

# OpenTheo

## Elijah, Sinful Woman (Part 1)



### **The Life and Teachings of Christ** - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the meaning behind Matthew 11, specifically the references to John the Baptist and Elijah. Gregg explains that the forceful proclamation of the Gospel has been a prevailing theme in God's Kingdom, as seen through the ministry of John the Baptist. He also clarifies the confusion surrounding the prophesied return of Elijah and how it has already been fulfilled through the appearance of John the Baptist. Finally, Gregg emphasizes the importance of spiritual discernment and notes the impending judgment that will come upon those who reject the message of Jesus.

### **Transcript**

Ok, today let's turn to Matthew chapter 11. Last time we were already in this chapter and we didn't finish it. And I believe we read up through verse 12.

Now, we should read verse 12 with verse 13, although it's not immediately apparent in this context that the two belong together. I mean, they do both have something to do with the Kingdom and something to do with John the Baptist. They appear on the surface to be separable from each other in terms of their thought, but they are linked.

In fact, they are put in reverse order and linked in one verse in Luke's parallel, which is Luke 16, 17. Let me read verses 12 and 13. Jesus said, And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. Now, we took that first of those two verses in our last session, that the kingdom of God suffers violence and the violent take it by force. I mentioned that while this could be subjected to more than one interpretation, possibly, it is most likely, especially when you consider the parallel in Luke 16, 17, that what it means is that the kingdom of God is not going to be easily obtained.

It will not be obtained without a determination, a certain forcefulness of determination to press into it that is equal to its value. Of course, in other places, there are parables that Jesus tells about the kingdom of God being like a pearl of great price, like a treasure

hidden in the field, which are so valuable that a person must be willing to sell all that they have to obtain it. Certainly, the kingdom is worth all that.

One of the things about it is that there is another kingdom that works, unfortunately, not only in the world, but also in our lives to a certain extent, especially before we are Christians, very much so. The kingdom of darkness and Satan, the king of darkness, or the prince of darkness, is very much opposed to people entering the kingdom of God and puts up tremendous obstacles. Many of these, at least in Jesus' day, I think he is alluding to, would be persecution.

He has got John the Baptist on his mind at this point, and of course, John was in prison at the moment from Herod, because John was announcing the coming of the kingdom of God and was imposing kingdom ethics on the existing king of Galilee, Herod. The ethics and the law of the kingdom of God were contrary to the laws of Herod. Herod's laws allowed him to have his brother's wife.

The kingdom of God did not permit that. John was saying it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife, thus imposing the legal standards of God's kingdom on the existing king. Well, there you have the conflict of kingdoms.

You have got the confrontation of the kingdom of God with the kingdom of darkness, or the kingdoms of this world. And in that particular encounter, it would appear as if the kingdoms of this world had won, because John was arrested and put in prison and he remained there until his dying day. He was eventually executed by the same king.

Now, it was from that venue in prison that John had sent messengers saying, are you the one or are you not the one? And Jesus said, listen, don't give up. Don't be offended because of me. Hang in there.

Trust me. I know what I'm doing. And it's in that context that he says the kingdom of God is suffering violence.

That is, violent people are attacking it. But violent men will take it by force, meaning those who wish to participate in it must press into it with a determination of forcefulness. Now, the King James and New King James word violence is probably unfortunate, because violence is usually a very negative kind of thing, but force is a better translation in this case.

It takes a forceful person to look at the obstacles involved in coming into the kingdom of God and say, well, I'm going to press right through those obstacles. Those obstacles could be the official opposition of the government, as in John the Baptist's case. In fact, it was even an obstacle to his faith that Jesus was not moving in the direction that John thought it would be.

That was another obstacle. Was John going to hang in there? Was John going to press

through his doubts, his stumbling blocks? Was he going to leap over them and say, I still am trusting in this thing? I'm still trusting in Jesus? This is what John was facing. He had suffered violence, and he had to bring a similar degree of forcefulness into his own approach to the kingdom that would press him beyond the stumbling blocks and the offenses of the program as it stood.

The program was that Jesus was not moving in the direction of overthrowing the Roman authority. Of course, that meant that Jesus was not getting close or even giving any clues that he intended to get John out of prison. And that was a stumbling block to John.

