

## Jesus Withdraws from Confrontation (12:15–21)

**Matthew 12:15** *Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all*  
**Matthew 12:16** *and ordered them not to make him known.*

**aware of this, withdrew from there....** “Matthew’s use of *ginōskō* [aware or know] rather than *oida* [know] (as in v. 25) suggests that he received a report of their intentions rather than knowing it by intuition.”<sup>1</sup> “Jesus follows the principle which He laid down for his disciples’ guidance.”<sup>2</sup>

“When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next....” (Matthew 10:23, ESV)

Jesus probably went outside of Israel to a Gentile area. There are two reasons to suspect this, *one*; the Pharisees did not follow him. They had been stalking him for some time, they are not now present. This indicates Jesus has left their area of interest and influence. *Two*, Jesus will now, unexpectedly, speak about Gentiles, a topic suited to a Gentile geography.

**many followed him...ordered them....** “...the crowds are to be viewed as already intent on creating publicity; Jesus is concerned to deflect them from this path. He is not after a power base in public opinion to protect him from the hostility of the Pharisees.”<sup>3</sup> “He came as Messiah but not the kind of nationalistic messiah they had chosen to expect.”<sup>4</sup>

**and ordered them not to make him known....** This phrase is a link to the next verse “with the assertion of Isa 42:2 that the servant will not make a lot of noise, and “no one will hear his voice in the streets.””<sup>5</sup> “That Matthew mentions the command to silence here at all must be connected with the idea that it is an expression of the hiddenness and the “silence” that according to v. 19a are marks of the *παῖς θεοῦ* (“child of God”).”<sup>6</sup>

**Matthew 12:17** *This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:*

This statement looks back to, “*and ordered them not to make him known....*” The full statement is found in Isaiah 42:1-4:

*“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring*

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<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew* (Understanding the Bible Commentary Series; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 114–115.

<sup>2</sup> A. Carr, *The Gospel according to St Matthew* (Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), 179.

<sup>3</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 491). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>4</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew* (Understanding the Bible Commentary Series; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 115.

<sup>5</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 469). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 191.

*forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.” (Isaiah 42:1–4, ESV)*

“Why does Matthew bring such a long quotation here? If he had been concerned *only* with the quiet and secret activity of Jesus, v. 19 (*He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street*) would have sufficed as a quotation. Therefore, we must try to interpret the entire quotation in the context of the gospel.”<sup>7</sup> This is Matthew’s longest quotations from the Old Testament and it is of extreme importance in Matthew’s story, for it is “a blueprint for Jesus’ ministry.”<sup>8</sup>

“Matthew wanted to use this long and important formula quotation here in the middle of his gospel and at the point in his narrative where the separation from Israel begins....”<sup>9</sup> It begins at the point where the leaders of Israel become determined to murder Jesus (12:14). There is here a major redirection of Matthew’s message.

***Matthew 12:18 “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.***

***servant***<sup>10</sup>.... In Greek the word means son or servant, however, the Hebrew word means servant.

***my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased....*** This phrase points the reader to Jesus’ baptism.

*“and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17, ESV)*

***I will put my Spirit upon him....*** (Luke 4:18; John 3:34; Acts 10:38) Again, it is the baptism of Jesus that is the focus of this phrase.

*“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him” (Matthew 3:16, ESV)*

There are two words given center stage in this passage; one is ***justice*** [judgment] and the other is ***Gentiles***.

***proclaim***<sup>11</sup>.... Or ***announce***

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<sup>7</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 192.

<sup>8</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 470). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>9</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 191.

<sup>10</sup> *παῖς child or servant* This word “in Greek usually means child, much less often servant.” Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 193.

<sup>11</sup> *proclaim* ἀπαγγέλλω “...inform, tell, report, proclaim, announce....” James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

**justice [judgment]**<sup>12</sup>.... “The Greek word *krisis*...is usually translated either “justice” ethically or “judgment” eschatologically.”<sup>13</sup> “But in the New Testament κρίσις [justice, judgment] has no other meaning but that of *final sentence, judgment*....”<sup>14</sup> “Understanding of the preaching and person of Jesus depends absolutely on understanding of His concept of judgment. **If there is no judgment of God as Jesus bears witness, then Jesus and His preaching can have only a constantly diminishing historical significance. They can have no bearing on man’s relation with God. Conversely, if there is such a judgment, man’s life is hopeless and intolerable without the declaration of Jesus: Thy sins are forgiven thee.**”<sup>15</sup>

This word is used twelve times by Matthew:

*Matthew 5:21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’*

*Matthew 5:22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.*

*Matthew 10:15 Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.*

*Matthew 11:22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.*

*Matthew 11:24 But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”*

*Matthew 12:18 “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.*

*Matthew 12:36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,*

*Matthew 12:41 The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.*

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<sup>12</sup> *justice* [judgment] κρίσις “In the basic sense “to part,” “to sift,” .... This leads to the sense “to divide out,” “to select,” ... “to value,” .... The most common meaning is “to decide,” ...; “to judge,” “to assess,” and ... “to go to law, to dispute with,” ...; also “to seek justice....” Kittel, G., Bromiley, G. W., & Friedrich, G. (Eds.). (1964–). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

<sup>13</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 556.

