

Rediscovering Jesus in the Jewish Gospels

Countdown to Mission Impossible -part 2

Matthew 22:15-46 Lesson 42

Wilmington's Guide to the Bible lists the events of the Passion Week of Jesus from Palm Sunday through the Passover/Last Supper as Step #51 of 72 steps *From Glory to Glory*. By Wilmington's account, Jesus' 34th and 35th healing events occurred, He taught his last 7 parables and preached his last 4 sermons. The events recorded in Matthew alone were accomplished in four days, Sunday through Wednesday, holding for a Thursday crucifixion as explained in lesson 41. Humanly speaking, it was a mission impossible. Jesus the "seed of the woman" will receive a fatal bite to His heel as prophesied "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). Humanly speaking the death of Jesus dashed all hopes, if He was just human. But as the prophets foretold, the Messiah would be the incarnation of God Himself and Satan's venomous death blow would be overcome by Jesus's death and resurrection. However, in real time, with human weakness and doubt as well as human depravity at the highest levels of world power, their (who?) faith in this mission impossible would be tested. The 12 would fail the faith test before He would win the victory over Death, Hell, and the grave.

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: *I am* he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Revelation 1:17,18).

Death and Taxes. (22:16-22) The Pharisees, accompanied by the Herodians, who were used to appealing to the egos of aspiring leaders, led with hypocritical praise. However, it was a clear signal of entrapment for Jesus in whose breast no prideful ego swelled. His Apostles and preachers would never forget that praises and pats on the back usually precede the dagger of betrayal.

Those plotting His death were testing His adherence to Roman law as indicated by the use of the word "lawful" (22:17). Only the Romans could carry out capital punishment. If they could get Jesus on record as defying Rome's tax laws, they could then accuse him of rebelling against the Roman government. Religion and Government are deadly bedfellows indeed. The phrase "Caesar or not," explained why they had the Herodian contingent with them this time. (22:15). Herodians were also mentioned in Mark 3:6, where the Pharisees ran to them to concoct a plan to entrap Jesus. Helen K. Bond in her article *Herodians* noted "They were a sect of Hellenistic Jews who supported the role of Herod. Their name is a Latinism which indicates they were a political party. Several later Christian writers claim they revered Herod 1 as the messiah. His rebuilding of the Temple may well have led his supporters to see him as a second Solomon, a new "Son of David," an anointed king of the Davidic line."ⁱⁱⁱ The kingdom of heaven messages of both John and Jesus alerted their radar. Bond conjectures that they could have been suborned as spies on Jesus by Herod Antipas himself. I'm sure that Jesus calling Herod a "fox" earned close Roman scrutiny (Luke 13:31-33).

In (22:18) Jesus called their bluff with his favorite pejorative label for the Pharisees - hypocrites. He asked for a "tribute" or tax coin. They showed him a "Penny" or denarius. It was Rome's main silver coin from 21 BC – 64 AD weighing 3.9 grams. During Julius Caesar's reign the pay for Roman soldiers increased to 225 denarii per year. Archaeological evidence from places such as Pompeii give us some interesting values of the denarii : [Glass of wine = 1, a loaf of bread = 2, 2 lbs of butter = 8, 8.3 liters of grain = 3, new tunic = 4, 1 mule = 130, 1 slave = 630]ⁱⁱ



Jesus made things simple by answering a question with a question. Whose image is on it? Whose name is on it? They said “Caesar’s.” The answer was splendidly obvious, yet too wise for entanglement.

“Render therefore unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s”

Scripture could have read that they were embarrassed or angered for being made to look stupid, but rather they were amazed. This answer satisfied the Pharisees who represent God and the Herodians who represented Herod and Caesar.

Saduceean Testing of Jesus (22:23-33)

Marriage and Resurrection (See lessons 7 and 36 for a thorough overview of marriage customs and divorce.) This command and custom of a “levirate” marriage of a brother’s widow was introduced in Genesis 38:8 and Deuteronomy 25:5. The Greek word ἐπιγαμβρεύω - epigambreuō is used only here in the New Testament.

