

Matthew 22:1 – 14

^{22:1} Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, ² ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. ³ And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. ⁴ Again he sent out other slaves saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited, ‘Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.’’ ⁵ But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, ⁶ and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. ⁷ But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. ⁸ Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.’ ¹⁰ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. ¹¹ But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, ¹² and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.’

Literary Context: Matthew 19:1 – 22:46

Relationships in Jesus’ Kingdom

- A. Marriage in the new creation community (19:1 – 12)
- B. Commandments, love neighbor, first/last (19:13 – 20:28)
 - Eternal life/love neighbor (first/last) (19:13 – 30)
 - Parable of the vineyard and the laborers (first/last) (20:1 – 16)
 - Servanthood (first/last) (20:17 – 28)
- C. Jesus as Son of David, triumphal entry (20:29 – 21:11)

Jesus Displaces the Old Temple, He is the New Temple of God

- D. Judgment on the old Temple: robbers’ den (21:12 – 17)
 - E. Parables of withered fig tree (Temple); mountain (presence of God) into sea (Gentiles) (21:18 – 22)
 - F. Jesus’ authority: John the Baptist, parable of two sons in vineyard (21:23 – 32)
 - F’. Jesus’ authority: Cornerstone of God’s new Temple (21:33 – 46)
 - E’. Parable of wedding banquet (Caesar is coming; Gentiles invited) (22:1 – 14)
- D’. Judgment on the old Temple: taxes to Caesar, old Temple to Caesar (22:15 – 22)

Relationships in Jesus’ Kingdom

- A’. Marriage in the final resurrection (22:23 – 32)
- B’. Great commandment/love neighbor (22:33 – 40)
- C’. Jesus as Son of David, vindication (22:41 – 46)

Cultural and Historical Background: Wedding Clothes

- Augustine of Hippo suggested that, in Jewish culture, the groom provided the guests with clean robes, but this has not been substantiated by other evidence. As far as we know, at weddings, ‘each guest was responsible for his own clothing.’¹ One must wear clean clothing of any sort. To arrive in dirty clothing was an insult to the host.

Cultural and Historical Background: Jewish Military Uprisings, 163 BCE – 135 CE²

- 163 BCE: Judas Maccabeus recaptures Jerusalem and cleanses the Temple, providing the model for a resistance tradition. The liberator-king cleanses the Temple, just as King David made Jerusalem his capital and began the building of the Temple.
- 40 BCE: Hezekiah leads revolts and skirmishes; was put down by Herod the Great. Samaia the Pharisee objects to this.
- 4 BCE: Young men, as Herod lay dying in 4 BCE, pull down Roman eagles from Jerusalem, who were then killed on Herod’s orders. They were supported by the teachers Judas ben Sariphaeus and Matthias ben Margalothus (Josephus, *War* 1.648-55; *Antiquities* 17.149-66).
- 3 BCE: ‘A countless multitude’ from all over Palestine, especially Judea itself (Josephus). Another violent revolt occurred the following Passover, which was renewed at Pentecost (*War* 2.1-13; 39-50; *Ant.* 17.206-18; 250-64). They laid siege to the Romans and besieged the commander himself in the palace. At this, anarchy broke out in Palestine (*War* 2.55; *Ant.* 17.269, referring to ‘continuous and countless new tumults’), including a revolt by Herod’s veterans and one by Judas, son of Hezekiah.
- 6 CE: Judas/Theudas the Galilean (*War* 2.118, *Acts* 5:37), probably the same person as Judas the son of Hezekiah.³ Judas, together with Zadok, a Pharisee, headed a large number of Zealots. Judas proclaimed the Jewish state as a republic recognizing God alone as king and ruler and His laws as supreme. The revolt continued to spread, and in some places serious conflicts ensued. Josephus calls this the most serious incident between Pompey’s conquest of Palestine (63 BCE) and the fall of Jerusalem (70 AD). Two thousand Jews were crucified. Judas was called Messiah.
- ‘The Samaritan’ led a group of armed followers and ended up in guerilla warfare. The unnamed ‘prophets’ described by Josephus (*War* 2.258-60; *Ant.* 20.167b-8) are subsumed under the general brigandage noted in *Antiquities* 20.167a. ‘Prophets’ and their followers entertained dreams of violent revolution.
- ‘The Egyptian’, according to *War* 2.262, intended to force entry to Jerusalem, overpower the Roman garrison, and set himself up as a tyrant.
- The unnamed prophet of *Antiquities* 20.188 appeared in the context of widespread brigandry.
- Jonathan the Weaver had aroused an uprising in Galilee (*War* 7.437-50; *Life* 424ff.).
- ~28 CE: The Galileans Pilate crushed at Jerusalem, mingling their blood with their sacrifices (Lk.13:1)
- 30 CE: Barabbas and the revolt in which he took part (Lk.23:19; in John 18:40, Barabbas is described as a *lestes*, ‘brigand’). Presumably the two *lestai* crucified alongside Jesus count as well.
- 40’s CE: The sons of Judas the Galilean, Jacob/James and Simon (*Ant.* 20.102), continued their father’s insurrection. They were crucified in the late 40s by Roman governor Tiberius Julius Alexander.
- The ‘common people’ who were punished along with Eleazor ben Deinaeus; in *War* 2.253, Josephus says the number of them was ‘incalculable’.
- Jesus ben Ananias enters Jerusalem on the Feast of Sukkot and decries the Temple; the governor interrogates him but later releases him.
- Brigands reported by Josephus in *War* 2.264f.; these may be the same ones who are mentioned in 2.271, but in the earlier passage it appears that the revolutionary fervor was far more widespread than a small group.

