

Rejection by the Jewish Leaders

Matthew 12:14—24

In Matthew 8:4 Jesus told the leper He just healed to tell no man but go immediately to the priest and offer the gift commanded by the Mosaic Law. The end of verse 4 says that it was for a testimony for the priests. In other words, Jesus was testifying that He was the Messiah through signs and wonders and was announcing this to the priests through the healing of the leper. Israel was trained while they were slaves in Egypt to look for signs (1 Corinthians 1:22) and this is exactly what Jesus gave them through casting out demons and healing. If the priests studied the Old Testament they should have known whom Jesus was when He came healing (Isaiah 29:18; 35:3—6; 49:13; Ezekiel 34:16; Zephaniah 3:18—19).

There is a change in Matthew 12:16 when Jesus tells the people He healed to keep it quiet. Now the Pharisees want to kill Jesus because He is threatening their power over the people (John 11:48). His first coming wasn't about setting everything right so He wasn't going to confront the leaders of Israel but rather continued to gather His Little Flock of believers and preparing them to go through the Tribulation and into the Kingdom.

Fulfilled prophecy (verses 17—21)

The word *fulfill* or its variants is used 16 times in the book of Matthew. The Old Testament's prophecies were all coming to a conclusion in the Gospels. The birth of the Son of God, His ministry among the people, His death, burial and resurrection and the setting up of the Millennial Kingdom were all promised in the Old Testament and were now in the process of being fulfilled. When John came proclaiming the Kingdom was at hand he was announcing fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

We are now presented with another fulfilled prophecy uttered by the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah presents one Messiah with two different functions. At His first coming Christ was calling the Little Flock of believers to Himself. He would then become a sacrifice for the sins of the people, as a lamb to the slaughter. He did not come in might and power but quietly and meekly. The prophecy in Isaiah 42 says He came as a Servant (Isaiah 53), one who will not quarrel nor cry out. He will not break off a bruised reed nor extinguish a smoldering wick. This is why He told the crowd not to tell anyone of these healings. He didn't come to make waves but to become a propitiation (a sacrifice to turn God's wrath away from those who believe).

This same Messiah will also come in supremacy and power at His Second Coming. It is then that He will come to conquer and judge the people and His enemies will become His footstool (Isaiah 63:1—4; Psalm 96:13; 98:9; Revelation 19:11—16).

There are a number of Rabbis who see two people fulfilling these two functions of servant Messiah (son of Joseph; see Zechariah 9:9) and the conquering Messiah (son of David; see Daniel 7:13). The Rabbis understand their Messiah to be a human who is empowered by God and that God has a man ready to step into that function for every generation as soon as Israel is ready to accept him.

This prophecy from Isaiah 42 states that the Gentiles will receive justice and have hope through the Messiah. Although we usually think of the future promises given to Israel we can see that the Gentiles also have a future hope. This is why Mark 2:27 says the Sabbath was made for man (not Israel). However, this hope was based on Israel's rise in glory over all the nations in the Millennial Kingdom (Isaiah 60:1—3). When Israel the nation rejected the offer of the Kingdom they also sealed the fate of the Gentiles since they could only be blessed through Israel's rise. Israel tried but failed to gain her righteousness through the Law instead of through faith in Christ (Romans 9:30—32). It was at this point that both Jews and Gentiles were locked up into unbelief and there was no hope for either group (Romans 11:32). This is why God raised up Paul as a minister of the Dispensation of Grace (Ephesians 3:1—11) to bring the Gospel of Grace directly

to the Gentiles, who were excluded in times past (Ephesians 2:11—19). No longer do the Gentiles need to rely on Israel's blessing to be blessed (as Ruth did by making Israel's God her God—Ruth 1:16) but we can now individually come to Christ instead of having to go through Israel.

There are parallel comparisons that can be made between God and Israel. Isaiah 41:8 and 42:1 say both Israel and Christ are servants chosen by God (the Father). However, verses 28—29 show how Israel failed and a new faithful Servant will be raised up. Israel is also called a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6; 60:3) just as Christ is a light to the Israel (Isaiah 9:2; 60:1). Salvation is also said to be from the Jews (John 4:22) and of course we know ultimately salvation is through Christ (Romans 11:26). Blessings were also given to those who blessed Israel (Genesis 12:15; Psalm 122:6; Zechariah 8:22—23) but God blesses Israel (Genesis 22:17-18; Zechariah 8:13).

Possessed, blind and dumb (verses 22—24)

I believe this man represents Israel. Satan had taken up residence in all of Israel. Everywhere Jesus traveled He needed to cast out demons. Israel was in complete spiritual darkness (Matthew 4:16; Luke 1:79). Since they were living in darkness Israel was spiritually blind. It was impossible for them to discern good from evil. This is why the leaders of Israel rejected their Messiah.

Since they were so wrapped up in darkness it was impossible for them to be a light to the nations. Their testimony was nonexistent. They were unable to speak out to the world about the glorious future that would be theirs in Christ. When Christ healed this man he was completely made new (Acts 3:16) just as He will do to Israel at His Second Coming.

Notice the contrast between the people's conception of Christ and that of the Pharisees. The People were thinking Jesus could be the Son of David, the Messiah of Israel, the One who was promised to come and save them from their enemies while the spiritual leaders of Israel were accusing Him of working for Satan. This shows how far from God these leaders had become (Jeremiah 2:8; 10:21; 23:1—3; Ezekiel 34:2).

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