

Notes for Matthew –Chapter 21 (Page 1 of 7)

Introduction – Chapter 21 can be summarized in one word: rejection.

1. Chapter 21 focuses upon the corporate rejection of Jesus by the Jewish nation.
2. The 1st section of this chapter deals with Jesus presenting himself to Israel as their king. (Vs. 1-11)
 - a. While many accept and praise Jesus as the Messiah, the majority of this same group will reject him once they realize Jesus is not there to overthrow Rome.
3. The 2nd section has to do with the “cleansing of the temple”. (Verses 12-13)
 - a. The religious leaders of Jewish temple were corrupt at this time. They were taking advantage of people and profiting off of people’s desires to worship God.
4. From Verse 15 to the end of the chapter, and going into Chapter 22, we have Jesus telling several parables that all tie to his rejection.
 - a. There is an “exception” in Verses 17-22, where Jesus curses a fig tree.
 - b. This is symbolic of Jesus’ rejection by the Jewish leadership.
5. What is interesting to read as a Christian application is how Jesus handled rejection.
 - a. Jesus promised that non-believers would reject Christians for our belief.
 - b. Jesus said, “All men (non-believers) will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” (Matthew 10:22, NIV)
 - c. What you don’t see in this chapter is Jesus throwing a temper tantrum, nor are you seeing Jesus calling out for angels to strike people dead, etc.
 - i. Jesus still focuses on those who are called to serve them.
 - ii. He focuses on those who accept him, and predicts the bleak future of those who choose to reject him.

Verses 1-3: As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

1. Chapter 20 was Jesus on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. It is about a 17-mile uphill journey.
2. Bethphage means “house of figs”. This is a hillside location that is part of the Mount of Olives area. From this point one has a panoramic view of Jerusalem, which is in a valley surrounded by a mountain range. This spot is about 300 feet higher than where the temple was located.
3. We know from the other gospels that the village ahead is called “Bethany”.
4. Jesus told his disciples in effect, “All right guys, go into town. Here is what you are going to find. There will be a donkey and the donkey’s colt. Take them, and if anybody questions you, say, “The Lord needs them.”
 - a. This event was a miracle all to itself. Would you give something to strangers just because they said, “The Lord needs them”?
 - b. It also shows Jesus predicting in advance what was going to happen.

Verses 4-5: This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ⁵ "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' "

1. Matthew is quoting Zechariah 9:9 in Verse 5.
 - a. Zechariah was written after all the kings of Israel had come and gone, so it was not written about any other Jewish King. Zechariah wrote this after Israel the Babylonians conquered Israel. Seventy years later, some returned and were rebuilding the temple.
 - b. Zechariah was encouraging them with the prophecy of “the king is coming”.
 - c. Of all the Old Testament predictions about Jesus, this is the only one I can think of where Jesus goes out of his way to arrange the fulfillment of that prediction.

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Verses 6-9 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them.⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"

1. This is the story of "Palm Sunday". It is mentioned in all four gospel accounts.
2. We call it "Palm Sunday" as the followers of Jesus cut down palm branches and laid them at Jesus feet. John's gospel says they were palm branches. (John 12:13).
3. Why did Jesus do this? So that the Nation of Israel has no excuse for rejecting the Messiah.
 - a. Let's suppose "Palm Sunday" never happened. The Israelites could claim to God, "It is not our fault we rejected Jesus. We never had an opportunity to worship Jesus as a collective group. We never got to see him proclaim himself as the Messiah.
 - b. Another reason was to fulfill prophecy. In Daniel Chapter 9, there is a prediction of the exact day when Jesus would proclaim himself as the king. Palm Sunday is that day.
 - i. "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (in rubble at that time) until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.'" (Daniel 9:25a, NIV)
 - ii. That word 'sevens' is a period of seven years.
 - iii. The text says "seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens'" which is sixty-nine 'seven's'.
 - iv. If a 'seven' is a 7-year period, the total time frame is 69 x 7 years, or 483 years.
 - v. In Nehemiah, a decree was given on a specific date to rebuild Jerusalem, which was in rubble from the Babylonian conquest. That was on March 14, 445BC.
 1. Source: Encyclopedia Britannica, Volume 10, Page 642.
 - vi. Using a Jewish calendar, which has a 360-day year, that period ends on April 6, 32 A.D. That is Palm Sunday. Daniel's prediction was exact to the day.
4. I believe Jesus held the nation of Israel responsible for understanding the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. The religious leaders should have known that this is the day that the Messiah would come to present himself before the people of Israel. Even if they didn't know the exact day, they should have known "roughly" that this was the time.
 - a. "As he (Jesus) approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." (Luke 19:41-44 NIV)
5. Verse 9 says the crowds following Jesus were saying "'Hosanna to the Son of David!' Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"
 - a. Remember that "Son of David" is a title for the Messiah as God made a promise to King David in that he would have a son who would rule forever. (See: 2nd Sam. 7:12).
 - b. The word "Hosanna" was originally was a cry for help: "Save!" (Ref.: 2nd Sam. 14:4; and 2nd Kings 6:26). In time it became an invocation of blessing and even an acclamation, the latter being the meaning here." (Bible Expositor's Encyclopedia)
 - c. Remember that most of this same crowd would later reject Jesus. This is why I believe they were hoping Jesus would overthrow Rome. When they saw that was not Jesus' intention and saw him beaten by the Romans, this led to the rejection.
 - d. It is also a reminder that an emotional reaction by a crowd is not enough to get people to change their lifestyle. It has to be a change of heart.

