

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOKS SERIES

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Volume Four

by

Harold Fowler



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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

INTRODUCTION

MATTHEW'S METHOD

In connection with this chapter two significant, apparent contradictions appear in Matthew's writing. From a careful reading of John 12:1-8, 12-19 with attention to chronological detail, it is clear that, upon arriving in the Jerusalem area, Jesus and the Twelve stopped for the evening at Bethany. Then, the day before the Triumphal Entry, He was anointed by Mary during a supper in the house of Simon the leper. Next day (John 12:12), He organized and executed the Royal Messianic Entry into Jerusalem (John 12:14-19). Matthew and Mark, however, reserve their narration of the supper and the anointing in Bethany until later in their text, thus giving the impression that this latter event did not occur until late in the Last Week. (Cf. Matt. 26:6-13 = Mark 14:3-9 in context.) It must be noticed, however, that neither Matthew nor Mark introduces the section in question with strict, chronological precision. Rather, both use the indefinite formula: "Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper . . .," without specifying when that took place. Further, what must not be missed in Matthew and Mark is the fact that it was precisely because of what occurred at the anointing in Bethany that Judas Iscariot went away to bargain with the chief priests to betray Jesus (Matt. 26:14ff. = Mark 14:10ff.). This is the cause, although he waited until later to present himself to the authorities. (Cf. Matt. 26:3-5, 14-16 = Mark 14:1f., 10f. = Luke 22:1-6.) This is no hazarded guess, because John informs us that it had been the thief, Judas Iscariot, that had objected so strenuously to the "waste" of money involved in the lavish anointing at Bethany (John 12:4ff.). It was to Judas that Jesus addressed His rebuke. The solution, then, to the apparent contradiction is that John records the Bethany supper in its normal time sequence and clearly identified Judas as the trouble-maker, whereas Matthew and Mark prefer to link Judas' later perfidy with the Bethany supper by means of a historical flash-back.

The second problem apparent in Matthew's narration is the way he rearranges the chronology of the cleansing of the temple and the withering of the fig tree. Mark states that Jesus did nothing in Jerusalem on the day of the triumphal entry (Mark 11:11), cursed the fig tree next morning on the way to Jerusalem from Bethany (Mark 11:12-14), then cleansed the temple (Mark 11:15-19). Matthew, on

the other hand, gives the clear impression that the culminating act of the triumphal entry was the cleansing of the temple (Matt. 21:12ff.) which was followed on Monday by the cursing of the fig tree (12:18f.) and the disciples' amazement apparently immediately thereafter (Matt. 21:20ff.). Mark, on the other hand, reserves the disciples' amazement for Tuesday (Mark 11:20). Here again it must be noticed that Matthew does not date the cleansing of the temple as occurring on the same day as the triumphal entry, even if a cursory reading would lead to this conclusion. Further, the expression "early" (*proi*, Matt. 21:18) does not mean "in the morning" in the same sense as "next day" (*tê epaurion*, Mark 11:12). So, while Mark intends to indicate the sequence of days, Matthew is giving the time of day without indicating on what day the cursing of the fig tree occurred.

Mark's is evidently the more detailed account, stating chronologically what actually happened. Matthew, on the other hand, aiming at succinctness, merely telescoped his version without denying that the disciples' amazement and Jesus' teaching occurred the following day. In fact, Matthew does not affirm "WHEN the disciples saw" that the fig tree had withered. His circumstantial participle (*kaì idòntes hoi mathetai ethaùmasan . . .*) affirms nothing about the chronology of the withering and the seeing, because its purpose is only to say that whenever it was that the disciples saw it, they marvelled. (See notes on Matt. 21:19f.) Matthew's method has the advantage of keeping together the two separate parts by welding them into one didactic unit.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE OUTLINES

- Section 54 Jesus Enters in Messianic Triumph into Jerusalem (21:1-11)
- Section 55 Jesus Cleanses Temple a Last Time and Receives Worship of Children (21:12-17)
- Section 56 Jesus Curses Fig Tree and Teaches Disciples Faith (21:18-22)
- Section 57 Jesus Meets Challenges of His Authority (21:23-45)
 - A. The Authority Behind John's Baptism (21:23-27)
 - B. The Parable of Two Sons (21:28-32)
 - C. The Parable of Vineyard Let Out to Unworthy Tenants (21:33-45)

