

Matthew

Chapter 21

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MATTHEW CHAPTER 21

JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM (21:1-11)

Jesus comes to Jerusalem—the final destination of His public ministry. His entry into Jerusalem will show that He is a king of a different order than most of the people expected.

Matt. 21:1 And when they had approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples

And when they had approached Jerusalem The Roman military road from Jericho to Jerusalem was about seventeen miles long and climbed three over thousand feet.

and came to Bethphage, The road passed through Bethany(v. 17) and nearby Bethphage (house of figs), which lay on the southeast slope of the Mount of Olives. These cities are named to inform the reader that Jesus is near to the city of Jerusalem.

at the Mount of Olives, This large hill, just to the east of Jerusalem, may have been mentioned here because of the Messianic associations with it (Zechariah 14:4).

then Jesus sent two disciples. Jesus sends two unnamed disciples ahead.

Matt. 21:2 saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me.

saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, He is purposefully making preparations to enter Jerusalem in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9.

and immediately you will find a donkey tied there, Jesus, a Lord or all, knows what they will discover.

and a colt with her. Colts that had not been ridden sometimes accompanied their mothers.

Untie them and bring them to me. Jesus now exercises a prerogative of royalty. Kings have the right of “impressing” or commandeering an animal. Jesus, as the Lord, has the right to whatever His subjects own—whether they be His disciples or not.

Jesus Himself arranges for the ride on the colt. This was a deliberate act of revealing Himself to those who had eyes to see and ears to hear. No longer will He be secret concerning His identity.

Matt. 21:3 And if anyone says anything to you, you say, ‘Their Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.”

And if anyone says anything to you, In case someone questions what they are doing.

you say, This is how you respond.

‘Their Lord The term *lord* might mean the owner of the animals. The Greek word *kurios* is used for the

divine name (Yahweh) as well as the simple title “master,” or “lord.” In this context, it seems the most natural way of taking it is Jesus referring to Himself.

has need of them,’ The true king has the right to anything that belongs to the members of His kingdom.

and immediately he will send them.” Jesus correctly predicts the outcome. Some have argued that this had been prearranged by Jesus with the owner of the animals apart from the knowledge of His disciples. There is, however, nothing in the context to suggest this. Jesus, as the Lord, is able to foreknow the future.

Matt. 21:4 This all took place to fulfill that which was spoken through the prophet, saying,

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts read *Isaiah the prophet* instead of *the prophet*.

This all took place to fulfill This might be the words of Jesus rather than Matthew.

that which was spoken through the prophet, saying, The first part is from Isaiah 62:11 and the rest from Zechariah 9:9.

Matt. 21:5 “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, gentle and mounted upon a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

“Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king The fulfillment shows that Jesus is indeed a king.

is coming to you, gentle and mounted upon a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” He is a meek king not a warrior-like king (see 11:29; 12:18-21). Officials used donkeys for civil not military processions (e.g. 1 Kings 1:33). Therefore this was not a triumphal entry in the sense of a Roman triumph. It is the meek and peaceful king coming to His subjects. This is Jesus’ definition of what sort of King He was.

Matt. 21:6 And the disciples went away and did just as Jesus directed them,

And the disciples went away and did just as Jesus directed them, The peaceful entry is now set in motion.

Matt. 21:7 And they brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and He sat upon them.

And they brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and He sat upon them. Jesus sat upon the garments, not both of the animals!

Matt. 21:8 And the great crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others were cutting down branches from the trees and spreading them in the road.

And the great crowd spread their cloaks on the road, They are making the way for the king.

and others were cutting down branches from the trees The cutting down of branches was appropriate for this setting. John (12:13) mentions that they cut down palm branches. Palm branches were normally used for the feast of Tabernacles or triumphal entries. Consequently the fact that Jesus was riding on a donkey showed that He was rejecting the revolutionary aspirations of some of the members of the crowd.

and spreading them in the road. They were acknowledging Jesus' kingship. In the midst of the noise of the crowd, Jesus rides the unbroken animal. As Matthew has already emphasized, Jesus is the Lord over nature (8: 23-27).

