

12 At that time Yeshua was walking through the grainfields on Shabbat. Because his disciples were hungry, they began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. ²When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, Look! Your disciples are doing what is not lawful on Shabbat!

—commentary—

12:1 At that time – After establishing that Yeshua did not come to bring peace but sword, and that those who are weary should come to him for rest, the author narrates how Yeshua wielded his ‘sword’ on a Shabbat, the resting day. He has begun to embody his role as Messiah ben Yosef (sefirah of Yesod) because, as the author previously pointed out, the nation did not accept the call for repentance, and so his Messianic role was split into two, following the tradition of the “son of man” messianic consciousness.

12:1 At that time – While in Mattai “At that time” refers to the events of the previous chapters, thus locating the incident in Galilee, the version in Luke implies it took place after Passover, perhaps in Judea (cf. *Luke 6:1*).

12:1 Yeshua was walking through the grainfields – The text suggests he and his many followers were caught there on Shabbat during their travels. Since they attended the synagogue service on that very same day, they had probably spent the night in the open and slept at or by the grainfields.

12:1 Because his disciples were hungry – It was not the common hunger one feels after waking up or before meals; otherwise the author would not have bothered to explain they were hungry. They did not carry with them a bag for extra food (cf. *Matt. 10:10*) and having been travelling from town to town and finding no place to lodge before Shabbat, Yeshua’s disciples were short of provisions. This can be deduced by two factors: Firstly, because Yeshua compares his disciples’ situation to David’s moment of necessity (cf. *1Sam. 21:5-7*), and secondly, because the disciples ate the grain raw at that very place.

12:1 pick some heads of grain and eat them – It is written: “When you enter your neighbour’s grainfield you may pluck the heads of grain with your hands, but you must not lift a sickle upon your neighbour’s standing grain” (*Deut. 23:26*). The poor can take grain from the corners of the fields and leftovers of the reapings (cf. *Lev. 19:10; 23:22*). However, the melakha (work) which involves doing these acts should be avoided during Shabbat.

12:2 When the pharisees saw this – As explained in chapter 9, the author is using the term Pharisees in its broadest sense, as a contrast to the Galilean Hassidic movement, so the term covers any group who, belonging to the Pharisaic faith, antagonized the Hassidim and more specifically Yeshua’s movement. Among these Pharisees there were the Haverim, the Hellenistic Pharisees and those who were Herod-friendly, if not Herodians themselves. The Talmudic sages were not Herod-friendly, but the Pharisees who antagonize Yeshua in the Gospels are working closely with Roman instituted sects, more precisely: Herodians and Sadducees. The Gospel of Mark makes the best case for this (cf. *Mark 3:6; 8:15; 12:13*).

12:2 Your disciples are doing what is not lawful on Shabbat – Yeshua lived in the era of the first Tannaim, when the schools of Hillel and Shammai were the paradigm of what was going on within the Pharisaic world in Israel, namely, a vast amalgam of opposing opinions concerning Jewish law, i.e., hallakha. In the first century the debates, discrepancies and confrontations on hallakha were taking place between the many different schools of thought, and so Yeshua’s point of view on Shabbat was one among many and totally within the Pharisaic frame. These debates were for the sake of heaven and about them it is written “Iron sharpens iron” (*Prov. 27:17*), which is interpreted to mean that “Torah scholars sharpen each other in hallakha” (*Rashi*). The outcome of all these debates would be recorded later in the Mishna (3rd century) and in the Gemara, thus becoming the source for the Jewish law which was to be observed after the fall of the Temple. It is written that on one occasion Rabbi Ullah visited Pumbedita and saw scholars shaking their garments – he thought, to remove the dust – and he accused those rabbis of desecrating Shabbat. “They are doing what is not lawful on Shabbat”. Rabbi Yehuda defended his students and told them that since they were not stringent about this matter, they should not worry about shaking their garments in Rabbi Ullah’s presence (*Shabbat 147a*).

³But he answered, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry and so too those who were with him? ⁴How he entered the house of God, and ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? ⁵Or have you not read in the Torah that the priests in the Temple disregard the Shabbat and yet are innocent? ⁶But I tell you that something greater than the Temple is here. ⁷If you had understood, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifices,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸For the son of man is master of the Shabbat. ⁹And Yeshua went from there and came into their synagogue.

