



Chapter 11

John the Baptist & Personal Discipleship

**By: Michael Fronczak
Bible Study Resource Center
564 Schaeffer Dr.
Coldwater, Michigan 49036**

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The movement continues in this chapter. The Lord Jesus has enunciated the ethic, He has performed the miracles, and He has sent His disciples out to present His claims—they have gone down the highways and by-ways until they have covered all the cities of Israel. Now what is the reception? What is the reaction to His messianic claim? Let me give it to you in one word: *rejection!*

This chapter makes a turning point in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. In verses 28–30 we will see that He gives a new message. It is a definite departure from the message of repentance in view of the presence of the King.¹

Having instructed the Twelve and sent them away, Yeshua continues his itinerant healing and preaching; the narrative joins up with 9:36. The disciples of Yochanan the Immerser come to Yeshua with a message “in code,” which he also answers in code (vv. 2–6). The interchange piques the crowd’s curiosity, on which Yeshua capitalizes by challenging their understanding of Yochanan’s ministry and pinning their attention to the chief subject of his preaching, the Kingdom of Heaven (vv. 7–14; see 3:2N). Finding his hearers dull of spirit he provokes them first with irony over failing to penetrate the surface of things (vv. 15–19), then with direct reproach at not turning from their sins even when confronted with evidence that God is present in a new and mighty way (vv. 20–24). Finally Yeshua states plainly that he himself has power and authority directly from God the Father (vv. 25–27), closing with an unexpectedly gentle challenge that they trust Yeshua as the one who can meet their needs (vv. 28–30).²

Matthew 11:1

And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.

[And it came to pass] The directions to his apostles were given in the vicinity of Capernaum. He went from thence to preach in their cities; that is, in the cities in the vicinity of Capernaum, or in Galilee. He did not yet go into Judea.

[commanded his twelve disciples] All the things commanded the first disciples are still in force (Matthew 28:20). The theories of the gospel of the kingdom being for the Jews and not for the church; the grace of God being for the Gentiles or the church and not for Jews; the Sermon on the Mount and the program of the gospels being for Jews and not for the church; the Gentile church being dealt with only in Acts and the epistles; and the signs, miracles and gifts of the Spirit being for apostles only—all are as erroneous and unscriptural as they can possibly be, serving as mere excuses to evade present gospel responsibility.³

¹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:62). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 11:1). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

³Dake Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

When Jesus had finished signals the conclusion of the Mission Discourse (ch. 10) and provides a transition to the next section. **he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.** Jesus carried on his mission while the Twelve went on theirs (ch. 10).

Chrysostom; “He Went On From There”

After Jesus commissioned the apostles, he proceeded to separate himself from them, to give them room and opportunity to do what he had called them to do. For while he was present with them and healing others, no one would be inclined to approach them.

The Gospel of Matthew, Holy 36: 1⁴

Matthew 11:2

Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,

John the Baptist was in prison in the fortress of Machaerus because he had courageously denounced the adulterous marriage of Herod Antipas and Herodias (Lk 3:19-20). It seems that the Jewish leaders would have opposed Herod and sought to free John, but they did nothing.

The account contained in this chapter of Matthew to the 19th verse, is found, with no material variation, in Luke 7:18-35. John was in prison. Herod had thrown him into confinement, on account of John's faithfulness in reproving him for marrying his brother Philip's wife. See Matthew 14:3,4.

It is not certainly known why John sent to Jesus. It might have been to satisfy his disciples that Jesus was the Messiah; or he might have been desirous of ascertaining for himself whether this person of whom he heard so much was the same one whom he had baptized, and whom he knew to be the Messiah. See John 1:29.⁵

Spurgeon: THE KING VINDICATES AND CHEERS HIS HERALD

Here we begin quite another story. The first verse ought to have gone with the preceding chapter, to which it belongs. John was in prison: he did not make a good caged bird — he of the wilderness and the river — and his faith began to flag. So some think. Was it so? Or was this embassy sent to our Lord for the sake of John's disciples? Were they wavering so much that John could not reassure them without the aid of Jesus? Or was it that John would intimate to our Lord that there were doubts abroad which would be met by a further proclamation of his mission? Was this all that John now thought himself able to do — namely, to call upon the Lord to state his claims in the most decisive manner? Did John resolve to draw from our Lord a very clear statement, that his disciples might thus be readily transferred to Jesus? The question as to our Lord's having a mission was surely not for John's sake: he knew full well that Jesus was the Son of God. But when he heard of all that Jesus did, he may have wondered that he himself was left in prison, and

⁴ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

⁵ Barnes' Notes

he may have thought that possibly another was yet to come before all things could be rectified. Dark thoughts may come to the bravest when pent up in a narrow cell. It was well that John's question was put, that it might receive a distinct reply; reassuring for himself, and instructive for us.⁶

Matthew 11:3

And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

[Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?] Note the difference between John's attitude here concerning Christ and before he went to prison (Matthew 3; Luke 3; John 1:15-36; John 3:22-36). It is clear in these passages he had indisputable proof of His Messiahship. John closed the Old Testament. Luke 16:16. Jesus opens the New Testament. You may wonder did John send these disciples for himself, or for them for a training mission?

[Art thou he that should come] That is, art thou the Messiah, or the Christ. The Jews expected a Saviour. His coming had been long foretold, Genesis 49:10, Isaiah 9:1-6, 11:1-5, 35:4-6, 53:1-12, Daniel 9:24-27. See also John 6:14. Comp. Deuteronomy 18:18,19. In Common language, therefore, he was familiarly described as *he that was to come*. Luke adds here, (Luke 7:21) that at the time when the messengers came to him, Jesus cured many of their infirmities, and plagues, and of evil spirits. An answer was, therefore, ready to the inquiries of John.⁷ John's proclamation of the final judgment and salvation was not being fulfilled as John had anticipated in his preaching. Jesus assures John that the prophecy of Isa 35:5, 6 is happening. Isaiah had a vision of the blessings of healing, life, and good news in the final day. Jesus holds that this is happening in history in His Person, words, and works, though in an unexpected form. John did not perceive the difference between the messianic salvation of the new age, which has now come, and the age to come. He expected the structure of the old age to be disrupted by the coming of the Messiah and was perplexed because it was not happening. This is a question asking clarification, not a question of doubt. In the O.T., the Messiah is presented in a twofold character: one as a Suffering Servant and the other as a reigning monarch. The prophets could not see the great interval of time between the two comings of our Lord.⁸

Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

As John was well aware that Yeshua was Messiah (i.e., John 1:29, Luke 3:22), one may ask, "Why would he ask such a question at this point?" Note that John is not asking if Yeshua is Messiah, but if there may be "another one." Among the various opinions in first-century Judaism concerning the Messiah, was the idea of there being two Messiahs. One of these was considered to be the suffering Messiah (Messiah ben-Joseph) and another, the victorious Messiah that would bring Israel to glory (Messiah ben David). The suffering Messiah would fulfill the duties of priest, and would be killed. The triumphant Messiah would fulfill the role of king and live forever. Some teachings had Messiah ben

⁶ Spurgeon's Commentary on Matthew

⁷ Barnes' Notes

⁸ Believer's Study Bible

David "avenging the death" of Messiah ben Joseph, and even being involved with raising the latter from the dead.

John is clearly considering that Yeshua may be "Messiah ben Joseph." (He would not think of Yeshua as the conquering Messiah, the Lion of Judah, as he knows that Yeshua is the Lamb, come to be slain for the sin of the world (John 1:29). John's background was probably Qumran/Essene, though it would seem he broke away to form his own following. By the time of Yeshua, the Essenes (as shown in the Dead Sea Scrolls) were developing a very accurate picture of Messiah, as king and priest being united in one person.