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Verses 6-9 (cont.) A discussion of Palm Sunday. It was 4 days prior to the Passover.

6. One of the requirements for the Passover dinner was to eat roasted lamb.
 - a. On this Sunday is the day when the religious leaders picked the lambs to be slaughtered.
 - b. No lambs with "blemishes" or defects of any kind were picked.
 - c. While the religious leaders were picking which lambs to choose, here is Jesus saying in effect "choose me, I am the true lamb of God coming to be sacrificed for your sins".

Verses 10-11: When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

¹¹ The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

1. The population of Jerusalem grew tremendously for the Passover season. When Jesus came trodding into Jerusalem on the donkey's colt was seen by a large crowd. It was the major event of the moment. Remember Jesus rode down a hill where everyone could see him.
2. It is interesting to note that the crowd saw Jesus as a "prophet" but not as Messiah.
 - a. Remember this: "Jesus asked his disciples in effect, who do "the people" say that I am?" Peter answered, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (Matthew 16:14 NIV)
 - b. In the world today, many acknowledge Jesus as a prophet, but not the Messiah.
 - i. For example, Muslims consider Jesus "a great prophet", but nothing more than that.
 - ii. My point is unless you understand that Jesus is God, that Jesus is the promised Messiah, anything "lower than that" (i.e., "prophet") is not acceptable for eternal salvation.

Verses 12-13: Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³ "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a `den of robbers.'"

1. Jesus 1st order of business after riding into town on the donkey's colt was to cleanse the temple.
2. The 1st century historian Josephus records that the High Priest of that day was very corrupt. He was eventually ousted by his own people.
 - a. He made money by selling "official" sacrificial animals at marked-up prices.
 - b. A temple tax was also required. Only a Jewish "shekkel" was permitted to pay this tax, and a high exchange rate was charged.
 - c. The fact that Jesus had a large crowd following him was enough intimidation that the moneychangers had to let Jesus get away with overturning the tables.
 - d. This is actually the second time that Jesus cleansed the temple. (Reference: John Chapter 2)

Verse 14: The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.

1. Here is Jesus cleaning the temple of the corrupt officials. Now he goes back to healing people!
2. Despite the rejection by the Jewish leaders, Jesus still took the time to reach out to those who wanted to be healed.
3. God has called on us to be his witnesses to the world, no matter what the circumstances or whatever else is going on in our life.

Verse 15: But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

1. Here were the religious leaders, seeing children yelling to Jesus as the Messiah and they further saw the miracles Jesus performed, yet refused to believe.
2. People can see all sorts of evidence of changed lives through Jesus and still not repent, mainly because they don't want to change their lives.
3. Jesus threatens the religious leaders' power. It is as if to say, "Who cares about Jesus' miracles? He is affecting my income. In that sense, he has to go!"

