

Matthew 15

Overview

After the last chapter showed the intensification of the miracles from 8-9, 15:1-28 reminds us of the Pharisees' rejection in ch. 12 (Figure 1, chart), while 15:29-39 takes us back to before the great schism, and in fact recalls ch. 5-7 as well as 8-9.

1-28, Pharisaic Rejection

The Lord's change in location in v. 21 divides this chapter into two episodes. The first stems from a criticism by the Pharisees concerning his failure to follow their tradition. The second records the faith of the woman of Tyre and Sidon, showing her openness.

This contrast between the Pharisees and the Gentiles echoes the chiasm structure of 12:1-45, but folded into a linear structure (Figure 2, chart), a common literary structure.

1-20, Discussion about Uncleaness

The section is organized by changes in the people to whom the Lord is speaking: first the Pharisees (vv. 1-9), then the multitude (10-11), and finally the disciples (12-20).

4:17 "From that time Jesus began to preach, ..."

4:17-11:30 Call & Preparation of the Disciples

Calling	4:18-22 the Four	9:36-10:4 the Twelve	11:2-30 (28) all
Summary	4:23 teaching ... preaching ... healing	9:35 teaching ... preaching ... healing	11:1 teach ... preach
Training	ch. 5-7 Teaching	ch. 8-9 Healing	10:5-42 Preaching

12:1-13:58 The Great Schism

	Ch. 12	Ch. 13
Public Rejection	1-45, the Pharisees reject the Lord	1-52, the Lord rejects unbelievers (by hiding his teaching in parables)
Private Rejection	46-50, the Lord rejects his family	53-58, his home town rejects the Lord

14:1-16:20 Growing Opposition

- 14:1-12 **King Herod kills the Baptist**
- **14:13-36 Miracles**
- **15:1-28 Pharisaic Rejection**
- **15:29-39 Miracles**
- **16:1-12 Pharisaic Rejection**
- 16:13-20 **Peter confesses King Jesus**

Figure 1: The Structure of 4:17-16:20

12:1-38

1-8 Picking grain on the Sabbath 2 But when the Pharisees saw <i>it</i> , they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.
9-14 Healing on the Sabbath 14 Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.
15-21 Healing great multitudes 18 he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles . 21 And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.
22-37 Casting out a Demon 24 But when the Pharisees heard <i>it</i> , they said, This <i>fellow</i> doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.
38-45 Seeking a Sign 38 Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

15:1-28

1-20 Discussion on Uncleaness 1 Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees , which were of Jerusalem, saying, 2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. 12 Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?
21-28 The Canaanite Woman 22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, <i>thou</i> Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

Figure 2: 14:1-28 folds the chiasm from 12:1-38

1-9, The Lord responds to the Pharisees

1 Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem,--The reference to their origin shows that they are not just local people who follow the traditions, but delegates sent to investigate this person, whose reputation is growing. This was their standard practice (chart). They investigated John in this way:

Joh 1:19 And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites **from Jerusalem** to ask him, Who art thou?

Luke tells us that this happened when he healed the man let down through the roof (reported in Matthew 9:2-7),

Luk 5:17 And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, **and Judaea, and Jerusalem:** and the power of the Lord was *present* to heal them. ...20 And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. 21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?

And Mark tells us that the accusation of 12:24 that his exorcisms were done by Satanic power was suggested by envoys from Jerusalem:

Mar 3:22 And the scribes which came down **from Jerusalem** said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.

What should we conclude from this activity?

It is not wrong for the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem to investigate what is happening elsewhere. Jeremiah sent a letter to the exiles in Babylon to exhort and encourage them:

Jer 29:1 Now these *are* the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon;

The church in Jerusalem sent representatives to see what was going on on Antioch (chart):

Act 11:22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. 23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

The dispute over circumcision in the church was driven by envoys from one church to another:

Act 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. 2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem

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unto the apostles and elders about this question.

In this case the envoys were wrong, but Paul felt a need to visit the churches he had founded, and we know from his letters that he often brought correction as well as encouragement:

Act 15:36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they do.

So it's fine for the Jews to look into what was happening in Galilee. Their failure is in what they do with the intelligence they gather. Their diligence renders them without excuse. They have seen the Lord's miracles and heard his teaching, and in the full light of this knowledge they decide to reject him. Israel's rejection of her Messiah is not accidental or a misunderstanding. It is a deliberate, considered decision.

saying, 2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?--Here is an explicit statement of the difference between the Lord and his Jewish opponents.

Orthodox Judaism believes that God gave two bodies of teaching to Moses on Mount Sinai: the written law and the oral law. The written law was deposited in the ark of the covenant (Exod 25:16, 21; Heb 9:4), but the oral law was passed down from teacher to student. The classical teaching on the subject is in the first verse of *Pirkei Avot*, a tractate of the Mishna (chart):

Moses received the Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Men of the Great Assembly. They [the Men of the Great Assembly] would always say these three things: Be cautious in judgement. Establish many pupils. **And make a safety fence around the Torah.**

The last sentence explains the motive for the tradition. Moses taught that someone who builds a house is responsible for a safety fence:

Deu 22:8 When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.

The rabbis conceived themselves as responsible for the law, and wanted a safety fence to keep people from transgressing it accidentally.

After the fall of the Second Temple, much of this tradition was codified in the Mishnah, and later in the Talmud. But in the time of Christ, the most appropriate way to describe it was as what was "said to them of old time," which is how the Lord referred to it in 5:21-48 in his six contrasts (Table 1, chart). This oral law was held to have

	21 Murder	27 Adultery	31 Divorce	33 Oaths	38 Revenge	43 Love
Ye have heard that	x	x		x	x	x
it was said	x	x	x	x	x	x
to them of old time	x			x		

Table 1: The Contrasts of 5:21-48

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higher authority than the written law, and the Lord's blatant disregard for it was an offense to the Jewish leaders.

for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.--This was not a matter of hygiene, but of ceremonial defilement. The OT only commands hand-washing in the case of the priests (chart):

Exo 30:18 Thou shalt also make a laver *of* brass, and his foot *also of* brass, to wash *withal*: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein. 19 For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: 20 When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD: 21 So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, *even* to him and to his seed throughout their generations.

The Jews extended it to everybody. This is a good example of the "safety fence": if everybody washes frequently, before eating, then certainly those who are priests will.

Now, the idea of being cautious about God's commandments is not wrong. When it comes to obeying the Lord, the idea is not to get away with as much as we can. We are to abstain, not only from sin, but "from all appearance of evil," 1 Thes 5:22, "hating even the garment spotted by the flesh," Jude 1:23. But we must be aware of two dangers.

The first is when we condemn others for what we consider lack of caution. It's one thing for me to go beyond the explicit teaching of Scripture in striving to please the Lord. And I can certainly encourage younger believers in this direction. But it's quite another thing for me to condemn those who do not share my standards. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," Rom. 14:5. The Jews had codified these "fences" and condemned anybody who did not share them.

The second danger comes when our fence around one commandment leads us to compromise another, a danger that is exacerbated by the flesh. The word of God must always take precedence over our fences, but the Jews held that the oral law was superior to the written law. The Lord proceeds to give an example of this.

3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?--As in the contrasts of 5:21-48, the Lord emphasizes the divergence between their tradition and God's law. He chooses the heart of the law, the ten commandments and its exposition in the book of the covenant (Exod 20b-23).