The figure of Melchizadek plays an important role in many of the Qumran writings, with his name being substituted for YHWH's in certain scrolls:

11Q13 - For this is the time decreed for the year of Melchizadek's favor and by his might he will judge God's holy ones and so establish a righteous kingdom, as it is written about him in the songs of David, "A godlike being has taken his place in the council of God; in the midst of the divine beings he holds judgment. Scripture also says about him, Over [it] take your seat in the highest heaven; A divine being will judge his people."⁹

Jerome; "Shall We Look for Another?" "Are You He Who Is To come?"

John asks this not because he is ignorant but to guide others who are ignorant and to say to them, "Behold, the Lamb of god, who takes away the sin of the world!" And he had heard the voice of the Father saying, "this is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased." Rather, it is the same sort of question as when the Savior asked where Lazarus was buried. The people only meant to show him the tomb, but he wanted them to be brought to faith and see the dead man return to life. Similarly, when John was about to be killed by Herod, he sent his disciples to Christ, intending that when they met him, the disciples would observe his appearance and powers and believe in him, and they would tell this to their teacher when he questioned them.

Commentary on Matthew 2:11.3.¹⁰

Matthew 11:4

Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see:

[Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see] Jesus answered John by showing the works of the Messiah predicted in Isaiah 11:2; Isaiah 35:5-6; Isaiah 61:1. These were His credentials (John 5:36; John 9:3-4; John 10:25,37-38; John 14:10; John 15:24; Acts 10:38). These are the divine credentials of all gospel ministers (Matthew 10:1-8; Mark 6:7-13; Mark 16:17-20; Luke 9:6; Luke 10:1-20; Luke 24:49; John 7:37-39; John 14:12-15; John 15:16; Acts 1:1-8; Acts 2:43; Acts 3:6; Acts 4:30; Acts 5:12-16; Acts 6:3-10; Acts 8:1-17; Acts 9:17,34; Acts 15:12; etc.).

⁹ Yashanet.com

¹⁰ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Thomas C. Oden, Intersity Press

[Go and shew John again] Jesus referred them for an answer to these miracles. They were proof that he was the Messiah. Prophets had indeed wrought miracles, but no prophet had wrought so many, or any so important. Jesus, moreover, wrought them *in his own name*, and by his own power. Prophets had done it by the power of God. Jesus, therefore, performed the works which none but the Messiah could do; and John might easily *infer* that he was the Christ.¹¹

Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see ...

Yeshua does not give a straightforward reply. His answer consists of presenting John with certain "evidences" - His miracles. These acts are directly associated with the "Jubilee Release," a concept related to Messiah returning the world to the way it once was.

There is something very curious in Yeshua's reply when compared to Isaiah's prophecy:

Matthew 11:5 - *The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them*

Isaiah 35:5-6 - *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.*

The key difference between these two Scriptures is the issue of "the dead being raised up." Isaiah does not mention this. Yet, in the scrolls found at Qumran, is one that relates the raising of the dead to the Messiah.

The Qumran *Redemption and Resurrection* scroll says of the Messiah:

4Q521 - *For He will honor the pious upon the throne of His eternal kingdom, setting prisoners free, opening the eyes of the blind, raising up those who are bowed down ...
... and the Lord shall do glorious things which have not been done, just as He said. For He shall heal the critically wounded, He shall revive the dead, He shall send good news to the afflicted ...*

This may suggest that Yeshua and John were communicating, using a mutually-recognized teaching not found in the Tenakh, but known to those who spent time "in the wilderness" (as both Yeshua and John did).¹²

¹¹ Barnes' Notes

¹² Yashanet.com

Matthew 11:5

The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them

These miracles were not only the most convincing proofs of the supreme power of Christ, but were also emblematic of that work of salvation which he effects in the souls of men.

1. Sinners are blind; their understanding is so darkened by sin that they see not the way of truth and salvation.
2. They are lame—not able to walk in the path of righteousness.
3. They are leprous, their souls are defiled with sin, the most loathsome and inveterate disease; deepening in themselves, and infecting others.
4. They are deaf to the voice of God, his word, and their own conscience.
5. They are dead in trespasses and sins; God, who is the life of the soul, being separated from it by iniquity.

Nothing less than the power of Christ can redeem from all this; and, from all this, that power of Christ actually does redeem every penitent believing soul. Giving sight to the blind, and raising the dead, are allowed by the ancient rabbins to be works which the Messiah should perform, when he should manifest himself in Israel.¹³

[The poor have the Gospel preached to them] It was predicted of the Messiah, that he would preach good tidings to the meek, Isaiah 41:1; or, as it is rendered in the New Testament, preach the gospel to the poor, Luke 4:18. By this therefore, also, John might infer that he was truly the Messiah. It adds to the force of this testimony, that the poor have always been overlooked by Pharisees and philosophers. No sect of philosophers had condescended to notice them before Christ; and no system of religion had attempted to instruct them, before the Christian religion. In all other schemes, the poor have been passed by as unworthy of notice.¹⁴

Chrysostom; “Blessed Is One Who Takes No Offense”

Jesus knew the mind of John who sent them, for he knew, as God knows, our inner thoughts. There he was, actively healing, the blind, lame, and many others. He healed not to teach John, who was already convinced, but those who had come to him doubting. Having healed them he said, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: 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.” And then he added pointedly, “And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.” By saying this Jesus implied that he knew even his questioners’ unuttered thoughts. For if he had said simply “I am he,” this would have fallen short of overcoming their unstated sense of being offended. And it would have given fuel to some Jews who were already saying to him, “You bear record of yourself.” Hence he answered nothing directly concerning his identity but left them to learn of it from the miracles, freeing what he taught from suspicion and making it plainer. Then Jesus gently chided them for being silently offended in him. He made their case for them, leaving it to their own conscience alone to judge, calling no witness of his

¹³ Adam Clarke’s Commentary

¹⁴ Barnes’ Notes

reprimand other than they themselves who knew what they had been thinking. For it was of their own inward offense that he was thinking when he said, "Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me." In this way Christ drew them all the more closely to himself.

*The Gospel of Matthew, Holily 36.2*¹⁵

Matthew 11:6

And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

(Isaiah 35:4-6) Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.

[blessed is he] First beatitude since Matthew 5:3-11. Note others in this gospel (Matthew 13:16; Matthew 14:19; Matthew 16:17; Matthew 21:9; Matthew 23:39; Matthew 24:46; Matthew 25:34; Matthew 26:26).

[offended in me] Stumble at Me and My teachings. Many did (Luke 4:22,28; John 6:66; John 7:30-44; John 8:19-44).

[not be offended in me] Isaiah 8:14,15, 1 Corinthians 1:22,23, 1 Peter 2:8

[And blessed is he] The word *offence* means a stumbling-block. Matthew 5:29. This verse might be rendered, "Happy is he to whom I shall not prove a stumbling-block!" That is, happy is he who shall not take offence at my poverty and lowliness of life, so as to reject me and my doctrine. Happy is he who can, notwithstanding that poverty and obscurity, see the evidence that I am the Messiah, and follow me. It is not improbable that John wished Jesus publicly to proclaim himself as the Christ, instead of seeking retirement. Jesus replied that he *gave* sufficient evidence of that by his *works*; that a man might discover it if he chose; and that he was blessed who would seek that evidence, and embrace him as the Christ, in spite of his humble manner of life.¹⁶

McGee: The answer of Jesus is remarkable and can be understood only in light of the credentials which the Old Testament said the Messiah would have. This is a direct reference to Isaiah 35:4–6: "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert."

