

22 And Yeshua spoke to them again in parables, saying: ²The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. ⁴Then he sent some more servants and said, Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.

—commentary—

22:1 again in parables – This parable is recorded in various gospels, however, each version is drastically different from each other. The variations depend on how the community remembered the parable and on the point the author wanted to make. The closest to the original is probably the one recorded in Thomas, which provides all the common elements of Mattai and Luke, while at the same time being independent from them. In Luke the context is that Yeshua went to have a Shabbat dinner with a Pharisee, and during the meal Yeshua mentions the resurrection of the righteous, to which someone at the table responds, Blessed be the one who eats at the feast in the kingdom of God! (*Luke 14:16*). Mattai continues the confrontation with the Pharisees and the chief priests of the previous chapter. In Thomas, as usual, there is no specific context, because the parable has a mystical connotation and it is for each one to meditate on it without a biased narrative. However, at the end of the parable Thomas adds words from Yeshua that criticize the corruption at the Temple, in the only indirect reference to the cleansing of the Temple incident. Yeshua says “Traders and merchants will not enter the place of my Father” (*Thomas #64*); this is easily understood if you read Mattai 21.

—relevant quotes—

"At all times should your clothes be white (*Ecc. 9:8*). Rabban Yohanan ben Zakai explains with a parable: A king invited his servants to a feast and did not set a time for them to come. The wise among them adorned themselves and sat at the entrance to the king's house. They said, is there anything else missing in the house of the king? But the fools among them went to their jobs, because they said, Is there such a thing as a feast without preparation? Suddenly the king requested the presence of his servants. The wise among them entered before him adorned, and the fools among them entered before him dirty. The king... said, These who adorned themselves for the feast shall sit and eat and drink. But those who did not adorn themselves shall stand and watch".

(Shabbat 153a)

"Yeshua taught, A man was receiving visitors, and when he had prepared the dinner, he sent his servant to call the visitors to come in. He went to the first one and said, My master invites you. He responded, I have claims against some merchants who are coming to me this evening. I must go and give them my orders, so I ask to be excused from the dinner. He went to another and said, My master invites you. He responded, I have just bought a house and I am required for the day. I do not have time to go. He went to another and said, My master invites you. He responded, my friend is going to get married and I am to arrange the dinner, So I will not be able to come. I ask to be excused from the dinner. He went to another and said, My master invites you. He responded, I have just bought a field and I am going to collect the revenue, so I will not be able to come. I ask to be excused from the dinner. The servant returned to his master and told him, Those whom you have invited have requested to be excused. The master said to his servant, Go out to the streets and bring in whomever you find to dine. Traders and merchants will not enter the place of my Father"

(Thomas #64)

⁵But they paid no attention and went off, one to his field, another to his business. ⁶The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his servants, The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find. ¹⁰So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

—commentary—

22:5 But they paid no attention and went off, one to his field, another to his business – Mattai’s version has many similarities with a parable told by Yohanan ben Zakai, a sage and contemporary of Yeshua. A king invites his servants to a feast, but the fools among them arrived filled with dirty clothes because they had been engaged in their own business instead of getting ready for the banquet. Therefore, the king tells them that instead of partaking of the banquet they will stand and watch (cf. *Shabbat 153a*). Ben Zakai makes the point that some people think their judgement day or their death are so far off that they do not worry about “clothing” themselves with Torah and mitzvot. But the time is imminent. “This world is like a hallway to the world to come. Prepare yourself in the hallway that you may enter in the banquet hall” (*Avot 4:16*).

22:6 The rest seized his servants – These are elements that the author took from the previous parable. These servants are the prophets of old as well as Yohanan the Immerser, for they were persecuted and executed during their mission to call the kingdom of Judea to repentance in the days of both the first and the second Temple.

22:6 destroyed those murderers and burned their city – As it is written: “In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month... came Nebuzardan... to Jerusalem and he burnt the house of Hashem... and all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the houses of the great ones he burnt with fire” (*2Kings 25:8*). Why was the first temple destroyed? Because there was... bloodshed... as it is written (*2Kings 21:16*): Menashe shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem [with innocent blood] from one end to another” (*Yoma 9b*). Few decades after Yeshua’s death, the Roman emperor Titus Vespasianus destroyed the second Temple and burnt down the lower city of Jerusalem (cf. *Josephus, Wars 6:6:3*). “Since in the second Sanctuary they were occupying themselves with Torah, mitzvot and acts of piety, why was it destroyed? Because there was in it baseless hatred, which is similar in gravity to idolatry, sexual perversion and bloodshed together... Rabbi Yohanan and Rabbi Eleazar said... in the case of the second Temple, their sin was not exposed [i.e., they concealed their hatred and their sins with their external piety]” (*Yoma 9b*). “Why was Shiloh destroyed? Because they loved money and hated one another” (*Tosefta Menakhot 13*).

