



## The Gospel of Mark - Chapter Twelve

- III. Mark 8:27-16:8 - Testing Jesus' Authority in Suffering (continues)
- III.b Mark 11:1-13:37 - Entering and judging Jerusalem (continues)
- III.b.ii Mark 11:12-12:44 - Jesus' judgment on religious leaders (continues/concludes)

### Summary of Chapter Twelve

It was still Tuesday of Passover week and Jesus was teaching in Jerusalem, surrounded by his disciples, the religious leaders and ordinary people. He told them the Parable of the Tenants, which was a cryptic account of the history of Israel: how God, as the landlord, had given the people a rich land, the vineyard. When it was time to reap the harvest, fruit for God, then the landlord sent his servants the prophets, but the Jewish tenants refused to give to God what he was due. They abused, mistreated and even killed those sent to him. Finally, the landlord sent his only Son to them but he too was abused and killed, so the landlord took the land away from the wicked tenants and gave it to others, which would be both Jews and Gentiles who accepted the Gospel message. The religious leaders knew this had been spoken against them and they plotted to kill Jesus.

A different group of leaders, Pharisees and Herodians, then set a trap for Jesus with a question on whether the Jews should pay the imperial tax to Rome or not. If Jesus said they should, he would lose favour with the Jews. If he said they should not then he was in danger of being arrested by the Romans. He produced the response that they should give to Cæsar what was his and to God what belonged to him.

Following this, some Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, tested Jesus with a well crafted story about seven brothers who each married the same woman as each of the men died childless and the next

brother then had to marry her under the law of Moses. Jesus corrected their misunderstanding about both relationships in heaven and the power of God.

A teacher, seeing that Jesus had answered well, asked him which of the commandments was the greatest, to which Jesus replied that everyone was to place God at the centre of their lives and to love all others around them. The teacher acknowledged that this was an excellent reply and that it was far more important than the religious ritualistic practices of the Jews. Jesus acknowledged that this man was close to the Kingdom.

Jesus taught that the Messiah, who was expected to be the son of David, was, according to David's own words, going to the Lord of David. Through his earthly genealogy, Jesus was a descendant of David, but the Psalm of David he quoted from showed that he was far greater than any human descendant of David could ever be.

Jesus issued a warning against the religious leaders who took more pride in their appearance and the honour bestowed on them at public gatherings than they did in performing their duty before God. Some would even stoop so low as to defraud widows, probably as they were helping them to settle their estates after their husbands had died.

While in the temple courts, Jesus observed many rich people putting large amounts of money in the offering. He also saw a widow put in a very small amount, but it was all she had, whereas the rich had an abundance of wealth remaining. Jesus stated that the woman had offered far more than all the others put together, for she, out of her poverty, gave all she had.

### **III.b.ii.3 Mark 12:1-12 - The Parable of the Tenants**

This parable of judgment was addressed primarily to the religious leaders of Israel. The story drew on everyday life. Disputes between absentee landlords, their representatives, in this case a servant, and tenants were common (vv.3-5). The attempt to seize the land by killing the rightful heir is bold but plausible (vv.6-8).

The key to understanding the story lies in v.12, for although the opponents of Jesus understood his story to be an accusation against them, they still did not take Jesus' words to heart. In fact, they acted out their part in the parable.

The vineyard was a well-known metaphor for Israel in Scripture. The beloved son of the landlord was rejected as the messianic stone. The builders (v.10), a metaphor for the religious leaders, kill the messianic stone (v.7 and v.10). This interpretation corresponded to the current tension between Jesus and his opponents, and the overall saving work of God, despite the rebellion of his people. Jesus' parabolic teaching either instructs or hardens its hearers, then and now.

**<sup>1</sup> Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place.**

## Mark 12:1

Jesus then began to speak to them in parables. This is the first recorded use of parables in Mark since Jesus was confronted by Jerusalem based Pharisees in Galilee, when he challenged their traditions on cleanliness: <<**Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them**>> (Mark 7:15).