And Jesus said, blessed is he who is not stumbled by me or not offended by me. And anyone who is going to press into the kingdom of God is going to have to be determined to press through despite the obstacles, whether that's official persecution from the government, whether it's your own doubts and the stumbling blocks that come with adherence and loyalty to the kingdom of God. It's going to take people who have the ability to join force with force, that is to face forceful opposition with a forceful determination to carry out the program and to stay in it and to participate in the kingdom.

Now, he's still talking about John in verse 13. He says, for all the prophets and the law prophesied till John, which actually sounds like a different idea. John is still in the picture, but it seems like he's turned to a different concept.

He's talking about something slightly different. But as I pointed out in Luke 16, 17, the contents of verses 12 and 13 here are linked actually in reverse order. In Luke 16, 17, I'm sorry, Luke 16, 16.

I've been giving you the wrong number here. Jesus says, the law and the prophets were until John. Well, that's what we just read.

Since that time, the kingdom of God has been preached and everyone is pressing into it. That's the parallel to violent men take it by force. Now, the idea here seems to be that there was a system that prevailed up through, up to and including the ministry of John.

It was God's system. It was instituted by God. It was the law and the prophets.

It centered around a kingdom, namely, national Israel, and it was the law of that kingdom that governed the people of God all the way up through John. John lived and died under that system as a citizen of Israel, as a participant in the kingdom that already had existed from the time of Moses. And John never was able to come into the kingdom of God that he foresaw and announced.

Therefore, up through John's lifetime, the kingdom that prevailed was that of the Old Testament Israel under the law and the prophets. And John was simply one of those prophets, the last of them. But since John, the kingdom of God has increased.

Now, this sort of places John in a transitional position here. He's part of the law and the prophets. He is certainly one of the prophets of the old covenant, but he's also a prophet of the new covenant.

He also is preaching the kingdom of God. Now, he was preaching that was near. He didn't get to preach that it had come quite.

But Jesus did actually make that statement a few times after John's imprisonment. And you certainly see it in the book of Acts, the kingdom had come. But John was sort of the transitional pivot.

He was the guy who had his hand on the old covenant and on the new. He never quite entered the new, but he was the one who stood as the last and major representative of the old, pointing into the new and saying, that's where to go. And that's why Jesus said of him in Matthew 11, 11, Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women.

I take that to mean merely natural born who have never been born again into the kingdom of God because they haven't had a chance to in John's day. There is none risen greater than John the Baptist, but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. I think the expression born of women in Matthew 11, 11 is an important key to understanding that John was born of women.

And so was everybody. But to get into the kingdom of God, you have to be born of the spirit. You have to be born again.

John was supernaturally, in a certain sense, conceived. There was divine intervention in his conception, in his mother's womb. He was not virgin born by any means, but born to a woman who was postmenopausal.

That was a miracle. He was filled with the spirit from his mother's womb, yet he never was born again because he did not live to see the institution of the new covenant. It was a condition of the new covenant that a new spirit and a new heart would be given and that God would write his laws in their hearts and give them his spirit.

John just didn't live to see that happen. So he never entered the kingdom in the sense that we read of it elsewhere in the New Testament. So the least in the kingdom is not simply born of women, he's been born again to see and enter the kingdom of God.

And John was a great prophet, the greatest of all those that were born once. But he that is born twice has a greater prophetic message, a greater word from God for the world than even what John has. And that's how I understand that enigmatic kind of a statement.

Let's move on to verse 14 now. Matthew 11, 14. And if you are willing to receive it, Jesus said, he is Elijah who is to come.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Now, when Jesus on occasion, not only here but elsewhere as well, says this statement, he that has ears to hear, let him hear. He said it in Matthew 13, 9. He says it on rare occasion.

When he says it, it seems to be saying, listen, you all have ears hanging on the side of your head and you all hear what I'm saying, but do you really hear me? Do you have your spiritual ears open? Can you hear what I'm really saying here? Of course you hear the sound of my words, but do you hear with your heart? Do you understand with your spirit? Are you getting the insight that I'm trying to give you here? When he says he that has ears to hear, let him hear, it would appear that Jesus is basically saying there's something about what I've just said that goes deeper or is challenging to what you would naturally think. And you need to hear this and let it affect your whole thinking on this subject. By the way, a very similar expression, in fact almost exactly the same expression, found seven times in the book of Revelation.

