

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 42, Chapter 11 and 12

We wrapped up the prior lesson with a message of awareness to a sad but dangerous reality within Christianity in modern times, in which not only is it acceptable within the academic branch of the Church for agnostics or even atheists to create commentaries on the various books of the Bible, but that these commentaries have found their way onto the desks of prominent theologians and into the course material of many of our seminaries. While I cannot know for certain what the motivation is for a person who believes neither in God nor in Christ to write papers and instruction material on the Bible, in general I don't see an intent to intentionally deceive the reader. For whatever their reasons, these scholars have chosen Bible history, or the biblical languages, or ancient literature as their specialty. So it is from expertise in these scholastic disciplines, and not any personal knowledge or experience with God, that they establish their authority to be a Bible commentator and teacher.

I incorporated in that lesson my warning to you about them because of a comment Jesus made in Matthew 11:25 & 26 part of which is essentially a brief prayer of praise that He made for the crowd surrounding Him to hear. Christ's comment made reference to the sophisticated and educated... or more literally to the wise and the learned.... but it was intended as sharp sarcasm towards those Pharisees and Scribes and Jewish academics that operated the Synagogues and instructed in the religious academies. Yeshua clearly had a bone to pick with these fellows because earlier in Matthew He referred to this group as wolves in sheep's clothing. That is, they were deceivers that harmed the flock (whether or not their intent was to deceive). How did they deceive? The more nuanced answer will come later in the Book of Matthew, but I'll quote some of it for you now.

^{CJB} **Matthew 15:6-9** *...Thus by your tradition you make null and void the word of God! ⁷ You hypocrites! Yesha'yahu was right when he prophesied about you, ⁸ 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me. ⁹ Their worship of me is useless, because they teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines.'"*

In the way it is used here, man-made rules are what at times are called traditions (or Traditions of the Elders), and doctrines more refers to biblical instruction and principles. As with most things said, they are neither black nor white but rather exist in shades of gray. That is, Yeshua isn't denouncing **all** traditions as unscriptural. But He is denouncing the ones that in essence go against the biblical truth and intent of God. In Matthew 11:25 & 26, He lays this accusation directly at the feet of the Jewish religious leaders, mostly aimed at the Synagogue leadership, which was dominated by the sect of the Pharisees. The reality is that such a negative comment can also be directly applied today to many Christian Theological institutes, Seminaries, and Church leaders. That the Church is fractured into at least 3000 identifiable denominations is proof of itself that man-made rules instead of the Bible have long ago become the bedrock of Christianity. And Yeshua says we're not going to get true divine revelation from them if that's who they are (again, as a general but not all inclusive statement) because God withholds revelation from them, and instead gives it to ordinary folks because it pleases Him to do so. Who are the ordinary folks? Those who trust God's Word, are obedient to Him, and are not puffed up with pride and self-deceived with false beliefs and traditions that always have a hidden agenda behind them.

Let's move on the final 4 verses of Matthew chapter 11.

RE-READ MATTHEW 11:27 - 30

Yeshua makes startling claim after startling claim in the last half of Matthew 11, and His statement in verse 27 that the Father has handed "everything" or "all things" over to "Me" only adds to it. I imagine that His listeners (and it's not entirely clear who they are) weren't certain about what He meant. They were in good company because to this day there is still no universal agreement over His intent.

We should begin to understand it by (as always) taking it in context. And the context is that He just finished saying that the self-important Jewish religious

leadership are not going to understand God's revelations, so His next claim is only for those who don't fall into that category of people. He then follows this up with the revelation and wisdom that The Father has handed over "everything" to Him. And then follows that up with saying that only the Son truly knows the Father, and only the Father truly knows the Son. We are entering the realm of the enormous and the mysterious, and it is challenging to comment on some of the things Christ is saying in any kind of a succinct way. I mean that in the sense that we live in a "bumper sticker", short attention span world that craves having the complex reduced to a sentence or less of explanation. That which by its very nature necessitates deep study, prayer, and much nuance to understand correctly and to properly apply to our lives is to be described by a glib and very short phrase. And I promise you that what comes next..... the Sabbath controversy..... is even more complex.

