

Jesus Questions the Pharisees
Matthew 22:41-46
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Matthew 22 records three questions in a series of attempts to trap Jesus, beginning with the disciples of the Pharisees and Herodians (22:15-22), followed by the Sadducees (22:23-33), and finally a lawyer representing the Pharisees. These various sects worked toward the same end in their opposition to Jesus.

Jesus responded to the Pharisees with questions of His own. His questions were far more important than theirs, for they involved who He was, rather than simply their disputes about taxes, the nature of the resurrection, and the greatest commandment.

In both Mark 12:35-37 and Luke 20:41-44, these words of Jesus are recorded. However, only Matthew includes the specific note that this was said to the Pharisees and only Matthew included the introductory question of whose son the Messiah is. The Pharisees are likely specifically referenced in Matthew because he uniquely provides the full address regarding the condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees to the crowds and His disciples (23:1-33).

The question of whose son the Messiah is (22:41-42)

Jesus addresses the Pharisees who had gathered to listen to the lawyer's question regarding the greatest commandment in the Law. He asked them the question, *"What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?"* This question was a simple one for the Jewish people in general, and even more so for those who were considered to be experts in the Old Testament. The Pharisees provided the obvious answer, *"the son of David."* Mark 12:35 noted that the scribes had taught this, *"How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?"*

Many Old Testament passages taught this, with the clearest being the words of God to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-14, *"When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men."*

There are many other passages that support this answer by the Pharisees, such as 1 Chronicles 17:11-14; Psalm 89; Isaiah 11:1, 10; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15; and Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24. All of these passages were from the Old Testament that the Sadducees considered to be of lesser character than the Law, the first five books. This question was specifically crafted for the Pharisees by Jesus.

Matthew's Gospel includes repeated reference to Jesus as the Son of David. It begins with this statement, "*The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham*" (Matthew 1:1), and uses this title for Jesus seven other times prior to this reference in Matthew 22:42 (Matthew 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9, 15). Matthew 1:1-17 makes a clear emphasis on the fact that Jesus is the Son of David (cf. Matthew 1:1, 6, 17).

The scribes and the chief priests had become indignant at the children who called Jesus, "*the son of David*" in Matthew 21:15. As the ancestry of all Jews was well known, they knew His lineage was from David, and they also knew that this title was Messianic. They correctly understood that calling Jesus, "*the son of David*" was the equivalent of calling Him the Messiah.

The Pharisees only acknowledged that the Messiah would be the son of David. But Jesus was one of many Jews who had descended from David. Their answer to Jesus' question only acknowledged the teaching of the Old Testament, it in no way ascribed to Jesus the title of "*son of David*."

The question of how David calls the Messiah his Lord (22:43-46)

Jesus then asked His follow-up question, which was the essence of His point, which is why the other synoptic Gospels include only this second question. Matthew wrote, "*He said to them, 'Then how does David in the Spirit call Him "Lord," saying, "THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, 'SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET'? If David then calls Him "Lord," how is He his son?'*"

Jesus' question quoted Psalm 110, which is the most quoted chapter in the New Testament. Psalm 110 includes the superscript "*A Psalm of David*." Clearly, both Jesus and the Pharisees viewed the superscript of this Psalm as truthful, for the Davidic authorship was uncontested.

In addition, Jesus said these words, "*in the Spirit*," or with the inspiration of God. Therefore, He considered Psalm 110, and by extension, the Old Testament, to be inspired by God. Mark's account clarifies that this is the Holy Spirit (Mark 12:36).

The Jews considered Psalm 110 to be one of the clearest Old Testament texts that prophesied about the Messiah. There was no question that David spoke about the Messiah in the minds of the Pharisees. One reason why Psalm 110 is quoted or alluded to more than 26 times is because the readers were predisposed to accept this Psalm as being Messianic.

The crux of Jesus' question was, "*If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?*" The Pharisees accepted that the Messiah was a descendant of David, but David in Psalm 110:1 refers to the Messiah as "*my Lord.*" This would appear to be very counter to any normal sense for one's son or descendant to be called "Lord." And David did not say this mistakenly, for he wrote "by the Spirit." There are other places in the New Testament that also attribute the words of the Old Testament to the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:25; Hebrew 3:7; 10:15; cf. Hebrews 9:8; 2 Peter 1:2).

The compelling answer to Jesus' question is that the Messiah is both the son of David and the Lord of David. He does not merely follow in the footsteps of David, He has the authority of God. The Lord established the Messiah to "*sit at My right hand.*" To be seated at the right hand is the position of highest honor and given all authority.

Once Jesus was crucified for the sin of man and conquered death by ascending into heaven, He sat at the right hand of God. "*He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD*" (Hebrews 10:12). "*So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God*" (Mark 16:19).

Throughout the church age, Christ is in this privileged position, "*keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God*" (Colossians 3:1). Several other New Testament verses state that Jesus is at the right hand of God (Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33; 7:55-56; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22). When Jesus returns, He will sit on His glorious throne to rule in the kingdom, "*Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*" (Matthew 19:28; cf. 25:31).

Yet the Messiah possesses the power and authority of God as not simply a human ruler, but as the divine Son of God. This was the point that Jesus made by teaching that David called the Messiah his Lord. The Pharisees had rejected Jesus as the Messiah, and had no concept of a divine Messiah. They were completely unable to answer Jesus with even a word (22:46).