4 For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother:--This is the fifth commandment in the ten commandments in Exodus 20.

and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.--This principle comes from the following chapter, Exod 21:27.

5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to *his* father or *his* mother, *It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me;* 6 And honour not his father or his mother, *he shall be free.*--

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The word “gift” δῶρον is both the dominant and the dedicated Greek translation for the Hebrew word קרבן, which appears frequently in Leviticus and Numbers to describe the offerings that people bring to the Lord. In his account, Mark (7:11) actually transliterates the word, κορβαν.

One category of offerings were vow offerings, which someone promises if the Lord does something for them. The law was clear that if one undertook such a vow, it had to be kept:

Deu 23:21 When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. 22 But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee.

The rabbis generalized this principle: anything could be irrevocably dedicated to the Lord, simply by declaring it to be קרבן, a gift.¹ The tradition allowed people to retain the use of the item themselves, deferring its transfer to the temple, but the point was that it was protected from any claims by other parties. As the Lord points out, this made the tradition a useful tool for evading obligations that they would otherwise have to fulfill, such as caring for their parents.

Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.--The end result is that a tradition intended to put a safety fence around the law actually leads to violation of the explicit statements of the law, a common effect with human extensions of God’s word.

7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, 8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. 9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.--The quotation is from Isa 29:13. It is worth considering the verse in its context. It is a general principle that when a biblical character quotes the OT, they usually have the broader context in mind, and expect their audience to recall that context, and this principle certainly holds true here. In this case, Isaiah’s prophecy has a nearer reference (to the Babylonian invasion about 100 years later), and a more remote one (to our Lord’s time, 700 years later) (Table 2, chart).

Isaiah begins with a woe against “the city where David dwelt,” that is Jerusalem. Isaiah calls it “Ariel” or “fire hearth,” that is, altar (cf. Ezek 43:16 and the Moabite Stone), and indeed it is where they “kill[ed] sacrifices” in the temple. But the name takes an ominous turn, for the Lord anticipates a coming judgment, when the enemy will encamp against Jerusalem, raise forts against it, and burn it. The city will indeed be a fire hearth, when the Lord kindles fire upon it.

Isaiah’s immediate vision concerns the Babylonian invasion (center column), when Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city. But this was not the last such occasion. In AD 70, an event that our Lord will anticipate in the Olivet Discourse, the Romans conquered the city and burned it, and it again became a “fire hearth.”

Isaiah continues (second row) by predicting the blindness of the prophets and rulers. Jeremiah’s history shows how he was at odds with the other prophets and rulers of his day when he warned of the coming Babylonian destruction, and God tells Ezekiel that he has deceived the prophets. In the same way, the scribes and Pharisees in our Lord’s day do not understand his teaching.

1 See the Bible Dictionaries, for example, <http://www.studylight.org/encyclopedias/mse/view.cgi?n=4938>

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Isaiah 29, ~ 700 BC	606-586 BC (Jeremiah, Ezekiel)	Our Lord
1 Woe to Ariel [fire-hearth], to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices. ... 3 And I will camp חנה against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee. ... 6 Thou shalt be visited of the LORD of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire .	Jer 52:4 Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came ... against Jerusalem, and pitched חנה against it, and built forts against it round about. ... 12 Now ... came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard,... into Jerusalem, 13 And burned the house of the LORD, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, ... burned he with fire :	Mat 24:2 There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.
Isa 29:10 For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes : the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered.	Eze 14:9 And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.	Mat 15:14 they be blind leaders of the blind.
Isa 29:13 Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:	Jer 14:14 Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. ... 23:16 they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD. ... 25 I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. 26 How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart;	Matt 15:8-9 Mat 15:13 But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. 14 Let them alone:
Isa 29:14 Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.		

Table 2: The Context of our Lord's Quotation of Isa 29:13

Now we come to the verse our Lord quotes. As in the Lord's day, so in the last years of Judah, men's precepts have taken priority over the word of God.

The Lord does not quote Isa 29:14, but his hearers would remember it, and apply it to the Pharisees. In its light, his words about plants being rooted up, and the declaration "let them alone," are truly ominous. When people turn away from God's law to human traditions, he will blind them. In Isaiah, vv. 11-14 are a chiasm, ABA, with v. 13 at the center giving the reason for the blindness described in vv. 10-12 and 14.

So the Pharisees' insistence on the priority of tradition over Scripture is not new. Any Israelite with a knowledge of their own history could have recognized that the drama of the seventh century BC is unfolding again, something our Lord will make clear in ch. 24.

After this initial confrontation, the two sides disengage from one another, but continue the combat indirectly.

10-11, The Lord addresses the multitude

10 And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: 11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.--The Lord responds to the Pharisees' attack by reinforcing his teaching about uncleanness. Usually the multitude seeks him out (chart):

Mat 4:25 there followed him great multitudes (cf. 8:1; 12:15; 19:2; 20:29)

Mat 13:2 great multitudes were gathered together unto him

Mat 15:30 And great multitudes came unto him,

Mat 14:13 When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities. 14 And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude,

This time he calls them to himself. Then he gives them instruction in such general terms as to be a direct challenge to the tradition of the Pharisees, discarding the fundamental notion on which the idea of ceremonial impurity rests. His teaching undermines not only the tradition of ceremonial hand-washing, but ultimately the whole notion of unclean foods in Leviticus 11.

12-20, The Lord instructs the disciples

12 Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?--The Pharisees recognize that he is deliberately attacking their teaching. So while the Lord is teaching the multitudes to reinforce his position, the Pharisees are criticizing him in circles where he is not present, but to which his followers apparently have access.

13 But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.--The OT says a good deal about trees that the Lord has planted (chart):

Isa 5:2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, **and planted it** with the choicest vine,

Jer 11:17 For the LORD of hosts, **that planted thee**, hath pronounced evil against thee, for the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done against themselves to provoke me to anger in offering incense unto Baal.

Jer 45:4 Thus shalt thou say unto him, The LORD saith thus; Behold, *that* which I have built will I break down, and **that which I have planted I will pluck up**, even this whole land.

The prophets do not hesitate to warn that these plants will be pulled up in judgment, yet it is still the Lord who has planted them. The Lord's image here must come from some other source, and in fact, it is perfectly aligned with the parable of the wheat and the tares in 13:24-30. The point of that parable is that two different parties are planting things in the field:

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Mat 13:37 He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; 38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*; 39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil;

The only other place where “root up,” ἐκρίζω (Strong's 1610) appears in Matthew is in 13:29, that parable. This verse shows that the Lord had at least the Pharisees in mind in giving that parable, and reinforces our interpretation of ch. 13 as a response to the attack of the Pharisees in ch. 12.

The prophets describe Israel, even in its sin, as something that God has planted. The Lord claims that his Father did not plant the Pharisees. The implication is that they are not truly Israelites. Paul, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, makes this point repeatedly in Romans (chart):

Rom 2:28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 29 But he *is a* Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God.

Rom 9:6 For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel: 7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, *are they* all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. 8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

But this is not an innovation with him. Moses himself distinguishes between physical circumcision and the true circumcision of the heart, when he predicts Israel's apostasy, the Lord's chastisement of them, and their return to him:

Lev 26:40 If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; 41 And *that* I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then **their uncircumcised hearts be humbled**, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: 42 Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land.