Matt. 21:9 And the crowd that was going ahead of him, and the ones following after were crying out saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who is come in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest!"

And the crowd that was going ahead of him, The crowds were leading the procession.

and the ones following after were crying out saying, "Hosanna This has the idea of save now.

to the Son of David! Unfortunately they did not grasp the full meaning of this term.

Blessed is he who is come in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest!" They acknowledge that He is the Messiah and He accepts their worship. However He will not entrust Himself to them (see John 2:23-25). A few days later, many from this same crowd will shout "crucify Him."

Matt. 21:10 And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken, saying, "Who is this?"

And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken, The same phrase is used of Jerusalem when the wise men came at the birth of Jesus (2:3).

saying, "Who is this?" They want to know the identity of this person the crowds are acknowledging. Jerusalem did not know its king.

Matt. 21:11 And the crowd was saying, "This is the prophet—Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.

And the crowd was saying, "This is the prophet—Not a complete description of Jesus.

Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee. It was possibly the Galilean crowd that explained to the others who Jesus was.

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE (21:12-17)

Jesus comes into Jerusalem and pronounces condemnation on the Temple practices. Furthermore, He overturns the tables and drives out the moneychangers in an act of judgment.

Matt. 21:12 Then Jesus entered into the temple and he drove out all the ones buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of the ones selling the doves.

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts read *temple of God* instead of *temple*.

Then Jesus entered into the temple and he drove out all the ones buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of the ones selling the doves. Jesus records His distaste for what is occurring in the house of worship. Like Jeremiah smashing the pot (Jeremiah 19) Jesus demonstration was a prophetic act warning of the temple's immediate destruction (24:1,2).

Matt. 21:13 And he said to them, “It is written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you yourselves are making it a robber’s den.”

And he said to them, “It is written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’

but you yourselves are making it a robber’s den.” It has become a place of robbers.

There has been much discussion regarding why Jesus cleansed the temple. Keener argues that it was not because of extortion on the part of the money changers.

The money changers probably did not see themselves as taking advantage of the pilgrims. Even in Galilee the varieties of local currency required money changers to convert coinage for use in the temple (and local economy); changing coins was necessary, not an option . . . Further the temple money changers seem to have made little if any profit (m. Seqalim 1.6-7), though Jerusalem profited from the resultant trade. We have no evidence that the priestly aristocracy made a direct profit (Keener, p. 314).

Blomberg seems to feel there was some evidence of price-gouging.

The Mishnaic document M. Ker. 1:7 gives evidence, at least from a later date, that extraordinary prices for doves exacerbated the plight of the poor (Blomberg, p. 314).

Matt. 21:14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.

And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. This is the proper ministry to occur in the house of God. Jesus, by healing the blind and the lame, rejected their laws which kept the ritually impure from being in the temple. This is the last mention of His healing ministry.

Matt. 21:15 But when the chief priests and scribes saw the marvelous works which he had done, and the children crying out in the temple, and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they became indignant,

But when the chief priests and scribes saw the marvelous works which he had done, After Jesus condemns the commercial system of the temple, He uses the same facility to perform miraculous works.

and the children crying out in the temple, The children understood where the religious rulers did not (see 19:13-15).

and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they became indignant. They cannot accept what the crowd is saying.

Matt. 21:16 and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and infants you have ordained praise?’ ”

and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” Their question implies that Jesus should have rebuked the children for their praise of Him.

And Jesus said to them, “Yes. Have you never read, Again, they are ignorant of the true meaning of the Scriptures.

‘Out of the mouth of babes and infants you have ordained praise?’ ” Shows that the humble

perceive spiritual truth.

Matt. 21:17 And he left them and went outside of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

And he left them The word translated “left” can also be translated “abandoned.”

And went outside of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there. Probably at the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.