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Verses 16-17: "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?"¹⁷ And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

1. Jesus quotes a line from Psalm 8:2 to the religious leaders.
2. Jesus is telling them that even the fact that kids are calling out to Jesus as the Messiah is an Old Testament prediction. If you read that verse in Psalm 8, you would think it is simply a praise to God. Jesus is saying that verse is predictive of him.
 - a. It is simply another reminder that the Old Testament is full of predictions that we may not realize are predictions. The Old Testament is full of word-patterns and word-pictures that are fulfilling some aspect of the events of Jesus' life.
3. Notice Jesus walked away in Verse 17. He didn't sit around and debate them. This is a reminder to use our time and resources wisely. If people aren't interested in change, don't spend lots of time trying to convince them otherwise.

Verses 18-19: Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. ¹⁹ Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.

1. This is the only place we ever read of Jesus saying to anyone else he was hungry.
 - a. Here, we read of Jesus going back to Bethany to spend the night (Mark 11:12).
 - b. The next morning, he was walking back to Jerusalem to continue his ministry.
 - c. Next we read that he was hungry, saw a fruitless fig tree and cursed the tree.
2. There are two main applications to see from this story.
 - a. The first is to teach about the power of faith. We'll discuss that in Verses 20-22.
 - b. The second is the symbolic reference of Israel as this fig tree.
 - i. Throughout the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is often compared to grapevines and fig trees. Often both word-pictures of Israel are coupled together.
 - ii. For example, 'I will take away their harvest, declares the LORD. There will be no grapes on the vine. There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither. What I have given them will be taken from them. (Jeremiah 8:13, NIV)
 - iii. Jesus cursing the fig tree is a visual-picture for Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

Verses 20-22: When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked. ²¹ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. ²² If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

1. The first thing to notice is that this tree cursing takes place in front of the disciples.
2. The second is Jesus uses it as an illustration to teach the disciples about faith.
3. Jesus is saying, "If you believe, God can give you the power to kill a tree or move a mountain."
 - a. Jesus is talking about the power of prayer. If we are praying for something that is God's will, God does give us the power to accomplish that will, and that can include some incredible miracles.
 - b. Paul summed it up well: "Now to him (God) who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21, NIV)
 - c. God wants to work through us to accomplish his plans. Prayer is a way we stay close to God and draw upon His strength to do His will.
 - i. "Without God, we can't; Without us, God won't".

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Verse 23: Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"

1. First of all, notice Jesus boldness to keep teaching despite the circumstances.
2. Jesus is showing how we are to be his witnesses and to do God's will for our lives despite previous rejections and despite any rejections to come.
3. Notice the religious leaders are again focusing on the "status quo" of their organization.
 - a. They could care less what Jesus is saying. They were only worrying that he didn't have the "proper authority" to preach the Gospel.
 - b. People will miss the point because they are focusing on "the rules" and not the message.

Verses 24-27: Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵ John's baptism--where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' ²⁶ But if we say, 'From men'--we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet." ²⁷ So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

1. Jesus was asked by what authority was he preaching. Jesus rebutted by asking about John the Baptist's authority. The religious leaders knew John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. Also, John was very popular with the common people, so they were afraid to say John was not a prophet. Therefore, they couldn't deny Jesus as the Messiah and at the same time reject John the Baptist's teaching, so they simply said, "We don't know." Jesus silenced his critics.
2. The religious leaders were too fearful of their own lives to say John was wrong.
 - a. "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 10:39 NIV)

Verses 28-32: "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' ²⁹ 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. ³¹ Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

1. To understand the parable, one has to remember the events of Matthew Chapter 3. (3 years ago)
 - a. Jews, religious and non-religious alike were coming to John, repenting of their sins and agreeing to be baptized to "wash away" their sin.
 - b. The religious leaders went to check out John and essentially rejected him.
 - c. Jesus is reminding them that despised tax collectors and the prostitutes repented at the preaching of John, but the religious leaders did not.
2. The parable says in effect, "Son #1 says yes, then doesn't go and son #2 says no and then goes".
 - a. Jesus "ends" this parable by saying the "tax collectors and prostitutes" will, in effect, enter heaven before you guys.
 - b. Jesus is comparing the religious leaders to the son who said he would go in the field, but didn't. They didn't, because they failed to recognize Jesus as Messiah.
 - c. Here is Jesus saying all of the religious leaders lives' work of study and "belief" in the God of the Bible fails because they did not recognize Jesus' purpose and mission.

