

Matthew 12

In 11:28-30, Jesus called on those “having been burdened” to come to Him for a light and easy yoke to carry and they will find “rest.” Chapter 12 illustrates the burden Jews had, living under the strict and dominant traditions of the Pharisees. When Jesus refuses to submit to the Pharisees’ traditions, it motivates them to begin seeking a way to destroy Him. The source of controversy was not what the Bible actually said relative to the Sabbath day “rest” (see Gen. 2:1-2; Exo. 20:11; Deut. 5:15); it was over what the Bible *did not say*, the traditions of men which had grown up around the Sabbath law. The Jews took their Sabbath-day traditions so seriously that in the days of the family of the Maccabees (1 Macc. 2:31-38), they allowed themselves to be slaughtered rather than fight on the Sabbath day.

TRANSLATION - 12:1-8:

1 In that time, Jesus went out on the Sabbath, through the standing grain. And His disciples hungered and they began to pluck the heads of grain and to eat. **2** And the Pharisees, after seeing, said to Him, “Behold your disciples do what is not authorized to do on the Sabbath.”

3 And He said to them, “Did you not read what David did when he hungered and those with him? **4** How he entered into the house of God and the bread of the presence he ate, which it was not being authorized to him to eat nor those with him, except only the priests? **5** Or did you not read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple the Sabbath they desecrate and innocent they are? **6** But I say to you that greater than the temple One is here. **7** And if you had known what this is, “Mercy I desire and not sacrifice,” you would not have condemned the innocent. **8** For Lord He is of the Sabbath, the Son of Man.”

WORDS:

This is the first use of the word “Sabbath” (ver. 1) in the NT; out of 68 occasions. Matthew uses the word 11 times, most of them (8 times) in this chapter. “Standing grain” is one word, used here; Mark 2:23; Luke 6:1. “Disciples” was first seen at 5:1. “To be hungry” was first used in 4:2; 5:6. “To pluck” is only used three times: here; Mark 2:23; Luke 6:1. “Heads of grain” refers to “ears of grain,” used only 5 times; here; Mark 2:23; 4:28 (twice); Luke 6:1.

“Pharisees” (ver. 2) was first seen at 3:7. “To be authorized” is used here, for the first time. It is used 31 times in the NT, 9 times in Matt, here at 12:4, 10, 12. “To read” (ver. 3) is used 32 times in the NT, 7 times in Matt. “David” was first seen at 1:1. “Bread” (ver. 4) was first seen at 4:3-4. “Presence” is found 12 times, only here in Matt. “Priest” was first seen at 8:4. “Temple” (ver. 5) is widely used in the NT, especially the Gospels; 72 times. In Matthew, the word is used 11 times, first at 4:5. “To desecrate” means “to violate sanctity” or “to profane.” It is used only here and at Acts 24:6. “Innocent” is used only in this context (12:5, 7).

“To condemn” or “to pronounce guilty” (ver. 7) is used 5 times: 12:7, 37; Luke 6:37 (twice); James 5:6. The phrase “Son of Man” was first seen at 8:20.

GRAMMAR:

The questions in verses 3 and 5 expect a positive answer. “To have known” (ver. 7) translates a verb in the pluperfect tense. Pluperfect describes an action completed in the past and the effects are felt after the completion of the act but before the time of the speaker. Also, the “if” in verse 7 assumes the Pharisees did not understand the mercy of God.

PARALLELS:

Mark’s account is found at 2:23-28; Luke’s, at 6:1-5.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

“Sabbath” (ver. 1) was the last day of the week, the day Jehovah God ceased His creative work (Gen. 2:1-2). God then made it a command under the Law of Moses for Israel to

take that day off from work and rest (Exo. 20:8-11). Israel was not supposed to work on the Sabbath (Exo. 34:21; Lev. 23:3; Deut. 5:12-15) and the Law did specify some activities that were unlawful: Exo. 16:22-30; 35:3; Num. 15:32-36; Jer. 17:21-22; Neh. 10:31; 13:15, 19. But the Jews by the days of Jesus had enumerated 39 different behaviors which they said were sinful on the Sabbath. Circumcision on the Sabbath was an accepted exception: John 7:22-23. It was also allowed to eat grain from someone else's field if it was for the immediate need (Deut. 23:24-25; 24:19-22; Lev. 19:9-10; Ruth 2:2-3).

"House of God" (ver. 4) is used 81 times in the OT, generally referring to the tabernacle or the temple of Jehovah God. The synonymous phrase, "house of the Lord," is used an additional 237 times. "Bread of the presence" (ver. 4) was prescribed in Exodus 25:30; 35:13; 39:36; Lev. 24:5-9. The bread was changed on the Sabbath. The account of David's behavior is found in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. The text of 1 Samuel does not condemn David's behavior. For the reference to the priests working in the temple on the Sabbath, see Num. 28:9-10.

COMMENTS:

Matthew's note at the beginning of verse 1 only serves to note that these events happened in the general timeframe of chapter 11's events. He is not necessarily giving a strict chronology of Jesus' life. This is the first time "Sabbath" is found in the NT and in Matthew. It will serve as a strong point of disagreement between Jesus' (proper) understanding of the Sabbath laws and the Pharisees' strictly-held traditions they created around the Sabbath laws.

On this Sabbath, Jesus and His disciples were walking through the standing grain, probably wheat or barley. Because His disciples were hungry, they began to pluck off heads of grain and to eat them, a behavior which the Law allowed. Just because there are "exceptions" to Laws does not mean those exceptions violate the Law. If "exceptions" (or "loopholes") are written into Law, they are part of the Law itself.