Jeremiah recognized that physical circumcision meant nothing in itself:

Jer 9:25 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will punish all *them which are* circumcised with the uncircumcised; 26 Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all *that are* in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all *these* nations *are* uncircumcised, and **all the house of Israel *are* uncircumcised in the heart.**

This harsh statement is a warning to everybody who is outwardly affiliated with the people of God. Baptism, church membership, ordination, canonization—all the outward signs that people so treasure—cannot show the state of the heart. And it is the heart, not the outward signs, that God regards.

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1Sa 16:7 man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

14 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.--The task of leading the blind is assigned in the OT to the Servant of the Lord (chart).

Isa 42:6 I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; 7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, *and* them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

Of course, one aspect of the Servant in Isaiah is as Israel, and contemporary Jews apparently prided themselves on fulfilling this role, as Paul notes,

Rom 2:19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,

But the Lord dashes their confidence by asserting that their correspondence to the Servant is in his blind character:

Isa 42:19 Who *is* blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger *that* I sent? who *is* blind as *he that is* perfect, and blind as the LORD'S servant? 20 Seeing many things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but he heareth not.

15 Then answered Peter—Now that Peter has “stepped out of the boat,” he begins to appear regularly—23x after the listing in 10:2 (twice simply as “Simon”) (Table 3, chart). James and John appear only one more time, with the Lord and Peter at the Transfiguration, and of the others, only Judas appears again. Clearly Peter is emerging as the prominent one among the disciples.

and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.--The Lord's answer shows that Peter is not talking about the plant or the blind, but the instruction in vv. 10-11. This reminds us that “parable” can refer to any epigram or memorable saying, and is not restricted to metaphors.

As an observant Jew, Peter was fastidious about the dietary laws, if not the hand-washing. When the Lord sent him to Cornelius in Acts 10, and gave him the vision of unclean animals that he was to eat, Peter protested.

Act 10:14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

He anticipates that the Lord's teaching casts those laws into question.

Name	Before 10:2-4	After 10:2-4
Peter	1	21+2
Andrew	1	0
James	1	1
John	1	1
Philip	0	0
Bartholomew	0	0
Thomas	0	0
Matthew	1	0
James	0	?
Lebbaeus/Thaddeus	0	0
Simon the Canaanite	0	0
Judas Iscariot	0	4

Table 3: Apostles by name

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The Lord's saying in vv. 10-11 has two parts: what goes in cannot defile, and what comes out does defile. He proceeds to explain each of these.

16 And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? 17 Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?²--The Lord's explanation lays the foundation for his later revelation to Peter in Acts 10:10-16. What we eat cannot defile us. It just passes through us.

18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. 19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:--The real source of defilement is the heart, which, if not completely dedicated to the Lord, can lead to all manner of sin (Deut 6:4-5). He echoes four of the ten commandments in order (Table 4, chart).

"Evil thoughts" may pick up the final commandment, against coveting.³ "Blasphemies" refers to disrespectful, derogatory speech, whether toward God or man, e.g.,

Mat 12:31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy *against* the *Holy* Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

Thus it subsumes the first five commandments, the four that require us to worship and honor God alone, and the fifth that commands honor toward one's parents. Our Lord puts it last, perhaps because it captures his emphasis on the mouth as the organ of defilement.

This insight explains the importance of speech as a diagnostic of a person's true condition, as James observes:

Jam 3:2 If any man offend not in word, the same *is* a perfect man, *and* able also to bridle the whole body.

20 These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.--The Lord's message here recalls Solomon's admonition in Proverbs, that from the heart proceed "the issues of life," in speech, thought, and action:

Pro 4:23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life. 24 Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. 25 Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. 26 Ponder the path of thy

Matt 15:19	Exod 20
evil thoughts	(17 thou shalt not covet?)
murders	13 Thou shalt not kill.
adulteries, fornications	14 Thou shalt not commit adultery.
thefts	15 Thou shalt not steal.
false witness	16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
blasphemies	(3-12 four God-ward + honor parents?)

Table 4: Evil things from the heart, and the Ten Commandments

² See notes for discussion of the addition in Mark 7:9

³ Or one might consider the suggestion of David N. Freedman, *The Nine Commandments* (Doubleday, 2000) that the tenth commandment is intended as a summary of the other nine, and so would not be included; in this case "evil thoughts" would be in apposition with the other offenses, emphasizing their internal character.

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feet, and let all thy ways be established. 27 Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.

We cannot maintain a pure heart in our own strength. Jeremiah reports its natural condition:

Jer 17:9 The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

But God is able to renew our hearts, something that David recognized after he repented of his sin with Bathsheba:

Psa 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

And the mechanism through which he does it is his Word:

Psa 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

21-28, The Canaanite Woman

Matthew punctuates the account of the Pharisees' rejection in ch. 12 with the Lord's withdrawal from them and an extended quotation of Isa 42:1-4 highlighting the inclusion of the Gentiles in the gospel proclamation (Figure 2, chart). In that case, Matthew quotes Isaiah as explaining the Lord's withdrawal, suggesting that in fact he moves into Gentile territory. Corresponding to that paragraph (12:15-21), he now gives a more detailed example of how the Lord reached out to those who were outside the covenant nation.

21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.--These are coastal cities in what is now Lebanon (Figure 3⁴, chart). In the time of our Lord, this territory was part of the Roman province of Syria, outside the control of the Herods, but dependent on Galilee for agricultural produce. Both characteristics are clear from the reference in Acts,

Act 12:20 And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because **their country was nourished by the king's country.**⁵

As in ch. 12, when things heat up with the Pharisees, he withdraws, following the instruction of 10:14, shaking the dust off his feet.

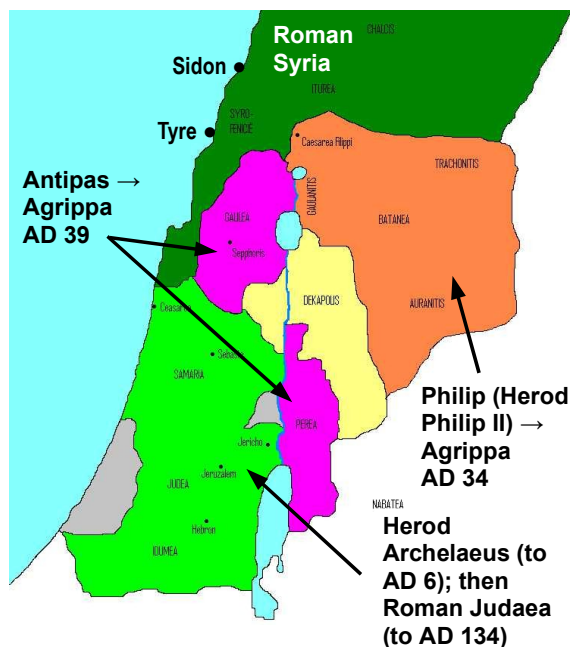


Figure 3: Political affiliation of Tyre and Sidon

4 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herodian_Tetrarchy#mediaviewer/File:Palestine_after_Herod.png , modified

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts,--Literally, “a Canaanite woman.” This is the only place where this adjective appears in the NT,⁶ but we find it more than 70 times in the LXX.

