Wheat and Tares		
Reference	Points of comparison	Singular point
Matt 13:24-30 & 36-43 Note: This is coupled to Parable of the Dragnet in Matt 13:47-50	The Sower = The field = Good seed = Tares = The Enemy = The harvest = The reapers = The burning of tares = The wheat gathered to the barn =	

Parables of the Mustard Seed and of the Leaven (coupled)		
Reference	Points of comparison	Singular point
Matt 13:31-32	<p>The Sower =</p> <p>Mustard seed =</p> <p>The field =</p> <p>The tree =</p> <p>The birds of the air =</p>	
Matt 13:33	<p>The Woman mixing flour =</p> <p>Leaven =</p> <p>Dough =</p>	

Parables of the Treasure and the Precious Pearl (coupled)		
Reference	Points of comparison	Singular point
Matt 13:44	<p>The man =</p> <p>The treasure =</p> <p>The field =</p>	
Matt 13:45-46	<p>The merchant =</p> <p>Pearl of great price =</p> <p>Cost of the Pearl =</p>	

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Parable of the Dragnet		
Reference	Points of comparison	Singular point
Matt 13:47-50 Note: This is coupled to Parable of the Wheat and Tares in Matt 13:24-30 & 36-43	The Dragnet = The Sea = The fishermen = Good fish = Bad fish =	

Parable of the Householder		
Reference	Points of comparison	Singular point
Matt 13:52	The householder = Old Treasure = New Treasure =	

As You Finish

- ⌘ Beloved, parables are about decisions. You have studied the “Kingdom Parables” – are you a citizen of the Kingdom? Do the simple and plain meanings challenge you? Or are you baffled and question what all the fuss is about?
- ⌘ Each one of us, must persistently take God's Word and apply it to our life. Always, upon hearing it, deciding to act. In this lesson, we all must make some decisions.

Lesson Four – Chapter Fourteen

As You Begin

- x The “waves of life” beloved are splashing around our feet. If we take our eyes off of our Master, we will sink. Those waves are frightening things to eyes that are not fixed squarely upon Yeshua. Don't be afraid – look up again into His face. Today as you begin this lesson, ask Abba, our Father in Heaven, to give you the strength and grace to refocus upon the “One Who Walks Upon the Waves”.
- x Read chapter fourteen.
- x Add any miracles in chapter fourteen to the chart in the Appendix titled, “Miracles of Yeshua.”

Historical Context

Herod and Herodias

The Herodian family history reads like so many stories of intrigue and debauchery. The fact that four generations of Herodian family all used the name “Herod” adds confusion to the web of interrelations in this political family.

When Herod the Great died in 4 BCE, his will made his son Herod Archelaus the new King. Roman Emperor Augustus in deciding the will of Herod the Great only gave half of the “kingdom” of Palestine to Archelaus. Archelaus turned out to be more brutal than his father and in 6 CE the Roman government deposed him and exiled him to Gaul, placing a Roman governor over his portion of Palestine. Archelaus' brother Herod Antipas had been granted by the will of Herod the Great rulership of a fourth of Palestine. Hence he is often referred to as “Herod the Tetrarch”. His territory was over the northern portion of Herod the Great's territory – around the Galilee region. Herod Antipas originally was married to the daughter of the king of Petraea. While visiting His stepbrother Philip in Rome, Herod Antipas began a relationship with Philip's wife, Herodias. Herodias was Herod Antipas' sister-in-law, and because of the intermarrying in the Herodian family, she was also his niece. Herod Antipas and Herodias conspired and returned to Palestine, together with Herodias' daughter Solome and are married. Herod Antipas' “first wife” upon hearing this fled to her father's kingdom.

When John the Baptizer began speaking against Herod Antipas and Herodias' “marriage”, Herodias convinced him to have John imprisoned. Herodias and her daughter were considered by the population to be Jewish, and the condemnation of “Jewish Law” (i.e. Torah) was no doubt a sensitive issue for her. John was placed in the prison at Machaerus which is near the Dead Sea.

After the beheading of John at the behest of Salome and Herodias, Herod Antipas became convinced that Yeshua was somehow connected to John; even thinking that somehow Yeshua

was a resurrected John the Baptizer. We will see Herod Antipas again – it was Herod Antipas who deliberated over Yeshua before His crucifixion.

Messiah and Bread

The scholars of Israel had long understood the relationship between bread and God's Word. They had read and understood that the giving of manna from heaven was related to the giving of the Torah by the Voice and the “finger of God” at Sinai. They treated bread as a need of life – and evidence of God's care for them with substance from the ground (bread) and substance from heaven (Torah).

Because of these insights, it is no surprise that Yeshua, born at Bethlehem [*Bet Lechem* = “house of bread”], would perform miracles involving bread. The Messianic implications were clear. The only question left would be whether the people would see the meaning, or simply fill their stomachs.

The “Feeding of the Five Thousand” and the “Feeding of the Four Thousand” both make nearly as much about the “leftovers” as the miracle itself. The sages of Israel had an interesting *midrash* (interpretation) that deals with leftovers. Ruth was a great-grandmother to King David, so the sages looked for Messianic interpretations of the accounts in the book of Ruth. Ruth 2:14 says,

Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, “Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.” So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed parched grain to her; and **she ate and was satisfied, and kept some back.**¹

When studying God's Word, the sages understood that no word was out of place, and every word had meaning. They not only saw Messianic implications in this passage, but that the “leftovers” related to the Messianic Kingdom.

And he reached her parched corn, and she did eat [and was sufficed, and left thereof]: Said Rabbi Eleazar: 'She ate' in the days of David, 'she was sufficed' in the days of Solomon, 'and she left over' in the days of Hezekiah. Some there are who interpret, 'She ate' in the days of David and Solomon, and 'she was sufficed' in the days of Hezekiah... it was taught: 'And she ate', in this world; 'and she was sufficed', in the days of the Messiah: 'and she left over', in the future that is to come.²

With the baskets left over after the Five Thousand and the Four Thousand, there is a symbolism pointing toward the Messianic Reign to come. The student of *midrash* in the First Century would no doubt have seen the Messianic relationship to the bread, and the leftovers. That is seen in the John account of the “Feeding of the Five Thousand” we read,

Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Yeshua did, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.” Therefore when Yeshua perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king...³

¹ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Ruth 2:14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 113a*, Soncino Edition

³ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (John 6:14-15a). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Walking on Water

Ancient Jews had a belief, based upon several Scripture passages, that the Abyss was the prison for fallen angels and was under the Sea and the waters of the earth. The Greek word *abussos* [Abyss] in Luke 8:31; Romans 10:7; Revelation 9, 11, 17, 20 etc. literally means “deep”. This word is used in the Septuagint⁴ a number of times and corresponds to the Hebrew word *t’hom* [depths, Abyss, Sheol]. This is the word used for the “fountains of the deep” which opened and brought the Flood in Noah’s time. *T’hom* is the word that Jonah uses when he said,

“The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; The deep closed around me...”⁵

The Psalmist also reflects upon the waters and the depths fearing God,

You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples. You have with Your arm redeemed Your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. The waters saw You, O God; the waters saw You, they were afraid; the depths also trembled.⁶

This correlation between the depths of the waters and Sheol (or the Pit) is seen dramatically in Ezekiel 26:19-20, when speaking of the pagan city of Tyre and the judgment God was bringing against it:

“For thus says the Lord God: ‘When I make you a desolate city, like cities that are not inhabited, when I bring the deep [*t’hom* = Abyss, Sheol] upon you, and great waters cover you, then I will bring you down with those who descend into the Pit, to the people of old, and I will make you dwell in the lowest part of the earth, in places desolate from antiquity, with those who go down to the Pit, so that you may never be inhabited; and I shall establish glory in the land of the living.’”⁷

So it is no wonder then that ancient Judaism taught that a father’s responsibility to his son was that he be circumcised, redeemed (if firstborn), taught Torah, given a wife, and taught to swim.⁸

Yeshua, seen walking on the waters on a dark night, no doubt made a dramatic picture to the disciples. Peter (who we know can swim from later passages) is understandably frightened by sinking into “the deep” after successfully walking upon it. This entire occurrence held deep significance to the *talmidim* – aside from the physical miracle of walking on water.

Analyzing Chapter Fourteen

The Truth about Marriage

In Matthew 14:3-5, we read why John the Baptizer was imprisoned by Herod Antipas (“the Tetrarch”). It says, “For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put *him* in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife. Because John had said to him, ‘It is not lawful for you to have her.’” At first glance, John’s public opinion seems expected – after all, it was John who was

⁴ Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures dating from approximately 270 BCE

⁵ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Jonah 2:5a). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ *Ibid.* (Ps 77:14-16).

⁷ *Ibid.* (Ezk 26:19-20).

⁸ Some sages say taught to swim – this is found in *Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 29a*

telling all Israel to repent. We have seen that life in the First Century was violent, and immoral. Adultery and divorce were common. Even among the most strict Pharisees, divorce was not frowned upon. John was in essence telling Herod Antipas, “what you are doing is just not right”. Doing this publicly was quite extraordinary in the minds of First Century people, considering the liberal attitudes regarding marriage and divorce. But then again, it was consistent with John's message – John not only preached truth, he was willing to suffer for it.

Exactly what was “not right” about Herod Antipas' marrying Philip's wife? As we have seen, the First Century was not kind to marriage – there was much immorality and divorce. Not only was pagan Rome descending into the moral abyss, it seems even the Land and people of Israel were in the midst of a moral decay. It was considered normal for Herod Antipas and Herodias to marry, regardless of the doubtful circumstances of how they began their relationship. After all, at least they were married, right? Scripture is quite clear regarding sexual unions – they are more than just “relationships” and more than “indulgences” – they are spiritual unions as well. God is quite clear on what He regards as right and wrong in this area. Sadly, it seems that John's message would be ignored today as well.

Let's look at some of the instructions regarding marriage, adultery, and divorce in Scripture.

Genesis 2:22-24: What is the relationship between husband and wife?

Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 20:10:

Leviticus 18:16; 20; 20:21 (to “uncover” someone's “nakedness” is Hebrew phrase that describes sexual intercourse):

Leviticus 21:7 (this is the first reference to divorce in Scripture, and is referring to the priests):

Proverbs 6:32:

Proverbs 7:1-27:

Beloved, write verse 27 here – if you are a woman, substitute the word “her” with the word “his”:

Matthew 19 contains an extending teaching on divorce which we will deal with later in this study, so for now we will skip that passage.