At the end of each of the epistles in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, they close with this same expression, he that has ears to hear, let him hear. And then it's added, what the spirit says to the churches. So he's obviously talking about spiritual hearing.

He that has an ear to hear, let him hear. What? Sounds? No. Let him hear spiritually.

Let him hear what the spirit is saying to the churches. Now, why did Jesus say that here? He doesn't say it all that often, but he says it immediately after he says, if you can receive it, John is Elijah, who was to come. Well, there are occasions, they're not that frequent, but there are occasions where we find Jesus giving an outright endorsement to a spiritualizing hermeneutic of Old Testament prophecy.

Now, the apostles do this all the time in their writings, and on occasion Jesus does the same. This is one of those occasions. He said, if you can receive it, John is Elijah, who is to come, or who was to come.

Well, that latter clause, who is to come, means he is the Elijah who is expected to come. Well, on what basis was Elijah expected to come? Who expected Elijah to come and why? Well, the Jews expected him to come, because Malachi said so, and only Malachi said so. There can be no passage of scripture that Jesus has in mind other than Malachi chapter 4, because there simply is nothing else in the Old Testament that would have warranted anybody expecting Elijah to come.

So, when Jesus said he is Elijah who is to come, he means he is the prophesied, he is the anticipated Elijah. And where was this prophesied? Well, he can be in only one place, Malachi chapter 4, verses 5 and 6. There is no other place in the Old Testament that he could conceivably be alluding to. What does that say in Malachi 4, 5 and 6? It says, Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth, or you could read the land, with a curse. The last warning in the Old Testament is, God will strike the land with a curse if they don't hear Elijah the prophet, who will be sent before the great and terrible day of the Lord. I take the great and terrible day of the Lord, and the smiting of the land with a curse, well, you know what I think it is.

But by the way, just prior to that, in verse 4, in Malachi 4, 4, it says, Remember the law of Moses, my servant, whom I commanded, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with these statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, etc. And it says, Remember Moses.

Now, remember the law of Moses, and keep it. What did God say in the law of Moses? He told the Israelites numerous times through Moses, if you keep this law and these statutes I give you, then you will be blessed in every sin. But if you violate, if you flout, if you turn against and rebel against God's laws and God's rule in your life, well, then every kind of curse will come upon you.

You'll be cursed from the land, you'll be cursed in every way, in the city and in the plain and in the wilderness. Everything will be cursed if you break my laws. Now, we know for a fact that from Moses day on, the Jews in cycles, but most of the time they were at the lower end of the cycle, were very disobedient to God's laws.

And he was quite entitled, if he had wished to do so at any given time, to carry out all those threats that he had enumerated in Deuteronomy. Although he is very patient, and he waited 1400 years or more to do so. But his final word to the Old Testament prophets was, listen, God's serious, don't forget what he said through Moses.

Just because, as Ecclesiastes 8 says, because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil. That's Ecclesiastes 8, 13 I think it is. And, you know, what that means is that just because God doesn't pounce and strike the moment that people deserve it, they sometimes get encouraged, wrongly, to think that he's never going to, and they're getting away with it.

And there's no repercussions for them to their misbehavior. And what God is saying through Malachi is, there are. God wasn't just talking to hear the sound of his voice when he told you through Moses that if you break the law, you have these curses to look forward to.

And while many hundreds of years had passed, by the time Malachi wrote, God's final word before he lapsed into 400 years of silence, was, the next word you're going to hear from me is going to be from Elijah. And he's going to come and try to turn you back to where you ought to be, and if you don't turn back, I'm going to smite the land with the

curse. What curse? The curse that God promised.

Now, the Jews, therefore, expected Elijah, that is the Tishbite, the literal, the historic Elijah who lived in the days of Jezebel and Ahab. And they thought he was going to come back. In fact, the Jews today still think that, the Orthodox Jews, they still set a place at the table for him at Passover.

There's still a seat set for Elijah, in case he happens to come that year while they're taking Passover. If I'm not mistaken, I think there's even a cup for Elijah at their Paschal meal. And the Jews still believe Elijah's going to come.

