



MATTHEW 10–12; MARK 2; LUKE 7, 11

TWELVE CALLED, COMMISSIONED, AND TUTORED

We begin this week with Jesus preparing the Twelve for their missions. His commission included teachings, examples of healings, new Sabbath laws, and ends by inviting all disciples who hear and follow him to become his family. Matthew, Mark and Luke share much of the same source material, but present it differently. To save space, I have not written out the scriptural verses, so follow along in conjunction with these notes.

OVERVIEW

| | MATTHEW | MARK | LUKE | JOHN |
|----------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Jesus Calls of the Twelve | Matt 10:1–26 | Mark 3:13–19; 6:7–11 | Luke 9:1–3; 6:12–16 | John 1:42 |
| The Value of Life | Matt 10:27–33 | Mark 13:9–13 | Luke 12:2–9, 11–12; 21:12–19 | John 13:16 |
| Conditions of Discipleship | Matt 10:34–42 | Mark 8:34–35; 9:41 | Luke 12:51–53; 14:25–27 | John 13:20 |
| John’s disciples’ Question | Matt 11:2–6 | | Luke 7:18–23 | |
| Jesus’ Witness of John | Matt 11:7–19 | | Luke 7:24–35 | |
| Woes to Galilean Cities | Matt 11:20–24 | | Luke 10:12–15 | |
| Jesus Thanks his Father | Matt 11:25–27 | | Luke 10:21–22 | |
| Come Unto Me | Matt 11:28–30 | | | |
| Lord of the Sabbath | Matt 12:1–8 | Mark 2:23–28 | Luke 6:1–5 | |
| Jesus Heals a Hand | Matt 12:9–24 | Mark 3:1–6 | Luke 6:6–11 | |
| Jesus Heals at Seaside | Matt 12:15–21 | Mark 3:7–12 | Luke 6:17–19 | |
| Jesus’ Family Reaction | | Mark 3:19–21 | | |
| Jesus Heals Blind–Dumb | Matt 12:22–30 | Mark 2:22–27 | Luke 11:14–15, 17–23 | John 7:20 |
| Sin Against the Holy Ghost | Matt 12:21–27 | Mark 3:28–30 | Luke 10; 6:34–35 | |
| Sign of Jonah | Matt 12:38–42 | Mark 8:11–12 | Luke 11:16, 29–32 | |
| Return of the Evil Spirit | Matt 12:43–46 | | Luke 11:24–26 | |
| Jesus’ Spiritual Kindred | Matt 12:46–50 | Mark 3:31–35 | Luke 8:19–21 | |

JESUS CALLS THE TWELVE

Matthew 10:1–26; Mark 3:13–19; 6:7–11; Luke 6:12–16; 9:1–4

Apostles vs. Disciples

The Twelve are often called “disciples,” just as Jesus referred to them in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 15:11). In Greek, the word “apostle/*apostolos*” means, “one sent, a messenger, ambassador of the Gospel; officially a commissioner of Christ.” We use it differently now than it was used in the New Testament (NT). In the NT, “apostle” and “disciple” are used for many believers, men and women.¹ The NT distinguishes Jesus’ closest disciples, those who received keys and authority as special witnesses, as “the Twelve.”

Matthew 10:1; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1–2 “power and authority” While Matthew and Mark explain that Jesus conferred “power/*exousia*” on the Twelve, only Luke 9:1 adds the double—power *and authority*, for emphasis and clarity. All righteous disciples may receive God’s power through the gifts and fruits of the Spirit. However, *authority* comes with Priesthood keys.² Jesus organized his quorum of the twelve after the Holy Order of God, which we refer to as the Melechizedek priesthood (D&C 84; 107). The three New Testament lists include the same men, except for Judas the brother of James who appears to overlap with Lebaeus/Thaddaeus.

List of Apostles in the Gospels

MATT 10:2–4

Simon, who is called **Peter**,
and **Andrew** his brother;
James *the son* of Zebedee,
John his brother;

Philip,
Bartholomew;
Thomas,
Matthew the publican;
James *the son* of Alphaeus,
Lebaeus surname Thaddaeus
Simon the Canaanite,
Thomas,
James *the son* of Alphaeus,
Judas Iscariot, betrayed him

MARK 3:13–19

Simon he surnamed **Peter**;
Andrew,
James and
John the sons of Zebedee...
surnamed “The sons of thunder”

Philip,
Bartholomew,
Matthew,
Thomas,
James *the son* of Alphaeus
Simon called Zelotes,
Judas *the brother* of James,
Thaddaeus,
Simon the Canaanite,
Judas Iscariot, betrayed him

LUKE 6:14–16

Simon, whom he also named **Peter**
Andrew his brother,
James and
John,

Philip,
Bartholomew,
Matthew

Judas Iscariot, the traitor

Eleven of these apostles carried on Jesus' work in the Apostolic church. In Acts 1:20–26, God directed the calling of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot in the quorum.³ The Gospel of Mark gives us the most details on the call of the Apostles (again consistent with the claim that Mark recorded Peter's memoirs). Only Matthew lists their names at the same time they are called as a quorum of the Twelve and sent out.

The Twelve's Commission Includes

Matthew 10:1–10; Mark 6:7–9; Luke 9:1–3

Jesus instructs the Twelve to preach the kingdom of God (Matthew 10:7; Luke 9:2) and heal (Matthew 10:1, 8; Luke 9:2), cast out devils and “all manner of sickness” (Matthew 10:1; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1). Though the Creator knew the differences between devils and sicknesses, the New Testament authors confused evil spirits for many illnesses, including emotional and mental challenges (i.e. deaf and dumb in Mark 9:25; epileptic in Matthew 17:15; etc.).