The landlord went to great expense, which justified his rightful expectation of a share in the profit. The allusion to God's vineyard, i.e. Israel: <<**Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down**>> (Isaiah 5:1-5 ESV), including vineyard, wall, and watchtower, suggests that Jesus continued the theme of the fruit of worship and righteousness for God as noted in: <<**Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again."** And his disciples heard him say it>> (Mark 11:13-14), and the comments made on that chapter. Immense Herodian-era manor houses with walls, towers, and winepresses have been excavated near Cæsarea Maritima.

He rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. It was quite common for wealthy men to own large areas of land and sub-let it to tenant farmers, taking payment either in gold or silver, or by having a share of the harvest. This was a perfectly legal arrangement although it was ordained by God that it was to be undertaken fairly by both parties involved: <<**If you sell land to any of your own people or buy land from them, do not take advantage of each other. You are to buy from your own people on the basis of the number of years since the Jubilee. And they are to sell to you on the basis of the number of years left for harvesting crops. When the years are many, you are to increase the price, and when the years are few, you are to decrease the price, because what is really being sold to you is the number of crops. Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. I am the Lord your God**>> (Leviticus 25:14-17), for the land was to be restored to its original owner in the year of Jubilee, i.e. every fifty years.

<sup>2</sup> At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.

## Mark 12:2

At harvest time, a representative of the landlord, in this case a servant, went to receive the landlord's share, some of the fruit of the vineyard.

<sup>3</sup> But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed.  
<sup>4</sup> Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. <sup>5</sup> He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

#### Mark 12:3-5

There was an escalation in the mistreatment of the landlord's servants: they were beaten, struck on the head, and ultimately killed. The repetition of these events, and so with many others, reinforced the injustice. While Israel might have borne fruit, the leaders of Israel, because of their misguided leadership, hindered the fruit from being given to God. Those that were mistreated and killed were the prophets sent by God to get his people back on track.

<sup>6</sup> "He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

#### Mark 12:6

One left to send, a beloved son: <<Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him'>> (Luke 20:13), which recalls the words spoken by the Father to Jesus at his baptism: <<When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased">> (Luke 3:21-22), and on the holy mountain: <<He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased">> (2 Peter 1:17), and therefore here it surely alludes to God's sending of Jesus to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom to Israel, and their widespread rejection of him.

The tenants' attitude toward the landlord was directly reflected in their respect, or rather lack of it, for his son, who represented Jesus. They had become like Pharaoh: <<So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, "This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, so that they may worship me'>> (Exodus 10:3), although God never closes the door on his people: <<But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors – their unfaithfulness and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies – then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land>> (Leviticus 26:40-42). God did, of course, have to punish them with exile for their hard heartedness because of the way the whole nation behaved, just as in this parable: <<Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord his God and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke the word of the Lord. He also rebelled against King

*Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him take an oath in God's name. He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the Lord, the God of Israel. Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the Lord, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem. The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy>> (2 Chronicles 36:11-16).*

<sup>7</sup> “But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’

#### Mark 12:7

The tenants displayed disrespect for the landlord by seeking to kill the heir. They may have assumed that the heir’s arrival meant the landlord had either died or that he would leave them alone after his son was killed by them.

This is reminiscent of Jacob sending a young Joseph to visit his brothers, who then sold him into slavery, despite knowing he was the beloved of his father: <<So he said to him, “Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.” Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived at Shechem, a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, “What are you looking for?”>> (Genesis 37:14-15), he eventually located his brothers, who were going to kill him but relented and sold him to slave traders instead. However, the selling of Joseph into slavery was part of God’s plan for the benefit of so many others, as Joseph would later acknowledge to his brothers: <<You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives>> (Genesis 50:20). During the trials of life, it is often difficult to see that God does it all for a very good reason.

<sup>8</sup> So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

#### Mark 12:8

So they took him and killed him. <<It was nine in the morning when they crucified him>> (Mark 15:25). In killing the heir they were then in a position to rule the church according to their own perceived needs.