They believed it in Jesus' day, they believe it now 2,000 years later. One thing that's striking to me is that many Christians also still expect Elijah to come. When you read in Revelation chapter 11 about the two witnesses, Dissensationalists believe that the two witnesses are literally two men who will come in the last days, and most of them believe that one of them at least will be Elijah.

And they believe that when Elijah comes back with somebody else, the second witnesses open up for grabs, in a sense, as to who he might be. Some think Moses, some think Enoch, some think another. But Elijah is fairly standard fare in the interpretation of the two witnesses in Dissensational commentaries, that Elijah is probably one of those two guys.

Dissensationalists believe that when Elijah and this other witness come, as per Revelation 11, that this will be the fulfillment of Malachi. Elijah would come before the great and terrible day of the Lord, and the great and terrible day of the Lord they take to be the second coming of Christ. So it's quite clear that they use this prophecy in Malachi to interpret Revelation.

Now let me suggest to you that that is not the right way to look at it. It may be that there is some relationship to what this prophecy in Malachi is saying to the book of Revelation, but the question is, is Revelation talking about the last days or some other time period? That's, again, one of those things that is not at all established with finality. But as far as the interpretation of Malachi 4, we have no less authority than that of Jesus Christ himself, to tell us how it was fulfilled.

He said, if you can receive it, John is the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. He was the Elijah who is expected to come. Now this creates a small problem, and we've probably gone over this before, but since it's one of those things that troubles people a lot, we'll go over it as quickly as we can again.

In John chapter 1, when John the Baptist was first beginning his public ministry and causing a stir, there were a delegation of Jewish leaders from Jerusalem sent up to where he was to get some information about him, who he claimed to be and so forth. And they

said in John 1, 21, they asked him, what then, are you Elijah? And he said, I am not. Now this is what's troubling Christians many times.

Jesus said, if you can receive it, John is Elijah. But when these Jewish leaders said, are you Elijah? He said, no, I'm not. Now, there seems to be a contradiction here, but I think not.

The Pharisees were not such men as could receive it. It says in 1 Corinthians 2, in verse 14 or 15, let me try it here. 1 Corinthians 2 says, the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God.

That's verse 14. The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. The things of the Spirit are spiritually discerned.

Not everyone can receive them. Not everyone can, for example, can't receive them. Now, Jesus said to his disciples, if you can receive it, are you spiritual men? I've got something spiritual to present to you.

He that has ears to hear, I hope he can hear it, because it has to be spiritually discerned. The scribes and the Pharisees believed that the physical, literal, historical Elijah, the prophet of Tishbite, was going to come back prior to the coming of the Messiah. And Jesus says, you've got to understand something, that's a spiritual thing.

If you can receive it, if you're a spiritual man, you can receive it, because as we spiritually discern, if you're a natural man, you can. If you're spiritual enough to be able to accept this, if you can take a spiritualized hermeneutic to this passage, then you've got it. Then you understand what Malachi was talking about, and John is who he was talking about.

And sure enough, that's how John interpreted his own ministry. John indicated that there was a great and terrible day coming. An axe was already laid to the roots of the fruitless trees, and they were going to be cast into unquenchable fire, and so forth.

And the grain was to be gathered into the barn, and the chaff into unquenchable fire. That's John's message, as per Matthew 3, verses 10 through 12. Now what I'm saying is that God did send Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord to warn them to remember the covenant.

They broke the covenant, and therefore God did strike the land with all the curses that Moses predicted. Just like Malachi said he would. Now, does that not quite explain why John said to the Pharisees, he's not Elijah? The reason is because they were natural men.

They understood Malachi in a natural way. They thought that Malachi was predicting the literal historical Elijah would come back. Therefore he understood that that's what



they're questioning.

That's what was in it. When they said, are you Elijah? What they meant, are you Elijah the Tishbite? You've got a girdle of leather like he had. You're a hairy man like he was.

You've got some literature like he did. By the way, are you the one? Are you that guy who confronted Jezebel and Ahab these many centuries ago? And since they were clearly thinking of the historical Elijah, because that's all they thought about. That was their understanding of the Malachi passage.

John, not wishing to endorse that false notion, said no, you've got the wrong guy. But only those who could receive it, only the disciples or spiritual men, could receive the fact that in spirit he was the fulfillment and the only fulfillment of that prophecy that was ever intended. Let me show you Luke chapter 1 real quickly here.

