

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 43, Chapter 12

We closed last week with discussing the establishment, purpose and ongoing relevance of the Sabbath. This stems from the opening verse of Matthew 12.

^{CJB} **Matthew 12:1** *One Shabbat during that time, Yeshua was walking through some wheat fields. His talmidim were hungry, so they began picking heads of grain and eating them.*

As one who spent the first half of my life not observing the true Sabbath, or believing I was observing it on a Sunday, it still perplexes me in some ways why the truth eluded me. Yes, I carried a lovely white leather covered Bible with my name on it in gold letters to Children's Sunday School (it was awarded to me for perfect attendance). And later in life I carried the more adult black leather covered Bible under my arm to Church each Sunday; still believing I was observing Sabbath Day. I had a beautiful copy of the 10 Commandments framed and prominently hanging in my home. So why didn't I believe what both the Bible and that listing of the 10 Commandments says? That the Sabbath is the 7th day..... not the 1st day..... of each week and that I have an obligation to God to observe it.

I suppose I could point a finger at the countless sermons of the many Pastors and Ministers I heard over those 40 years, who either proclaimed Sunday as the Sabbath, or while not necessarily claiming it their words and prayers heavily implied it. After all.... weren't they the "experts"? Who was I to question them? And yet, how many times did I read right over the words of the Bible.... Old and New Testaments..... that the Sabbath was the 7th day of the week, and it never occurred to me to wonder, even challenge, why the Church determined that we

didn't have to obey it, and even moved Sabbath to another day. Yet in reality, such a "move" wasn't actually the case, either.

As I explained to you last week, in reality it was at a council of Church Bishops meeting from various far flung parts of the Roman Empire, in the year 363, when Christian observance of the biblical Sabbath was officially brought to halt, and abolished. The attending Bishops established that Sunday, the 1st day of the week, was to become the new weekly communal meeting day for Christians; and if they desired to have a rest, then it should be on Sunday. And that Sunday would be, for Christians, considered as "The Lord's Day". So the Lord's Day was a sort of substitution for Sabbath. This wasn't a mistake; it was intentional, it was part of an agenda, and it was wrong.

After the Lord opened my eyes to the truth of His Word, and I was forced to face the unnerving reality that several of the long cherished Church doctrines I had been taught defied the clear words and divine instructions of the Bible I began a faith journey to discover that truth in a more comprehensive and authentic way. One of the first challenges I encountered was that of the Sabbath.

Last week we established the plain biblical truth about the 7th day Sabbath (Shabbat in Hebrew), and also that the Sabbath was NOT originally ordained on Mt. Sinai during the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, but rather it was established at the beginning of the world, as the concluding act of God's work of Creation.

^{CJB} Genesis 2:1-3 *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 when we read the 10 Commandments as written in Exodus 20, the 4th commandment was NOT that God was inaugurating the Sabbath but rather the Israelites were to remember it..... to recall it.... and to re-start its observance. That is, it had always been, from Adam and Eve onward, that the 7th day was to be a day of ceasing in remembrance of the Creation. However at Mt. Sinai, since the entire world's population that had emerged since the Great Flood seems to have forgotten it, God also made observing Sabbath as the sign of acceptance of

the Covenant of Moses whereby He set Israel, and all God worshippers, apart from all other humans on the planet as His own.

CJB Exodus 31:12-17 ¹² ADONAI said to Moshe, ¹³ "Tell the people of Isra'el, 'You are to observe my Shabbats; for this is a sign between me and you through all your generations; so that you will know that I am ADONAI, who sets you apart for me. ¹⁴ Therefore you are to keep my Shabbat, because it is set apart for you. Everyone who treats it as ordinary must be put to death; for whoever does any work on it is to be cut off from his people. ¹⁵ On six days work will get done; but the seventh day is Shabbat, for complete rest, set apart for ADONAI. Whoever does any work on the day of Shabbat must be put to death. ¹⁶ The people of Isra'el are to keep the Shabbat, to observe Shabbat through all their generations as a perpetual covenant. ¹⁷ It is a sign between me and the people of Isra'el forever; for in six days ADONAI made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day he stopped working and rested.'"

Therefore from a biblical perspective there is no more important day, and no more important observance for God worshippers, than that of Shabbat. Further, it is not an option.

