

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 41, Chapter 11 Continued 2

Before we continue in Matthew chapter 11, let's back-up a wee bit and reset the context. The first 19 verses of this chapter were about John the Baptist in relation to his connection with Christ. First, he was the foretold herald, the messenger, who prepared the way in the wilderness for the Lord. So, he fulfilled the role of Elijah. Second, he was not greater than Yeshua. In fact, Yeshua was John's lord as much as He is for the rest of us. Therefore, John was lesser in rank than Jesus and was to obey and trust in Him. And finally we find that John's and Christ's ministries ran along parallel tracks even though those tracks were connected at some points while separated at others. We've already encountered the reality that John wasn't entirely certain of who Yeshua was, and that what John taught his disciples didn't always agree with what Yeshua taught His.

With verse 20 we enter a new phase. The 12 Disciples have been taught and sent out to towns and villages throughout the Galilee region. Yeshua Himself has traveled mainly around the Galilee (and currently is doing it alone) teaching and doing miracles typical of a Jewish Holy Man; a **Tzadik**. He has explained that He is Daniel's Son of Man and thus (to those with open ears and minds) this firmly establishes Him as of divine connection if not origin. So now the issue becomes the response to Him of those who have heard Him and witnessed the many miraculous healings He has done. What we'll see is that this response includes both that of individuals, as well as that of communities. That is, it is one thing for an individual person to trust Him, but that's not the end of it. There is also an expectation by Jesus that entire cities, regions, even nations are to respond corporately, as a community, to who He is. Therefore a person can come to trust Him (and ultimately be saved) but can at the same time wind up as collateral damage if that person is attached to a community that corporately stands against

Him. This greatly mirrors what we find in the Torah. We saw in the matter of Abraham entering into negotiations with God over the fate of the people of Sodom (mainly to the benefit of his nephew, Lot), that individuals might be rescued on account of their faith but may lose their lives if they choose to remain among communities that are condemned for their wickedness.

So let's get our bearings by reading Matthew 11 starting at verse 19.

RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 11:19 - end

The reason I wanted to begin our reading at verse 19 is because of something we've discussed a couple of times in earlier lessons. It is that Yeshua is depicted in the Gospel accounts (and especially in John's and Matthew's) as the embodiment of Wisdom. This is no small matter if we are to properly understand the nature and character of Our Savior.

The scriptural relationship between God and Wisdom is central to the writings of the Bible. In Jewish literature of the day, Wisdom was seen as feminine and even given the name Sophia. Thus in the Jewish concept divine Wisdom was more than an ideal; it had actual form. Yeshua was expressing that He is that form.

In verse 27 when Christ states that only the Father knows the Son, and only the Son knows the Father (a very intimate, closely tied relationship), we find this same kind of relationship in Jewish thought that only Wisdom knows God. While we find a great deal of attention to the matter of wisdom outside of the Bible, there is also much attention paid to it within the Holy Scriptures; only sometimes it seems vague to us. Therefore, I'd like to recite a passage in Job that is quite pertinent to what Jesus has said. Open your Bibles to the Book of Job.

READ JOB 28:12 - 28

Therefore Job declares that Wisdom is from God, and its substance is of God. This is not intended in an abstract or allegorical sense. Notice in verse 27 how Wisdom is characterized as a living entity, having a form. A truly fascinating expose' about Wisdom can be found in Ecclesiasticus, also known as The Wisdom of Sirach. This is one of the books of the Apocrypha that has been included in the Bible (usually as a separate section, just as the Old Testament and New Testament are seen as separate sections), but then removed, re-included, removed again, and finally permanently banished from Protestant

Bibles in the early 1800's. It remains in the Catholic Bible, many Orthodox Bibles, and several of the lesser known branches of Christianity also retain it. Never was it seen as on the same high level of inspiration as the Old and New Testaments.... not even in the 1st century among Jews. However, the Apocryphal books were seen as truthful, insightful, and worthy of being read and incorporated into a God-worshipper's life. So we shouldn't simply dismiss these works and I recommend that all of you acquire a Book of the Apocrypha and read it. Before I recite to you a short passage from the Wisdom of Sirach I need to explain a little more about this particular work and the Apocrypha in general.