THE CURSING OF THE FIG TREE (21:18-19)

Jesus performs only the second destructive miracle of His ministry—the cursing of the fig tree. This miracle is representative of Christ’s coming and failure to find fruit among the people who should have welcomed Him with open arms—particularly so, in light of the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27. This acted out parable of the cursing of the fig tree has a greater meaning than just the cursing of the Jews for their unbelief. It curses all hypocrites who make a show of faith because there is no fruit (compare the parable of the sower).

Matthew records the story for the spiritual lesson it teaches. It is the only one of two recorded miracles in the ministry of Jesus that caused some destruction. It has been a source of embarrassment to many commentators and believers, because it supposedly is out of character for Jesus. But this is not the case. The same Jesus exorcised demons so that two thousand pigs drowned (8:28-34), also drove out the money changers with a whip. In addition, He said not a few things about the torments of hell. It should be noted, however, that these two punitive miracles—the swine and the fig tree—are not directed against men. This, of itself, should teach us something of Jesus’ compassion. He who is to save the people from their sin and its consequences resorts to prophetic actions not directed against His own people, in order to warn them of the power of the devil (the destruction of the pigs) and of God’s hatred with all hypocrisy (the cursing of the fig tree).

Matt. 21:18 And early in the morning, while he was going back to the city, he became hungry.

And early in the morning, while he was going back to the city, Jesus is now returning to Jerusalem.

he became hungry. Jesus approached the fig tree in hope of satisfying His hunger.

Matt. 21:19 And seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except only the leaves. Then He said to it, “No longer may there ever be fruit from you! And suddenly the fig tree withered.

And seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except only the leaves. However, it was not the season for the figs. Fig leaves appear about the same time as the fruit or a little after. The green figs are edible, though they are sufficiently disagreeable as not to be usually eaten until June. The leaves normally point to the prospect of fruit, even if not fully ripe. Sometimes, however, the green figs fall off and leave nothing but leaves

Then He said to it, “No longer may there ever be fruit from you! This fig tree would never bear fruit again.

And suddenly the fig tree withered. Why would Jesus curse a fig tree for not bearing fruit when it was not bearing fruit? The fact that it was not the season for the figs explains why Jesus went to this particular tree, which stood out because it was in leaf. It advertises that it was bearing fruit when it was not. Jesus

uses this to teach a memorable lesson and cursed the tree. It was not because it was not bearing fruit, whether in season or not, but because it made a show of life that promised fruit yet was actually bearing none.

JESUS SPEAKS ABOUT FAITH (21:20-22)

After the fig tree withers Jesus teaches His disciples on the importance of faith.

Matt. 21:20 And when the disciples saw this, they marveled, saying, “How did this fig tree wither so quickly?”

And when the disciples saw this, they marveled, Again we note the response to a miracle of Jesus—it would be the same for you and I.

saying, “How did this fig tree wither so quickly?” Matthew leaves indistinct the time when the disciples saw the withered tree (Mark tells us it was the next day (11:12-14, 20-26). Matthew also has condensed other accounts (9:18-25). Mark places the accounts between Jesus cleansing of the temple. His rage against the fig tree is an acted out parable of the meaning of that cleansing. Instead of finding fruit in Israel, the Messiah finds the dry leaves of hypocrisy and formalism and He judges it.

Matt. 21:21 Jesus answered and said to them, “Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you can not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, “Be taken up and be thrown into the sea, and it will happen.”

Jesus answered and said to them, “Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, The transition between the withering of the fig tree and the statement about faith is somewhat difficult to understand.

you can not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, “Be taken up and be thrown into the sea, and it will happen.” Removing mountains is figurative for doing impossible.

Matt. 21:22 And all things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.

And all things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive. The lesson here is in the power of prayer. This promise has to be read in accordance with the other things Scripture has to say about prayer. We cannot take this verse out of its context and assume that we can get whatever we ask God to give us.

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS QUESTIONED (21:23-27)

After the cleansing of the temple the religious leaders want to know by what authority Jesus is doing these things.

Matt. 21:23 And when he had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him while he was teaching, saying, “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave to you this authority?”