An important element in John's rebuke of Herod Antipas and Herodias is the fact that they were supposed “Jewish” rulers (certainly Herodias was considered Jewish). We do not read of John rebuking the Roman emperor Caligula for his degenerate behavior. How does the being an “insider” enter into what is going on in John's rebuke? Read and comment on how 1Corinthians 5:1-13 may relate to what John said about Herod Antipas and Herodias.

The Feeding of 5,000

Matthew 14:15-21 contains the account of the feeding of the five thousand. At first glance it appears to be simply another miracle to validate the connection between Yeshua and Moses, and that Yeshua was the Great Redeemer that Moses prophesied would come. In John 6:14 we read that this was the conclusion of the people who experienced this miracle,

Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Yeshua did, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

Yeshua's own words in Matthew 16:8-10 invite us to look a little deeper into this miracle and engage in a little *midrash*.⁹ Yeshua draws attention back to this miracle and the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand in this way,

But Yeshua, being aware of *it*, said to them, “O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up?”¹⁰

⁹ *Midrash* is an interpretive method which expounds upon a passage by using key words and phrases and cross referencing to other passages to reveal additional meaning.

¹⁰ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 16:8-10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

We will deal with the feeding of the four thousand later, but in regard to the five thousand, we see obvious symbols being used in the narrative, and how Yeshua Himself refers to the miracle. In the John account, we are told that the five loaves of bread were barley bread. This is an important ingredient in this account. Barley bread was called the “bread of first fruits” because barley was harvested in the early spring. The feast of First Fruits which is described in Leviticus 23:9-11 was prophetic of Yeshua's resurrection. Barley also speaks of the Hebrew people. There is another account of barley bread in Scripture.

Read 2Kings 4:42-44 and comment on the similarities between this miracle of Elisha and the miracle of Yeshua in Matthew 14:

In the feeding of the five thousand, we observe that it is five loaves, and two fishes - for five thousand people. We also see that there are twelve baskets left over. If twelve baskets picture the twelve tribes of Israel, and the barley bread alludes to Hebrew people as “first fruits” in the Kingdom, is there a way to fit the numbers 5 (five loaves) and 2 (two fishes) into this *midrash*?

Sadly, John 6:26 records that the majority of people did not understand the sign they were shown. Why did they follow Yeshua? Record your answer from John 6:26:

In the Mark account we also read that even Yeshua's *talmidim* did not fully comprehend what they were witnessing. For them, it would take yet another miracle to help them to gain understanding of exactly Who Yeshua was. Mark 6:52 tells us,

For they [the disciples] had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.

The Significance of Walking on Water

Following the miracle of Yeshua walking on water, something changed in the minds of the *talmidim*. In Matthew 14:33, we are told,

Then those who were in the boat came and worshipped Him, saying, “Truly, You are the Son of God.”

To truly understand the significance of this, we need to remember that in First Century Judaism, no one but God was to be worshipped. Beloved, there is deep significance to this – the *talmidim* wondered no more... this Man standing before them was not simply the King, not simply the Messiah – He was God-in-the-flesh. Surely, His *talmidim* knew the significance of this miracle.

Read and comment on how the following Scriptures deal with the significance of the sea and the miracle of treading on the waves.

2Samuel 22:5-7:

Job 9:1-8:

Healing in His Tzit-tzit

In Matthew 14:35-36, we are told once again that when people touched the “hem” of Yeshua's garment, that they were healed. The word used for “hem” is the same word used in Matthew 9:20 where woman with the issue of blood is healed – it is the Greek word *kraspedon*. The Hebrew equivalent is the word *kanaf* (pronounced: *kaw-nawf*). *Kanaf*, as we saw in *Mattityahu Part One*, means “wing”. The garment, that this *kanaf* is a part of is called a *tallit* (pronounced: *taw-leet*), and the fringes on the *kanaf* are called *tzit-tzit* (pronounced: **zeet-zeet**). Read and comment on the possible role that Yeshua's *kanaf* and *tzit-tzit* played in healing.

Numbers 15:38-40 – what did these represent or symbolize? (note: some versions use “corner” for *kanaf* and “tassels” for *tzit-tzit*):

Zechariah 8:23:

Malachi 4:2 (“wings” = *kanaf*):

As You Finish

- ⌘ Sometimes, the common or oft repeated story makes our hearing dull. Our hearts can become hardened by treating God's Word as "old news". Beloved, His Word is fresh and alive – it is food and life for us. Let's not be hardened by thinking you know what it is all about. Let's ask God to feed us and to grow us in grace and truth.
- ⌘ As you finish today, thank God for the provision of His Word – for the food that He has given you today. "Giving thanks" after being fed (physically or spiritually), will teach you to look not to the commonness of the "food", but the uncommonness of the Holy One of Israel.
- ⌘ Meditate on Exodus 33:13:

Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people.

Lesson Five – Chapter Fifteen

As You Begin

- ✘ Beloved, are you hungry? Have you tasted of His goodness, and long for more? Do you see His Word as more than an intellectual pursuit? If so, then go to your Father in Heaven today as you begin this lesson, and ask Him for more – more of Him – more of His Word – to fill you... and then let you count what remains. His provision is abundant.
- ✘ Read chapter fifteen.
- ✘ Add any miracles in chapter fifteen to the chart in the Appendix titled, “Miracles of Yeshua.”

Historical Context

Tradition or Commandment?

Rabbi 'Awira expounded sometimes in the name of Rabbi Ammi and at other times in the name of Rabbi Assi: Whoever eats bread without previously washing the hands is as though he had intercourse with a harlot... Rabbi Zerika said in the name of Rabbi Eleazar: Whoever makes light of washing the hands [before and after a meal] will be uprooted from the world.¹

As Matthew 15 opens, we find ourselves once again in the midst of controversy between tradition and commandment. Just as we saw with the Sabbath, differences between the traditions surrounding religious life in the First Century and the actual commandments of God had been blurred. In some cases, they were indistinguishable. In many cases, the “traditions” had been given equal status with the written Word – by claiming that they were “Oral Torah”, that is, handed down orally through the ages and coming from God Himself. This was dangerous ground and Yeshua immediately answered their question regarding the washing of hands with an accusation of sorts, when He asked, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?”² It was not the **tradition** of washing hands that He was addressing – but the **tradition** of “*korban*”.

Large portions of the oral traditions dealt with vows. *Korban* was a type of vow. If a man wished to dedicate something to Temple service, he could simply declare, “*Korban*” and that was supposedly reserved for God. A practice among some Pharisees was to use this vow to keep others from taking something that they otherwise might have access to.

This legal loophole was extensively practiced because the *korban* vow was seen as a positive command. The otherwise legitimate (from a rabbinic standpoint) use of a vow was thus being used to actually keep from performing the obligation to honor father and mother with care and

¹ *Talmud Bavli, Sotah 4b*, Soncino Edition

² *The New King James Version*, Mt 15:3b. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982.

sustenance. This was essentially a “dirty little secret” among the Pharisees. It wasn't much of a secret to the parents who were destitute, nor with Yeshua. This practice may have been publicly frowned upon by some of the sages, but the tradition of the *korban* vow was sacrosanct to them.

When Yeshua finished showing how the Pharisees' traditions were being used to thwart the clear teaching of God's Word, He added,

“Hear and understand: Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.”³

This offended the Pharisees greatly. This was foreign to their thinking. Yeshua's disciples pointed out that the Pharisees were offended by His statement, and in the process made it clear that even they did not understand what Yeshua meant. They thought Yeshua was speaking in parables again. No matter how clear His words are to those of us not living in the First Century, they required additional explanation to His *talmidim*. Coming down squarely against traditions which did not teach Scriptural truth, He concluded:

So Yeshua said, “Are you also still without understanding? Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”⁴

Based upon Leviticus 11 and other passages, the people knew that there were some animals that were to be considered food (called “clean”) and some that were not to be considered food (called “unclean”). There were additional instructions in Leviticus regarding animal carcasses that might come into contact with otherwise “clean” food, which was to render it “unclean” and no longer food at all. From these instructions, came an interpretation and an elaborate system of “clean” and “unclean” food in the Second Temple period. The Pharisees had numerous traditions for washing utensils and keeping food “clean”. Included in those traditions of course there was hand-washing. They believed that otherwise “clean” food could be rendered “unclean” by unwashed hands – even though there was no command in Torah to lead them to that conclusion.

The Pharisees' tradition had obscured the truth – namely that something was to be considered “food” or “not food” **solely based upon the command of God**. And if something was not to be considered food (i.e. “unclean”), eating it was not what defiled a person – rather it was the fact that such an act was disobedience and rebellion against the command of God. This was beyond the comprehension of so many who had confused and perverted the commands regarding food.

Visiting Gentile Lands

In Matthew 15, we see Yeshua leaving the Galilee region and going to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Although this was an excursion into Gentile territory, this was not an expansion of Yeshua's ministry to Gentiles. Certainly, there is an allusion to a future Gentile inclusion in Yeshua's words and actions – but this visit was no doubt to escape the revolution-minded Jewish inhabitants in the Galilee region. Visiting the relatively close Jewish enclaves in the

³ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 15:10b-11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 15:16-20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

region around Tyre and Sidon provided a safe environment. In the land along the Mediterranean coast, Yeshua and His *talmidim* were outside the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas and the religious authorities who had been sending delegations to question Him.

His arrival in the region could not be kept a secret. He had to deal with the question of ministering to Gentiles, in their own land.

After healing the Canaanite woman's daughter, He departed with His *talmidim* for the region near Galilee, but still outside Jewish territory. Even though He was in Gentile territory, the crowds found Him, and once again we see another miracle with bread.

Analyzing Chapter Fifteen

Tradition versus Commandment

In the movie, *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye is a very sympathetic character who is dealing with the issues of tradition. He desperately wants to know what is right, and says repeatedly, "as it says in the Good Book..." – and then often misquotes or misapplies Scripture. But when certain traditions are questioned, he does not know their origin. He does not know why he wears *tzit-tzit* [fringes] – assuming it is merely a tradition – not knowing they are commanded in Numbers 15:37-40. It is poignant then when he sings, "If I Were A Rich Man", that the sweetest part of all would be to "study Torah seven hours each day." We need to have hearts like Tevye – desiring the constant study of His Word. Yet, unlike him, we need to be careful not to fall into the subtle trap of confusing traditions and the Word.