So how are we to observe Shabbat? This is actually what is at issue in the first several verses of Matthew chapter 12 as regards the hungry disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath. To answer this question of **how** to observe the Sabbath we're going to have to approach it from a few different perspectives. Today I'd like to begin with the Orthodox Jewish perspective.

I have in my library a 2 volume set of Shabbat observance instructions that total over 300 pages. Among religious Jews this is actually considered as a more or less Reader's Digest version of the many laws and commands of the Rabbis that have been compiled over the centuries. Rabbi Ze'ev Greenwald is the author, and I'd like to quote for you part of the introduction from volume 1 of the set.

"Shabbat is not merely an opportunity for physical rest; it is an exalted and sublime day that we are to utilize for spiritual inspiration. We relate in the Shabbat Minchah prayer: "A day of rest and holiness you have given to your people. Abraham rejoices, Isaac sings joyously, and Jacob and his sons rest thereon. A rest of love and free will, a rest of truth and faithfulness, a rest of peace and tranquility, and of serenity and security....."

a perfect rest with which you are pleased. Your children will realize and know that the rest comes from you and through their rest, they sanctify your name.

Shabbat has the power to release us from weekday concerns, enabling us to rise above the mundaneness of the six weekdays and feel the spirituality of the seventh..... which is a foretaste of the cessation of work and the rest of the eternal world. A person who truly observes Shabbat is able to carry over to the other days of the week the spirituality and special mood of the Shabbat prayers and meals. Thus Shabbat becomes a source of inspiration and holiness to the days that precede and follow it".

Jesus would not have disagreed with a word of that, and in fact as we'll see He validates it especially as Shabbat being a "foretaste of the cessation of work and the rest of the eternal world".

But herein lies one of the challenges of Sabbath (Shabbat); exactly what are we to do and not do to properly observe that day? Anyone who has been to Israel quickly learns that the entire Jewish society there revolves around Sabbath. Their week is structured around Sabbath, work hours are structured around Sabbath, and store opening hours are structured around Sabbath. The week precisely follows the biblical command; it is not based on Jewish Tradition. Stores begin the closing process on mid-afternoon on Friday, work ceases in time for everyone to get home before the Sabbath commences but also to give working folks time to prepare for the Sabbath. By sundown the city streets and sidewalks throughout Israel are empty; whether we are talking about the super-religious places like Jerusalem and Tzfat, or the super-secular places like Tel Aviv and Eilat, the rhythm of Israel beats to the drum of Shabbat.

Yet at this point, Yeshua would **not** agree with everything that the revered Orthodox Rabbis and Sages of the past have ordained as Jewish Law (***Halachah***) that defines what goes on, and doesn't go on, on Shabbat. The mere fact that I have spoken to you about a 2 volume set of Sabbath instructions ought to be enough to make my point especially when no such large set of numerous Sabbath regulations exists in the Torah, The Law of Moses, or the entire Bible..... Old and New Testaments. We find the following in the Torah:

^{CJB} **Deuteronomy 5:12-15** ¹² ***"Observe the day of Shabbat, to set it apart as holy, as ADONAI your God ordered you to do.*** ¹³ ***You have six days to labor***

and do all your work, ¹⁴ 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 ox, your donkey or any of your other livestock, and not the foreigner staying with you inside the gates to your property- so that your male and female servants can rest just as you do. ¹⁵ You are to remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and ADONAI your God brought you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore ADONAI your God has ordered you to keep the day of Shabbat.

I want you to notice two things about Sabbath observance as defined by God in His Word. First: Sabbath is NOT a God-ordained day of communal worship. No biblical instruction... Old or New Testaments... sets aside a weekly day of communal worship. Sabbath and Day of Worship are in no way connected. The Jewish custom of communal worship on Shabbat is a Jewish Law... a manmade tradition. This doesn't at all make it wrong in some way. But what IS wrong is to pronounce it as a God-ordained instruction. For Christians, the nearly universal communal meeting day of Sunday is also not to be found in the Bible. Rather, it too is a Christian Church Law... a manmade custom... which I have shown you was ordered as a formal doctrine and rule more than 3 centuries after Christ's time. Neither is this long-standing Christian tradition wrong. But it IS wrong to in some way holy-fy it as though it was of divine origin or instruction.