Now waters did not break out in the wilderness nor were there streams in the desert when Jesus came. Why? Because He did not establish the kingdom when He came the

¹⁵ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

¹⁶ Barnes' Notes

first time. But He was the King, and He had the credentials of the Messiah—that is all He is saying. John would recognize the credentials.¹⁷

Yochanan the Immerser, apparently discouraged by being **put in prison** after having announced Yeshua as the Messiah (3:11, 17; Yn 1:27, 29), asks, “**Are you the one who is to come?**”—the one who will put an end to political oppression and get me out of jail? The question is in code, for the phrase, “the one who is to come,” would be clear only to those acquainted with Yochanan’s teaching. Had they asked, “Are you the Messiah?” it would have been more difficult for Yeshua to send an answer to Yochanan without revealing his identity, which he was not yet wanting to do (see 8:4&N, 9:30).

Yeshua’s answer is also in code. He refers to prophecies in the book of Isaiah of six signs which the Messiah will give when he comes: he will make the blind see (Isaiah 29:18, 35:5), make the lame walk (Isaiah 35:6, 61:1), cleanse lepers (Isaiah 61:1), make the deaf hear (Isaiah 29:18, 35:5), raise the dead (implied in Isaiah 11:1–2 but not made specific), and evangelize the poor (Isaiah 61:1–2 in the light of 4:23N above). Since he has done all these things (chapters 8–9), the message should be clear: Yeshua is the one; Yochanan need not look for another. See 8:1–4N.

But his answer avoids mentioning the Messianic sign of “proclaiming liberty to the captives” (Isaiah 61:1). Added to his remark, “**How blessed is anyone not offended by me,**” Yeshua seems to be saying delicately that even though he is the Messiah, Yochanan will not be set free—as proves to be the case (below, 14:1–12).

Another view of this passage: Yochanan had prophesied that the Coming One would be an instrument of judgment as well as compassion. But in prison he had heard nothing of judgment, only of compassionate miracles. His question thus arises from lacking insight into a first coming in mercy and a second coming for judgment.¹⁸

Matthew 11:7

And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, **What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?**

[**What went ye**] Luke 7:24-30

[**with the wind**] Ephesians 4:14, James 1:6

What went ye out into the wilderness to see?—The purport of our Lord’s design, in this and the following verses, is to convince the scribes and Pharisees of the inconsistency of their conduct in acknowledging John Baptist for a divinely authorized teacher, and not believing in the very Christ which he pointed out to them. He also shows, from the excellencies of John’s character, that their confidence in him was not

¹⁷McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:62). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁸Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 11:3). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

misplaced, and that this was a farther argument why they should have believed in him, whom the Baptist proclaimed as being far superior to himself.¹⁹

A reed shaken with the wind?—An emblem of an irresolute, unsteady mind, which believes and speaks one thing to-day, and another to-morrow. Christ asks these Jews if they had ever found anything in John like this: Was he not ever steady and uniform in the testimony he bore to me? The first excellency which Christ notices in John was his steadiness; convinced once of the truth, he continued to believe and assert it. This is essentially necessary to every preacher, and to every private Christian. He who changes about from opinion to opinion, and from one sect or party to another, is never to be depended on; there is much reason to believe that such a person is either mentally weak, or has never been rationally and divinely convinced of the truth.²⁰

McGee: By the way, John was not the reed shaken with the wind; he was a wind shaking the reeds! In our day, the pulpit has become very weak because it is in subjection to somebody sitting out there in the pew who doesn't like the preacher. Or the message is tailored to suit a certain group in the church. Too often the pulpit is a reed that is shaken in the wind. Thank God for John the Baptist, a wind shaking the reeds!²¹

[A reed shaken with the wind] Persian reeds were in great quantities on the Jordan. They grew up to 20 feet tall and were fresh green when all else seemed to be dead and dry. They made shelter for birds and animals (Job 40:21). This statement was a Hebrew idiom for a weakling who was irresolute and unsteady, believing and speaking one thing one day and another thing the next day. Steadiness is here noted of John the Baptist.

[And as they departed] . Jesus took occasion, from the inquiries made by John's disciples, to instruct the people respecting the true character of John. Multitudes had gone out to hear him, when he preached in the desert, (Matt. iii) and it is probable that many had been attracted by the novelty of his appearance or doctrines, and many had gone simply to see and hear a man of singular habits and opinions. Probably many who followed Christ had been of that number. He took occasion, therefore, by some striking questions, to examine the motives by which they had been drawn to his ministry.²²

[A reed shaken with the wind?] The region of country in which John preached, being overflowed annually by the Jordan, produced great quantities of *reeds*, or *canes*, of a light, fragile nature, easily shaken by the wind. They were therefore an image of a light, changing, inconstant man. John's sending to Christ to inquire his character, might have led some to suppose that he was changing and inconstant, like a reed. He had once acknowledged him to be the Messiah, and now, being in prison and sending to him to inquire into the fact, they might have supposed he had no firmness, or fixed principles.

¹⁹ Adam Clarke's Commentary

²⁰ Adam Clarke's Commentary

²¹ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:62). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²² Barnes' Notes

Jesus, by asking this question, declared, that notwithstanding this appearance, this was not the character of John.²³

Spurgeon: Our Lord will sooner or later bear testimony to the man who has faithfully testified of him. John honors Jesus; and in due time Jesus honors John. Our Lord asks his hearers what they thought of John. You went to see John; you even “went out into the wilderness” to have a look at him. What did you see? A vacillating orator? A man who felt the influence of his times, and bowed before its spirit, like a bulrush in the breeze? Nay, verily; John was no time-server, no flattering courtier, no pleaser of the great. The Baptist had not sent to Jesus because he was weak, but because he was honestly outspoken, and so anxious for absolute certainty that he could not endure the shadow of a doubt. John sent to headquarters to make assurance doubly sure, by a new declaration from Christ’s own lips.²⁴

Matthew 11:8

But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft *clothing* are in kings’ houses.

[**soft raiment**] Mantles made of silk or linen and worn by the gentry in the East (cp. Matthew 3:4). John's simplicity and ruggedness are here stated.

A man clothed in soft raiment?—A second excellency in John was, his sober and mortified life. A preacher of the Gospel should have nothing about him which savours of effeminacy and worldly pomp: he is awfully mistaken who thinks to prevail on the world to hear him and receive the truth, by conforming himself to its fashions and manners. Excepting the mere color of his clothes, we can scarcely now distinguish a preacher of the Gospel, whether in the establishment of the country, or out of it, from the merest worldly man. Ruffles, powder, and fribble seem universally to prevail. Thus the Church and the world begin to shake hands, the latter still retaining its enmity to God. How can those who profess to preach the doctrine of the cross act in this way? Is not a worldly-minded preacher, in the most peculiar sense, an abomination in the eyes of the Lord?²⁵

Are in kings’ houses—A third excellency in John was, he did not affect high things. He was contented to live in the desert, and to announce the solemn and severe truths of his doctrine to the simple inhabitants of the country. Let it be well observed, that the preacher who conforms to the world in his clothing, is never in his element but when he is frequenting the houses and tables of the rich and great.²⁶

[**Clothed in soft raiment**] The kind of raiment here denoted was the light, thin clothing worn by effeminate persons. It was made commonly of fine linen, and was worn chiefly

²³ Barnes’ Notes

²⁴ Spurgeon’s Commentary on Matthew

²⁵ Adam Clarke’s Commentary

²⁶ Adam Clarke’s Commentary

for ornament. Christ asks them whether they were attracted by anything like that. He says that the desert was not the place to expect it. In the palaces of kings, in the court of Herod, it might be expected; but not in the place where John was. This kind of clothing was an emblem of riches, splendour, effeminacy, feebleness of character. He meant to say that John was a man of a different stamp: coarse in exterior; hardy in his character; firm in his virtue; fitted to endure trials and privations, and thus qualified to be the forerunner of the toiling and Suffering Messiah.²⁷

Matthew 11:9

But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

[more than a prophet] More, because what the prophets predicted John actually saw and handled (John 1:31-34; 1 John 1:1).

[A prophet?] He next asks whether they went to see a prophet? They *had* regarded him as such; and Jesus tells them that in this their apprehensions of him were correct.