Let's look at the Pharisaic tradition of "washing hands before eating" – which sadly today, some simply assume is part of the "old covenant" which they claim God has done away with. We have seen that there is nowhere in the TaNaKh⁵ where we are commanded to wash our hands before eating. There are important principles regarding the spiritual significance of "clean hands" – but the rules of the day took those principles and created commands – and then blurred the lines between the spiritual principles and the actual command of God (or in this case, the lack of a command). Also interesting is the fact that the only place in Scripture where it even approaches a command to wash your hands is found in the Apostolic Scriptures. Read James 4:8 and comment upon how this relates to Matthew 15:1-2:

In His accusation against them, Yeshua quoted from Isaiah 29:13. Read and comment on what the problem with the scribes and Pharisees was regarding not only the traditions of men, but in their understanding of the commandments of God.

⁵ TaNaKh = Torah, Nevi'im, K'tuvim (Pentateuch, Prophets, Writings), Hebrew Scriptures, known by some as the "Old Testament".

Beloved, can you see that God's commands were given to His redeemed people, not to gain entrance into His Kingdom – but to sanctify them **within** His Kingdom? Can you see that His commands are always about **relationship**? He did not call a people to **earn** righteousness by following lists of rules and regulations; nor did He call people to create new commands – and declare them to be from God's mouth. Beloved, Yeshua did not create new commands (John 12:49-50), why do those claiming to follow Him think that they can?

Healing the Daughter of a Canaanite woman

Matthew 15:21-28 includes a curious occurrence to those of us of Gentile lineage. Yeshua and His *talmidim* departed the region of Galilee and went to the Jewish communities which were located in a Gentile region around Tyre and Sidon. It is there that a "Canaanite woman" – a Gentile, comes and says to Him, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."⁶

It is important to note, the following facts regarding this woman:

- x She had an understanding of Who Yeshua was by title – not merely what He could do.
- x She had an understanding of what truly ailed her daughter – not in terms a pagan would understand.
- x She worshipped Yeshua – an acknowledgement of His true identity.
- x She knew that she has no right to ask for His blessing.

From these facts, we can logically deduce that she may have been a "God-fearing Gentile" – that is a Gentile that knew the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and who loved the Scriptures etc. She clearly knew that Yeshua is "Lord" (*kurios* – a Greek word for God). She clearly knew that "Son of David" is a worthy title. She clearly knew that He has authority over the powers of darkness, and that her only hope was His mercy. Knowing all of this, makes Yeshua's response somewhat puzzling on the surface, where He says,

"I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."⁷

Weren't Gentiles included in Yeshua's earthly ministry? Wasn't the Kingdom message – the Gospel given to everyone? Remember in Matthew 10:6-7 where Yeshua sent His *talmidim* out to preach the Kingdom message? He instructed them, "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Why Israel? Why did they go in groups of two? Why, if a town rejected their message were they to leave and "shake the dust" from their sandals? What is this Kingdom message really all about? Let's look at some of these questions in a little more depth. Read and comment on the following passages:

Jeremiah 50:6-7 (what was the problem for the sheep?):

⁶ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 15:22b). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *Ibid.* (Mt 15:24).

Ezekiel 34:22-23; 37:24-25 (what did the Canaanite woman call Him again?):

Acts 3:24-26:

Let us leave any conclusions regarding this until a later time – but for now, understand that this Kingdom message was first only for the “lost sheep of Israel”.

Feeding the 4,000

Yeshua, of course, did heal the daughter of this woman. Before doing so, however He began to reveal to us something behind the “miracles of bread” – and His comments regarding manna and bread. He said in Mathew 15:26,

“It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw *it* to the little dogs.”

Yeshua wants us to see what He is doing as a type of “giving bread to children”. Let’s look back at the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. Remember the symbolism we saw in the numbers? Remember, 5 loaves, 2 fishes, and 12 baskets of leftovers? Remember how Mark 6:52 told us that the *talmidim* did not understand what the miracle was all about?

For they [the disciples] had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.

Now, let’s look at the next “bread miracle”. Matthew 15:32-38 records the feeding of the four thousand. Take note of the numbers used in the account of this miracle:

- x 4,000 men
- x 7 loaves
- x A few little fish
- x 7 baskets of leftovers

It appears that if we are to draw some significance in the numbers in the feeding of the five thousand – we should also consider the significance in numbers of the feeding of the four thousand. In the following table of comparison, the feeding of the five thousand is compared to the feeding of the four thousand. The facts come from all of the Gospel accounts.

Feeding the Five Thousand	Feeding the Four Thousand
5 barley loaves	7 loaves
2 fish	A few fish
In Jewish territory	Outside Jewish territory
5,000 men fed	4,000 men fed
12 baskets remaining	7 baskets remaining

Basket = <i>kophinos</i>	Basket = <i>spuris</i>
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The word for “basket” in all the accounts in the Gospels relating to 5,000 is the word *kophinos*. The word for “basket” relating to the 4,000 is always the word *spuris*. What is significant is that the first word is used in the Septuagint – and yet the second word is not. The first word has a Hebrew equivalent – the second does not. The first word refers to a basket in use by First Century Jews – the second is Gentile.

Although it is doubtful that the multitude of Matthew 15 are Gentiles, the significances of the Gentile elements in the second feeding at least suggest something not yet seen in the book of Matthew – the Kingdom message (the Kingdom food), prophetically given to Gentiles. Yeshua's comments in Matthew 16 about these two miraculous feedings allude to the fact that there is something in them that constitute a sign – beyond the miracles themselves. We will watch how this sign is played out as we continue our study in following weeks.

For now, let's look at some other “bread” references that give us more insight into the word picture that Yeshua is drawing for us. In the passages that follow, comment on how bread relates to Yeshua.

Matthew 4:4:

John 6:28-35:

John 6:47-51:

Matthew 26:26:

As You Finish

- x Do we have traditions that are not faithful to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Do we have a list of rules for ourselves? Have our own way obscured God's Word in our lives? Can God's Word challenge you in this area?

Lesson Six – Chapter Sixteen

As You Begin

- ⌘ How many times, beloved, have you asked for a “sign from heaven” to determine what is best – or maybe just as an encouragement and a way to know God’s favor? If you are like me, you occasionally want to “see”, and not just “hear”. God is gracious, and He knows our frailty – and He provides signs in His time... but they are primarily from His Word. As you start this lesson, pray that your “sign seeking” will be “voice hearing” – that is, hearing His voice and obeying His Word. While you are speaking to your Heavenly Father... thank Him for those ways in your life that He does show you His favor. He is good isn’t He?
- ⌘ Read chapter sixteen.
- ⌘ Find any references in chapter sixteen to the word “Kingdom”. Mark them in your Bible with a blue pencil.

Historical Context

Give Us A Sign!

Matthew 16 begins again with the Pharisees and Sadducees seeking a sign from Yeshua. They were asking whether He was the promised Messiah, though they knew full-well that the Messianic test was not merely a sign – but faithfulness to Torah along with signs. After Yeshua's resurrection, with all the signs pointing to Him – they still were looking for signs. Shortly after this exchange, we read that Yeshua went to Caesarea Philippi and asked His *talmidim* who people said that He was. It was in Caesarea Philippi that Peter was the first to say it out loud – to confess that Yeshua was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. It is ironic and sad that there in Caesarea Philippi, a generation later, some were still looking for a sign indicating the arrival of Messiah.

The disciples of Rabbi Jose ben Kisma asked him, 'When will the Messiah come?' He answered, 'I fear lest ye demand a sign of me.' They assured him, 'We will demand no sign of you.' So he answered them, 'When this gate [The gate of Caesarea Philippi, the home of Rabbi Jose.] falls down, is rebuilt, falls again, and is again rebuilt, and then falls a third time, before it can be rebuilt the son of David will come.' They said to him, 'Master, give us a sign.' He protested, 'Did ye not assure me that ye would not demand a sign?' They replied, 'Even so.' He said to them, 'if so, let the waters of the grotto of Paneas [the spring source of the Jordan] turn into blood;' and they turned into blood.¹

¹ *Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 98a, Soncino Edition*

Upon This Rock, the Confession

It is in Matthew 16 that Yeshua makes His statement regarding “the rock” and Peter. This statement has been used over the centuries to varying degrees to establish ecclesiastic authority, and in the case of Roman Catholicism, Papal authority and successorship. To miss the confession aspect (Peter’s confession that Yeshua was the Messiah and Son of God), is to completely miss what is occurring in this passage. The occurrence is easily understood in a Jewish historical setting. Alfred Edersheim points to Yeshua's play on words between Peter’s name [*Petros*] and the rock [*petra*] of confession in his book, “The Life and Times of Yeshua the Messiah”:

Again, the Greek word Petra - Rock - (‘on this Petra [Rock] will I build my Church’) was used in the same sense in Rabbinic language. It occurs twice in a passage, which so fully illustrates the Jewish use, not only of the word, but of the whole figure, that it deserves a place here. According to Jewish ideas, the world would not have been created, unless it had rested, as it were, on some solid foundation of piety and acceptance of God’s Law - in other words, it required a moral, before it could receive a physical foundation. Rabbinism here contrasts the Gentile world with Israel. It is, so runs the comment, as if a king were going to build a city. One and another site is tried for a foundation, but in digging they always come upon water. At last they come upon a Rock (Petra). So, when God was about to build his world, He could not rear it on the generation of Enos nor on that of the flood, who brought destruction on the world; but ‘when He beheld that Abraham would arise in the future, He said: Behold I have found a Rock (Greek "Petra") to build on it, and to found the world,’ whence also Abraham is called a Rock (Hebrew "Tsur") as it is said: ‘Look unto the Rock whence ye are hewn.’ The parallel between Abraham and Peter might be carried even further. If, from a misunderstanding of the Lord’s promise to Peter, later Christian legend represented the Apostle as sitting at the gate of heaven, Jewish legend represents Abraham as sitting at the gate of Gehenna, so as to prevent all who had the seal of circumcision from falling into its abyss... And we can further understand how, just as Messiah’s contemporaries may have regarded the world as reared on the rock of faithful Abraham, so Messiah promised, that He would build His [*ekklesia*] on the [“rock”] in Peter - on his faith and confession. Nor would the term [*ekklesia*] sound strange in Jewish ears. The same Greek word [*ekklesia*] as the equivalent of the Hebrew Qahal, ‘convocation,’ ‘the called,’ occurs in the LXX [Septuagint], rendering of the Old Testament, and in ‘the Wisdom of the Son of Sirach’ and was apparently in familiar use at the time.²

Ekklesia: The Assembly of Called-Out Ones

It is most common, and most understandable, to read Matthew 16:18 and 18:17 and to see the English word “church” and immediately think you know what Yeshua was talking about. However, if you understood it as a majority of English-speakers do, you would be completely wrong.