¹ R.T. France, *Matthew*, edited by Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), p.316. Interestingly, according to William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol.2 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 269 – 270, there were two other Jewish rabbinical stories of kings and garments, with moral lessons. One story involved a king who invited guests to a feast without telling them the exact day or time; the wise cleaned and readied themselves, the foolish did not, thinking the time would be long delayed. The moral was to be ready for the summons of God. Another story involved a king who handed his servants royal robes, but for no stated reason; the wise kept them clean, the foolish wore and soiled them. The king commended those who kept their garments clean, but cast into prison those who soiled their robes. The moral was to return one’s soul pure to God. Barclay believes that Jesus was echoing these stories, but

² N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fortress Press, 1992), p.170 – 181

³ *Ibid.*, p.180

- 66 CE: Multiple Jewish revolts occur, which are together called the First Jewish-Roman War. A faction led by John of Gischala and his followers revolt in Galilee and then take Jerusalem (refs. in Wright, *NTPG*, p.177 n. 54). The Sicarii, the ‘dagger men,’ led by Menahem, another son or grandson of Judas the Galilean (*War* 4.198, *Ant.* 20.186f., etc.), forced their way into the Temple and then burned the houses of Ananias, Agrippa, and Bernice, and the Record Office with the records of debt. Menahem broke into the armory at Masada, distributed arms, and returned to Jerusalem as ‘king’ over the revolutionary forces. Menahem was called Messiah.
- 70 CE: The Romans, led by future Emperor Titus Flavius, conquer Jerusalem and burned the Temple (not the city) to the ground. Josephus claimed that 1,100,000 people were killed, mostly Jews; 97,000 were captured or enslaved (*War* 6.9.3). This ends the First Jewish-Roman War.
- 73 CE: The Romans recapture the fortress Masada from the Jewish Sicarii. The defenders, 960 Jews, commit mass suicide before the Roman victory.
- 115 – 117 CE: Diaspora Jews in Cyrene, Cyprus, Mesopotamia, and Egypt lead widespread revolts around the Mediterranean region against Romans. These are together called the Kitos War, the ‘rebellion of the exile,’ or sometimes the Second Jewish-Roman War.
- 132 – 135 CE: Simon Bar-Kochba leads a Jewish uprising at Masada. Bar-Kochba was called Messiah and supported by Pharisee Rabbi Akiva. The Romans crush the uprising at great cost. Roman historian Cassius Dio writes that 580,000 Jews were killed, 50 fortified towns were razed, and 985 villages were destroyed. This was called the Third Jewish-Roman War, if one counts the Kitos War as the Second.

Cultural and Historical Background: The Language of ‘the Chosen People’

- ‘Chosen people’ is a title. In Matthew 22:14, ‘chosen’ (*eklektōi*) is a predicate adjective used with *eisin* (to be). So the more accurate grammatical reading is, ‘For many are the called, but few are *the chosen*.’ It is not a verb, and hence, strictly speaking, it is not accurate to read this as, ‘For God invites many but chooses few.’ The word occurs in the New Testament only two other times – Colossians 3:12 and Revelation 17:14 – and in those contexts seems to have the same meaning.
- Jesus took that title away from Israel as a whole, and carried it himself as the ‘Chosen One’:
 - Mt.3:16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on him,¹⁷ and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, ‘This is **My beloved Son**, in whom I am well-pleased.’
 - Mt.12:15 But Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. Many followed him, and he healed them all,¹⁶ and warned them not to tell who he was.¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:¹⁸ ‘Behold, My Servant whom I have **chosen; My beloved** in whom My soul is well-pleased; I will put My Spirit upon him, and he shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles.¹⁹ He will not quarrel, nor cry out; nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.²⁰ A battered reed he will not break off, and a smoldering wick he will not put out, until he leads justice to victory.²¹ And in his name the Gentiles will hope.’ *Notice that the Gentiles would hope in him.*
 - Mt.17:5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, ‘This is **My beloved Son**, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to him!’ *Notice Luke’s version:* Lk.9:35 Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is **My Son, My Chosen One**; listen to him!’
- Jesus redefined ‘chosen people’ around himself, since he was ‘the Chosen One.’
 - Positively, to be part of ‘the chosen people’ now means ‘those who are Jesus’ people, commissioned by Jesus to carry out his mission in the world.’ That task is to announce God’s salvation and invite people to Jesus.
 - Negatively, to reject Jesus’ invitation to become one of the ‘chosen people’ means that one is motivated by individual pride or collective ethnocentrism or both!
- In this context, Jesus is challenging the Pharisees and Jerusalem leadership about their assumption that they are ‘the chosen people.’