Matthew 10:5–10; Mark 6:8–9; Luke 9:3 “lost sheep” Jesus taught the Twelve rules for their missions. He instructed them to preach only to the lost sheep of Israel. Matthew includes a prohibition against gentiles and Samaritans. This seems at odds with the example Jesus set in John's Gospel when teaching the Samaritan woman and her fellow townspeople of Sychar. These Samaritans become, possibly, the first branch of Christianity.⁴

Matthew 10:9; Mark 6:8; Luke 9:3 “Scrip” was a knapsack or satchel. It was not needed because they were not to bring an extra “coat” (meaning something worn next to the skin, a tunic or undergarment), nor two pair of sandals, no money, or even bread/food (Matthew 10:10; Mark 6:9; Luke 9:3).

“Stave / Staff” Matthew and Luke include no need to bring a “stave” or “staff.” They were used either as a walking stick or weapon to protect against robbery. Mark includes a similar list of exclusions, with one exception: “take nothing for their journey *except a staff*” (NAE). Interestingly, the Mishnah (written later than the NT by rabbis), includes a list of things that were left outside of the temple before entering: a staff, sandals, wallet, and dust.⁵ Sacred space and sacred callings both left behind things of the world to focus on things of God.

Matthew 10:10 “laborers” When Jesus send the Twelve out, they are “workmen/*ergates*,” not as dignitaries or religious rulers.

Ministry Rules for Entering a House

Matthew 10:12–13; Mark 6:10; Luke 9:4

Matthew 10:12–13 “peace” Jesus offers advice for the first missionaries. If they are invited into someone's home to preach the word of God, Jesus' tells them to share their “peace” (Matthew 12:13). Peace or *shalom* is also a Hebrew greeting. Yet, here I think Jesus meant more. Peace is also the language and witness of the Spirit (D&C

6:23). Jesus also gave instructions on where to sleep. The practice of lodging within local homes on their journey was a customary practice of the Essenes and others in the ancient world.

Matthew 10:14; Mark 6:8; Luke 9:5 “dust off” The Lord also gave instructions on what to do if (or when) the apostles were rejected. If they shook the dust off their feet, it became a sign or testimony against the town (which we see in action by Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:51). Joseph Smith received a similar commandment as part of the restoration of all things. This is an ordinance against those who refuse to accept the gospel (D&C 60:15–17; 75:20; 84:92; 99:4). Joseph Fielding Smith explained, “The cleansing of their feet, either by washing or wiping off the dust, would be recorded in heaven as a testimony against the wicked. This act, however, was not to be performed in the presence of the offenders, lest thou provoke them, but in secret, and wash thy feet, as a testimony against them in the Day of Judgment.”⁶



Christ with His Disciples by A.N. Miranov. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Matthew 10:15 “judgment” If missionaries are doing God’s work, they do not need to fear rejection, as God will judge their efforts and reward them. Matthew adds that those who reject them will have a harsher judgement than the people of Gomorrah. This message parallels, “where much is given, much is required” (Luke 12:48).

Facing Persecution

Matthew 10:16–25; Luke 10:3

Under the direction of the Good Shepherd, the apostles go out as sheep among wolves. Well intended people may become deceived by Satan and become like wolves attacking God’s message.



Jesus Chooseth His Apostles by William Hole.

Matthew 10:16 When persecution results, Jesus gave more advice: be wise and innocent. The KJV reads: “wise as serpents,” an emblem of cunning. The JST changed it to “be ye therefore wise *servants*, and *as* harmless as doves.” This change encourages servants to be wise by following their master, Jesus.

Matthew 10:17 “Councils” were a tribunal who acted as a judge in each town (they were not allowed to issue a capital sentence, which was saved for the Sanhedrin, with Roman validation).

Matthew 10:17 “Scourging” or “flogging” is called for in the Law of Moses. One may receive 39 (one less than 40—the number for purifying) lashes with a whip of leather, with bones, and rocks at the ends.

Matthew 10:19 “No thought” means not to be, “anxious, or seek to promote one’s interests.” In the face of persecution—saints are not to worry about what to say. However, this does not mean that missionaries and members should not prepare for preaching and teaching opportunities. While we do so, the Lord promises that his Spirit can guide his servants at their times of need (also see Luke 12:11–12).

Matthew 10:20 When the apostles speak as directed by the Spirit, “the Spirit of your Father . . . speaketh in you.” This is also true for other missionaries and servants of the Lord who are guided in their ministry.

Matthew 10:21–23 These tragic disruptions of familial love are prophesied to come at the last days and at times and of ravishing wars—including AD 68–70 at the destruction of Jerusalem.

Matthew 10:26 To help those who will suffer such persecution, Jesus promised that justice would come.

The Value of Life

Matthew 10:27–33; Luke 12:2–9

Matthew 10:27 and Luke 12:2–3 offer a parallel account of Jesus’ encouragement to fearlessly confess him. “Proclaim upon housetops” has new meanings today with satellite dishes and digital clouds.

Matthew 10:28 and Luke 12:4–5 Jesus’ warning has not lost its pertinence over time. He asks us to be more worried about our spiritual condition than our physical condition. Our spiritual safety is at stake when counterfeits and falsehoods filter into our minds and hearts.

Matthew 10:29–31; Luke 12:6–7 Sparrows and hairs were used as examples of things that come and go—almost imperceptibly. Their minor value is used in contrast to the great worth of humanity.