Canaan was Noah’s grandson by Ham. After the flood, when Noah became drunken, his son Ham dishonored him, and Noah replied by cursing Ham’s son Canaan:

Gen 9:24 And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. 25 And he said, Cursed *be* Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

Canaan’s descendants include many peoples who appear later in the biblical history:

Gen 10:15 Canaan begat Sidon his firstborn, and Heth, 16 And the Jebusite, and the Amorite, and the Girgashite, 17 And the Hivite, and the Arkite, and the Sinite, 18 And the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite: and afterward were the families of the Canaanites spread abroad. (Also 1 Chr 1:13)

Canaan and his descendants settled the eastern edge of the Mediterranean. This region is called “the land of Canaan” 66 times in the OT, the first time in Gen 11:31 as the designation of Abram’s destination when he left Ur of the Chaldees. Though Canaan settled it, God promised to give it to Abram (Gen 13:17), a promise that unfolds in the conquest of the Canaanite tribes by Israel. When the children of Israel leave Egypt and head back to the land of Canaan, God repeatedly promises to drive out the descendants of Canaan nations from before them. According to Deuteronomy 20, Israel may make peace with the nations far off, but these nations are to be destroyed, fulfilling Noah’s curse. The names are familiar from the genealogy in Genesis 10:

Deu 20:17 But thou shalt utterly destroy them; *namely*, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee:⁷

When God chose Abram, of the line of Shem, Noah’s other descendants were left without divine revelation, and descended into abominable behavior. The reason Moses gives for requiring their utter destruction is

Deu 20:18 That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the LORD your God.

As late as the time of Ezra, after the return from Babylon, the remnants of this people are still considered impure:⁸

Ezr 9:1 Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of

5 Ezek 27:17 also describes the agricultural commerce between Tyre and Israel.

6 Though Tamar and Rahab, in the genealogy of ch. 1, were Canaanites.

7 Some references add the Girgashites to make seven. God’s initial grant to Abraham in Gen 15:18-21 has an even longer list.

8 Ezek 16:3 highlights Jerusalem’s sin by calling her a Canaanite.

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Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, *doing* according to their abominations, *even* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 2 For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of *those* lands: ...

Against this background, it is not remarkable that the Lord responds harshly to this woman's request. What is remarkable is that such a woman persists in faith, and the Lord recognizes the validity of her faith. A hint to what is going on may lie in her words to him:

and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.--“Son of David” is the title with which Matthew introduces our Lord in his very first verse. It is the royal title of the promised king of Israel, but his own people are slow to recognize it. The first ones to acknowledge him as Son of David are the blind men of 9:27, but they do not add the divine title, “Lord.” The people in 12:23 express their doubts: “This can't be the Son of David, can it?” But now this pagan woman comes with this title. She offers him worship (v. 25), and three times calls him “Lord” (vv. 22, 25, 27). Where does she come by this knowledge? Tyre and Sidon are in ancient Syria, the home of Naaman, whom Elisha healed. Perhaps she knew the history of Naaman and saw her case as similar to his.

23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. 24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.--The Lord's hesitation reflects the instruction he gave the disciples in ch. 10, the only other place he speaks of “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (chart):

Mat 10:5 Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not: 6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Before his passion, this is to be his focus. Only after the resurrection does he declare that he has received authority to send them to other nations, as the prophets had promised⁹:

Mat 28:18 All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations

At that point he has been to the Ancient of Days, and has received dominion over all nations, as described in Daniel 7,

Dan 7:14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him:

During his earthly ministry, that time has not yet come, so he does not reach out to the Gentiles. But a few of them come to him—the wise men in ch. 2, the centurion in 8:8, and this most notable example, a woman of Canaan.

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.--We have remarked before

9 E.g., Zech 2:10, 11; Psa 22:7; Isa 60

that this word, in the NT, clearly indicates divine worship, and not just respect to a superior human being. In the context of worship, “Lord” surely refers to the divine title, Jehovah.

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* to dogs.--When he finally does speak to her, it is to remind her that she is a Gentile, not entitled to blessing under the old covenant. The title of “dog” is a serious insult. Dogs in the Bible are not cuddly indoor pets. They are unclean animals, living in the street and eating refuse.¹⁰

Yet his answer, for all its apparent gruffness, actually includes an encouragement, if her heart is inclined to hear it. The dogs are not wild beasts, but live near men, and draw their nourishment from their refuse, and she picks up on this.

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: *yet* for indeed the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.--A third time she calls him “Lord.”

The conjunction translated “yet” (καὶ γὰρ) is not adversative, but agreeing with what has been said and drawing out its implications. “For indeed” would be a better rendering. She seizes on the reference to dogs. She recognizes her subservient position, which will be the position of the Gentile nations during the Millennium.¹¹ If she is a dog, let her at least enjoy the benefits of a dog. The scraps are all she wants.

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great *is* thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.--The Lord characterizes her faith as great, so it is worthwhile for us to meditate on its characteristics.

- She recognizes her weakness. Faith and an attitude of self-sufficiency are incompatible. She faces a problem that she cannot solve.
- She recognizes her unworthiness. She is willing to take the place of a dog. This is the attitude of repentance that the Scriptures constantly exhort.
- In contrast with her weakness and unworthiness, she acknowledges the power and worthiness and power of the one to whom she comes. He is able to deliver her, and he is worthy of her worship.
- She is persistent. Initially he ignores her. Then he rebuffs her. But she persists. True faith does not give up when it does not see immediate results.

This last characteristic leads us to an important lesson: the importance of wrestling with the Lord in prayer. It is easy to fall into a view of prayer that's like shopping: we take our list, put everything in the basket, and check out. This simple engagement has its place: it teaches us to rely on the Lord for everything we need, and directs our minds to him as the source of all our blessings. But this woman is one of several examples of a deeper level of prayer to which he

10 The only positive reference to dogs in the OT is Job 30:1, “But now *they that are* younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock.” Dogs helped with sheep, but even here they are despised, and Job insults people by saying that they are not even as good as dogs.

11 Recall Isa 60:10, 12

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wishes to draw his people. In these cases, the Lord does not yield his blessings to a casual request, but requires his children to engage with him, to wrestle with him and persuade him. The picture is not of a grudging god who must be overcome by his petitioners, but of a father who wrestles with his son to strengthen and instruct him. Consider several examples (chart).

The prototype example is Jacob, upon his return to the land of promise after his exile in Haran. He sends his family over the Jabbok, but spends the night on the far bank.

Gen 32:24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. 25 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. 26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, **I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.** 27 And he said unto him, What *is* thy name? And he said, Jacob. 28 And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. 29 And Jacob asked *him*, and said, Tell *me*, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore *is it that* thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. 30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

Both Jacob and the woman encounter a man whom they recognize to be God. Both of them wrestle with him—Jacob literally, the woman figuratively, in order to obtain a blessing. In both cases the blessing is given. Significantly, this is the episode in which Jacob gains the name Israel, and the woman by her struggle gains access to Israel's blessings.

Moses also wrestles with God in Exodus 32-33. First, he persuades the Lord not to destroy the people after their sin with the golden calf:

Exo 32:9 And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it *is* a stiffnecked people: 10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. 11 And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people,¹² which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? 12 Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit *it* for ever. 14 And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

Then, the Lord announces that he will not accompany the people:

Exo 33:2 And I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite: 3 Unto a land

¹² Dave Nelson notes that this characterization, as well as a later statement in 33:12, come from the Lord's original commission to Moses in ch. 3. There, the Lord repeatedly calls them "my people," 3:7, 10.

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flowing with milk and honey: for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou *art* a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way.

But Moses insists on his presence, and prevails:

Exo 33:12 And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people:¹³ and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. 13 Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation *is* thy people. 14 And he said, My presence shall go *with thee*, and I will give thee rest. 15 And he said unto him, If thy presence go not *with me*, carry us not up hence. 16 For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? *is it* not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that *are* upon the face of the earth. 17 And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.