Perhaps the primary reason that the several books of the Apocrypha were removed as a section of the Protestant Bible is because they were always considered as Jewish in flavor and tone; too Jewish in fact. So, yes, anti-Semitism played a significant role for their exclusion. These books were written well before Christ was born. The Wisdom of Sirach, for instance, was written about 180 B.C., in the Hebrew language. Soon it was translated into Greek and it spread throughout the Jewish Diaspora. It was an exceedingly valued book within the Jewish culture even before Jesus came along, and it continued to be all during His lifetime. The point is that we are going to see some phrases and sayings of Yeshua that are similar to what we find in the Apocrypha, and in other cases they are nearly word for word. This shouldn't in any way alarm us, but it should peak our curiosity. These books (and especially the Wisdom of Sirach) were greatly valued and believed and taught; so of course Jesus knew them well. He wouldn't have had much disagreement with most of what these works had to say. As He was communicating with fellow Jews who also were familiar with these works He would occasionally employ familiar terms and phrases that came from them as a natural flow of conversation. The difficulty for us arises when we attempt to understand these terms and phrases taken from a work such as the Wisdom of Sirach (as used to describe wisdom and its source, for example) outside of the common Jewish cultural context of the 1st century.... which is exactly what mainstream Christianity often attempts. The result can be some rather unsound doctrines.

I'm going to read to you from The Wisdom of Sirach chapter 1, starting with verse 1.

All wisdom comes from the Lord and remains with Him forever. The sand of the seas, and the drops of rain, and the days of eternity... who can count them? The height of the heavens, and the breadth of the earth, and the

deep, and wisdom... who can track them out? Wisdom was created before them all, and sound intelligence from eternity. To whom has the source of wisdom been revealed? And who knows her devices? There is but one who is wise, a very terrible one, seated upon His throne. The Lord created her; He saw her and counted her, and He poured her out upon all He made. Upon all mankind, as He chose to bestow her. But He supplied her liberally to those who loved Him.

This represents the rather general view of Wisdom common throughout Jewish culture. So in Matthew 11, we have Jesus identifying Himself as that embodiment... that form... of divinely created Wisdom. This means that Yeshua has the knowledge to reveal hidden revelations that mankind cannot, of ourselves, simply "know" no matter how intently we seek it on our own. What Yeshua says agrees very closely to what Ben Sirach says. But in Yeshua's words we also see another connection to yet another person from the past in Hebrew history: Moses.

From the beginning of our study of the Gospel of Matthew I have pointed out that always in the background of what Matthew writes about Yeshua is Him being the literal embodiment of Wisdom; but also that He is the "prophet like me" that Moses said would come. These sorts of things sound a bit alien to 21st century gentile Christians; in fact I think gentile Christianity has from its earliest day struggled in dealing with this clear reality because of its inherent Jewishness. Therefore we are meant to see that Moses and Yeshua are tightly linked and so we should look to the Torah to help us understand what Yeshua means by many of the things He says. For instance, when Yeshua speaks about the Father and Son knowing each other in Matthew 11:27 it has a direct connection to Moses and God in Exodus 33:12 - 13. I'm going to present this in the KJV because it is the more literal translation from the Greek than the CJB.