22:10 the bad as well as the good – People that the Haverim call “am haAretz;” consisting of both sinners and pious people. “Call them all to repentance and welcome anyone of them who answers to the calling.”

22:10 and the wedding hall was filled with guests – In the Matthean version, the entire parable is all about Israel; there are “bad as well as good” Jews. On the other hand, the Lukan version – being a later product of the Pauline school – adds the idea that afterwards there was still plenty of room in the banquet. This was to include the gentiles in it (cf. *Luke 14:22-23*). This was a later development in the community (cf. *Acts 15:1ff*), so Luke intentionally redesigns Yeshua’s parable. Nevertheless, the concept is not foreign to Mattai at all, as it can also be found in the story of the centurion (cf. *Matt. 8:8-11*).

¹¹But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²He asked, How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend? The man was speechless. ¹³Then the king told the attendants, Bind him by his hands and his feet, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ¹⁴For many are invited, but few are chosen.

—commentary—

22:11 But when the king came in to see the guests – As long as the wedding banquet did not officially begin, everybody was welcome, in the aspect of “Seek Hashem while he can be found” (*Isa. 55:6*). The moment the king stepped in, people without proper clothes were dropped out, for it is written, “At all times should your clothed be white” (*Eccl. 9:8*).

22:12 How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend? – This parallels Adam’s sin, as it says, “And they heard the voice of Hashem, God, going in the garden... and Hashem God called to man and said to him, Where are you?... Who told you that you are naked?” (*Gen. 3:8,9,11*). And so with Kain he said, “Where is your brother Hevel?” (*Gen. 4:9*), and with Bilaam, “Who are these men with you?” (*Num. 22:9*). This is because Heaven does not decree a final punishment without a fair trial. Therefore, before its judgment a sinner’s soul does introspection on their life (cf. *Eccl. 12:14*). It is, thus, written, “Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of his throne” (*Psalms 89:15*). The Zohar says “Woe to those who do not look to their foundation and neglect the precepts of the Torah. For some of these precepts fashion a glorious garment above, and some a glorious garment below, and some a glorious garment in this world [in addition to a glorious garment in the world to come], and a man requires them all” (*Zohar 1:226b*).

22:13 Bind him by his hand and his feet – Here Yeshua is paraphrasing the book of the Watchers from Hanokh, where it is written: “The Lord said to Raphael, Bind Azazel by his hands and his feet and throw him into the darkness... and cover his face so that he may not see the light, so that on the great day of judgment he may be hurled into the fire” (*Enoch 10:4-6*). In the Enochian eschatology, which is based on the Great Flood, it is taught that the kings and the leaders would be thrown into the valley that burns with fire (*Enoch 54:1-2*), “because they became servants of Satan and led astray those who dwell on the dry ground” (*ibid. 54:6*).

22:13 throw him outside, into the darkness – As it says “My people perishes for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you from being a priest to me; since you have forgotten the Torah of your God, I will also forget your children” (*Hoshea 4:6*). Being thrown into darkness may be a reference to the Sheol at the end of their lives, as in the book of Hanokh. Darkness symbolizes the inability of the person to find God’s presence, because he is so spiritually separated from the Creator that he cannot perceive him, as it is written, “He made darkness his hiding place” (*Psalms 18:12*). Therefore, in addition to the above, the ending of this parable could symbolically represent the people of Judea, for whom the Temple meant God’s presence among them. Being thrown outside to the darkness could be a symbol of the imminent exile Jerusalem was going to experience.

22:13 weeping and gnashing of teeth – You can gnash your teeth in envy, in shame or in anger, as it is taught, “Qorakh caused his ancestors to gnash their teeth in shame” (*Sanhedrin 109b*)^a and “The guardian angels of the nations of the world stand with their accusations, gnashing their teeth against us” (*Qav haYashar 89:1*). See also commentary on Matt. 8:12. But come and see: it is written, “The malicious waters would have gone over our soul, so blessed be Hashem, who has not given us as a prey to their teeth” (*Psalms 124:5-6*). “Does water have teeth? Rather, the malicious waters symbolize the pagan nations, and their teeth are their supernal leaders, who worship stars and constellations” (*Zohar 1:63b*), as it is written, “your enemies hiss and

^a cf. Ohr haHayim and Rabbenu Bahya on Num. 16:1.

