

## THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

### Lesson 92, Chapter 26 Continued 4

When we left off last time in Matthew 26, Yeshua had just been identified by Judas and betrayed to the Temple authorities. It was nighttime, a short time after the Last Supper, and so it occurred within the first few hours of the day of Passover, Nisan 14<sup>th</sup>. Let's re-read the short section where the arrest happens. Open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 26.

#### **RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 26:47 – 56**

Matthew describes a crowd that came with Judas leading them to arrest Christ. The Apostle John describes this crowd as consisting not of ordinary Jewish citizens but of military-like people, no doubt the Temple police. These were not Roman soldiers, but rather a militia of Jews (probably Levites) loyal to the Jewish religious authorities and formally employed to help control the many people, Jews and gentiles, that came to the Temple, and to arrest violators of religious laws. We're told that some chief priests along with elders were among the group. The chief priests were senior priests (Temple representatives) but not the High Priest. The elders were representatives of the Synagogue system so both ends of the Jewish religious leadership spectrum were present and very likely these men were all members of the Sanhedrin and would be part of the council convened to condemn Jesus.

When Yeshua is grabbed hold of by the Temple police one of the men with Him (one of His 12 disciples) reacts instinctively, pulls out a sword, and cuts off the ear of one of the police in the crowd. Matthew doesn't name the disciple with the sword or the man whose ear was amputated, however John does.

**CJB John 18:10 <sup>10</sup> Then Shim'on Kefa, who had a sword, drew it and struck the slave of the cohen hagadol, cutting off his right ear; the slave's name was Melekh.**

John supplies the information that it was Peter (what a surprise) that was the one that acted impulsively, and that it was a servant of the High Priest whose ear was severed... his name was **Melekh** (in Hebrew it means "king"). John wants us to notice that Peter didn't just swing his sword at random, but rather picked out the High Priest's household representative that was present. It shouldn't fly by us that Peter was armed and dangerous, which seems a little odd after all of Jesus's teachings about being passive, or at least peaceable, in the face of evil or oppression. Clearly Peter saw danger in being Christ's disciple, and also saw himself as Christ's personal bodyguard.

Jesus instantly chastises Peter for his action and completes His statement with a saying that has become famous at least in the world of Western Christianity: "for everyone who uses the sword will die by the sword". This is neither a promise nor a new divine law pronounced by Christ; rather it is a proverb. A proverb is a general truism or wisdom saying that doesn't necessarily apply in every situation nor does it always turn out that way; but it is a good rule of thumb. I want to take a moment to discuss this slightly more because I think due to this scene, especially, Yeshua is sometimes characterized by Christians as an adamant pacifist.

We are dealing here with a very specific set of circumstances. First, Yeshua by His nature was not a violent man. Jewish Holy men, **Tzadikim**, were, within their divine calling, healers, miracle workers, diplomats, and teachers. Second, Jesus knew (in His later adult life) that mistreatment, brutalization, and then execution was His God-ordained fate and thus to do anything that would subvert or delay that would be to go against His Father's will. Third, it is God's general will for His followers to always seek peace on earth and goodwill towards all men, and Yeshua exemplified that... to a point. Paul made a midrash (an interpretation) on this concept that itself is more proverb than command, in the Book of Romans.

**CJB Romans 12:17-21 <sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil, but try to do what everyone regards as good. <sup>18</sup> If possible, and to the extent that it depends on you, live in peace with all people. <sup>19</sup> Never seek revenge, my friends; instead, leave that to God's anger; for in the Tanakh it is written, "ADONAI says, 'Vengeance is my responsibility; I will repay.'" <sup>20</sup> On the contrary, "If**

***your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by doing this, you will heap fiery coals [of shame] on his head."*** <sup>21</sup> ***Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good***

Paul recognizes in Christ's teachings that we are (generally speaking) to approach our fellow man as peaceably as possible, but sometimes it's not up to us. Thus, there is a fine line to walk in order to carry this instruction out. Jesus, for instance, is not depicted as being attacked during His arrest; only led away by government officials. But the idea that a Believer is never to act in self-defense against a violent criminal aggressor is not part of the concept. Rather, it is to understand that there are going to be many times in our lives when our options are limited, life hangs in the balance, or justice is not done on earth; and yet we are not to become vigilantes to try to extract justice as we see fit (that's what revenge amounts to). Rather God will make right the wrongs in the world to come.