A prophet? yea—and more than a prophet—That is, one more excellent (περισσοτερον) than a prophet; one greatly beyond all who had come before him, being the immediate forerunner of Christ, (see below), and who was especially commissioned to prepare the way of the Lord.

This was a fourth excellency: he was a prophet, a teacher, a man divinely commissioned to point out Jesus and his salvation; and more excellent than any of the old prophets, because he not only pointed out this Christ, but saw him, and had the honor of dying for that sacred truth which he steadily believed and boldly proclaimed.²⁸

[More than a prophet] Sustaining a character more elevated and sacred than the most distinguished of the ancient prophets. Those had been regarded as the most eminent of the prophets who had most clearly predicted the Messiah. Isaiah had been distinguished above all others for the sublimity of his writings, and the clearness with which he had foretold the coming of Christ. Yet John surpassed even him. He lived in the time of the Christ. He predicted his coming with still more clearness. He was the instrument of introducing him to the nation. He was, therefore, first among the prophets.²⁹

²⁷ Barnes' Notes

²⁸ Adam Clarke's Commentary

²⁹ Barnes' Notes

Matthew 11:10

For this is *he*, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

[For this is he] The passage of Scripture here quoted is found in Malachi 3:1. The substance of it is contained also in Isaiah 40:3.

[is written] Isaiah 40:3, Mal 3:1, Luke 1:76

[Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee] The 9th Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in Matthew (Matthew 11:10; Malachi 3:1). Next, Matthew 12:17.

Behold, I send my messenger—A fifth excellency of the Baptist was, his preparing the way of the Lord; being the instrument, in God’s hand, of preparing the people’s hearts to receive the Lord Jesus; and it was probably through his preaching that so many thousands attached themselves to Christ, immediately on his appearing as a public teacher.³⁰

The Lord declares clearly that John is the fulfillment of Malachi 3:1, which states: “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.” John was that messenger. John was specially chosen to introduce the Messiah to Israel. Note also John 1:21–23.

Chrysostom; “How John is greater than a prophet”

But suppose someone might say, “What if John had one opinion earlier but later changed his mind?” This is why Jesus spoke further about his garments, his imprisonment and his role in prophecy. Having said that he is greater than a prophet, Jesus signifies also in what was he is greater. And in what is he greater? In being so very near the One who was to come,

*The Gospel of Matthew Homily 37.2*³¹

Matthew 11:11

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

He is suggesting that John the Baptist is the end of an era, and there is a new era just begun. Luke 16:16. When did the Old Testament end? John the Baptist.

³⁰ Adam Clarke’s Commentary

³¹ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

[greater than John the Baptist] The comparison of greatness is not absolute, but relative to certain aspects of the parties involved. Such a statement could not make a full and accurate measure of even John's life, much less of all who lived before him. Christ wanted the people to comprehend the religious reformation with which both He and John were identified. It could not be that Jesus sought to convey the idea that John was greater in moral character, holy living, obedience to, or intimacy with God, or that he had more natural and spiritual gifts and abilities than all those Old Testament prophets whose great ministries excelled that of John in many respects. In view of the inferiority of the law with the gospel, and of man's position and privileges in the new order being so much better and greater than under the law of Moses, there was no similarity (2 Cor. 3:6-15; Hebrews 8:6). It was John's position and privilege of representing the Messiah who was to bring these changes that made him greater than other prophets.

[least in the kingdom of God is greater than he] Greater in position and privileges in the fullness of the gospel than was John's position under law in introducing the Messiah who was to bring the fullness of blessing and grace to men (John 1:16-17). John could only have a measure of the Spirit (John 1:15-17; Matthew 3:14), but now the least believer can have the fullness (John 7:37-39; John 14:12-15; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8; Acts 2:38-39; Acts 5:32; Ephes. 3:19). Men could only have certain gifts of the Spirit in Old Testament days. Now the least believer may have them all (Mark 16:15-20; John 14:12-15; 1 Cor. 12). Many other blessings the gospel promises now which could not have been given anyone before Christ (2 Cor. 3:6-15; Hebrews 8:6; 1 Peter 1:10-12). No believer in this period can be greater than John in the points under note ^b, above.

A greater than John the Baptist—A sixth excellency of the Baptist—he was greater than any prophet from the beginning of the world till that time:—

- 1st. Because he was prophesied of by them, Isaiah 40:3, and Malachi 3:1, where Jesus Christ himself seems to be the speaker.
- 2ndly. Because he had the privilege of showing the fulfillment of their predictions, by pointing out that Christ has now come, which they foretold should come. And
- 3dly. Because he saw and enjoyed that salvation which they could only foretell. See Quesnel.

Notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven—By the kingdom of heaven in this verse is meant, the fullness of the blessings of the Gospel of peace; which fullness was not known till after Christ had been crucified, and had risen from the dead. Now the least in this kingdom, the meanest preacher of a crucified, risen, and glorified Savior, was greater than John, who was not permitted to live to see the plenitude of Gospel grace, in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Let the reader observe,

- 1st. That the kingdom of heaven here does not mean the state of future glory. See Matthew 3:2.
- 2dly. That it is not in holiness or devotedness to God that the least in this kingdom is greater than John; but
- 3dly. That it is merely in the difference of the ministry.

The prophets pointed out a Christ that was coming; John showed that that Christ was then among them; and the preachers of the Gospel prove that this Christ has suffered, and entered into his glory, and that repentance and remission of sins are proclaimed through

his blood. There is a saying similar to this among the Jews: “Even the servant maid that passed through the Red Sea, saw what neither Ezekiel, nor any other of the prophets had seen.”³²

[Them that are born of women] This is an emphatic way of saying that there *had never* been a greater man than John. See Job 14:1.

No man ever fulfilled his God-given purpose better than John. Yet in God’s coming kingdom all members will have a greater spiritual heritage than John because they will have seen and known Christ and his finished work on the cross.

Matthew 11:12

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

[days of John the Baptist until now] Including John's ministry, proving that he was as much in the kingdom of heaven as Christ and others who proclaimed it (Matthew 3:2; Matthew 4:17; Matthew 10:7; Matthew 11:12).

[suffereth] Greek: *biazō* (GSN-971), to use force, to force one's way into a thing. The idea here is that before John the kingdom could only be viewed in the light of prophecy; but now that it was preached, men were pressing into it with ardor resembling violence or desperation. They appeared as if they would seize it by force (Matthew 11:12; Luke 16:16). It expresses the earnestness that men must have in getting rid of sin, all satanic powers, the world, and in standing true when relatives oppose them (Matthew 10:34-39).

[And from the days of John] That is, from the days when John began to preach. It is not known how long this was, but it was not probably more than a year. Our Saviour here simply states a fact. He says there was a great *rush*, or a *crowd* pressing to hear John. Multitudes went out to hear him, as if they were about to take the kingdom of heaven by force. See Matthew 3:5. So, says he, it has continued. Since *the kingdom of heaven*, or *the gospel*, has been preached, there has been a *rush* to it. Men have been *earnest* about it; they have come *pressing* to obtain the blessing, as if they would take it by violence. There is allusion here to the manner in which cities were taken. Besiegers *pressed* upon them with violence, and demolished the walls. With such *earnestness* and *violence*, he says, men had pressed around him and John, since they began to preach. There is no allusion here to the manner in which individual sinners seek salvation; but it is a simple record of the fact that multitudes had thronged around him and John to hear the gospel.³³

the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

The concept of violence surrounding God's attempts to set up His kingdom on earth is also found in the mystical writings of a Hebrew commentary called the Zohar. The Zohar section below also makes a connection between this turbulence of the Kingdom and the

³² Adam Clarke's Commentary

³³ Barnes' Notes

feast of Rosh Hashana, with atonement coming on Yom Kippur. This parallels Revelation's period of great tribulation that befalls the earth (as we will discuss in our Revelation study.)