That said, modern Christianity has used this statement about the Father turning "everything" or (depending on your Bible version) "all things" over to Christ as if it was a mammoth Christmas tree on which every type of ornament can be hung. There is simply no way around the fact what is meant by, and included in "all things" can seem ambiguous because in the English language that term is by nature general and non-specific. So great liberties have been taken to use this statement to validate any number of man-made Church doctrines. For instance: some say it means that the Father has handed the entire physical Universe and the Spiritual world over to Christ and gone into retirement. Or, it means that since Jesus is now in charge whatever the Father has previously ordained can now be updated and changed because He has given His Son the authority to do so. Some say that it is pointing towards what He is about to say in the next couple of verses (several wisdom sayings). I suggest that if we simply remove the paragraph changes and verse markings that our Bibles have in them, the meaning becomes a little more clear.

It bears repeating that the Hebrew Bible..... the Tanach... the Old Testament, which is the only Bible that existed in Jesus's time or would for the next 150 years, had no chapters, paragraphs, or verse numbers. While on the one hand these sorts of simple devices make our ability to reference various parts of the Bible easier to read, study and communicate by breaking up the narratives into smaller bite-sized chunks, they can also misguide us. How so? Because in Western literature chapters and paragraphs indicate definite changes in the flow of words such as the end of one scene and the beginning of another, or the end of one thought and the beginning of another. And because we find in most Bible

translations a paragraph change between verses 26 and 27, then we think that Christ has ended one train of thought and moved on to the next. I want to remove those markings and read it to you in a way that I think may make the meaning of "these things", or "all things", or "everything" more clear.

CJB Matthew 11:25-27 ²⁵ *It was at that time that Yeshua said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you concealed these things from the sophisticated and educated and revealed them to ordinary folks.* ²⁶ *Yes, Father, I thank you that it pleased you to do this.* ²⁷ *"My Father has handed over everything to me.*

He next goes on to speak of the Son and Father knowing each other. It is my opinion that the best choice is to connect the statement concerning "these things which the Father has concealed" in verse 25 with the "everything" of verse 27. That is, the Father has turned over all the knowledge of all revelatory wisdom to Yeshua. It is not an issue of transfer of possession of physical property such as the Temple or even of the entire planet. Nor is it about turning over the possession of literary property such as the Law Code (The Law of Moses) or the entire Old Testament. Remember: Matthew has structured his entire Gospel around a handful of concepts among which is that Jesus is Wisdom. He is the tangible form, the embodiment, of Wisdom. And wisdom is to be understood as meaning divinely sourced knowledge.

Yet another concept that Matthew puts forth is that Yeshua is the 2nd Moses. And thus when we add these verses I just quoted to the statement that "no one fully knows the Son except the Father, and no one fully knows the Father except the Son", it connects nicely to Moses in Exodus chapter 33.

CJB Exodus 33:11-14 ¹¹ *ADONAI would speak to Moshe face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. Then he would return to the camp; but the young man who was his assistant, Y'hoshua the son of Nun, never left the inside of the tent.* ¹² *Moshe said to ADONAI, "Look, you say to me, 'Make these people move on!' But you haven't let me know whom you will be sending with me. Nevertheless you have said, 'I know you by name,' and also, 'You have found favor in my sight.'* ¹³ *Now, please, if it is really the case that I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways; so that I will understand you and continue finding favor in your sight. Moreover, keep on seeing this nation as your people."* ¹⁴ *He answered, "Set your mind at rest-my presence will go with you, after all."*

Both Moses and Jesus speak of knowing the Father and the Father knowing them, but then notice how the thought ends with the concept of rest. God tells Moses to "rest" because His presence will go with Him into the wilderness, and in Matthew 11:29 Yeshua tells His followers that if they'll take on His yoke, they will find rest. This is not a coincidence.

