

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Matthew 21:1-17

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, March 30, 2014

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, March 30, 2014**, is from **Matthew 21:1-17**. Please Note: Some churches will only study **Matthew 21:1-14**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Matthew 21:1-17

(Matthew 21:1) When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,

Bethphage means “place of young figs;” it was a small village on the Mount of Olives near Bethany. When they reached Bethphage, in order for there to be two witnesses to this miracle of Jesus, Jesus chose two unnamed disciples for His mission (two witnesses were needed for acceptable legal testimony according to the laws of Moses).

(Matthew 21:2) saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me.

Bethany was near Bethphage, but Matthew does not name the village where the two disciples found the donkey and colt. The village may have been Bethphage, which seems most likely. Jesus used the word “immediately,” because the disciples would not need to search around in order to find the donkeys: God’s providence and the guidance of the Holy Spirit arranged for them to quickly find the donkeys exactly as Jesus said they would and according to the prophecy of Zechariah (Zechariah 9:9).

(Matthew 21:3) If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.”

Jesus told His disciples to refer to Him as “the Lord” if anyone asked them why they were taking the two donkeys. “The Lord needs them” was to be a sufficient response to anyone who asked them for an explanation. Jesus said that in response to those four words the owner would send the

donkeys “immediately.” God could have used a dream or the appearance of an angel to prepare the owner in advance for the coming of Jesus’ disciples to get the donkeys.

(Matthew 21:4) This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

The two witnesses reported that they found the donkeys exactly as Jesus foretold, The prophet Zechariah had also foretold that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Among other miracles, these two miracles occurred to show God the Father endorsed Jesus’ words and works as the Messiah: Jesus’ prophecy to (sending of) the two disciple witnesses and Zechariah’s prophecy were both fulfilled.

(Matthew 21:5) “Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Matthew quoted a portion of Zechariah 9:9. Though Jesus had been victorious over the devil, demons, diseases, and death, Matthew abbreviated Zechariah and did not mention that Jesus had been and would come into Jerusalem “triumphant and victorious;” perhaps because most people might have thought only in military terms with respect to the Messiah’s defeat of the Romans who occupied Judea. Jesus will fulfill all of the Old Testament prophecies about Him completely, and He will win

militarily over all of God's enemies when He comes again (as the Book of Revelation describes).

(Matthew 21:6) The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them;

The disciples obeyed Jesus immediately. If they had not obeyed Jesus "as Jesus had directed them," they would not have experienced the miracle Jesus prepared them to receive, and they would have missed the opportunity to serve Jesus and be a part of fulfilling the words of two prophets: Zechariah and Jesus.

(Matthew 21:7) they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.

Jesus chose two disciples that He knew would obey Him exactly as He commanded them. They found and brought the donkey and the colt exactly as Jesus said. Since these animals had no saddle blanket or saddle, the disciples put their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit upon. Of course, Jesus did not ride on both of them at the same time.

(Matthew 21:8) A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

Some famous people or royalty enter a room or palace on a special red carpet. Some would use this expression about them, "They were given the red carpet treatment." In a

similar way, Jesus entered Jerusalem in a way that declared His royal status as the Messiah, and the crowd gave Jesus royal honors by laying their cloaks on the road.

(Matthew 21:9) The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Some went ahead of Jesus to tell others that their king was coming, “the Son of David,” one qualified to serve as the promised Messiah. They blessed Jesus because He came “in the name of the Lord,” not in the name of Rome or the Emperor. “Hosanna” has been interpreted to mean, “Save us, we pray!” Jesus came to save His people from their sins in a totally unexpected way, but according to the Hebrew Scriptures, which is far more significant with eternal implications than saving the residents of Jerusalem from Roman oppression (which was most probably the people’s expectation on that Palm Sunday).

(Matthew 21:10) When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?”

When Jesus entered the city, obviously fulfilling the Messianic expectations of the Jews, His two disciple witnesses could testify to their experience of miraculously finding the donkeys for Him. God the Father had prepared Jesus to enter the city in fulfillment of Scripture, and God had prepared and provided the donkeys. They and the

other disciples could explain who Jesus was. When He entered the city, turmoil would have erupted because some might have thought He came to replace their Roman rulers.

(Matthew 21:11) The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

The people knew from Jesus’ prior trips to Jerusalem and His public ministry in Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, that He was a prophet of God. Many may have speculated that He was more than a prophet. They knew He came from Nazareth, and they might have wondered why He was riding into Jerusalem humbly on a donkey instead of a war horse when they wanted a military hero to free them from political oppression.