First, we need to understand that the Greek word *ekklesia* [called-out assembly] bears absolutely no correlation to the English word “church”. In English, it is telling that we use two words in opposition to each other: “church” versus “synagogue”. Any English-speaker would understand that “church” is a place and organization for “Christians” and that “synagogue” is a place and organization for “Jews”. If we understand this dichotomy between “church” and “synagogue” we will go a long way toward sorting out much of the puzzlements of the Apostolic

² Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Yeshua the Messiah*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Public Domain). p1047-1048.

Scriptures³. Matthew 16:18 is where the word *ekklesia* is first introduced in the Apostolic Scriptures. Yeshua said,

And I also say to you that you are Peter [*Petros*], and on this rock [*petra*] I will build My [*ekklesia*], and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.⁴

Of course, we know that Yeshua was responding to Peter's confession in verse 16 where he said that Yeshua was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Peter is the first to conclude and openly proclaim this by faith. So how would the believers of the First Century have understood this word *ekklesia* [English Bible "church"]? Our modern thinking would have them scratching their heads and asking "what's a church?" The fact is, that the *talmidim* knew full well what He was speaking of. He was speaking of **them**.

When speaking in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17, Yeshua would have used the Hebrew word *kahal* which means, "a called-out gathering or assembly". This word is used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures to denote the people of God collectively. The Greek word *ekklesia* is a fair representation of Hebrew word *kahal*. The word *ekklesia* is used 80 times in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the TaNaKh (the Hebrew Scriptures). In the Septuagint, the word *ekklesia* refers to the whole assembly of Israel – God's people. It refers as well to smaller called gatherings within the assembly of Israel. From the construction of the word, we can see it faithfully and descriptively used.

ekk = a preposition meaning "out, from, of, etc."
kaleo = "called, named, invited"

Literally, *ekklesia*, it means "called-out-ones". The focus in this word is the contrast between those called out, and not called out. Thus, Yeshua's use of this word in its first instance in the Apostolic Scriptures is contrasting the people in His Kingdom of light versus the kingdom of darkness.

In the First Century, and even into the Second Century, another word was used as a synonym for *ekklesia*: "synagogue".

Synagogue [*sunagoge*] is a Greek word coming from two other words:

sun = a preposition denoting union, i.e. "with, beside"
ago = "bring, lead, guide"

We see that *sunagoge* means "to bring together". This word is used in various forms in the Septuagint as well. What we see then is that depending upon the emphasis, the words *ekklesia* and *sunagoge* were referring to same thing, namely, "an assembly of people who have been called out and are assembled together".

In the Second Temple period, the local places of study, learning, and prayer were called "synagogues". The synagogue was not a "Jewish church" in the way of our modern thinking, but rather it was simply a local place of gathering. It was never a replacement for the Temple in Jerusalem, nor did it have priests officiating. Following the Babylonian captivity, the great scribe

³ Greek Scriptures; also known by some as the "New Testament" – although it is neither "new" nor is it a "testament".

⁴ *The New King James Version*, (Mt 16:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982.

Ezra knew that something that previously hindered God's *ekklesia* [assembly of called-out ones] in obedience to God's Word, was the lack of knowledge of it. The synagogue was a natural outgrowth in the teaching and reverence for God's Word in the Second Temple period. The Temple remained the place of service and worship of God – the synagogue was the place of learning and prayer. Even within Jerusalem itself there were numerous large synagogues.

Although the synagogue had organization and structure, it should never be understood to refer to that in its primary sense. As modern Rabbinic Judaism has shown in its own practice, the synagogue's primary purpose was to gather groups together for reading and prayer. An example of that is shown the fact that a complete and formal prayer service requires a *minyan* (a group of ten men). An organization, and a building, while convenient, were not needed for these purposes. Hence, all of the people of Israel were an *ekklesia* and a *sunagoge* – and every small gathering of them was also an *ekklesia* and a *sunagoge*. Thus we see the Apostle Paul looking and finding Jews meeting together as an *ekklesia* and a *sunagoge* even on the banks of rivers in Gentile lands. When Paul uses the word *ekklesia* in the Epistles, it is used in this way always – to refer to God's people collectively – not some religious organization or structure.

Our modern thinking, so twisted by 1,800 years of "Replacement Theology", must be changed in order to correctly read and understand the use of the word *ekklesia*. It is not referring to an organization, a leadership structure, or a building – rather, it is referring to a group or gathering of God's "called out ones" – who have been brought together under **His leadership and authority**. Yeshua, in His first usage, thereby declares that such an assembly which follows Him as confessed by Peter – Messiah and Son of the Living God – will be a mighty army against His Enemy. How could it be in some people's minds and actions, Yeshua's *ekklesia* [assembly of called-out ones] is a man-made, man-centered, and man-run organization?

Analyzing Chapter Sixteen

Signs and Spiritual Adultery

Matthew 16 starts with a return to the "sign of Jonah" we saw back in Matthew 12. Yeshua brought this up and equated the desire for a sign with wickedness and adultery⁵. What about "sign-seeking" is adulterous? Look up the following Scriptures and comment on how they relate to adultery.

Deuteronomy 13:1-4:

What good is a sign, if it leads one away?

⁵ This is not to say that the First Century generation of which Yeshua was speaking was not literally wicked and adulterous – because it most certainly was. Underneath the physical reality of their wickedness and immorality, was a spiritual adultery; and the cause was not where many would expect it – it was the religious leadership of the day.

Jeremiah 3:20-21:

Jeremiah 23:14:

Beloved, is there “spiritual adultery”? What do leaders do that causes “spiritual adultery”?

Jeremiah 5:30-31:

Jeremiah 29:23:

Ezekiel 13:2-3; 22:

Micah 3:11:

Sum up what you have learned about spiritual adultery, and how seeking a sign can be called adulterous.

Loosing and Binding

What is the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees that Yeshua mentioned in Matthew 16:6? The Pharisees not only believed in the written Word of God (i.e. Written Torah), they believed in the “Oral Word of God” (i.e. Oral Torah, or “traditions of the fathers” etc.). The Sadducees believed only in the written Torah. What did these two opposing sects of Judaism have in common? In Matthew 16:12, Yeshua described them as having a common “doctrine”. Beloved, it is that many within their ranks were guided by men – rather than God. There were men in both sects that wanted to rule the people of Israel; and both sects had members who used the trappings of religion to exercise political and social power. As we have seen, this equated to wickedness and adultery on their part. Although they differed greatly in religious beliefs, they shared this common flaw: “And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”⁶

In the past, Matthew 16 has traditionally been viewed as the establishment of ecclesiastical authority (i.e. “church” governing authority over individuals). Who is not aware of the tradition that “St. Peter” holds the keys to heaven, permitting and denying access at its gates? In more recent years, a common view of Matthew 16 is that the “loosing and binding” mentioned relates to the “loosing and binding” of angelic or demonic forces. This has been the prevailing view in Charismatic and Pentecostal circles.

To see the correct view of this passage, it is best to observe the whole council of God’s Word – with an eye toward what First Century Judaism was doing with the words “loose” and “bind”. “Loosing” and “binding” are rabbinic words to describe *halachah* [literally “path” or “walking” = meaning ways to live out what was written]. The fact that Yeshua was giving authority for *halachic* reasons [i.e. practical living] does not mean that a “church governing authority” was being established as the Roman Catholic Church has done with regard to Papal authority. Rather, the authority to establish *halachah* was the authority to act within clear Scriptural guidelines.

Understanding how we are to live in light of what God has written is an important part of being a *talmid* [disciple]. So important, that God’s Word lays down guidelines for deciding on *halachah* – that is, how one should practically live out what God has commanded. Let’s look a little deeper into this, beloved. We want to see if we are following Scripture in our *halachah* – or if we are being like the scribes and Pharisees: teaching as doctrine, the commandments of men. Remember, Yeshua compared the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees to **adultery**. Who is our “Husband” and Who should we obey? What will be our guideline for pleasing our “Husband” – the traditions of men, or His Word acted out in love?

Let’s start with the basics. Read and comment on Proverbs 4:2-4:

⁶The New King James Version. 1996, c1982 (Mt 15:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Next, the basis for deciding *halachah* (as in, how to walk out our faith) must come in light of our understanding of Who Yeshua is. Read and comment on Matthew 16:13-16:

So here is a foundation – a rock, or a confession:

- ⌘ What has God already said (written)
- ⌘ Yeshua is the Messiah, the Son of God.

And what will be the result of such a confession? Read Matthew 16:16-19 and comment on the relationship between the statement that Peter made, the “keys”, and “loosing and binding”.

There is a caveat to the authority to “loose and bind”, to decide *halachah* [how to walk out our faith]. Read Matthew 16:21-23 and comment on how this relates to *halachah* (as in, how to practically live out what God has said).

There were issues that were “gray” for some of the early believers. One example was eating meat that **might** have been offered to idols. There are numerous commands in God's Word against idolatry. There are commands against **things** offered to idols – but no command about eating something that, unbeknownst to you, was offered to an idol. The *halachah* of most Jewish sects said that they could not buy anything from a Gentile market, because it might have played a role in **someone else's idolatry**. But Torah did not say that – this was a *halachic* ruling by the religious authorities. The same issue came up in the Jewish sect called **The Way** (i.e. followers of Yeshua, the Messiah; Re: Acts 24:14) – how would the followers of Yeshua deal with this “gray” area *halachically*? Read and comment on the following passages.

1Corinthians 8:4-10:

1Corinthians 10:19-31:

Matthew 5:43; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8:

With regard to *halachah*, we must always be mindful to follow our Master and His commandments. Yeshua, in Matthew 16:24, again reminds His *talmidim* of the cost of discipleship. Following Yeshua means setting aside ourselves. It means we must seek to understand how Yeshua lived – and then to act it out in our everyday lives (i.e. *halachah*).