The proof that Jesus was teaching that Psalm 110:1 taught His divinity is that it revealed His preexistence. In other words, David's Lord, the Messiah, existed when David lived. Furthermore, there is a glimpse of the nature of God, as a plurality within the Godhead, where one divine person spoke to another.

Psalm 110:1 used the Hebrew term "Yahweh" for "*the LORD*," which can be seen in some English translations by the capitalization of all four letters. This term is the name for God that communicates the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. Psalm 110:1 used the Hebrew term "Adonai" for "*my Lord*," which was the common designation for God in the Old Testament. Both of these terms are translated by the Greek term "Kurios," which is translated into English as God.

The text that all three synoptic Gospels quoted was the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint.

Clearly, Psalm 110 teaches that David's son and David's Lord were the same person, Jesus Christ. Attempts have been made by unbelievers to answer the question posed by Jesus, whether Psalm 110 was not written by David, or that David did not speak of the Messiah in this Psalm. Yet the teaching of Jesus is clear, and Matthew's account is supported by the rest of the New Testament, which teaches that Jesus is both the Messiah and the divine Son of God.

Matthew had already described that Jesus was greater than David when he included the account of the Pharisees' response to the disciples of Jesus picking and eating heads of grain on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-6). "*For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath*" (Matthew 12:8), and is greater than David, the temple, or the prophets (Matthew 12:6, 41). Jesus is greater than David because He is the preexistent Creator of David, which is why David calls Him "*My Lord*."

The Pharisees' view of the coming Messiah was in contrast to this teaching of Jesus. While Psalm 110:1 supported their hope that the Messiah would be a conquering hero, "*Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet*," Jesus was more than only a conqueror. Also, the timing of His triumph was also a point of confusion. The Jews saw their Messiah as only a savior over their enemies, not as the Savior over their sin. Since Jesus did not come to defeat the Romans, but to bring salvation to the Romans (cf. John 3:16), He did not meet their expectations. Jesus said, "*My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place*" (John 18:36). Therefore, He would be crucified to bring true deliverance to all who believe, and thus conquering the ultimate enemy.

The importance of understanding the true nature of the Messiah is central to His question to the Pharisees. More than their confusion over the timing and nature of the deliverance of God, they completely misunderstood the Messiah, as revealed in the Old Testament. They envisioned a human figure, not God incarnate, *“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14).

As the Lord, Jesus was the only One who could bring forgiveness of sin to the world. All sin is ultimately against God Himself, and only God can forgive sin. Even the Pharisees understood this, as they expressed when Jesus forgave the sin of the paralytic in Luke 5, *“Seeing their faith, He said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven you.’ The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, ‘Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?’”* (Luke 5:20-21).

Since He is the Lord, He is also holy, without sin, and completely true. Yet the Pharisees consider His deeds to be evil, *“But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, ‘This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons’”* (Matthew 12:24). They denied His nature as God, His words of truth, and His character of righteousness.

This core problem was their failure to understand who Jesus really was. The identity of Christ is what Jesus emphasized to His disciples, when He asked His disciples, *“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven’”* (Matthew 16:13-17). Peter did not just respond by identifying Jesus as *“the Christ,”* but by following that with *“the Son of the living God.”* Jesus as the Son of God meant that He was righteous, truthful and had all authority.

As the Son of God, Jesus was righteous in His judgment of these Pharisees. They had placed themselves in the position of the teachers of Israel but were hypocrites (Matthew 23:1-2). They did not lead people to the Lord, but made them into sons of hell (Matthew 23:15). They were unable to answer Jesus’ question because they were *“fools and blind men”* (Matthew 23:17). In their opposition to Jesus, their destiny had become secure, *“how will you escape the sentence of hell?”* (Matthew 23:33).

This was the end of the attempts by the various sects that opposed Jesus to trap Him with their questions. Neither the Pharisees nor any of the other Jews *“were able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him any questions”* (Matthew 22:46). His refutation of the Pharisees and Sadducees brought an end to their attempt to discredit Him in order to retain their religious control of the Jews. All that was left to them was their plot to *“seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him”* (Matthew 26:4).

Conclusion

In Matthew 22:41-46, Jesus taught that Psalm 110:1 proved that the Messiah was the Lord God, and not simply a human conqueror from the lineage of David. As the Lord of David, and thus sovereign over all people, He was worthy of the worship and allegiance of the Jewish people. Their rejection of Him and this truth of His nature would introduce His judgment of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23, along with His revelation regarding the end of the age, just prior to His second coming.

There is no greater question for mankind than who we understand Jesus to be. If we sincerely believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, then we will enjoy eternal life. *“He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life”* (1 John 5:12; cf. John 6:47).

As we represent Jesus Christ in our days on earth, our appeal must center on who Jesus is in order to fully communicate what He has done. If we fail to understand who the Lord is, we will fail to understand what He has done. This is because it is only *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29). No other one could bring the forgiveness of sin.

This will mean that understanding that Jesus Christ is the Lord is fundamental to true salvation. *“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”* (Romans 10:9). Indeed, recognizing His authority as the Lord should motivate us to more eagerly share the good news of Jesus.

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:20-21).