—commentary—

12:3 How he entered the house of God – The “house of Hashem” (*1Sam. 3:15*), in reference to the Sanctuary, for David went to the courtyard where the priest baked the showbread (cf. *1sam 21:2; Menakhot 95b*). When David was escaping from Shaul, he went to Nov and requested food from Ahimelekh the priest, but the priest responded that the only food he had was the showbread of the Tabernacle (*1Sam. 21:5, 7*), which only the priests are allowed to consume. But as the sages explain, David requested the showbread because he was famished (*Menakhot 95b-96a*), and “preservation of life takes priority” (*Ketuvot 19a*). It is written about the commandments: “A man must do and live by them” (*Lev. 18:5*). “It says: live by them, and not: die by them” (*Yoma 85b*). Therefore, Yeshua’s ethical response (mussar) is not only found in the Talmud itself, but it also became the Jewish normative (hallakha).

12:5 the priests in the Temple disregard the Shabbat – As the sages say, “With regard to the twelve loaves of the high priest’s griddle-cake offering: their kneading, the forming of their loaves and their baking take place inside the Temple courtyard, and all types of labour involved in those actions override Shabbat” (*Menakhot 96a*). Also, “The sacrificial service supersedes Shabbat” (*Shabbat 132b*).

12:6 something greater than the Temple is here – Just like the sacrificial service at the Temple is greater than Shabbat, saving a life is greater than the Temple itself, as the sages taught, “Acts of lovingkindness are greater than the sacrifices and burnt offerings which Israel will bring upon the altar, for it is written: I desire mercy, not sacrifices” (*Pirquei d’Rabbi Eliezer, ch.12 [14a]*). Incidentally, Yeshua is about to quote this very same verse.

12:7 If you had understood, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifices’ – This is a passage from Hosea (6:6). Yeshua defends his disciples by calling them “innocent”; what they were doing was justified and therefore, was not considered a violation of Shabbat. At the same time, by citing them the words of the prophet, he is accusing them of not having mercy. When they saw that his disciples had nothing to eat, they should have provided food for them as an act of compassion, instead of accusing them of breaking Shabbat. It seems they conceded that Yeshua was right, because far from splitting and going each group their own way, Yeshua visits their synagogue right afterwards (cf. 12:9).

12:8 For the son of man is master of the Shabbat – The meaning is that Shabbat can be relativized for the sake of people, as Mark explains: “Shabbat was made for man; not man for Shabbat” (*Mark 2:27*). This is a principle of the Pharisees, as they taught: “Shabbat was handed over to you, and not you to the Shabbat” (*Mekhilta Shabbeta I on Exodus 31:13 [109b]*), and in the words of Rabbi Yonathan: “Shabbat is committed to your hands, not you to its hands” (*Yoma 85b*). “The son of man” refers to every son of man, because it is for the sake of every man that Shabbat can be relativized in case of necessity.

—relevant quotes—

“Rabbis Ishmael, Aqiva and Eleazar ben Azariah were once walking on the road, and Levi haSaddar and Rabbi Ishmael, son of Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, were walking behind them. Then this question was asked for them: Whence do we know that preservation of life פקוח נפש overrides Shabbat? — Rabbi Ishmael answered and said: If a thief be found breaking in [and he is struck and dies, there is no blood-guiltiness] (*Exodus 22:1*). Now, if this is the case, even when it is uncertain whether he came to take one’s money or one’s life; and although the shedding of blood pollutes the land and the Shekhina departs from Israel, yet it is lawful to save oneself at the cost of other’s life, how much more so preserving one’s life overrides Shabbat!” (*Yoma 85a*)

“If temple service overrides Shabbat, how much more preserving one’s life overrides Shabbat!” (*Yoma 85b*)

¹⁰And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned him and asked, Is it lawful to heal on Shabbat? that they might accuse him. ¹¹He said to them, If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on Shabbat, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹²How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore, it is lawful to do good on Shabbat. ¹³Then he said to the man, Stretch out your hand. So he stretched it out and it was restored, just like the other.

commentary

12:10 And a man was there – Since Yeshua had won the previous argument, these men invited him to their synagogue because “a man was there whose hand was withered” and so they thought: “This man is teaching that we can disregard Shabbat in order to save a life, but let us see if he disregards Shabbat for the sake of a man whose life is not in danger”.

12:10 is it lawful to heal on Shabbat? – There is not prohibition in the Torah about healing on Shabbat. The rule that forbids healing on Shabbat is a fence d’rabbanan; i.e., a measure by the Tannaitic rabbis, but in Yeshua’s days it was not universally binding since all these matters were still being debated. And why was this fence created? To prevent people from preparing their own medicines from scratch (cf. *Shabbat 53b*), for it was the custom to crush herbs or to cook remedies for the sick, and oftentimes they did so on Shabbat instead of having it ready the day before. Therefore, building on the principle that such prohibition was not binding in Yeshua’s days, the measure did not even contemplate Yeshua’s miraculous healings, because he did not prepare herbs or ointments, or prescript therapy. He healed people through faith. Still, If we want to argue that the hallakha existed as binding in Yeshua’s days – which was certainly not the case – even the most recent codes of Jewish law exonerate him, for healing under specific conditions is still permitted today (as we will see below), and notice that modern orthodox hospitals in Israel still run on Shabbat. We must not overlook the fact that hallakhic codes acknowledge the existence of several differing opinions throughout the centuries, so the final word was never set on stone, but rather, subject to each community’s custom, as it says, “there are those who say this, there are those who say that”... “there are those who forbid it when a limb is not in danger; there are those who allow even if the limb is not in danger...” etc. (cf. *Shulkhan Arukh, Orakh Hayim 328:17*).

