

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 29, Chapter 8 Continued 2

We took another extensive detour last week in our continuing study of Matthew Chapter 8 to explore some of the Early Church Fathers in order to trace their viewpoint on the all-important matter of Believers in Christ having an obligation to follow, or not to follow, the Law of Moses. What we found was that the very earliest Church Father of record (Clement of Rome) was discipled at the knee of both Peter and Paul, and actually served with Paul for a time. He was so involved with the Church at Corinth that following Paul's death Clement wrote letters (theologians call them epistles) to the congregation there. Clearly Clement was seen as Paul's successor and had authority. As history shows, Clement also became part of the Church government in Rome.

Clement's recorded position was that gentiles as well as Jews who follow Messiah are to obey the Torah (the Law of Moses). He knows nothing of the anti-Jewish, anti-Law fiction eventually developed by the gentile Church leadership that is sometimes called the Law of Jesus or the Law of God. This pro-Law of Moses position was not only recorded by Clement in his one surviving epistle but also repeated by later Church Fathers Papias and Polycarp. What we find is that after the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., and after gentiles took over control of the Church starting about 100 A.D., the Church Fathers naturally, as a result of their esteemed positions, were the ones who advocated these various forms of anti-Law and anti-Semitism.... at first rather mildly and then more militantly..... until we arrive at the time of Justin Martyr in the mid 2nd century. Justin Martyr was openly and forcefully anti-Law, anti-Jew and in his famous treatise called A Dialogue with Trypho he laid out his argument that Christians should not follow the Law or do anything that Jews do (feasts, Sabbath, day of worship, etc.) because the Jews were the Christ killers and God had given them over to evil. In

fact, Justin Martyr said that the Law of Moses itself was a negative institution imposed upon the Israelites as they left Egypt as a punishment due to their wickedness.

From this point forward, the Church was nearly entirely gentile in government and congregation and so in the early 300's at the Council of Nicea, headed up by Emperor Constantine, the Church laid down a set of authoritative faith doctrines (they were at that time call canons) that embedded the anti-Jewish, anti-Law of Moses as a principle foundation of Christianity that has been embraced and led astray ever since. Without apology or hesitation I stand opposed to this view and mindset because it is also quite anti-Jesus, even if it is done so out of the same ignorance I had as a young man. After all; Jesus could not have made it more clear in His Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in Matthew chapter 5, as He issued a command (along with a stern warning as to the consequences) that all of His followers were to obey the Law. Further that no one should ever construe anything He said that day, or ever, as meaning He has abolished the Law of Moses, changed it in the slightest way, nor has He created a new Law of Jesus. But Christianity in general has followed the lead of Justin Martyr and nearly all the gentile Church Fathers that succeeded him and as a result have disobeyed Yeshua's explicit instruction thus, sadly, steering the institutional Church dangerously off course. Here at Seed of Abraham Ministries Torah Class we shall continue to endeavor to teach and to follow the Law of Moses as Yeshua has instructed us to do, as much as is possible in the 21st century, and in forms that represent modern circumstances and realities. We plead with our brothers and sisters of the faith to reconsider, repent, and reconnect with the entire Bible and to once again embrace full obedience to God's laws and commands. We acknowledge that we do not, ourselves, do it perfectly. Whenever it is clearly impractical or impossible to follow a commandment to the letter due to the circumstances of our modern times, including the lack of a Temple and Priesthood in Jerusalem, we shall follow the Law of Moses in the spirit it is intended, guided by the Holy Spirit that Christ Himself sent to us. And at the same time pray for God's forgiveness when we fail. These issues of the relevance of the Law and of the totally Jewish character and culture of Yeshua are assumed throughout Matthew's Gospel.

Next we discussed the matter of the Roman Centurion who came to Jesus to ask that He heal the soldier's house slave. After that we addressed Yeshua walking a few steps from the synagogue in Capernaum to Peter's house where his mother-in-law lay ill with a fever. Messiah merely took her hand and instantly healed her.

We also spent a bit of time discussing that Peter's house has been found in Capernaum and has been excavated and preserved such that visitors to the Sea of Galilee can see it. Having been there many times I can say that for me, personally, it is a most moving and affirming experience.