^{KJV} ***Exodus 33:12-13 ¹² And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. ¹³ Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people.***

In the last couple of verses of Matthew 11 Yeshua speaks of His own meekness (or gentleness) and of His "yoke". Meekness is one of the primary attributes the

Torah ascribes to Moses, and the term "yoke" was a word regularly used among Jews to describe one's required connection to the Law of Moses. So while it's not readily apparent to the modern gentile Believer, ancient Jews would have picked up on the Yeshua-Moses connection. Whether they accepted it or not is another matter (obviously, most didn't). Yeshua also speaks of giving "rest" to the people who "yoke" themselves to Him. This again cements His link with Moses. In Exodus 33:14 God speaks to Moses and says:

^{CJB} **Exodus 33:14** ¹⁴ ***"... Set your mind at rest- my presence will go with you, after all."***

Moving on. In Matthew 11:20, Yeshua speaks about the negative responses to His person and His message that He sees coming from several cities. Since any and every city or town is actually but a conglomerate of the people who live there, then it would be unimaginable that every last person in a decent sized city or town would reject Jesus and His message. So when here we find Christ condemning these cities to destruction, it is on a corporate and not an individual level. The city (as a whole) will pay a steep price in the form of physical destruction that will potentially harm even the few (or the one) that has decided to trust in Him.

Notice the reason for Christ's denunciation of the cities. It is that He had done many miracles there; He had healed many people but this still did not bring that community to trust in Him. We discussed in earlier lessons that one of the great points made within Matthew's Gospel is that the working of miracles does NOT lead to people trusting in Christ, as it might seem that it ought to. Clearly Jesus thought that it should have; and it made Him not just a little bit upset that it didn't. He didn't do miracles with the ulterior motive of individuals and cities trusting in Him; He did them because He had great compassion on the afflictions of the people. On the other hand, He expected that these many jaw-dropping miracles would have affected the people in a way that went beyond easing their physical suffering. He expected they would have turned from their sins (that is they would have repented) in response to being healed..... and the witnesses to these miracles would have been equally impressed..... but it didn't turn out that way.

So in verse 21 Yeshua specifically calls out the cities of Korizin and Bethsaida. If you've been to Israel with me, you've probably been to those places. Both of these are located in the Upper Galilee, near to the Sea of Galilee. Korizin is a couple of miles north from Capernaum (Jesus's resident city for some time, now),

and Bethsaida is towards the northern end of the Sea of Galilee, however it's exact location is in dispute. There is a substantial academic debate over whether the ruins of Bethsaida are to be identified with the archeological dig at El-Tel, or the one at El-Araj. Both are on the northeastern side of The Lake. Either way, these 2 cities are the targets of Yeshua's ire. He says that the thoroughly gentile and thus pagan cities of Tzor and Tzidon (located in modern day Lebanon) would have been more accepting of Him than were the thoroughly Jewish cities of Korazin and Bethsaida.

Tzor and Tzidon at one time had been completely destroyed, but by Christ's day had been rebuilt and were thriving port cities on the Mediterranean. In Ezekiel chapter 28 both Tzor and Tzidon are singled out for judgment and no doubt this is why Christ chose them to use as an illustration. It appears that by the 1st century the words "like Tzor and Tzidon" had more or less joined the regularly used "like Sodom and Gomorrah" as a way of speaking about warnings of judgment. Yeshua says that if He had done His miracle healings in those 2 gentile cities, they would have put on sackcloth and ashes. The wearing of sackcloth and the throwing of ashes over one's head was symbolic of both mourning and repentance (usually the mourning was the result of the repentance). So the implication is that Tzor and Tzidon would have turned from their sinful paganism and accepted Yeshua. It is difficult to accept this as a truly prophetic statement. That is, this doesn't seem to be that Yeshua is claiming to know from some kind of divine foreknowledge that had He visited those 2 cities and performed miracles that they would indeed have repented. Rather this more seems like the use of a standard phrase within Jewish culture of that era in order to make a passionate point.

So; Yeshua as the accuser has set Korazin and Bethsaida before the Great Judge as unrepentant sinners and now comes the verdict. On Judgment Day those 2 Jewish cities (meaning the community of people living there along with the buildings) will suffer more catastrophe and suffering than did Tzor and Tzidon did when they were destroyed, as promised by God.

