

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Matthew: Jesus As Israel's Messiah And His Kingdom

H. Christ As Israel's Messiah Seen In His Appeal To John The Baptizer's Witness (Matthew 21:23-27)

I. Introduction

- A. When Jesus presented Himself as the Messiah at Jerusalem, He was not accepted by the chief priests and elders of the people, for they challenged His authority and the source of His authority, Matthew 21:23.
- B. However, Christ had divine authority, and there had already been an extensive, credible witness of it, and Jesus referred to that witness in Matthew 21:23-27 with a lesson for people in His era and also for us today:

II. Christ As Israel's Messiah Seen In His Appeal To John The Baptizer's Witness, Matthew 21:23-27.

- A. When Jesus entered the temple in Matthew 21:23a, the religious leaders approached Him as He was teaching and asked, "By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?" (Matt. 21:23b) By "these things" they referred to His Triumphal Entry, His acceptance of praise from the people, His clearing of the temple, His healing of the blind and lame in the temple and His teaching, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 69.
- B. This was an important question in Jesus' day: Rabbinism held that "(a)ll teaching must be . . . approved by authority . . . some great authority, whether an individual Teacher or a Decree by the Sanhedrin," Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, 1972, v. ii, p. 381. The leaders sought to discredit Jesus on His seeming failure in Jewish practice to appeal to another previous reputable human authority, *Ibid.*
- C. However, God had already provided so that even this Rabbinic requirement would be met in Jesus' ministry, and Christ directed His questioners to that human authority precedent of His in Matthew 21:24-26:
 1. Jesus replied that He would ask the religious leaders a question, and if they answered Him, He would then tell them by what authority He had done these things that concerned them, Matthew 21:24.
 2. That question was this: "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" (Matthew 21:25a)
 3. This question actually pointed the questioners to John the Baptizer as Jesus' credible Rabbinic precedent:
 - a. John the Baptizer's ministry had so impressed the people of Israel that all men in Judaea, Jerusalem and the area around Jordan had gone out to him to be baptized in the Jordan, confessing their sins, Matt. 3:5-6.
 - b. John then publicly told the people of Israel that he was the Forerunner of a Greater Messenger from God (Matthew 3:11-12), and when Jesus came to him to be baptized, John declared Jesus was the Lamb of God Who took away the sin of the world (John 1:29) and the Son of God, a claim to deity, John 1:32-34; 5:18.
 - c. Even more important was John's testimony that his decision to identify Jesus as the Messenger from God came about **NOT** by **JOHN'S INITIATIVE**, **BUT** by **DIVINE REVELATION**, John 1:33-34.
 4. Accordingly, Jesus put His questioners in a difficult position: (a) if they admitted that John's baptism was from heaven, then Jesus would ask them why they didn't believe John's supportive testimony about Him, but (b) if they replied that John's ministry was not from God, they would be despised by the people who all held John the Baptizer to be a prophet from God, Matthew 21:25b-26.
- D. Feeling cornered by Jesus' question, the religious leaders dishonestly answered Jesus, saying, "We cannot tell [whether John's baptism was from heaven or of men]," Matthew 21:27a, 25a.
- E. Since these religious leaders bypassed the reputable testimony of John whom God the Father had sent to fulfill even the Rabbinic requirement of a reputable human authority for a teacher in Jesus, Christ refused to tell His questioners by what authority He had done what He had, Matt. 21:27b. If they refused to heed the forerunner God had sent for Jesus in John, they would not accept Jesus' authority were He to explain it any further.

Lesson: *Jesus appealed to His forerunner, John the Baptizer, for the Rabbinic requirement in His day that a spiritual teacher have a credible human authority behind him, which authority was both dependent on the authority of God by divine revelation and was viewed by the people of Israel as a prophet of God, and who claimed that Jesus was the Lamb of God Who would take away the sin of the world and that He was the Son of God. Since the religious leaders refused John's credible authority, Jesus refused to explain any further His divine authority.*

Application: *(1) May we believe that Jesus is from God based on the credible testimony in His forerunner, John the Baptizer. (2) May we believers today heed the reputable human authorities behind reputable Bible teachers we have today. (3) May we also heed God's circumstantially evident signals that certify the credibility of His teachers today (John 1:33-34 with Acts 16:6-10 [on another illustration of God's circumstantial signals in the Church era.]*