In both cases, the Lord is teaching Moses. This line of conversation culminates in God's great declaration of his gracious purposes:

Exo 34:5 And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. 6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, 7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*.

It was his purpose all along to forgive the sin of the nation, and to lead them into the land, but he wants Moses to understand the the divine character on which his gracious forgiveness rests. So, like a father with a son, he wrestles with him.

Jacob wrestled physically. Moses, and the Canaanite woman, wrestled in petition, and so did the apostles. Paul reports to the Colossians how their envoy interceded for them:

Col 4:12 Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

“Labouring” is *αγωνιζομαι*, which describes the struggles in an athletic context, of which wrestling was a prime example among the Greeks. He did not just recite a litany of requests, but he wrestled with God. Paul uses the same word to describe his intercession for them:

¹³ See note on 32:11; the charge is in 3:10.

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Col 1:28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: 29 Whereunto I also labour, **striving ἀγωνίζομαι** according to his working, which worketh in me mightily. 2:1 For I would that ye knew what great **conflict ἀγών** I have for you, and *for* them at Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; 2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

Paul and Epaphras, like Moses, wrestle with God on behalf of his people. The woman of Canaan wrestles with the Lord Jesus for her daughter. May the Lord strengthen us in wrestling with him for the blessing of others, not being discouraged at his initial apparent indifference to our need, but thinking through the case under the direction of the Holy Spirit as he leads us, by our wrestling, to a deeper understanding of the ways and purposes of God.

29-39, Miracles

As Figure 1 shows (chart), Matthew once again takes us back to ch. 4-11, before the great schism. We also see many similarities with ch. 14 (Table 5, chart). As in ch. 14, he heals the multitude, then feeds them.

	15:29-39	ch. 4-11	ch. 14
Arrived by Sea of Galilee	29a		13a
Went up into a mountain	29a	5:1	23
Multitudes came	30a	4:25	13b
Healings	30b	4:24; 8:16; 8:28-32	14
Feeding	32-38	9:10	15-21
Westward boat ride away from the multitudes	22-34	8:34-9:1	39

Table 5: Summary Comparison of ch. 4-11, 14, and 15b

29-31, Healing

Table 6 (chart) shows in more detail the correspondences in the first part of this section, dealing with the healings.

29 And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee;--He has left the region of Tyre and Sidon and is near the Sea of Galilee. The setting is similar to that in 14:13, at the feeding of the 5000.

and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.--The words recall the start of the Sermon on the Mount. There, though his focus was on the disciples, others sought him out (7:28).

The statement that the Lord “went up into the mountain”¹⁴ appears three times in Matthew (chart): here, at the start of the Sermon on the Mount, and in 14:23, after the feeding of the 5000, when he withdraws for prayer. There are other ascents as well, described with slightly different language, for example, the temptation (4:8), the transfiguration (17:1), the mount of Olives for the Olivet discourse (24:3), and the final rendezvous with the disciples in Galilee (28:16). The

¹⁴ See notes for complete list of OT and NT instances of ἀναβαίνω εἰς τὸ ὄρος

Matthew 15

15:29-39	ch. 4-11	ch. 14
And Jesus departed from thence , and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee;		13 When Jesus heard <i>of it</i> , he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart:
and went up into a mountain , and sat down there.	5:1 he went up into a mountain : and when he was set ,	
30 And great multitudes came unto him ,	4:25 And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and <i>from</i> Decapolis, and <i>from</i> Jerusalem, and <i>from</i> Judaea, and <i>from</i> beyond Jordan. 8:1 When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him . → healings in ch. 8-9	and when the people had heard <i>thereof</i> , they followed him on foot out of the cities.
having with them <i>those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed</i> , and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:	4:24 and they brought unto him all sick people ...and he healed them. 8:16 ... they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick:	14 he healed their sick .

Table 6: Healing the Multitudes

expression “to go up into the mountain” appears sixteen times in the OT as well, and Matthew’s fascination with it may echo those events.

Recall how the birth narrative emphasizes parallels between our Lord and Moses. The first set of ascents in the OT is those of Moses into Mount Sinai to receive God’s revelation. Ten instances of the 21 occurrences of this phrase in the OT describe Moses’ three ascents: the first when the nation arrives at Mt Sinai in Exodus 19 to receive the invitation to the covenant, the second after the covenant meal in Exodus 24 to receive the tables of the law, and the third time in Exodus 34 to receive the replacement tables of the law. It has often been suggested that our Lord’s ascents reflect his position as the new Moses, giving God’s new covenant law to his people.

But there is an important difference between our Lord’s ascents and those of Moses.

30 And great multitudes came unto him,--Here, the multitudes follow him into the mountain. Apparently they did this at the Sermon on the Mount as well, for though 5:1 focuses on his disciples, the sermon ends with the note (7:28), “the people [οἷοι multitudes] were astonished at his doctrine.” This access contrasts with what happened at Sinai. There, the people were forbidden to ascend the mount, on pain of death:

Exo 19:12 And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, *that ye go not* up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death:

The temple mount, like Sinai, is a holy place, hazardous to common people:

Psa 24:3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? 4 He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto

vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.¹⁵

Moses had no power to grant sinful people access to God's presence. But remarkably, during the promised earthly kingdom, the nations will have access to this holy hill:

Isa 2:3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

So our Lord, by ascending into the mountain, reminds us that he is the prophet like Moses; by bringing the multitudes with him, he reminds us that he is greater than Moses, the redeemer who delivers them from sin and grants them access to God.

having with them *those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: 31* Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see:--As in the previous episodes, multitudes of miserable people see in him their only hope. They throng to him, and he does not disappoint them. In the face of Pharisaic opposition, Matthew continues to remind us of the evidence that the Lord presented to John the Baptist in 11:2-6, the miraculous healings predicted in Isa 35:5, 6.

and they glorified the God of Israel.--The Pharisees accuse him of casting out demons by Satanic power (9:34; 12:24). These multitudes attribute his power to the God of Israel. This expression is widely used in the OT to describe the object of Israel's prayer and worship. They give God the glory for the Messiah's work that the more educated religious elite deny him.¹⁶

32-38, Feeding

Table 7 (chart) shows the extensive correspondences among this feeding and those in ch. 9 and ch. 14. Both of these episodes recall the Lord's meal with publicans and sinners in 9:10. The theme of that meal was access—the Lord dined with those whom the religious elite shunned. And we'll see that this same theme characterizes this feeding as well.

32 Then Jesus called his disciples *unto him*, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.--In both stories, the need is the hunger of the multitude. But here they have been fasting three days, not just one, and it is the Lord, not the disciples, who recognizes the problem. The disciples would have sent them away, but he, full of compassion, provides for them.

33 And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the

¹⁵ Does this warning also lie behind the exclusion of the people from "going up into the mount" (that is, the hill country of Judah) after their disobedience in Numbers 14? See the cluster of instances of ἀναβαίνω εἰς τὸ ὄρος around this part of the history, in the notes.

¹⁶ For discussion of this title, and why it is not a clear indication that these people are Gentiles, see the notes.