Now, understanding the historical context, we can better interpret Matthew 22:1 – 14. Fill in the chart:

<i>Parable</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
^{22:1} Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, ² ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.	
³ And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. ⁴ Again he sent out other slaves saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited, ‘Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.’’ ⁵ But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, ⁶ and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them.	
⁷ But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire.	
⁸ Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.’ ¹⁰ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests.	
¹¹ But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, ¹² and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless.	
¹³ Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’	
¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.’	

Leader’s Notes

1. Without looking at any of the literary, cultural, or historical background, read this parable. What impressions of God do you have from first reading this parable? Probably something like this:
 - a. God is a narcissistic, brutal dictator who kills his own people;
 - b. He is vengeful in a way that is out of proportion to the crime: set their city on fire?;
 - c. He retaliates brutally against the one guy not dressed correctly;
 - d. And on top of all that, does God choose for people to be damned and destroyed from the start?
2. Now read the historical background on Jewish military revolts from 163 BCE – 135 CE. Ask yourself this question: If you were trying to stop religious leaders from a military, jihad-like campaign, what language would you use?
3. Jesus was creating a community where Jews and Gentiles would be reconciled to God and each other through him. Thus, he repeatedly warned the Jewish leaders to follow him and stop their armed resistance to Rome, lest the Romans destroy Jerusalem. See also Luke 13:1 – 5; 13:34 – 35; 19:41 – 44.
 - a. Note: Protestants tend to read the New Testament in the following way:

Jesus vs. Pharisees =	‘Salvation by grace through faith’ vs. ‘salvation by works and self-righteousness’
Paul vs. Judaizers =	
Luther vs. Catholics =	

- b. Hence, we miss the centrality of Jewish racism, ethnocentrism, and militant nationalism. While I believe in ‘salvation by grace through faith,’ I don’t think that it is accurate to interpret 1st century Jews by 16th century European Catholics. Notice that some Jews rejected Jesus because he loved Samaritans and Gentiles as such (e.g. Luke 4:14 – 30), not for any other theological reason. Jews did ask the question, ‘Are you keeping the Mosaic Law and Temple sacrifices?’ But this was part of a larger *Jewish* question, ‘Are you *Jewish* enough?’ Most Jewish leaders effectively had a theology of *Jewish purity* and *Jewish solidarity against outsiders*. The 1st century Jewish question was broader than the 16th century Catholic question, ‘Are you doing enough good works *as an individual*?’ For more information, see N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Fortress Press, 1992) and the extensive literature he references on what first century Judaism was like.
 - c. Illus: The *Left Behind* book series by Tim Lahaye draws on the theology of dispensationalism. In that theology, God will resume working with the State of Israel (assuming that the State of Israel is biblical Israel) and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. But how would that be consistent with what God has revealed through the person and teaching of Jesus, in terms of love for the Gentile enemy?
 - i. Note: That dispensationalist view is based on an interpretation of Revelation 11 where the Temple is standing and God’s ‘two witnesses’ prophecy to it. Does that refer to the end times in that sense? But notice the ‘two witnesses’ could refer to ‘Moses and Elijah’, since they are described with motifs drawn from the lives of Moses and Elijah (Rev.11:4 – 6). So that could refer to the followers of Jesus preaching from the Law and the Prophets, represented by the biblical idiom of ‘two witnesses’ by which God entered the land of pagans (Moses – Joshua, Elijah – Elisha).
4. Now read the cultural and historical background on the language of ‘the chosen people.’ How have we seen Jesus take on the identity of ‘Israel’ throughout Matthew?
 - a. Jesus was hunted as a baby by King Herod, flees to Egypt, comes back into the land
 - b. Jesus gets baptized in water (Israel was baptized in the Red Sea), and then goes to the wilderness for 40 days (Israel went into the wilderness for 40 years)
 - c. Jesus meets with God on mountains (Mt.5:1 – 2; 17:1 – 13)
 - d. Jesus writes the law of God into his own human nature (Mt.5 – 7)
 - e. Jesus will fully enter the exile of Israel at the hands of the Romans and be cursed by being placed on a tree
5. Now fill in the chart to better understand what Jesus was saying with his parable:

