

The Bible Journey – Great Questions

Matthew

QUESTION 1

Scripture: *And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.* Matthew 2:11

Question: What happened to the gold, frankincense and myrrh?

Response

The answer to this question is, “We do not know”. The Bible is silent. I am always hesitant to speculate when the Bible is silent. The narrative focuses on the gifts as acts of worship worthy of a king, rather than the gifts as a means of provision. As we read the story, our focus should be the same.

That said, by the time the magi arrived, Jesus was probably about two years old. The family had moved from the stable into a more suitable “house” accommodation. Immediately following the visit of the magi and presentation of their gifts, God spoke to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Get up” and “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him” (Matthew 2:13). That same night the family departed for Egypt and stayed there until the death of Herod.

The Bible does not say what Mary and Joseph did with the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but many scholars believe that these gifts would have helped finance the family’s material needs during their trip to Egypt and beyond. Any of the gifts could have been sold or traded for supplies, accommodations, and living expenses.

There are some who believe Mary saved the frankincense and myrrh to use as ointments to anoint Jesus’ body for burial. But the Bible doesn’t mention this. Instead, John’s Gospel states that Nicodemus brought “about seventy-five pounds” of a perfumed mixture of “myrrh and aloes” to anoint Jesus’ body for burial (John 19:39–40).

Since the Bible does not reveal what Joseph and Mary did with the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, speculation only seems to lead us away from the primary expression of worship that the gifts represented.

QUESTION 2

Scripture: *And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.* Matthew 2:23

Question: Who was the prophet that was referred to in this scripture that declared that Jesus would be called a Nazarene?

Response

To understand this verse, we need a little background information. First, remember that Matthew is writing looking back. He has walked with Jesus, listened to Jesus and after the resurrection begins to make connections to the Old Testament that he may have missed earlier, or have now become clearer.

Second, let's consider the town of Nazareth. It was a small town in Galilee that history tells us may have garrisoned Roman soldiers. When Philip finds Jesus, he quickly invited Nathanael to join him. Nathanael's response is telling. ⁴⁵ *Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."* ⁴⁶ *Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."* John 1:45-46. Nazareth had a well-known reputation of being a despised place or place of contempt.

Third, notice that Matthew uses the term, "prophets", not "prophet". Matthew seems to not be referencing a specific prophet but to a general idea communicated by the prophets. A common theme of the prophets was that Jesus would be despised and considered contemptible in the eyes of many. See Psalm 22:6-8 and Isaiah 53:1-3 as examples.

So, what it appears is that Matthew is using a current expression of derision that found its roots in the Old Testament. "Matthew is not saying that a specific Old Testament prophet foretold that the Messiah would live in Nazareth; he is saying that the Old Testament prophets foretold that the Messiah would be despised." The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8, Page 96.

QUESTION 3

Scripture: ¹³ *Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”* Matthew 3:13-17

Question: When Jesus was baptized the heavens opened and the Spirit was released. Since the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have always existed as the Trinity, did Old Testament people have the help of the Spirit? Or was it not until Jesus died and the Holy Spirit was sent down?

Response

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit did not permanently indwell God's people but would come upon them as directed by the Father to accomplish His purpose. For instance, in Numbers 27:18-23, the Spirit comes upon Joshua to succeed Moses as leader of Israel. In 1 Samuel 16:12-13 the Spirit comes upon David when Samuel anoints him the future king of Israel. The book of Judges records this same experience several times. In this regard, the ministry of the Spirit was the same in the Old Testament as the New Testament with the difference being temporary versus permanent.

The permanent indwelling of the Spirit was promised by Jesus (John 14-16). See specifically John 14:25-26. ²⁵ *“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

The fulfillment of Jesus' promise occurred in Acts 2:1-4, *When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested^[a] on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

In summary, the ministry of the Spirit has remained similar throughout the Bible with the exception being a temporary indwelling in the O.T. and then a permanent indwelling in the N.T. The ministry of the Spirit includes conviction of sin, regeneration, restraining sin in the world, indwelling and sealing of salvation, and empowerment for service.