Threw him out of the vineyard. <<Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha)>> (John 19:17), and: <<So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb>> (Mark 15:46). By throwing the Son out of the vineyard, they effectively dismissed the Gospel message he had brought with him.

<sup>9</sup> “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

### Mark 12:9

Finally, the owner of the vineyard, i.e. God, punished the evil tenants, primarily the leaders of Israel, again noted in: <<*Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled*>> (Isaiah 5:3-5), and sought new tenants, i.e. give the vineyard to others, which relates to the Gentiles. Israel and the Son sent to her belong to God, and he will not be second best to anyone, so he will find others that will do as his will demands: <<*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people – the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world – just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace*>> (Colossians 1:3-6). Israel’s leaders disrespected the possessions of God, as recorded in Mark 11:27-12:12, and thus incurred the righteous judgment of God.

He will come refers to the Second Coming of Christ: <<*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Kill those tenants refers to spiritual rather than physical death, i.e. they will spend eternity separated from God, commonly known as hell: <<*But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death*>> (Revelation 21:8).

What Jesus was telling these people was nothing new for it had been written about long ago that God would not just come to redeem this one small nation, no matter how special he may see them: <<*And now the Lord says – he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honoured in the eyes of the Lord and my God has been my strength – he says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth”*>> (Isaiah 49:5-6).

<sup>10</sup> Haven't you read this passage of Scripture:

“The stone the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;

<sup>11</sup> the Lord has done this,  
and it is marvellous in our eyes’?”

### Mark 12:10-11

At the time of Jesus, Psalm 118:22-23, quoted here, was already known as a messianic psalm, and was used by those in the early church as by Peter: <<*Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone’*>> (Acts 4:11), and Peter repeats it in his first epistle: <<*Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for*>> (1 Peter 2:7-8).

The opponents of Jesus could thus understand what he meant:

- The stone refers to the Messiah.
- Builders refers to the leaders of Israel.
- Rejected echoes the theme of the persecution of the prophets of God, refer to Nehemiah 9:9-35 and Acts 7:1-53.

The new, faithful Israel, i.e. spiritual Israel, will accept the Son as the rightful messenger, heir and cornerstone of the messianic Kingdom, leaving the old kingdom desolate: <<*“No rock will be taken from you for a cornerstone, nor any stone for a foundation, for you will be desolate forever,” declares the Lord*>> (Jeremiah 51:26), and: <<*“What are you, mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘God bless it! God bless it!’”*>> (Zechariah 4:7).

Verses 9-10 speak of reversal: in v.9 God transferred responsibility for his people to others, and in v.10 the rejected messianic stone was divinely vindicated and established as the cornerstone of a new building, God’s spiritual temple, with disciples becoming the living stones that make up the rest of that building.

<sup>12</sup> Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

### Mark 12:12

The opponents of Jesus had long determined to kill him: <<*Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus*>> (Mark 3:6), and: <<*The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole*

*crowd was amazed at his teaching*>> (Mark 11:18). From their vantage point, only his popularity hindered them: <<*Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. “But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot”*>> (Mark 14:1-2). Also, they could not take him because of his nature: <<*Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees, who asked them, “Why didn’t you bring him in?” “No one ever spoke the way this man does,” the guards replied*>> (John 7:45-46), or until the divine time that had been set by the Father: <<*At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come*>> (John 7:30).

They were afraid of the crowd. Jesus had just laid it out before these men just how they had behaved toward the God they claimed to represent and the consequences that now faced them. They would have arrested him there and then if it were not for the reverence that the people had for Jesus and the leaders own fear of them. Instead of repenting and changing the course of history, or their personal destiny at least, they left him and went away.

#### III.b.ii.4 Mark 12:13-17 - Paying the Imperial Tax to Cæsar

Those in authority set another trap for Jesus by trying to get him to make a judgement on Roman taxation, which was extremely unpopular and also deemed to be against God’s law for the Jews. If Jesus had said it should be paid he could lose a lot of credibility with the Jews; if he told them not to pay, he could be handed to the Romans for opposing their authority, a capital crime in itself.