And when he had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to

him while he was teaching, saying, “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave to you this authority?” They want to know what claims He will make for Himself.

Matt. 21:24 And Jesus answered and said to them, “I, too, will ask you one question, which, if you tell me, I, too, will tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

And Jesus answered and said to them, “I, too, will ask you one question, which, if you tell me, I, too, will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. Answering a question with a counterquestion was common in Jewish debate.

Matt. 21:25 The baptism of John: where was it from? From heaven or from men? And they began to discuss among themselves saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven;’ he will say to us, ‘Why, then, did you not believe him?’

The baptism of John: where was it from? From heaven or from men? ’ Heaven means from God.

And they began to discuss among themselves saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven;’ he will say to us, ‘Why, then, did you not believe him?’ If John derived his authority from Heaven then so did Jesus. The messenger acts on the full authority of the one who sent him.

Matt. 21:26 But if we say, ‘From men,’ we are afraid of the crowd; for all regarded John as a prophet.”

But if we say, ‘From men,’ we are afraid of the crowd; for all regarded John as a prophet.” They cannot win no matter how they answer the question.

Matt. 21:27 And they answered Jesus and said, “We do not know.” Then he said to them, “Neither shall I say to you by what authority I am doing these things.”

And they answered Jesus and said, “We do not know.” Then he said to them, “Neither shall I say to you by what authority I am doing these things.” Jesus will not answer this insincere question.

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS (21:28-32)

Jesus now gives the parable of the two sons.

Matt. 21:28 “What do you think? A man had two sons and he went to the first one and said, ‘Son, go out and work today in the vineyard,’

What do you think? A man had two sons and he went to the first one and said, ‘Son, go out and work today in the vineyard,’ The first son was asked to work in the vineyard.

Matt. 21:29 And he answered and said, “I will not.” But later, after changing his mind, he went off.

Note on variant readings: Verses 29-31 have several variant readings. The issues include: Was the son who initially said no but then changed his mind the first or the second son mentioned? (vs 29) Which of the two sons did the Jews assert had done the will of the father (verse 31), and what word did they use in reply to Jesus (verse 32)? The text of these verses is found in three principal forms.

1. Some manuscripts have the first son saying no but afterwards he repents. The second son says

yes but does nothing. Which one did the will of the father? The answer is the first one.

2. Other manuscripts have the first son saying no but afterward he repents. The second son says yes but does nothing. Which one did the will of the father? The answer is the second.

3. The third group of manuscripts have the first son saying yes but doing nothing while the second says no but afterward repents. According to these manuscripts the last one did the will of the father (some editions of the Greek New Testament and the *New American Standard Bible* follow this reading).

And he answered and said, “I will not.” But later, after changing his mind, he went off. The first son had a change of heart and eventually followed His father’s wishes.

Matt. 21:30 And he went to his other son and said the same thing. He answered and said, ‘I will, sir.’ But he did not go.

And he went to his other son and said the same thing. He answered and said, ‘I will, sir.’ But he did not go. The second son agreed to do what his father asked, but never ended up doing it.

Matt. 21:31 Which of the two of them did the will of the father?” They said, “The first one.” He said to them, “Truly, I say to you, that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering into the kingdom of God ahead of you.

Which of the two of them did the will of the father?” They said, “The first one.” He said to them, “Truly, I say to you, that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering into the kingdom of God ahead of you. He could not have given a more offensive comparison.

Matt. 21:32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax gatherers and prostitutes believed him. But you, when you had seen this, neither changed your mind afterward so as to believe in him.

Note on a variant reading: Instead of the last phrase *But you, when you had seen this, neither changed your mind afterward to believe in him.* Some manuscripts read *But you, when you had seen this, at last repented so as to believe in him.*

For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax gatherers and prostitutes believed him. But you, when you had seen this, neither changed your mind afterward so as to believe in him. John’s message was not received by the religious leaders but it was received by those who initially had rejected the way of God.

THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANTS (21:33-46)

Jesus presents another parable to illustrate His point.