QUESTION 4

Scripture: ¹² Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned.” Matthew 4:12-16

Question: Where is the land of Zebulun and Naphtali located and what is the Galilee of the Gentiles and what was going on that they were living in darkness the shadow of darkness.

Response

Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the 12 tribes of Israel, and their portions of land were located in the Northern part of Israel. Capernaum was a city located on the Northeast coast of the Sea of Galilee. To understand the phrase “Galilee of the Gentiles” we need a little history lesson. When the United Kingdom of Israel was divided during the reign of Rehoboam, Galilee became a part of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Southern Kingdom was Judah, which continued to be ruled by the descendants of David.

The Northern Kingdom, under Jeroboam and subsequent ungodly kings, turned to false worship. Judah did a little better with many godly kings. When both kingdoms became corrupt, God began to warn of a coming day of judgment, a day when God would use the Assyrians as His instrument of judgment, carrying the people of the Northern Kingdom into captivity. The Assyrians would threaten Judah and Jerusalem but would not succeed in sacking that city (See Isaiah 8:1-8).

Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, did just as God had forewarned (2 Kings 15:29), the Assyrians sacked the Northern Kingdom, they carried the people to Assyria. Later, Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, would once again march against Israel and would carry the Israelites into exile in Assyria (2 Kings 17:1-6). The Assyrians then brought captives from other places to live in the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 17:24). As a result, the Northern Kingdom (which included Galilee) became diluted (the people of Judah would probably say polluted) ethnically and spiritually. Over time the Jewish population in the Northern Kingdom increased somewhat. Nevertheless, for the Jews of Judah and Jerusalem, Galilee was not considered a place of status.

As a result, Galilee was the most pagan of the Jewish provinces, at least in the eyes of the Southern Jewish people. Those in Galilee were considered less biblically pure and less obedient to the Law. Therefore, they are referred to as a people “dwelling in darkness” and “shadow of death” who have seen the “great light” of Christ which has “dawned” in their very presence.

The fact that Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee is Matthew’s way of saying to his Jewish audience, the Messiah is for all people, regardless of ethnicity or background.

QUESTION 5

Scripture: ¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:17-20

Question: Jesus references heaven and earth disappearing. Does that mean it will? Or is he saying this will never happen so continue to follow the commandments. Lastly how do we ensure our righteousness is good or better?

Response

Let's begin by identifying the context. Obviously, this is part of the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon is Jesus presenting the Kingdom of God to Israel. He is proclaiming that Messiah has come and His Kingdom is present. Then He describes life in the Kingdom.

Jesus references heaven and earth disappearing. Does that mean it will? Or is he saying this will never happen so continue to follow the commandments. Jesus' declaration that He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, not to abolish them, contains two statements in one. There is something Jesus *did* and something He did *not* do. What Jesus did was fulfill the Law and Prophets in His actions and teachings, all of the Old Testament. What He did not do. He did not render them invalid. The Prophets will be fulfilled; the Law will continue to accomplish the purpose for which it was given. At the same time, Jesus emphasized the eternal nature of the Word of God.

Jesus is also drawing a contrast between the temporary nature of physical creation and the eternal nature of God's Word. Revelation 21:1-8 describes God destroying physical creation and creating a new heaven and earth. Note that heaven refers not to the abode of God but to the heavens or skies. In contrast to the temporary nature of creation, God's Word will remain eternal. Verse 18 does not say the Law will end but will be fully accomplished or fulfilled.

Lastly how do we ensure our righteousness is good or better? Is this meaning to always continue to study and read the Bible? This is an intriguing question. How do we measure righteousness? First, remember in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is redefining righteousness to include not just what we do but the heart attitude behind what we do. In other words, Jesus is elevating righteousness to a standard way higher than the Pharisees accepted.

Second, notice just a few verses later the standard, *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* Matthew 5:48. The term “perfect” communicates maturity or to be brought to the purpose for which something was created. Why did God create people? To bring them into relationship with Him where they obey, honor and glorify Him.