Soncino Zohar, Bereshith, Section 1, Page 174a - *With Benjamin, the Shekinah was equipped with the full twelve tribes, and with him the kingdom of heaven began to be made manifest on earth. Now the beginning of any manifestation is brought about with strain, and involves a doom of death before it can become established. Here, when the Shekinah was about to assume her rightful place and to take over the house, the doom fell upon Rachel. Similarly, when the kingdom was about to be made manifest on earth, it commenced with a judgement, and the kingdom was not established in its place until a doom had fallen upon Saul, in accordance with his deserts; and only then was it established. It is a general rule that beginnings are rough, whereas the subsequent course is smooth. Thus, on New Year's day (Rosh-hashana) the year opens with severity, as the whole world passes under judgement, each individual according to his deeds, but soon after comes relief and forgiveness and atonement.*³⁴

THE KINGDOM OFFER

In examining the text of Isaiah 60:22 the ancient Rabbis noticed what they called a "contradiction" in the phrase "I, the L-RD, will hasten it in its time." The Talmud discusses this verse as follows:

R. Alexandri said: R. Joshua b. Levi pointed out a contradiction. It is written, "In its time [will the Messianic Kingdom come], whilst it is also written, "I [the L-RD] will hasten it!"-- If they are worthy, I will hasten it; if not, [it will come] at the due time. [b.San. 98a]

Thus, the Rabbis understood this verse to mean that the L-RD would offer to hasten the Messianic Kingdom, if they were worthy but if not, the Kingdom would not come until its due time.

Tractate Sanhedrin of the Talmud also tells us that the Rabbis believed that such an offer was to be made around the Hebrew year 4,000 (around the first Century). The Talmud relates this tradition which it accredits to the school of Elijah:

The school of Elijah teaches: The world is to exist six thousand years. In the first two thousand years was chaos; two thousand years the Torah flourished; and the next two thousand years are the days of the Messiah, but through our many iniquities all these years have been lost. [b.San. 96a-97b]

The text goes on to discuss the delay of the Messianic Kingdom, and then says:

Rab said: All the predetermined dates [for the Messianic Kingdom] have passed, and the matter [now] depends only on repentance and good deeds. [b.San. 97b]

³⁴ Yashanet.com

This requirement for repentance prior to the Messianic Kingdom is taken directly from the Torah (see Deut. 30:1-6).³⁵

Matthew 11:13

For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

[until John] Until John's ministry, not its end.

All the prophets and the law prophesied until John—I believe προεφητευσαν means here, they taught, or continued to instruct. They were the instructors concerning the Christ who was to come, till John came and showed that all the predictions of the one, and the types and ceremonies of the other were now about to be fully and finally accomplished; for Christ was now revealed. The word is taken in this sense, Matthew 7:22.³⁶

For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

The Greek text has the word "until" (John). However, the *Shem Tobe Hebrew book of Matthew* has the term "concerning" (John). The Hebrew spelling of the "concerning" is AYIN LAMED. The term "until" would be spelled AYIN-DALET.

Since Yeshua has just quoted from the prophets about John, it is clear that the prophets prophesied CONCERNING John. It would therefore appear that a translator misread the text. This is quite possible, as the two letters are very similar. If the top of a LAMED was not clear (i.e., flaked off of the manuscript), it could easily be mistaken for a DALET.³⁷

Matthew 11:14

And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

[this is Elias, which was for to come] He represents Elijah in spirit and power (Luke 1:17), not Elijah in person (John 1:21) who is yet to come (Malachi 4:5-6; Zech. 4:11-14; Rev. 11:3-11).

This is Elias, which was for to come—This should always be written Elijah, that as strict a conformity as possible might be kept up between the names in the Old Testament and the New. The Prophet Malachi, who predicted the coming of the Baptist in the spirit and power of Elijah, gave the three following distinct characteristics of him. First, That he should be the forerunner and messenger of the Messiah: Behold I send my messenger before me, Malachi 3:1. Secondly, That he should appear before the destruction of the second temple: Even the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, *ibid*. Thirdly, That he should preach repentance to the Jews; and that, some time after, the great and terrible day of the Lord should come, and the Jewish land be smitten with a curse, Malachi 4:5, 6. Now these three characters agree perfectly with the conduct of the

³⁵ Yashanet.com

³⁶ Adam Clarke's Commentary

³⁷ Yashanet.com

Baptist, and what shortly followed his preaching, and have not been found in any one else; which is a convincing proof that Jesus was the promised Messiah.³⁸

[**This is Elias**] . That is, *Elijah*. Elias is the *Greek* mode of writing the Hebrew word *Elijah*. An account of him is found in the first and second books of Kings. He was a distinguished prophet, and was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire, 2 Kings 2:11. The prophet Malachi, (Malachi 4:5,6) predicted that *Elijah* should be sent before the coming of the Messiah, to prepare the way for him. By this was evidently meant, not that he should appear in person, but that one should appear with a striking resemblance to him; or, as Luke Luke 1:17 expresses it, "in the spirit and power of Elijah." But the Jews understood it differently. They expected that Elijah would appear in person. They also supposed that Jeremiah and some other of the prophets would appear also to usher in the promised Messiah, and to grace his advent. Matthew 16:14, 17:10, John 1:21. This *expectation* was the reason why he used the words, *if ye will receive it*, implying that the affirmation that John was the promised Elijah, was a doctrine contrary to their expectation.³⁹

And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

The key part to this verse are the first words. *If Israel would receive it ...* What is the "it" in this statement? The topic has not changed - "it" is the Kingdom. What Yeshua is saying here is that IF they as His people, accepted Him and the Kingdom offer, then John would play the role foretold of Elijah.

This remains a difficult text however. John clearly says that he is not Elijah (John 1:21), yet Yeshua says that he is. On the surface, a contradiction.

The first hint as to the answer is found in Luke's account where we are told John comes in the "spirit and power" of Elijah:

Luke 1:17: *And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

The idea of someone coming "in the spirit" of another is not foreign to Judaism. The prophet Elias asked for a "double helping" of Elijah's spirit. Neither is the idea of Elijah playing dual roles alien to Jewish writings. In the following citations (1), we see Elijah mysteriously hiding himself in order to fulfill an early and later role:

Midrash Zuta, shir haShirim 2:8 - *The voice of my beloved, behold it cometh (Songs 2;8). These are the voices which will come in the future before the Messiah ... For the door (of Redemption) will not be opened completely at once, but Elijah will come to one city and remain hidden to another, and will speak to one man and remain hidden to his neighbor ...*

Seder 'Olam Rabba, ch. 17 - *In the second year of (King) Ahazia, Elijah was hidden, and he will not be seen again until King Messiah comes. And then he will be seen but will be hidden a second time, and seen again only when Gog and Magog come.*

³⁸ Adam Clarke's Commentary

³⁹ Barnes' Notes

This second section (above) is especially interesting, as Elijah comes with Messiah the first time and returns a second time at "Gog and Magog." Yet we know that "Gog and Magog" is directly associated with Messiah, hence He must come twice as well:

Talmud, Mas. Avodah Zarah 3b - ... *but when the battle of Gog-Magog will come about they will be asked, 'For what purpose have you come?' and they will reply: 'Against God and His Messiah'*

Soncino Zohar, Shemoth, Section 2, Page 57b - "*Thy right hand, O Lord, glorified in power*", refers to this time, to this world; the words "*Thy right hand will dash the enemy*" to the time of the Messiah; "*In the fulness of thy majesty thou wilt overthrow thine opponents*" to the time of Gog and Magog;

(See also: Talmud; Berachoth 10a, Shabbat 118a; Sanhedrin 94a; Leviticus Rabbah 30:5, Song of Songs Rabbah 4:20)⁴⁰

Matthew 11:15

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Seven Churches in Revelation, "He that hath an ear..." The seven churches are anticipated by seven kingdom parables in Matthew 13!