12:11 If any of you has a sheep – A case for Shabbat exceptions is often made through a ‘qal vaKhome’ argument. Yeshua is saying: “You are hypocritically testing whether I will help a human being on Shabbat when, in fact, you do not hesitate to help an animal! But is not a person more important?”

12:12 It is lawful to do good on Shabbat – He is defending his case through mussar: “I say that you are missing the point of the Torah. You expect me to ignore this fellow, although I can help him right now. How can I enjoy Shabbat and pretend that God takes pleasure with me, when my neighbour is unwell, suffering beside me, and I do not move one finger for him? What is the heart of the Torah? To rest on Shabbat? Or is it: doing to others what you want them to do to you?” Luke records another incident In which Yeshua defends his case, not through mussar, but through hallakha (*Luke 13:16*): “You untie your ox or your donkey on Shabbat and lead them to watering” – Because, although the act of untying the knot is a Shabbat prohibition derived from the Torah,^a you still do so in order to feed your domestic animals,^b and even if you have to untie two knots of grain for them, you acknowledge there is nothing wrong with it^c – and “yet, you criticize me for loosening a woman who was bound by Satan”, even though the miracle of healing does not involve any of the 39 melakhot derived from the Torah. The sages taught: “If circumcision, which rectifies only one of the 248 limbs of the body supersedes Shabbat, how much more the saving of the whole body!” (*Yoma 85b*). This parallels Yeshua’s reasoning in the fourth gospel (*John 7:23*), for he argues: “A boy is circumcised on Shabbat so that the Torah of Moses will not be invalidated – because circumcision, the correction of one part of the body, must be done on the eighth day – so why are you angry at me because I restored a man’s whole body on Shabbat?”

12:13 stretch out your hand – There are three principles by which healing on Shabbat is nowadays permitted even when a person’s life is not at risk at all, and these are “sakanat eivar” (literally: danger of a limb סכנת איבר), “Kholeh kol gufo” (the whole body is sick, חולה כל גופו) and “Tzar gadol” (a terrible pain צער גדול). These are cases in which someone is bodily disabled to function as a whole person. When somebody is losing the function of a limb, or if he has to stay in bed, or if he suffers from a fracture that bothers him, then he can be healed on Shabbat because compassion for his pain overrides Shabbat. If a part of the body is especially fastidious or if the body’s vitality is like one who must stay in bed, then his healing precedes Shabbat, and more than that; he is also allowed to eat food which is not kosher for the sake of his recovery (cf. *Hilkhhot Yesodei Torah 5:8*). With the course of time some loopholes have been made, such as having a gentile do the healing for you – which, by the way, is not without controversy, because the principle is:

^a cf. *Shabbat 111b*; *S”A haRav 317:2*.

^b cf. *Orakh Hayim 324:11*.

^c cf. *Shabbat 155a*.

¹⁴But the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him, that they may do away with him.
¹⁵Aware of this, Yeshua departed from there. Great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all. ¹⁶He charged them not to make him known. ¹⁷This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁸Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved, in whom I delight; I will put my spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. ¹⁹He will not contend nor cry out; no man will hear his voice in the streets. ²⁰A bruised reed he will not break, and a flickering lamp he will not extinguish, till he has brought justice to victory. ²¹In his name the nations will put their hope.

—commentary—

“No work shall be done **בָּהֶם** with them” (*Exodus 12:16*), which the Melkhilta interprets to mean “No melakha shall be done [by others] for you” (*Melkhilta Shemot 12:16*) – and in truth, a Jew is totally permitted to do the healing by himself as long as he does the minimum work possible (cf. *Orakh Hayim 307:5*).

