

Rejection by the Nation of Israel**Matthew 12:22—32**

We are reaching the climax of a crisis in Israel. First John the Baptist came preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom—repent for the Kingdom is at hand. He ended up being murdered while Israel watched. Now Christ and His disciples went out preaching the same message. When the leaders of Israel are confronted with the plea for them to believe that Jesus is the Christ and that the Kingdom is at hand, they are forced to make a decision. Do they give up their power over the people and all the perks that go with the role as leader or do they humbly submit themselves to Jesus Christ as their future King? We saw from the healing of the man with the withered hand (verses 10—13) that the Pharisees were much more concerned about their position than about the people.

The sad state of Israel (22—24)

Jesus left the Pharisees because of their death threats. The people followed Him and He healed them all. A man who was demon possessed, blind and mute was brought to Jesus. This man, I believe, is a picture of the condition of Israel. Satan was free to do his work throughout Israel and had spiritually bound the people. They were blind to the light that was given them through Jesus Christ (Luke 1:79). This man was also mute. Israel was unable to be a light to the nations not able to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles.

When Jesus healed this man the multitudes wondered if Jesus could be the Son of David. Even the masses understood that the Son of David, their Messiah, would come and give comfort to Israel (Isaiah 49:13; Matthew 5:4) and they could see that these works of healing related to the writings of the prophets.

The leaders rejected Jesus as the Messiah. In fact, instead of seeing Him as being sent from God they said He was of Satan. According to the Pharisees His power to cast out demons came from Satan. When the people see Jesus they see their Messiah. When the leaders see Him they see Satan. There couldn't be a greater contrast and it shows how far from God the leaders were.

Pharisees condemned (verses 25—28) (Mark 3:23—27; Luke 11:17—22)

The Pharisees were so blind and wrapped up in their own self-righteousness that they could not perceive Jesus as Messiah in spite of all the signs and wonders He performed to prove himself. Bezebul literally means lord of dung and was used as a title for the leader of demons, Satan. When they indicted Jesus of casting out Satan by the power of Satan, Jesus used logic to dispel their accusations. How could Satan be fighting against himself and yet be so strong? His strength would come from a unified effort to deceive, blind and bind.

In verse 27 Jesus turns the tables on the Pharisees by asking them by whose power their sons were casting out Satan. They apparently had trained people to handle exorcism. Jesus was performing great and powerful signs everywhere He went. John even mentions it would take innumerable books to contain all the things Jesus did (John 21:25). Christ's power to heal was unlimited. If you were to choose who was working by the power of God the obvious pick would be Jesus. This is why the people thought Jesus could be their Messiah. If the Pharisees thought they were casting out Satan by the power of God then Jesus was even more so. By denying that Jesus was casting out Satan by God's power they were only condemning themselves.

Two strong men (verse 29—30)

There are two strong men in this parable. The strong man is Satan who has taken the house of Israel captive. As Luke 11:21 states when a strong man is fully armed he guards his house so none of his possessions can be disturbed. Instead of being a people of God Israel had become a people of Satan. No human was capable of going against Satan to take Israel back. Israel was in a hopeless state. The only hope was that someone stronger than Satan overpowers him. The stronger man is Christ, the only one capable of defeating Satan and taking Israel back.

Those who do not follow Christ are against Him, in other words they are on Satan's side doing Satan's work. This was directed to the Pharisees. Christ was gathering the Little Flock remnant of believers out of Israel while the leaders of Israel were scattering the sheep.

Blasphemy (verse 31—32) (Mark 3:28—30; Luke 12:10)

There is a lot of confusion about blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and the unforgivable sin. The standard interpretation to this verse is that since Christ was given the Holy Spirit at His baptism and was able to heal through the power of the Holy Spirit, that when the Pharisees accused Jesus of healing by the power of Satan they were really blaspheming the Holy Spirit. To blaspheme is to speak evil of. In this case, they would say the Pharisees spoke evil of Christ when they accused Him (and thus the Holy Spirit) of doing Satan's work. However, this interpretation would make it impossible to blaspheme Christ because when the Pharisees spoke evil of Christ it's said they were really speaking against the Holy Spirit. This in spite of Scripture saying they could blaspheme Christ.

In reality, the Pharisees were not aware that Christ's power came from the Holy Spirit so they truly directed their blasphemy to Jesus, the Son of Man. They could not blaspheme the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit had not even been given yet. He would not be given until Jesus Christ ascended to heaven (John 7:39; 14:16; Acts 2:33). The Holy Spirit was given to Israel in Acts 2. This was a special, prophetic manifestation of the Holy Spirit not to be confused with Him being given to Jesus at His baptism (Matthew 3:16), being given to the Disciples (John 20:22) nor with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer today.

So blasphemy of the Holy Spirit could only be committed after the Holy Spirit was given meaning it could only happen after Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. According to Acts 2:4 when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers they all began to speak in tongues and in verse 16 Peter made it clear that this was in fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2 when God would pour out His Spirit on all mankind. Since this is all according to prophecy and since Jesus is addressing the Pharisees in Matthew 12:31 we can see that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit concerns Israel, not the body of Christ. Israel was at a crossroads to accept or reject God's call for them to come into the Kingdom. God the Father had called Israel into the Kingdom through John the Baptist (John 1:6). God the Son had come as a human to call them into the Kingdom and finally the Holy Spirit was given and called Israel into the Kingdom through Stephen. Israel rejected John's call and watched him being murdered. Israel rejected Jesus' call and demanded Him to be killed. Finally, Israel rejected the Holy Spirit's call through Stephen by murdering him (Acts 7:51—60).

God had given Israel three calls to come into the Kingdom. After the third call there would be no more opportunities for Israel to enter the Kingdom. When Israel rejected God the Father, Jesus was presented to Israel. When Jesus was rejected, God sent the testimony of the Holy Spirit to Israel. After the Holy Spirit was rejected there would be no more opportunities for Israel to accept God's offer of the Kingdom. This is why blasphemy of the Holy Spirit was unforgivable. Israel had a limited time to accept God's offer and after a certain amount of time the offer was no longer valid. We can see in Hebrews the idea that Israel needed to act now while it was still "To day" (Hebrews 3:7, 13—15).

Hebrews continues comparing Israel going into the Promised Land with her going into the Kingdom (Hebrews 3:16; 4:6—7 6:4—6). These passages refer to Israel entering the Promised Land from Kadesh-barnea (Deuteronomy 1:19—46, 9:23). God told Israel the He would go before them to defeat the enemy and make the land theirs. When they saw how formidable the enemy was they panicked and refused to go into the land. After God withdrew His offer for them to go into the Promised Land they decided to go in themselves but were repelled by the enemy and ended up wandering in the wilderness for 40 years because of unbelief.

Israel also had a limited amount of time to enter into the Kingdom. If they rejected God's plea, the door would close after the final call goes out through the Holy Spirit. After the invitation is withdrawn, they could no longer go back, repent and accept the call to come into the Kingdom.

For previous notes and additional mid-Acts materials please visit www.MidActsTruths.com