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in some word. ¹⁶They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. Teacher, they said, we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You are not swayed by others, because you do not look on the appearance of men. ¹⁷Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?

textual variants

22:16 you do not look on the appearance of men – Semitic mms. literally have, אינך מכיר פנים, “You do not recognize faces,” which is a Hebrew idiom meaning ‘You do not show favoritisms’ or ‘you are not partial’ (cf. *Deut. 16:19*). The Greek has “you do not look at the face” which means, ‘you do not care for superficial appearances’ as in: “our generation looks only at the face” רואה אלא לפנים (*Sotah 47b*).

commentary

gnash their teeth” (*Lam. 2:16*). Because the wicked leaders of Israel behave like the wicked leaders of the nations, they will be thrown to the outer darkness together with them and will no longer be part of the Holy City’s leadership. The chief priests and the Sadducees went extinct after the destruction of the temple, and the Rabbis in Bavel took their roles.

22:15 and laid plans to trap him in some word – Or in some matter, for the Semitic word is the same.

22:16 sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians – It appears to be an unnatural alliance, since in theory one sect was patriotic and the other embraced Rome. According to some, the Herodians could perhaps be what the sages call the Boethusians, whose hallakha was in opposition to that of the Pharisees and their behavior was unethical (cf. *Mishna Rosh haShana 2:1*). Certain Shimon ben Boethus was appointed high priest by Herod,^b and so his priestly family could be the Herodians. A minority of scholars want to identify them with the so-called “sons of Beteira,” who were part of a Herodian-friendly aristocracy in the Sanhedrin (cf. *Pesakhim 66a*).^c Regardless of this, as a political party, i.e., as people who enjoyed the kingship of Herod, some among the Pharisees would be defined as Herodians as well. Either way, the passage speaks of a very specific kind of Pharisees who were willing to join forces at the Temple with the Sadducees and the Herodians. These are the type of Pharisees that are also criticized in the Talmud, as mentioned above (see *textual variant note on Matt. 21:13*). This is in contrast with the other Pharisees who were friendly with Yeshua, as Luke says, “Some Pharisees came to Yeshua and said to him, Leave this place and get away, for Herod wants to kill you” (*Luke 13:31*).

22:16 Teacher – In Aramaic “*malpana*” מלפנא, which is the same term used in the Gemara when Rav Hisda was foretold in his youth that he would be a teacher (cf. *Yevamot 21b*).

22:16 you do not look on the appearance of men – “You do not care if they are wealthy kings, or powerful priests or reputed rabbis. If someone commits a sin before you, you call them out and tell them to repent.” Because he does not judge by what his eyes see, not by what his ears hear (cf. *Isaiah 11:3*).

22:16 Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not? – Literally, the “head silver.” As a land occupied by Rome, the Israelites had to pay to Rome a denarius per year, which was collected through a census. The Caesar, קיסר, the Roman Emperor of those days, was Tiberius.^d The question itself is one of those common hallakhic inquiries one finds in the Talmud. In an actual Pharisaic debate, both points of view are discussed, as we know some of the sages would speak in favour and some against it (e.g., *Pesakhim 112b*). Although many in Israel helped farm the tribute, many others among the religious people felt indignation for it, as it is recorded

^b Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 15:9:3.

^c B.D. Chilton, *Jesus ben David*, JSNT 14, pp.104-105.

^d Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 18:2:3; Tacitus, *Annals* VI:50-51; Suetonius, *the lives of twelve Caesars*, *life of Tiberius* 73.

¹⁸But Yeshua knew their malice, and said, Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for paying the tax. They brought him a denarius, ²⁰and he asked them, Whose image is this? And whose inscription? ²¹Caesar's, they replied. And he said to them, So give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God.

—commentary—

that certain Galilean called Yehuda revolted against the taxation and called “cowards” to those who paid it (cf. *Josephus, Jewish wars 2:8:1*). The point is that due to the present audience, the question was framed as a dilemma: If Yeshua spoke against the tribute, the Herodians could accuse him of inciting the nation against Rome (cf. *Luke 23:2*),^e but speaking in favour would incur these Pharisees and the majority of the people's disapproval, for the common people wanted freedom from Rome. This way, no matter what he responded they could easily discredit him.

22:18 you hypocrites – “Why do you call me teacher with your mouths, yet do not do what I say?” (*Egerton gospel, fragment 2*).

22:19 show me the coin – Because he obviously was not carrying Roman currency with him.