12:14 But the Pharisees – Even if they disagreed with his healings on Shabbat, Yeshua’s reasoning was legitimate according to Pharisaic hermeneutics. For the Jewish scholar Hyam Maccoby, Pharisees wanting to murder Yeshua for utilizing Pharisaic theology is absurd, and so he theorizes that perhaps in the early developments of the gospels scribes altered the text and used the word “Pharisees” in places where “Sadducees” was actually meant (cf. *Maccoby, Jesus the Pharisee, ch.10, p.125*). The reason being the fear that the Romans would burn their books; being then similar to what transpires in the book of Esther, which was written in code because of Persia. Other scholars (me included) are of the opinion that the main reason for Mattai’s generic use of the word “Pharisees” has more to do with the fact that Yeshua was a Galilean Hassid and the two groups had a few differences, as explained in previous chapters. And although most of the original followers were in fact Pharisees,^d perhaps because of the persecutions and everything that transpired afterwards, by the time the gospel was written the author identified himself as part of a new Jewish sect – the Nazarenes – who made themselves different from the Pharisees only in their belief that Yeshua was the Messiah. Nevertheless, the Nazarene sources draw a clear distinction between two different groups of Pharisees: Luke says: “That day some Pharisees came and told him: Go and flee from here because Herod wants to kill you” (*Luke 13:31*). These were friendly Pharisees, who invited Yeshua for meals (cf. *Luke 7:36*) and even said “we know you come from God” (*John 3:1*). Rabban Gamliel himself defended his movement (*Acts 5:34*). But then, there were other Pharisees who sought to kill him, the later being identified as either followers or allies of Herod.

12:14 that they may do away with him – The fact that healing on Shabbat is not a Torah prohibition begs the question: why? Why killing someone simply for not having the same opinion as you do, or for not wanting to follow your traditions? In the first century there were Pharisees, Sadducees, Essences, Zealots, Hellenistic Jews, Samaritans.... Etc, and they all had different opinions and different observances. They all called each other heretics, but there was not blood shed for it. For instance, the Samaritans did not accept the Temple in Jerusalem as legitimate. Why then these Pharisees are not targeting Samaritans? Why are they targeting a man whose only “crime”, so-to-speak, is healing people on Shabbat, which is not forbidden in the Torah? The reasons are evidently two: On the one hand, Yeshua’s enemies are Roman friendly people who do not want to lose their aristocratic positions, and on the other hand, there are those who fear a brutal response from Rome if the masses dared to rise a Jewish king. Who are involved? Three main groups: Herodians (who thought the Messiah could only be a member of Herod’s house), Sadducees and their priesthood (who were Roman friendly), and some among the Pharisees, especially the most hellenized ones.

12:16 He charged them not to make him known – Because there were people wanting to murder him, he did not want to draw their attention more than necessary.

12:17 This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet – The verse used is Isaiah 42:1-4. The author is applying the prophecy to Yeshua as a peshet to the situation he was living at that time, for the original prophecy refers to the pious among Israel, as stated in other passages (cf. *Isaiah 45:4*; see *Ibn Ezra on Isaiah 42:1*). It is thus written “Hashem chose Yaaqov for himself” (*Psalms 135:4*). See how the expression “to fulfil what was spoken” is also used by our sages when an event in their lives matches a Biblical passage. Rabbi Aqiva was recorded as saying: “Every interpreter interpreted my dreams differently, yet all the interpretations were realised in me, to fulfil what was spoken: All the dreams follow the mouth” (*Berakhot 55b*). “When Mar ben Rabbina came to Bavel, he took up some earth in his mantle and cast it out, to fulfil what was spoken: I will sweep it with the besom of destruction” (*Berakhot 57b*).

12:19 He will not contend nor cry out – He will not need to raise his voice publicly. He will not admonish or prophesize to the nations, because they will come on their own, as it is written (*Zech. 8:23*): “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (cf. *Rashi on Isaiah 42:2*). So he told his disciples not to go to the gentile towns.

^d cf. John 3:1-2; 7:45-50; Acts 15:5, 23:6.

²²Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Yeshua healed him, so that he could both talk and see, ²³and the multitudes were astonished and said, Could this be the son of David? ²⁴But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, This man does not cast out demons, except by Baal-zebul, the prince of demons. ²⁵But Yeshua knew their reasoning and said to them, Every kingdom divided against itself is desolated, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶Now, if Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? ²⁷And if by Baal-zebul I cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out? So then, they will be your judges. ²⁸But if it is by the spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and plunder his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.

commentary

12:23 Could this be the son of David? – I.e., could this be Messiah ben David, the one who is to bring deliverance to Israel? Yeshua's Messianic role was for the deliverance of the soul rather than the nationalistic messianism than many hoped for, as he himself stated in many different passages, "My kingdom is not of this world" (*John 18:36*); "the kingdom of God is within you all" (*Luke 17:21*), following the words of the Psalm: "A song of David... I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will return to you" (*Psalms 51:13*). Although the performance of miracles is not one of the signs by which we recognize the king Messiah, a midrash states that "The last redeemer will be just like the first redeemer" (*Qohelet Rabbah 1:9*). Just like Moses performed three signs so that Israel would recognize him as God's agent (cf. *Pesakh Aggadah; Exod. 4:5, 9*), there are those who believe the Messiah will perform signs before Israel too. This is why they were wondering: Could this be the son of David?