Matt. 21:33 “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, placed a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, built a watchtower, rented it to tenants, and then went away on a journey.

“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, placed a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, built a watchtower, rented it to tenants, and then went away on a journey. Landowners generally lived far away and had little personal contact with their workers. He addressed this parable to the rulers of Israel (21:23) reminding them they are mere custodians appointed

by God.

Matt. 21:34 And when the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the tenants to receive his fruit.

And when the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the tenants to receive his fruit. The landowners had the legal power over their tenants.

Matt. 21:35 And the tenants took his slaves, beating one, and killing another one, and stoning another one.

And the tenants took his slaves, beating one, and killing another one, and stoning another one. Here the tenants act as if they are the ones with power.

Matt. 21:36 He sent again other slaves, more than the first time, and they did the same to them.

He sent again other slaves, more than the first time, and they did the same to them. Israel martyred most of its prophets (Acts 7).

Matt. 21:37 Finally, he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’

Finally, he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ The son would command respect.

Matt. 21:38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said among themselves, “This is the heir, come let us kill him and take his inheritance.”

But when the tenants saw the son, they said among themselves, “This is the heir, come let us kill him and take his inheritance.” Tenants presume they will inherit the land. The story paints them as terribly wicked and stupid. The landlord could have stipulated someone else to inherit the vineyard or representatives from the emperor could have seized it. This is probable not an illustration taken from real-life events.

Matt. 21:39 And they took him, and threw him outside of the vineyard, and killed him.

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts reverse the order in this verse *And they took him and killed him and then threw him outside of the vineyard.*

And they took him, and threw him outside of the vineyard, and killed him. Death outside of the camp.

Matt. 21:40 Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” What will be their fate?

Matt. 21:41 They said to him, “The evil ones he will miserably destroy, and he will rent his vineyard to other tenants, who will pay back to him the fruits at the proper times.”

They said to him, “The evil ones he will miserably destroy, and he will rent his vineyard to

other tenants, who will pay back to him the fruits at the proper times.” They pronounce their own judgment.

Matt. 21:42 Jesus said, “Have you not read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected, this one became the cornerstone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’

Jesus said, “Have you not read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected, this one became the cornerstone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’ Jesus is the rejected stone that will become the foundation for the new work of God—the church.

Matt. 21:43 Therefore I say to you, that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and will be given to a nation that produces its fruits.

Therefore I say to you, that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and will be given to a nation that produces its fruits. A very strong statement! The New Testament church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, will now be the people that God is working through—not the nation Israel.

Matt. 21:44 And the one falling upon the stone will be broken to pieces, but on whom it falls will be ground to powder.

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts do not have this verse.

And the one falling upon the stone will be broken to pieces, but on whom it falls will be ground to powder. You fall upon the stone, or the stone will fall upon you.

THE RESPONSE OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS (21:45,46)

Knowing that the parable was aimed at them, the religious leaders wish to arrest Jesus, but they cannot because of the crowd.

Matt. 21:45 And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard this parable, they knew that he was talking about them.

And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard this parable, they knew that he was talking about them. They did not miss the point.

Matt. 21:46 And they were seeking to seize him, but they feared the crowd, for they regarded him to be a prophet.

And they were seeking to seize him, but they feared the crowd, for they regarded him to be a prophet. His time had not yet come.

SUMMARY TO CHAPTER 21

Jesus finally reaches Jerusalem. For the first time He allows Himself to be acknowledged publicly when He enters the city. This, however, was not a triumphal entry in the Roman sense of the term—a conquering military hero. Rather He came in meek and mild riding upon a donkey.

After entering He cleanses the temple overturning the tables of the money changers.

He then curses the fig tree in a symbolic gesture against the hypocrisy of the people.

The religious leaders want to know where He derives His authority. Jesus answers them by asking them a question about the authority of John the Baptist.

The chapter closes with the parable of the two sons and the wicked tenants. After the religious leaders heard the parable they attempted to seize Jesus, but the crowd kept them from going forward.