22:19 brought him a denarius – A *dinar* דינר. While the coins in Israel had merely symbolic representations, the dinar had the graven image of Caesar crowned with laurel. In the first century he had been elevated to the level of a divine being by the Romans, and even given a temple with priests. The inscription of a common denarius read, “Tiberius Augustus Caesar, son of the Divine Augustus.” This raises the question of whether this denarius with the graven image of a false deity should have been brought at the Holy Temple in the first place, for it was not a common coin to begin with. Why were these Pharisees and Herodians carrying the image of a Roman deity into the precincts of the Holy Temple, when the Essenes refused to carry or even to stare at such coin?^f

22:21 give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar – Notice that the question in itself is of hallakhic nature, however Yeshua responds with mussar, as he always does. This saying is recorded in all the synoptics as well as in Thomas and an independent manuscript called the Egerton gospel (*fragment 2*), so it is with all certainty a genuine saying of the historical Yeshua. While Mattai sets up an antagonistic atmosphere, Thomas does not bother with those elements. Historically, it might simply be that two different groups were discussing the matter and Yeshua was caught in the middle of the debate. This also happens in another incident a few paragraphs later, in which Mattai sets an antagonistic scenery (cf. 22:35), but in Mark's version the atmosphere is actually friendly.

—relevant quotes—

"Yeshua was shown a gold coin and was told, Caesar's agents demand tribute from us. He said to them, Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, give to God what belongs to God, and give to me what belongs to me." (*Thomas #100*)

^e Agrippa said that not paying the tribute to the Romans was like calling Rome to the war (cf. *Josephus, Jewish wars 2:16:5*).

^f Hippolytus, *Refutation of all Heresies* 9:21 [26].

²²When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

²³In that day came the Sadducees, who said there is no life for the dead. They questioned him:

—textual variants—

22:23 there is no life for the dead – Greek manuscripts say more explicitly, “There is no resurrection.”

—commentary—

22:21 and to God what belongs to God – Yeshua’s response was genius, both cryptic and clear at the same time. The Biblical background for such answer is the passage, “one lot for Azazel and one for Hashem” (*Lev. 16:8*). Come and see: The coin had the image of a pagan Emperor and Yeshua told them to give him what belongs to him. However, humankind has been created in the image of God, and so we should give ourselves entirely to him. Caesar represents the king of the other side, as the Zohar teaches (*2:184b*), we must give a portion to Azazel, so that he will be occupied with the offering and its aspect of *Din* (judgment) will not fall upon us – Azazel derives from *Azaz-El עַזַּז אֱלֹהִים* (Divine attribute of rage). The Sitra Akhra gets temporarily satisfied without knowing he is “heaping coals of fire upon his head” (*Prov. 25:22*). This is in the aspect of Esther inviting the wicked Haman to her banquet with the king (cf. *Esther 5:12*). Therefore, is Yeshua advocating for civil obedience?⁸ In part, yes, as Yosei ben Hanina taught: “The Blessed Holy One adjured Israel that they should not rebel against the nations of the world [who rule over them]” (*Ketuvot 111a*). This is also the typical interpretation in Keifa’s words, “Submit yourselves to every human institution for the sake of the Lord” (*1Peter 2:13*). God told the prophets in the time of the Babylonian exile that he had given the land to Nebuchadnezzar his “servant” (*Jer. 27:6*), so that the citizens would not rebel against his rulership and end up being exterminated. Similarly, Rome’s power came from God’s permission to rule over Israel (*Avoda Zara 18a*) and when the Jews revolted against Rome in the year 66 C.E., the Romans burnt Jerusalem down to the ground. Said this, the phrase “give to God what belongs to God” implies an order in hierarchy; for God is the ruler of the entire universe. One cannot separate the secular and the spiritual because in Judaism every matter is spiritual. Ultimately, a man cannot serve two masters (*Matt. 6:24*), therefore, when the laws of the government force its citizens to violate Torah, God’s Torah overrules them, for God is the king of kings and he determines what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to him. With these words, Yeshua is indirectly condemning his audience for bringing a denarius inside the Temple, for such idolatrous coin does not belong to the House of God. Come and see: As they allowed the presence of a foreign deity into God’s Sanctuary, the Shekhina departed from them. Measure for measure, the Roman emperor desecrated and destroyed the Sanctuary in the year 70 C.E.. Nevertheless, a talmudic passage elucidates that there are consequences for defying the government: When the Romans forbade the study of the Torah, Rabbi Hanina ben Teradion kept studying it every day, which triggered a debate between him and his teacher Rabbi Yosei. Eventually the Romans found out and burned him alive together with his Torah scroll (*Avoda Zara 18a*). Did he do the right thing? This is up to debate, but the conclusion is that although he refused to obey Rome, he received a great portion in the world to come.

22:23 came the Sadducees – In this chapter Yeshua is brought to different theological challenges: First the confabulation between Pharisees and Herodians, then the Sadducees, then a scribe, and in the end, Yeshua himself poses a question to the Pharisees that nobody of them is able to answer. The author’s purpose is to show Yeshua’s superiority in theological debate over the other Judean sects of the first Temple.