The second thing to notice is what the ONLY commanded biblical observance of the 7th day Sabbath is: no work. Essentially the bulk of Jewish tradition about Sabbath has to do with defining what work is, and sort of rolled-up with the issue of work is what ceasing creating amounts to. That is, since God ceased creating on the 7th day, then so should mankind. Thus from the 30,000 foot view, work can be defined as humanity ceasing from creating in imitation of God. This entire issue is itself wrapped up in the Jewish word that is always translated to "work" in English Bibles; that word is ***melakah***. Therefore all the commandments about Sabbath revolve mostly about what we are NOT to do; we are not to do ***melakah***. We are not to create.

The Hebrew lexicons are in full agreement as to what ***melakah*** means and refers to: it is occupation, work, and business. Once we understand this, then what we are NOT to do begins to reveal itself. We are not to do our occupation or skill; we are not to do work (hard labor), and we are not to conduct business on the Sabbath. Every one of these things involves "creating" and "ceasing". But even

trying to discern the specifics of what this means is the topic of hundreds of Rabbinical rulings in the Mishna and Talmud.

It is easy to look at the many arcane rules of Jewish Law about Sabbath and discount them on their face. Some of those rules even involve the intricacies of how one carries a cooking pot or the order in which one cuts their finger nails. More practically many Christians know that Jews don't drive cars on the Sabbath. Or they don't turn on a stove or oven on Sabbath. The even more strict don't turn on lights. This is because one strand of Jewish Law says that "ignition" (as in igniting a fire) is part of creating. That is, when we drive a car, ignition is occurring in the engine. When we turn on a stove, we either ignite flammable gas or we create a spark for electric heating elements. All ovens that Jews use have what is called a Sabbath setting. This is essentially a tiny heating element in the oven properly sized such it doesn't have to turn on and off to regulate the temperature; so it is enabled just before the beginning of Sabbath and disabled immediately following. Light bulbs are unscrewed from their sockets before Friday sundown, and yet others are turned on and left on during the duration of Sabbath because the action of turning a light bulb on causes ignition.

We can snicker or roll our eyes at such things, yet we should also remember and respect that for many centuries before Yeshua arrived, the Israelites continually and sincerely wrestled with what NOT to do on the Sabbath versus what was permitted, in order to obey and thus please God. Christians on the other hand have for around 17 centuries dismissed Sabbath altogether; so little serious thought within the Church has been directed at the subject other than to denounce its observance or to strike it from the 10 Commandments. My point is not that as Christians we should follow Jewish Law on the matter of Sabbath, but rather that it can be a most useful resource to help us gain a practical understanding on the matter of work, and what it amounts to, which has been studied and various solutions found within the Hebrew community for over 3000 years.

So as we get ready to continue in Matthew 12, I'll sum up the issue of Sabbath observance as it is presented in God's Word. First and foremost is that gentile Christians are as equally bound to the biblical 7th day Sabbath as are Jews, because gentile Believers are spiritually bound to Israel and to their covenants. And because it was a law ordained at Creation. Second is that the ONLY biblical rule about how to observe the 7th day Sabbath is to do no work on it. But... communal worship is not only NOT commanded for Sabbath, nowhere in the

Bible is a weekly communal worship service on a specific day commanded. Third is that the Church didn't actually "change" the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, it abolished it. This change or abolishing is purely an unauthorized, and frankly wicked, manmade tradition that was made to not just discourage Jews from being part of the Body of Christ, but also to turn gentile Christians into anti-Semites. It has succeeded much to Satan's delight. Fourth is that the definition of work, especially as it applies to 21st century Western society, means to not labor within our occupations, or to do our regular or hard labors (such as cooking or making repairs), and we are not to operate our businesses.

I've only touched on the tip of the iceberg as it relates to Shabbat, and I have no doubt you have tons of questions now circulating in your heads. But we need to move on and we'll deal with the matter of the Sabbath in more bite-sized chunks as we continue our venture through the Gospel of Matthew. Open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 12.

RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 12:1 - 16

Now that you have an understanding of the many issues about Sabbath as regards what may be done and not done on that day, you are better equipped to understand this Sabbath controversy that Yeshua encountered (some might even say that He caused). Perhaps the most important thing to understand is that in no way was Yeshua abolishing Shabbat or easing its God-given rules, or remolding them to His liking. Rather He was challenging the many manmade rules and doctrines that the Pharisees were insisting upon that so greatly burdened 1st century Jewish society. Although it is impossible to know precisely how many rules and what they all were regarding Shabbat in Yeshua's day, we encounter a few of them in Matthew's Gospel. Today, Judaism counts 39 categories of what work amounts to.