Let's pause and think about this for a moment. The Jewish residents of the 2 cities of Korazin and Bethsaida (Jewish cities) no doubt thought of themselves as good and righteous worshippers of God, whereas Tzor and Tzidon never thought of themselves as worshippers of God. And yet because Korazin and Bethsaida didn't repent from their sins and accept Yeshua, they are going to be judged more harshly than those 2 pagan cities will. Why? Because the residents of the 2

Jewish cities had been steeped in the Hebrew religion. They had every advantage. Their entire heritage was based on knowing Yehoveh, the God of Israel. They had the Law of Moses, the Torah and the Prophets. It's not that they thought they had become wicked and sinners. But in Jesus's eyes by rejecting Him they were wicked and they were also rejecting their true religion and their God.... The Father. Let me say that a bit differently. As a result of their sin and blindness to it, it led to the Jewish people of Korazin and Bethsaida rejecting their Messiah.

There is today a dangerous doctrine called the Dual Covenant that's been around awhile, and lately it has been championed by several Pastors who clearly love Israel and the Jewish people. They love them so much that they can't (emotionally) stand the idea that Jews would be destined for the Lake of Fire if they didn't accept Jesus as their Messiah. So the Dual Covenant doctrine states that Jews believing in The Father is sufficient for salvation for them. Look; I love Israel and the Jewish people as well. But I love them so much that I'm not about to tell them something that is false, even if it is offensive to them, especially because it affects relationship with their God and their eternity. This section of Matthew makes it clear that trust in Yeshua is what saves a person...Jew or gentile... from judgment. Believing in God isn't enough. Being of Jewish heritage isn't enough. Yeshua shows us that if we truly trust God in the way God counts it as our trust, then we'll trust His Son. All else is lip service and it destines us to a dark future.

You see, the major turn-off for Jews is not that they don't want to trust in a Messiah; it's that they don't want to trust in the **gentile** Christian version of a Messiah that marginalizes His own Jewishness, and discards God's love for His people and nation, Israel. The Crusades and the Inquisition happened many centuries ago, but the victims of the Church's unconscionable actions were primarily Jews, and it is well remembered within modern Jewish society. For young people, today, it may seem like the 75 years ago that the Holocaust happened is but dusty ancient history; yet it is not such a long time ago and a few people who were victims of it are still alive today to remind us. The point is that I don't blame the Jews one bit for not wanting to hear about a Western, Romanized Christianity. Nor of an Eastern Orthodox Christianity that has a history of being just as hateful towards the Jews, and that also sees Jews as thrown aside and forgotten by God. So the answer from Christianity shouldn't be to present Jews with the false hope of dual covenants for Salvation; one for Jews, the other for gentiles. One that requires trust in Messiah Yeshua, the other

that doesn't. That approach only makes the Church feel better and perhaps applies a little balm to our collective guilt. Or maybe it makes us think we can get the Gospel message monkey off our back so we don't have to evangelize Jews and suffer their rejection. The only answer is for the Church to truly love the Jewish people with the truth, with mercy and respect, and for the millions of members of the Church to don sackcloth and ashes and acknowledge our wrong doing and make meaningful change. But this can't and won't happen until a lot of unsound Church doctrine is addressed head on, and hopefully relegated to a shameful past. This is not going to happen from the top down by trying to retrain the executive level of various denominations. It is only going to happen from the bottom up by teaching one willing but ordinary Believer at a time, just as Christ did.

As we discussed in earlier lessons, Yeshua didn't arrive with banners screaming "Your wait is over! Your Messiah is here and I am He!" Rather, since the Jewish people's acceptance of Him would necessarily require repentance..... by a people who already believed in the God of the Bible and thought they were in good stead with Him.... Christ had to address some of the wrong doctrines (misguided traditions) that had sent them careening off course, before they were able to hear and understand the truth of who He was (and is). I maintain that the present Church is (in general) little different and has been in a similar boat as those Jews for at least 1700 years. Allow me to offend you a little more. The Jesus as is usually portrayed by the mainstream Church is not the historical, biblical Jesus, but rather is some kind of contrived caricature that satisfies the need to have Him fit with predetermined doctrines and various gentile cultural views. Can that save anyone, no matter now genuinely sincere or nice they are? No matter how much they raise their hands and call on this non-historical Jesus's name? I would imagine that it is not a one-size-fits-all answer, and I have no ability to separate the sheep from the goats (so to speak). But I want to remind you of what I deem as the most terrifying words in Bible because I think they were spoken just for this scenario.