Elijah Promised

- John was the last of the Old Testament prophets.
- Christ states that John's ministry was the fulfillment of Malachi 3:1
 - Had the nation received Jesus, John would have been the Elijah promised by God (v. 14, Cf. 17:10-13).
 - Because they rejected both John and Jesus, the literal and final fulfillment will not come until the end times (Mal 3:1-3).

(Matthew 17:10-13) *And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.*

[He that hath ears to hear, let him hear] First of 15 times and only by Christ to call attention to certain utterances: 7 times on earth (Matthew 11:15; Matthew 13:9,43; Mark 4:9,23; Mark 7:16; Luke 8:8; Luke 14:35); and 8 times in heaven (Rev. 2:7,11,17,29; Rev. 3:6,13,22; Rev. 13:9).

McGee: John the Baptist fulfilled the prediction of the messenger to come, as recorded in Malachi 3:1. But the question arises: "If Israel had accepted Christ at His first coming,

⁴⁰ Yashanet.com

would He have established the kingdom immediately, and would John the Baptist have been Elijah?" The answer is *yes*. You say, "How can that be?" I have an answer for you: I don't know. I only know that this is what Jesus said, and He can do things which I cannot explain. In fact, He does a lot of things which I can't explain; I simply accept them.

There are those who argue, "Well, if Christ intended to go to the cross and die, His offer of Himself as King was not a sincere offer." But it *was* sincere. "But," they insist, "what if Israel had accepted Jesus as their King?" Well, the point is that they *didn't*! These are "if" questions we are asking, and the fact is that the Jews rejected the Lord. "Iffy" questions pose problems that don't exist. And there are enough problems that do exist without making up some!

The next two verses compose one of the Lord's parables that was loaded with biting sarcasm and irony. The Lord did not give this story to hurt or to harm but to illustrate a great truth.⁴¹

Spurgeon: This matter is worthy of earnest heed. If you can hear anything, hear this truth. This call to attention needs to be oft repeated. Through the hearing ear, the divine blessing comes to the soul; therefore hear, and your soul shall live. Our Lord and King, who made the ear, has a right to demand its attention to his voice. Some men have no ears to hear truth, but quick ears for falsehood. We should be grateful if the Lord has given us spiritual perception; for "the hearing ear and the seeing eye" are from the Lord.⁴²

Matthew 11:16

But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,

[But whereunto shall I liken this generation?] The Jews were like stubborn children who would not take part in games of dance, funerals, weddings, etc. (Matthew 11:18). They refused every proposition offered by Jesus.

[this generation] Occurs 16 times and always of a particular span of life and not of a race of people (Matthew 11:16; Matthew 12:41-42; Matthew 23:36; Matthew 24:34; Mark 8:12; Mark 13:30; Luke 7:31; Luke 11:30-32,50-51; Luke 17:25; Luke 21:32). Note the epithets used of the generation that rejected Christ, such as "evil," "adulterous" (Matthew 12:39,45; Matthew 16:4; Mark 8:38; Luke 11:29); "faithless and perverse" (Matthew 17:17; Mark 9:19; Luke 9:41); and "untoward" (Acts 2:40).

[fellows] Friends, as in Matthew 20:13; Matthew 22:12; Matthew 26:50.

[But whereunto shall I liken] Christ proceeds to reprove the inconsistency and fickleness of that age of men. He says they were like children. Nothing pleased them. tie refers here to the *plays* or *sport* of children. Instrumental music, or piping, and dancing, were used in marriages and festivals, as a sign of joy. Children imitate their parents and

⁴¹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:63). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴²Spurgeon's Commentary on Matthew

others, and *act over* in play what they see done by others. Among their childish sports, therefore was probably an imitation of a wedding, or festival occasion. We have seen also, Matthew 9:23 that funerals were attended with mournful music, and lamentation, and howling. It is not improbable that children also, in play, imitated a mournful funeral procession. One part are represented as sullen and dissatisfied. They would not enter into the play. Nothing pleased them. The others complained of it. We have, said they, taken all pains to please you. We have piped to you, played lively tunes, and engaged in cheerful sports, but you would not join with us; and then we have played different games, and imitated the mourning at funerals, and you are equally sullen; *you have not lamented*; you have not joined with us. Nothing pleases you. So, said Christ, is this generation of men. *John* came one way; *neither eating nor drinking*, abstaining as a Nazarene, and you were not pleased with him. I, the Son of man, have come in a different manner, *eating and drinking*; not practicing any austerity, but living like other men, and you are equally dissatisfied. Nay, you are less pleased, You calumniate him, and abuse me for not doing the very thing which displeased you in John. Nothing pleases you. You are fickle, changeable, inconstant, and abusive.⁴³

Matthew 11:17

And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.

You are not dancing to our tune.

Matthew 11:18

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.

[For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil] John abstained from all social life (see Luke 1:80). Not once is it recorded that he was entertained like Jesus frequently was (Matthew 8:15; Matthew 9:10; Luke 7:36; Luke 22:15; John 2). He lived a separated life and you would not receive him. I came accepting invitations to eat and you call me a winebibber and a glutton and you reject Me.

Matthew 11:19

The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

Jesus kept company with sinners. He was a man of the people

⁴³ Barnes' Notes

[gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners] His enemies said this of Him, but there is no evidence that He was intemperate in eating or drinking.

[Wine-bibber] One who drinks much wine. A great drinker. Jesus undoubtedly lived according to the general customs of the people of his time. He did not affect singularity; he did not separate himself as a Nazarene; he did not practice severe austerities. He ate that which was common, and drank that which was common. As wine was a common article of beverage among the people, he drank it.

[wisdom is justified of her children] Wisdom has seen fit to justify both courses (taken by John and Jesus, note, Matthew 11:18, above) but you hypocrites condemn them. You would condemn any course taken by any godly man, for you seek to justify your acts of darkness and rejection of truth.

Jesus was friendly. What about Him? “Oh, He is gluttonous. He’s too friendly with sinners!” They weren’t pleased with John, nor were they pleased with Jesus.

There are some folk that you simply cannot please, and you are better off to forget about them. They don’t like one preacher because he just stands up there and in a monotone gives his sermon. Then the next preacher they don’t like because he is very demonstrative and pounds the pulpit. Or one is too profound, and they don’t understand him, and the other is too simple—so they don’t like him either. There are a lot of people whom no one can please, and that was certainly true in our Lord’s day.⁴⁴

This peculiar verse, "wedged in" if it were, in the midst of Yeshua's argument, is very mystical in its meaning. We would suggest that Yeshua is equating Himself with "Wisdom," and his deeds as "her children."⁴⁵

Matthew 11:20

Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:

The Northern cities of the Sea of Galilee.

[upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done] The more light men have the less excusable they are for sin.

[most of his mighty works were done] This suggests that Jesus concentrated His labors in one section.

[repented not] Even miracles and judgments will not move hardened sinners (Rev. 9:20-21).

⁴⁴McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:64). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴⁵ Yashanet.com

Yeshua's miracles are the Father's testimony that Yeshua is the Messiah. The people are not condemning Yeshua's works. Rather, they reject the authority by which He did them and the witness that His miracles attest to. The result of all this is that they are guilty of blasphemy against God's Holy Spirit as He later tells them (in the next chapter.)⁴⁶

Matthew 11:21

Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

Chorazin and Bethsaida are nothing but ruins today. Tyre and Sidon are all through the Old Testament. Why worse for Chorazin and Bethsaida? If the works that were done at Chorazin and Bethsaida were done there, they would have repented. To whom much is given, much will be required. Chorazin and Bethsaida will have a greater judgment than Tyre and Sidon because they were given greater light and did not respond.⁴⁷



[they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes] An example of how the gospel affects different peoples.