Yet, the disciples' behavior violated the Pharisees' traditions relative to the Sabbath law. Luke 6:1 clarifies why the Pharisees saw the disciples' action as "work." Therefore, they challenged Jesus and asked why His disciples did something that was not authorized. Jesus responds with three points.

First, He challenges whether they have read the Word of God itself (as He did on other occasions: 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31), directing them to the account of King David in 1 Samuel 21. When he was hungry and those with him, they entered into the tent of meeting, the "house of God," and ate the "bread of the presence," which was not authorized. The Pharisees held David in very high esteem and would not have condemned David's behavior, when it was clearly outside the boundaries of God's authority. So, Jesus' first point is that the Pharisees were hypocrites.

Secondly, Jesus challenges whether they have read the Law itself, as opposed to the history books, since the Law allowed exceptions to the Sabbath, for example, when priests could serve in the temple on the Sabbath, and still be "innocent" of any wrong. Thus, Jesus concludes that One "greater than the temple" is among them. Jesus knew the Law and their history; He could expertly cite it and explain it better than their own rabbis. Yes, what Jesus' disciples did was consistent with the Law of Moses.

Thirdly, as Jesus did earlier (9:13), He quotes Hosea 6:6 and challenges the Pharisees to be more merciful in their views and attitudes toward others. While God did and does require sacrifice (worship), He also requires a merciful and loving attitude toward others. Binding one's opinions and traditions on others, as if they were divine law, is not merciful and loving. In fact, it is blasphemous.

Jesus ends this discussion by pointing out that the "Son of Man," Whom He is proving Himself to be, is the "Lord of the Sabbath." He wrote it. He knows how to apply it. Yet, as we have pointed out, the disagreement over the Sabbath law is going to serve as a strong catalyst for the animosity the Pharisees have toward Jesus.

APPLICATION:

Jesus teaches us in this text that man's traditions are not bound on other men as God's commandments are. He also teaches us that we need to follow God's commandments, which often have "exceptions" built into them. This is not to suggest that we have the moral right to lie when we feel like it is necessary. God makes no exceptions to lying (Rev. 21:8). But when God's law gives its own exceptions, we need to allow those exceptions. It is still necessary to show mercy.

Jesus will also teach that His body is the Temple (John 2:20-21). It is, then, through Him that men today have access to God (Rom. 3:21-26). The contrast between Jesus and the physical temple will become acute toward the end of His life: 21:12-16, 18-22; 23:38; 24:1-2; 26:60-61; 27:40. In chapter 24, Jesus will discuss the destruction of the temple and the rejection of the nation of Israel as God's chosen people and the tearing of the veil at 27:51 begins that process.

TRANSLATION - 12:9-14:

9 And after passing over from there, He came into their synagogue. **10** And behold a man, a hand having paralyzed; and they asked Him saying, "If authorized on the Sabbath to heal?" In order that they might accuse him. **11** And He said to them, "Who is from you, a man, who has a sheep and if it might fall on the Sabbath into a pit, will not grasp it and raise it up? **12** Therefore how much more worth a man than a sheep? Therefore authorized on the Sabbath [it is] to do well." **13** At that time, He said to the man, "Extend your hand." And he extended [it] and it was restored healthy as the other. **14** And after going out, the Pharisees counsel they took against Him, how Him they might destroy.

WORDS:

For "synagogue" (ver. 9), see at 4:23. The adjective "paralyzed" or "withered" (ver. 10) is used only here and 23:15 in Matthew, out of 8 uses. It might also simply be a hand whose muscles have atrophied. "To ask" is used here, for the first time (out of 56 total uses in the NT); Matthew uses the verb 8 times. "To heal" was first seen at 4:23-24. "To accuse" or "to bring charges against" is used 23 times; in Matthew only at 12:10; 27:12.

"Sheep" (ver. 11) was first seen at 7:15; 9:36. "To fall" is used 7 times, only here in Matt. "Pit" is used here; Matt. 15:14; Luke 6:39. "To seize" or "to grasp" was seen first at 9:25. "To be worth" (ver. 12) is used 13 times, first at 6:26; 10:31. "To extend" (ver. 13) was first seen at 8:3. "To be restored" is used 8 times, twice in Matt (12:13; 17:11). The word "healthy" or "sound" is used 11 times; in Matthew here and 15:31. "Counsel" (ver. 14) is used 8 times, in Matt at 12:14; 22:15; 27:1, 7; 28:12. "To destroy" was first seen at 2:13; 5:29-30; 8:25; 9:17.

PARALLELS:

For Mark's parallel, see 3:1-6; for Luke's, 6:6-11.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The Law of Moses forbid work on the Sabbath day in the Ten Commandments: Exo. 20:8-11. Earlier, God had emphasized how important the Sabbath law was: Exo. 16:23ff. "Sabbath" is found in the Hebrew OT 111 times, beginning in Exodus 16. The Law also required Israelites to be considerate of their neighbor's animals: Exo. 23:4-5; Deut. 22:4.

COMMENTS:

The controversy over the Sabbath day is not over. On a Sabbath day (not necessarily the same Sabbath), Jesus entered their synagogue. There was a man there whose hand was unusable; it was paralyzed or atrophied from some illness. The Pharisees are likely the "they" in verse 10; they ask Jesus if it is authorized to heal on the Sabbath. The traditions said "no," unless the healing was necessary to save a life. Here, Matthew gives us insight into their motivation: they wanted to accuse Him. Their animosity toward Jesus has been evident at least

since 9:34, but that animosity has been growing so that now, they are wanting to take Jesus into court, before the Sanhedrin.