“An example of levirate marriage in the Bible is the story of Ruth and Boaz. Ruth’s first husband died without leaving a child (Ruth 1:1–5). Later, Ruth met a rich landowner named Boaz in Bethlehem, and he happened to be a relative of Ruth’s late husband (Ruth 2:20). Ruth asked Boaz to be her “kinsman-redeemer”; that is, to marry her and preserve the land her husband had owned (Ruth 3:9). Boaz agreed but informed Ruth that there was one other relative of nearer kin; the obligation to marry Ruth and redeem her land fell on him first (verse 12). As it turned out, the nearer relative officially transferred his right of redemption to Boaz, clearing the way for Boaz to marry Ruth and “maintain the name of the dead with his property” (Ruth 4:5).ⁱⁱⁱ

This *halitza* or release from obligation is still enforceable in most Sephardic orthodox communities. “His brother’s widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, pull the sandal off his foot, spit in his face, and make this declaration: “Thus shall be done to the man who will not build up his brother’s house!” And he shall go in Israel by the name of “the family of the unsandaled one.”^{iv}

But this was just the preface to the faux predicament. The Pharisees and Herodians had given a riddle in which both answers were wrong. This question seemed like a riddle, where a correct answer posed a theoretical dilemma about disloyalty to Rome or polygamy in heaven. While they knew the scriptures about levirate marriage they knew not the scriptures about the resurrection (22:29). They no doubt gloated to see their opponents the Pharisees humbled and were clueless that they were about to get their “come-uppings.”

(22:30) Some have taken this verse out of context inferring that mortals who die become angels. The text does not say that. Secondly, there was an assumption that saints in heaven would not know each other. The clear teaching is that those who were once mortal will be eternally immortal in heaven, will recognize each other, but will no longer be bound by the mortal laws of relationships. They will still be unique individuals. Abraham will be distinctly not like Jacob, nor Jacob like Isaac. Individual identity will not be erased, but binding marital relationships will be eradicated. Levirate marriage was an ethical moral obligation not an eternal marital bond.

Paul/Saul of Tarsus the former Rabbi and Pharisee of the Pharisees made the case for death being the release from marriage law in Romans 7. He is giving an interpretation of the law of Moses and making an application.

“the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to *her* husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of *her* husband. So then if, while *her* husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.” (Rom. 7:2-4)

It is clear in the New Testament that believers are referred to as the bride of Christ, freed from the old husband of Sin by death to the law vicariously suffered by Christ.

“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you* as a chaste virgin to Christ.” 2 Corinthians

“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, *even* to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Romans 7:4).

They were ignorant and in error two ways, not knowing nor believing the scriptures. They did not believe in the resurrection. It was in the scriptures. God speaks in present tense of being the “I Am” of living men who had died. They beyond death were everlasting. His promise was forever present tense to those alive in Him.

“And I will establish **my covenant between me and thee**” (Genesis 17:7).

Resurrection is based on the guarantee of the Abrahamic covenant.

“Accounting that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.” (Hebrews 11:19)

Exodus 3:6 “Moreover he said, I *am* the God of thy father, **the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.**”

Exodus 3:15 “The LORD God of your fathers, **the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob**, hath sent me unto you: this *is* my name for ever”

If there is no resurrection then how does God continually speak of being the God of the Patriarchs in the present tense? (22:32)

The Sadducees were “silenced” - translated in 22:13 “bind him hand and foot” of muzzling an ox.

The multitudes were astonished at His doctrine or teaching.

(22:35) While Matthew says a “lawyer,” and Mark says a “scribe,” both are accurate. A scribe was focused on copying and interpreting texts, and a lawyer would have been specialized in legal disputes between interpretations and applications. Not all scribes were lawyers, but lawyers had to know the text and may have served as scribes from the sect of Pharisees.