You'll probably remember this. That when Zacharias was in the temple and the angel appeared to him to let him know that he was going to become a father and John the Baptist was going to be born. In Luke 1.17 the angel said this about John the Baptist.

Luke 1.17, he will also go before him, that is before Jesus, in the spirit and power of Elijah. He wouldn't be Elijah but he'd be in the spirit of Elijah. His ministry would have the same spiritual significance as that of Elijah and the power of Elijah.

To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. Now that line is a direct quote from Malachi. It's directly quoted from Malachi 4.6. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.

Now that indicates that the angel is telling Zacharias that the Malachi prophecy has its fulfillment in this child that was now being announced to come. He's going to be the one who turns the hearts of the fathers to the children. It was an obvious quote from Malachi.

And he's coming in the spirit and power of Elijah. Clearly referring back to the prophecy of Malachi. Jesus certainly understood that John was the spiritual fulfillment.

Now some might say but if there's a spiritual fulfillment shouldn't there also be expected a natural fulfillment? Why? Jesus said if you can receive it, John is Elijah who was to come or who is to come. Therefore, frankly I think Jesus could receive it. And if he could receive it, I can.

I mean, I'll take his word for it. But you see, in order to do so, this challenges the hermeneutic that is favored by many Christians which is take those Old Testament prophecies literally. No spiritualizing.

Well what in the world did Jesus do with that prophecy? He spiritualized it. This man who was not Elijah, who came only in the spirit and power of Elijah, was in fact the fulfillment

of a prophecy that Elijah would come. It was a spiritual fulfillment and Jesus said if you can receive it, you need look for no further one.

Jesus believed at least that that prophecy and who knows how many others in the Old Testament were properly to be spiritualized and a person who would not spiritualize it would miss it. He that has ears to hear, let him hear. This requires something to be spiritually discerned.

Now, you may be aware, you may be familiar enough with the Gospels to know that this came up one other time with Jesus and his disciples. And that was in the 17th chapter of Matthew when Jesus was coming down the mountain of Transfiguration with the three disciples that had been up there with him. Matthew 17.10, it says, And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then do the scribes say, Elijah must come first? Then Jesus answered and said to them, Elijah truly is coming first and will restore all things.

That I take to be a paraphrase of Malachi. He's just quoting the verse. Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.

Jesus is not predicting that it was still future from the point of view. He's basically quoting, he's paraphrasing the prophecy. Elijah surely will come first and restore all things.

That's not exactly how Malachi put it, but very close. It's kind of a combination of Malachi 3.1 and Malachi 4.5. Anyway, that's how I understand this when he uses that. Then he says, But I say to you that Elijah has come already.

Now, how clear do you have to have it? I say to you, Elijah has come already. Yeah, the scribes say that Elijah must come first. They have scripture on their side.

The scripture says Elijah will come first and restore all things. But you know what? It already happened, he says. Elijah has come already.

And they have done to him whatever they wish. Now, it says in verse 13, Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptist. So, I don't know how anyone who takes the New Testament seriously could think that the Malachi prophecy has not yet been fulfilled.

In John the Baptist. And Jesus makes that clear in a couple of places. Now, let's get back to Matthew 11, to our present passage under consideration.

Matthew 11, 16, But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to their companions, saying, We played the flute for you and you didn't dance. We mourned to you and you didn't lament. For, Jesus says, John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say he has a demon.

The son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Look, a gluttonous man and a wine-digger, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. But wisdom is justified by her children. Now, Jesus compares his generation with a bunch of implacable children.

Children who will not be humored. He imagines a group of children playing in the marketplace, saying, Okay, come and play with us. And they say, Well, you do something and we'll see if we want to do what you're doing.

So, okay, we'll play a happy song, we'll dance. And we play a happy song, we dance, but you don't want to join in the dance. Okay, what do you want? We'll mourn for you, let's play funeral.

You know, we'll play funeral, we'll all mourn. You don't want to mourn either. You don't want to do anything.

You don't want to play happy, you don't want to play sad. You don't want to celebrate, you don't want to mourn. You're just impossible to please.

You simply are implacable. Now, he says, that's what this generation is like, because John the Baptist was like a mourner. He came living a stark, Spartan, ascetic style of life, not eating meat, not drinking wine or anything from the grapevine because he was a Nazarite.