At the same time, we have witnessed Yeshua taking on the deceived and corrupt Jewish religious establishment using strong and even offensive terms that He of course knew would provoke a strong backlash that could (and would) eventually lead to violence. Fourth, just as the Law of Moses prescribes, Jesus doesn't ever speak against soldiers killing the enemy in battle, or against someone protecting their homes or families against aggressive criminals bent on physical harm. The Torah defines those defensive actions as proper, and is labeled as justifiable killing (which is not a sin).

Things change however, as concerns Jesus, when the Son of Man returns. The same One preaching non-violence (for the time being) transforms into God's unstoppable avenger. Much of the population of planet Earth will be killed by Him and those Believers (and angels) that He leads as an army to execute God's wrath against the irredeemably wicked.

So, we should not make Jesus into the type of Joan Baez pacifist who once said that even if a killer was standing over the crib of her infant child, bent on killing it, she would do no more than beg him not to. She would assert no physical action to stop him, whether by fighting with him or by using a weapon. Rather, in the case of Christ's ministry and arrest, all His passiveness was intended for Him to arrive at a pre-destined purpose; going to the cross for you and for me.

Then in verse 53 Yeshua says something that simply drips with interesting

implications. He says that the reason Peter should not attack those arresting Him is that if Yeshua intended on stopping it, all He had to do was to ask His Father to send a dozen (12 is what the Greek says) armies of angels to help Him. The first thing we should take from this is that Jesus was well aware that he had a choice; He wasn't a programmed robot...He had a free will. He could have averted the humiliations and the crucifixion if He wanted to. The second thing to notice is that once again the hierarchy of divine authority is highlighted. Yeshua doesn't call angels to help Him on His accord; He must ask His Father to send them. So Yeshua's level of authority is always junior to the level of His Father's authority. Third, while calling upon angels to protect Him would subvert His purpose in this His first coming (which was to die as a sin offering for humanity), in His return angels will indeed be called upon. This current conflict that He is experiencing is meant to keep its location firmly earthbound; Jerusalem. Only later will this great spiritual battle spill over to include the cosmos. Fifth, Holy War has always been part of God's arsenal. Holy War is what Joshua waged on God's behalf to claim the Holy Land, and angels are regularly part of Holy War. Yeshua's current situation would not see Holy War employed because the time for it wasn't yet at hand. When He returns in the future, it is Holy War that will be fought at a level never seen before nor will it ever again. And finally notice that the number 12 is used; 12 legions of angels corresponding to the 12 tribes of Israel. Then in verse 54, Jesus explains why He has chosen to allow Himself to be tortured and killed. He asks Peter a rhetorical question as regards calling on angels to rescue Him: "...if I did that, how could the passages in the Tanakh be fulfilled that say it has to happen this way?"

So, Jesus is following the determined path He is on, knowingly allowing evil to overcome Him, in order that the full listing of OT prophecies about Him are checked off. None can be skipped. I have heard atheists and even some religious Jews argue that because Yeshua admitted He was doing these many things with the intent and purpose to publicly fulfill the writings of the biblical prophets, then this means He was but a somewhat deranged man contriving His own demise so that many might think He must be the subject of these OT prophecies, when in fact any other would-be Messiah (with sufficient grit and courage) could have done the same. I would only argue that for the many centuries before Yeshua showed up, no one (at least none I've ever heard of) attempted to do what He did. Perhaps the better way to think of what Yeshua was doing is that it was much less choreographing His own death, than merely allowing Redemption History to take its God-ordained course without resisting it. Besides: there is no credible way that anyone, no matter how intelligent or courageous, could have

willed all the many elements and people and decisions involved to happen in a perfectly coordinated manner and arrive at the same place at the same moment as we see unfolding.