<sup>13</sup> **Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words.**

#### Mark 12:13

Two very different groups in Palestinian Judaism, Pharisees and Herodians went against their natural antipathy toward one another to collaborate against Jesus. This was also noted in a Scripture quoted as part of the comments on v.12. These two groups made strange bedfellows in this account, as the Pharisees were in favour of the freedom of the Jews from foreign oppression, understanding that paying taxes to the Romans was against God’s Law. The Herodians were in favour of the Romans for they had set Herod up as a ruler and their main power came through the continued relationship between Herod’s descendants and Rome.

The opponents of Jesus attempted to catch him in his words by means of difficult questions: <<*The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven*>> (Mark 8:11), <<*Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”*>> (Mark 10:2), and: <<*They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you authority to do this?”*>> (Mark 11:27-28).

<sup>14</sup> They came to him and said, “Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Cæsar or not?”

#### Mark 12:14

We know that you are a man of integrity. Jesus rightly labelled his opponents’ kind words as hypocrisy (v.15). Since Jesus purported to be teaching the way of God, they figured that he must have an opinion as to whether it was lawful to pay poll taxes or property taxes to the oppressive Roman emperor. A rejection of paying taxes would seem to entail rebellion against Cæsar; a willingness to pay taxes would appear to compromise devotion to God.

You teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. It seems strange that these men should think this way, even if they were just trying to ingratiate themselves to Jesus or to put him at his ease in their attempts to catch him. They were so accurate in their description of Jesus that they only needed to come to the appropriate conclusion, seek his forgiveness and become his disciples. Their eternal salvation was so close to them at that time and yet they could not or would not accept it for themselves, or for all the other people that looked to them for guidance. The prophet had long ago spoken of such men as these: <<“*Remnant of Judah, the Lord has told you, ‘Do not go to Egypt.’ Be sure of this: I warn you today that you made a fatal mistake when you sent me to the Lord your God and said, ‘Pray to the Lord our God for us; tell us everything he says and we will do it.’ I have told you today, but you still have not obeyed the Lord your God in all he sent me to tell you. So now, be sure of this: You will die by the sword, famine and plague in the place where you want to go to settle*”>> (Jeremiah 42:19-22).

<sup>15</sup> Should we pay or shouldn’t we?”

But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. “Why are you trying to trap me?” he asked. “Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.”

#### Mark 12:15

Jesus was not buying time while he thought up an answer. He wanted the coin to illustrate his response that would leave his opponents speechless.



A denarius depicting Tiberius Cæsar

<sup>16</sup> They brought the coin, and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

“Cæsar’s,” they replied.

## Mark 12:16

The likeness of Tiberius Cæsar and inscription on the coin, valued as the wage of a day's labour, represented the person of Cæsar and his authority. By carrying and using Roman coinage, and there were viable alternatives, Jesus' opponents showed that they already participated in the Roman social order.

Rome may have been seen as the oppressor but they were also renowned for good governance, providing water and food in the populated areas, investing in infrastructure to aid trade routes and they provided security for the population in general. This cost money and so they charged taxes to pay for it. Their taxation was also used to maintain their presence in a land where they were not welcome, which is why it was so unpopular. What tax system has ever been popular throughout the course of history?

<sup>17</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Cæsar what is Cæsar's and to God what is God's."

And they were amazed at him.

## Mark 12:17

What is Cæsar's, what is God's. Jesus did not discuss the question of whether the current Roman governance was just or unjust, but he did imply that it was right to pay taxes to Cæsar. God's Kingdom, however, transcends all of these things. All people should give to God that which is his, namely their whole being, along with all honour, praise and glory that they should hold for him as their creator God: <<"*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being*">> (Revelation 4:11).

They were amazed at him. Jesus never failed to amaze people with his teaching, his powers, his love and compassion, and his devotion to his Father. However, they were probably amazed that he had so easily avoided their trap.