Matthew 15

ch. 4-11	ch. 14	15:29-39
9:10 And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.	15 And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying , This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals .	32 Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said , I have compassion on the multitude , because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat : and I will not send them away fasting,
	17 And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes .	34 And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes .
	19 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to <i>his</i> disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. 20 And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. 21 And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.	35 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. 36 And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake <i>them</i> , and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. 37 And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken <i>meat</i> that was left seven baskets full. 38 And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.

Table 7: Feedings in Matthew

wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?--They echo Moses' question in Num 11 (chart),

Num 11:13 **Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people?** for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat. ... 16 And the LORD said unto Moses, ... 18 ... say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow, and ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? ... 21 And Moses said, The people, among whom I *am, are* six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. 22 Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?

It is interesting to compare the roles between these two stories (Table 8, chart). In particular, the people here are patient, unlike the multitudes in the desert; and the Lord Jesus stands in the role of the Lord God, feeding them. In ascending the mountain, the Lord was presented as the second Moses, but now he is seen on an even higher level, as the Lord God.

Matthew 15	Numbers 11
Multitude (patiently waiting on the Lord)	Children of Israel (complaining)
Disciples (asking where to get bread)	Moses (asking where to get food)
The Lord Jesus (promising bread)	The Lord God (promising meat)

Table 8: Matthew 15 and Numbers 11

34 And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. 35 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. 36 And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake *them*, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. 37 And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken *meat* that was left seven baskets full. 38 And they that did eat

Matthew 15

were four thousand men, beside women and children.--The record is an almost verbatim repetition of 14:19-21. The similarity emphasizes the structural pattern of alternation between Pharisaic opposition and evidence that the Lord is the promised Messiah.

The Lord's frequent healings recall the prophecy of Isaiah 35 of healing in the coming kingdom. In the same way, these two feedings emphasize another of Isaiah's prophecies, about a coming banquet (chart):¹⁷

Isa 25:6 And **in this mountain** shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people[s] a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

Note the location of Isaiah's feast: "in this mountain," that is, Zion. We have already noted that the location of this segment, in a mountain (v. 29), recalls Israel's experience at Sinai, and that the people's presence with the Lord on this mountain is contrasted with their exclusion from Sinai (Exod 19:12). We also noted that Moses ascended three times into the mount. The second time, in ch. 24, was after a covenant meal between the elders of the nation and the Lord.

Exo 24:1 And [the Lord] said unto Moses, **Come up** unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. 2 And Moses alone shall come near the LORD: but they shall not come nigh; neither shall the people go up with him. ... 9 Then **went up** Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: 10 And they saw the God of Israel: and *there was* under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in *his* clearness. 11 And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink. 12 And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them.

In this event, the leaders of the nation "go up," but only to the lower slopes; only Moses ascended to the summit. But there on the slopes of Sinai, they ate with the Lord. Isaiah promises that one day not only Israel, but other peoples (plural) as well, will enjoy the Lord's feast in his holy mountain. And now that the kingdom of God is coming nigh, the Messiah anticipates this coming feast by feeding the people—here, on a mountain. Like the meal with the publicans and sinners in ch. 9, this meal emphasizes the access that the Lord gives his people to God.

39, Departure

Table 9 (chart) shows the correspondences here among the three sections. Though Matthew does

15:29-39	ch. 4-11	ch. 14
39 And he sent away the multitude , and took ship , and came into the coasts of Magdala .	8:34 And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts. 9:1 And he entered into a ship , and passed over, and came into his own city .	22 And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship , and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. ... 34 And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret .

Table 9: Westward boat ride away from the multitudes

Matthew 15

not emphasize it, Mark's description of these events (Mark 7:31) suggests that they take place on the eastern shore of the Sea, in Decapolis, in Gentile territory (Figure 4, chart¹⁸). Note in particular the contrast between his first encounter in Decapolis, when the people sent him away, and this one, where they have now come to him and he sends them away. The Gentiles are becoming increasingly attracted, even while the Jewish opposition is increasing.

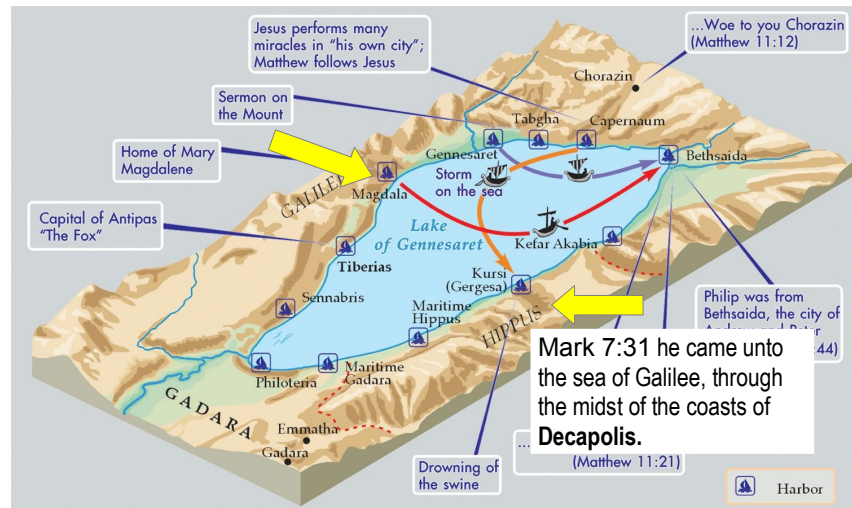


Figure 4: Locations around the Sea of Galilee

39 And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.--

Now the Lord returns to the western shore, back in Jewish territory, ready for the next exchange with the Pharisees.

18 https://abramkj.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/ch-22_lake-of-gennesaret.png, from Rainey and Notley, The Sacred Bridge, Carta, 2006, p. 354. Reflecting Notley's critical position, the map recognizes only a single miraculous feeding. Also, though the map shows the location of Magdala well, Notley's discussion shows that he does not accept that reading in Matt 15:39, and so he does not show it as the destination of this boat trip.

Notes

Mark 7:9

Mark extends v. 17 with the clause, “purging all meats,” where “purging” is καθαρίζον (neuter) in the MT, but καθαρίζων (masculine) in the old uncials as well as in many later mss. Hodges and Farstad mark the neuter with a Roman M rather than a German M, indicating a large but not overwhelming majority of witnesses, but not so small as to warrant identifying a division within the majority text (for which they use M^{pl}).

If the reading is nominative, the easiest parsing is to take it as resuming λεγει in v. 18, an interpretation which (according to Metzger) goes back to Origen and Chrysostom. This reading and understanding removes the words from our Lord’s mouth and makes them Mark’s commentary on what the Lord has said. Perhaps the addition comes from Peter’s later recollection of the Lord’s teaching, realizing that it lays the foundation for the instruction he received later in Acts 10:10-16.

But MT has the neuter: to what does this refer? Meyer explains the neuter as in apposition to εκπορευεσθαι εις τον αφεδρωνα, and thus something that the Lord actually says. He explains the nominative as resuming, not v. 18, but αφεδρωνα, becoming nominative (rather than agreeing with the accusative) as a “logical subject,” citing various authorities for this Greek usage. Alford and Lange also understand the masculine in this way. Bengel (and probably Gill) read the neuter and explain it as does Meyer.

Even if the nominative is the correct reading, a resumption of v. 18 would be remote and awkward. Since both readings are consistent with the nearer reference, I prefer to understand the words as on our Lord’s lips. Note that in either case, the expression lays the foundation for the obliteration of the dietary law in Acts 10, and so its recollection (or insertion) by Peter is appropriate. However, the Lord’s immediate purpose is to reject Pharisaic tradition, not the actual commands of the OT, which he professes to follow scrupulously. The Pharisees are never able to make a case against him for actual rejection of the Scripture, only of their tradition.