So Yeshua knowing the Father fully, and the Father knowing the Son fully at least includes the idea of having mutual knowledge. As always, we must understand this in a general and not a precise or all-inclusive-without-exception sense. I caution this because another common Christian doctrine (especially in the Evangelical branch of the Church) is that Yeshua's knowledge is a carbon copy of the Father's, which then makes them co-equals. In other words, the doctrine is that Jesus and God the Father are equally omniscient. However this doctrine is clearly dashed in any number of statements out of Yeshua's own mouth, including this as perhaps His most famous concerning the subject:

CJB Matthew 24:34-36 ³⁴ Yes! I tell you that this people will certainly not pass away before all these things happen. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. ³⁶ "But when that day and hour will come, no one knows- not the angels in heaven, not the Son, only the Father.

So here Yeshua confesses that there are things, there is knowledge, which the Father holds but it has not been imparted to the Son. We need not see this as a contradiction to Matthew 11:27 but rather we need to understand that the words of the various authors of the Bible and the words of the many Bible characters who are quoted, are similar to how we talk in everyday speech. "Everything" and "all" doesn't have to mean 100%, and it usually doesn't. Rather it more typically means the majority but with some exceptions.

No matter how **we** might wish to nuance and understand what Yeshua meant by this statement of the Son knowing the Father and the Father the Son, we must once again put on our 1st century Jewish mindset and try to see this the way the Jews who heard Him would have taken it. Clearly Christ was setting Himself in the position as being the Son; and just as clearly the Father meant God the Father (and not Yeshua's own human father, Joseph). So, Yeshua was saying that He was the Son of God who possessed the same wisdom that God the Father had and that He (God) was the one who would reveal divine revelation to whomever He chose. Yeshua was making a strong case for His own divinity and

all that came with it.

Now that He has made this pretty straightforward claim, He takes it a step further in verse 28. He says that because of who He is, all who are struggling and burdened can find rest in Him. I think the KJV translates these words the best and most literally. The KJV says:

^{KJV} **Matthew 11:28** *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Yeshua is making a word play in order to make an illustration. The English words labor and heavy laden, play well with the final word of the passage, which is rest. These 3 words translate the Greek words **kopiao**, **phortizo**, and then **anapauo** that work together to form a mental picture for His Jewish listeners of hard labor, heavy loads, and then a welcome break (a rest) to allow the body to refresh and re-energize. The focus of the passage is that it is Yeshua who will provide the welcome break. He then continues with this word play by employing the word yoke. In its literal sense, a yoke is an uncomfortable-looking, heavy wooden device made to join two work animals together in order to pull a wagon or a plow. However mid-sentence we see that the mental picture this conjures up is to be taken metaphorically. Jesus is not talking about literal hard manual labor, or carrying heavy loads, and then some blessed idleness that comes about in order to let the exhausted body rejuvenate. Rather, He says, "learn from Me". And the reason they should learn from Him is because He is gentle and meek. Other Bible versions might say that He is humble and gentle, or lowly in heart. OK, pause. Why does the quality of being gentle (or humble) and meek make Him the better choice for the people seeking truth? What did Christ just finish saying about to whom God chooses to give revelatory wisdom, and to whom He withholds it? God gives it to the humble and the meek (which is what Yeshua says He is), but withholds it from the arrogant and self-important (Scribes and Pharisees) who see their own wisdom as equal to, or above, God's. I'll repeat: Christ says that He is humble and meek, so He qualifies (even from the purely human aspect) to be one that God would choose to reveal Heavenly wisdom. Therefore, the people should seek Yeshua for true knowledge and wisdom and not those they had been listening to.

So the term "yoke" in this passage becomes a metaphor. In Jewish thought "yoke" is used to mean obedience and subordination. It also includes the idea of education, commitment and connection. It was common then, and still is among

the Jewish Orthodox today, that "yoke" is a term used to define a Jew's relationship to the Torah and to the Law. That is, they speak of the "yoke of the Torah" or the "yoke of the Law" and it is intended in these several senses. It was (and remains) a positive term, and not something to avoid. The thing to understand is that a man could, in the metaphorical sense, yoke himself to the Torah, yoke himself to his wife, yoke himself to his family and clan, yoke himself to his Rabbi and to a number of other things all at the same time. So in this way a person could have more than one "yoking", but one was never to be yoked to opposing or opposite things.