Jesus was not establishing a political kingdom in opposition to Cæsar, so his followers should pay taxes and obey civil laws. There are matters that belong to the realm of civil government, and there are other matters that belong to God's realm. Jesus does not specify here which matters belong in which realm, but many Christian ethicists today teach that, in general, civil government should allow freedom in matters of religious doctrine, worship and beliefs about God, and the church should not attempt to use the power of government to enforce allegiance to any specific religious viewpoint. All forms of the Christian church throughout the world today support some kind of separation between matters of church and matters of state. By contrast, totalitarian governments usually try to suppress the church and subsume everything under the realm of the state. And some extreme Islamic movements have tried to abolish independent civil government and subsume everything under the control of Islamic religious leaders. Historically, when the church and state have become too closely aligned, the result most often has been the compromise of the church, or at least, what it is meant to stand for.

### III.b.ii.5 Mark 12:18-27 - Marriage at the Resurrection

Having seen off the Pharisees and the Herodians, the major religious sect, the Sadducees, who dominated the Sanhedrin, believed they had a way to show that Jesus' doctrine was false, at least in terms of there being a resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection and put together what they thought was a carefully crafted story to entrap Jesus. Once again, Jesus is more than a match for human ingenuity.

<sup>18</sup> Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. <sup>19</sup> "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. <sup>20</sup> Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. <sup>21</sup> The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. <sup>22</sup> In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. <sup>23</sup> At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

#### Mark 12:18-23

The Sadducees cite the OT law of what is later called levirate marriage taken from the Latin *levir* or brother-in-law, in which the surviving brother of a childless, deceased man was obligated to marry his sister-in-law in order to provide for her needs and to preserve the deceased brother's family line: <<*If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfil the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel*>> (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

The overstated and theoretical question, seven successive levirate marriages assumed a tension between the Mosaic law: <<*Then Judah said to Onan, "Sleep with your brother's wife and fulfil your duty to her as a brother-in-law to raise up offspring for your brother"*>> (Genesis 38:8), and: <<*Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property"*>> (Ruth 4:5); and belief in the resurrection, which the party of the Sadducees rejected. How can one woman and seven men be married in heaven?

The Sadducees were perhaps trying to undermine the teaching of the law that spoke of the resurrection of the dead, but most of all they wanted to undermine the popularity of Jesus by disproving what he was teaching on this subject that was the cause of so much passion in their debates.

The Sadducees, including the high priest Caiaphas (AD18-36), were primarily of wealthy priestly families in Jerusalem. Josephus claimed they were unfriendly, even to one another, and were unpopular (Jewish War 2.166; Jewish Antiquities 13.298). They could be cruel judges (Jewish Antiquities 20.199;

Mishnah, Sanhedrin 7:2; Makkot 1:6). When Jesus disrupted their financial interests in the temple, he was arrested and condemned. James, the half-brother of the Lord and prominent church leader in Jerusalem, was later killed by the Sadducean high priest Ananus in AD62 (Jewish Antiquities 20.200).

The Sadducees, who were deists, rejected the extra-biblical traditions of the Pharisees, perhaps embracing only the Pentateuch as being canonical (Jewish Antiquities 13.297; 18.16). This narrow canon may explain why they did not believe in the general resurrection of the dead, since it is not explicitly mentioned in the Pentateuch. Perhaps, for the same reason, they embraced human responsibility, which is emphasised in the Law of Moses, in contrast to the determinism of another key group at the time called the Essenes (Jewish War 2.166; Jewish Antiquities 13.173).

<sup>24</sup> Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?”

#### Mark 12:24

In asking their question, the Sadducees were in error on two counts: they do not know the Scriptures or the power of God, see comments on vv.26-27.

Those who call on God Almighty must also know of the power of God for it has not been hidden and was acknowledged by David: <<*One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard: “Power belongs to you, God”*>> (Psalm 62:11). Abraham based all his hopes on that very power: <<*Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised*>> (Romans 4:19-21).