Let's continue with Matthew chapter 8 beginning at verse 16.

RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 8:16 - end

Here we find Yeshua continuing to do what Jewish Holy Men (*tzadikim*) do; heal. In the first 15 verses we found Him healing an interesting array of people; a person with *Tzara'at* (a spiritually caused skin condition), then a Roman soldier's house slave, and then a woman (although He of course knew her well). What is the common theme among all these folks? They not only don't represent Jewish religious hierarchy they are also the powerless. We need to be paying attention starting now as to the position that Yeshua is putting Himself in. He stands in obvious opposition to the Jewish leadership, while standing with the common man. I think it would be fair to say that He quite naturally identifies with regular Jewish folk because that is not only His own background, but also He sees the injustice built-in to 1st century Jewish society. Considering the things He's doing and the following He's gaining, without permission or authority granted from either the Priestly leadership or the Synagogue leadership, He is setting sail on a collision course with both.

It bears repeating because otherwise we lose all context for what is happening: in no way do those following Jesus around, begging Him to heal them or a family member, think of Him as divine or as their prophesied Messiah. He indeed has dropped some abstract hints of His true mission and identity that hardly anyone present could have caught. In fact, as we move through Matthew we'll find that at this point those closest to Him..... His family and His 12 Disciples.... didn't think of Him as any more than a righteous Holy Man. John the Baptist thought of Him as something special, someone who was indeed prophesied about, but even he wasn't entirely certain that Yeshua was the Messiah because up to now Yeshua had not plainly said so. Thus the hoards who came to Christ, and He spoke to in the hills above the Sea of Galilee, came primarily seeking healing from all manner of afflictions. And those who followed Him down the mountain, and those who joined the crowd in Capernaum, also came for healing. So far we have seen Christ heal physical ailments. Now in verse 16 we see Him heal an evil spiritual ailment: demon possession.

We must also understand that while the Jewish people were so very glad and excited for this new Holy Man, Jesus, to have arrived, what He was doing was not so different than what they had seen before from other famous Holy Men who were miracle healers like **Honi the Circle Drawer** and then a few years later **Hanina Ben Dosa**, both of whom ministered prior to Christ's birth. These Holy Men were considered as ultra-pious and so their words and prayers were much coveted by the people. In other words, Yeshua's miracle healings had a precedent; so these miracles were expected of Him since He had proved Himself to be a Holy Man, and in none of the Gospel accounts did He ever deny it. Had He not done the miracles, He would not have been so sought after.

So Yeshua the miracle worker drew people to him (even some gentiles) like moths to a flame. Jesus turned no one away and effortlessly healed all who came to Him. It has been pointed out to me that we must not overlook that Yeshua's healing and His word (His instruction) are organically tied together. Because Moses is the model after which Matthew patterns Christ, it is informative to read a pertinent comment made by Philo. In his **Vitas Mosis** chapter 1, Philo says this:

Moses exemplified his philosophical creed by his daily actions. His words expressed his feelings, and his actions accorded with his words, so that speech and life were in harmony, and thus through their mutual agreement were found to make melody together as on a musical instrument.

Although this was a statement about Moses, it would be difficult to find anything more lofty and true in the character and deeds of Christ. So we must not read past Matthew recording that Christ healed the demon possessed and all who came to Him with but a "word". In ancient times speech was seen as something great and mysterious; words were thought to possess actual, tangible power. In our day we don't think of words that way. So when Yeshua merely spoke and the evil spirit left the possessed man, it held a different connotation for those Jews that witnessed it than how we think of it now.

Matthew then goes on to say (from his Believing Jewish mindset) that what Yeshua was doing was in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4. Matthew says: "He himself took our weaknesses, and bore our diseases". This is a loosely fashioned quote from Isaiah; not an exact one. Nonetheless Bible scholars don't doubt that this is meant to be understood as a quote from Isaiah 53. So Matthew, able to see from the perspective of hindsight, tells us that Yeshua is the subject of Isaiah chapters 52 and 53. I've mentioned on a few occasions that it was Jewish practice when

referring to Scripture not to quote long sections but only short passages. The short passages were not meant to be taken alone but rather they were to direct the reader to the entire section of the Holy Scripture that was pertinent. Since in those times there were no such things as chapters and verses or page numbers, then there was no other way for them to communicate the reference to a Scripture passage. The intent was for the reader to recognize the passage and then consult what was written surrounding it.