Beloved, when we get to Matthew 18 we will deal with the issue of “loosing and binding” again in group (i.e. community) terms. For now, assuming that Yeshua's authority for making *halachic* decisions, applies to all of His *talmidim* individually; let's make it more personal. Summarize in your own words what you have learned in such a way that you could teach a new believer. Use Scripture in your summary. To get you started, let's assume that a “practical” question comes up, that appears to have “gray areas” in it. Explain how this new believer should go about applying the Written Torah (i.e. the whole of Scripture) with the authority to “loose” and to “bind”. For review, here is what we looked at in our study, and the questions to ask when deciding *halachah*.

- x Is it written of in God's Word?
- x Does it deny (or promote) Who Yeshua is?
- x Does it go against God's purposes?
- x How will this affect my neighbor, my brother – will it show love?

Now, beloved, write a *halachic* process for a new believer.

For the last exercise today, explain how the process you just described can be kept from becoming like the “leaven of the scribes and the Pharisees” – to keep from being spiritual adultery.

As You Finish

- x Beloved, our lives are sometimes filled with leaven. We are sometimes puffed up and think we have figured out the best way to live in obedience to God. The question we must ask ourselves is – is our “best way”, God's way? Spend some time in quiet reflection and prayer on the various areas in your life where this chapter of Matthew has spoken to you.

Lesson Seven – Chapter Seventeen

As You Begin

- ✘ I often imagine myself at the foot of Sinai. In my imagination, I hear the thunder, I see the cloud boiling around the mountain, and I feel the earth shaking beneath my feet. My imagination sometimes hears that Voice – that Voice that spoke as it had never spoken before – loudly, for millions to hear. Beloved, that Voice is speaking every moment of our lives if we will but learn to hear it and determine to obey it. It is the Voice of our Creator, speaking words of love to us. As you go to your Creator in prayer today, and as you open your Bible to read what He has said – thank Him for His Voice. There is power in it – for in His creative Voice, He is able to make something, from nothing...
- ✘ Read chapter seventeen.
- ✘ Add any miracles in chapter seventeen to the chart in the Appendix titled, “Miracles of Yeshua.”

Historical Context

Moses and Elijah

It would be difficult to overestimate the effect that the personages of Moses and Elijah had on Jews living in the Second Temple period. The vivid account of the “Transfiguration” of Yeshua on the mountain and the appearance of Moses and Elijah is more than compelling evidence of Yeshua's Messiahship. There is no doubt that this occurrence had a powerful effect upon the *talmidim* who saw it.

The mountain setting described in Matthew 17 draws upon two pictures with regard to Moses: Mount Sinai and Mount Nebo. Mount Sinai is where Moses, in the sight of all Israel, had ascended into the enshrouding clouds and met “face to face” with God Himself. Mount Nebo is where God took Moses to show Him the Promised Land, and where Moses ascended into the Eternal Presence of God – and where His body was buried by God. Now in Matthew 17, we are witnesses through Mattityahu's words, to another cloud enshrouded mountain – and Moses is not dead, but alive!

On Mount Sinai, all Israel had heard the voice of God speaking from the cloud on the mountain. Now, in Matthew 17 we hear again a Voice from heaven saying,

“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him”¹

With Moses in full view alongside the glorified Yeshua, the *talmidim* would have thought back to Moses' own words in Deuteronomy 18, which spoke prophetically of this moment,

The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in

¹ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 17:5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.' And the LORD said to me: 'What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My Name, I will require it of him.'²

If there was any doubt left in these disciples' minds – it was now gone. This Yeshua was indeed the long-promised Prophet – He was indeed Messiah – He was indeed God's Son. There was no longer any doubt, they were *talmidim* of the Messiah of the Holy One of Israel, and they were to obey Him.

Likewise, the appearance of Elijah carried special meaning. Extant Jewish literature is full of references to the appearance of Elijah. The sages often spoke of Elijah appearing to settle an issue, or to speak of Messiah. In the following example, Elijah is said to have appeared outside the tomb of a sage. In this legend, it is Elijah who is the one telling the hearer to hear and obey the voice of Messiah.

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi met Elijah standing by the entrance of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai's tomb. He asked him: 'Have I a portion in the world to come?' He replied, 'if this Master desires it.'... He then asked him, 'When will the Messiah come?' 'Go and ask him himself,' was his reply. 'Where is he sitting?' – 'At the entrance.' And by what sign may I recognize him?' – 'He is sitting among the poor lepers... So he went to him and greeted him, saying, 'peace upon thee, Master and Teacher.' – 'Peace upon thee, O son of Levi,' he replied. 'When wilt thou come Master?' asked he, 'Today', was his answer. On his returning to Elijah, the latter enquired, 'What did he say to thee?' – 'Peace Upon thee, O son of Levi,' he answered. Thereupon he [Elijah] observed, 'He thereby assured thee and thy father of [a portion in] the world to come.' – 'He spoke falsely to me,' he rejoined, 'stating that he would come today, but has not.' He [Elijah] answered him, 'This is what he said to thee, today, if ye will hear his voice.'

Thus in Matthew 17, on the "Mount of Transfiguration", the *talmidim* are given a glimpse into the Eternal Kingdom of Messiah – and a confirmation by Moses, who died and was buried by God. They saw a confirmation by Elijah, who did not die but was taken by a chariot of fire. Most importantly, they heard the confirmation and command of a Voice from Heaven – from the God of "dead and the living" – that this was indeed Messiah, glorified before them.

Analyzing Chapter Seventeen

The Mount of Transfiguration

The "Transfiguration" account in the Gospels is the kind of thing that often leaves us scratching our heads. When we read Matthew 17:1-13 and the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke we may have suspicions that this must have some significance beyond its mere reading. Beloved, it does. This "Transfiguration", as it is called, is rich with meaning, if we care to dig a little deeper. That is what we are about to do.

Most of our English Bibles have headings over the chapters, to indicate a theme or topic. Most of our Bibles will have something regarding the "Transfiguration" of Yeshua over Matthew 17:1-

² Ibid. (Deut 18:15-19).

13. This is most unwelcome – because in doing so, they leave the previous verse to a different topic. No, Matthew 16:28 belongs with the “Transfiguration” passage if we are to begin to get an idea of what it means. The clue is found in Matthew 17:1, which begins by saying,

Now after six days Yeshua took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

The phrase “now after six days” ties this passage to the previous verse. Let’s put them together:

“Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” Now after six days Yeshua took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves.³

Beloved, Matthew 17:1-13 is a portal to see the “Son of Man coming in His Kingdom”. There is one interesting view that we must consider regarding the phrase “six days” as well – namely, that this is mentioned to emphasize the Kingdom aspect of the “Transfiguration”. Both Matthew and Mark include this phrase prior to their accounts of the “Transfiguration”. Luke let’s us know that it was the eighth day including the day of the events in chapter sixteen. Parsing that out points to the Millennial Kingdom (“after 6” = “the 7th”).

We have seen in *Mattityahu Part One* how Yeshua was both prefigured and announced by Elijah. We saw in chapter eleven how John the Baptizer was compared to Elijah. We have clearly understood the connection to Elijah and Messiah. As well, we have seen how Moses prophesied that a Prophet like him would come (Deuteronomy 18) – and how Yeshua was a fulfillment to that prophecy. We have seen the many parallels between Yeshua and Moses – and now, on this mountaintop, we are seeing through the eyes of His *talmidim*, Yeshua standing and talking to Moses and Elijah!

Read and comment on how the following passages relate to Matthew 17:1:

Exodus 34:29-30:

Psalms 104:2:

Revelation 1:13-17:

³*The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 16:28-17:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

From Matthew 16:28, we know that we are being provided a glimpse into the Kingdom of Messiah. We see Him as a radiant King – but why do we see Moses and Elijah there with Him? What was their conversation about? With those questions in mind, read and comment on the following Scriptures:

Exodus 24:15-18 (note the reference to “six days” as seen in Matthew 17:1):

Luke 9:30-31 (KJV word “decease” is the Greek word *exodus* = “departure”):

John 5:45-46:

Acts 7:37:

Hebrews 3:3:

Hebrews 11:24-29:

Revelation 15:3:

Beloved, Moses was there on the mountain – as he is in the Kingdom: a friend of the Bridegroom. Moses saw the pattern while on Mt. Sinai – God spoke to him “face to face”, and revealed to Him Messiah.

2Kings 2:9-14:

Malachi 4:5; Matthew 11:14:

Matthew 17:10-12:

Afterward, Yeshua told His *talmidim*, “Now as they came down from the mountain, Yeshua commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.”⁴ His *talmidim* immediately respond by asking the question,

“Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”⁵

This is an odd response and question for them. They have just been told that He was going to die, and that He was going to be raised from the dead! What was going on in their minds? It is because they thought that now that they had seen Elijah speaking to Yeshua, that Malachi 4:5 was fulfilled – it was time for the “day of the Lord” – and the establishment of His Kingdom. Yeshua went on to point out that, indeed, “Elijah” had already come in the person of John the Baptizer – but that “picture of Elijah”, nor this occurrence on the mountain was a complete fulfillment Malachi had foreseen. No, the complete fulfillment of Malachi 4:5 was for a time in the far distant future – for the time known as, “the great and dreadful Day of the LORD.”

After seeing the Kingdom reality on the mountaintop – we are immediately reminded of the fallen world. In verses 14-21, we are told about the demonized boy and how the disciples had been unable to do what they successfully did in Matthew chapter 16 – namely, to take authority over this demon. Read verses 20-21 and write down the reason for their failure:

Read and comment on how James 5:15-20 relates Matthew 17:20-21 (do you think it is only coincidence that it is **Elijah** that is modeled as an effective man of prayer in James 5?):

⁴ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 17:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *Ibid* (Mt 17:10)

Matthew 17:24-27 describes how Yeshua paid the “Temple tax”. What is this “Temple tax” all about? Read and comment on Exodus 30:11-16:

As you could see, the “Temple tax” was how the Tabernacle/Temple operation was supported (not the Levitical tithe – that was for the Levites themselves). Answer the following questions regarding Matthew 17:24-27:

When asked if Yeshua paid the Temple tax, what was Peter's immediate response?

Why do you think Peter was so sure?

Yeshua found a teaching moment to make a bigger point; so He asked Peter a question. What point do you think Yeshua was trying to make?

Do you think there is any significance to how the money was provided – if so, what?