**This is a key passage in Scripture that demonstrates that God can not only be relied on to keep his promises, he has the power and capability to keep them!**

<sup>25</sup> When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.

#### Mark 12:25

When the dead rise. Jesus is confirming a general resurrection that will occur at the end of the age. This was the point that the Sadducees mainly opposed in Jesus’ teaching and he cleverly used an example from the Pentateuch, the only Scripture they had faith in, to demonstrate it was a reality. If they had been prepared to believe that the prophets spoke the words of God, they would not have rejected the idea of resurrection at all: <<*Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I*

*have done it, declares the Lord'>> (Ezekiel 37:12-14). This is basically what Jesus was teaching some 450 years or so later: <<Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself>> (John 5:24-26).*

*In less than a week, Jesus himself would be raised from the dead and would answer all their doubts, yet they would still not believe, despite this remarkable display of the power of God: <<I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come>> (Ephesians 1:18-21), which set the pattern for all who would believe: <<But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body>> (Philippians 3:20-21).*

*Paul would later use the Sadducees' resistance to the resurrection to help him gain support within the Sanhedrin, after he had been arrested by the Romans and brought before the Sanhedrin for trial: <<Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead." When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.) There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?">> (Acts 23:6-9).*

*The Sadducees falsely assumed Jesus taught on continuing human relationships like marriage in heaven, and he corrected them on that. Interpersonal relationships in heaven will be similar to the relationships of angels, whose existence the Sadducees likewise denied, as they did the entire spiritual realm.*

**<sup>26</sup> Now about the dead rising – have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?**  
**<sup>27</sup> He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"**

## Mark 12:26-27

### Have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush.

There was no separation in the OT Scriptures in those days and they could therefore not be referenced by chapter and verse. However, the Jews knew the Scriptures and would refer to them in this way, as recorded elsewhere: <<*This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth”*>> (Acts 8:32), referring to Isaiah 53:7-8; or: <<*God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don’t you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah – how he appealed to God against Israel: “Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me”*?>> (Romans 11:2-3), referring to 1 Kings 19:10 and 19:14.

Citing the OT Scriptures, the account of the burning bush, Jesus explained the full power of God when it comes to the dead rising, for: <<*Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God*>> (Exodus 3:6), which was stated in the present tense several hundred years after the men’s lives on earth had ended, and it cannot mean that God made himself known to Moses as the God of the dead. Rather, as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, i.e. the faithful, covenant-keeping God, he is the God of the living: <<*God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – has sent me to you.’ “This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation. “Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt’*>> (Exodus 3:14-16). Abraham and his descendants therefore continue to exist and to enjoy the blessings of God’s covenant, i.e. their souls are still alive: <<*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*>> (Romans 8:35-39), and hence will also be raised from the dead; that is, will rise to be given resurrection bodies.

### III.b.ii.6 Mark 12:28-34 - The Greatest Commandment

Noticing that Jesus’ teaching to the Sadducees was good, a teacher of the law asked him which of the commandments of God was the most important. Jesus replied with a summary statement showing that love for God and for all humanity was what God commanded. The teacher showed that he understood and accepted Jesus’ teaching and was therefore close to the Kingdom of God. After that the questions stopped coming.

<sup>28</sup> One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

<sup>29</sup> “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’ <sup>30</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ <sup>31</sup> The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

### Mark 12:28-31

A teacher of the law or scribe, a theological scholar, probably of the Pharisaic faction, held a friendly dialogue with Jesus, probably wanting to be taught by him. The scribe requested to know which commandment of God is of fundamental importance and central to everything else. Jesus answered directly: the most important commandment is to love God completely: <<*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*>> (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Second to this is to love your neighbour as yourself, which is taken from: <<*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord*>> (Leviticus 19:18), and extends to Gentiles: <<*The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God*>> (Leviticus 19:34). The faithful, covenant-keeping God asks the objects of his love to love him and other human beings too, something picked up on by the apostles: <<*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law*>> (Romans 13:8-10), <<*For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbour as yourself”*>> (Galatians 5:14), <<*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*>> (1 John 4:10-11), and: <<*We love because he first loved us*>> (1 John 4:19).