Jesus responds to their challenge, to their lack of mercy, by asking if any of them, having a sheep fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, would not remove the sheep from the pit. That was actually an action the traditions would allow, so the Pharisees would respond “yes.” Yet, a human being is more valuable than a sheep. Therefore, Jesus answers their question, “Yes, it is authorized [by the Law, by God] to heal someone on the Sabbath day.”

To emphasize that Jesus knew the Law and knew how to interpret the Law, that He was the “Lord of the Sabbath” (ver. 8), He tells the man to extend his hand. Nothing is said about the man’s faith, but he extended his hand and it was “whole” or “healthy,” in the same condition as the other one.

The hatred of the Pharisees for the Son of God reached a pivotal point in verse 14 as the Pharisees went out, to consult with one another, how they might destroy (“kill”) Jesus. It will take some time for them to lay out their plan, but it will happen.

APPLICATION:

The word “Sabbath” is mentioned 12 times after the Gospel accounts; 10 are in the book of Acts as the Christians have interactions with the Jews. In 1 Corinthians 16:2, the word is used for a “week,” as Paul discusses the worship assembly of Christians which would take place on the first day of the week, rather than the last day (the “Sabbath”). The word “Sabbath” is never used to refer to the day of Christian worship. In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul writes that the Sabbath and other aspects of the Law of Moses were a shadow, indicating the the Son of God was coming. Therefore, since Christians no longer celebrate the Sabbath, they should not feel concerned about the Jews “judging” them for that behavior.

It is ironic that the Pharisees are critiquing Jesus for not observing their traditions, but then they take counsel for premeditated murder, which was forbidden under the Law: Gen. 9:5-6; Num. 35:29-34; Deut. 21:1-9. They were preparing to break the sixth commandment because Jesus was “violating” the fourth!

TRANSLATION - 12:15-21:

15 And Jesus, after knowing, withdrew from there; and there followed Him many [crowds], and He healed them all. **16** And He warned them seriously in order not known Him they would make, **17** In order that it might be fulfilled the word through Isaiah the prophet saying, **18** ‘Behold, My Servant whom I chose, My Beloved in whom delights My soul. I will put My Spirit on Him, and judgment unto the nations He will announce. **19** He will not quarrel nor will He cry out, nor will any hear in the streets His voice. **20** A reed having been crushed He will not break and a wick smoldering He will not extinguish until He will bring unto victory the judgment. **21** And His name the nations will hope.”

WORDS:

The verb “to withdraw” (ver. 15) was first seen at 2:12-14, 22. “To follow” was first seen at 4:20, 22, 25. “To warn seriously” (ver. 16) was seen first at 8:26. “Evident” or “known” is used only here in Matthew, out of 18 uses. The verb “to fulfill” or “to be fulfilled” was first seen at 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23. “Prophet” was first seen at 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23.

“Servant” (ver. 18) was first seen at 2:16; 8:6, 8, 13. “To choose” is used only here. “Beloved” was first seen at 3:17. “To delight” was first seen also at 3:17. “Soul” was first seen at 2:20; 6:25. “Spirit” was first seen at 1:18, 20. Here, as at 1:18, 20, it denotes the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. “Judgment” or “justice” was first seen at 5:21-22. “Gentiles,” denoting anyone who was not a Jew, was first seen at 4:15; 6:32. The verb “to announce” was first seen at 2:8; 8:33; 11:4. It is the verb form of the noun which gives us “angel.”

“To quarrel” (ver. 19) is used only here. “To cry out” is used only here in Matthew, out of 9 uses. “Street” was first seen at 6:5. “Voice” was first seen at 2:18. “Reed” (ver. 20) was first seen at 11:7. “To be crushed” is used 7 times, only here in Matthew. “To break” is used only

here in Matthew but three times in John (19:31-33). “Wick” is used here and Revelation 15:6. This is the only use of the verb “to smolder.” “To extinguish” is used 6 times; in Matthew at 12:20; 25:8. “Victory” is used 4 times; here and 1 Cor. 15:54-55, 57. “Name” (ver. 21) was used first at 1:21, 23, 25; 6:9. “To hope” is used only here in Matthew but 31 times overall in the NT.

GRAMMAR:

“To be crushed” (ver. 20) translates a verb in the perfect tense, suggesting damage done in the past that is still felt in the presence.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

“Isaiah” is mentioned 6 times in Matthew: 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14; 15:7. This quotation comes from one of the so-called “Servant Songs” in Isaiah: 42:1-4. While the text is not quoted or alluded to here, the personality of Isaac, that is his humility, seems to be a mirror of the Lord’s personality: Gen. 26:14-22.

COMMENTS:

Jesus had miraculous knowledge (cf. John 2:25) and knew what the Pharisees were plotting, yet it was not time for His arrest and trial. So following His advice He gave His apostles in 10:14, Jesus withdrew. Crowds followed Him and He healed all those in His audience. Many of them became His disciples. However, as He had done before (8:4; 9:30), Jesus seriously warned the people not to make these miracles known. His work, at this point, was to be less confrontational. He will command silence again in 16:20; 17:9.