The Place of the Canaanites in the Seven Nations

Gen 15:18-21 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: 19 The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, 20 And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, 21 And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

	Canaanites	Hittites	Hivites	Perizzites	Girgashites	Amorites	Jebusites	Others
Gen 15:18-21	8	4		5	9	7	10	1,2,3,6

Matthew 15

	Canaanites	Hittites	Hivites	Perizzites	Girgashites	Amorites	Jebusites	Others
Exod 3:8	1	2	5	4		3	6	
Exod 3:17	1	2	5	4		3	6	
Exod 13:5	1	2	4			3	5	
Exod 23:23	4	2	5	3		1	6	
Exod 23:28	2	3	1					
Exod 33:2	1	3	5	4		2	6	
Exod 34:11	2	3	5	4		1	6	
Num 13:29*	5	2				4	3	1
Deut 7:1	4	1	6	5	2	3	7	
Deut 20:17	3	1	5	4		2	6	
Josh 3:10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Jos 9:1	3	1	5	4		2	6	
Jos 11:3*	1	3	6	4		2	5	
Jos 12:8	3	1	5	4		2	6	
Jos 24:11	3	4	6	2	5	1	7	
Jud 3:5	1	2	5	4		3	6	
1 Ki 10:22		2	4	3		1	5	
2 Chr 8:7		1	4	3		2	5	
Neh 9:8	1	2		4	6	3	5	
Total	18	20	17	17	5	19	19	
Median	2	2	5	4	5	2		
Mean	2.5	2.15	4.68					
Ratio of 1's	0.39	0.25	0.06	0	0	0.21	0	
Overall total (Hebrew)	73	48	25	25	7	89	41	

* Geographically ordered

1Ki 9:15 20 *And all the people that were left of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, which were not of the children of Israel, --No Canaanites, but LXX has 1Ki 10:22 πάντα τὸν λαὸν τὸν ὑπολειμμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ Χετταίου καὶ τοῦ Αμορραίου καὶ τοῦ Φερεζαίου καὶ τοῦ Χαναναίου καὶ τοῦ Εὐαίου καὶ τοῦ Ιεβουσαίου καὶ τοῦ Γεργεσαίου*

Exod 33:2 lacks Canaanites in the LXX

See also Ezra 9:1, where LXX uses *χανανι*:

Ezr 9:1 Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, *doing* according to their abominations, *even* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

Αναβαινειν εις το ορος

The expression appears 21x in the LXX and 5x in the NT, three of them in Matthew.

Moses going up into the mount to receive God's revelation:

- The initial meeting with God

Exod. 19:3 καὶ Μωυσῆς ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐκάλεσεν αὐτὸν ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τοῦ ὄρους λέγων τάδε ἐρεῖς τῷ οἴκῳ Ιακωβ καὶ ἀναγγελεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ισραὴλ

- After the covenant meal with the elders of Israel

Exo 24:12 καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν ἀνάβηθι πρὸς με εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ ἴσθι ἐκεῖ καὶ δώσω σοι τὰ πυξία τὰ λίθινα τὸν νόμον καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς ἃς ἔγραψα νομοθετῆσαι αὐτοῖς

Exod. 24:13 καὶ ἀναστὰς Μωυσῆς καὶ Ἰησοῦς ὁ παρεστηκὼς αὐτῷ ἀνέβησαν εἰς τὸ ὄρος τοῦ θεοῦ

Exo 24:15 καὶ ἀνέβη Μωυσῆς καὶ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ ἐκάλυψεν ἡ νεφέλη τὸ ὄρος

Exod. 24:18 καὶ εἰσῆλθεν Μωυσῆς εἰς τὸ μέσον τῆς νεφέλης καὶ ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ ἦν ἐκεῖ ἐν τῷ ὄρει τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας καὶ τεσσαράκοντα νύκτας

Deu 9:9 ἀναβαίνοντός μου εἰς τὸ ὄρος λαβεῖν τὰς πλάκας τὰς λιθίνας πλάκας διαθήκης ἃς διέθετο κύριος πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ κατεγινόμεν ἐν τῷ ὄρει τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας καὶ τεσσαράκοντα νύκτας ἄρτον οὐκ ἔφαγον καὶ ὕδωρ οὐκ ἔπιον

- To receive the revelation of God's name and have the tablets rewritten

Exo 34:1 καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν λάξευσον σεαυτῷ δύο πλάκας λιθίνας καθὼς καὶ αἱ πρῶται καὶ ἀνάβηθι πρὸς με εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ γράψω ἐπὶ τῶν πλακῶν τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἦν ἐν ταῖς πλαξίν ταῖς πρώταις αἷς συνέτριψας

Exod. 34:4 καὶ ἐλάξευσεν δύο πλάκας λιθίνας καθάπερ καὶ αἱ πρῶται καὶ ὀρθρίσας Μωυσῆς ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος τὸ Σινα καθότι συνέταξεν αὐτῷ κύριος καὶ ἔλαβεν Μωυσῆς τὰς δύο πλάκας τὰς λιθίνας

Deu 10:1 ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς με λάξευσον σεαυτῷ δύο πλάκας λιθίνας ὥσπερ τὰς πρώτας καὶ ἀνάβηθι πρὸς με εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ ποιήσεις σεαυτῷ κιβωτὸν ξυλίνην

Deut. 10:3 καὶ ἐποίησα κιβωτὸν ἐκ ξύλων ἀσήπτων καὶ ἐλάξευσα τὰς δύο πλάκας τὰς λιθίνας ὡς αἱ πρῶται καὶ ἀνέβην εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ αἱ δύο πλάκες ἐπὶ ταῖς χερσίν μου

Matthew 15

The people are not to go up to the mountain:

Exod. 19:12 καὶ ἀφοριεῖς τὸν λαὸν κύκλῳ λέγων προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς τοῦ ἀναβῆναι εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ θιγεῖν τι αὐτοῦ πᾶς ὁ ἀψάμενος τοῦ ὄρους θανάτῳ τελευτήσῃ

Deut. 5:5 κἀγὼ εἰστήκειν ἀνὰ μέσον κυρίου καὶ ὑμῶν ἐν τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ ἀναγγεῖλαι ὑμῖν τὰ ῥήματα κυρίου ὅτι ἐφοβήθητε ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ οὐκ ἀνέβητε εἰς τὸ ὄρος λέγων

The hill country of Judah, explored by the spies, and later presumptuously attacked by the people, with disastrous results

Num. 13:17 καὶ ἀπέστειλεν αὐτοὺς Μωυσῆς κατασκέψασθαι τὴν γῆν Χανααν καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἀνάβητε ταύτῃ τῇ ἐρήμῳ καὶ ἀναβήσεσθε εἰς τὸ ὄρος

Deut. 1:24 καὶ ἐπιστραφέντες ἀνέβησαν εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ ἦλθοσαν ἕως Φάραγγος βότρυος καὶ κατεσκόπευσαν αὐτήν