David Stern did a good job of listing several of the Old Testament Prophecies that Jesus was fulfilling, and I'll highlight a few.

Isaiah 49:7 says that at first He'll be hated without reasonable cause, yet later the nations will applaud Him.

Zechariah 11:12 says that He'll be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver.

Zechariah 13:7 prophecies that when He's been struck down, His sheep (His followers) will abandon Him.

Isaiah 53 perhaps has the most to say about Him. He was a plain man; nothing special with His appearance. People avoided Him and many despised Him. Like any other human being, He suffered sorrow and pain. He would be crushed and wounded not for anything wrong that He did, but for all the wrong that we have done. He would be buried in the grave of a rich man. His ordeal will make many men righteous before God. While being condemned as a great sinner, He actually is interceding on the behalf of true sinners. There's more, but this alone is sufficiently sobering and amazing as the accuracy of it in hindsight boggles the mind.

After rebuking Peter, Jesus proceeds to rebuke the Jewish religious authorities who have come after Him. He essentially denies that He is any sort of rebellion fomenter or leader. But, they approach Him in the dark of the night, with many men equipped with swords and wooden clubs, as though He was a dangerous person that had to be apprehended with utmost caution. He points out that His actions were but teaching in the Temple courts... hardly something a rebel leader would do...so if His teachings are the problem, why not arrest Him there? Of course, that question was already answered a few sentences earlier. The High Priest and others feared that publicly arresting this popular Galilean Holy Man on the occasion of Passover would cause riots... for which the High Priest would be held responsible by Rome. He repeats to the cadre of the Temple guard the same thing He just told Peter: all this is happening to fulfill the prophets. In other words, He is making all them participants and facilitators of prophecies concerning the Messiah.

Isn't it odd that no one seems to ask: which Prophets? What prophecies? Just as what is coming soon at the mock trial of Jesus, there is no truth seeking going on. This is a political witch hunt perpetrated by the elite of the Jewish religious system of that day. Personal ambitions, their fierce guarding of the religious power structure that benefited them so luxuriously, and probably a growing hatred of this man that they may not have been able to explain, is at the core of their determination that Yeshua had to go. What God wants and what is right never seems to enter the picture. What we see happening is truly the mystery of how biblical prophecy becomes fulfilled. These fulfillments are a mixture of unexpected circumstances, along with inexplicable levels of human desires or fears or hatreds, that just seem to erupt out of nowhere. As a prophetic fulfillment unfolds none of the involved, the wicked or the righteous, have any idea that they are but instruments in the Master's hands. And I promise you that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as we proceed at jet speed towards the End of Days, all those yet to be fulfilled prophecies will play out just like that. We think we won't be surprised because we're so ready and wary of current events; but we will be. All prophecies have come about in this same pattern. We should approach this conundrum not by thinking "then what's the use of knowing the prophecies". But rather like we would knowing hurricane season is coming. We in the south know that sooner or later we'll get hit; we just don't know when (and it certainly doesn't happen every year). We get warning, but occasionally it's a surprise as a hurricane blows up suddenly or changes its track. If we're knowledgeable and prepared, surprise or not, we're OK. If we're ignorant and not prepared, however it happens, it is going to be potentially very harmful to us. In Matthew's Gospel we see regular warnings by Yeshua to His followers to be alert and be prepared for the Day of Lord. Not so much so that they can see it coming, but because they probably won't.