In this way, Matthew tells us, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of the Servant of the Lord relative to His personality and mannerism. Isaiah 42 is one of the so-called “Servant Songs,” about the Servant of the Lord. There are times when the “Servant Songs” seem to speak of Israel, times when they seem to speak of an ideal Israelite, and times, they must point to the Messiah. This song is one of the latter. Jesus is identified as the “Servant” of the Lord, Whom the Lord chose. Jesus is called the “Servant” of God in Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30. He is also identified as the Lord’s “Beloved” (cf. Matt. 3:17) in Whom His soul delights. In other words, the Servant has the Lord’s approval. So much so that He will put His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, on Him and so empowered, He will announce justice to the nations, the Gentiles. Matthew has had a strong emphasis on the Messiah’s outreach to the Gentiles since he wrote of the wisemen in chapter 2. “Justice” here refers to the Gentiles being right, being made right, being vindicated in the eyes of the Lord by their choice to follow the Messiah.

Relative to the Messiah’s personality, Isaiah predicted that He would not “quarrel” or “cry out.” His teaching and preaching would be soft-spoken, easily entreated, compelling. His voice would not be heard in the street because He would not raise His voice. The truth does not need to be supported by yelling. As to His character, He will not break a reed that is about to break. Clearly this reed and the smoking wick symbolize those who are weak and downtrodden, hurting spiritually, physically, psychologically, and emotionally. A wick that is smoking and about to go out will not be further extinguished by the Messiah. He is patient, merciful, graceful, and caring. This quality will characterize the Messiah “until” He brings out justice unto victory. He will make that justice available once He dies and raises again; He will consummate that justice unto victory when He returns.

Finally, the Gentiles, the nations, will trust or “hope” in His name. They will find justice in the eyes of God through the name of Jesus Christ, His Messiah.

APPLICATION:

The NT writers also emphasize how Christians ought to be patient, gentle, humble, and kind in their teaching the word of God to others: 2 Cor. 4:7-10; 12:9-10; 2 Timothy 2:24-26. In 1 Peter 2:23, Peter tells Christians that Jesus gave Himself into the hands of the One who judges righteously. In the same way, Christians should give themselves into the hands of the Father who loves them and will do the right thing for them.

TRANSLATION - 12:22-32:

22 At that time, there was brought to Him a demon-possessed, blind and mute, and He healed him, so that the mute to speak and to see. **23** And they were being amazed, all the crowds and they said, "Is not this one the Son of David?" **24** But the Pharisees after hearing, said, "This One does not cast out the demons except by Beelzebul, ruler of the demons."

25 Having known their thoughts, He said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid in ruins and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. **26** And if Satan casts out, from himself, he will be divided. Therefore, how will stand his kingdom? **27** And if I, Myself, by Beelzebul cast out the demons, your sons... by whom do they cast out? On account of this, they will be your judges. **28** But if by the Spirit of God I, Myself, cast out demons, then it has overtaken you, the Kingdom of God. **29** Or how is any able to enter into the house of a strong man and his belongings to seize, unless first he may bind the strong man; and at that time, his house will be thoroughly plundered. **30** The one not being with Me against Me he is, and the one not gathering with Me scatters. **31** On account of this, I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, yet the blasphemy of the Spirit will not be forgiven. **32** And whoever may speak a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven to him; and whoever may speak against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven to him, neither in this age nor in the one coming."

WORDS:

"Demon-possessed" (ver. 22) was first seen at 4:24; 8:16, 28, 33. "Blind" was first seen at 9:27-28. "Mute" was seen at 9:32-33. "To be amazed" (ver. 23) is used 17 times, only here in Matt. For "Beelzebul" (ver. 24), see at 10:25. For "ruler," see 9:18, 23, 34. For "demons," see at 7:22; 9:33-34. "Thoughts" (ver. 25) was first seen at 9:4. On "kingdom," see 3:2; 4:8, 17, 23. This is now the 19th use of "kingdom" in the NT / Matthew. "To be divided" is used 14 times, only in this context in Matt. "To lay in ruins" is used only here in Matt, out of 5 times in the NT. "Judges" (ver. 27) was used first at 5:25. This is its last use in Matt. "To come upon" or "to overtake" (ver. 28) is used 7 times, only here in Matt.

"Strong man" (ver. 29) was first used at 3:11. It is used here and in 14:30. It is used 29 times in the NT. "Belongings" can be translated as "equipment, vessel, or things." It is used 23 times, only here in Matt. "To seize" was first seen at 11:12. The verb "to thoroughly plunder" is an intensified form of the same verb. This latter verb was only used here and Mark 3:27. "To bind" is used here, out of 10 times in Matthew, 43 times in the NT. "To gather with" (ver. 30) is the verb form of the noun *synagogue*. It was first used at 2:4; 3:12; 6:26. "To scatter" is used here; Luke 11:23; John 10:12; 16:32; 2 Cor. 9:9. "Sin" (ver. 31) was first seen at 1:21; 3:6; 9:2, 5-6. "Blasphemy" means to "speak against" or "to slander." It is used 18 times in the NT, in Matthew at 12:31; 15:19; 26:65. "To forgive" can also mean to "release or let go." It was first used at 3:15; 4:11, 20, 22. "Spirit" was first seen at 1:18, 20. For the phrase "Son of Man," see at 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19. On the "Holy Spirit," see at Matt. 1:18, 20. The word "age" is used 122 times in the NT, in Matt, here for the first of 8 uses (12:32; 13:22, 39-40, 49; 21:19; 24:3; 28:20).