[Tyre and Sidon] These were cities of Phoenicia, formerly very opulent, and distinguished for merchandise. They were situated on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, and were on the western part of Judea. They were, therefore, well known to the Jews. Tyre is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament as being the place through which Solomon derived many of the materials for building the temple, 2 Chronicles 2:11-16. It was also a place against which one of the most important and pointed prophecies of Isaiah was directed. Isaiah 53:1 and following. Comp. Ezekiel 26:4-14. Both these cities were very ancient. Sidon was situated within the bounds of the tribe of Asher Joshua

⁴⁶ Yashanet.com

⁴⁷ Chuck Missler, Notes on Matthew, khouse.org

19:28; but this tribe could never get possession of it, Judges 1:31. It was famous for its great trade and navigation. Its inhabitants were the first remarkable merchants in the world, and were much celebrated for their luxury. In the time of our Saviour it was probably a city of much splendour and extensive commerce. It is now called Seide, or Saide, and is far less populous and splendid than it was in the time of Christ. It was subdued successively by the Babylonians, Egyptians, and Romans, the latter of whom deprived it of its freedom.

Miracles. Modern critics sometimes criticize Christianity for emphasizing Yeshua's miracles as a major ground for believing in him as Messiah and Son of God. They often add that while rabbinic literature frequently reports miracles, they are neither central to the content of Judaism nor taken as proof that God's Law is valid. My response:

(1) The *Tanakh* itself grounds the Israelites' faith in God on one of his most awesome miracles. Exodus 14:31 reports that after the Egyptians had been drowned in the Red Sea, "When Israel saw the great power *Adonai* displayed against the Egyptians, they feared *Adonai* and put their trust in him and in his servant Moshe." Yeshua, showing forth God's power, is only asking from his fellow Jews the same response to God and his servant the Messiah which their mutual ancestors gave.

(2) We have already seen (9:34, 10:25) and will see again (12:24–32; Yochanan 9, 11) that Yeshua's miracles were acknowledged as such even by those who opposed him. To avoid having to decide whether to trust him as God's man, they attributed the miracles to demonic powers. Unlike the modern critics they recognized that miracles require a response, a decision; they just made the wrong one.

(3) Why should it be less noble or sophisticated to predicate faith initially on God's miracles rather than on his Law? Both are from God. One who truly trusts God will acknowledge both his Law and his miracles; can one who withholds belief in either be described as trusting God? ⁴⁸

Matthew 11:22

But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

[**more tolerable**] Degrees of punishment (Matthew 10:15, note).

[**day of judgment**] Acts 17:31; Rev. 20:11-15.

McGee: Light creates responsibility. The Lord never had a ministry in Tyre or Sidon, nor did He have His headquarters there. But He spent a lot of time in the area of Chorazin and Bethsaida, and He holds them responsible for the light which He gave them. It is my understanding that there will be degrees of punishment as well as degrees of reward at the time of God's judgment. Even in our own day, there are many folk who have had a glorious opportunity to receive Christ, but they have turned their backs on Him.

⁴⁸Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 11:20). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Without going into detail, let me say this: I do not know what God will do with that person on a little island in the South Pacific who has never heard the gospel and bows down and worships an image. I *do* know what God is going to do with that person who comes and sits in church Sunday after Sunday and hears the gospel and does nothing about it.

Now the Lord speaks of Capernaum, His headquarters.⁴⁹

Matthew 11:23

And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

[**Capernaum**] A city on the north end of Galilee where Jesus made His headquarters (Matthew 4:13; Matthew 17:24-27; Mark 1:21-45; Mark 2:1-6; Mark 9:33; Luke 4:31; Luke 7:1-10; Luke 10:15; John 4:46-53; John 6:17-25,59).

[**exalted unto heaven**] A Hebraism for great prosperity.

[**Which art exalted to heaven**] This is an expression used to denote great privileges. He meant, that they were peculiarly favoured with instruction. The city was prosperous. It was successful in commerce. It was signally favoured by its wealth. Most of all, it was signally favoured by the presence, the preaching, and the miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here he spent a large part of his time in the early part of his ministry; and in Capernaum and its neighbourhood he performed his chief miracles.⁵⁰

[**hell**] Greek: Hades (GSN-86) All these cities were totally destroyed by the Romans and are no more.

[**Shalt be brought down to hell**] This does not mean that all the *people* should go to hell; but that the city which had flourished so prosperously, should lose its prosperity, and occupy the *lowest place* among cities. The word *hell* is used here, not to denote a place of punishment in the future world, but a state of *desolation* and destruction *as a city*. It stands in contrast with the word *heaven*. As their being exalted *to heaven* did not mean that the people would all be saved, or dwell in heaven, so their being brought down to *hell* refers to the desolation of the *city*. Their privileges, honours, wealth, etc., should be taken away, and they should sink as *low* among cities as they had been before exalted. This has been strictly fulfilled. In the wars between the Jews and the Romans, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, etc., were so completely desolated that it is difficult to determine their former situation. It is not to be denied, also, that he threatened future punishment on those who rejected him. The truth inculcated is, that those who are peculiarly favoured must be punished accordingly if they abuse their privileges.⁵¹

⁴⁹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:64). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵⁰Barnes' Notes

⁵¹Barnes' Notes

[If the mighty works-had been done in Sodom] Matthew 10:15. Sodom was destroyed on account of its great wickedness. Christ says, if his miracles had been done there, they would have repented, and consequently the city would not have been destroyed. As it was, it would be better for Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for Capernaum, for its inhabitants would not be called to answer for the abuse of so great privileges.

Matthew 11:24

But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

This is the harshest language of all. Remember it fell from the lips of the gentle Jesus. He speaks here as the Judge and King. This strong language ought to make us sit up and listen. I would much rather be a Hottentot in the darkness of a jungle without having heard the gospel than to be an officer in one of our modern churches, having a Bible but never truly having accepted Christ as Savior.

Although Sodom and Gomorrah were terrible places, it will be more tolerable for them in the Day of Judgment than for cities that heard the message of Jesus and rejected Him.⁵²

Matthew 11:25

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

“wise and prudent” as the world sees them.

Wise and prudent—The scribes and Pharisees, vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds, and having their foolish hearts darkened, refusing to submit to the righteousness of God (God’s method of saving man by Christ) and going about to establish their own righteousness, (their own method of saving themselves), they rejected God’s counsel, and God sent the peace and salvation of the Gospel to others, called here babes, (his disciples), simple-hearted persons, who submitted to be instructed and saved in God’s own way. Let it be observed, that our Lord does not thank the Father that he had hidden these things from the wise and prudent, but that, seeing they were hidden from them, he had revealed them to the others.

There is a remarkable saying in the Talmudists, which casts light upon this: “Rab. Jochanan said: ‘From the time in which the temple was destroyed, wisdom was taken away from the prophets, and given to fools and children.’ Bava Bathra, fol. 12. Again: ‘In

⁵²McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:64). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

the days of the Messiah, every species of wisdom, even the most profound, shall, be revealed; and this even to children.” Synop. Sohar. fol. 10.⁵³

[hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes]

Truth is always hidden from the professing wise who reject it because of self-conceit and pride (Romans 1:18-32; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; 1 Cor. 1:18-21; 1 Cor. 2:1-16). It is always revealed to the simple who accept and obey it (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Hebrews 5:12-6:1; 1 Peter 2:1-2). It is right that this be so (Matthew 11:26; Isaiah 28:9-11; Matthew 13:11-16; 1 Cor. 1:18-21).