While I won't do an extensive study of Isaiah 52 and 53, these are short chapters and we need to understand what Matthew was telling us by his directing us there. So we will read them completely as would have studious Jews from Yeshua's time. Turn your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 52.

READ ISAIAH CHAPTERS 52 AND 53 all

These 2 chapters represent one of the most remarkable messianic prophecies in the Bible. It has been taught thusly in Christendom since the first Jewish Believers emerged. Matthew essentially identifies Yeshua as "the suffering servant", which is one and the same as His being "God's servant". So Matthew is connecting Christ's works of miracles with Him being God's servant. Clearly the crowds following Yeshua didn't make that same connection and Judaism in general to this day doesn't either. Judaism either denies the messianic nature of Isaiah's words or they say this doesn't pertain to Yeshua of Nazareth. Especially the Orthodox will claim that Judaism does not and never has seen Isaiah 52 and 53 as referring to anything but Israel itself. That is, Israel (the people) are the suffering servant; not a Messiah. But in fact, a number of Rabbis from the past have recognized the messianic message of these words and written about it. There are many, but here is a small sample.

In Midrash Tehillim, Psalm 16.5 we read this portion: ***Rabbi Levi taught in the name of Rabbi Idi: Suffering is divided into 3 portions: One, the Patriarchs and the generations of men took; the generation that lived in the time of Hadrian's persecution took; and one, the lord Messiah will take.***

Ben Ish Chai commented on the Talmudic passage Sanhedrin 93b in this way: ***"...through afflictions, the Messiah rises to great spiritual heights. In addition, his afflictions atone for Israel so that they can continue to live and perform mitzvot. Since without the Messiah, these mitzvot would not have been done, he is a partner in Israel's mitzvot. Thus because He loaded him***

up with afflictions like millstones, He loaded Him up with mitzvot as well.....the Messiah is Israel's guarantor; he has undertaken suffering to atone for Israel's sins in order to shorten the exile".

Even the Zohar, which is the book of foundational faith statements of mystical Jewish Kabbalah, Shemoth, Section 2, speaks about the same attributes of Messiah and it largely mirrors Christianity's doctrine on the matter. This rather unexpected comment about Isaiah 53 is recorded: ***"When the Messiah hears of the great suffering of Israel in their dispersion, and of the wicked among them who seek not to know their Master, he weeps aloud on account of those wicked ones amongst them, as it is written: But he was wounded because of our transgressions, he was crushed because of our iniquities. The souls then return to their place. The Messiah, on his part, enters a certain Hall in the Garden of Eden, called the Hall of the Afflicted. There he calls for all the diseases and pains and sufferings of Israel, bidding them settle on himself, which they do. And were it not that he thus eases the burden from Israel, taking it on himself, no one could endure the suffering meted out to Israel in expiation on account of their neglect of the Torah. So Scripture says: Surely our diseases he did bear, etc. A similar function was performed by Rabbi Eleazar here on earth. For, indeed, beyond number are the chastisements awaiting every man daily for the neglect of the Torah, all of which descended into the world at the time when the Torah was given. As long as Israel were in the Holy Land, by means of the Temple service and sacrifices, they averted all evil diseases and afflictions from the world. Now it is the Messiah who is the means of averting them from mankind until the time when a man quits this world and receives his punishment."***

So the claims many within Judaism make that Judaism does not, and never has recognized Isaiah 52 and 53 as speaking of the Messiah are not accurate. Yet we must understand that the reason behind this false claim is because of their hatred of Christianity and the strange type of un-biblical, un-historical Jesus that Christians have come to worship. It is no different than the false claim by Christianity that in the Sermon on the Mount Yeshua abolished the Torah and the Prophets, and later that Paul denounced the Torah and told Jews and gentiles alike that it was an ugly, faulty covenant that they were to disavow and disobey. These false claims are made because of the writings of the Early Church Fathers who fomented hatred of the Jews and thus an insistence that all things Jewish (and especially The Law) must be denied and shunned: in time, even the entire Old Testament.

