

# Matthew 12

by John Nelson Darby

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*Jesus pronounces judgment on the evil generation, rejecting their request for a sign and acknowledging only those who do the will of His Father in heaven.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 42:1-4, Ezekiel 20:12-20, Matthew 12:1-8, Matthew 12:14-32, Matthew 12:38-41, Matthew 12:43-50, Romans 3:10-12

**Topics:** "Rejection of Christ", "Authority of Jesus"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby discusses the rejection of the nation of Israel and the transition to a new system under Christ, emphasizing that Jesus, as the Son of God, stands alone in a world judged by its rejection of Him. He highlights the significance of Jesus' actions on the Sabbath, illustrating His authority over the law and the covenant, and the necessity of mercy over sacrifice. The sermon also addresses the Pharisees' blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, warning of the dire consequences of attributing God's work to Satan. Ultimately, Darby concludes that true kinship with Christ is defined by doing the will of the Father, marking a shift from earthly ties to spiritual ones. This pivotal moment in Matthew 12 sets the stage for the new work of Christ and the proclamation of the kingdom.

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## Transcript

At length the rejection of the nation, in consequence of their contempt of the Lord, is plainly shewn, as well as the cessation of all His relations with them as such, in order to bring out on God's part an entirely different system, that is to say, the kingdom in a particular form. Thus this last chapter is the great turning-point of the whole history. Christ is a divine witness to Himself, and John Baptist has so to receive Him, as another would. He stood no longer as Messiah witnessed to, but as Son of God, but gives His full testimony to John. But the nation had rejected God manifested in warnings and grace alike: only there was a remnant. Wisdom was justified of her children. Then comes His submission to His rejection, evil as it might be, as the Father's will; but this leads Him out into the consciousness of His personal glory, the real ground of that rejection. All things were delivered to Him of His Father. None could know Him, nor any the Father unless He revealed Him. The whole world, tested by His perfection, was found lying in wickedness (though with a spared remnant), but man was universally away from God. He looked down from heaven to see, as we read, but they were all gone out of the way, none righteous, no, not one. So Jesus, as He walked on the sea, stood alone in a judged world, judged by His rejection, but now in the sovereign grace of the Father, as the Son revealing Him, and calling to the revelation of this grace in Himself. This is just now the new position. He had tried man. The very thing that He was, hindered their receiving Him. Now he

that was weary must come to Him who stood thus alone, and He would give them rest. They must learn of Him who thus had absolutely submitted, and they would have rest as to the world and everything here. So with us: where we wholly bow, we come into the conscious possession of our privileges as disowned, on the heavenly and higher ground.

The first circumstance that brought forward the question of His Person, and of His right to close the dispensation, was the disciples' plucking the ears of corn and crushing them in their hands to satisfy their hunger. For this the Pharisees rebuke them, because it was on a Sabbath day. Jesus sets before them that the king, rejected by the malice of Saul, had partaken of that which was only given to the priests. The Son of David, in a similar case, might well enjoy a similar privilege. Besides God was acting in grace. The priest also profaned the Sabbath in the service of the temple; and One greater than the temple was there. Moreover, if they had really known the mind of God, if they had been imbued with the Spirit which His word declared to be acceptable to Him-"I will have mercy and not sacrifice," they would not have condemned the guiltless. In addition to this, the Son of man was Lord even of the Sabbath. Here He no longer takes the title of Messiah, but that of Son of man-a name which bore witness to a new order of things, and to a more extended power. Now that which He said had great significance; for the Sabbath was the token of the covenant between Jehovah and the nation (Ezek. 20:12-20); and the Son of man was declaring His power over it. If that was touched, it was all over with the covenant.

The same question arises in the synagogue; and the Lord persists in acting in grace, and in doing good, shewing them that they would do the same for one of their sheep. This only excites their hatred, great as was the proof of His beneficent power. They were children of the murderer. Jesus withdraws from them, and great multitudes follow Him. He heals them, charging them not to make Him known. In all this however His doings were but the fulfilment of a prophecy which clearly traces out the Lord's position at this time. The hour would come when He should bring forth judgment unto victory. Meanwhile He retained the position of entire lowliness, in which grace and truth could commend themselves to those who appreciated and needed them. But in the exercise of this grace, and in His testimony to the truth, He would do nothing to falsify this character, or so to attract the attention of men as to prevent His true work, or which could make it even suspected that He sought His own honour. Nevertheless the Spirit of Jehovah was upon Him as His beloved, in whom His soul delighted; and He should declare judgment to the Gentiles, and they should put their trust in His name. The application of this prophecy to Jesus at that moment is very evident. We see how guarded He was with the Jews, abstaining from the gratification of their carnal desires respecting Himself, and content to be in the background, if God His Father was glorified; and glorifying Him perfectly Himself on the earth by doing good. He was soon to be declared to the Gentiles; whether by the execution of the judgment of God, or by presenting Himself to them as the One in whom they should trust.