CJB Matthew 7:21-23 ²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants. ²² On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?' ²³ Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'

Notice that the issue is not about whether a person knows or worships the God of Israel; that is taken as a given. Rather the issue is knowing and worshipping Yeshua as God's Son. Not a made-up Jesus, but the real Jesus; the New Testament Jesus. And it also involves our obeying Him in the context of what He instructed; not in some modern spin that allows us to avoid what He clearly said and He expects of us.

How could hundreds, even thousands of Jewish people in Judea and Galilee personally witness His amazing miracles and hear His incomparable words directly from His own mouth, and say "No thanks"? Because if you already believe you are righteous, and think you already know the truth, you're not open to being corrected. Nor are you open to having what you believe challenged, and being forced to defend it with actual Scriptural truth. I'm not nearly as concerned for pagans who know they're not saved. I'm far more concerned for those who are certain they ARE saved, but in reality they don't know their Savior or have any idea of their obligations and duties to Him and to His Father because they rely on traditions and caricatures and not biblical truth. This is precisely what has happened to the good people of Korazin and Bethsaida.

Verse 23 continues to startle. Yeshua condemns His own home city of Capernaum similarly. Many, many of His miracles were done in Capernaum.... some of His most spectacular and meaningful. And yet, even **those** residents refused to repent from their sins and trust in Him.

I think it is fair to ask at this point exactly what the Jews were to trust in Christ as. That is, it is correctly said that these Jews were to trust in Him; but exactly what was it they were supposed to trust? Even John the Baptist was struggling with this issue ("are you the one that is to come, or should we look for someone else?"). To date, the message that the 12 Disciples were sent out with was only that the Kingdom of Heaven had arrived. It was NOT that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah because He had not directly said so and the subject hadn't been broached. So between His miracles and His teaching, Yeshua's point was not yet that the people should trust in Him as their Messiah, but rather that they should trust in Him enough to learn through His authoritative instruction that they are sinners..... they are NOT righteous before God as they think they are.... and they need to repent. There's a larger point to be made here. Folks: we don't accept Yeshua and THEN repent. First we repent and then we accept Yeshua. If we don't feel any deep urging to confess and confront the fact that we are sinners, and that we sincerely repent from our sinning, then why would we need

a Savior?

In verse 23 by Yeshua asking the rhetorical question about if Capernaum would be exalted to Heaven, it means: would the city and inhabitants of Capernaum be held up to God and presented as innocent on Judgment Day? Yeshua says no way to that. But, they are certainly going to be brought down to **She'ol**. Actually, the Greek says they'll be brought down to Hades. You can look up the terms **She'ol** and Hades on the Torah Class website to get some in-depth understanding, but for our purpose today know that to Jews and even to the Greeks of that day, Hades was not the equivalent of Christian Hell. But neither was it the CJB translation of **She'ol**. **She'ol**, for the Jews, was simply the grave. And since Yeshua is speaking to Jews, He meant **She'ol**, the grave..... the place where the dead are buried. So to be clear: even though we indeed find in the Greek manuscripts the word Hades, it's because this was the way they translated **She'ol** (remember: Matthew was originally written in Hebrew). And, it is not the best translation. For the Greeks, Hades was the Netherworld. It was the pagan realm of the dead, with some people living quite comfortably, and others not so much. There were cities, and servants, and food.....even parties and orgies..... pretty much everything available to the living only better. The Jews had no such concept.

