

# Matthew 21

by John Nelson Darby

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*In Matthew 21, Jesus enters Jerusalem as a humble King, confronts the religious leaders, and illustrates the consequences of spiritual barrenness through parables and actions.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 8:2, Psalm 118:25-26, Zechariah 9:9, Matthew 21:1-14, Matthew 21:18-22, Matthew 21:28 - 22:14

**Topics:** "Spiritual Fruitfulness", "Jesus as King"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Matthew 21, illustrating Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as a humble King, fulfilling prophecy while being met with both adoration and impending rejection. The sermon highlights the significance of the people's response, as they acknowledge Him with cries of 'Hosanna,' yet their hearts remain unchanged. Darby emphasizes the judgment that follows, where Jesus confronts the religious leaders, exposing their inability to recognize His authority and their failure to produce fruit for God. The fig tree serves as a metaphor for Israel's spiritual barrenness, symbolizing the consequences of rejecting the Messiah. Ultimately, the sermon reflects on God's sovereignty and the transition from the old covenant to the new, as Jesus prepares to establish a new way of grace.

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## Transcript

Afterwards (chap. 21), disposing of all that belonged to His willing people, He makes His entry into Jerusalem as King and Lord, according to the testimony of Zechariah. But although entering as King—the last testimony to the beloved city, which (to their ruin) was going to reject Him—He comes as a meek and lowly King. The power of God influences the heart of the multitudes, and they salute Him as King, as Son of David, making use of the language supplied by Psalms 118, [See Footnote #62] which celebrates the millennial sabbath brought in by the Messiah, then to be acknowledged by the people. The multitude spread their garments to prepare the way for their meek, though glorious King; they cut down branches from the trees to bear Him testimony; and He is conducted in triumph to Jerusalem, while the people cry, "Hosanna [Save now] to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!" Happy for them if their hearts had been changed to retain this testimony in the Spirit. But God sovereignly disposed their hearts to bear this testimony; He could not allow His Son to be rejected without receiving it.

And now the King is going to review everything, still maintaining His position of humility and of testimony. Apparently the different classes come to judge Him, or to perplex Him; but in fact they all present themselves before Him to receive at His hands, one after another, the judgment of God respecting them. It

is a striking scene that opens before us—the true Judge, the everlasting King, presenting Himself for the last time to His rebellious people with the fullest testimony to His rights and to His power; and they, coming to harass and condemn Him, led by their very malice to pass before Him one after another, laying open their real condition, to receive their judgment from His lips, without His forsaking for a moment (unless in cleansing the temple, before this scene commenced) the position of Faithful and True Witness in all meekness on the earth.

The difference between the two parts of this history is distinguishable. The first presents the Lord in His character of Messiah and Jehovah. As Lord, He commands the ass to be brought. He enters the city, according to the prophecy, as King. He cleanses the temple with authority. In answer to the priests' objection He quotes Psalms 8, which speaks of the manner in which Jehovah caused Himself to be glorified, and perfected the praises due to Him out of the mouth of babes. In the temple also He heals Israel. He then leaves them, no longer lodging in the city, which He could no longer own, but with the remnant outside. The next day, in a remarkable figure He exhibits the curse about to fall upon the nation. Israel was the fig-tree of Jehovah; but it cumbered the ground. It was covered with leaves, but there was no fruit. The fig-tree, condemned by the Lord, presently withers away. It is a figure of this unhappy nation, of man in the flesh with every advantage, which bore no fruit for the Husbandman.

Israel in fact possessed all the outward forms of religion, and were zealous for the law and the ordinances, but they bore no fruit unto God. So far as placed under responsibility to bring forth fruit, that is to say, under the old covenant, they will never do so. Their rejection of Jesus put an end to all hope. God will act in grace under the new covenant; but this is not the question here. The fig-tree is Israel as they were, man cultivated by God, but in vain. All was over. That which He said to the disciples of the mountain's removing, while it is a great general principle, refers also, I doubt not, to that which should take place in Israel by means of their ministry. Looked at corporately on the earth as a nation, Israel should disappear, and be lost among the Gentiles. The disciples were those whom God accepted according to their faith.

We see the Lord entering Jerusalem as a king-Jehovah, the King of Israel—and judgment pronounced on the nation. Then follow the details of judgment on the different classes of which it was composed. First come the chief priests and elders, who should have guided the people; they draw near to the Lord and question His authority. Thus addressing Him, they took the place of heads of the nation, and assumed to be judges, capable of pronouncing on the validity of any claims that might be made; if not, why concern themselves with Jesus?

The Lord, in His infinite wisdom, puts a question to them which tests their capability and by their own confession they were incapable. How then judge Him? [See Footnote #63] To tell them the foundation of His authority, was useless. It was too late now to tell them. They would have stoned Him, if He had alleged its true source. He replies, Decide on John the Baptist's mission. If they could not do this, why inquire respecting His? They cannot do it. If they acknowledged John to have been sent of God it would be acknowledging Christ. To deny it would be to lose their influence with the people. Of conscience there was no question with them. They confess their inability. Jesus then declines their competency as leaders and guardians of the faith of the people. They had judged themselves; and the Lord proceeds to set their conduct, and the Lord's dealings with them, plainly before their eyes, from verse 28 to chapter 22:14.

First, while professing to do the will of God, they did it not; while the openly wicked had repented and done His will. They, seeing this, were still hardened. Again, not only had natural conscience remained untouched, whether by the testimony of John, or by the sight of repentance in others, but, although God

had used every means to make them bring forth fruit worthy of His culture, He had found nothing in them but perversity and rebellion. The prophets had been rejected, and His Son would be so likewise. They desired to have His inheritance for themselves. They could not but acknowledge that in such case the consequence must necessarily be the destruction of those wicked men, and the bestowal of the vineyard on others. Jesus applies the parable to themselves, by quoting Psalms 118, which announces that the stone rejected by the builders should become the head-stone of the corner; moreover, that whosoever should fall on this stone-as the nation was at that moment doing-should be broken; but that on whomsoever it should fall-and this would be the lot of the rebellious nation in the last days-it should grind them to powder. The chief priests and the Pharisees understood that He spoke of them, but they dared not lay hands on Him, because the multitude took Him for a prophet. This is the history of Israel, as under responsibility, even till the last days. Jehovah was seeking fruit in His vineyard.

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#### Footnotes for Matthew 21

62: This Psalm is peculiarly prophetic of the time of His future reception, and is often cited in connection with it.

63: This throwing back on conscience is often the wisest answer, when the will is perverse.

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