Righteousness is tied to the idea of justification. Justification has two aspects. First, Christ pays our unpayable sin debt through His sacrifice on the cross. Second, Jesus imparts to us His righteousness through His resurrection. Our sin debt is paid and our 'righteousness' bank account is filled with the righteousness of Jesus. This is what Paul says, *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* 2 Corinthians 5:21

The pursuit of righteousness is you and I increasingly aligning our lives, behaviors, attitudes, etc. with what has been imparted to us, the righteousness of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. So perhaps instead of "good or better" we think in terms of aligning more and more with Christ and His teachings. That would certainly include studying God's Word, repentance, loving others, and loving God.

QUESTION 6

Scripture: ¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21

Question: Are the treasures on earth like wealth and power? Then what are the treasures in heaven and how do we get those treasures?

Response

A couple observations before answering the more direct question. First, notice the description of the earthly treasures as being something that can be tangibly impacted (moths can eat them, rust can tarnish them, and thieves can steal them). The descriptions are intended to communicate the temporary nature of the treasures.

In addition, a common tradition among the religious leaders was that wealth was an indication of God’s blessings. Therefore, their perspective to pursue and acquire wealth reflected God’s blessings on them.

The whole Sermon on the Mount attacks this idea that external righteousness apart from internal holiness is not honoring to God. Therefore, the pursuit of wealth and things for the sake of acquisition alone is dishonoring to God.

Jesus offers a different option. Pursue and lay up eternal treasures or treasures that supersede in value and impact any earthly treasure. These treasures will not be tangible because they are not impacted by earthly things like moths, decay and thieves. The New Testament mentions various rewards (Luke 6:22-23; 2 Timothy 4:8, etc.) which would certainly count as eternal treasure. In addition, what Christ commands would also be treasures (serving, giving, etc.). We acquire these treasures through obedience. Verse 21 is the main take away. What captures and consumes our heart will direct which treasure we pursue and what we pursue will reflect the focus of our heart.

QUESTION 7

Scripture: ¹⁹ *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

²² *“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

²⁴ *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. Matthew 6:19-24*

Question:

Question: In Matthew 6:19 Jesus starts his teaching on money and continues it to the end of the chapter. But in verses 22-23 he starts talking about the eyes and the darkness from having unhealthy eyes and then he goes back to talking about money again. How are these two concepts connected?

Response

In Matthew 6 I think many of the teachings are the overflow of proper prayer as taught in verses 9-14. When we get prayer right, our attitudes and behaviors in other areas of our life must also conform to Christ.

Specifically, I see the flow of these verses like this.

- Verses 19-21: Jesus offers a choice between earthly treasures which are temporary and treasures in heaven which are eternal. The choice is which one will you store up. This is a perspective change regarding earthly treasures. How they are acquired and used reflect how tightly God holds your heart.
- Verses 22-23: Jesus offers the same choice but changes the imagery. A healthy eye lets in light thus enlightening a person. An eye incapable of letting in light darkens one's ability to see. I think Jesus uses this as a metaphor to continue His emphasis on heart attitude. Our eyes serve as gatekeepers to our hearts. Where we set our eyes (attention) will determine the health of our heart. You have a choice to which type of eye you have; eyes set on “light” or eyes set on “darkness”. The failure to realize you do not see clearly is all the more terrible.
- Verse 24: Verses 19-23 gave a choice between two treasures and two visions. Each stem from an even more basic choice: which master will you serve? It is not possible to serve both earthy treasure/darkened eyes and eternal treasure/lighted eyes. Or more bluntly, one cannot serve money/possessions and God.

QUESTION 8

Scripture: ⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Matthew 3:7-10

¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. Matthew 7:15-20

Question: Are the two scriptures related? The first is a reference to Pharisees the second seems more general. Was John preparing the hearts of the people to hear this message from Jesus?

Response

The Matthew 3 passage is clearly talking about the religious leaders. The Matthew 7 passage uses the more general phrase, “false prophets” without specifically identifying who the false prophets are.

Both passages use the same metaphor of fruit or works as a means of identifying the heart of those being addressed. In addition, both passages conclude with the same warning, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire” (verses 10b and 19).

That said, I would conclude both instances refer to the religious leaders at a minimum. And I would be comfortable linking the two passages because they share a common theme. To see a common link between the teachings of John and Jesus would not be surprising. Whether John is ‘setting up’ Jesus’ teaching is unknown.