<sup>14</sup> Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of Matthew* (ed. Frederick Crombie; trans. Peter Christie; vol. 1; Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880), 335.

<sup>15</sup> Kittel, G., Bromiley, G. W., & Friedrich, G. (Eds.). (1964–). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

*Matthew 12:42 The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.*

*Matthew 23:23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.*

*Matthew 23:33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced [the judgment] to hell?*

“In what sense does Matthew take [judgment, justice] κρίσις here in 12:20? As indicated at 5:21, the word κρίσις [justice] refers primarily to the activity of judging, and then derivatively to the bringing of justice, to the body that makes judgments (a court), to the sentence of condemnation, or even to the punishment resulting.”<sup>16</sup>

This proclamation of judgment is both good news and bad. Good news to those whose justice is satisfied in Jesus judgment, bad news to those whose justice must be satisfied in their own judgment.

***Matthew 12:19 He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets***

***quarrel or cry aloud....*** These words demonstrate why Jesus left his prior discussion with the Pharisees after besting them in debate in a discussion on the Sabbath. By doing so, he avoids an unseemly public fight. He has “...withdrawn to avoid a further “shouting-match” with the Pharisees.”<sup>17</sup> It was not then, nor is it still now, unusual for those in the Middle East to haggle loudly in the market or violently yell at each other in political or religious debates. The fierce atmosphere of near eastern passion is the context of this passage. This Jesus avoided, giving us an example on how to handle disagreeable discussions and people in our own day as well.

***nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets....*** “...the language cannot be applied literally to Jesus, but the claim is certainly being made that Jesus is not behaving like a rabble-rouser, stirring up people with his demagoguery.”<sup>18</sup>

However, “The picture is not one of utter silence ... else how could he “proclaim” justice...?”<sup>19</sup>

***Matthew 12:20 a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory;***

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<sup>16</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 493). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>17</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 472). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>18</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 494). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>19</sup> Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 286). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

**he will not break**<sup>20</sup>.... To the common person, the bruised and damaged, Jesus will not add burden to their plight. We should not lose track of Jesus' comments in chapter 11. He continues to give rest to the burdened.

*"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*  
(Matthew 11:28–30, ESV)

A **bruised reed** and a **smoldering wick** are things that do not have much value. How are Isaiah and Matthew using these useless items? They appear to have reference to "...the tax collectors and sinners, valued by Jesus but marginalized in their own community (9:10–13). After 12:1–8, the poor in their neediness may also be in view (and perhaps even the sick in their suffering after vv. 9–14)."<sup>21</sup> Jesus did not snap them off like so many dried up leaves on an otherwise healthy tree as the Pharisees were all too inclined to do. He did not snuff out their weakened cries as others were disposed to do. He heard, he stopped, he healed. He gave strength to the bruised reed, he gave voice to the smoldering wick.

"The imagery thus describes an extraordinary willingness to encourage damaged or vulnerable people.... The servant will not be quick to condemn and to discard, but will persevere until God's purpose of "justice" has been achieved. **Here Matthew finds a further portrait of the meek and lowly Jesus who offers a kind yoke and a light burden, the giver of rest to the toiling and heavily loaded (11:28–30).**"<sup>22</sup>

*"The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down."*  
(Psalm 145:14, ESV)

**until he brings justice [or judgment] to victory....** "By gentle perseverance the servant will successfully bring forth the justice which it has been his role to announce (v. 18)."<sup>23</sup> "The prophet cannot acquiesce in the thought that evil will finally have the victory. For him it is clear that in the end the servant will bring about the triumph of justice."<sup>24</sup>

"This victory is won at Jesus' awful cross, is proclaimed at his triumphant resurrection, is worked out in history in his reign at God's right hand, and will be consummated at his glorious judgment."<sup>25</sup>

But let's look at how Mark tells this story.

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<sup>20</sup> *break κατάγνυμι* "To break in two, break down...." Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 494). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