12:25 But Yeshua knew their reasoning – This was not the first time this group accused Yeshua of performing miracles by Baal-Zebub. But this is the first time Yeshua directly responds to their accusation, because this is the chapter of Yehoshua's sword.

12:25 Every kingdom divided against itself is desolated – "The kingdom of the house of David would not have been divided – and consequently sent to exile – had Israel not worshipped idols" (*Shabbat 56b*), as Eliyahu said: "Until when will you keep hopping between two ideas? If Hashem is God, go after him, and if Baal, then go after him" (*1Kings 18:21*).

12:27 by whom do your children cast them out? – "Your children", means "your disciples", those who have done repentance because of the Pharisees' teachings; the disciples are also called children, as in: "the children of the prophets" (*2Kings 2:3*). This is because among the Pharisees there were also those who performed miracles and drove out demons.

12:27 they will be your judges – He is saying: "Your disciples and I do the very same thing; we all worship the same God, and we all cast out demons the same way. What makes them holy and what makes me a sorcerer? If you call me sorcerer, then you are accusing your disciples too of sorcery. And if you accept that it is by the spirit of God that your disciples cast out demons, then so do I, and then we are all bringing down the Kingdom of Heaven".

12:29 enter a strong man's house – He means Baal-Zebub, the idol of healing. They are not using the name literally for the idol per se, but they are referring to the metaphysical force behind the idol, identified as the "prince of demons"; that is, the force in charge of impurity, as it is taught: "The evil inclination lies like a fly [zebul] at the doors of the human heart" (*Berakhot 61a*) and: "The evil inclination and Satan are the same" (*Bava Bathra 16a*). This makes much more sense if we follow the thought process of a first century scholar, for they reasoned matters of Torah in two different languages, as they were bilingual and it was natural for them to mix Hebrew and Aramaic: The idol is called "Baal-Zebub" (lord of the flies), which comes from the Hebrew. A literal translation in Aramaic would be "Beel-Devava" בעל דבבא, for devava means "fly". Incidentally, "Beel-Devava" is an Aramaic idiom for "adversary", which is synonymous with the Hebrew word "Satan".^e This is also found in the apocryphal esoteric Testament of Solomon, in which the prince of demons is called "Baal-zebul" (*Testament of Solomon 6:1-4*), and he is the same which the Talmud calls Ashmodai (*Gittin 68*). The "possessions" of the "strong man" are the spirits of impurity and the demons. One cannot cast out demons from someone's heart without first subduing the strong man; that is, their leader who has taken possession of the heart. "For I have read in the book of Hanokh the tzaddiq that the prince of the wicked spirits is Satan" (*The Testament of Dan 5:6*). The Talmud narrates that once the prince of demons spoke to Rabbi Hanina bar Papa, because he was giving charity during the night, and the prince of the demons used Scripture to argue that his behavior was an invasion of his domains – for Satan is ruler over the night. "Hanina bar Papa replied: Is it not written, a gift in secret subdues anger? – meaning: I'm protected from your domain because of this mitzvah – On hearing this, the prince of demons became disheartened and fled from before him" (*Yerushalmi Peah 8:8, [21b]*).

^e See in the Talmud, where it is written: "This man is the בעל דבבא 'adversary' of that other man" (*Gittin 55b*).

³⁰Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ³¹And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the spirit will not be forgiven. ³²Anyone who speaks a word against the son of man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the holy spirit will not be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come.

³³Make a tree good and its fruit good, or make a tree bad and its fruit bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. ³⁴You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

commentary

12:30 Whoever is not with me is against me – This is in reference to his previous mention of the Pharisees’ disciples. They also drive out demons, they also “gather with” him. But the group which he is confronting does not gather, but “scatters”. This is better explained in the context of the next verse.

12:31 blasphemy against the spirit will not be forgiven – God knows that when a scholar thinks another scholar is wrong there is going to be mahlokhet (argument, confrontation), like the school of Shammai confronting Beit Hillel, so he can forgive this matter. God also knows people tend to fall into lashon hara (slander) and at times they criticize righteous people, perhaps out of ignorance. And so when people slander the son of man, God can forgive this matter. However, there are those who know a person is righteous and is doing nothing wrong, and they are aware that he is working for the kingdom of Heaven. Still, they publicly slander him because of their selfish interests and interfere with the mission of the saint and cause others to go astray, and this is the sin against the “spirit” which is not forgiven, because there is no remorse whatsoever and is done with premeditation and out of wickedness.