QUESTION 9

Scripture: ²⁸ And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. ²⁹ And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" ³⁰ Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. ³¹ And the demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs." ³² And he said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. ³³ The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. ³⁴ And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region. Matthew 8:28-34

Question: Why do you suppose the people pleaded with Christ to leave their region?

Response

This is a case when comparing the story in the other Gospels can shed some light on your question. A few observations as I read the passage. The country of the Gerasenes would have been a predominantly Gentile area. Therefore, their awareness of Jewish religious practices and traditions would have been largely unknown. It is also likely the concept of a Jewish Messiah was not prominent.

Second, Mark 5 and Luke 8 are parallels of this event. Mark mentions that the local people had repeatedly attempted to constrain these men but failed. I would conclude from this that the local people were aware of these men, and this had been going on for some period of time.

Third, Luke 8 provides an additional detail that answers your question. ³⁵ Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, **and they were afraid.** ³⁶ And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. ³⁷ Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were **seized with great fear.** So he got into the boat and returned. Luke 8:35-37

What Jesus did was so outside of their categories that fear of Christ gripped them. If the demon-possessed men made them afraid, imagine how much more afraid they would have been of Someone who could do what Jesus did.

QUESTION 10

Scripture: *¹⁴ Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” ¹⁵ And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. ¹⁶ No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. ¹⁷ Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”* Matthew 9:14-17

Question: What does the images of clothes and wine mean?

Response

In order to understand this, we must understand the way clothes were mended, and wine was made in biblical days. When patching an older garment, if a new unshrunk piece of cloth was used, when it dried and shrunk it would only pull the garment apart.

What about wine? Bottles for carrying various liquids were made by killing an animal, cutting off its head and feet, skinning the carcass, and sewing up the skin, fur side out, to create a sealed container with one hole, usually the neck. The skin was tanned with special care to minimize disagreeable taste. In time, as the skin aged, the skin would become brittle and hard. If new wine, still fermenting, were put into an old skin, the buildup of fermenting gases would split the brittle container and ruin both the bottle and the wine. New wine was placed in new wineskins that were still pliable and elastic enough to accommodate the pressure.

Jesus was comparing His teachings to those of John the Baptist. John came proclaiming repentance to those steeped in the traditions of the Jewish faith. Jesus, on the other hand, did not come to ‘patch up’ the old system but to introduce a new path to the Kingdom of God, Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus was teaching that the new truth He was introducing could not simply be poured into the old wineskins of Judaism. New truth required a new form. The old brittle traditions of the past will not contain the kingdom that Jesus is proclaiming. Old religion is being replaced by a personal relationship with God.

Now the context was the question from the disciples about fasting. Jesus said fasting is not the issue. The real issue is the difference between the old ways and the new way. The new way will not obliterate the old, but it will not fit into either. The kingdom has arrived and now is not the time to fast. Now is the time to accept the Savior and rejoice.

QUESTION 11

Scripture: ²⁴ *“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.*
Matthew 10:24-25

Question: What does this mean “if they call the master of the house Beelzebul how much more will they malign those of his household?”

Response

In Matthew 10, Jesus is sending out the disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God (verses 1-15). In verses 16-23, Jesus informs them to expect persecution. He is sending them out as sheep among wolves. I think this is also true for us as Christians today. In verses 26-39 Jesus continues talking about the persecution they can expect and offers encouragement.

Specifically in Matthew 10:24-25, Jesus is continuing to talk to the disciples about that persecution. Notice the progression of what Jesus says. First, a disciple or learner is not above his teacher nor a servant above his master. In other words, the disciple and servant are in submission to the teacher and master.

The passion or desire of the disciples and servant is to imitate the teacher or master. In other words, evidence of followership is imitation. Jesus then says those who persecute you have called or identified Him (the master of the house) as Beelzebul. Beelzebul was another title for Satan or the prince of demons. The word literally means “lord of the flies”. Take a look at Matthew 12:24-30 for another instance when the Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan.

QUESTION 12

Scripture: ³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. ³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Matthew 10:34-39

Question: Why does Jesus say he's come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, etc.?