The specific issue before Yeshua is the picking of grain on Sabbath by His disciples, and that such picking was prohibited by the Jewish Laws of the time. It was 3 laws about Sabbath that the Pharisees would have seen as being violated. The first was that by plucking the grain kernels, they were harvesting. The second was that by rolling the grain in their hands, they were threshing. And the third was that by separating the grain from the chaff they were winnowing. All of these things were, by Jewish Law, categorized as **melakah**... labor. And who among us would claim that harvesting, threshing, and winnowing was NOT labor, and therefore the very thing God prohibited on Shabbat? Yet I would argue this

against this point. The Pharisee's position that the disciples were harvesting, threshing, and winnowing is the straining of gnats. It is not taking into account proportion and scale. Pinching a few heads of grain off of some stalks as you stroll by is not the same as taking a handful of stalks and cutting them with a sickle. Rubbing a few kernels of plucked grain in the palms of ones hands is not the same as spreading thousands of stalks on a hard surface and running them over with a weighted sled pulled by oxen. And the bit of chaff that falls to the ground from the disciples rubbing the grain in their hands is not the same as having a huge pile of threshed grain being systematically thrown into the air with a pitch fork. It's an issue of degrees and God absolutely looks at things in degrees... and so then does Christ. Such a matter of degrees is front and center in the Sermon on the Mount when Yeshua speaks of the status of the lesser and greater that enter the Kingdom of Heaven based upon the measure of one's diligence to obey The Law of Moses.

Already the concept of a Sabbath Day's walk existed. Walking on Shabbat was permitted; otherwise all of Israel would be frozen in place. Note that there was no objection by the Pharisees to the disciples walking (from somewhere) to get to the grain field, and then walking through it to get to somewhere else. They didn't ask where they came from or where they were going. There was some amount of physical exertion called walking that was allowed on Sabbath; but walking anymore than a distance prescribed by Jewish Law constituted *melakah* (labor) of the kind outlawed on Shabbat. At that time the distance was 3000 cubits, around 3/4's of a mile.

Jesus responds to the Pharisees with what I think is an answer that doesn't seem on the surface to be a good analogy. In verse 3 He refers to "what David did". The only rationale Jesus offers for what David did is that his men were hungry. And what they did was to enter the Tabernacle (at that time located in Nob), take the shewbread that was being replaced that day with the new, and eat it. Let's look at this story as it is documented in 1Samuel 21.

^{CJB} **1 Samuel 21:1-7** *So David got up and left, and Y'honatan went back to the city. ² David went to see Achimelekh the cohen in Nov. Achimelekh came trembling to meet David and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?" ³ David said to Achimelekh the cohen, "The king has sent me on a mission and told me not to let anyone know its purpose or what I've been ordered to do. I've arranged a place where the guards are to meet me. ⁴ Now, what do you have on hand? If you can spare five loaves of*

bread, give them to me, or whatever there is."⁵ ***The cohen answered David, "I don't have any regular bread; however, there is consecrated bread- but only if the guards have abstained from women."***⁶ ***David answered the cohen, "Of course women have been kept away from us, as on previous campaigns. Whenever I go out on campaign, the men's gear is clean, even if it's an ordinary trip. How much more, then, today, when they will be putting something consecrated in their packs!"***⁷ ***So the cohen gave him consecrated bread, because there was no bread there other than the showbread that had been removed from before ADONAI to be replaced by freshly baked bread on the day the old bread was removed.***

Notice a few things. First, David and his men set out from Jerusalem (we find this in the preceding chapter). It wasn't very far to Nob; maybe a day or a day and a half's walk. Second, David didn't barge in and take the shewbread. He went to the priest in charge and asked for food. Third; the priest said the only bread they had was the consecrated bread (the shewbread) that had been removed from the Holy Place a few hours earlier and replaced with fresh. This occurs, by biblical command, each Sabbath. And fourth: David and his men were welcome to have 5 loaves of it (less than half of the total amount) provided they were ritually clean (that is the meaning about their staying away from women because having sex brought ritual impurity with it). So David didn't commandeer the bread, or enter the holy spaces of the Tabernacle that were prohibited to him. And, unlike what Jewish Tradition says, David and his men were not in starvation and thus their lives were not in danger. Rather, they were merely hungry.