(Matthew 21:12) Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.

Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this world, so rather than going to the seat of Roman authority to see Pilate, Jesus went to the temple, to the public seat of God’s authority on earth. Here, Jesus cleansed the temple from obvious sin and the priests’ abusive treatment of worshipers by cheating them. He had preached about the love of money as the root or cause of evil. The love of money had brought money changers into the temple (who

robbed the people with the approval of the religious leadership). He went to the temple to discipline those who used God's house and the Jews way of sacrificial worship to deceive God's people and enrich themselves.

(Matthew 21:13) He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers."

Through the prophet Isaiah, God declared, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isaiah 56:7). And later, through the prophet Jeremiah, God warned, "Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight? You know, I too am watching" (Jeremiah 7:11). God intended for people to meet Him in a loving relationship through prayer at the temple in Jerusalem. At the temple, they could confess their sins and receive assurance of God's forgiveness. They could offer sacrifices and thank offerings for God's many blessings, including an offering for the birth of a child. Instead of promoting temple worship for God's intended purposes, the priests permitted money changers to rob the people in the exchange of their foreign money for approved temple coins and in their purchase of approved sacrifices for temple worship. As Jeremiah foretold, God was watching, and His Son cleansed the temple that had become a den of robbers. Jesus reaffirmed the purpose of temple worship as *a house of prayer for all peoples*. Temple worship had been corrupted with the approval of the chief priests, who later plotted Jesus' death, perhaps partly because He had condemned their corrupt practices

and had hurt the profits from their criminal enterprise. Certainly, the priests could have stopped the corruption if they had wanted to do so.

(Matthew 21:14) The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them.

In addition to quoting Scripture as a justification for His actions, Jesus demonstrated that He was a true prophet of God when He healed the blind and the lame, those who came to Him in the temple immediately after He had cleansed the temple. The godless priests who stole from the people had no power to provide God's healing touch in answer to the prayers of the people, so they were jealous of Jesus. While Jesus remained at the temple that day, His heavenly Father protected Him from the wrath of the priests. He was only arrested by the temple guards at night and taken to the chief priests for a mock trial after He had celebrated the Passover with His disciples according to His Father's perfect timing.

(Matthew 21:15) But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry

Jesus did only good things in the name of God. Jesus truly demonstrated perfect love for God the Father and others. The chief priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees saw Jesus do all of these good things to bless and heal others. Jesus did things they had never seen before to meet the needs of

others in miraculous ways, but Jesus good deeds only made them angry. They became even angrier when the common people praised Jesus as the Messiah and called out to Him to save them, saying “Hosanna.” In spite of all the evidence that God had sent Jesus to bless His people, the religious leaders hated Jesus; they became angry enough to plot His death.

(Matthew 21:16) and said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?’”

When the religious leaders made their hateful accusations against Jesus, He once again returned to the teachings of their Scriptures, and probably quoted a portion of Psalm 8:2 – “Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger” (NRSV) or “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger” (KJV). If these religious leaders completed in their minds the latter part of Psalm 8:2 that Jesus did not quote to them, they would have heard God’s Word convict them of sin, because God ordained and prepared these infants (these common people in the crowds) to praise Jesus “because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger” or “because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.” In spite of Jesus’ powerful enemies, the crowds praised Him and called out

for Him to help them. God the Father had inspired their praises of His Son, Jesus, and when Jesus quoted the Scriptures to them, He silenced His enemies that day. Matthew's quotation also included the implied truth that because Jesus is the Son of God, He had prepared the praises of the people for himself: "you have prepared praise for yourself." As the divine Son of God, Jesus qualified to receive their praises.

(Matthew 21:17) He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

After Jesus answered these religious leaders, He went to the village of Bethany where He spent the night. Mary and Martha and their brother, Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead, lived in Bethany, so He may have stayed in or near their home where He probably continued teaching until He went out on the Mount of Olives to pray as was His custom.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

Since this is the second of a two part lesson series, only 4 of the 5 Study Questions will be asked below.

1. What, if any, reason did Jesus give His two disciples when He told them to go into the village to get the donkey and the colt?

2. How did the crowds address Jesus when they cheered for Him as He entered the city? How did people in the city describe who Jesus was?

3. Where did Jesus go first when He entered the city? What did He do there?

4. What did Jesus say the temple should be called? Should this name be applied to churches today? How well does this name describe your church: too much, too little, just right?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

— © Copyright 2014 by L.G. Parkhurst, Jr. Permission Granted for Not for Profit Use.