Verse 18 explains that when Yeshua saw the crowds He gave orders to His Disciples to take Him to the other side of the Lake. Yeshua was still at Capernaum and some of His Disciples would have had their fishing boats there so a boat was easily obtained. Why did Yeshua instruct His Disciples to leave Capernaum? Did the crowds grow so large as to become unruly? Were the numbers so great that there would have been no end to the healings requested? Was He exhausted (yes, Jesus was human and got just as tired and worn out as we can)? Was it simply time to take His miracle healing ministry elsewhere? We don't know. But we do know that it was Yeshua's idea to leave; He commanded His Disciples to get a boat and take Him to the other side of the Lake. Where was the other side of the Lake? A few verses later we're told that He arrived in the territory of the Gadarenes. Capernaum was at the Northwest part of the Sea of Galilee and the territory of the Gadarenes was at the Southeast part of the Sea; about a 45 degree angle across the Lake, so the journey was around 12 miles.

But before He boarded the boat a Scribe approached Him. While the CJB correctly calls this person a Torah-teacher, the official position was called Scribe. And indeed they were Torah-teachers..... even better, they were **Tanakh**-teachers....who operated within the synagogue system. That is, they had no attachment to the Temple or to the Priesthood. The Scribe calls Jesus **didaskalos** in Greek, which translates to teacher in English. Because this Scribe was almost certainly a Pharisee, it would have been in this context that he was speaking to Christ. Thus the KJV rightly translates the Greek as Master because a run-of-the-mill teacher was not the Scribe's intent when He addressed Yeshua. Rather he sees Him as having authority, and thus we find the term Rabbi used in the CJB. Rabbi means "great one" and fits well with the scene taking place, here. The Scribe asks if he can accompany Yeshua; he says he will follow Yeshua wherever he goes. "To follow" meant to come under the authority of someone. This was the standard way that the religious Jews chose a Rabbi (a Master) to sit under and be disciplined during that era (as opposed to the way that Yeshua, the Master, **chose** His first disciples).

Yeshua responded to the Scribe in a rather unexpected way. He quotes an ancient folk expression about foxes having holes to live in, and birds having nests, but then adds that the Son of Man has no home of his own. Now clearly the meaning is that Yeshua cannot promise this Scribe a place to live or food to eat because Yeshua lives day to day at the hospitality of others. Having said He has no home, He doesn't mean it literally. His mother Miriam was still living (and as far as we know she was still living in her own home, the same one in Nazareth

that her husband Joseph brought her into when they were first married), so Yeshua of course could go there. But at this point in His ministry Yeshua was an itinerant preacher and healer. What is most important about this statement is Christ calling Himself "The Son of Man".

"Son of Man" was a favorite title that Yeshua regularly called Himself. Clearly Jesus had much respect for the prophet Daniel as in Matthew chapter 24 He speaks of him and a prophecy Daniel made concerning a son of man.

^{CJB} **Daniel 7:13-14** ¹³ " *I kept watching the night visions, when I saw, coming with the clouds of heaven, someone like a son of man. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence.* ¹⁴ *To him was given rulership, glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His rulership is an eternal rulership that will not pass away; and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

Because Yeshua now identifies Himself as Daniel's son of man, we understand something that Daniel and his readers couldn't have. You see, the term "son of man", which was written down in the Book of Daniel in Aramaic, is **bar-enosh**. It's Hebrew equivalent is **ben-adam**. While it literally is translated to English as "son of man", what it meant to the ancients was "human being". However now in hindsight we understand that we can view Daniel's words in both the **P'shat** sense and in the **Remez** sense. That is, the **P'shat** is that this "someone like a son of man" means "someone like a human being". However in the **Remez** it hints at something more. "Son of Man" now becomes a title for the Messiah; a human being that is indeed a man, but more than a man. "Son of Man" is a name Yeshua called Himself more than 80 times in the New Testament, but He also used the term "Son of God". The standard interpretation of these two titles is that Son of Man speaks of Christ's humanity, and Son of God speaks of His divinity. However in reality, it is the reverse. Son of God was a term used in the Bible for Israelite kings long before it was used of Christ; and there was no thought that these kings were deity. The subject is fascinating but extensive. I spoke in depth on it in my Torah Class study on Daniel lessons 19 and 20; so you can go there for further study.