GRAMMAR:

"To be amazed" (ver. 23) translates a verb in the imperfect tense, which suggests the idea of continuous, constant action in the past. The question put in verse 23 expresses some doubt among the crowd. "Having known" (ver. 25) is a verb in the perfect tense, suggesting a settled state of knowledge. It suggests intimate acquaintance. The "if" statement in verse 28 assumes the truth that Jesus does cast out spirits by the Holy Spirit.

PARALLELS:

This event has its parallels in Mark 3:20-30; Luke 11:14-23; 12:10.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

For the phrase “Son of David” (ver. 23), see 1:1, 20; 9:27. It was a title for the Messiah. For sin originating in a rebellious heart, see Numbers 15:30-31; Deut. 29:18-20.

COMMENTS:

This is the only man healed by Jesus who was both blind and deaf. This condition was caused by demon possession. Generally, while demon-possession is listed with physical illnesses, it is distinguished from them. Here, the demon was causing the blindness and deafness. Jesus healed him and the impediments were removed as he “spoke and saw.” The crowds expressed their doubts by asking if Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah, the “Son of David.” As we noted in an earlier chapter, the Messiah was expected to heal illnesses (Isa. 35:5-6).

Yet the Pharisees, hardhearted as they were, could not draw that same conclusion as evident as it was. Rather, they accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of the ruler of the demons, Beelzebul. They had first made this accusation in 9:34, but Jesus mentions it again in Matthew 10:25 (see comments there for “Beelzebul”).

Again, Jesus shows His omniscience and challenges their logic. A kingdom, city, or house divided against itself, fighting within, cannot be successful. Neither will stand. All will come to an end. By that reasoning, it is clear that Jesus and the demons are not on the same side. Secondly, Jesus reasons, if He casts out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do their fellow Jews, their “sons,” cast out demons? We do not know if God allowed Jews, whether faithful to God or not, to cast out demons. Jesus used this practice to show His Messiahship; however, non-biblical sources, such as Josephus, do talk about Jews casting out evil spirits through the use of magical incantations, talismans, etc. Jesus could exorcise by the power of His word.

In verse 28, Jesus challenges the Pharisees to consider the opposite possibility. If He, by the Spirit of God, casts out demons, then they need to understand that the Kingdom of God is on its way to establishment. Normally Matthew uses the expression “kingdom of heaven.” Here and in 19:24; 21:31, 43, he uses “kingdom of God.” They are synonymous terms. The connection between the exorcism and the Kingdom is made in verse 29. Before one can plunder a strong man’s house, he must first bind the strong man and then he will have access to the man’s belongings. Since Jesus has shown that He is more powerful than demons, the servants of Satan, by casting demons out of men, then clearly He has more power than Satan and nothing will stop Him from establishing His kingdom (cf. 16:18-19).

In verse 30, Jesus clearly points out that there is no ambiguity allowed in serving Him. Using imagery from sheep and sheepfolds, Jesus states that if one is not with Him, he is necessarily against Him. The one who does not “gather” the sheep with Him, is one who scatters the sheep like the false prophets did in the OT. Finally, Jesus warns the Pharisees that they are on the verge of committing a sin for which there is no forgiveness. Sin and blasphemy (“speaking against”) men can be forgiven. But blaspheming the Spirit of God cannot be forgiven. This is a permanent sin; there is no forgiveness in “this age or in the one coming.” At first sight, it might be understood that “this age” refers to the Jewish age while “the one coming” refers to the Christian age. Yet, when Mark records Jesus referring to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as an “eternal” sin (3:29), Jesus clearly refers to this “earthly” age and the coming “eternal” age.

There has been considerable confusion and debate over this specific sin. Mark tells us (3:20) that Jesus warned about this sin because the Pharisees “kept saying (the force of the verb in the imperfect tense), ‘He has an unclean spirit.’” We have seen the Pharisees say this first in 9:34 and Jesus alludes to it in 10:25. Jesus performed His miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:14). The Spirit, then, authenticated His message. If the Pharisees were so closed-minded that they could not see that the Spirit was the source of Jesus’ power, thus the One vindicating His message, there could be no hope for salvation for them. We do not know of anyone today who claims that Jesus’ miraculous powers have their origin in Satan.

APPLICATION:

For more on demon possession and exorcism, see at 8:28-34. Jesus clearly has power over Satan and his demons: John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Rom. 16:20; Eph. 2:1-6; Col. 2:13-15; 1

Peter 3:19; 1 John 3:8. The account of Job (chapters 1-2) shows that God can and does limit the power Satan has to strike people. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that Satan is bound by the power of God in his ability to tempt Christians.

TRANSLATION - 12:33-37:

33 “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree rotten and its fruit rotten; for from its fruit the tree you know. **34** Generation of vipers, how are you able good to speak, evil being? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. **35** The good man, out of the good treasure, brings out good, and the evil man out of the evil treasure, brings out evil. **36** But I say to you that every useless word which men speak, they will answer concerning that word in the day of judgment. **37** For out of your words, you will be vindicated, and out of your words, you will be condemned.”

WORDS:

“Tree” (ver. 33) was first seen at 3:10; 7:17-19. “Fruit” was seen at 3:8, 10; 7:16-20. “Rotten” can mean “worthless, bad.” It, too, was first seen at 7:17-18. “Generation” (ver. 34) was used first at 3:7. Other than its use here, it is only used again in Matt. 23:33; Luke 3:7. “Vipers” was used at 3:7; it is also used at 23:33; Luke 3:7; Acts 28:3. The word “good” in verse 34 is different from the word “good” in verse 33. This word was used first at 5:45; 7:11, 17-18. It is used 102 times, 16 in Matt. “Evil” was first seen at 5:11, 37, 39, 45. “Heart” is used 156 times in the NT, first in Matt at 5:8, 28.