As You Finish

- x Ah, His Voice! To hear it should be our enduring motivation. To see His face, glorified and with His Kingly crown upon it, should be our unwavering hope. Beloved, if you will obey it, that Voice is calling even now:

This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!⁶

- x **Chazak! Chazak! v'Nitchazeik!** Be Strong! Be Strong! And let us be strengthened! Let's determine to keep on hearing, and obeying Him.

⁶ *The New King James Version*, Mt 17:5. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982

Lesson Eight – Chapter Eighteen

As You Begin

- ✘ Beloved, before you begin today, pause for a moment in quiet reflection and ask God to reveal to you any unforgiveness toward others. If He does, stop immediately and pick up the phone, or walk down the hall, or in some way get into contact with that person. Make it right. Now that there is peace between you and your brothers and/or sisters, ask God for the peace He promises to all those who trust in Him.
- ✘ Read chapter eighteen.
- ✘ Find any references in chapter eighteen to the word “Kingdom”. Mark them in your Bible with a blue pencil.

Historical Context

Bet Din: A House of Judgment

In the Second Temple Period every synagogue or assembly of Israel was presided over by a *bet din* [house of judgment]. A *bet din* had at least three elders in it, and acted as a legal council. The largest, and most important *bet din* was the Sanhedrin. A *bet din* had two primary functions:

- ✘ Decide and settle legal disputes
- ✘ Decide and enforce community standards

Matthew 18:15-18 is speaking specifically about the first function (i.e. settling legal disputes between members of the believing community) of the *bet din*, where Yeshua said,

“But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the *ekklesia*. But if he refuses even to hear the *ekklesia*, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”¹

In this instance, the word *ekklesia* can be understood to refer to a legal council known **within** the “assembly of called-out ones”, in other words a *bet din*.

Even though in Matthew 18 we are not dealing directly with the second function of a *bet din* (i.e. deciding community standards etc.), it is important to look into this in order to help us see the distinction. As we saw in Matthew 16, *halachah* literally means “how to walk”. This very Hebraic of concepts was used to describe the lifestyle of those within the believing community. The Torah did not deal with every possible means of living out the commandments, so there were practical guidelines decided by the *bet dins* and by the academies of the sages. It is this usage

¹ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 18:16-17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

of the *bet din* that we looked at when we considered the “binding and loosing” in Matthew 16. It was this usage of the *bet din* which does not so easily align itself with how Yeshua expected His *talmidim* to approach the decisions of practical righteousness. The difference was not in so much in function – but in two necessary questions that arose from our study of Matthew 16 and 1 Corinthians 8 & 10:

- ✘ What does Scripture say?
- ✘ How does this affect my neighbor (i.e. does this show love for my neighbor)?

We have seen where in the deciding of legal cases, that God required “two or three witnesses”. The rabbinic *bet din* functioned in a similar way for both legal, and *halachic* purposes, where agreement “by two” constituted a majority opinion, and agreement “by three” constituted a unanimous opinion. The concepts of “inclining with the majority” is a cornerstone of rabbinic decision making regarding *halachot* (plural form of *halachah*), that is how one should live; and also in deciding legal issues as a court would.

We also saw in the lesson on Matthew 16 that Yeshua and Paul both gave guidance on how the issue of deciding *halachah* was not to be “majority” decided – but rather “love decided”, in other words, deferring to the weaker brother. We saw that the first question in such matters should be “what does Scripture say?” The practice of some rabbinic *bet dins* challenged this concept sometimes in the extreme. In explaining the principle of “Majority Rule” in Encyclopedia Judaica, it says,

“... where there is a controversy between an individual and the many, the *halakhah* follows the many... The *halakhic* opinion that has prevailed is that the law is decided in accordance with the view expressed by a majority of the scholars, and this is so even if in a particular matter a heavenly voice should declare that the law is according to the minority opinion.”²

What this is saying is that when it comes to *halachah*, if the majority decides something, even a “heavenly voice” cannot overrule it. The phrase “heavenly voice” [*bat kol*] means the voice of God Himself. This very principle is represented in this account from the *Bavli*:

On that day Rabbi Eliezer brought forward every imaginable argument, but they did not accept them. Said he to them: 'If the *halachah* agrees with me, let this carob-tree prove it!' Thereupon the carob-tree was torn a hundred cubits out of its place... 'No proof can be brought from a carob-tree,' they retorted. Again he said to them: 'If the *halachah* agrees with me, let the stream of water prove it!' Whereupon the stream of water flowed backwards — 'No proof can be brought from a stream of water,' they rejoined. Again he urged: 'If the *halachah* agrees with me, let the walls of the academy prove it,' whereupon the walls inclined to fall... Again he said to them: 'If the *halachah* agrees with me, let it be proved from Heaven!' Whereupon a Heavenly Voice cried out: 'Why do ye dispute with Rabbi Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the *halachah* agrees with him!' But Rabbi Joshua arose and exclaimed: 'It is not in heaven.' What did he mean by this? — Said Rabbi Jeremiah: That the Torah had already been given at Mount Sinai; we pay no attention to a Heavenly Voice, because Thou hast long since written in the Torah at Mount Sinai, after the majority must one incline.’³

Of course, “After the majority must one incline” is not what is said in Exodus 23:2 – in fact, it is the opposite – to not incline with the majority to do evil in judgment. This account sadly shows

² *Encyclopedia Judaica. Majority Rule.* (Israel: Judaica Multimedia v.1.0, 1997).

³ *Talmud Bavli, Baba Mezi'a 59b*, Soncino Edition

how easy it was for some of the ruling religious authorities of Yeshua's time to discount the clear commands of God. It also characterizes how, throughout the history of Christendom, this traditional perversion of authority has been used “officially” to annul or twist the clear commands of God – acting as if a **council of men** have ever been given the authority to “make law”.

The confusion of the role of the *bet din*, and the deciding of legal cases, versus deciding of how to live out God's instructions (i.e. *halachah*), is a dividing line between what was going on with the religious leaders of the early First Century and what Yeshua said constituted God's way. The correct “majority decisions” regarding legal issues before a *bet din* did not mean a *bet din* could erase God's clear instructions, nor did it mean that a *bet din* could trample upon the consciences of the weaker members.

Analyzing Chapter Eighteen

Chapter eighteen begins Yeshua's fourth didactic teaching section in the book of Matthew. This teaching section is normally considered to be His “Community Discourse”. Previously, we saw the “Sermon on the Mount” teaching in chapters five through seven. We saw His “Sending Discourse” or “Apostolic Discourse” in chapter ten. Then we saw His “Kingdom Parables” teaching in chapter thirteen. As we have previously learned, there are five major teaching sections in Matthew, corresponding to the five books of Moses (i.e. “Torah”).

Greatest in the Kingdom

At the end of chapter seventeen, Yeshua had begun to teach His *talmidim* plainly about the fact that He would soon suffer, die, and be resurrected on the third day. No doubt this troubled the disciples in such a way that their question, “who then will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” seems to indicate that there are things about the reign of King Messiah that were still confusing to them. The Gospel of Mark adds the comment that the disciples were confused and did not understand Yeshua's plain-speaking on His death.

But did they even need to ask such a question about who would be greatest? – did they not already have the answer? Yeshua indicated in 18:4 that humility is an important trait to be found in Kingdom People.

Read Matthew 5:19 and comment on what the disciples had already been told regarding “Kingdom greatness”:

How does humility tie into this? Read and comment on the following passages and how they relate to Yeshua's comments about Kingdom entrance, and Kingdom People.

Numbers 12:3 (“meek” = “humble”):

Isaiah 57:15:

Mark 10:14:

1Peter 2:2:

1Peter 5:5:

Comment on how Matthew 19:13-14 relates to the issue of humility:

Settling Disputes

We saw in Matthew 16 the introduction of the word “church” to our English Bibles. The word *ekklesia* [called-out assembly] of course does not refer to the organization, or building, of what is today called “the church”. Nor is it referring to some spiritual entity that has replaced the Commonwealth of Israel.

In Matthew 18:17 we are given the word *ekklesia* [called-out assembly] again. This time relating to settling disputes between “brothers”. The process of settling disputes in Matthew 18:15-20 is likely well-known by believers. Sadly, many often use this process to settle misunderstandings where one or both parties have been offended or emotionally harmed. This passage is not speaking about the myriad of relationship issues that arise amongst God’s community. Rather, Matthew 18:15-20 is addressing legal issues. A firm understanding of the Torah principles would go a long way to understanding why Yeshua spoke this to His *talmidim* – because, this is simply Torah being repeated.

In verses 19 and 20, Yeshua said,

“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

These verses are often taken out of context and said to mean that all one needs is “two or three” in agreement in prayer and God will hear such a prayer. Instead, these verses are part of the same topic of discussion – Yeshua was speaking about this “legal” process for settling disputes.

Let’s look a little deeper into the legal issue regarding “two or three” witnesses. Read the following passages and then answer the questions associated with them.

Leviticus 19:16-18: How does this relate to going to a brother privately in Matthew 18:15?

Deuteronomy 19:15-21: This is the passage quoted in Matthew 18:16. From this we can see the legal aspects of this. Remembering that “eye for eye” etc. is used as a liability limitation, what kind of disputes do you think are being settled (cross reference Exodus 21:23-25 in your answer)?

1Timothy 5:19: From what you have already read, does an accusation or a dispute against an elder have a **higher standard** by having “two or three witnesses”?

Matthew 18:17b says what to do with the unrepentant offender as part of the process. It says, “let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” The Torah-based process repeated by Yeshua in Matthew 18:15-20 was done in 1Corinthians 5:1-5; and 2Corinthians 2:4-11 (Although the described issue is not a legal dispute **between** brothers, it deals with sin that needed to be dealt with collectively). Explain in your own words what apparently occurred and how what Paul had them do was consistent with Yeshua's words in Matthew 18:15-20

As we have seen, the “tell it to the church” [*ekklesia* = “called-out assembly”] is speaking of a *bet din* [house of judgment]. The use of the phrases “loose” and “bind” make this clear. This harkens back to our study in Matthew 16 regarding the “loosing” and “binding” there. As we saw, these words are used for making judgments – **not for making law**. The framers of the American Constitution used these same principles in establishing the Legislative and Judicial branches of government. It is the Legislative branch that creates law. It is the Judicial branch that interprets and applies law in specific cases. To this line of thinking, God is the only One that can create “law” – and within those strict guidelines He commands His people to apply “the law” (i.e. His instructions) to the specific circumstances. The *bet din* [house of judgment] is the

“judicial branch” of God’s divine government for His called-out people. We can see this concept dealt with elsewhere in Scripture as well.