[Hast revealed them unto babes] To the poor, ignorant, and obscure; the teachable, simple, and humble. Such as his disciples were. He had reference here probably to proud and haughty scribes and Pharisees in Capernaum. They rejected his gospel; but it was the pleasure of God to reveal it to obscure and more humble men. The reason given, the only satisfactory reason is, that it so seemed good in the sight of God. In this the Saviour acquiesced, saying, *Even so, Father:* and in the dealings of God it is fit that all should acquiesce. *Such is the will of God,* is often the only explanation which can be offered in regard to the various events which happen to us on earth. Such is the will of God, is the only account which can be given of the reason of the dispensations of his grace. Our understanding is often confounded. We are stopped in all our efforts at explanation. Our philosophy fails, and all that we can say is, "Even so, Father: for so it seems good to thee." And this is enough. That GOD does a thing, is, after all, the best reason which we can have that it is right. It is a *security* that nothing wrong is done; and though now mysterious, yet light will hereafter shine upon it like the light of noon-day. I would have a better security that a thing was right if I could say that I knew such was the will of God, than I could to depend on my own reason. In the one case, I confide in the infallible and most perfect God; in the other, I rely on the reason of a frail and erring man. God never errs; but nothing is more common than for men to err.⁵⁴

Matthew 11:26

Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.

Matthew 11:27

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*.

[All things are delivered unto me of my Father] This teaches His deity and membership in the Godhead (John 5:17-27; Rev. 1:1; Matthew 28:18; John 17:1-5; Col. 1:16-18).

⁵³ Adam Clarke's Commentary

⁵⁴ Barnes' Notes

[no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son] None can fully comprehend the Father, but the Son (John 1:18).

[No man knoweth the Son] That is, such is the nature of the Son of God; such the mystery of the union between the Divine and human nature; such his exalted character as Divine, that no mortal can fully comprehend him. None but God *fully* knows him. Had he been a mere man, this language surely would not have been used of him.

In the Old Testament, “know” means more than knowledge. It implies an intimate relationship. The communion between God the Father and God the Son is the core of their relationship. For anyone else to know God, God must reveal himself to that person, by the Son’s choice. How fortunate we are that Jesus has clearly revealed to us God, his truth, and how we can know him.

All things have been handed over to me by my Father. This reveals the profound divine self-consciousness of Jesus, as well as the supreme authority of the Father within the Trinity, by which he has delegated authority over “all things” to the Son. “All things” probably refers to everything needed with respect to the carrying out of Christ’s ministry of redemption, including the revelation of salvation to those to whom he **chooses to reveal** the Father. **no one knows the Son except the Father.** In both Jesus’ incarnate state and his eternal state as Son, the Father and the Son share an exclusive relationship, including a direct and immediate knowledge of each other.⁵⁵

Matthew 11:28

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest] Christ’s first recorded general invitation to all men. Compare the last one (Rev. 22:17).

[labour] Greek: *kopiao* (GSN-2872), to feel fatigue, to work hard, toil. Any weary, hard worker can find rest (Ephes. 4:28).

[heavy laden] Greek: *phortizo* (GSN-5412), to carry a load; to overburden with ceremony (Matthew 11:28; Luke 11:46). The Mosaic rites were burdensome enough, but the Pharisees had manufactured hundreds of additional burdens related to keeping the minutest detail of the law.

[rest] Twice rest is promised to all laboring, heavy-laden, soul-distressed, and sick people (Matthew 11:28-29; cp. Isaiah 28:9-11; Hebrews 3:11-14,18; Hebrews 4:1-11; Rev. 14:13).

⁵⁵ ESV Study Bible Notes

Matthew 11:29

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

yoke - is supposed to curb the will and bring one under control.

[Take my yoke upon you] "Take's" for believers (Dake):

1. Take the yoke of Christ (Matthew 11:29)
2. Take up the cross daily (Luke 9:23)
3. Take no thought for life (Matthew 6:25)
4. Take no thought for raiment (Matthew 6:31)
5. Take communion (1 Cor. 11:24)
6. Take the whole armor (Ephes. 6:13)
7. Take Heed to Yourselves:
 - (1) How you give alms (Matthew 6:1-4)
 - (2) What you hear (Mark 4:24)
 - (3) How you hear (Luke 8:18)
 - (4) What you covet (Luke 12:15)
 - (5) How you forgive (Luke 17:1-4)
 - (6) How you overload yourselves in eating, drinking, and cares of this life (Luke 21:34-36)
 - (7) How you feed and care for the church (Acts 20:28; Col. 4:17)
 - (8) How you build on Christ (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Romans 14:10)
 - (9) How you use your liberty (2 Cor. 8:9-13; Romans 14:1-15:3)
 - (10) Lest you fall (1 Cor. 10:12-13)
 - (11) Lest you destroy each other (Galatians 5:15; Ephes. 4:31-32)
 - (12) Lest you backslide (Hebrews 3:12)
 - (13) How you take suffering for your own faults (1 Peter 2:20-21)
 - (14) How you walk in light (2 Peter 1:19; 1 John 1:7)⁵⁶

[learn of me] Three commands here (Matthew 11:28-30):

1. Come unto Me (Matthew 11:28)
2. Take My yoke upon you (Matthew 11:29)
3. Learn of Me (Matthew 11:29)

[I am meek and lowly in heart] Four things about Christ (Matthew 11:28-30):

1. I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28)
2. I am meek and lowly in heart (Matthew 11:29)
3. My yoke is easy (Matthew 11:30)
4. My burden is light (Matthew 11:30)

⁵⁶ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

Matthew 11:30

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

[For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light] Seven things the believer receives:

1. Acquaintance with Christ and eternal life (Matthew 11:28; John 17:2-3)
2. Relief from fatigue (Matthew 11:28)
3. Relief from heavy burdens (Matthew 11:28)
4. Soul rest forever (Matthew 11:28-29; Hebrews 4)
5. Truth, wisdom, knowledge—learn of Me (Matthew 11:29; John 14:6; 1 Cor. 1:30)
6. An easy yoke or obligation (Matthew 11:29-30; cp. Acts 15:10; Galatians 5:1)
7. A light burden (Matthew 11:30; Psalm 55:22)

McGee: This language is in contrast to what has preceded it in this chapter. It is like coming out of a blizzard into the warmth of a spring day, like passing from a storm into a calm, like going from darkness into light. This is a new message from Jesus. He turns from the corporate nation to the individual. It is no longer the national announcement about a kingdom but a personal invitation to find the “rest” of salvation.

“I will give you rest” is literally, “I will rest you.” When He speaks of being “heavy laden,” He is referring to being burdened with sin. This same figure is used by Isaiah and the psalmist: “Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward” (Isa. 1:4). “For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me” (Ps. 38:4).

My friend, sin is too heavy for you to carry—you’ll really get a hernia if you try to carry your load of sin! The only place in the world to put that burden is at the cross of Christ. He bore it for you, and He invites you to come and bring your burden of sin to Him. He can forgive you because on the cross He bore the burden of your sin.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” refers to the salvation of the sinner through Jesus Christ. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” refers to the practical sanctification of the believer. There is a *rest* which Jesus gives, and it is the rest of redemption. There is also a *rest* which the believer experiences, and it comes through commitment and consecration to Christ. You don’t have to worry about being recognized; you don’t have to jockey for position if you are committed to Christ. Frankly, I quit joining organizations because I got so tired of watching ambitious men trying to be chairman of something or trying to be president of something. If you are committed to Christ, you don’t have to worry about that. He will put you exactly where *He* wants you when you are yoked up to Him.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:65). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The Revelation of the King is now complete. Mt 1-10

The Rebellion against the King begins to appear. Mt 11-13

In this section, the Jews rebel against every revelation Christ gave of Himself:

- He was announced by John.
 - They allowed John to be arrested. Mt 11:1-19
- He performed many miracles.
 - The cities refused to repent. Mt 11:20-30
- He announced His principles.
 - They argued with Him about them. Mt 12:1-21
- He revealed His Person.
 - They said He worked with Satan. Mt 12:22-50

In the next chapter (Matthew 12), we will reach a turning point in the ministry of Christ as presented by Matthew.