12:31 against the holy spirit – That is, the spirit of the community. Before the fall of the second temple, it was not common to see the term “Shekhina”, and so the Jewish sources prior to it favour the Biblical term “ruakh haQodesh” in reference to the Divine immanence; i.e., God’s spirit imbedded within the community (see not only the NT, but also the Dead Sea scrolls and the apocrypha). After the fall of the temple, the sources tend to avoid using unnecessarily the term “spirit of Hashem”, using instead the term Shekhina, to better differentiate when “ruakh haQodesh” is used as a form of Divine Inspiration, and when it is used like in this passage, in reference to God’s immanence. So what is this verse saying? It says that taking something holy and publicly desecrating it is an act of Hillul Hashem (desecration of the Name, blasphemy), because it diminishes the honor of God on earth. The sages taught that there is no atonement for Hillul Hashem on earth, neither by repentance, neither through suffering nor in Yom Kippur, but these three may protect him until he dies (*Yoma 86a*).

12:31 either in this world or in the world to come – It is taught: “Whoever causes the masses to sin has nearly no ability to repent... for he will not be sent to Gan Eden while those who followed him are cast into Gehenna. It is, thus, stated (*Prov. 28:17*): A man who is laden with the blood of any person will hasten his steps to Sheol; none will support him” (*Yoma 87a*). “None will support him” refers to the Heavenly court. Since he has desecrated God’s name before the masses, he has also dishonored the King of the heavenly court, and they do not forgive him. Although the sages spoke in these harsh terms to prevent Hillul Hashem, the statement should not be taken as an absolute, because “There always is forgiveness of sin; even the most atrocious one, granted that a person repents properly. For otherwise a person could reason: Since my soul is forever stained, from now on I will do as I please” (*Avraham Tzvi Kluger*). The commentators on this Talmudic passage say that a person cannot be forgiven neither in this world nor in the world to come if they repent out of fear for the punishment. Rather, he must repent sincerely, out of love for the Creator and his creation, and since he has caused masses to go astray, his repentance must be done publicly as well. This way, his sin is transformed into merits and therefore, the transgression no longer exists (cf. *Mishne Shakhir, Moadim p. 234*).

12:33 Make a tree good and its fruit good – Fruit tends to have the essence of the tree: if the tree has good qualities, it tends to produce good fruit. So, if you recollect good fruit from the tree, the tree is undoubtedly a good one. Yeshua is, thus, saying: “Are not my good deeds coming from a good source, just like the good deeds of the Pharisees?” At the same time, the way the sentence was worded turns it onto a rebuke, and Yeshua is calling them for consistency. If your sect is good, and you call yourselves the good ones, then produce good deeds. If you come from God, produce fruits from Hashem.

12:34 You brood of vipers – When it comes to serve Hashem, “childish deeds, silliness, and the evil inclination... are a nest of snakes and a vipers” (*Hovat haTalmidim 8:7*), so Yeshua says, “You are telling people that I heal from Baal-zebul and you yourselves are the ones with evil intentions, conspiring against me”. The sages in the Talmud stated that only a tiny portion of the Pharisees were perfectly good, as they harshly wrote about their own: “The plague of the Pharisees brings destruction to the world” (*Sotah 20a*).

³⁵A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. ³⁶But I tell you that, for every empty word they have spoken, everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment. ³⁷For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

³⁸Then some of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, Teacher, we want to see a sign from you. ³⁹He answered, A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Yonah. ⁴⁰For as Yonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the son of man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

commentary

12:36 for every empty word – It is written: “He has told man what his speech is” (*Amos 4:13*). Does not a man know his own speech? But what the verse is intending to say is “That even the frivolous conversations between a man and his wife will be recounted to man in the hour of his death” (*Hagiga 5b*). Which comes to teach that every single word a man utters, whether good, evil or pointless, will be brought to him on the day of his judgment. Now imagine how hard it will be for a man to explain in the Heavenly court the words of lashon hara which he publicly spoke against a righteous person under baseless hatred.

12:37 by your words you will be condemned – “Death and life are in the power of the tongue; those who love it will eat its fruit” (*Prov. 18:21*). If they love words of Torah, they will receive reward of Torah. If they love words of lashon hara, they will receive its retribution (cf. *Rashi on Proverbs 18:21*).

12:38 Teacher – In Hebrew, Moreh.

12:38 We want to see a sign from you – Were not his many miracles sign enough? But they were claiming that his miracles came from Baal-zebub, so they wanted a sign that his miracles came from Hashem and not from Satan. As somewhere else it is written “a sign from Heaven” (*Matt. 16*).