THE MESSIANIC TRIUMPH

STUDY OUTLINE

THE MESSIANIC TRIUMPH (21:1-11)

- I. The decision to depend on lowly donkeys (21:1-3)
- II. The Deliverer's divine dignity shows by divesting Himself of it (21:4, 5)
- III. The excited crowd expects the fulfilment of their dreams (21:6-9)
- IV. The dim-sighted demonstrate the unbelief that determined their destiny (21:10)
- V. The disciples display their own conclusions (21:11)

THE TEMPLE CLEANSED (21:12-17)

- I. A radical restoration of repentance and renewal (21:12)
- II. A rational rebuke of this form of religion (21:13)
- III. The believers were rewarded for receiving the Redeemer (21:14)
- IV. Radiant rejoicing is offensive to the Pharisees (21:15a)
- V. A Refined Reminder (21:16)
- VI. A return for reflection and rest (21:17)

THE WITHERING OF THE FIG TREE (21:18-22)

- I. PUNISHMENT FROM GOD FOR HYPOCRISY AND BARRENNESS (21:18, 19)
 - A. The Sterile Fig Tree
 1. The justice of Jesus' expectation to find fruit on the tree: "Leaves promise fruit."
 2. His just expectation was disappointed: "Nothing but leaves."
 3. The justice of Jesus' judgment: He simply hastened the inevitable judgment that had to come in the course of nature.
 - B. The Polluted Temple (21:12-17, according to Mark's order of events)
- II. POWER FROM GOD THROUGH FAITH, PRAYER AND MERCY (21:20-22)
 - A. The Disciples' surprise (21:20; Mark 11:20, 21)
 - B. The Lord's lesson (21:21, 22; Mark 11:22-25)
 1. "Mountains of difficulty can be removed from the path of duty by undivided trust" (21:21).
 2. "Trusting prayer, confident of God's power and concern, is assured of its answer" (21:22).

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JESUS' AUTHORITY CHALLENGED (21:23-45)

- I. THE AUTHORITIES ATTACK: "PRODUCE YOUR ORDERS!" (21:23).
The authorities attack: "Produce your orders!" (21:23).
- II. JESUS COUNTERATTACKS: "JOHN'S AUTHORITY IS INDICATIVE OF MINE" (21:24-27).
 - A. Before being given new revelations, you must face previous ones fairly.
 - B. If John's authority was from God, listen to him, since he testified to me.
 - C. If you cannot discern John's authority, by what right do you seek to judge mine, when your admission of disability disqualifies you?
 - D. John was called directly by God to serve, without human authorization: I am too.
- III. JESUS DRIVES FOR DECISION: "DECIDE ON AN OBJECTIVE CASE: THE STORY OF THE TWO SONS" (21:28-32).
 - A. Religious outcasts and rank sinners repent and are considered qualified to enter God's Kingdom.
 - B. Religious professionals do not repent and are rightly rejected by God.
 - C. Although repentant sinners precede the more respectable sinners, opportunity is yet available for a change of mind.
- IV. JESUS SHOWS HIS PROPER PLACE IN GOD'S ETERNAL PROGRAM WHILE REVEALING THE FATE OF THOSE WHO OPPOSE HIM (21:33-45).
 - A. Bountiful mercy (21:33)
 - B. Mercy's rights (21:34)
 - C. Mercy outraged (21:35)
 - D. Increased guilt versus incredible patience (21:36)
 - E. Mercy resolute (21:37)
 - F. Mercy mistaken for weakness (21:38)
 - G. Mercy rejected (21:39)
 - H. Mercy finally ended (21:40)
 - I. Mercy offered to others (21:41)
 - J. Mercy's victory (21:42)
 - K. The reading of the sentence (21:43)
 - L. Double punishment inflicted (21:44)
 - M. Jesus' story hit home (21:45)
 - N. The clergy fumbles its responsibility (21:46)