Response

Let's begin by considering the whole chapter.

- Matthew 10:5-15: Jesus sends out the disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God.
- Matthew 10:16-25: Jesus warns that following Him will lead to conflict and persecution. ¹⁶ “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.
- Matthew 10:26-33: In response to the previous teaching, Jesus encourages the disciples to not live in fear. ²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Now we come to the text in question. The whole chapter is Jesus communicating that obedience to Him and proclamation of the Kingdom will bring conflict, persecution and perhaps even death. Family and family relationships do not eliminate this conflict and persecution.

Jesus is elevating entry into the Kingdom and obedience to Him as of higher priority than family relationships. The decision to choose Christ may put you at odds and in conflict with your family. If you are forced to choose between family and Jesus, choose Jesus. There may also come a time when unredeemed family will turn on redeemed family in order to preserve their life. The love of family cannot supersede love for Christ.

In Matthew 12 (below), Jesus speaks to family again by stating that entry into the Kingdom of God brings us into a second family, a family identified as those who know God and obey Him. That family may prove to be more a family than biological family.

⁴⁶ While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. ⁴⁸ But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!” ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” Matthew 12:46-50

QUESTION 13

Scripture: ² Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” ⁴ And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” Matthew 11:2-6

Question: Matthew 11:6 What did Jesus mean when he said "God blesses those who do not fall away because of me"?

Response

The context of this verse is John the Baptist, while in prison, sending a disciple to Jesus to inquire if Jesus is the expected Messiah. John would have been fully aware of who Jesus was and the mission of Jesus. Yet, in this moment of suffering, I believe he is looking for assurance.

In response, Jesus tells the disciples of John to simply note what they have seen: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor receive the Gospel. In other words, John, you can take assurance from not just the things you have heard but the things Jesus has done. In all ways, Jesus reflects the Scriptural image of the Messiah.

Jesus then encourages John in verse 6. “John, do not be offended or stumble in your faith.” Remain faithful and strong. Many will stumble over Christ’s claims of Messiahship. John, don’t be one of those people. In the verses that follow, Jesus goes on to praise and honor John for his work in preparing the way for the Messiah.

QUESTION 14

Scripture: ²¹ After going out from there, Jesus went to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

²² A Canaanite woman from that area came and cried out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is horribly demon-possessed!" ²³ But he did not answer her a word. Then his disciples came and begged him, "Send her away, because she keeps on crying out after us." ²⁴ So he answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ But she came and bowed down before him and said, "Lord, help me!" ²⁶ "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs," he said. ²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, your faith is great! Let what you want be done for you." And her daughter was healed from that hour.

Matthew 15:21-28

Question: This whole paragraph is troubling. Jesus does not speak to the woman, His disciples want to send her away, then Jesus does speak to her. Jesus' answer does not make sense.

Response

A cursory reading would lead us to think Jesus is being harsh to the woman but that is not the case. The woman is described as a Canaanite or Gentile, but a Gentile with an unusual amount of faith. Notice also, she addresses Jesus as "Lord, Son of David". Those are Messianic words. Apparently, this woman had some knowledge of who Jesus was.

She somehow finds out where Jesus is eating and approaches with a request that Jesus heal her demon possessed daughter who has remained at home. Somehow, she manages to overcome the disciples attempts to keep her away, and makes it into the presence of Christ. Her conversation with Jesus is actually very beautiful. In verse 24, Jesus seems to dismiss the woman and her request. Jesus states that He has come for the lost sheep of Israel.

Now in His presence, she pleads her case. Jesus' response needs some explanation. In a typical family, the children are fed before the household pet or dog. Jesus uses that as an example to communicate that He came for Israel first, not the Gentiles.

The woman, however, is more perceptive than most of Jesus' listeners for she catches the implication of His example. She takes notice that Jesus says to feed the children then the pets. Perhaps she grabs hold of this and thinks, "this implies an order not an exclusion". Yes, the children eat first, but the dogs do get to eat as well.