Therefore Yeshua is saying to change who and what you are yoked to. The question for Believers then becomes, so what yoke is it that Christ is saying they should discard in favor of His yoke? The standard answer within Christianity is that we should shuck-off the yoke of The Law of Moses. But the Law of Moses has not been part of the conversation about what it is that Yeshua is speaking about or denouncing. When Yeshua says that His yoke is "light" this is clearly not in contrast to the biblical Torah or the Law of Moses. Rather it was in contrast to the burdens of a yoke of man-made traditions that was hung upon the necks of the common people by the wise and learned (the Scribes and the Pharisees); a yoke that was indeed heavy and full of needless difficult burdens. By turning people away from those man-made burdens and back to the comforting truth of God's Torah, Jesus offered rest in the sense of peace of mind and soul instead of ceaseless activities that revolved around behaviors rather than a Godly attitude and determination.

I hope most of you have studied the Torah with me. If you haven't, I wonder why you're trying to follow these lessons on the Gospel of Matthew? You're not as prepared as you could be because you're putting the proverbial cart before the horse. For those who have studied the Torah then you know that it is anything but a system of heavy burdens placed upon us by a stern God, and Jews have certainly never considered it so. Rather the Torah and the Law instructs us on how to love God and how to love our fellow man. It tells us how to be in harmony with the Universe as God created it, rather than battling against it. It provides for the welfare of the poverty stricken and the defenseless of society. It provides a proportional and fair standard for civil and criminal justice. It gives us a perfect moral compass whose needle never deviates simply because circumstances change. It provides us with firm and unequivocal definitions of good and evil. It provides us the source for determining our personal worth and value as human beings. The Torah is the indispensable foundation for all Believers and the New

Testament assumes our familiarity with it.

So by Yeshua saying "learn from Me", He was telling the Jewish people to give up the Scribe or Pharisee they were listening to for their religious instruction and instead listen to Him. He made it abundantly clear back in Matthew chapter 5 in the Sermon on the Mount that the people were to return to, cling to, and obey, the biblical Torah.... every last detail. And if they'll do that with the sincere motivation of loving God, they'll find rest for their souls and become members of the Kingdom of Heaven. Yeshua is using words many of the people hearing Him might have found familiar from Jeremiah chapter 6. This is a very dramatic and heart-rending passage, but... oh!.... how this also applies to us of this world of the 21st century. Or better to those of today who claim to worship God but don't pay attention to Him; so their disobedience produces a weak faith that is exposed for what it is as they live lives of anxiety, worry, trouble and without the contentment that comes from meaning and purpose.

READ JEREMIAH 6:1 - 16

Let's move on to Matthew chapter 12.

READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 12 all

This chapter begins with what I call the Sabbath controversy. I have for some time pondered how to teach this section of Matthew because its ramifications are both immense and terribly misunderstood. We'll spend some time discussing the Sabbath because what you think you know about Sabbath is likely either not sufficient for understanding Matthew's Gospel or it is laced with manmade doctrines from both Judaism and Western Roman Christianity. I may get more emails on this subject than any other. The first question I get is usually: as a Christian do I have to obey the Sabbath law? Second after that is: what is considered as work?

The subject of Sabbath is big enough for at least one large book, and it is covered in Jewish Law by a number of books and documents. It is quite difficult to teach this effectively because it is a matter that is often smothered in details and nuances that themselves require lengthy explanations. Sometimes much must be unlearned about Sabbath before we can learn what God actually says about it. Let's begin with the 1st verse of chapter 12 and use Matthew's words and Christ's instructions as a skeleton framework upon which I hope to flesh out

the issue of Sabbath.

The opening word of verse 1 makes it clear that the context of everything that happens in the opening scene has to do with observing **Shabbat**. **Shabbat** is the Hebrew word from which we get the English word Sabbath. We don't know how near to the time of the actions described in the previous verses of chapter 11 that this is occurring; it could have been hours or a few days. Perhaps weeks. We also don't know exactly where Jesus was; but there's nothing to definitely indicate that He had journeyed to a different region of the Holy Land, out of the Galilee. But what we do know is this: the Jews hearing what Yeshua was speaking held some pretty rigid views about Shabbat because the weekly life for Jewish society revolves around it. Some of those views and practices were biblically grounded and some not.