22:23 the Sadducees, who said there is no life for the dead – They denied the immortality of the soul (*Josephus, Antiquities 10:11:7*). The majority opinion in the Mishna is that “those who say there is no resurrection of the dead in the Torah do not have a share in the world to come” (*Sanhedrin 10:1*).

⁸ Justin Martyr, First Apology 17:1.

²⁴Teacher, Moshe told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him. ²⁵But there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. ²⁶The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. ²⁷Finally, the woman died. ²⁸Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her? ²⁹Yeshua replied, You err because you are ignorant of the Scriptures and of the power of God. ³⁰At the resurrection they neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.

commentary

22:24 if a man dies without having children – This is the law of levirate marriage (cf. *Deut. 25:5; Yevamot 14b*).

22:26 right on down to the seventh – This may be inspired by the book of Tovia, where it says a woman named Sarah bat Raguel was suffering because she married seven times, but in each marriage the demon Ashmodai killed her husbands (cf. *Tobit 3:7-15*).

22:28 at the resurrection – Aramaic: Qaiamta קימתא and Hebrew: Tekhiat haMeitim תחיית המתים. Literally, the arising of the dead. Daniel says, “Many who sleep in the dust of the earth will awaken, some to eternal life לחיי עולם and others to shame” (*Daniel 12:2*). However, there are alleged claims that the Sadducees only regarded the five books of Moshe as divinely inspired (cf. *Origen contra Celsum 1:49*). Even if this assumption was not entirely correct, the book of Daniel was written after the canonization of the Prophets and the Sadducees did certainly reject it.

22:29 you are ignorant of the Scriptures and of the power of God – After debating with the Pharisees and the scribes Yeshua would say to the masses that “they sit on Moshe’s seat.” Concerning the theology of the Sadducees he says they are “ignorant of the Scriptures.” While Yeshua aligns mostly with the Pharisaic world view (cf. *Mattai chapter 5ff*), he treats the Sadducees as straightforward heretical, not needing to bother much with them. The book of Acts records Pharisees becoming followers of Yeshua, but never Sadducees (cf. *Acts 15:5*), for they rejected all the theologies which they considered of Pharisaic tradition for not being found in the plain text of the Torah (cf. *Sanhedrin 91b*).^h Hence, their approach to the Torah was more earth centered, for they rejected immortality of the soul and resurrection... in other words, for them there was only the ‘here and now,’ which was for them what the black-and-white text of the Torah taught (They were the Sola-Scriptura of their time). Their disbelief in an afterlife caused them to become easily corrupted with money and social status.

22:30 At the resurrection they neither marry nor be given in marriage – The sages similarly taught that “in the world to come there is no eating, nor drinking nor procreation... rather the righteous sit with their crowns [of glory] on their heads and delight in the radiance of the Shekhina” (*Berakhot 17a*). “In the world to come... there is not any of the appetites of this world” (*Sikhot haRan 96*). In the resurrection of the world to come, the bodies will resemble in glory that of the primordial Adam (cf. *Bereshit Rabbah 24:5*) and “the entire world will turn divine” (*Maharal, Netzakh Israel ch.42; cf. Midrash Tanhuma Naso 7:1*).

22:30 like the angels in heaven – Ministering angels, unlike animals, do not eat and drink, do not procreate and do not emit excrements (cf. *Hagiga 16a*). They also “have wings and fly from one end of the world to another” (*ibid.*). “In the years in which the Blessed Holy One will renew his world... What will the righteous

^h Josephus wrote about them, “They admit no observance at all apart from the laws” (cf. *Antiquities 18:1:4 [16]*), which means they disregard philosophy, aggadah and mussar; their only preoccupation is practical observance, i.e., hallakha.

³¹But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ³²I am the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzhaq and the God of Yaaqov? He is not the God of the dead but of the living. ³³When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

³⁴Hearing that Yeshua had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.

³⁵One of them who was knowledgeable in the Torah, to test him inquired:

³⁶Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Torah?

—commentary—

do? The Blessed Holy One will make wings for them like eagles and they will soar over the face of the waters” (*Sanhedrin 92b*).

22:32 the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzhaq and the God of Yaaqov – This is how Hashem introduced himself to Moshe at the burning bush (*Exodus 3:6*).

22:32 He is not the God of the dead but of the living – It is written, “I appeared to Avraham, Yitzhaq and Yaaqov as El-Shaddai... I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan” (*Exodus 6:3-4*). The sages notice that it says “to give them” the land, instead of “to give you.” The implication is that he would give the land to the Patriarchs themselves, so the sages respond, “From here we deduce that the Torah teaches the resurrection of the dead” (*Sanhedrin 90b*).