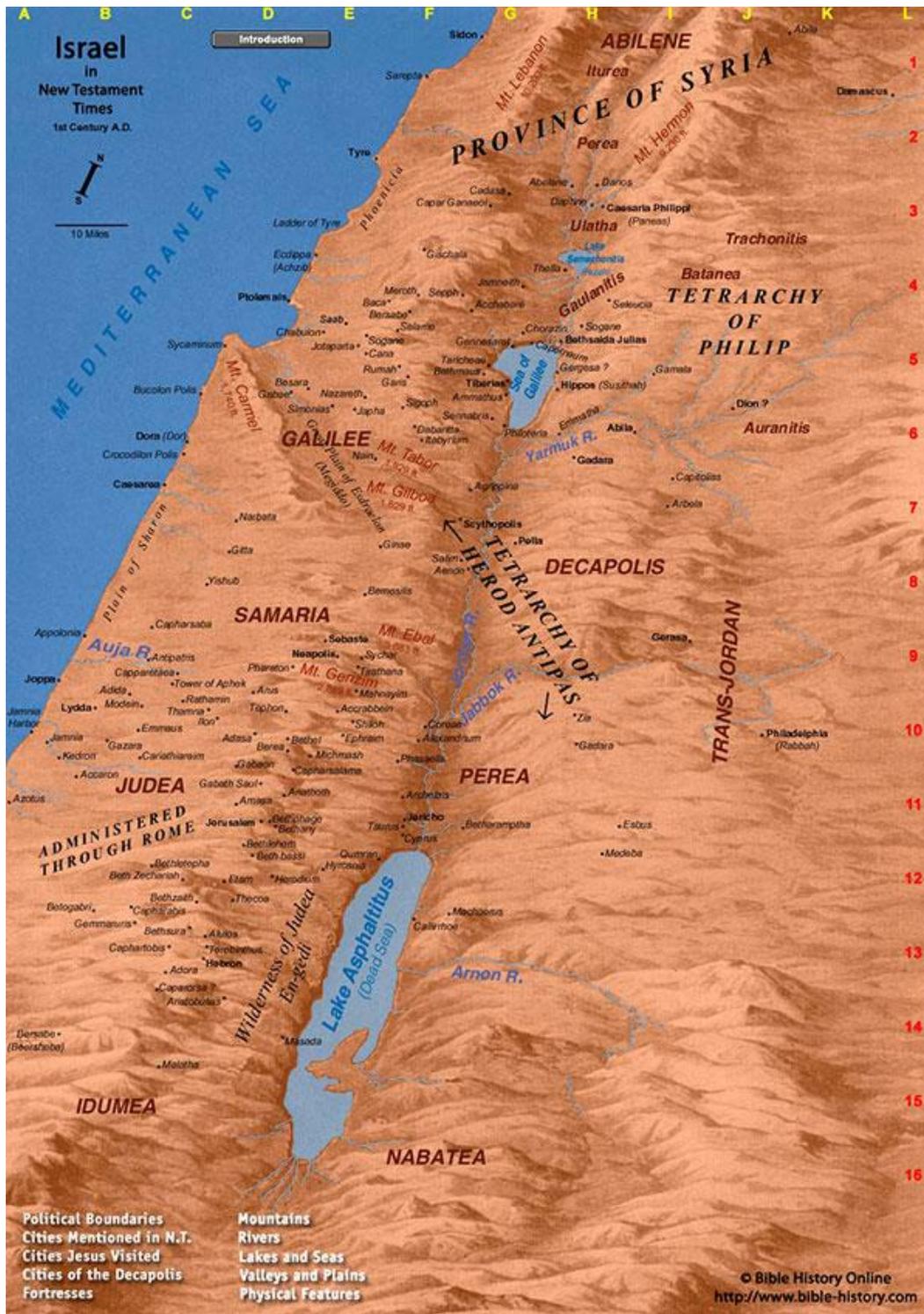
<sup>22</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 473). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>23</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 495). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>24</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 312.

<sup>25</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 558.

“Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.” And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.” (Mark 3:7–12, ESV)



Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem are the areas where Jews live. Idumea and beyond the Jordan are mixed areas of Jews and Gentiles, whereas Tyre and Sidon are fully Gentile areas. The area defined is north, south, east and west of where Jesus is ministering.

**Matthew 12:21 and in his name the Gentiles will hope.**

This phrase in verse 18 and here again in verse 21 appear to be an inclusio around verses 19 and 20, the main message of the passage. Verse 18 refers to a proclamation to the Gentiles to hope **his name**.

*“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus [Jehovah Saves], for he will save his people from their sins.”* (Matthew 1:21, ESV)

*“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us).”* (Matthew 1:23, ESV)

*“And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”* (Acts 2:21, ESV)

**the Gentiles....** “The claim is being made that the action of God now initiated through the Isaianic servant has goals as wide as humanity.”<sup>26</sup> However, it does come as something of a surprise to see this message so early in the Gospel and in a section in which Gentiles play no role in the narrative. We find it again in these verses:

*“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”* (Matthew 24:14, ESV)

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”* (Matthew 28:19, ESV)

And yet, we have echoes of this idea much earlier in Matthew.

*“I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,”* (Matthew 8:11, ESV)

We can see from these and other passages that the preaching of the kingdom of God was always intended for the whole world.

This mystery is fully revealed by Paul.

*“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”* (Ephesians 3:6, ESV)

“This Isaian blue sky is God’s perspective on Jesus’ role in the history of the world, and only from this divine perspective will history make sense ... a “God’s-eye view” of the whole Gospel.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 495). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>27</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 559.

**hope....** But there is more than judgment to the Gentiles (12:18), there is also hope for the Gentiles.

*“For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.” (1 Timothy 4:10, ESV)*