The final words of verse 56 are so very sad and in some ways ought to be a bit terrifying for us. It says that when after Yeshua had dressed-down everyone present, the 11 remaining disciples deserted Him. I cannot stress enough that what is happening here is not merely some frightened men running off to hide. The entire point is a loss of faith. Back in verses 34 and 35 Yeshua predicted that all of them would **disown** Him... not just run away because they got scared. I think the speculation is fair to say that once their Master got arrested, they figured their movement was over. They had been mistaken and had tied their hopes and future to the wrong man. If those 12 disciples would either betray or renounce Jesus when things got tough, what might we do when things get tough for us? Can we be so naïve as to think that their loss of faith wasn't also loss of

salvation? If it's not, then faith as the condition for our salvation has no meaning. Let's read some more of Matthew.

### **RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 26:57 – 68**

What comes next is sometimes called the Trial of Jesus. Yet, similarly attempting to understand exactly what the Last Supper was in Jewish tradition, so it can be as challenging to figure out what was really going on when Yeshua was taken before a group of men at the home of Caiaphas, the High Priest.

The panel of men gathered at Caiaphas's house was no doubt some or most of the Sanhedrin (the High Priest was always the President of the Sanhedrin). So, some thought and organization had gone into finding Christ, arranging to arrest Him, bringing Him to a pre-designated place, and then having these men already assembled to quickly pass a verdict on Him... without a nosy public being aware. We are meant to notice that expected Jewish justice was not being done here. It was not allowed for the Sanhedrin to meet at night and hold a trial. Instead, what we have is a group of men meeting with the full intent to do wrong; but to do it under the false cover of the authority of the biblically ordained justice system. Religion of every manner, at all stages of history, has been misused to do intentional injustice and harm for a wide array of purposes and wicked intentions. This is because flawed human beings are the leaders and officials of every religion. So, in that sense, nothing unusual or unique is happening here at Caiaphas's home... except that unbeknown to these members of the Sanhedrin, their rotten deed is being used by the God they claim to know and worship to achieve a goal different from theirs.

We're told that Peter followed the procession of the posse to Caiaphas's house, even into the courtyard. Next he went and sat down with the guards (almost certainly the same Temple guards who had just arrested Jesus), because he was curious as to what would happen next. For whatever reason these guards didn't associate Peter with Jesus and seemed fine with him sitting there, waiting along with them.

Matthew makes the intent of the Sanhedrin, as a single-minded assembly, quite clear. They have no good legal reason to do anything to Jesus and they know it; so, they seek false evidence so that they can contrive a reason to kill Him. What is happening is not a trial at all; it is a meeting of conspirators that are plotting murder. They are searching for something... anything... to charge Yeshua with to

try to make the killing of Him seem justified. It must necessarily be something that rises to the level of the death penalty and there was only a tiny handful of crimes that could be punished as capital offenses. Remember: what they had to find was not something criminal in the civil sense of it, but rather the breaking of a Jewish religious law. Criminal offenses were tried under the authority of Rome; in Roman courts under Roman law. As verse 60 points out, what must have been a very frustrated court trotted out a string of liars, but the judges still couldn't come up with an offense that even remotely approached a death sentence. Finally, however, 2 men were brought in who said that Jesus had said that He could tear down the Temple and build it again in 3 days. In Jewish tradition, saying anything against the Temple was considered as bad as saying something against God.

As regards the timing of this event, it had to have been on Nisan 14<sup>th</sup>, Passover, because Nisan 15<sup>th</sup> was the first day of Unleavened Bread and thus a special festival sabbath, so there is no way that Caiaphas would have been able to convene any type of assembly on a sabbath. As wicked as were these men, Jewish tradition still ruled their thoughts and they weren't about to do something that (ironically) they thought would get them in trouble with God.

Caiaphas latched onto this hope of a finally finding a suitable crime and bellowed at Yeshua to respond to the accusation; Yeshua stood silent and refused to answer. Clearly this accusation wasn't going to go anywhere so Caiaphas tried something different. By refusing to answer, Jesus even facilitated Caiaphas moving on to something that not only gave Jesus an opening to announce to the Jewish religious authorities who He really was, but also would be the nail in the coffin so to speak, that could finally move this process along of getting Him to the cross. Caiaphas says that He puts Christ under oath to answer if He is the Messiah, the Son of God. What is really sort of fascinating is that the question Caiaphas has put to Jesus is the entire point of the Gospel. Are you the Messiah, the Son of God He says to Yeshua? Yeshua responds that the words are your own; it is a Jewish expression of affirmation. Caiaphas got it right! But, Yeshua didn't stop there. He also makes a prophecy that the Sanhedrin recognized as indicating a divine connection. He says that one day they will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power. And that they will also see Him "coming" with the clouds of heaven.