22:35 who was knowledgeable in the Torah, to test him inquired – He was a sofer, as Mark calls him, a scribe. It must be emphasized that all the gospels are individual works collecting stories formerly known in oral form. Remember when Mattai wrote the sermon of the mount, which is a collection of Yeshua’s famous mussar sayings put together. We know from the other gospels that most of those sayings had been told separately in different places and on different days. Here too, Mattai is narratively setting an antagonistic atmosphere in the entire chapter, but this does not mean that all the audience and debaters had malicious intentions or were trying to trap Yeshua. Mark offers an earlier and totally different context for the pericope with the scribe: “After hearing their debate, and seeing how good Yeshua had responded to them, certain scribe arose and asked him, Which is the greatest command of all?” (*Mark 12:28*). After Yeshua’s response the scribe compliments Yeshua and says, “That is correct, teacher.” He also adds his own insight, that “loving your neighbor is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices”, to which Yeshua responds, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” (*ibid. 12:34*). Luke’s version is a middle ground between the other two gospels (cf. *Luke 10:25-28*). The fourth gospels’ parallel of this is the story of Naqdimon, a.k.a., Nicodemus (*John 3:1; Taanit 20a*). Although Yeshua tells him that he must be born again, it is a cordial conversation, and the Rabbi’s praise is not ill intended but genuine, “Rabbi, we know that you come from God” (*John 3:2*). As we have seen in previous chapters (cf. *first commentary on Matt. 19:3*), “testing” someone’s theology does not have an inherent negative connotation; it is actually Biblically expected that we may do so.

³⁷Yeshua replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your might and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰All the Torah and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

—textual variants—

22:37 with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might – This text is almost like the Masoretic in the Torah, having the triad of: heart, soul and מאד might. Most certainly, the author had this other verse in mind: “And now, Israel, what does Hashem your God demand of you? ... To love and to serve your God Hashem with all your heart and with all your soul, keeping Hashem’s commands and laws” (*Deut. 10:12-13*). For the Torah, the LXX translates the word heart לב as mind or thoughts διανοία, so it reads “with all your mind, with all your soul and with all your might.” Mattai’s Greek manuscripts omit “might” but somehow the word mind: “with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your διανοία mind or thoughts.” Curiously, both Mattai’s Aramaic in the Peshitta and the gospel of Mark mention the four things, “your heart לבך, your soul נפשך, your might חילך and your mind רעינך” (*Mark 12:30*). In this case “mind” is explicative, as we are going to see.

—commentary—

22:37 with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might – This is the Shema (*Deut. 6:4-5*) – the liturgical prayer which the Jews pray three times a day – containing the core of Jewish faith. The Mishan explains, “With all your heart means with your two inclinations; the good inclination and the evil inclination. With all your soul means even if God takes your soul. With all your might means with all your money [as the Scripture sometimes refers to money as might]. Alternatively, with all your might means with every measure he imposes on you; thank him [regardless of it being good or bad]” (*Mishna Berakhot 9:5*). By adding “your mind” this is what Yeshua means: Consider what is the thing of this world that you value more in life and then love God with all of it. If you value money more than anything, love God with all your money. If what you value the most is a woman, then love God with that desire and with the woman you choose. This follows a discussion in *Berakhot 61b*, where understanding is required to love God.

22:39 Love your neighbor as yourself – “Love your neighbor as yourself” (*Leviticus 19:18*). Rabbi Aqiva said, This is a fundamental principle in the Torah” (*Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:3*; cf. *Sifra Qedoshim 4:12 on Lev.19:18*).

22:40 All the Torah and the Prophets hang on these two commands – When Rabbi Hillel was asked to teach the entire Torah while standing on one foot he responded, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow; this is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary, go and study it” (*Shabbat 31a*). Loving your neighbor and loving God are the essence of the entire Torah and the Prophets, as we see in the Decalogue, which consists of five utterances about God and another five utterances of behavior towards others. The tablets of the Decalogue were inscribed on both of their surfaces (*Exod. 32:15*), so these two principles are two sides of the same coin. This is the meaning of “For I desire piety and not sacrifices, and knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (*Hoshea 6:6*).