Read and comment on 1Corinthians 6:1-7:

1Corinthians 6:7-8 says, “Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to [civil] law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!”

Beloved, have you been cheated by a brother or sister? How should one deal with that? The Master does not leave us hanging – He deals with that in the verses that follow Matthew 18:15-20.

Forgive and Being Forgiven

There is often a disconnect between the way we treat others when we have been offended, and how we expect forgiveness from God. Beloved, God’s Word is quite clear regarding what our response should be to someone who has sinned against us.

In Matthew 18:21, Peter asks about the degree of “forgiveness” that is to be present in Yeshua's *talmidim*. Yeshua's answer and parable in 18:22-35 is sobering. Read and comment on the following passages:

Matthew 6:14-15:

Mark 11:25:

John 20:23:

Now, turn to Matthew 18:34-35 and write it out in the space below:

As You Finish

- x We have read sobering words about forgiving one another. God is so gracious, and so forgiving it is easy to forget about these words we have studied about forgiving others. Beloved, it is precisely because of His grace and mercy that we should be compelled to extend that to others.

- x Spend some time in thankful prayer. Thank God for His mercy and grace that was so evident at the Cross. Thank him that His anger and wrath were satisfied by the atoning death of Yeshua – and thank Him that Yeshua's resurrected life lived out through His *talmidim* is a life of forgiveness and mercy to others.

Lesson Nine – Chapter Nineteen

As You Begin

- ✘ Sometimes we are so busy in “following” we forget what it is, or Who it is, that we are following. We can so easily miss the “forest for the trees”. Beloved, sometimes we all need to step back and consider how we might follow Yeshua, as a child might follow a father’s footsteps on the beach – stretching to place tiny feet into those clear impressions in the sand. Such a child is not thinking about where those footsteps lead, but delighting in fitting tiny feet into daddy’s big prints. It’s all about “being big like daddy” – giggling all the way. Go to your Heavenly “Daddy” today and ask Him to show you His “footprints in the sand” – because you don’t need to understand everything – you just love Him and want to be like Him. Now, delight in Him – for if you are His, you are a member of His household – His *bet* [house].
- ✘ Read chapter nineteen.
- ✘ Find any references in chapter nineteen to the word “Kingdom”. Mark them in your Bible with a blue pencil.

Historical Context

Marriage and Divorce

The Mishnah and Talmud record, what amounts to be, a raging and ongoing debate between the two prominent rabbis who taught in the generation before the birth of Yeshua. Rabbi Shammai and Rabbi Hillel had many disagreements, but their disagreement over marriage and divorce matters was monumental. The *talmidim* of these two factions in Pharisaism are referred to in these extant Jewish documents as “Bet Shammai” and “Bet Hillel” (i.e. “House of Shammai” and “House of Hillel”).

The sharp disagreements between Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel over marriage and divorce was so bad that in subsequent generations they had to deal with questions as to whether the two groups could even intermarry. This dispute is brought into the Apostolic Scriptures in Matthew 19, where the Pharisees asked Yeshua,

"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"¹

Their question to Yeshua was an attempt to discover where *Bet Yeshua* [“house of Yeshua”] and His *talmidim* would come down on the controversy. Would He and His *talmidim* side with Bet Hillel, or Bet Shammai?

Rabbi Shammai had taught His disciples that divorce was permitted in the most serious of cases of adultery. Although the debate as to what constituted the most “serious of cases” was

¹ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 19:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

still going on centuries after Shammai, it can be fairly stated that Rabbi Shammai took a fairly strict view of divorce .

Rabbi Hillel said that divorce was permitted for many other reasons not associated with immorality. Over a hundred years later, Rabbi Akiva [a member of Bet Hillel], went so far as to say that divorce was permissible if the husband found another woman that pleased him more than his wife. Regardless of what Rabbi Hillel meant, it can be fairly stated that Rabbi Hillel took a very liberal view of divorce.

When the question came from the Pharisees, the phrase “for just any reason” seems to indicate that the questioners were likely from the more strict Bet Shammai group. It is important to understand that both of these rabbis’ *talmidim* believed that divorce was permitted in at least some instances. Both also understood that in every regard, a permissible divorce always allowed for remarriage. Some scholars often try to cast this contest between Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel here in Matthew 19 as the two extremes – with Yeshua placing Himself squarely between the two opposing camps – in other words, not taking sides. This view is incorrect, and does not correctly take into account the recorded positions of Hillel and Shammai in extant Jewish texts. Nor does it take into account that a large portion of Yeshua's answer in Matthew 19 was not even spoken when the Pharisees were present, nor was it a direct answer to their question. Instead of Yeshua's response to the question speaking about His diplomacy (i.e. carefully finding middle ground); His answer speaks volumes about His knowledge of the intent of Torah.

In both Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai, divorce was somewhat common – the only question in their minds was how prevalent could it be. Yeshua, in His questions and answers to their test reveals that *Bet Yeshua* [Yeshua's *ekklesia*] would seek to find the intent of the Holy One of Israel with regard to marriage. *Bet Yeshua* would not look for loop-holes – but delight in the instructions and institutions of Almighty God.

Yeshua's response not only discounted both Shammai and Hillel – it even questioned whether remarriage was permissible in all cases. This position was not only unique in the First Century, it was radical. This radical view of marriage and divorce was successfully adopted by *Bet Yeshua*, in the generation that followed Yeshua's ministry. The early assemblies of believers held fast to Yeshua's radical teaching about marriage and divorce, and in so doing, distinguishing themselves from all the rest of Judaism in the First Century in this regard. In fact, this view of marriage and divorce became something that they were known for amongst the other Judaic sects.

The Apostle Paul provides significant teaching on marriage in his Epistles. It is significant that Paul, a *talmid* [disciple] of Yeshua was thus a member of *Bet Yeshua*. His views accurately reflected His Master, Yeshua – even though earlier in his life he had been a disciple of Rabbi Gamaliel, the grandson of Rabbi Hillel. Paul, when he wrote so eloquently on marriage, was a member of *Bet Yeshua*, even though earlier in life he had been a member of Bet Hillel.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Messiah is head of the *ekklesia*; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the *ekklesia* is subject to Messiah, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Messiah also loved the *ekklesia* and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious *ekklesia*, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves

his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the *ekklesia*. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Messiah and the *ekklesia*. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.²

Blessing Children

In Matthew 19:13-15 we read,

Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Yeshua said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And He laid His hands on them and departed from there.³

In this account the Hebrew practice of “blessing of children” is reflected. Since ancient times, fathers gathered their sons to them on the eve of the Sabbath and placed their hands upon them and blessed them, “May HaShem make you like Ephraim and Manashe.” Likewise, fathers gathered their daughters to them and blessed them, “May HaShem make you like Sarah, Rachel, Rebekah, and Leah.” In these blessings fathers were speaking prophetic words of blessing over their children.

Yeshua, Author of life, knows each of these children – and the appropriate creative and prophetic blessing to speak over them individually. We are not told His words, so we are simply left with the beautiful and powerful image of a Father blessing His children.

Entry into the Kingdom of God

Matthew 19 contains a very familiar idiom with regard to the rich entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 19:23-24 says,

Then Yeshua said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”⁴

The idiom, “camel passing through the eye of a needle” has often been represented in allegorical terms. There have been varying descriptions of this idiom in an attempt to describe it. A similar idiom is used in Jewish texts, where something which is impossible is compared to, “an elephant going through the eye of a needle”⁵. Our best source for understanding this idiom is often missed – Yeshua Himself. He explains it this way,

When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” But Yeshua looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”⁶

² *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Eph 5:22-33). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *Ibid.* Mat 19:13-15.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 19:23-24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson

⁵ e.g. Baba Mezi'a 38; Berakoth 55b

⁶ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 19:25-26). Nashville: Thomas Nelson

There is no doubt – for anyone, rich or poor, to “Enter the Kingdom of Heaven” is impossible – but with God, all things are possible!

Analyzing Chapter Nineteen

Marriage and Divorce

Matthew 19 begins with Yeshua being questioned again by the Pharisees. We have seen that the Pharisees were divided on the issue of divorce. We have also seen that they intentionally read a “commandment” for divorce into Torah, when in fact there is none. This makes their question interesting in specifically what they ask, and what they do not ask. This passage of Matthew has been used in many circles to justify remarriage after divorce in some cases. Understand, the Pharisees do not ask about remarriage because to them, that was a given. In other words, in their minds, if divorce was permitted then of course remarriage was as well.

Yeshua's answer to the divorce question is interesting because He did not immediately answer their question – instead He discussed the nature of marriage. Yeshua quoted from Genesis 2:24. Read Genesis 2:21-24 and comment on the relationship between “taken out of man” (verse 23) and “become one flesh” (verse 24):

In Matthew 19:5, Yeshua used the “two shall become one flesh” statement to turn it around into the negative in verse 6. Now He adds, “no longer two but one” – which strengthens the statement even further. The final piece to His answer comes from the picture He has now presented of two becoming one – and only one:

“...therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”⁷

This was a pretty stunning answer to the Pharisees, who were asking a question about how and when divorce could happen – it was if to say, “Gentlemen, the answer to your question is not for ‘any reason’ or ‘some reason’, but ‘no reason’”.

The disciples' response in verse 10 tells how shocking Yeshua's words were to the First Century hearer (as they are to the modern hearer). They said, “If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”

Of course the Pharisees were shocked, not only by the severity of Yeshua's answer, but also because in their minds, Yeshua did not know the Law of Moses as well as they assumed He would. As we have seen, they thought Deuteronomy 24:1ff was a Torah procedure for divorce (which it isn't). They immediately brought this up to Yeshua when, in verse 7 they say,

“Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?”

⁷*The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 19:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Ah, but Moses did not **command** any such thing! Yeshua chose His words wisely when He answers in verse 8,

“Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”

Yeshua had taken their theological question and turned it around to challenge not only their view of Scripture, but the condition of their hearts. Assuming there was a “when” or “how” to divorce was the indication of a hard heart.

Verse 9 contains what is called in some circles, the “exception clause”. Verse 9 is where Yeshua raised the bar on the question. It is very important to understand however that the Pharisees only heard the first part of this exchange. They only heard through verse 8. Verse 9 was told to His disciples in private. Mark 10:10-11 makes this clear.