And he says, you just think he's got a religious demon, man. You think he's really out there. He's a fanatic.

You're not attracted to him. So, here comes the Son of Man in exactly the opposite style. He's eating and drinking, wine is implied, since that's what John the Baptist wasn't drinking.

And he's eating with the wrong crowd. He's a party animal. I don't mean to be disrespectful, but Jesus went to feasts and parties and hung out with all those party people and stuff.

Not in the sense of going there to be a partier himself. It's quite obvious. He explained his own conduct when he was challenged on it once.

In chapter 9 of Matthew, he said, well, it's not those who are well that need a position, but those who are sick. So, he saw himself in the company of these people, not as one of them so much, as a physician coming to people who are sick. Obviously, to do something toward healing them.

So, Jesus went there to call them to repentance, but he went there nonetheless and he was frequent in feasts and he was no ascetic by any means. It's very important that we remember that because there are still people who are Christians, and there always have

been since the early days of the monastic movement, who have interpreted spirituality in terms of separation from the world and doing hard things to yourself, making yourself unnecessarily uncomfortable. This is asceticism and that resembles, to a certain extent, John the Baptist's lifestyle, but not Jesus's.

We're not called to imitate John the Baptist, we're called to imitate Jesus. Jesus was a social person. A sociable person who enjoyed, to a certain extent, life.

He was also a man of sorrows, according to his grief, but he enjoyed a good meal. And he enjoyed the company of ordinary people. He was sociable.

But the problem he's saying is that this generation has not been pleased with John's approach or my approach. When I come and get sociable with them, the very thing John didn't do, you say, look, a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. And his final statement, wisdom is justified by our children, is somewhat enigmatic.

It's a little difficult to know exactly how he means that. I think it means that, it could mean a number of things, but it could possibly mean something like the children who embrace this kind of argument, this kind of wisdom, justify it to themselves. It's unjustifiable, but they think they're being reasonable.

Wisdom is always justified by her children. Those who are the adherents to this kind of thinking, this kind of wisdom or reasoning, are always going to think that it's justified, and they'll always feel like it's right. Or it could mean something else.

It could mean simply that children means the product or the outcome of a certain course of action. Jesus and John have taken a certain course of action. The Jews are taking a different course of action.

The outcome or the fruit or the children, the product of their two courses will soon be manifest. And John and Jesus, if they are right, will be vindicated by the outcome of the course that they've taken. And the Jews will be shown wrong, or they'll be shown right if their wisdom is better.

It's a hard statement to really know exactly how he meant that. But I suppose it's not the most important part of what is said here. I would like to point out the expression in verse 16, this generation.

To what shall I liken this generation? This is, I believe, the first time in Matthew that we encounter the expression this generation, but it occurs several times more. In fact, the expression occurs four times in chapter 12, the very next chapter, once in chapter 23, and once in chapter 24. Now, this generation means this generation.

It's quite obvious which generation he has in mind here. Why is that obvious? Because

he says they are like children who've seen John the Baptist and rejected him, and they've seen Jesus and rejected him. Certainly there's never been any generation other than the one he lived in that saw him and John the Baptist and rejected them, having seen them.

He's talking about the people of his own day. When he says this generation, he means the generation in which he was living. His contemporaries, his peers.

Now, of course, that's how we ordinarily understand this word. But you may be aware, some people have felt that this generation in some other context means something other than that. But look at chapter 12, and we'll just look at the few occasions where this appears there.

Chapter 12 and verse 39, Jesus said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Now, this generation will be given a sign.

This adulterous generation will get this one sign. They would see the resurrection of Christ. There's only one generation in history that ever got to see that happen.

A lot of generations have looked forward to it, before it, and many have looked back in retrospect, but only one was given this sign visibly before their eyes, and that was the generation that killed Jesus at which time he rose. Verse 41, Matthew 12, 41, The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation, this generation, and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Noah, and indeed a greater than Noah is here, meaning himself. Here I am.

Jonah was there. I am here. When Jonah preached, his generation of Ninevites, though he was not a Ninevite himself, but the people living at the time who heard Jonah repented.