The bottom line is that Yeshua says that Capernaum is not only **not** going to be exalted, they are in for a catastrophic fall. Yeshua resurrects the old usage of Sodom as an object lesson for the wicked by saying that what happens to Capernaum will be worse than what happened to Sodom. I don't know how much worse it could be; Sodom never recovered from God's judgment on them!

The next verse has a couple of parts to it. Verse 25 is essentially a prayer of thanksgiving that Yeshua speaks publicly so that the crowd can hear it and learn from it. It extols The Father as the true Lord of Heaven and Earth. So while as Believers we can speak of Christ as Lord of Heaven and Earth in one sense, we must always understand it from the perspective of seeing Christ as The Father's agent. The Father didn't die or retire and turn the family business over to his son. Christ continually receives His power and authority from The Father in order that it would be used to continually carry out the Father's will; Yeshua emphasizes this at every opportunity. It is interesting that the phrase "Lord of Heaven and Earth" only occurs 3 times in the entire New Testament. Each time it is meant for the readers to recall God The Father creating the Universe from Genesis 1:1.

The second part of verse 25 says that God has hidden "these things" from the wise and educated, but made them known to the simple. I imagine your version will say something different but similar as I'm trying to condense all the translation possibilities into one. First: what are "these things" God has hidden from the wise and educated? There's many different theological opinions on this statement. From the general sense it had to be whatever it was that Jesus was revealing. What He was revealing was an awareness of just where Israel and the Jewish people stood at that moment in history. More specifically, it was a revelation of awareness of what comes with the Latter Days.

As we've discussed on many occasions, the Jews believed they had entered the End Times. They were wrong about that, but indeed they had been experiencing the Latter Days. Christians tend to make the Latter Days and the End Times as synonymous terms, yet clearly they are not because in the New Testament we find 2 Latter Days and only 1 End Times. The term "End Times" means exactly what it says; the End. There will be no more human history as we know it after that. However after the first of the two Latter Days, history will (and did) continue. Both Latter Days require an appearance of the Messiah (His advent and then His return); and this is what confused the Jews the most as concerned Jesus because they didn't see two appearances of the Messiah in their theology (although interestingly we do find later Rabbis suggesting it).

Second: another part of this verse concerns who, exactly, is having the revelation hidden from them, and who is being allowed to receive it. This question must be coupled with: why would The Father want this revelation hidden from anyone..... let alone wise and understanding people? What's wrong with being wise? I thought that's what we're supposed to be as God-worshippers? We find the following in Isaiah 29.

^{CJB} **Isaiah 29:14** *therefore, I will have to keep shocking these people with astounding and amazing things, until the 'wisdom' of their 'wise ones' vanishes, and the 'discernment' of their 'discerning ones' is hidden away."*

And in 1Corinthians:

^{CJB} **1 Corinthians 1:19** *Indeed, the Tanakh says, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and frustrate the intelligence of the intelligent."*

The term "wise and understanding" or "wise and intelligent" or "wise and

prudent", had become among 1st century Judaism a negative expression. It is sarcastic in tone because it refers to people.... sometimes secular.... who are enamored and puffed up by their own intelligence and are certain of having unassailable wisdom (they're a legend in their own mind). But in reality as for correct knowledge of God, they have little or none. So who were those to whom these revelations were revealed? Again we find a variety of translations from the Greek to English. These people are babes. They are children. They are the childlike. They are the simple. They are, as the CJB has it, the ordinary folks. The Greek word being translated into all these words is *nepioi*. In certain usages it means infants. But the idea as it is used here is that it represents people who are the opposite of the wise and learned. So, are we to assume that Yeshua doesn't much like intelligent people? Or people who are educated? No, that's not what is happening. We have to put our 1st century Jewish mindsets on to get it.