Yeshua has shifted His reference point from the present to the future; to the End Times when judgment falls. The court full well understood the Son of Man reference as found in Daniel and saw it as messianic in nature, but not



necessarily as divine. It was the “sitting at the right hand of Power” and “coming with the clouds of heaven” part that enabled Caiaphas to charge Jesus with blasphemy. Power (or better The Power) was another designation for God. Coming with the clouds of heaven is an interesting statement to deal with. For Caiaphas this was Jesus associating Himself with the divine. But how should we take it? Should we take the clouds as literal or even somewhat figurative clouds (the white fluffy kind that floats in the sky... in the heavens) or might the “clouds of heaven” refer to legions of angels alongside perhaps myriads of Believers that had, earlier, been resurrected and/or raptured to Heaven and are now returning to earth from Heaven to fight a Holy War alongside Messiah Yeshua? While I can’t dismiss the latter, I think it is too much part of Daniel’s prophecy of the Son of Man coming in the clouds to stretch this to mean clouds of Believers and angels coming back with Jesus. For Jews the Son of Man primarily represented judgment. The thought of clouds as revived Believers came much later in Christian thought. So, at the least it certainly didn’t mean that to the Sanhedrin.

There’s a couple of other notions included in Christ’s claim. The “you will see” doesn’t so much mean the men sitting in that chamber, but rather it is a general and panoramic “you”, probably meaning “everyone”. It conjures up the thought of the general resurrection to come when both the wicked and the righteous shall arise from their graves, and so perhaps being witness to Christ’s return. “From now on” definitely frames this as a future event, but it could be the near or very far future. This is a rather cryptic statement that for the Sanhedrin didn’t impart a lot of specific information other than that Yeshua was definitely saying that He was indeed Israel’s Messiah, and Daniel’s Son of Man, and that He is in some manner divine. More than enough for Caiaphas to cry: “Blasphemy!”. I suspect for him that cry more meant: “Victory!”. Yeshua had just condemned Himself. In Jewish law a suspect that confesses negates the need for two corroborating witnesses. Blasphemy was the most serious breaking of the Law of Moses and it was a capital offense. That they didn’t immediately execute Him says they couldn’t; they didn’t have the authority to do it. They’d have to wait until they could get in touch with Pilate in the morning and ask for Yeshua’s execution. The members of the Sanhedrin are said to agree that He was guilty and that death is the proper sentence. They are now equally and fully liable for sending God’s Son to the execution stake.

We’re told that they spit in His face and hit Him with their fists, and mocked Him by saying to prophesy, which of them hit Him. Spitting was to put shame upon the one who was receiving their spittle.

Let's re-read the remainder of chapter 26.

**RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 26:69 – end**

The focus returns to Peter, somewhat representative of the entire 12 disciples (and in a deeper sense, all of us). He is still sitting in the courtyard of Caiaphas's house when a house servant says that she recognizes him as having been with Yeshua from Galilee. We've spent much time emphasizing that when reading the New Testament and especially the Gospel accounts we need to be able to draw a necessary distinction between the Jews of the Galilee and the Jews of Judea. Each not only had a number of different traditions concerning the observances of various holidays, but they had a general difference in style of living and in underlying values. Nearly all nations have such divisions. For example: in the USA we have recognizable differences in values and styles of living between people of the Northeast versus the South, and from the Midwest versus the West Coast. We can recognize different accents, notice outgoing versus more reserved behavior, different modes of dress, and there are numerous other indicators that reveal where someone might be from. And in this modern polarized world, there can be outright dislike and disrespect from people living in one region towards people living in another. This is what life was like in the Holy Land in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Judeans generally considered themselves more sophisticated and pious than that Galileans, which they looked down upon as inferior. The Galileans looked at the Judeans as snooty and hypocritical self-righteous people.