<i>Parable</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
^{22:1} Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, ² ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a	King = God; son = Jesus;

wedding feast for his son.	wedding feast = celebration of union between God and humanity in Jesus
³ And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. ⁴ Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.' ⁵ But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, ⁶ and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them.	Slaves = disciples of Jesus; 'those who had been invited, were unwilling to come' = Jewish leaders his own farm = land business = money seized his slaves, etc. = killed Christians
⁷ But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire.	His armies = Romans City on fire = Jerusalem destroyed in 70 AD. Note that Jesus <i>consistently warned</i> the Jewish leaders and people against pursuing their militant course of trying to liberate Jerusalem (e.g. Luke 13:1 – 5, 34 – 35; 19:41 – 45; 21:5 – 28). The 'city on fire' was really their fault. The Romans are not literally 'God's armies.' This is a figure of speech, designed to get the Jewish leaders to question their assumptions that God was on their side through and through.
⁸ Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.' ¹⁰ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests.	Main highways, as many as you find there = Gentiles Both evil and good = everyone!
¹¹ But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, ¹² and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless.	Not in wedding clothes = not celebrating the union, rejecting the wedding Speechless = he has no excuse for <i>racial prejudice</i>
¹³ Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'	Outer darkness = a motif of hell
¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.'	Many are the called = all are invited Few are 'the chosen' = few agree with the premise of the kingdom for all humanity; Jesus was debating with them who can legitimately bear the title 'the chosen people.'

6. Application (knowing God): What is the character of God?

- a. Well, if you believe in 'double predestination' then you have to conclude that the historical background and rhetorical considerations mean nothing. Instead, your original impressions of God's character from question 1 are correct: Especially in relation to ancient Israel, the original chosen people...
 - i. God is a narcissistic, brutal dictator who kills his own people;
 - ii. He is vengeful in a way that is out of proportion to the crime: set their city on fire
 - iii. He retaliates brutally against the one guy not dressed correctly;
 - iv. And on top of all that, God chooses people to be damned and destroyed from the start
- b. For a contrasting theological position, please see my ppt presentation 'Romans 9 – 11: Predestination and Free Will, the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart, and Ongoing Outreach to the Jewish Community' here: http://nagasawafamily.org/paul_romans.09-11.hardening.ppts.pdf
- c. The character of God is seen in Jesus' attempt to dissuade the Jewish leaders from violent revolution against the Roman oppressors. It is also seen in Jesus' invitation to be part of his missionary movement to the whole world, to express God's love and announce Jesus' lordship.

They would have to let go of their ancestral land (Mt.6:19 – 34; 8:18 – 22; 13:1 – 23; 19:13 – 30), and love their enemies (Mt.5:38 – 48), but this is what Jesus himself did, as the embodiment of Israel.

7. Application (evangelism): Imagine your non-Christian friends reading this passage, and coming to you afterwards. What questions can you ask them that are relevant and will lead them to new insight or ask new questions?
 - a. Well, look, if you were trying to stop religious leaders from a jihad, what language would you use? *Language that would completely challenge their worldview*
 - b. What actual war were they starting? *The Jewish-Roman War of 66 – 70 CE. Jesus was trying to get the Jewish leaders to stop leading the city to war with Rome. Read the passages above from Luke to see that.*
 - c. Do you know what it means to show up to a wedding without the right clothes? *Social insult, not approving the wedding, i.e. the union of God and humanity through Jesus. They wanted to defend the Temple in Jerusalem instead of seeing Jesus as the new Temple of God.*
 - d. Why would they not be in favor of the wedding? *Their racism against the Gentiles.*
 - e. Main point: State the *positive* things that Jesus was doing: anti-racism, reconciliation, peace, and new humanity for all humanity. You have to read this passage in its historical context and take into account how sharp rhetoric actually works.
8. Application (ethics): Does violence and force manifest Jesus' kingdom?
 - a. Christians in the Roman Empire weren't complete pacifists, because they permitted Christians to serve in the internal police force. But they were anti-war. A Roman officer waging war against the Persian Empire, for example, who wanted to commit to Jesus was told to resign and find another job. They said, 'Jesus told us to love our enemies, and we just don't think you can do that when you're killing them.' Jesus launched a reconciliation movement under his lordship.
 - b. There is a strong critique of military triumphalism found in American political rhetoric. The defeat of evil is not to be equated with identifying some people – like Iran, North Korea, and Syria – as 'evil' and ourselves as 'good.' We might have to get involved to defend the weakest or for pragmatic reasons (if you hold to just war theory). But that is very different.
 - c. The kingdom of Jesus is manifested by missionaries to give up their lives at home and go out to others to spread the reign of Jesus by word of mouth.