The term "the wise and the learned" is a direct shot at the Pharisees and the Scribes that drips with sarcasm. It probably includes the heads of the Jewish religious academies, the most renowned among them located in Jerusalem (just like the one Paul attended). This is a negative characterization of the arrogant Synagogue and Jewish academic leadership that boasts of their personal wisdom and knowledge that is anything but God-inspired. All during His ministry on earth Yeshua had a running battle with the Jewish religious elite and the Pharisees. They never failed to question His doctrine, and He never failed to denounce theirs. The babes, on the other hand, represent the opposite. They were those common Jews who in the opinion of the Jewish religious authorities are weak and simple; but in God's economy they are His elect.

It is embedded in Jewish literature of that time (and later) that God's revelation is not there for everyone to share. There is an underlying criteria that God uses to determine who among His created humanity receives such divine revelation. We can find this thought in the Book of Job.

^{CJB} **Job 28:28** *And to human beings he said, 'Look, fear of Adonai is wisdom! Shunning evil is understanding!'"*

So the criteria is that those who are wholehearted and have prepared themselves, humbly, to receive God's revelations by fearing Him, will gain wisdom by means of obeying Him. The moral, obedient and meek will be given such knowledge but those who see God's revelations as but mere literary or human based knowledge to be obtained, or perhaps as something that should be

measured against secular standards, will be denied. I want to editorialize a bit to give you a practical, but perhaps shocking, example of this for the 21st century because you need to be made aware.

There are several modern era Bible commentators that not only don't believe in Christ, they don't claim any belief in God. If they do, it is not necessarily the God of the Bible but perhaps of some undefined non-earthly intelligence or a mix of attributes of gods of various religions so as not to appear bigoted but rather fair minded. It is in vogue today at many Christian Colleges to add an Islamic Studies department, because they either see no conflict between that and the Christian faith or that there is an intellectual argument to be made for Believers to learn all about Islam so as to promote more diversity, tolerance and understanding (if not acceptance) of a faith that they see as having a common heritage to ours.

Some of this particular strand of popular Bible commentators, professors, and their colleagues believe in a kind of spiritualism, but not Spirit. Others don't accept the spiritual whatsoever. This is actually not only a 21st century phenomenon; it began among the European Bible commentators of the early 19th century because of the rise of European Enlightenment that tars and feathers anyone believing in God as a primitive, ignorant person, who trusts superstition instead of science and reason, and in so doing impedes mankind's social and intellectual progress.

Since many Bible commentators today operate out of secular Universities, they long to be respected by their peers and so for many decades now Christianity has become relegated to the status of but one of many human philosophies, and the Bible as a specific kind of ancient Jewish literature and myth that is no different than any other ancient literature and myth except that it is entirely religious in nature. Therefore, the Bible is perceived that way, read that way, interpreted that way, and taught that way to their young, eager students. And as hard as it might be to believe, folks, much of the teaching material used in modern seminaries and even in Christian theological schools comes from that particular strand of commentators because their approach has gained such popular appeal.

I tell you this not only as a caution, but also as object lesson because these particular scholars and commentators I'm describing are indeed intelligent, well educated and decent people who are at the same time the prime examples of what Jesus is speaking against in Matthew 11:25. They are who Job warns us

about, and are also what Paul is getting at in 1Corinthians (and he ought to know, having gone to the elite of Jewish religious academies). Some of the most respected Bible commentators of our era believe, rightly, that the academic preparation and the criteria for being able to properly understand the words of the Bible so as to be able to teach others about it is scholarly expertise in the original languages, or literary knowledge of the Bible era, or being a historian of the ancient Near and Middle East, or all of the above. These are all good and useful (if not indispensable) disciplines for learning and teaching God's Word. But... tragically what they leave out, and they don't understand, is that the doors to true wisdom and authentic divine knowledge and revelation are closed to them because they don't know or trust God. Without that trust they are operating and teaching only within their own limited human understanding, intellect, and wisdom. This is an explosive mixture that makes them just as dangerous for the God seekers of today as it was when many of the Pharisees and Scribes used their human-centered thoughts to instruct the Jews who sought God in Yeshua's era. Yeshua aptly described them, earlier in Matthew, as wolves in sheep's clothing.

We'll continue in Matthew chapter 11 next week.