Matthew 10:32–33; Luke 12:8–9 Christ will stand by those at the judgment bar, who stand up for Him day by day. This is terrific comfort for those enduring persecution. At the time the Gospels were written, many, if not most Christians, were persecuted or else they knew others who were suffering for their testimonies.

CONDITIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Matthew 10:34–42; Luke 12:51–53

Negative Consequences

In addition to restoring the full plan of happiness, Jesus’ discipleship also brought painful separations. He asked his followers to stand up for their beliefs, even at the cost of their lives. This was what the early Christians faced as the Gospels were being written—life and death decisions and separations from family members were sacrificed for Jesus’ sake. This message had very real personal application for them.

Matthew 10:34, Luke 12:51 The word for “peace” also means 1) “a state of national tranquility; exemption from the rage and havoc of war;” 2) “peace between individuals, i.e. harmony, discord;” 3) “security, safety, prosper-



Saint John the Baptist in Prison Visited by Two Disciples by Giovanni di Paolo. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ity, felicity.” Jesus taught that discipleship can bring *peace of mind and heart* and eternal rest (meaning exaltation). But in this life, discipleship also requires real sacrifice and brings great challenges.

Matthew 10:37; Luke 14:25–26 Jesus asks disciples to let nothing in life, including one’s family, detour us from following Him. Everything life has to offer is not worth what Jesus has to offer.

Matthew 10:38; Luke 14:27 The “cross” is and was the symbol of extreme suffering, crucifixion, or ignominy. We must be willing to die (and live) in the service of God. Elder James E. Talmage wrote, “Figuratively, to take, take up, or bear one’s cross is to endure suffering, affliction, or shame, like a criminal on his way to the place of crucifixion.”⁷ These verses require the reader to ask, “am I willing to pay a similar cost?” As we do not know what our personal sacrifices or costs will be, we must walk humbly before God, submitting our will to His. Obedient disciples seeking the spirit of inspiration are in training to heed God at any cost. The Lord gives most disciples an Abrahamic sacrifice, tailor-made for them, to prove and refine them. God’s requires whole heartedness from disciples, and the consequences of sacrifice are real.

Positive Consequences

Matthew 10:39 JST changes “findeth” to read: “*He who seeketh to save his life . . .*” The meaning is that we give up our personal desires or will to do the Lord’s will.

Matthew 10:40–41 Jesus promised that those who follow the Lord’s servants—apostles, prophets, righteous teachers—will receive the same rewards as those good leaders. (The KJV “righteous man” can be “humans.”) This is an amazing consequence! The workings of the Spirit of God are passed on from one disciple to another.

Matthew 10:42 Those hands who serve and feed little ones are very sacred to God and will be rewarded. Perhaps the “cup of water” in this verse also refers to the as those who share Christ’s living water.

Matthew 11:1 Matthew’s repeated phrase, “when Jesus had made an end…” hints that he will change the subject.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist’ Disciples’ Questions

Matthew 11:2–6; Luke 7:18–35

While John the Baptist was imprisoned in Herod Antipas’ Dead Sea fortress,⁸ his followers were distraught and came to Jesus with questions. Before we study this account—remember what you know about John the Baptist. How did he know Jesus was the Savior? Did he know he was preparing the way for Him? Matthew’s and Luke’s texts can be read as if the questions/answers were for John the Baptist’s disciples’ benefit. As all four Gospels (as well as 1 Nephi 11:27), claim that John the Baptist received a clear witness from God at Jesus’ baptism—I presume the questions are coming from the disciples. It helps to keep this in mind—as Jesus’ praise negates John the Baptist’s faith wavering. Yet we also must ask, “What effects does imprisonment have on humans and their loved ones?”

Matthew 11:1–3; Luke 7:18–19 Perhaps they expect Jesus to miraculously release John the Baptist. But the Lord cannot do that if God sees it best for John the Baptist to become a martyr. We know from Matthew 4:11 JST that Jesus sent angels to John the Baptist. Also note Matthew 11:3 JST addition points to Matthew’s focus of showing Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament (OT) Law and prophecies, “Art thou he *of whom it is written in the prophets* that *he* should come?”

Luke 7:20 “sent” Luke’s wordplay with “one sent/*apostolos/apesteilen*” can refer to Jesus, the apostles, and John the Baptist.

Matthew 11:4–6; Luke 7:21–3 The Lord’s examples include the sign that only the Messiah can perform—healing blind—as a sign of Him. Luke includes Jesus’ double witness of enacting miracles along with his verbal witness. The JST of Matthew 11:6 adds Jesus’ blessing on his cousin, “Blessed is *John and* whosoever shall not be offended in me.”

Jesus' Witness of John the Baptist

Matthew 11:7-19; Luke 7:24-35

Matthew 11:7 “a reed?” This is a statement of irony. Often, in the Gospels, Jesus taught by exaggerating, using irony, and shock-value to maintain the attention of his audience while teaching. When Jesus asked John the Baptist’s disciples what were they going out in the wilderness to find—was it something extraordinary? The use of wind is *NOT* the usual “*pneuma*/wind/spirit,” but is the Greek word “*anemos*/wind,” meaning, “a violent agitation and stream of air, a very strong tempestuous wind.” Could Jesus’ words have meant “were you looking to get shaken up or blown away?” The opposite follows.