“Treasure” (ver. 35) was first seen at 2:11; 6:19-21. It can also refer to the box which holds treasure. “To bring out” was first seen at 7:4-5, 22. It is used frequently to cast out evil spirits. “Useless” (ver. 36) or “worthless” is seen here; 20:3, 6 in Matt, out of 8 times. “To answer” or “to fulfill, give” was first seen at 5:26, 33; 6:4, 6, 18. On “day of judgment,” see 10:15; 11:22, 24. Outside of Matthew, it is only used at 2 Peter 2:9; 3:7; 1 John 4:17. “To be vindicated” (ver. 37) also means to be “justified, or declared right, or righteous.” It was first seen at 11:19. This is its only other use in Matthew; it is used 39 times in the NT. “To be condemned” is used in 12:7, 37; Luke 6:37; and James 5:6.

PARALLELS:

Luke’s parallel is in 6:43-45. Matthew has already presented the essence of this teaching from Jesus’ sermon on the mount (7:16-19).

COMMENTS:

In this paragraph, Jesus challenges the Pharisees to think more logically. In 7:16-20, in the sermon on the mount, Jesus taught that one’s behavior reflects what is in the heart. In this paragraph, He shows that one’s words also reflect what is in the heart. A good tree will produce good fruit. If you have good fruit, you have a healthy tree. A bad tree will produce rotten fruit. If you have rotten fruit, it is because you have a diseased tree.

Echoing the words of John the baptizer (3:7), Jesus calls the Pharisees a generation of venomous, dangerous snakes, vipers. If they are speaking evil, in saying Jesus performed miracles by the “ruler of the demons,” it must mean the tree is evil. The mouth speaks what is in the heart. A good man speaks good; an evil man speaks evil. Thus, in verses 36-37, Jesus warns the Pharisees to be very careful what they say because their words will either save them or condemn them.

APPLICATION:

Christians, too, ought to be very careful that our behavior and our speech reflects a good, pure heart: Eph. 4:29; 5:3-4, 12; Col. 3:17; James 1:19; 3:1, 13-18; Jude 15. If our words are not what they ought to be, we need to reexamine our heart and bring it back under submission to the Lord.

TRANSLATION - 12:38-42:

38 At that time they answered Him some of the scribes and Pharisees, saying, “Teacher, we desire from you a sign to see.”

39 And after answering Jesus said to them, “An evil generation and adulterous a sign pursues, and a sign will not be given to it, except the sign of John the prophet. **40** For just as he was Jonah in the belly of the sea creature three days and three nights, thus will be the Son of Man in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. **41** Men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment against this generation and they will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold a greater than Jonah [is] here. **42** The queen of the south will raise up in the judgment against this generation and will condemn it, because she came from the limits of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon [is] here.”

WORDS:

“Scribes” (ver. 38) was first seen at 2:4; 5:20; 7:29. Likewise, “Pharisees” was first seen at 3:7; 5:20. “Teacher” was first seen at 8:19; 9:11; 10:24-25. This is the first use of the word “sign,” as a synonym for miracle, in the NT. The word is used 77 times, 13 times in Matt, 17 times in John’s gospel (cf. 20:30-31).

“Generation” (ver. 39) was first seen at 1:17; 11:16. See above, at 12:34-35, for the word “evil.” “Adulterous” is used 7 times in the NT; in Matt at 12:39; 16:4. “To pursue” means to “seek earnestly.” It was first seen at 6:32. “Jonah” is mentioned 9 times in the NT; in Matt here (12:39-41) and 16:4. Further, he is mentioned in Luke 11:29-30, 32. On “prophet,” see 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23.

“Belly” (ver. 40) is used 22 times in the NT. “Sea creature” is used only here in the NT. Some translations use “whale.” Others use “fish.” It is not possible for us to know exactly what type of animal it was which swallowed Jonah, thus we leave it ambiguous. This word “men” (ver. 41) is the word for “male.” It was used at 1:16, 19; 7:24, 26. “To rise up” was first used at 9:9. “To condemn” is used here for the first time in Matt (12:41-42). It is also used at 20:18; 27:3. It is used 18 times total in the NT. “To repent” was first seen at 3:2. “Preaching” refers to the act of preaching or declaring news. This noun is used 9 times, only here in Matt.

“Queen” (ver. 42) is used only 4 times in the NT: Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31; Acts 8:27; Rev. 18:7. “South” is used 7 times in the NT: Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31; 12:55; 13:29; Acts 27:13; 28:13; Rev. 21:13. “Wisdom” was first seen at 11:19. “Solomon” was first seen at 1:6, 7; 6:29. He is mentioned 12 times in the NT.