The Pharisees seized upon the bewilderment of the Sadducees and asked which law had top priority. (22:34-40)

(22:36) Jesus quoted the verse following the *Shema* “Hear oh Israel, The LORD our God is one LORD” with; “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” Then He said; “This is the first and great commandment.” (22:38) “The scribes had declared that there were 248 affirmative precepts, as many as the members of the human body; and 365 negative precepts, as many as the days of the year, the total being 613, the number of letters in the decalogue.”

Was He quoting “thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deuteronomy 6:4,5), or was he quoting “to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,” (Deuteronomy 10:12 or 30:6)?

If He was quoting Deuteronomy 6:4 he replaced might with mind. If He was quoting 10:12 or 30:6, he was just adding “with all thy might.” The authority of Moses’ last reiteration of the law was more authoritative than the first rendering to the Pharisees, who had even made even their interpretation and traditions more authoritative. Either way, the experts in the Law of Moses did not correct His quotation. The significance of loving God was that it be whole-hearted from the entirety of one’s being which includes the soul/might/mind. Jesus’ addition of the second greatest commandment addresses the soul, for loving thy neighbor is a soul to soul transaction (*nefesh be nefesh* - Hebrew). The measuring stick of equally applying love to another is subjectively mentally reckoned by how one loves himself. One has to think, is that how I want to be treated? If I only mentally think I love them without acting upon it with my might, then I am void of obedience to the first commandment.

“Hereby perceive we the love of *God*, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of *compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” (1 John 3:16-18)

“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (22:40) The first five of the Ten Commandments concern our relationship to God, and the second five deal with our relationship to man.

Then he equated “the greatest,” making the vertically focused love of God applicable to mankind horizontally. “And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” (22:39)

The letter of the law was all that the lawyer was concerned about. Jesus addressed the spirit of the law with the second commandment, which can only be observed by benefitting our fellow man.

Therefore the verse “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20) They could not catch Jesus in any trap of disloyalty to Caesar’s law or disloyalty to God’s law.

Jesus' next question dealt with the deity and humanity of the Messiah (22:42) “Whose son is He?” David they said. Jesus quoted David, “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” Psalm 110:1 Jesus asked How can Messiah be David’s Lord and his son (22:45). Rather than answer Jesus’ question, that would affirm the Messiah is both deity and humanity and thereby confirming the multitude’s belief that Jesus is the Messiah, they departed in silence. Messiah was prophesied to be the divinely born human son of David. They just refused to admit it was even possible. In this they were closer to their enemies the Sadducees who denied the supernatural, a point the Sadducees no doubt enjoyed.

Jesus had just divided the proverbial baby as in Solomon’s wise answer when the two prostitutes disputed which one was the mother. In this case both the Sadducees and the Pharisees were unwilling to admit the truth.

“Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.” (Proverbs 26:4,5) The wisdom of God, His word and His Spirit are needed to expose the lie by the truth.

“They durst ask Him any more questions.” This is like when Elijah asked the Israelites on Mt. Carmel to take a stand for God against Baal and the people answered him not a word. Only when fire fell from Heaven did they admit, “The LORD He is the God.” These elders of Israel refused to admit that Jesus is the Son of David and divine Son of God. His resurrection would harden their cement into concrete but “a great company of the priests” who were Sadducees later believed (Acts 6:7).

ⁱ <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/articles/herodians>

ⁱⁱ <https://atlasmythica.com>

ⁱⁱⁱ [What is a levirate marriage? | GotQuestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org/What-is-a-levirate-marriage/)

^{iv} [Halitzah: The Ceremonial Release from Levirate Marriage | My Jewish Learning](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/halitzah-the-ceremonial-release-from-levirate-marriage/)

^v Vincent Word Studies, Word pictures of the New Testament, A.T. Robertson, Matthew and Mark, Kregel Publications, 2004, Grand Rapids, MI, p 184