—relevant quotes—

"Ben Azzai says that the verse: This is the narrative of the generations of man (*Gen. 5:1*) is a fundamental principle in the Torah [for all nationalities and races are called man]. Rabbi Aqiva says that: Love your neighbor as yourself is a fundamental principle in the Torah, so that you will not say, I was insulted so another should be insulted with me, I was cursed, another should be cursed with me. Rabbi Tanhuma said, if you did this, know whom you are insulting, for in God’s image he made him." (*Bereshit Rabbah 24:8*)

⁴¹While the Pharisees were gathered together, Yeshua asked them, ⁴²What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he? They replied, The son of David. ⁴³He said to them, How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him master? For he says, ⁴⁴Spoke the Lord to my master: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.

commentary

22:41 While the Pharisees were gathered together – The Pharisees gathered together to discuss Torah in the capital of the kingdom, according to the verse, “for out of Tzion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem” (*Isaiah 2:3*). The Pharisees not only discussed halakha, but also theology and aggadah. The center of Torah learning moved from Jerusalem to Yavne when the destruction was about to befall Judea (cf. *Gittin 56b*). Throughout the chapter Yeshua has been approached by different Temple groups, but this time it is him who approaches them. Not in a defiant manner, but rather to reveal Torah with them.

22:42 What do you think about Messiah? Whose son is he? – The author does not disclose the debate, but this type of questions are the daily bread of Talmudic debates. It is very unlikely that in real life these Pharisees only gave a two-words answer. The common behavior is to provide a biblical verse that substantiates the response, having various schools of thought offering different insights. One would answer, “He is a son of Yehuda (i.e., Judah), as it is written, “the sceptre will not depart from Yehuda... until Shiloh comes, and to him will be a gathering of peoples” (*Gen. 49:19*). Other will further develop: He is a son of Yishai, as it is written, “A shoot will spring forth from the stem of Yishai, and a twig will sprout from his roots” (*Isaiah 11:1*). Eventually they would conclude: He is a son of King David, for it is written, “Hashem has sworn to David in truth, from which he will never turn back: Of the fruit of your body I will have someone seat upon your throne” (*Psalms 132:11*). However, the author wants to focus on the character of Yeshua, not on the whole debate, which would have been quite interesting to read.

22:43 David, speaking by the Spirit – There was discrepancy over who is the first person speaking in the Psalm, different schools attributed it to different people. Yeshua’s position is in agreement with Rabbi Meir, who allegedly said in a Baraita:ⁱ “All the praises stated in the book of the Psalms were recited by David, as it says (*Psalms 72:20*), The prayers of David son of Yishai are ended. Do not read ‘ended’ *kalu* כלו, but ‘all of these’ *kol elu* כול אלו” (*Pesachim 117a*). Similarly, “All these are the prayers of David son of Yishai” (*Psalms 72:20*).

22:44 Spoke the Lord to my master – This is from the Psalms (*110:2*). It begins with *LeDavid* לדוד (*110:1*), which literally means “for David” or “concerning David” but it can also be interpreted as “by David” (see commentary above). The Hebrew says, “Speech of Hashem to my master” נאם יי לאדני. The word “Lord” is the four-letter Sacred Name, whereas “my master” is *L’adoni*. Due to the mention of Melchizedek in the Psalm the Talmudic sages easily identify *adoni* as Avraham: “Avraham was a high priest, for it says, Hashem has sworn and will not repent, You are a priest forever after the manner of Melchizedek” (*Bereshit Rabbah 46:5*). “The Blessed Holy One took Avraham and placed him at his right hand and they threw dust which turned to swords” (*Sanhedrin 108b*). He was told this because he was like a king, victorious over all the other pagan kings (*Tanhuma Lekh Lekha 13*; cf. *Nedarim 32b*). In Scripture, the term *adoni* is indeed used for Avraham (*Gen. 23:6*; *24:36*), but also for Moshe (*Exod. 32:22*) and for David (*1Sam. 24:7*). About David says the Zohar, “David said to the Blessed Holy One (*Psalms 39:5*), Hashem, make me know my end, what is the portion of my lot? And he had no rest until he was told, Sit at my right hand” (*Zohar 1:63a*).

ⁱ A Baraita בריתא is an early tradition which was not incorporated in the Mishna.