PARALLELS:

This interchange is found in Mark 8:11-12 and Luke 11:29-32.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The Israelites in the wilderness were an “evil and adulterous” generation: Deut. 1:35; 32:5, 20. This phrase was also used frequently by the OT prophets for Israel: Isa. 50:1; 57:3; Jer. 3:8; 13:27; 31:32; Ezek. 16:15, 32, 35-42; Hosea 2:1-7; 3:1. “Nineveh” (ver. 41) is used 3 times in the NT: Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:30, 32. It is one of the oldest cities in human history (Gen. 10:11-12). It is mentioned 19 times in the OT. It is largely known as the capital of the Assyrian Empire. It was then (793-753 B. C.) that Jonah, the prophet, preached to them to repent of their sins. They did so and God spared their existence. Later, they returned to their sins and Nahum, the prophet, preached against them once again. Jonah’s story is told by the book bearing his name. The Queen of the south, the Queen of Sheba, has her story told in 1 Kings 10:1-10; 2 Chronicles 9:1-12. It is believed the city of Sheba was around the area of modern-day Yemen.

COMMENTS:

Having been scolded several times in this text, despite having seen a miracle themselves, the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus for a “sign.” This is the first time this Greek

word is found in Scripture; generally (but not always), it refers to miracles. Here is one of those occasions. A miracle was a sign that the worker of the miracle was a spokesman for God (John 3:2; Mark 16:17-20; Heb. 2:3-4). The Pharisees, as a group, have witnessed many of the miracles recorded in the last five chapters (8-12), yet they ask for one more. It is clear that they are not sincere.

Jesus knows their hypocrisy and sees through their charade. He echoes the rebuke of the Jewish prophets, calling the Pharisees an “evil and adulterous generation.” They were in the process of committing spiritual adultery against the God of heaven. Unlike their ancestors who gave their hearts to false gods such as Baal and the Ashtaroath, the Pharisees were giving their hearts to themselves, their pride, and their traditions.

Jesus states that they will not be given any sign except the sign of Jonah, the prophet. Citing Jonah 1:17 (2:1 in the LXX), Jesus accepts the historicity of the account of Jonah, how he was swallowed by a fish, or a large sea creature, and vomited out on land, having spent three days and three nights in the belly of the animal. In the same way, Jesus will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. Here is the first overt prediction of His resurrection, but it was too esoteric for the disciples to understand it at that time.

The day of the Lord’s resurrection is described in various ways, all of which must say the same thing: He would rise “on the third day” (16:21; 17:23); “after three days” (Mark 8:31); and here, after “three days and three nights.” Just as we do today, the Jews often considered part of a day as a whole day. For example, we might travel to a distant city, arriving around noon and leave two days later, perhaps around two or three in the afternoon. Subsequently, we might say we stayed in that city “three days,” when we did not stay a complete 72 hours. For biblical examples, see Gen. 42:17-18; 1 Kings 12:5, 12; Esther 4:16; 5:1; Matt. 27:63-64. Jesus was crucified on Friday and rose early on the first day of the week (28:1), on the third day.

In 11:20-24, Jesus warned His generation that the pagan cities of Tyre and Sidon would rise in judgment against them because they would have repented had they seen the miracles Jesus performed. Here, Jesus uses another pagan city, Nineveh, and says they, too, will rise in judgment against His contemporaries because they repented at (literally “unto”) the preaching of Jonah. That is, they listened to the message, responded to it, and changed their behavior to make it fit the message Jonah preached. Jonah, himself, was a lesson to the Ninevites because he had been swallowed by the fish and then vomited alive on land. Either Jonah told them this story and they believed it or, perhaps, some of the sailors with them shared the message. Jesus’ conclusion is: “behold, a greater than Jonah [is] here.” They ought to repent at the preaching of Jesus.

The Lord gives another example which we have recorded in the OT, the queen of the south, better known as the Queen of Sheba. She is another Gentile who will arise in judgment against the Jewish nation because she sought the wisdom of Solomon, traveling a great distance to do so. The Jews, on the other hand, are in the presence of the Son of God, and refuse to seek His wisdom: “and behold, a greater than Solomon [is] here.” In this text, Jesus has now claimed to be greater than the temple (12:6), greater than Satan (12:29), greater than Jonah (12:41), and greater than Solomon (12:42). Truly, His claims would be outlandish if He did not support those claims with miraculous powers.

APPLICATION:

First, we emphasize that Jesus accepted the literal understanding of the story of Jonah. If we are to honor Him as the Lord and Master, we should also accept a literal understanding of Jonah and the big fish. Secondly, Jesus only hints here that He will be killed and rise again on the third day. Now is not the time for Him to openly declare that purpose of His coming; but He will in 16:21.

The resurrection of Christ was God’s definitive sign of His approval of all that Jesus did and taught: Acts 2:24, 32, 36; 3:15; 13:30, 33, 34, 37; 17:31. James says in 4:4 that friendship with the world is enmity (adultery against) God. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus will say that if one were to raise from the dead, unbelievers will still not submit to the teachings of Christ (Luke 16:31).

TRANSLATION - 12:43-45:

43 And whenever an unclean spirit may go out from the man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find [it]. **44** At that time he says, 'Into my house, I will return from whence I came out.' And after coming he finds [it] standing empty, having been swept and having been organized. **45** At that time, he goes out and takes along with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself and after entering, he dwells there. And it happens the last [state] of that man [is] worse than the first. Thus it will be even to this evil generation."

WORDS:

"Unclean" (ver. 43) was first used at 10:1. "Spirit" was first seen at 1:18, 20. Here it clearly refers to "unclean" or "unholy" (in contrast to the "Holy" Spirit) spirits, otherwise known as demons. "Waterless" is seen only here in Matt; it is also used at Luke 11:24; 2 Pet. 2:17; Jude 12. "Rest" was first seen at 11:29. It is also used in Luke 11:24; Rev. 4:8; 14:11. "To stand empty" (ver. 44) is used only here and at 1 Cor. 7:5. "To sweep" is used three times: Matt. 12:44; Luke 11:25; 15:8. "To be organized" is used 10 times, in Matthew at 12:44; 23:29; 25:7. The Greek word, transliterated, gives us the word *cosmetics*.