This passage is manifestly placed here by the Holy Ghost, in order to give the exact representation of His position, before laying open the new scenes which His rejection prepares for us.

He then casts out a devil from a man who was blind and dumb-a sad condition, truly depicting that of the people with respect to God. The multitude, full of admiration, exclaim, "Is not this the Son of David?" But the religionists, on hearing it, jealous of the Lord, and hostile to the testimony of God, declare that Jesus wrought this miracle by the power of Beelzebub, thus sealing their own condition, and putting themselves under the definitive judgment of God. Jesus demonstrates the absurdity of what they had said. Satan would not destroy his own kingdom. Their own children, who had the pretension to do the same, should judge their iniquity. But if not the power of Satan (and the Pharisees admitted that the devils were really

cast out), it was the finger of God, and the kingdom of God was among them.

He who had come into the strong man's house to spoil his goods had first to bind him.

The truth is that the presence of Jesus put everything to the test; everything on God's part was centred in Him. It is Emmanuel Himself who was there. He who was not with Him was against Him. He who did not gather with Him scattered. Everything now depended on Him alone. He would bear with all unbelief as to His own Person. Grace could remove that. He could pardon all sin; but to speak against and blaspheme the Holy Ghost (that is, to acknowledge the exercise of a power, which is that of God, and to attribute it to Satan) could not be pardoned; for the Pharisees admitted that the devil was cast out, and it was only with malice, with open-eyed deliberate hatred to God, that they attributed it to Satan. And what pardon could there be for this? There was none either in the age of the law [See Footnote #32] or in that of the Messiah. The fate of those who thus acted was decided. This the Lord would have them understand. The fruit proved the nature of the tree. It was essentially bad. They were a generation of vipers. John had told them the same. Their words condemned them. Upon this the scribes and Pharisees asked for a sign. This was nothing but wickedness. They had had signs enough. It was only stirring up the unbelief of the rest.

This request gives the Lord occasion to pronounce the judgment of this generation.

There should be only the sign of Jonah for this evil generation. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so should the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. But then lo! Christ was already rejected.

The Ninevites by their conduct should condemn this generation in the day of judgment, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and a greater than Jonah was here. The queen of the south likewise testified against the wickedness of this perverse generation. Her heart attracted by the report of Solomon's wisdom, had led her to him from the uttermost parts of the earth; and a greater than Solomon was here. Poor ignorant Gentiles understood the wisdom of God in His word, whether by the prophet or the king, better than His beloved people, even when the Great King and Prophet was among them.

This was then His judgment: the unclean spirit (of idolatry) which had gone out of the people, finding no rest away from Israel (alas! its true house, whereas they ought to have been the house of God), should return with seven spirits worse than itself. They would find the house empty, swept, and garnished; and the last state should be worse than the first. What a solemn judgment of the people was this—that those among whom Jehovah had walked should become the habitation of an unclean spirit, of a superabundance of unclean spirits; not merely of seven, the complete number, but together with these (who would incite them all to madness against God and those who honoured God, thus leading them to their own destruction) that other unclean spirit also, who would draw them back into the wretched idolatry from which they had escaped! Israel's judgment was pronounced.

In conclusion Jesus publicly breaks the bonds that naturally existed between Himself and the people after the flesh, acknowledging those only which were formed by the word of God, and manifested by doing the will of His Father which was in heaven. Those persons only would He acknowledge as His relations, who were formed after the pattern of the sermon on the Mount.

His actions and His words after this bear witness to the new work which He was really doing on the earth. He leaves (chap. 13) the house and sits beside the lake. He takes a new position outside, to proclaim to the multitude that which was His true work. A sower went forth to sow.

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## Footnotes for Matthew 12

32: Take notice of this expression. We see the manner in which the Holy Ghost passes on from the time then present to the Jews, which would soon end, to the time when the Messiah would set up His kingdom, their "world [age] to come." We have a position outside all this, during the suspension of the public establishment of the kingdom. The apostles even did but preach or announce it; they did not establish it. Their miracles were "the powers of the age to come" (compare 1 Peter 1: 11-13). This, as we shall see by-and-by, is of great importance. Thus also with regard to the new covenant, of which Paul was the minister; and yet he did not establish it with Judah and Israel.

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