⁴⁵If then David calls him master, how can he be his son? ⁴⁶No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

commentary

22:45 If then David calls him master – Under the agreed premise that David wrote the Psalm himself (as mentioned above). If the Psalm is part of the enthronement chants, it can refer to any king, but who is David calling master? Who can be greater than David himself? The answer is Messiah. This is found in the Midrash which says, “In the time to come... the Blessed Holy One will place the King Messiah at his right hand, for it is written, Sit at my right hand” (*Midrash Tehilim 18:29*). Similarly teaches Shimon bar Yohai, “The Blessed Holy One will fight for Israel and will say to Messiah, Sit at my right hand. The Messiah will say to Israel, Gather together and stand, and see the salvation of the Lord” (*Tefilat Shimon bar Yohai 4:124*). Consequently, the phrase: “until I make your enemies a footstool at your feet” (*Psalm 110:1*) is understood as an eschatological vision of the end days, for it is taught, “Messiah is the archenemy of Satan” (*Pesiqta Rabbati 3:6 [161b]*), hence, the last enemy to be destroyed is death itself, as it is written, “He will swallow up death forever” (*Isa. 25:8*). Kabbalistic interpretations also identify *adoni* as the spiritual force of Messiah ben Yosef: “He will judge the nations filled with corpses” (*Psalm 110:6*). The initial letters of “He will judge the nations filled” *Yadin bagoyim malei* ידין בגוים מלא, hint to *Mashiakh ben Yosef*, going from left to right (the side of justice). Hence “the entire Psalm is said about Messiah ben Yosef” (*Zohar 2:61*). “Yaaqov, changing his hands, placed ox on the right and lion on the left, for which reason spoke Hashem to my master, Sit at my right hand. This is the tzaddiq that corresponds to Messiah ben Yosef” (*Zohar 3:242b [Pinhas]*). “[the physical] Messiah ben Yosef is also from David’s lineage ... only if in the end he is unsuccessful [as king Messiah] he is more closely identified with Yosef... like Yosef, who saved the sons of Israel, but left them stranded in Egypt. Messiah ben David, on the other hand, will accomplish a complete deliverance” (*Moshe Friedman, A Good resolution about Moshiach*).

22:45 How can he be his son? – Contrary to established religion, in mysticism the thought process is quite more purifying than obsessing over a dogmatic right answer, which is often limited, hasted or erroneous. This is popularly known in eastern mysticism as a *Koan*, a great doubt; or in Aramaic *qushia* קושיא a ‘difficulty’ which a teacher poses to his students. Its purpose is to send the pondering mind to a terrain where it has never been before, the terrain beyond Binah (understanding). In order to attain a response to the *qushia*, the seeker and the question itself become one. This is a common theme in the Zohar, where the Rabbis often ask questions that go beyond expectation or logic, and only through creative, nonlinear thinking they are able to reveal the deepest secrets of the Torah. “When Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai would raise a קושיא difficulty, Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair would come up with twelve different answers” (*Shabbat 33b*). In our premise, all the audience automatically agreed that when Yeshua said “Messiah,” he meant the future son of David who would inherit the kingdom. But with his second question, Yeshua was – not denying that the man destined to be Messiah would be a son of David – but implying that the very soul of Messiah transcends the physical heritage of king David. It is expected for a son to call his father master, but a father would not do that to his son. So whose son is Messiah? Messiah, as the mystical “son of man;” i.e., as the communal soul of Israel, is the son of God himself, as it is written, “Israel is my firstborn son” (*Exod. 4:22*). Here Israel is spoken of collectively as saints, as the Zohar teaches, he “who strives to cling to the secrets of wisdom and properly cleaves to his Master... he is the son of God” (*Zohar 3:112a; cf. Beit Yaaqov on Bereshit 19:5*). The son of man’s soul elevates to the level of Atiqat Qadisha, the Ancient of days (*Daniel 7:13*), becoming the living manifestation of God’s will on earth, as it is written, “He gave him dominion and glory and kingdom, and all peoples and nations and tongues will serve him” (*Daniel 7:14*). Certainly, Messiah is the “life force of all creation” (*Shaare Orah, shaar 2*). And so, the man destined to be the head of Israel receives this soul, for which reason it is written, “I have installed my king on Zion... You are my son, today I have begotten you” (*Psalm 2:6-7*). “Who are you O great mountain?” (*Zech. 4:7*). The midrash explains, “This is the Messiah son of David.

⁴⁶No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

—commentary—

And why is he called a great mountain? Because he is greater than the forefathers, as it is written (*Isaiah 52:13*), "Behold, my servant will prosper; he will be exalted and lifted up, and he will be very high. ... loftier than Avraham... more elevated than Moshe... higher than the ministering angels... and from whom will he issue? From Zerubbabel... descendant of king David" (*Tanhuma Toldot 14:1 [1:138]*). This is a secret: "He who is despised by men, although not for evil deeds, is destined to be exalted, as it is written, Behold my servant will prosper... etc. And who is this? The same one of whom it is written (*Isa. 53:2*), He was despised and forsaken by men" (*Sefer Hassidim 55*). Hence, Messiah is called Bar Nafli, son of the fallen (*Sanh. 96b*), after the verse, "I will establish the tabernacle of David which was fallen" (*Amos 9:11*).