"More wicked" (ver. 45) is similar to the word "evil" used in this verse and broader context. It was first used in 5:11, 37, 39, 45. "To dwell" was first used at 2:23; 4:13. "Worse" was used first at 9:16. "Generation" was used first at 1:17; 11:16.

GRAMMAR:

The verbs "to be swept" and "to be organized" (ver. 44) translate verbs in the perfect tense, suggesting a current state which results from some past action.

PARALLELS:

There is a parallel in Luke 11:24-26.

COMMENTS:

This brief paragraph is not designed to give us a theology about the nature and preferred housing of the demons. Jesus uses their nature simply as an illustration of the need to replace evil in one's heart with good; otherwise, the evil will return and be worse.

"Unclean" spirits are demons (cf. 10:1) and when they have been cast out of someone, they pass through waterless places, seeking rest. If they have not found any, they will say to their companions, "Let us return!" This particular spirit finds seven more spirits more wicked than he, and they return to their "house," the heart of man, and find it having been swept and organized. Because, it has not been filled with the words of the Holy Spirit, the complete cohort of evil spirits (eight in total) inhabit that man's heart and the latter condition is worse than the first.

Jesus' contemporary generation is in the same condition as that particular man. If Jesus casts out demons (literally) or if He uproots false teaching (metaphorically), and the individual does not continue to pursue truth and righteousness, then Satan's servants will return and that person's spiritual condition will be even worse!

APPLICATION:

Peter warns that a Christian who returns to the world after having been washed by the blood of Christ is in a worse spiritual condition than before he ever obeyed Christ (2 Pet. 2:20-22). It is so very important for Christians to continue walking daily with Jesus Christ, in prayer, Bible study, worship, and fellowship with fellow Christians.

TRANSLATION - 12:46-50:

46 Still speaking to the crowds, behold, the mother and His brothers stood outside seeking to speak to Him. **47** And someone said to Him, 'Behold Your mother and Your brothers

outside have stood seeking to speak to You. **48** And after answering He said to the one speaking to Him, ‘Who is My mother and who are My brothers? **49** And after extending His hand to His disciples, He said, “Behold, My mother and My brothers. **50** For whoever may do the will of My Father, the One in the heavens, My brother and sister and mother he / she is.”

WORDS:

“Disciples” (ver. 49) was first seen at 5:1. It is used 261 times in the NT. “Will” was first used at 6:10; 7:21.

GRAMMAR:

The verb “stood” (ver. 46) is in a verb tense known as the pluperfect. The same verb is used in verse 47 in a perfect tense. At the end of verse 50, I have included “he / she” although the verb is simply third person singular because Jesus includes women in His general principle: “sister” and “mother.”

PARALLELS:

This parallel is found in Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Verse 47 is missing in some manuscripts, but appropriate scholars believe this was because scribes’ eyes probably dropped a line since “to speak” is found at the end of verse 46 and at the end of verse 47. In the study of NT manuscripts, this error is called a homoeoteleuton.

COMMENTS:

Verse 46 does tie this paragraph directly into the preceding paragraph: “still speaking to the crowds...” Jesus’ mother and his physical, earthly brothers stand outside the crowd, desiring to speak to Him. We know that His brothers did not accept His Messiahship before the resurrection (John 7:1-5). Here, they seem to want to pull Him away from the crowds (cf. Mark 3:21). It is presumed that since Joseph is not mentioned, he has died. When someone informs Him that His mother and brother desire to speak to Him, Jesus puts them in their place (cf. 10:34-39).

Jesus never gave His mother any spiritual role or significance in His kingdom. She brought Him into the world and she gave birth to Him. After that, she had to submit herself to His teachings just as anyone else. Repeating what He had said in Matthew 7:21, what is paramount is obedience to the will of the Father. Jesus says that those who obey the will of the Father are His “mother, sisters, and brothers.” Notice that Jesus includes “sisters” here. In contrast to Jewish rabbis, Jesus accepted and welcomed female followers into His discipleship. It is true that He did not call any women to be His apostles and limited their role in the work and worship of the church (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15), but He still calls them to pick up their cross and follow Him (cf. Luke 8:1-3; 10:38-42; John 4:7-30). In Christ, there is equality between the genders (Gal. 3:28).

APPLICATION:

This text, among others such as Matt. 1:25 and 13:55-56, destroy the idea that Mary was a perpetual virgin. There is no biblical evidence for such a claim. It is true that “brother” can be used in a non-literal sense. Jesus uses it that way in this very text: verse 49 (cf. 18:15, 21, 35; 19:29; 23:8; 25:40; 28:10), but the normal meaning of the word should be understood unless there is reason to take it figurative and there is no reason to understand it this way in the text. Jesus did give His mother’s care into the hands of the apostle John (19:26-27), but it must be remembered that His brothers were not believers before the resurrection (John 7:5). Nowhere in His teachings does Jesus give His mother any spiritual role or superiority over anyone else. Clearly here, Jesus emphasizes that one’s relationship with Him is the highest

priority. In Luke 11:27-28, when some wanted to offer a blessing on Mary, His mother, Jesus again turned it around to say, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it."

Paul will teach that if Christians die faithful to the Lord, they will be fellow-heirs with their "elder" brother, Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:17).