Christ and some of His disciples were walking through an unidentified grain field and obviously the grain was ripe enough to eat. The grain was either of barley or wheat; we can't say with certainty which it was. So the time of year was anywhere from spring to early summer. Matthew says that the disciples Yeshua was with were hungry. I doubt that this was the 12 Disciples but rather they were some other disciples, because we don't read of any of the 12 returning from their mission (although we know that at some point they must have) and they aren't characterized as "**The** Disciples" but only as His disciples. They did what probably seemed natural; as they strolled through the grain fields they plucked off some heads of grain, rolled them in their hands to expose the edible kernels, and ate them. But some Pharisees spotted them and confronted Yeshua as their leader and Master. At once they told Yeshua that what they (and probably He as well) were doing was violating Shabbat. So what law concerning Shabbat were they violating?

There's much involved here that is needed as preparation for understanding the problem. So let's take this from the top. The disciples were walking in someone's field and taking grain from it. However this was not stealing; it was permissible according to the Torah.

^{CJB} **Deuteronomy 23:25-26** ²⁵ *"When you enter your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat enough grapes to satisfy your appetite; but you are not to put any in your basket.* ²⁶ *When you enter your neighbor's field of growing grain, you may pluck ears with your hand; but you are not to put a sickle to your neighbor's grain.*

The purpose for this law is twofold. First, it is a means for the poverty stricken to have a way to have food. Second, it is for travelers to be able to get a little something to eat on their journey as they go through people's vineyards and fields. But of course, the accusation of the Pharisees had nothing to do with theft or eating. It had to do with it happening on Shabbat.

Shabbat (Sabbath) is the 7th day of the week. In the old Hebrew system it is the only day of the week that is given a name instead of a number. Since among Hebrews a day is defined as beginning and ending at sunset, then in Western terms Sabbath begins Friday at sundown and ends Saturday at sundown. Do not confuse this with another use of the word Shabbat that we seen in the Old Testament. In addition to this every-weekly Sabbath there were others that were associated with various of the 7 biblical feasts of Leviticus. The rules for what is to be done, and not done, on the weekly 7th day Sabbath were generally not the same as that for the feast Sabbaths... or at least not all of them.

An important question to be answered is: where did Shabbat come from? The usual answer from Christians is that it is the 4th of the 10 Commandments given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Yes and no. The Sabbath law came much earlier. I'll quote an extended passage so that the context is established.

CJB Genesis 1:27-2:3 ²⁷ *So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.* ²⁸ *God blessed them: God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air and every living creature that crawls on the earth."* ²⁹ *Then God said, "Here! Throughout the whole earth I am giving you as food every seed-bearing plant and every tree with seed-bearing fruit.* ³⁰ *And to every wild animal, bird in the air and creature crawling on the earth, in which there is a living soul, I am giving as food every kind of green plant." And that is how it was.* ³¹ *God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good. So there was evening, and there was morning, a sixth day.*

CJB Genesis 2:1 *Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, along with everything in them.* ² *On the seventh day God was finished with his work which he had made, so he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.* ³ *God blessed the seventh day and separated it as holy; because on that day God rested from all his work which he had created, so that it itself could produce.*

Thus, the 7th day ended Creation and was consecrated by God the Creator and set apart as holy at that time. The 7th day would be special and completely unlike all other days of the week. So much later in Exodus when Moses is given the 10 Commandments and in the 4th one concerning the Sabbath we read:

CJB Exodus 20:8-11 ⁸ "Remember the day, Shabbat, to set it apart for God. ⁹ You have six days to labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Shabbat for ADONAI your God. On it, you are not to do any kind of work- not you, your son or your daughter, not your male or female slave, not your livestock, and not the foreigner staying with you inside the gates to your property. ¹¹ For in six days, ADONAI made heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. This is why ADONAI blessed the day, Shabbat, and separated it for himself.