Matthew 11:8–9 report Jesus reminding them that they did not go out to find a nicely dressed king. John the Baptist dressed in camel’s hair with a leather sash and ate desert foods like Elijah did (Mark 1:6). They went out find a prophet—a man who was God’s servant and testified of knowing God. Jesus also witnessed that John the Baptist was more than a prophet.

Matthew 11:10 Jesus explained the gap between the forerunner and himself as the Messiah by quoting Malachi 3:1. Malachi 3:1 is quoted in all four—standard works.⁹ Unfortunately, at least at this point, it appears that John the Baptist’s followers did not move toward understanding that Jesus was their Promised Messiah. It’s as if they accepted the burning match, but did not use it to light the candle.



Saint John the Baptist Revealing Christ to the Disciples by Salvator Rosa, 1655. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Matthew 11:11 Jesus offered remarkable praise of John the Baptist. One wonders, was Jesus referring to those living at that time, or for all mortal history?¹⁰ The prophet Joseph Smith defined this statement as John the Baptist having the 1) mission to prepare the way for Jesus, 2) baptized Jesus, and 3) acted as the legal administrator in the affairs of the kingdom by receiving and passing on the priesthood keys.¹¹

The phrase, “*least in the kingdom of heaven*” is used three times in the NT (twice in Matthew and once when Luke shared similar source materials). They do not mean the same thing though. The Greek words behind “least” are different. In Matthew 5:19 “least/*elachistos*” means small in size, or authority, or rank. Here, “least/*micros*,” also refers to age or time. When it is used in the Sermon on the Mount, it does not refer to Jesus, but here in Matthew 11:11, it may.

MATT 5:19

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach [them], the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

MATT 11:11

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Matthew 11:12–14 “suffereth violence” The Gospel of Luke stops sharing Matthew’s source material just for these four verses, and Matthew’s Gospel alone references the expectation of Elijah from Malachi 4:5. In Matthew 11:12, the word *violence*/*biastes*/*forceful*/*strong*, is only used one other time in Luke 16:16–17, “From the time of the Law all the prophets prophesied . . . until John the Baptist. For that time the Kingdom of heaven is violently attacked and violent men lay hands on it” (Anchor Bible Translation). The JST adds the joyful message that the violence that has attacked God’s kingdom will end: “but the days will come when the violent shall have no power . . . Yea, as many as have prophesied have foretold of these days” (Matthew 11:13, 14, JST Bible Appendix).

Matthew 11:15 “Those who have ears to hear” is repeated eight times in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; 7:16; Luke 8:8; 14:35). Endowed members receive a special blessing to hear the word of God if they live worthy of their temple covenants.

Matthew 11:16–17; Luke 7:29–32 The publicans, lawyers, and Pharisee’s positions were added by Luke. They treated Jesus and John the Baptist like children playing at the market, ignored by the adults. Some see this section as the Lord’s invitation to have John the Baptist’s disciples and Jesus’ other listeners to become fully initiated



Ruins of the ancient Great Synagogue at Capernaum (or Kfar Nahum) on the shore of the Lake of Galilee, Northern Israel. Photograph by Eddie Gerald. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

into higher ordinances. He invited them to the “wedding feast of the Lamb” and “his death” (both places where one hired flute players), but they would not receive his invitation.¹² A complementary additional interpretation comes from Hugh Nibley’s studies on prayer circles:

In Matt. 11:7, Jesus is speaking about John the Baptist’s followers and begins, “concerning John, what went ye out into the wilderness to see?” This is a challenge to the desert sectaries. They were out there, as the Serekh Scroll (VIII, 12ff.) so clearly tells us, to “prepare the way” (see Matt. 11:10). He spoke of John’s great mission as the herald of a dispensation, an “Elias, which was for to come” (Matt. 11:14), and then addresses the initiates: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (v. 15), describing the present generation as those rejecting John’s message (v. 12)—they would accept neither John nor the Lord (vs. 18–19): they refused to dance to their playing, nor would they mourn with them for the sins of the world (vs. 16–17). The knowledge is properly guarded – “he that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (v. 15), a hint to the initiated that it is meant only for them. In the Acts of John, the Lord says, “Grace is dancing. I would pipe: Dance all of you. I would mourn: mourn all of you!” The connection with Matthew is undeniable, and again the limitation of the real meaning to the inner circle: “He that does not move in the circle knows not what is happening. Amen.” An important clue is the likening to little children in Matt. 11:16.¹³

Matthew 11:18–19; Luke 7:33–35 While John the Baptist is described as an Old Testament (OT) “prophet-look-alike” (as described earlier—he ate ritually clean foods from Leviticus 11:22, “locust,” and wild date honey; and from Luke 1:15, he drank “neither wine nor strong drink”), the Lord on the other hand, is condemned for living a normal Jewish life—eating and drinking as the Law called for. Later, Matthew 14:11 and Mark 6:28 speak of John the Baptist’s beheading as part of King Herod’s birthday celebrations, but Luke avoided it.

GALILEAN MINISTRY CONTINUES

Woes to Galilean Cities

Matthew 11:20-24; Luke 10:12-15

Matthew 11:20; Luke 10:12 “Woe” Jesus calls three towns and cities around the sea of Galilee to repentance. The meaning of repentance is slightly different in different cultures and languages. In Greek it includes: “heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins.” In Hebrew, “to [re]turn;” in Chinese to “change your heart every day.” The restored scriptures give us the most information and the broadest definitions for repentance. It has always been at the core of coming unto Christ.