Immediately upon the accusation, Peter denied He even knew what the girl was talking about. He made his denial in front of numerous people meaning denial of His faith was as public as was His initial profession of faith; the current profession erasing the first. As he begins to try to slink away from this girl who recognizes him, he moves to a further outward area where a girl confronts him because she's not buying it; despite his denial she knows its him. She announces to no one in particular that Peter was with Yeshua of Nazareth. Peter resorts to swearing... that is, making an oath that necessarily in the Jewish world invokes God's name... that He doesn't know this man Yeshua. Some bystanders now approach Peter... probably after overhearing this servant girl... and say that Peter must be "one of them" because his accent gives him away. Yes, the Galileans had a known accent that was different from the Judean accent. Now Peter goes all in and even invokes a curse on himself (if he's not telling the truth) and insists he doesn't know Jesus.

In Jewish thought of that era, just as saying or doing something positive 3 times denotes sincerity and eagerness to do right, so does saying or doing something negative 3 times denote sincerity and eagerness to do wrong. Peter went to full length to deny any knowledge of, and therefore any faith in, Jesus Christ. He had 3 opportunities to recant his renunciation, but he didn't. Peter no longer confessed the Lord. Peter no longer acknowledged even knowing who the man was. Peter had only hours ago boasted that he was willing to die with the Lord if necessary; but when he wasn't even threatened with death, only perhaps being punished in some small way, it was enough for him to lose courage.

The cock crowed and it served as a reminder that Yeshua had told him that this is exactly what was going to happen. Jesus's prophecy is repeated: "Before the rooster crows you will disown me 3 times". Peter had saved himself from any kind of jeopardy; but it was a soul-destroying decision. He wept bitterly. I don't want to sound overly dramatic; however, we ought to consider that Peter's sudden loss of salvation happened before Christ's death and resurrection. When Peter made the decision to renounce Christ the proof of who Yeshua is, which lies mainly in the cross and the empty tomb, hadn't yet happened. Perhaps that's why Yeshua was so willing to anticipate that He would meet up with this same group of reformed deserters back in the Galilee. But what of everyone since after His death and resurrection? We have the knowledge of it; the many witnesses; it is history and not prophecy. To my mind, it is an even greater condemnation of one's character at this point in history to deny Him, or (maybe worse) to know Him and then walk away from Him, than it was for Peter and the disciples.

I think Peter's bitter weeping is that first step towards his repentance. He has failed, utterly. He knows it. He has to face now who he really is. And when we approach Christ that way, it is all the more humbling to know that God so loves us that He sent His only Son, an innocent man, to die for us. And that His Son, who could have chosen otherwise, followed through. I've always enjoyed Matthew's Gospel because he tries the least of them all to put a happy face on the character and behavior of the 12 disciples, including Peter. We have the opportunity to learn from Peter. The lesson is that we must take care and take precautions at all times, and not think too greatly of ourselves or believe that somehow that new nature God has given us has wiped away the old that remains dangerously active within.

New Testament authors repeatedly warn us that we are always in danger of

falling away from our Savior Jesus as did Peter. James gives us the good news of hope that it doesn't have to be our end story:

**CJB James.5:19-20 <sup>19</sup> My brothers, if one of you wanders from the truth, and someone causes him to return, <sup>20</sup> you should know that whoever turns a sinner from his wandering path will save him from death and cover many sins.**

On the other hand, the anonymous writer of the Book of Hebrews warns of the ominous consequences of turning our backs on Christ:

**CJB Hebrews 10:26-27 <sup>26</sup> For if we deliberately continue to sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but only the terrifying prospect of Judgment, of raging fire that will consume the enemies.**

We'll open chapter 27 to begin our next lesson.