To love the Lord your God involves having faith in him and also delighting in him above all else. All the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke include the words heart, i.e. emotions, will and deepest convictions; soul, i.e. the immaterial part of a person’s being; and mind, i.e. reason. Mind is lacking in Deuteronomy 6:5 <<*Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*>>.

Matthew 22:37 alone lacks the term strength, i.e. how a person uses the abilities and powers that one has as an indication of the total devotion of one’s entire being that is required.

The command, from Deuteronomy 6:5, was repeated twice daily by faithful Jews and encapsulates the idea of total devotion to God, including the duty to obey the rest of God's commandments. Heart, soul, strength and mind do not represent rigid compartments of human existence but rather together refer to the whole person.

The command in essence is a simple one. There is only one creator God and each person is to love him, even more than they might care for themselves or their loved ones, for God is above all. Next, each person is to love all others as they would love themselves, for everyone was created in the image of God and are therefore of equal nature to each other, and yet that is so rarely achieved: <<Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another?>> (Malachi 2:10).

<sup>32</sup> “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. <sup>33</sup> To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

#### Mark 12:32-33

Well said, teacher. The man, himself a teacher, acknowledged Jesus' status and excellent doctrine. He also agreed with Jesus that it is the heart and actions of a person that are more important to God and not the ritualistic keeping of the law through the sacrificial system, i.e. all burnt offerings and sacrifices.

With all your understanding implies that a person's love toward God should be out of their whole understanding; that is, their rational powers and faculties must all be set to work, that they might lead out the affections of their very souls toward God.

The Christian life still requires sacrifice, although not one that is prescriptive but given from the heart willingly and in love. For there was one sacrifice that was needed in order to establish a right relationship with God and believers are required to share in that sacrifice with Christ: <<Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory>> (Romans 8:17).

<sup>34</sup> When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

#### Mark 12:34

He had answered wisely translates the Greek word *nounechos*, which means as one that had a mind; as a rational intelligent man; as one that had his wits about him; as one whose reason was not blinded, whose judgment was not biased, and whose forethought was not fettered, by the prejudices which other scribes seemed to be so much under the power of. He answered as one that allowed himself

freedom of thought and time to rationalise, as one that had considered and concluded according to the facts.

Not far. This inquisitive scribe was separated from the present Kingdom of God simply by his ignorance of Jesus as the beloved Son of the Father, as the one to be confessed, and as the one who would suffer a substitutionary death on his behalf. Had he continued in his quest he would have found out that there was something as equally important as these commandments - the Gospel of Christ, but no one dared ask him any more questions.

### III.b.ii.7 Mark 12:35-37 - Whose Son Is the Messiah?

Israel had always expected a warrior king from the line of David to come to them as their Messiah. Jesus showed that he was far greater than David or any other human descendant could ever be. The teachers of the law would once again have their ignorance of the Scriptures exposed; probably making them even more determined to rid themselves of Jesus.

<sup>35</sup> While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, “Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David?”

<sup>36</sup> David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:

“The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand  
until I put your enemies  
under your feet.””

<sup>37</sup> David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?”

The large crowd listened to him with delight.

### Mark 12:35-37

While in the temple courts, Jesus publicly raised a question that he had already discussed in private with his disciples: who is the Messiah of God? Is he essentially the son of David or the Lord of David? Jesus’ point is not to deny that the Messiah is a descendant of David: <<*The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Saviour*>> (Jeremiah 23:5-6), and: <<*I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken*>> (Ezekiel 34:23-24). Refer also to Psalm 2, Psalm 89, and Isaiah 9:1-7.