The thing that was wrong with what David did was not that he stole something or that it was Sabbath when this happened. It was that only priests are entitled to eat the consecrated bread. So David broke no Sabbath laws, but he did seem to break the Law of Moses about eating holy food that was only allowed to be eaten by holy men (priests). And, on the surface, the priest that voluntarily gave it to him was every bit as much sinning as was David. The thing is that neither were Jesus and His disciples starving nor were their lives in danger if they didn't eat. Like David and his men, Yeshua and His men were merely hungry as all humans get hungry during the day. It was Sabbath; no business could be transacted to purchase food and so they had to make do. Therefore what is the principle by which Christ is saying that it was OK for His disciples to pluck the grain and eat it on Sabbath?

The David incident and the Jesus incident have been debated among scholars

with no consensus of opinion. I'd like to analyze it this way: first, the only reason Sabbath enters the picture in the David incident is that it is only **on** Sabbath that the old shewbread is removed from the Tabernacle and the new bread replaces it. The priest didn't offer, and David didn't ask, for the new fresh bread. No matter what the circumstance or what day of the week it might have occurred, no one but priests were allowed to consume the shewbread whether it was the old or the new.

The Jesus incident also happened on Shabbat, and the fact that it was Shabbat is the crux of the matter. Any other day of the week and the Pharisees would have found no fault in Christ's disciples plucking some grain and eating it. The common ground between the 2 stories is the issue of hunger... but not at all to the level of starvation... and what to do about it on Sabbath. The other common ground was that there was no other means for the people involved to get food at the time. Nob was in a wilderness area and it was a sizable distance to the next town. Stopping at Nob was David's only choice; and the priest there claimed they had no other food except for the old shewbread. Jesus's disciples were going somewhere on Shabbat at a time when the normal purchase of food was prohibited so some other means to get food was needed. Plucking grain from a field and eating just a few bits of it, raw, was the solution. The only bottom line that can fit both of these scenarios for why it was **not** wrong in Jesus's eyes, is mercy. The priest of Nob showed mercy to David and his hungry men; but the Pharisees showed **no** mercy to Jesus and His hungry men. Jesus is saying that they should have. Therefore we learn that Shabbat doesn't bar acts of mercy, but rather ought to encourage them. And considering the holiness of the day, shouldn't mercy have perhaps an even greater priority?

What a great example this story is of how God worshippers can turn obedience to the Law into a burden, or even into unkindness. The Law of Moses is essentially several hundred case examples showing us in detail how to put into action the two foundational and over-riding God-principles that drives the instruction of the entire Bible: Love God with all our heart, mind and strength, and love our fellow man as ourselves. We should not deprive our fellow man of food or mercy because his needs occur on a holy day, even if it means we may not be following a specific Law of Moses according to the letter. This is a ***Kal V'homer*** argument; light and heavy. That is, there are weightier matters and there are lesser matters of the Law; every law and command is not equal in seriousness or effect. Every sin is not equal in seriousness or effect. What matters is our motive and intent, with every act tempered with mercy. I want to say this in the strongest possible

way; if it is sincerely our motive and intent to obey God, then we must study His Word. And if we study His Word, denying no part of it, then we'll understand what God is demanding of us far better than if we don't. Upon that understanding, we'll be able to determine (upon any of the infinite number of situations we could find ourselves in) how best to properly apply The Law of Moses in the spirit God intends.

I'll also inject a pet peeve. When I hear someone say that they are a "New Testament Christian" (meaning they see no relevance of the Old Testament to their lives) it is only out of better judgment that I don't say to that person: "then you are also an ignorant Christian". If one refuses to know the Torah and the Old Testament then that person has a greatly diminished way to properly discern the words of Jesus or of the Apostles. I know this as an indisputable fact from personal experience and from working with so many "New Testament Pastors". And while mercy is called for as a high virtue, at the same time mercy doesn't relieve us of devoted obedience to God's Laws.

So in verse 5, in defending His stance on the rightness of His disciples plucking grain from a field to satisfy their hunger, Yeshua says something that cannot be understood without knowledge of the Torah. He says that according to the Law, on Shabbat priests profane the Sabbath and yet they are held blameless. Here's the issue: on Shabbat priests still do **melakah**: work. They practice their regular occupation. They do physical labor. They perform the Temple rituals on Shabbat, just as they do on other days of the week. Yeshua has but moments earlier given an example of this with the priests of Nob making and replacing shewbread in the Tabernacle on Sabbath. But sacrificing animals and produce on the altar also occurs on Shabbat, and this too is a Law of Moses.