Yeshua, in His answer to the Pharisees, and the following private discussion with His *talmidim*, made it clear that marriage is permanent – Here is the equation Yeshua created in these Matthew 19:8-9:

- ⌘ Divorce for any reason = hardness of heart
- ⌘ Remarriage (unless *pornea*) = adultery

The so-called exception clause of course comes into play in the last equation. What about “marital unfaithfulness” – in other words, if a man is joined to a woman, and that woman then commits adultery, isn’t the marriage bond broken? So divorce and remarriage would not be adultery, right? Is that what Yeshua’s meant? Yeshua’s choice of words is interesting, beloved. In fact, the phrase “marital unfaithfulness” (as per the New International Version) is not at all accurate. The word behind that phrase is the Greek word *pornea*. This word is directly tied to idolatrous sexual practices such as pagan temple-prostitutes. In the Septuagint, this word is always used for prostitution. It is from this word we get the English word “pornography”. It is a complete different word from the Greek word for adultery (i.e. marital unfaithfulness), which is *moichao*. Most modern commentators simply chalk this up to literary license and the use of a synonyms, but as we continue to see in Scripture, the words chosen are always chosen for a reason. In fact, both *pornea* and *moichao* are both used by Yeshua in Matthew 5:32,

“But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication [*pornea*], causeth her to commit adultery [*moichao*]: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery [*moichao*].

Let’s look at some places those words are used for some context. Record your insights.

Matthew 5:19-20 (both words are used here: fornication = *pornea*; adulteries = *moicheia*):

Mark 10:11-12 (commits adultery = *moichao*):

Acts 15:20 (fornication = *pornea*; each one of the things listed involves the pagan temple or idol worship):

1Corinthians 5:1 (fornication = *pornea*):

1Corinthians 6:15-18 (fornication = *pornea*; harlot = *porne*):

1Corinthians 7:2 (fornication = *pornea*):

Galatians 5:19 (both words are used: fornication = *pornea*; adultery = *moicheia*):

What are your conclusions regarding the so-called “exception clause”? Did Yeshua say that it is a righteous thing to divorce a spouse that has committed adultery, and then that it is alright to marry another person?

Beloved, Yeshua has brought the First Century and modern times to the same place by reminding us that the whole question of divorce stems from a hardness of heart on our part. The Holy One of Israel desires that His people not be hard-hearted or stiff-necked, but believing – and where they have sinned, to be repentant.

Celibacy

After dealing with the question of the Pharisees, we see a related topic – celibacy. Yeshua does not wait for this question, because it was likely a question on everyone's mind already – why wasn't Yeshua, a righteous man, married and having children?

In Matthew 19:11-12, Yeshua did not elevate the celibate to a higher plain of spirituality – verse 11 makes it clear that it is better **for some**. In using the word “eunuch” in place of celibacy, He evokes the principle that eunuchs were not all castrated, but they were all people of responsibility. In fact, in the TaNaKh, the word that is used in the Septuagint is almost always simply translated, “official”. An example is that Potiphar in Genesis 37 is called a “eunuch” [*eunouchos*], and yet we read that he has a wife.

Instead of the image of castration, or even celibacy, the actual Greek word *eunouchos* [eunuch] is a word that literally means, “one who stands by the bed” (i.e. “chamberlain”). This is a word that speaks of one who has been given a task and duty which may take away from the otherwise common path of marriage and children. This is what Yeshua was speaking of, and in so speaking He reminds us that there is indeed a Kingdom place and reward for such.

Read and comment on Isaiah 56:3-5:

What shall I do to inherit eternal life?

Matthew 19:16-26 presents us with the account of the “Rich Young Ruler”. This account presents us with some very interesting challenges. It also reminds us of Yeshua's foundational Kingdom message – “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” Let's look at the question and Yeshua's answer in detail.

In verse 16 what is this man's question? Remember, in First Century Judaism taught that all Israel had a part in the world-to-come. So this question should strike us as odd to begin with. From the text, can you come up with a possible reason why he was even asking this question?

What is Yeshua's response in verse 17?

Does that answer surprise you? Was Yeshua saying that one must “keep the commandments” without a single failure? Beloved, remember that the “the commandments” included making sin offerings.

Yeshua did not dispute the man's answer that he had kept the commandments – instead, He said,

“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”⁸

Do you think Yeshua was adding to His answer in verse 17, or do you think verse 21 is included in what He said in verse 17? Think about it. Include Scripture in your reasoning.

Now Beloved, remember what Yeshua said, not only about “rich men” entering the Kingdom of Heaven – but all of us:

“With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”⁹

When Yeshua told the young man to “follow Me” – what did that meant? This is the focus of this passage. It is not the “sell all that you have” – it is the “come and follow Me”. They are tied directly to those who were following Him. In verse 28 we read,

So Yeshua said to them, ‘Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’¹⁰

What is it to “follow” Him? The Greek word used for “follow” is the word *akoloutheo* which is made up of the preposition “a” which means “with”, and the word *keleuthos* which means “road or path”. This is a word used for disciples that follow and go along with their master. It

⁸ *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982 (Mt 19:21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁹ *Ibid.* (Mt 19:26).

¹⁰ *Ibid.* (Mt 19:21).

is that picture of a disciple (as a child) walking in the footsteps of the master (as a father). The Hebrew word that Yeshua would have used is the word *acharei* – which means “follow behind”. This must have had a poignant word for Mattityahu as he wrote down these words. We read in Mark 2:14,

As He passed by, He saw Levi [Mattityahu] the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him.

In the following passages, read and comment this word for “follow” applies to discipleship – and to you.

Ruth 1:16-17:

Isaiah 30:21:

John 12:26:

Revelation 14:4

As You Finish

- x Are you counting upon “the impossible” for entrance into Yeshua's Kingdom? We should all understand that there is no entrance by the will of man – by “the possible”. As John 1:12-13 tells us:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

- x We have now finished another section in our study of Matthew. You are to be commended beloved, because you have done a lot of reading and a lot of personal study. Remember though, we want to hear the words of our Master,

Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.¹¹

Those words are the words uttered not to “hearers only” of His words – but to the doer of them. Let us all keep running the race – not the race of “information” or “theology”, but the race of **living a life consistent with Yeshua's example**.

- x May you be blessed beyond measure – filled up and overflowing – and may that blessing be evident in your daily life. Amen.

¹¹ Ibid (Mt 25:21).

Appendix – Prophecies Fulfilled in Yeshua

Ref	What fulfilled	How fulfilled	How relates to Messiah
1:20-23	<i>virgin with child, bear a Son, Immanuel – God with us</i>	Mary, virgin, a Son, call Him "Yeshua" – saves His people from sins	Messiah is Savior

Ref	What fulfilled	How fulfilled	How relates to Messiah

Appendix – Miracles of Yeshua

Ref	Miracle	How healed	Reactions of others

Ref	Miracle	How healed	Reactions of others

Glossary and Pronunciation Guide

Adonai (<i>awd-o-neye</i>)	Hebrew: "Lord, master". Also used in place of the Tetragrammaton
Apostolic Scriptures	Scriptures written in the First Century. "New Testament"
Bavli	Babylonian Talmud
Chanan (<i>khaw-nawn</i>)	Hebrew: "grace"
Chesed (<i>khe-sed</i>)	Hebrew: "mercy"
Circumlocution	The use of other words or names to avoid vainly using God's holy Name
Dead Sea Scrolls	Found in 1947 in Qumran, most dating to First Century or earlier
Didache	Early document of the Apostles
Essenes	Austere sect of Judaism in the First Century
HaShem (<i>ha-shem</i>)	Hebrew: "The Name" – used as a circumlocution for God's holy Name
Hellenization	The practice of replacing a culture, with the Greek culture and language
Kanaf (<i>kaw-nawf</i>)	Hebrew: "wing". This is the garment also known as a <i>talit</i> .
Kinneret (<i>keen-er-et</i>)	Hebrew: "Sea of Galilee"
Levi (<i>lev-ee</i>)	Hebrew: of the tribe of Levi. Matthew's surname.
Mashiach (<i>maw-shee-awkh</i>)	Hebrew: "Messiah, Anointed One"
Mattityahu (<i>maw-teet-yaw-hu</i>)	Hebrew: "Matthew" – means "Gift from God"
Mishnah	Oral Torah edited and written
Natzeret (<i>nawt-zer-et</i>)	Hebrew: "Nazareth"
Navi (<i>naw-vee</i>)	Hebrew: "prophet"
Navi'im (<i>naw-vee-eem</i>)	Hebrew: plural, "prophets"
Pharisees	Conservative sect of Judaism
Pseudographia	Writings from the Inter-testament times written under assumed names
Remez	Ancient teaching method which uses allusion.
Sadducees	Temple-centered sect of Judaism
Sage	An ancient Hebrew scholar
Septuagint	Greek version of the "Old Testament" circa 270 BCE
T'shuvah (<i>teh-shoov-aw</i>)	Hebrew: "repentance"
Talit (<i>tawl-eet</i>)	Hebrew: "prayer shawl, or outer garment" – had <i>tzit-tzit</i> at corners
Talmid (<i>tawl-meed</i>)	Hebrew: "disciple"
Talmidim (<i>tawl-mee-deem</i>)	Hebrew: plural, "disciples"
Talmud (<i>tawl-mood</i>)	Hebrew: "teaching" – a sort of commentary on Torah
TaNaKh (<i>tawn-awkh</i>)	Acronym for Torah, N evi'im, K 'tuvim – "Old Testament"
Targums	Aramaic commentaries of Torah
Techelet (<i>te-khel-et</i>)	Hebrew: "blue" – this is the blue thread in the <i>tzit-tzit</i> .
Tetragrammaton	The four letter Name of God. Not normally pronounced.
Torah (<i>tow-raw</i>)	Hebrew: "instruction". First five books of the Bible. All Scripture.
Tzit-tzit (<i>tseet-tseet</i>)	Hebrew: "tassels" – tied on the corners of a garment
Yeshua (<i>yeh-shoo-aw</i>)	Hebrew: "Yeshua" = "Salvation"
Yochanan (<i>yo-khawn-awn</i>)	Hebrew: "John"
Yoshia (<i>yo-shee-aw</i>)	Hebrew: "save"

Bibliography and Reading List

There are an abundance of good sources for this type of historical study of Apostolic Scripture. Listed are some sources used for this study.

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