Now, one greater than Jonah is here now to this generation, and they're not repenting, therefore this generation is going to be worse off than the Ninevites. And he says the same thing in verse 42, The queen of the south will rise up in the judgment with this generation, and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and indeed a greater than Solomon is here, meaning himself. Now, both these illustrations obviously make it clear that this generation means the very generation to whom he was speaking, because they had opportunity to hear one greater than Jonah and to repent, or to hear the wisdom of one greater than Solomon.

They didn't, therefore they were going to stand worse off in the judgment than the queen of the south who came to hear Solomon, or the people of Nineveh who repented at the preaching of Jonah. Look now at Matthew 23, in verse 36, Matthew 23, 36, verse 36, a very short statement, Jesus said, Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come

upon this generation. He's talking about the guilt of killing the prophets, and the punishment that was going to come on the Jews for having done that.

He says it's all going to come on this generation. Well, we know that it happened in 70 A.D. That was literally the same generation to whom he spoke. The most sensible way to understand it was his own generation.

The most controversial occurrence of this expression, or of the like expression, is in Matthew 24, in verse 34, because Jesus said there, Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away until all these things are fulfilled. This generation will not pass. Now, as you know, there's a lot of opinions about what this generation means here.

Some think it means the Jewish race. Some think it means a future generation, not yet born, or perhaps even currently living, but not yet born at the time he spoke it. I've certainly had occasion to address this on previous occasions.

I won't go into detail now, but I'd say the most obvious rebuttal of that opinion is that if Jesus were talking about a future generation other than his own, then he would most naturally have said, That generation will not pass. Not this generation will not pass. Furthermore, this is not an isolated case.

Jesus used the expression, this generation, half a dozen other times in the book of Matthew, and always in the context means his own. So there seems to be no reason to make it mean something different in Matthew 24, 34. Okay, now back to Matthew 11, beginning with verse 20.

Then he began to abrade, that means scold, the cities in which most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. Woe to you, Chorazin! Let's say it up. For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, which was, of course, the headquarters of most of his ministry, who are exalted to heaven, in their own estimation, will be brought down to Hades, for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in that day of judgment than for you.

This is so similar to what we just looked at in Luke 12, verses 47 through 48, where he said, on the day of judgment, the men of Nineveh are going to judge this generation. On the day of judgment, the queen of the south, the Gentile Arabian queen, is going to judge this generation. Why? Because she showed more spiritual interest than they do.

Likewise, he's saying to these people something similar, not identical. He said, these

people of Sodom, these people of Tyre and Sidon, who will, in fact, be lost, will nonetheless have an easier judgment than you. Why? Because of what you have had occasion to see and what they did not have occasion to see.

They never saw the signs that you have seen. If these signs that have been done right in front of your face had been done to the people of Sodom, they would have repented. There would still be a Sodom on the map today.

Who knows? The people of Sodom would have ended up being the people of God. Never can tell. But the point is, I'm not saying that's a very likely story.

What he's saying is, they would have repented. But the cities of Israel that saw it didn't repent. Now, what he's suggesting here is that there will be a greater judgment, a more severe judgment for those who have seen more and know more.

In Matthew chapter 23, verses 23 and 24, Matthew 23, 23 and 24, I'm sorry, Luke 12, forgive me, Luke 12, 23 and 24, it says, And that servant who knew his master's will and did not prepare himself or do according to his will shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know yet committed things worthy of strike shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given from him much will be required.

And to whom much has been committed shall be asked more. There is more responsibility for the person who has had more given to him in terms of knowledge of God. Now, Capernaum and these cities, Chorazin and Bethsaida, they had seen a lot.

They had seen more than Tyre and Sodom had. They had seen more than Sodom had. Therefore, their judgment would be stricter.

Now, it's interesting to suggest that on the Day of Judgment it'll go easier for some than others. But apparently, among the lost, there are degrees of suffering because he says it'll be more tolerable for Tyre and Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida. How is that to be understood? I don't know.

It'll be more tolerable for Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for you. Now, the Day of Judgment we would take to mean the day at the end of the age when Jesus returns. And if that is the correct way of understanding the Day of Judgment, then I think we'd have to say that at the Judgment, although many people will be lost and go to Hell, not all are going to have the same level of punishment.