- Chorazin was two miles north of Capernaum in a hilly area now totally covered with black basalt.
- Bethsaida was the small fishing village where Peter, Andrew, James, and John were born.
- Capernaum was on the northern crest of the sea, a wealthy city and a major Roman cross-road.
- Tyre and Sidon were strong Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean coast from Joshua’s time.
- Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for wickedness during Abraham and Lot’s lifetimes.



Ruins of the ancient Great Synagogue at Capernaum (or Kfar Nahum) on the shore of the Lake of Galilee, Northern Israel. Photograph by Eddie Gerald. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Jesus Thanked His Father

Matthew 11:25-27

Matthew 11:25-27; Luke 10:21:24 “Revealed ...to babes” Jesus thanked his Father for keeping precious truths for the innocent. The flow of these passages doesn’t seem to quite fit together in Matthew. Fortunately, there are helpful JST additions: “*There came a voice from heaven, and Jesus answered. . .* And in v. 27 the last phrase is replaced with, “they to whom the Son will reveal himself; they shall see the Father also.” These are powerful doctrinal additions (Luke also has clarifying, but different JST additions).

Come unto Christ

Matthew 11:28-30

Matthew 11:28 “Come unto Christ and find rest to your soul” This outlines Jesus’ call and the purpose of His Church. The “Lord’s rest” is defined in the Book of Mormon as entering into God’s presence—or the sanctification that comes to those worthy to live with Him (Alma 13:12, 16; 29–30; 16:17; 60:13; Moroni 7:3; etc.).



Image by skeeze on Pixabay.

Matthew 11:30 “my yoke” Isn’t it interesting that the Lord used the image of a yoke? Especially, an easy or light yoke. Jesus asks us to put on his yoke to walk beside him, to really conform to his direction. In this analogy, our load is easier because we are walking beside a yoke-fellow who is stronger. God’s commandments are not hard to live—in fact, life is easier when we live as God directs. A yoke is only difficult if we don’t want to go where our yoke-fellow or master is leading us. Carrying the image further, when they work together both grow stronger and both to do meaningful work. A yoke allows the trainer to teach the trainee, alongside, not in front or behind. This allows the trainer and trainee to strengthen their relationship as well as their power. When both yoke-fellows pull the load, a mutuality exists, teamwork, and accomplishment. “Christ’s Gospel is not a ‘do-it-yourself program,’ but rather it is a do-it-with-Christ program.”¹⁴

Lord of the Sabbath

Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5

Matthew 12:1; Luke 6:1-2 “sabbath” As Jesus and his disciples walked through a field, they practiced the Mosaic Law of “gleaning.” This law asked farmers to leave a little food to provide for poor or travelers (Leviticus 23:22). The Pharisees who observed Jesus’ traveling band were upset about the specific day they choose to glean. The word “sabbath” is mentioned 55 times in the NT with Luke using it the most frequently with 17 times. The strict law-enforcing Pharisees were obsessed with their Sabbath *Oral Laws*.

Shortly after 600 BC, when the Jews were taken captive to Babylon, they tried to build a “fence” around their commandments.¹⁵ This was especially detrimental to the fourth of Moses’ 10 Commandments: Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy (Exodus 20:8, BSB). Scribes systematized their definition of “work” into 39 categories (or “forty save one”). In an attempt to build a fence or to protect the Sabbath, they forbade each of these types of work:

(1) sowing, (2) ploughing, (3) reaping, (4) binding sheaves, (5) threshing, (6) winnowing, (7) cleansing crops, (8) grinding, (9) sifting, (10) kneading, (11) baking, (12) shearing wool, (13) washing, (14) beating, (15) dyeing, (16) spinning, (17) weaving, (18) making two loops, (19) weaving two threads, (20) separating two threads, (21) tying [a knot], (22) loosening [a knot], (23) sewing two stitches, (24) tearing in order to sew two stitches, (25) hunting a gazelle, (26) slaughtering or (27) flaying or (28) salting, (29) curing its skin, (30) scraping it or, (31) cutting it up, (32) writing two letters, (33) erasing in order to write two letters, (34) building, (35) pulling down, (36) putting out fire, (37) lighting fire, (38) striking with the hammer, and (39) taking aught from one domain into another.

Closer to the time of the NT, Rabbis elaborated further on these 39 banned labors to include hundreds of micro-manage-style details. For example, the Mishnah records that you could not carry a handful of straw, a dried fig's bulk of foodstuff, a piece of leather, etc. To protect against ploughing or cultivate the dirt, one could not spit in the dirt, only on a rock on the Sabbath.¹⁶

Matthew 12:3–7; Mark 2:23–26; Luke 6:3–4 “read what David did” Jesus answered the Pharisees’ questions by appealing to scriptures—just as he did with Satan’s temptations. He began with a story of King David from 1 Samuel 21:3–6. Luke and Mark end there, but Matthew includes two more scriptural accounts from Numbers 28:9–10 and Hosea 6:6.

Matthew 12:6 “One greater than the temple” Jesus rightly equated himself to the temple, as it was created as a pattern of him. Paul explained that it acted as, “a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Galatians 3:24). As a few examples, we see the Savior in the washing for cleansing and anointing/*messiah* for sanctification, in the altar as a place of sacrifice, in the unblemished animals as vicarious offerings, in the blood shed to carry sin, in the veil as a meeting place between God and man, and in the mercy seat or seat of at-one-ment. The whole high priest’s experience on the Day of Atonement speaks of the Redeemer, starting with selecting the scapegoat to carry Israel’s sins through the veil onto the ark and the covenant (Leviticus 16). The path to the Holy of Place was “the way” back to the tree of life (menorah) to partake without sins and from there through the veil into the Holy of Holies. Each of these things depicts aspects of Christ’s

Disciples Eat Wheat on the Sabbath by James Tissot.





at-one-ment. He is the great or real high priest who goes through the veil to enter God's presence. Every aspect of the Mosaic temple spoke of our Creator who took on flesh as Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus understated the facts when he said, "in this place is one greater than the temple."