Second, she forms her response by calling Jesus Lord. This is a recognition of the authority of Jesus. She puts these together in a request that even though she may receive less, she STILL RECEIVES. And she is asking only for a morsel of the power and authority of Jesus...because that will be sufficient.

Jesus responds to her insight, her faith and her heart. Perhaps all along Jesus has been slowly drawing out her faith to both affirm her and to communicate to the disciples that the mission of Christ is for Jews and Gentiles. Later, when Gentiles read this story, their hearts rejoice that Christ is for them as well.

QUESTION 15

Scripture: *²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. ²⁸ Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”* Matthew 16:24-28

Question: Please explain to me how this works out as Jesus' original disciples, whom he was speaking to at the time, have all long since passed away from this earth and Jesus hasn't returned yet.

Response

Jesus' comment about not tasting death refers back to verse 25. He is saying that although some of those who follow Him will lose their lives for His sake, some of them would see a manifestation of the coming kingdom before they faced martyrdom, because to see Jesus in His glory is to see a preview of that day when He will return to reign.

What's remarkable about this saying is that it occurs in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and is immediately by the transfiguration of Jesus. Peter, who was the one on the mountain with Jesus during the transfiguration, in his second epistle, treats this experience of the transfiguration on the mountain with Jesus as a preview of the second coming — a validation, we would say today a movie trailer, of the second coming.

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son,^[1] with whom I am well pleased,” 2 Peter 1:16–17

These verses seem to have Peter referring to the power and the coming of the Lord as a preview experienced on the Mount of Transfiguration, which means that what Jesus was saying was that some of his disciples, namely Peter, James and John, would not die before they glimpsed Jesus in His divine form or the form He will have when He returns. This happened at the transfiguration.

QUESTION 16

Scripture: ¹And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. Matthew 17:1-2

Question: What is the purpose of the transfiguration of Jesus.

Response

1. It is a response to Matthew 16:28. *Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.* Peter, James and John saw Christ in His kingdom form.
2. Matthew 17:2 describes the brilliance of Christ to demonstrate that He was more than just a teacher, rabbi or miracle worker, but the Son of God.
3. A reference to Matthew 5:17, *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.* Moses represented the Law since he was the one through whom the Law was given. Elijah represented the prophets of the Old Testament, especially in the sense that he ascended directly to heaven without dying on earth.
4. Matthew 17:5, when the Father speaks, serves to declare that Christ is the Son of God and Messiah and therefore, should be obeyed. Also, the Father's words show that the Law and the Prophets must give way to Jesus. Jesus is the new replacing the old.
5. Matthew 17:9 is referenced in 2 Peter 1:16-18, ¹⁶ *For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.* Peter refers to the transfiguration as a defining moment, although not fully grasped in the moment, in Peter's life and the ministry he gave his life to.

QUESTION 17

Scripture: ²⁸ *Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 19:28*

Question: Are the 12 disciples sitting on thrones in heaven judging Israel? Is the 12th disciple Judas?

Response

The context of Matthew 19 places this verse within a dialogue Jesus was having with the disciples regarding a rich man who sought Christ. Jesus says it is difficult for rich people to enter the kingdom because their wealth is a strong idol. In response to Peter's statement that they have left everything, Jesus draws their attention to the eternal. They may have left everything while on earth, but they will gain so much more in heaven.

Luke 22:28-30 describes the same conversation and locates it in the broader discussion of the disciples wondering who was the greatest.

So, the context is Jesus affirming to the disciples that their current 'sacrifices' of the temporary world would be rewarded with so much more in the final day of Christ. The Apostle John offers us this in Revelation 21 when describing the new Jerusalem.

"It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" Revelation 21:12-14

Jesus has revealed to these men that they will have more than just treasure in heaven. They will occupy thrones and positions of great responsibility and power alongside Jesus. The disciples will be given authority to judge the 12 tribes. What does this judgement look like? We are not told but a common thought is not so much judgment as in passing judgement on behavior, but the distribution of rewards and fellowship in light of obedience.

Now to your question, "Who was the 12 disciple who will sit on a throne?" I do not believe Judas will be that person. In Acts 1:15-26, Judas was gone, having gone out and hung himself. In response the disciples seek to replace Judas and Matthias is chosen and was "numbered with the eleven apostles".