Some will find their punishment more tolerable than others. In which case, we would argue for degrees of torment in Hell. Now, there is a remote possibility, I don't say that it's the right one since it is talking about cities rather than individuals.

Maybe talking about the time when those cities come under temporal judgment. Because on the Day of Judgment when Jesus comes back, we're not going to be judged

by how McMinnville did. You know, we're going to be judged as individuals.

Every man is going to have to give an account of himself to God, Paul said. He's going to reward every man according to his work. But here we're talking about judgment on cities.

The judgment on the cities of Tyre and Sodom will go easier than the judgment on Bethsaida and Chorazin. And Sodom will be more tolerable than the judgment of Capernaum. Now, the judgment of individual cities, that could be said to be more related to when God judges those cities in history, not at the end of time.

And we do know that Sodom had come under judgment and so had Tyre and Sidon. Sodom had back in the days of Abraham and Tyre and Sidon had at the hands of Alexander the Great 300 and something years before Christ. They both suffered terrible judgments from God.

But Jesus could be saying that when your time comes, which was within that generation, it'll be worse for you than it was for them. Now you might say, well, how could anyone suggest that, say, 70 A.D., which was certainly the time when this, or from 66 to 70 A.D., the three and a half years of the Jewish War, when these cities were destroyed by the Romans, how could anyone say that their judgment was worse, for example, than what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah where fire and brimstone consumed them? Well, fire and brimstone consumed Sodom and Gomorrah in an instant. It was a quick death.

The Jews had a drawn-out ordeal for three and a half years, and especially those that were hemmed in the city walls had a living hell for many months. And it could easily be said that they suffered a more intolerable judgment than Sodom did. Now you can take that either way.

He's either talking about levels of judgment and punishment in eternity, or else he may be talking about temporal judgment upon cities. Certainly all the cities mentioned did come under God's judgment. And he may simply be saying that in the day that Sodom is judged, which was already historical, that itself is more intolerable than what you can look forward to.

In any case, we can't solve that one. Let's go on through Matthew 11, verse 25. At that time, Jesus answered and said, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.

Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight. All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal him. Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.



Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Now, this passage began with Jesus rejoicing. Actually, it just says here that he said, I thank you, Father, but in Luke 10, 21, the parallel, I believe it's there, it mentions Jesus rejoiced in his spirit.

Let me get there. Yeah. Luke 10, 21, the parallel says, In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the spirit.

Now, we never read of Jesus laughing, and we do read of him weeping, and for this reason, sometimes people think Jesus must have been kind of a morose character, but actually we do on occasion find Jesus rejoicing and marveling, sometimes in a positive sense, marveling at someone's faith and being very pleased about it. Here he's rejoicing in his spirit, even though he's just predicted a horrible judgment on the cities that he's ministering in, yet there's something very comforting to him, something that gives him joy, and that is that while these wise and prudent ones, these ones who are too wise, too respectable, to go along with this group of vagabonds that were following this peasant Jesus around, the Pharisees and the scribes and the other intellectual Jews and so forth, they wouldn't be caught dead in that entourage. Well, these people were going to experience judgments worse than that of Sodom, but there were some to whom he had revealed the truth, and he was glad of that.

They were babes, the word babes in the Greek actually means an infant too young to speak. Of course, he's speaking figuratively of his own disciples. They weren't real literal infants, but they were not intellectuals either.

They were regarded by the wise Jews as babes. We know that from Romans chapter 2, because Paul basically characterizes the pride of the Jew. In Romans chapter 2, beginning with verse 17, he says, Now, it's probable that Paul is mainly thinking of the way the Jews thought about the Gentiles.

The Gentiles were the foolish and the darkness, those who are in darkness and the blind, and the babes. But we also know that the education of the Jews felt that way about the average people of the land, the average Jewish person who is uneducated, un-Pharisaical. For example, I think I can find it without much difficulty, I think in John chapter 7, if I am not mistaken, yes, when Nicodemus spoke up among his peers in favor of Jesus, in John chapter 7, the Pharisees said to him, in verse 47, John 7, 47, The Pharisees answered them, Are you also deceived? Oh, that was to the soldiers.

It says, Have any of the rulers of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed. Then Nicodemus spoke up for Jesus and they blasted him for doing so too. But the point here is the Pharisees said, This crowd that does not know the law is accursed.