Matthew 2:27 "The sabbath was made for man," only Mark leaves us this gem—made all the brighter with its JST addition: "Wherefore the Sabbath was given unto man for a day of rest; and also that man should glorify God . . ." Jesus reoriented the Jews to honor the Sabbath as a day of worship, rest, healing, and doing good.

Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5 All three synoptic Gospels emphasize Jesus' divinity, "the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." As the Creator of the world He knows what is best for His Creations.

Jesus Healed a Withered Hand on the Sabbath

Matthew 12:9-24; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11

Matthew 12:9; Mark 3:1; Luke 6:6 "right" Jesus entered a synagogue to see a man with a withered hand. Only Luke, the physician, included that it was his *right* hand. A withered right hand is significant as it was to perform all "clean" functions, thus if it were withered, it was "unclean." Furthermore, whatever he touched would be unclean with his good left hand would be unclean. No doubt he would have been ostracized for this.

Luke's Gospel specifically points out in one-third of the 26 healings listed that Jesus performed them on the Sabbath. This was highly offensive to the Pharisees as there were oral laws against healing on the Sabbath, and they held these oral traditions as scripture.

In the oral laws that governed the Sabbath, rabbis outlawed healing as a form of work. If one dislocated a joint or broke a bone on the Sabbath, oral laws forbade you to set the fracture or relocate the joint because once in place, the victim's body would work to heal itself, thus breaking the Sabbath.¹⁷ One could take out a thorn with "a sewing-needle" as long as the needle was not used for sewing.¹⁸ Certain foods, like Greek hyssop, were often used for medicinal purposes, so they made a law to not cook with it on the Sabbath in case it might stimulate the work of healing.¹⁹ Ironically, Rabbi Meir gave permission to use certain cures on the Sabbath: "a nail of one that was crucified" to cure a festering wound, or a locust's egg to cure an ear ache, or a jackal's tooth to cure sleepiness (if the jackal were still alive) and sleeplessness (if the jackal were dead).²⁰

Luke 6:8a "He knew their thoughts" was pointed out by Luke alone. I believe that means Jesus knows ours too.

Matthew 12:11; Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9 "to do good" Luke repeatedly highlighted the Lord's doing good on the Sabbath. I think Jesus deliberately broke the "oral Sabbath laws," as a way to denounce them. Yet it appears that he lived the Mosaic Law completely.

Matthew 3:3; Luke 6:8b-9 "Stand forth" Jesus got everyone's attention by having the disabled man stand in the middle of the synagogue to receive his healing.

Matthew 12:12-14; Mark 3:5-6; Luke 6:10-11 "do well" Jesus' benchmark for appropriate Sabbath activities is if it does good and saves lives. I fear our generation is on the opposite spectrum of the Pharisees of his day. Modern prophets have called us to reexamine our Sabbath observance. We can fine-tune by asking the question, is this a "good, better, or best" thing to do on the Sabbath.²¹



Jesus Healed Multitudes

Matthew 12:15–21; Mark 3:7–12; Luke 6:17–19

Jesus' audience changed to a larger group gathered. Matthew saw this healing as a fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1–3. In similar instances, Jesus healed many in large groups, which are described across the four Gospels. The multitudes included seekers from the Mediterranean, Jerusalem, and Judea. Similar events are recorded by Mark 3:8, at the seaside, and Luke 6:17 in a valley or flat plane.

Jesus Healed a Blind and Dumb Man

Matthew 12:22–30, Mark 3:22–27, Luke 11:14–18, John 7:20

Matthew 12:22; Luke 11:14–15 “one possessed” Social and medical understanding labeled one “possessed with a devil” when they had birth defects or other “abnormal” behavior. The opposite may be truer as those with disabilities often have extra divine blessings.²² We see evidence that the hosts of Satan were clearly working at the time of Jesus, but more likely in the hearts and minds of those who attacked Jesus rather than those with disabilities. The healing of the blind and dumb man was thrown into that category, too (Luke only includes that he was dumb). Blindness was so difficult in the ancient world that blind infants were often killed rather than to try to take care of them. Later in the Jewish world, the cause of blindness was attached to “punishment for specific sins—such as the taking of bribes, feigning blindness, negligence in feeding the poor, improper behavior during cohabitation, and faulty education for one’s son or pupil.”²³

Matthew 12:23 “Son of David” (JST capitalizes Son) An onlooker sees Jesus healing the blind as evidence that he is the *Messiah ben Judah*, or son of David (as prophesied in Isaiah 35:5). One hundred years before Jesus' birth, Jews combed through their scriptures to find all the statements that referred to the coming of their promised Messiah. They compiled them into a document called, “Psalms of Solomon.”

Matthew 12:24–27 Mark 3:22–26; Luke 11:15–18 “Beelzebub” Even though this is a name used for Satan in the NT, it is probably from the god of Ekron, *Baalzebub*, meaning “the lord of flies,” or, “the lord of dung.” Jesus pointed out their faulty logic and tried to teach them with an example of a parable or story of a divided house.