12:39 A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign – “You know well I did not do anything against the Torah, you know well you are making up the accusations that I heal by Baal-zebub, and yet you are demanding a sign from me. Hypocrites”.

12:40 for as Yonah was three days and three nights – The sign this wicked generation will receive is that of the prophet Yonah, whose mission was to call for repentance. This is from Yonah 2:1. Because he did not want to fulfil his mission and call Nineveh to repent, a big fish swallowed him. He still did not pray while in the belly of the fish, so God made the first fish spit him out and immediately after a female pregnant fish swallowed him back, so that he would be distressed and pray with all his heart, as it is written (*Yonah 2:2*), “And Yonah prayed to Hashem his God from the belly of the {female} fish” (cf. *Yalqut Shimoni 550:2*). Yonah took this incident as a sign that God controls everything and that there is nothing secret in the entire universe that can be hidden from him (cf. *ibid.*).

12:40 so the son of man – The son of man in this case refers to the Messianic consciousness which Yeshua embodies. It is the first time Yeshua mentions the resurrection and he derives it from Yonah. Just like Yonah was called to preach repentance to Nineveh, the soul of Messiah descends to preach repentance as well. The school of the Vilna Gaon teaches that the prophet Yonah fulfilled the role of Mashiakh ben Yosef (*Qol haTor 2:36, 88*). The boy that Elisha brought back to life was Yonah (*Shokher Tov 16:7*), and “Elisha anointed him – i.e., made him Messiah” (*Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer 8*). The Vilna Gaon specifically states: “Yonah was Messiah ben Yosef in his generation... and he will admonish many peoples” (*Qol haTor 2:75*). So did Yeshua give his generation the sign of Yonah, which is the admonishment to do teshuva. MBY is like Eliyahu in the aspect of rebuke before the day of redemption (cf. *Pirquei d’Rabbi Eliezer 43*). And if they do not repent, Messiah ben Yosef will receive the same fate as Yonah: Staying for three days in the belly of Sheol and coming out again. Notice how Yonah’s prayer says not “out of the belly of a fish” but “Out of the belly of Sheol I cried” (*Yonah 2:2*). For he was as dead. The Hebrew word for fish, דג DaG, is the acronym of “Din Gehinom” (judgment of Gehenna). Yeshua refers to Yonah’s verse when he says “Three days and three nights”, but this must not be taken literally, because according to Mattai’s own account, Yeshua was not literally dead three days and three nights, but rather two nights, and then he rose up on the third day, following Hoshea’s verse: “After two days he will revive us, on the third day he will raise us up” (*Hoshea 6:2*). The three days is a code name for the resurrection of the dead (cf. *Targum on Hoshea 6:2*). The phrase used by Yeshua here, “Three days and three nights” are two aspects of the same principle, for its Hebrew, **לילוש ושלשה ימים** has the numerical value of **משך משיח בן יוסף** “Meshekh Mashiakh ben Yosef”, ‘the duration [of time] of Messiah ben Yosef’, plus **כשם משיח בן יוסף** “K’shem Mashiakh ben Yosef”, ‘like the name [fame] of Messiah ben Yosef’. Shem can also be read as ‘Sham’, meaning: ‘there’, thus reading: “as there he is Messiah ben Yosef”. Therefore three days refers to the duration of MBY’s death, and three nights refers to him staying in a place of darkness; the Sheol.

⁴¹The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Yonah, and now something greater than Yonah is here. ⁴²The queen of Teiman will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here. ⁴³When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴Then it says, I will return to the house I left. When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. ⁴⁵Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.

commentary

12:41 Something greater than Yonah is here – These pagan nations repented when they heard the words of the prophets, even when they were not given any sign at all. However, Yeshua's generation had the redemption at hand, and had seen him perform miracles and call them to repentance, but they did not repent.

12:42 The queen of Teiman – Teiman is Yemen; Greek manuscripts call it "the South". This is in reference to the queen of Sheba (*1Kings 10:1*). She came by herself to listen to Solomon, attracted by the fame of his wisdom. And she said: "I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes, and after seeing it, I must say I was not told even half of it" (*1Kings 10:7*). Yeshua and the Immerser were also famous, and although their message was way simpler: "Repent, for the kingdom is at hand", it was accompanied with signs and wonders, and these wicked men not only rejected it, but also fought against them. Then, hypocritically, had the boldness of asking Yeshua for a sign.