So this "work" of the priests on Shabbat can in one sense be rightfully seen as profaning the Sabbath. And yet God holds those priests blameless and innocent. Why? Because they are serving Him in the way they are obligated to, even if on the other hand it may indeed be sin in some circumstances. This is yet another example of **Kal V'homer**, light versus heavy. The priest has to choose: does he find it the weightier matter of The Law to serve both God and His fellow man by sacrificing animals on the Sabbath on behalf of all Israel? Or does He determine that it is weightier to do no work and to take away any chance of his being held to have personally broken a commandment? If ever there is proof to destroy the argument that the Law of Moses is a rigid, mechanical set of burdensome rules, this is it. The Law is anything but rigid, and when obeyed and applied in the

proper spirit, obedience to it is beautiful and satisfying, and it is beneficial to, and in harmony with, God's Creation and Kingdom. What Yeshua is doing is condemning the rigidity and lack of mercy inherent in the manmade doctrines and traditions of the Pharisees. He is pointing out the mercy of the priest of Nob, but the unkindness and merciless traditions that the Pharisees insist upon.

This may all sound lofty, highly spiritual, or even something that can only occur in Hebrew society from ancient times. Not true. In modern times we regularly find ourselves confronted with a situation in which it seems that whichever way we turn, we are going to break one of God's Laws, and thus commit a sin. I have used (because it is so dramatic) the situation of the WWII hero Corrie Tenboom, who hid Jews in her home so that the Nazis wouldn't kill them. Her duly elected German government passed laws to end the "Jewish problem". Her duly elected leaders made it a law that all Jews were to be turned in, and no one was to harbor them. On several occasions she was confronted by her civil authorities if she knew the whereabouts of certain Jews.... Jews she was hiding. She lied and said no. She made a choice that countless of her Christian friends in Germany didn't make. They decided that Jesus's command to obey their local government and the command not to lie was weightier than saving the lives of innocent Jews whom the State wanted to murder by the millions. She decided correctly. She acted with mercy. Those other Christians decided wrongly, showing ignorance and the lack of mercy.

Was her lying a sin? Yes it was. But it was better before God (it was weightier) for her to save innocent human lives than to allow her local government to murder them, even if the law to eliminate them was by earthly standards entirely legal. No doubt by showing mercy, her sin of lying was forgiven by our merciful God just as the priest at Nob had his sin forgiven for feeding David and his hungry men the shewbread to which they were not entitled.

Verse 6 says: "I tell you, there is in this place something greater than the Temple". This sentence nearly seems out of place considering the subject of Sabbath controversy and what it is lawful to do on the Sabbath. What can it mean? To understand it, we have to break it down simply and not let our minds fill in the blanks. The phrase "in this place" can only mean right there in the grain field where the Pharisees were confronting Yeshua (and we really don't know where in the Holy Land it was). The second issue is what the Temple has to do with it. Notice that in the last 2 versus the subject has revolved around actions located at the Temple (the priest at Nob and the shewbread, and then the priests

profaning each Sabbath by doing Temple sacrifices). So whatever it is that Christ is talking about that is greater than the Temple..... something that is present there in the grain field..... is being weighed against the things that go on inside the Temple. There are 3 primary solutions usually offered as to who or what it is that is greater than the Temple. Some scholars believe it is referring to the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven. Others think it is referring to the disciples. Still others think it is referring to Jesus Himself. It is also often thought that by saying that something is greater than the Temple, it is to be interpreted that Yeshua means something is greater than The Law of Moses. This last interpretation of course fits into the standard Christian narrative that The Law of Moses was abolished. And to those who make that claim I say: there is not one word about the Law of Moses here. The Temple is the subject; not the Law the Moses.

I think Robert H. Gundry has the most probable answer that fits the context; I'll paraphrase. He explains that what is present in that grain field is a superior greatness even when compared to the greatness of the Temple. He stresses that what he means by that is the QUALITY of superior greatness as opposed to the superior greatness of Yeshua's personal identity. What exactly is that certain quality of superior greatness? It is the incomparable earthly presence of the divine saving activity... redemption... as embodied within Yeshua of Nazareth: Daniel's Son of Man. Christ saves; the Temple does not.

We'll continue in Matthew 12 next week.