We see a fair amount of detail is offered about this commandment, but let's not overlook the first word of it: remember. Remember. So this is not about creating something new but rather about calling to mind something old. It was an ordinance that God made a long time before Mt. Sinai, at Creation. And what is really interesting is that while the majority of the mainstream Church argues that the Law is only for Jews, and therefore Sabbath is only for Jews (so gentiles don't have to obey it) there were no Jews around when God originated this commandment. In fact, there was (at most) 2 people on the entire face of the earth and they weren't Jews or Hebrews or Israelites or even gentiles because none of those sorts of identities that eventually came as a result of divisions of society even came about until the time of Abraham. Thus it is rather hard to argue that of all the Laws of Moses, or even of the 10 Commandments, that the Sabbath is uniquely for the Israelites and their descendants.

Biblically speaking Shabbat, the weekly Sabbath, is the day following the 6th day..... the 7th. There is no other day of the week that is Shabbat. Since Shabbat is actually the name of the 7th day, to claim that there is "a" Sabbath each week as opposed to "the" Sabbath is bogus. It would be like saying that there is "a" Saturday each week, but we can place Saturday anywhere in the week we like, and change it as often as it suits us.

The Christian notion of a 1st day Sabbath (Sunday) as opposed to the biblically ordained Sabbath (the 7th day) is a misnomer. In fact, Christianity (meaning early-on the Church at Rome, long before it was called the Catholic Church), didn't change the Sabbath to another day, it abolished it. In 363 A.D. at the Council of

Laodicea, the Church created a long list of new Church rules called canons. Many of them were specifically aimed at customs the Jews followed, and therefore in their view gentile Christians should not. Here are the actual words of the canon that effectively abolished Sabbath for Christians.

Canon 29. Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.

The Lord's Day was referring to Resurrection Day..... Sunday as the Romans called the 1st day of the week. Sunday was so named in honor of the Sun God. The primary religion of the Roman Empire as of that time worshipped the Sun God, and Sunday was declared as the day of communal worship of the Sun God (hence Sun Day). The suggestion of the Laodicean council that if a Christian felt the need to take a day off, to do it on Sunday was to be in tune with the rest of Rome. But please notice: this was NOT a change of Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday....from the 7th day to the 1st day.... it was the abolition of the God ordained holy day of Sabbath for the Christian Church. Instead of the biblical Sabbath the canon said that Christians should rest on the Lord's Day. So Sabbath was exchanged for the Lord's Day. They are in no way the same things, nor do they celebrate the same things.

Most modern day Christian denominations (some even confused by their own doctrines on the matter) will admit at the upper levels of Church government that they have never observed Sabbath. But at the lower level (the individual congregation level) the Pastor or Minister will sort of mumble that Sunday is Sabbath rather than trying to explain what the Bible obviously says about Sabbath, and just as obviously what is in the minutes of the Council of Laodicea about what the Church did to that God-ordained holy day. I've always found it curious that Church members will so easily dismiss the ONLY day in the Bible listed as Shabbat, the 7th day, in exchange for the 1st day without blinking an eye. That said, some denominations are more forthcoming about it and condemn any Christian for celebrating Sabbath whatsoever. They see Sabbath as a thing of the past, a burden, and a repudiation of Christ.

I can't count the times that I've heard Christians say something like: "Well, I make Tuesday (or some other day) as MY Sabbath" as though they are in the holy-day ordination business. In other words, their notion is that God has told us: Just

take a day off each week; I don't care which one. Any day you choose is fine; just call it Sabbath. Folks: Sabbath, **Shabbat**, is directly linked to Creation. It is a set-apart day honoring the completion of God's Creation. Shabbat is the day after God finished His work of Creation. So it would be comical, instead of blasphemous, if we could just understand that by declaring some other day of the week as Sabbath, we're essentially declaring the end of the Creation as some other day than God says it was. But this is how far Christianity has gone to distance itself from the Old Testament, from God's laws, and from Jesus's own people, the Jews.

We'll continue with understanding Shabbat and the Sabbath controversy of Matthew 12 next week.