QUESTION 18

Scripture: *They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, Matthew 23:5*

Question: What are phylacteries?

Response

Phylacteries were small leather or parchment boxes containing a piece of vellum inscribed with texts from the Law. They were worn on the arm and tied to the forehead (see Exodus 13:9,16; Deuteronomy 6:8; 11:18).

The purpose was to remind the Israelite that they were to know God's Law (forehead) and obey God's Law (arm). It was a tangible way to remind them to be spiritually obedient and faithful.

To show off their piety, some religious leaders would make large, showy phylacteries. The goal being to call attention to themselves and their piety. Pretty much the whole chapter is Jesus calling down a series of woes directed at the outward focus on the religious leaders while completely ignoring their heart.

Originally the phylacteries were worn all day and removed at night. In more recent Jewish practice, they are worn only during morning prayers.

Morning prayer

Phylacteries, called tefillin in Hebrew, are worn by observant Jewish men each weekday morning during prayer.

A reminder

- Two small leather boxes contain verses from the first books of the Bible; boxes are attached to leather straps

One tied to arm, the other placed on head

- Worn as a reminder of God and to follow Jewish law daily
- Removed at conclusion of morning prayer services

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Source: Jewish Virtual Library
Graphic: Melina Yingling, Lee Hulteng



QUESTION 19

Scripture: ³ Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴ saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." ⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. Matthew 27:3-5

Question: How did Judas die and did he freely chose to betray Jesus?

Response

The death of Judas was a suicide committed after he was filled with remorse (but not repentance) for his betrayal of Jesus. Matthew says that Judas died by hanging. Luke says that Judas fell into a field and that his body ruptured. Here is the account in Acts: *"With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood".* Acts 1:18-19

Concerning how Judas died, here is a simple reconciliation of the facts: Judas hanged himself in the potter's field (Matthew 27:5) and that is how he died. Then, after his body had begun to decay and bloat, the rope broke, or the branch of the tree he was using broke, and his body fell, bursting open on the land of the potter's field (Acts 1:18-19). Note that Luke does not say that Judas died from the fall, only that his body fell. The Acts passage presumes Judas's hanging, as a man falling in a field does not normally result in his body bursting open. Only decomposition and a fall from a height could cause a body to burst open. So, Matthew mentions the actual cause of death, and Luke focuses more on the horror surrounding it.

Jesus chose Judas Iscariot as one of the 12 disciples. Judas was "a devil" (John 6:70-71), "a thief" (John 12:6), and an unbeliever (John 6:64), yet he held a respected position within the group). Since Jesus "knew what was in each person".

Jesus chose Judas as a disciple because, ultimately, Judas fit into the plan of God. One of the reasons Jesus chose Judas was that prophecy had to be fulfilled. Speaking of His imminent betrayal, Jesus says, "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him" (Matthew 26:24).

So, Jesus chose Judas to fulfill prophecy and because the plan of God required someone to betray the innocent Son of Man. However, none of this means that Judas and others who condemned and crucified Jesus were without fault. Judas Iscariot bore the responsibility for what *he* chose to do. Jesus said, "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born" (Mark 14:21).

Judas, like all people, have free will within the sovereignty of God. While God knew Judas would be the betrayer, Judas chose his path willingly and freely.

QUESTION 20

Scripture: ⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" Matthew 27:51-54

Question: Did the "Godly men and women who were raised from the dead and left the cemetery, after Jesus' resurrection", physically (in human form) go into Jerusalem and appear to many people? Or were they appearing to people as spirits? If they were in human form, what happened to them after they appeared to people in Jerusalem (since they were previously already dead)? Did they just continue living on until they died again?

Response

I think this text is a preview of what awaits in the final resurrection. Therefore, the bodies would have been like those in the resurrection. The bodies are in human form but are now eternal in design as described in 1 Corinthians. While the text does not tell us where they went after appearing to many, the thought would be that they went to the dwelling place of God, just like will happen in the final resurrection.

⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵ *"O death, where is your victory?*

O death, where is your sting?"

1 Corinthians 15:50-55