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Verses 28-32: (cont.) Notice the words "ahead of you"

3. Notice Jesus says in Verse 31: "tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you."
 - a. I see this phrase as Jesus still pleading with the religious leaders to repent.
 - b. The tax collectors & prostitutes are "ahead of them" because they believed in Jesus first.
 - c. Jesus' point is that it is not too late, nor never too late for those who wish to open their heart to the Gospel message.
 - d. In Acts 15:5, there were some Pharisees that became Christians (Acts 15:5).

Verse 33a: "Listen to another parable..."

1. From Verse 33 to the end of the chapter is another parable.
2. Look at what Verse 45 says, "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them." They were correct. This parable is about the religious leaders.
3. A summary of the parable: A landowner built a vineyard. He leased it to farmers. The landowner sent servants to collect rent, who were killed. More servants were sent and the owner's son was sent. They were all killed.
 - a. Jesus ends the parable by saying in effect, "The landowner will kill those wicked servants and at harvest time give his share to others."
 - b. Luke's Gospel says, "When the people heard this, they said, 'May this never be!'" (Luke 20:16b, NIV)
 - c. The crowd knew Jesus was talking about the Jewish nation in this parable.

Verses 33b-34: "There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

1. Notice the landowner is the one who "did all the work".
2. Our "job" as vineyard tenants, is to be God's ambassadors to the world. That is the "work" required of them, and of us today.
3. Verse 34 is payment time. All people are held accountable to God based on what information we do know about Jesus.

Verses 35-38: "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.

³⁷ Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. ³⁸ "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' ³⁹ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

1. This parable shows the patience of God the father.
 - a. God knows eternity is far longer than our time here on earth.
 - b. Therefore, God the father, who loves all people, is doing everything possible to get people to repent and change their ways for the sake of eternal salvation.
2. From Chapter 23: Jesus said, "And you (Pharisees) say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets." (Matt. 23:30-31, NIV).
 - a. The "servants" who were killed in this parable represent the Old Testament prophets.

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Verses 40-41: "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

⁴¹ "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

1. At the end of Verse 41 in Luke is where the crowd yells, "May this never be!" (Luke 20:16).
2. Two thousand years of history has shown this to be true. Christianity has been the main source of the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Judaism has been a minor religion for 2,000 years.
3. I also need to add here I disagree with the view that the rejection of Israel is permanent.
 - a. Paul teaches that God made unconditional promises to the Nation of Israel.
 - b. Romans 10:12 (present age) says, "For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile"
 - c. Romans 11 (future era) says, "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved." (11:25b-26a, NIV)
 - d. Romans 10 and 11 have to be different time eras, if not Romans 11 & 12 would be a contradiction.
 - i. Romans 10 says "no difference between Jew/Gentile."
 - ii. Romans 11 makes a distinction. Therefore, Paul is discussing different time eras.
 - e. Jesus says, "For I tell you (Israel), you (collectively) will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Matthew 23:39).
 - i. The "until" can mean the corporate acceptance of Jesus by the believing Jews.
 - ii. We'll discuss this more in Chapter 23.

Verse 42: Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

1. This is a quote of Psalm 118, Verses 22-23.
2. Notice Jesus has not given up on trying to teach the religious leaders who he is.

Verse 43-44: "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴ He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

1. This parable within the parable is about a stone.
 - a. Whoever the stone falls on will be crushed. This refers to eternal salvation.
 - b. Whoever falls on this stone will be broken to pieces. This sounds "bad", but it is not. This part specifically is about Jesus working in our lives and he "breaks us" of our old habits.
 - c. For extra credit, study Isaiah 8:14-15 and Daniel 2:35 as similar "stone" references to Jesus.

Verse 45: When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. ⁴⁶ They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

1. It never occurs to the religious leaders that Jesus might be right and they have to repent.
2. The only reason they didn't arrest Jesus on the spot was fear of the people.
 - a. They feared for their own lives. They eventually lost it.
3. It reminds you of Jesus saying, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 10:39, NIV)
4. We too, like Jesus must try to warn as many as possible about the eternal consequences of rejecting Jesus. In that sense, we are preaching the same message.