Nonetheless clearly (at least clearly to Matthew) Christ did not mean to say that this "human being" had no home of His own. Rather the mysterious person that Daniel spoke about was Yeshua of Nazareth as the Messiah, and here He was standing there, in person, on the Sea of Galilee and publicly claiming Daniel's

"son of man" title for Himself.

Now in verse 21 yet another man comes forward and wants to go with Christ. This man is already a disciple (a follower, but not one of the original 12 Disciples) so it is not someone making a new or sudden decision. His request to do something first before He follows Christ reminds us of Elijah and Elisha.

^{CJB} **1 Kings 19:20** *He (Elishah) left the oxen, ran after Eliyahu and said, "Please let me kiss my father and mother good-bye; then I will follow you."*

Yet we mustn't take this too far, because Elijah gave permission for Elisha to indeed do as he asked, while Yeshua did the opposite. So what are we to make of Christ's response to the disciple's request to go home and bury his father? That is, saying to him "let the dead bury the dead". Some see this as very harsh. Others see it as breaking more than one Torah command; first to honor your parents but also the mandatory requirement to bury the deceased immediately and to go into 7 days of mourning. All kinds of solutions to this have been proposed including that it is a Hebrew or Aramaic expression that has been mangled or obscured by translating it to Greek. In the end it DOES mean something, and I think clearly it means that following Yeshua in faith trumps all. But it certainly can't mean to break the Law of Moses in order to do it! My suggestion is that it indeed sounded harsh to the disciple and probably to the crowd surrounding Christ. But then again, think about what He would say a bit later than lands in a similar manner upon a listener.

^{CJB} **Matthew 10:37** *Whoever loves his father or mother more than he loves me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than he loves me is not worthy of me.*

As severe as that sounds, Luke's version is even stronger, as he puts the same thought in the negative.

^{CJB} **Luke 14:26** *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, his mother, his wife, his children, his brothers and his sisters, yes, and his own life besides, he cannot be my talmid."*

I believe what we have in Matthew 8 is this: we must not think that here stands a Jewish son in Capernaum talking with Yeshua after leaving his father at home, a corpse, and still not buried! That would have been the height of breaking both

biblical law and Jewish Tradition. While there were several nuances in Tradition about burying the dead, it is unthinkable that a son would leave his dead father to go hear a person speak (even a Holy Man) and then return later to handle the burial. Death and burial were very serious matters that pre-empted nearly everything. The matter of familial involvement could not be subcontracted out except in the rarest of circumstances. On the flip side, however, is that if a parent were very elderly or sickly, his son might not wish to venture far because his duty to be present for the burial and all its arrangements was a deeply embedded virtue in Jewish culture. It wasn't like today when, because of embalment, a burial can be postponed for a while to make it more convenient for all family members to arrive and attend. So while in no way can I be certain, these realities to me add up to the disciple's father not actually being dead....yet... but rather the son wanting to go back home and enjoy just a little more of the good life until his father did eventually pass, and the disciple was finally ready to follow the Messiah as his true Master, but on his own timetable and terms. To me, this is where the lesson lies. Otherwise we have a cranky Jesus telling this young man that he must forego standard Jewish burial practices for his father, or that the spiritually dead ought to bury the physically dead, thus putting this disciple in an impossible bind through no fault of his own.

So how do we measure Yeshua's responses to these two followers? And how does this fit with the prophetic fulfillment of Isaiah that He came to suffer terribly and unselfishly for the sake of sinful humanity? We find a super-compassionate Holy Man on the one hand, and a rather abrupt no-nonsense Master on the other. Here's what we must recognize about Our Savior: He is a complex being. Our Lord is greatly merciful and loving (just as His Father is); ready to comfort us. Yet He is not one whose "goodwill towards men" can be trifled with, or taken for granted or under the assumption that it will be given under any circumstance. He indeed is Savior, but He is also Lord and King and therefore while He gives love, He expects to receive love. And, like His Father, the love He seeks amounts to obedience.