The issue is that, in this passage taken from Psalm 110:1-2, there is no mention of the Messiah being the son of David; rather, the Messiah is here the Lord of David. Jesus affirmed the divine inspiration of the Psalm through the Holy Spirit. The Lord, Hebrew *Yahweh*, said to my Lord, i.e. he grants to David’s Lord, Hebrew

'Adonay, an exclusive place of honour at his right hand and helps David's Lord overcome his enemies, i.e. put your enemies under your feet. Jesus anticipated being exalted to the right hand of God, and thus he far transcends any expectation of a merely political, Davidic Messiah.

The teachers of the law were right that the Christ would come from the line of David and sit on his throne: <<*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David*>> (Luke 1:32), although they were unable to actually interpret what that truly meant. Instead, they simply read the Scriptures without understanding their true meaning. Something all believers in the church can also be guilty of.

The large crowd listened to him with delight yet it did not appear that they became disciples of Christ. He was able to bring understanding to the Scriptures, perhaps his voice had a cadence that was pleasing for them to listen to, but the hearts of many do not appear to have been touched. It was perhaps as the prophet had noted: <<*Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice*>> (Ezekiel 33:32).

### III.b.ii.8 Mark 12:38-40 - Warning Against the Teachers of the Law

Jesus warned against men, who held some of the most authoritative positions in their communities and yet were in the main self-centred, status seeking men, who loved to be noticed by others; some of them were not beyond corruption.

<sup>38</sup> As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, <sup>39</sup> and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. <sup>40</sup> They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."

#### Mark 12:38-40

Many teachers of the law sought public recognition by means of their flowing robes and taking the places of honour in public gatherings. As lawyers, they exploited widows while pretending to be pious. For Jesus, true devotion to God includes a genuine concern for social justice and true humility.

The most important seats. Jesus had taught on this issue before: <<*When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honour at the table, he told them this parable: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honour, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.'* Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honoured in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted">> (Luke 14:7-11), and criticised the leaders for their

actions of taking the best places despite his warnings: <<*Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces*>> (Luke 11:43).

For a show make lengthy prayers. Since God knows the hearts of everyone there is no need to speak to him in prayer for longer than is needed and it should never be done for show, as that is mockery toward God. However, there is nothing wrong with spending as much time in prayer to God as is needed, as communion with the Father can only be good for an individual, and something the Father desires. Jesus spent a lot of time in prayer during his earthly ministry, all night at times: <<*One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God*>> (Luke 6:12).

These men will be punished most severely. Not only would they or their descendants lose their positions when Jerusalem and the temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD70, but they will receive no eternal reward, the worst of all punishments, unless they come to faith in Christ Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

### III.b.ii.9 Mark 12:41-44 - The Widow's Offering

The chapter concludes by showing that it is not the intrinsic value of the offering made to God but the motivation of the heart behind it and the willingness to make a sacrificial offering to God.

<sup>41</sup> Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.



An artist's impression of the scene depicts Jesus observing the widow giving her offering into the treasury box.

#### Mark 12:41

Jesus showed that a lot can be learned about other people by taking time to observe their behaviour. However, it should be noted that he makes no judgement on the rich people who gave large amounts of money, which was a good thing, although probably for them not as sacrificial as the insignificant amount of money given by the widow in v.42.

<sup>42</sup> But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

<sup>43</sup> Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. <sup>44</sup> They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on."

## Mark 12:42-44

Small copper coins, uses the Greek word *lepta*, where a *lepton* was a Jewish coin worth about 1/128<sup>th</sup> of a denarius. Given that a denarius was a day's wage for a labourer, who might work up to 12 hours for it, then the widow's offering amounted to the equivalent of about 5 minutes work!

Yet this poor widow gave more than all the rich people, according to God's evaluation, for she gave everything she had out of her poverty, while the rich gave from their surplus.



**Two lepta like those in this account**

What is interesting is that these collection boxes in the temple were not for the temple tax that would be used for the upkeep of the temple and paying the priests and Levites. This collection went into the temple treasury, some of which was to be used by the chief priests to help those in need, people just like this poor widow, and yet she thought it appropriate to give what little she had to help others less fortunate than herself!