Deut. 1:41 καὶ ἀπεκρίθητέ μοι καὶ εἶπατε ἡμάρτομεν ἔναντι κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἡμεῖς ἀναβάντες πολεμήσομεν κατὰ πάντα ὅσα ἐνετείλατο κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν ἡμῖν καὶ ἀναλαβόντες ἕκαστος τὰ σκεύη τὰ πολεμικὰ αὐτοῦ καὶ συναθροισθέντες ἀνεβαίνετε εἰς τὸ ὄρος

Deut. 1:43 καὶ ἐλάλησα ὑμῖν καὶ οὐκ εἰσηκούσατέ μου καὶ παρέβητε τὸ ῥῆμα κυρίου καὶ παραβιασάμενοι ἀνέβητε εἰς τὸ ὄρος

Moses goes up to Mount Nebo to see the land:

Num. 27:12 καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν ἀνάβηθι εἰς τὸ ὄρος τὸ ἐν τῷ πέραν τοῦτο ὄρος Ναβαυ καὶ ἰδὲ τὴν γῆν Χανααν ἣν ἐγὼ δίδωμι τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ ἐν κατασχέσει

Deut. 32:49 ἀνάβηθι εἰς τὸ ὄρος τὸ Αβαριν τοῦτο ὄρος Ναβαυ ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν γῇ Μωαβ κατὰ πρόσωπον Ἰεριχω καὶ ἰδὲ τὴν γῆν Χανααν ἣν ἐγὼ δίδωμι τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ εἰς κατάσχεσιν

The mount of the Lord, requiring holiness to ascend

Ps. 23:3 τίς ἀναβήσεται εἰς τὸ ὄρος τοῦ κυρίου καὶ τίς στήσεται ἐν τόπῳ ἁγίῳ αὐτοῦ

Where the nations go to meet the Lord during the Millennium

Mic. 4:2 καὶ πορεύσονται ἔθνη πολλὰ καὶ ἐροῦσιν δεῦτε ἀναβῶμεν εἰς τὸ ὄρος κυρίου καὶ εἰς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ Ἰακωβ καὶ δείξουσιν ἡμῖν τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ πορευσόμεθα ἐν ταῖς τρίβοις αὐτοῦ ὅτι ἐκ Σιων ἐξελεύσεται νόμος καὶ λόγος κυρίου ἐξ Ἱερουσαλὴμ

Isa. 2:3 καὶ πορεύσονται ἔθνη πολλὰ καὶ ἐροῦσιν δεῦτε καὶ ἀναβῶμεν εἰς τὸ ὄρος κυρίου καὶ εἰς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ Ἰακωβ καὶ ἀναγγελεῖ ἡμῖν τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ πορευσόμεθα ἐν αὐτῇ ἐκ γὰρ Σιων ἐξελεύσεται νόμος καὶ λόγος κυρίου ἐξ Ἱερουσαλὴμ

The Sermon on the Mount

Matt. 5:1 Ἰδὼν δὲ τοὺς ὄχλους ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος, καὶ καθίσαντος αὐτοῦ προσῆλθαν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ·

The Lord retreats for prayer

Matthew 15

Matt. 14:23 καὶ ἀπολύσας τοὺς ὄχλους ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος κατ' ἰδίαν προσεύξασθαι. ὁψίας δὲ γενομένης μόνος ἦν ἐκεῖ.

The gathering of multitudes by the sea

Matt. 15:29 Καὶ μεταβὰς ἐκεῖθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἦλθεν παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας, καὶ ἀναβὰς εἰς τὸ ὄρος ἐκάθητο ἐκεῖ.

The calling of the twelve (may be associated with the Sermon on the Mount)

Mk. 3:13 Καὶ ἀναβαίνει εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ προσκαλεῖται οὓς ἠθέλεν αὐτός, καὶ ἀπῆλθον πρὸς αὐτόν.

Transfiguration

Lk. 9:28 Ἐγένετο δὲ μετὰ τοὺς λόγους τούτους ὥσπερ ἡμέραι ὀκτὼ [καὶ] παραλαβὼν Πέτρον καὶ Ἰωάννην καὶ Ἰάκωβον ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος προσεύξασθαι.

God of Israel

The expression in 15:31 has been taken (Carson, Blomberg) to suggest that the people are Gentiles, as well they may have been (cf. Mark 7:31). If indeed he is in Decapolis, he is returning to the district where he exorcised the demoniacs (8:28-32), which would be another correspondence between this section and ch. 8-9.

As a piece of history, based on Mark's additional information, it is likely that these people are Gentiles. However, this may not be Matthew's emphasis.

Alford thinks it is an expression of relief by the disciples after the awkward engagement with the Canaanite woman, and Luz points out that the expression is used regularly in Jewish worship, for example, at the end of the first, second, and fourth books of Psalms (LXX of Ps 41:13; 72:18; 105:48), and would have been common in Jewish-Christian gatherings. Meyer: "Ἰσρ. is added in the consciousness of the advantages they possessed over the neighbouring Gentiles." J.R.C. Cousland (*The Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew*, NovTSup 102. Leiden: Brill, 2002, p. 19) maintains that the crowds are Jewish throughout Matthew, and observes that this is a distinctly Jewish construct (note its arthrous use by Zecharias in Lk 1:68, Jeremiah's frequent use for it in apposition to "Lord of Hosts," and Ezekiel's use of it without any other title).

The use of the expression in the OT is complicated by its common association with the covenant title יהוה. But it occurs 30 times without κυριος in the LXX, and some of these are on the lips of Gentiles.

By Israelites:

Gen 33:20, Jacob names his altar at Shechem

Jos 24:25, covenant renewal before the tabernacle of the God of Israel (LXX only)

1 Sam 1:17, Eli blesses Hannah in the name of the GoI

Matthew 15

2 Sam 23:3, David's last words

1 Ch 4:10, the one on whom Jabez called

1 Ch 5:26, the narrator's description of the one who brought Assyria against RGM/2

1 Ch 15:12, 14, David's description of the Ark (MT adds יהוה)

2 Chr 29:7, Hezekiah's description of the one to whom the people have not burned incense

Ezr 3:2, narrator, describing the altar that Joshua and Zerubbabel built

Ezr 5:1, the one in whose name Haggai and Zechariah prophesied

Ezr 6:14, narrator, describing the one who gave the command to rebuild

Ezr 9:4, supporters of Ezra's marriage decree, who trembled at the name of the GoI

Jdt 4:12; 6:21; 10:1 (11 KJV) the one to whom the Jews cried and to whom Judith prayed

Psa 67:9 (KJV 68:8) the one before whom Sinai was shaken

Psa 67:36 (KJV 68:35), the one who gives strength to his people

Pss 9:8 object of prayer

Ezek 10:10 the one supported by the cherubim

Ezek 10:22, 11:22; 43:2 "the glory of the GoI"

By Gentiles:

1 Sam 5:7, 8, 10, 11, the Philistines describe the ark of the GoI

1 Ki 20:23, the servants of the king of Syria describe the GoI as a god of the mountains

Ezr 1:3, Cyrus' command to rebuild the temple (MT adds יהוה)

Conclusion: the expression can be used by gentiles who have been led to respect Israel's God, but the most common use is by Jews. The inference by Carson and Blomberg is unwarranted. But its common use in exilic contexts does suggest that it emphasizes the national nature of this deity: he is the God who chose Israel and set him apart, and it is the Lord Jesus, not the Pharisees, who legitimately represent him. Like his words to the Canaanite woman, this expression emphasizes his distinctly Jewish mission.