How many thousands..... perhaps millions.... of people have heard the Gospel message and said that they "weren't ready" to accept it, yet. As much as not, it was not because they didn't suspect it was true; it's that they understood enough to know that they couldn't continue the lifestyle they were leading if they turned away from their sins, and turned their life over to Yeshua. When people ask me why human beings sin and even continue to, knowing better, I tell them it's because we enjoy it. We like the sinful things we do otherwise we'd be quick to

give them up. How many thousands of millions of people will live in eternal darkness because they assumed they had a lot more time to live, and then maybe in old age they would finally turn to Christ, only to die suddenly before they made that decision. And how many more had their hearts moved by hearing the truth, but didn't make thinking about it or acting upon it a priority. Instead their thoughts turned back to everyday life, its temptations and its challenges, never again to think seriously about salvation. The issue Jesus was addressing with the disciple who wanted to go back home until his father died, was allegiance and priorities that potential followers of His must necessarily face. For in the biblical realm, love is closely linked to allegiance and loyalty. Allegiance and loyalty establish the order of our priorities. Remember what Christ said earlier in the hills above the Lake:

^{CJB} **Matthew 6:24** *No one can be slave to two masters; for he will either hate the first and love the second, or scorn the second and be loyal to the first. You can't be a slave to both God and money.*

Thus after saying it as a principle, Yeshua has now demonstrated it in practice in dealing with the Scribe and the potential follower as He was about to board a fishing boat to cross the Sea of Galilee.

In verse 23 Yeshua is now on the boat and heading for Gadara with several disciples on board. Suddenly a storm blows up, the Sea begins to churn, and dangerous waves start lashing at the small boat He is in. The disciples are certain their death is imminent and begin to panic. These boats are meant for the calm waters of the Lake; they are not designed to fight against this kind of severe weather. As the disciples (who are fishermen used to being on the Lake) become alarmed we find Yeshua is fast asleep.

For those who have toured Israel with me, you will have visited the Jesus Boat museum at the Nof Ginosar Hotel in Israel. They have an actual fishing boat made in that same period, which was buried in the mud of the seashore, and discovered by a man who lived on the associated Kibbutz. Viewing it helps us understand how small and puny a boat like this would be against a raging sea. But it also makes us ask: how in the world could Jesus sleep on such a crowded and uncomfortable craft, let alone in the midst of it becoming tossed about in a storm?!

And yes, these sorts of storms do blow in suddenly and can be quite perilous. I

was out on the Lake on one of the rather large tourist boats that can hold 100 people or so when some foul weather suddenly blew in. We were in no danger but the swells and then waves formed in a matter of minutes. It was uncomfortable enough that the trip had to be cut a little short or risk having some seasick passengers to contend with. I could immediately imagine what it must have been like for that little fishing boat that had just set sail from Capernaum as it bobbed around on the churning waters.

No doubt this story was recorded in all 3 synoptic Gospels because of its close association with another prophet that Yeshua identified Himself with: Jonah. Christ said:

CJB Matthew 12:40 *For just as Yonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea-monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the depths of the earth.*

Notice how He manages to connect not one but two prophets and prophecies to Himself: that of Jonah and of Daniel. The subject of Matthew 12:40 was of course Jesus speaking about the burial cave He would repose in after His crucifixion. However note the similarity between Jonah's Mediterranean sea adventure and Christ's on the Sea of Galilee in our story of Matthew chapter 8.

CJB Jonah 1:1 *The word of ADONAI came to Yonah the son of Amitai: ² "Set out for the great city of Ninveh, and proclaim to it that their wickedness has come to my attention." ³ But Yonah, in order to get away from ADONAI, prepared to escape to Tarshish. He went down to Yafo, found a ship headed for Tarshish, paid the fare and went aboard, intending to travel with them to Tarshish and get away from ADONAI. ⁴ However, ADONAI let loose over the sea a violent wind, which created such stormy conditions that the ship threatened to break to pieces. ⁵ The sailors were frightened, and each cried out to his god. They threw the cargo overboard to make the ship easier for them to control. Meanwhile, Yonah had gone down below into the hold, where he lay, fast asleep. ⁶ The ship's captain found him and said to him, "What do you mean by sleeping? Get up! Call on your god! Maybe the god will remember us, and we won't die."*

There's more to be gleaned from the story of the tempest on the Sea of Galilee. And we will explore that the next time we meet.