Matthew 12:28–30 Mark 3:27; Luke 11:19–23 “the stronger man” The discussion on the devil’s power provides evidence that Jesus was stronger, and an enemy of wickedness. Even though Satan and his power were, and are, misunderstood in the ancient and modern worlds, we have lots of evidence that Satan reigns over many demons who opposed Jesus in the Bible and modern scripture. The JST of Matthew 12:28 is one of those: “For they also cast out devils by the Spirit of God, for unto them is given power over devils, that they may cast them out.”

Forgiveness for Repentance—Except the Sin against the Holy Ghost

Matthew 12:31–37; Mark 3:28–30; Luke 12:10

Matthew 12:31; Mark 3:28 “sins . . . forgiven” The JST in both Mark and Matthew add important messages on repentance and forgiveness. Mark 3:28 adds: “All sins *which men have committed when they repent*, shall be forgiven them, *for I came to preach repentance unto the sons of men . . . [They] shall be forgiven them that come unto me and do the works which they see me do.*” Likewise, Matthew 12:31 adds that they “shall be forgiven unto men *who receive me and repent.*” Both of these qualifiers teach an important lesson about God’s conditions for forgiveness.

Matthew 12:32–33; Mark 3:29 “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost” is the one unforgiveable sin. This is not as simple as ignoring a prompting. The Lord taught a similar message to our dispensation, “The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which shall not be forgiven in the world nor out of the world, is in that ye commit murder wherein ye shed innocent blood, and assent unto my death, after ye have received my new and everlasting covenant, saith the Lord God; and he that abideth not this law can in nowise enter into my glory, but shall be damned, saith the Lord” (D&C 132:27; also Jacob 7:19; Alma 39:6). The prophet Joseph Smith elaborated on this, “To commit the unpardonable sin . . . he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened to him, and to deny the Plan of Salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it.”²⁴

Matthew 12:34 “vipers” Three times Matthew elicits this image from Eden, likening the wicked in his audience to snakes or followers of the devil (Matthew 3:7; 23:33).

Matthew 12:36–37 “every idle word,” or empty, careless or thoughtless words (NIV, ESV, ISV). Jesus the Judge warns that our words will condemn ourselves.



Holy Spirit Window in St. Peter’s Basilica, Vatican, Italy.
Photograph by Antoine Taveneaux via Wikimedia Commons.

Sign of Jonah

Matthew 12:38-42; Luke 11:16, 29-32

Matthew 12:39-40; Luke 11:29-32 “Sign of Jonah” The Gospels of Matthew and Luke use Jesus’ statement differently. In Matthew it is repeated twice (12:39; 16:4), both refer to a sign of Jesus’ resurrection, “as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale so will the Son of Man be.” In Luke, the sign of Jonah points to repentance. The Assyrians repented after Jonah’s preaching, and they will condemn the Jews who heard Jesus and did not repent. (Note how Luke repeatedly highlights the gentiles as the precursor to change in Christianity; Luke 4:24-27; 8:26-39; 10:1-8; 11:31.)

Matthew 12:42 Luke 11:32 “Queen of the South” is the Queen of Sheba, from 1 Kings 10:11-10. She exemplifies another gentile, who wisely came to honor Solomon.



Jonah and the Whale by Pieter Lastman, 1621. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Return of the Evil Spirit

Matthew 12:43–46, Luke 11:24–26

Matthew 12:43–46 “seven other spirits” In this story, Jesus emphasizes Satan’s power, and teaches humans to take personal responsibility to keep evil influences away. To do so, humans must fill their souls with goodness, and their lives with good habits. The JST connects Matthew’s account of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost with the seven evil spirits (see Bible appendix). The JST adds a section on Jesus, explaining how someone could succumb to denying God because the devils want to completely take over—with seven evil spirit representing a complete take over or a whole possession. Devils continue to tempt and derail pure people with good intentions. Even after a person has had the heavens open to them, Satan can tempt them. The JST warns that those who have received an inner cleansing from God (and Joseph Smith later taught, a sure witness), still need to be diligent to avoid temptation.

Jesus’ Spiritual Kindred

Matthew 12:46–50; Mark 3:31–35; Luke 8:19–21

Matthew 12:46–47; Mark 3:2–32; Luke 8:19–20 “mother and brethren” Joseph, Mary’s husband, is not present during Jesus’ ministry or passion in any of the Gospels. This leads us to question if he were still living. But the rest of the family came to visit Jesus. Mary and Joseph’s children are listed in Matthew 13:55–56 (James, Joses, Simon, Judas, and sisters). John 7:5 and Mark 3:21, both hint that Jesus’ half-siblings did not believe Jesus’ divine calling, yet. This may have prompted part of Jesus’ statement.

Matthew 12:48–50; Mark 3:33–35; Luke 8:21 “Whosoever shall do the will of God” become Jesus’ kindred. Luke adds “hear the word,” as well as “do it.” We find a similar message in the early Christian church across the world, “for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:14; also see 3 Nephi 9:7; Moroni 7:26, 48). With the Spirit as their guide, they follow God’s will.

Header Image: Calling of the Apostles by Domenico Ghirlandaio, 1481. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

¹ In Romans 16:7. Paul mentions a female disciple named, Junia who was “well known to the apostles” (ESV), or “prominent among the apostles” (CEB, RSV, NRSV), or “outstanding among the apostles” (NIV), or “leaders among the apostles” (NIRV). As the various translation show, the verse can be read in many ways.