12:43 When an impure spirit comes out of a person – One may think that Yeshua has changed the subject here, but he is not talking about a 'dybbuq' or demon that possesses a man. Contextually, he is still addressing the wicked generation in which he lived, so he is speaking allegorically about their Yetzer haRa; their evil inclination. This is derived from David's words, when he repented from his sins and said, "Create in me a pure heart" (*Psalms 51:12*). The implication of calling a repented heart "pure" is that one which follows its evil inclination is "impure". So the sages say that "David called the evil inclination impure" (*Sukka 52a*). Hence the impure spirit, or spirit of impurity. It is also called "Tzefoni" (lit. northern), as it is written: "I will remove hatzefoni far off from you" (*Yoel 2:20*). "Why is it called Tzefoni? Because it is always hidden (tzafun) in the heart of man" (*Sukka 52a*). Notice that the same Talmudic folio which talks about the Yetzer hara being called "impure" and being hidden in a man's heart (i.e., *Sukka 52a*) is the same folio that mentions the death of Messiah ben Yosef, as it says: "What is the reason for the cry? One said it is because of the death of Messiah ben Yosef who was killed, and the other said it is for the evil inclination which was slayed" (*Sukka 52a*). Mattai follows the same pattern: Yeshua first talks about the "sign of Yonah" and immediately after gives the allegory of the "impure spirit". He uses this allegory because of their false accusations against him, as the false prophets are inspired to speak falsehood by a spirit of impurity, ruakh haTuma (*Zech. 13:2*).

12:43 comes out of a person – That is: When they do teshuva, following the words of the prophet: "I will remove haTzefoni far off from you" (*Yoel 2:20*), about which I have already explained refers to the evil inclination.

12:43 arid places – That is: places where there is no Torah, as it is written: "Everyone who is thirsty, come for water" (*Isaiah 55:1*). According to Jewish folklore Seirim (demons) dance in places devastated by sin (cf. *Isaiah 13:21*), and spirits of impurity dwell in deserts and cemeteries (*Sanhedrin 65b; cf. Lev. 16:10*).

12:43 seeking rest and does not find it – Continuing with the allegory of the yetzer hara, the evil inclination has the mission of tempting a person in order that the person, paradoxically, will not listen to it (cf. *Bava Bathra 16a*). This is derived from Yaaqov's encounter with the angel, who was none other than his yetzer hara. Yaaqov equals 182, Satan equals 359. If Yaaqov overcomes Satan, then he becomes Israel (182 + 359 = ישראל Israel, 541). If the evil inclination does not find a person that fights him back, then it finds no rest. The imagery used in the allegory, though, refers to the desire in a spirit of impurity to dwell in a human body, since there is a certain kind of demon that was created right before Shabbat, and these 'rukhot' were not completed (*Avot 5:6*). Therefore, they thirst for a human host to feel completion, but the side effect is that they harm the man they attach themselves to, or tempt him to sin, thus fulfilling the same function as the yetzer hara.

12:44 it finds the house unoccupied – The house – a person's heart – is clean and decorated because of the spirit of purity, which came through the person's repentance. At first the evil inclination will leave him alone, and he will think he has defeated it. However, the fact that the house is "unoccupied" means the spirit of purity has also gone.

12:45 seven other spirits – That is to say that if a person repents of their sins but does not occupy himself with Torah and mitzvot from heart, the yetzer hara will overpower him harder than before, because the holier a person is, the

⁴⁶While Yeshua was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷Someone told him, Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you. ⁴⁸He replied to him, Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? ⁴⁹Pointing to his disciples, he said, Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

commentary

greater his evil inclination, as the sages taught: "Every man who attains [spiritual] greatness has a bigger evil inclination" (*Sukkot 52a*). That is how Yeshua is defining that generation of Pharisees.

12:48 Who is my mother? – Yeshua is not trying to disrespect his biological family, but he is making a point. There are passages in other texts that show how close Yeshua's relationship was with his mother (cf. *Luke 2:51 for instance*), and his brother Yaaqov became the leader of the Nazarenes after him (cf. *Acts 15:13; Gal. 2:9*). But there was something more important at hand than greeting his mother and brothers. This behavior serves to disregard the anachronistic theology of the holy mother, or divine mother, which the Romans held dear. For Yeshua, his mother was merely that; a woman.

12:50 whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother – This principle derives from mysticism. On the verse "Whoever robs his Father and his Mother" (*Prov. 28:24*), the sages say "the Father refers to God... and the Mother refers to the community of Israel" (*Berakhot 35b*). The people of Israel elevate by means of its holy men, who contribute to peace and harmony. Therefore, they receive the name "Mother Israel" (*Ohr haHayim on Vayiqra 5:21:5*). Kabbalah explains that "Father" refers to Wisdom (Hokhma) and "Mother Israel" to the sefirah of Binah, the Mother, from where the emotive sefirot emerge. These derived attributes receive the family names (partzufim) of Son and Daughter of Binah. Yeshua, identifying himself with Zeir Anpin (the Son) hence says, "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."