² My dissertation explored Joseph Smith’s understanding of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. By searching everything he we have recorded that he wrote or said on the subject, I am convinced that Joseph thought the power of God available to all covenant members of God’s kingdom regardless of gender or calling. The keys he saw differently. See Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Joseph Smith’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit Contrasted with Cartwright, Campbell, Hodge, and Finney*, (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2010), appendix 4–5. For an abbreviated version, free online see: Lynne H. Wilson, “A New Pneumatology: Comparing Joseph Smith’s Doctrine of the Spirit with His Contemporaries and the Bible,” *BYU Studies*, 51.1 (Winter, 2012).

³ History adds to the biblical account recording the Apostles missions:

| APOSTLE | DESTINATION |
|---|--|
| Simon Peter | Parthia [Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia], Britain |
| Andrew (Peter’s brother) | Cappadocia, Galatia, Bithynia, Scythia |
| Simon the Zealot | North Africa [Egypt, Cyrene, Mauritania, Lybia], Britain |
| James son of Alphaeus | Spain, (and possibly Britain and Ireland) |
| Thomas | Parthia, Media, Persia [Carman, Hyrcani, Bactria—or Iran and Afghanistan today], Northwest India |
| Bartholomew | Parthia, Media, Persia, Northwest India |
| Judas (Libbaeus Thaddaeus) | Assyria, Mesopotamia |
| Philip | Scythia, Upper (Northern) Asia Minor |
| Matthew | Parthia, Asiatic Aethiopia (Hindu Kush) |
| John | Gaul? (modern France) |
| James (brother of John) | Beheaded with a sword by Herod (Acts 12) |
| Matthias (replaced Judas Iscariot) | Dacia (Romania), Upper Macedonia |
| Paul (apostle to Gentiles, Israelites, kings) | Southern Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, Spain |

⁴ The name Christians is not used until Paul preaches in Antioch with Barnabas. Earlier names of the movement were “the way” (Acts 9:2), and the “sect of the Nazarene” (Acts 24:5).

⁵ Mishnah, *Zeraim*, *Berakoth* 7.5.

⁶ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Seek Ye Earnestly* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1970).

⁷ James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1915), 667.

⁸ John the Baptist was imprisoned for speaking against Herod Antipas marrying his brother, Herod Philip's wife, Herodias (see LDS Bible Dictionary, p. 701).

⁹ Malachi 3:1 is quoted in: 3 Ne 24:1; Matthew 11:1; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27; JS-H 1:36. Malachi is also quoted in several other verses in D&C 45; 110; 138; LXX Exodus 23:20, is also similar to Malachi's promise.

¹⁰ A similar generalization about the Joseph Smith was written at his passing and as recorded in D&C 135:3.

¹¹ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1976), 275 (For original scribal spellings see the JosephSmithPapers.org). "How is it that John was considered one of the greatest prophets? His miracles could not have constituted his greatness. First. He was entrusted with a divine mission of preparing the way before the face of the Lord. Whoever had such a trust committed to him before or since? No man.

"Secondly. He was entrusted with the important mission, and it was required at his hands, to baptize the Son of Man. Whoever had the honor of doing that? Whoever had so great a privilege and glory? Whoever led the Son of God into the waters of baptism, and had the privilege of beholding the Holy Ghost descend in the form of a dove, or rather in the sign of the dove, in witness of that administration? The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in the sign of a dove. The Holy Ghost is a personage, and is in the form of a personage. It does not confine itself to the form of the dove, but in sign of the dove. The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a dove; but the sign of a dove was given to John to signify the truth of the deed, as the dove is an emblem or token of truth and innocence.

"Thirdly. John, at that time, was the only legal administrator in the affairs of the kingdom there was then on the earth, and holding the keys of power. The Jews had to obey his instructions or be damned, by their own law; and Christ Himself fulfilled all righteousness in becoming obedient to the law which he had given to Moses on the mount, and thereby magnified it and made it honorable, instead of destroying it. The son of Zacharias wrested the keys, the kingdom, the power, the glory from the Jews, by the holy anointing and decree of heaven, and these three reasons constitute him the greatest prophet born of a woman."

¹² Kent Brown, *BYU Commentary: Luke a new translation?*

¹³ Hugh Nibley, "The Early Christian Prayer Circle," *BYU Studies*, 19, no. 1 (1978): 50. The quote continues: "The Kasr el-Wazz fragment says, 'We made a circle and surrounded him and he said, 'I am in your midst in the manner of these little children. . .,' he added, 'Gather to me, O holy members of my body, and when I recite the hymn, you say Amen.' The central act of the prayer circle was prayer, and it was 'as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples' (Luke 11:1-2) . . . In exactly the same situation in the Book of Mormon the resurrected Lord blesses the little children 'one by one,' but he begins his discourse to the Nephites by telling them three times that no one can approach him except as a little child. (See 3 Ne. 9:22, 11:37) The prayer circle is the nearest approach to the Lord that men make on earth—and they can approach him only 'as little Children.'"

¹⁴ James Harris, *New Testament and the Latter-Day Saints*, 94.

¹⁵ Mishnah, *Avoth*, 1:1; "raise up many disciples, and make a fence around The Law."

16 Mishnah, *Shabbath*, 7:2–4; 8:3.

17 Ibid., 22:6

18 Ibid., 17:2

19 Ibid., 14:3

20 Ibid., 6:10

21 Dallin Oaks, “Good, Better, Best,” *General Conference*, Oct 2007.

22 <https://www.lds.org/topics/disability>

23 Avraham Steinberg, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 106–107. The “improper behavior” included keeping one’s eyes open during conception.

24 Smith, *TPJS*, 358.