

February 27-March 5, 2023

## Matthew 8; Mark 2–4; Luke 7

“THY FAITH HAS SAVED THEE”

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**Summary:** *Matthew 8. Jesus heals a leper, cures the centurion’s servant and others, stills the tempest, and casts out devils—The devils enter a herd of swine.*

*Mark 2. Jesus forgives sins, heals a paralytic, eats with tax gatherers and sinners, and announces that He is Lord of the Sabbath.*

*Mark 3. Jesus heals on the Sabbath day—He chooses and ordains the Twelve Apostles—He asks, Can Satan cast out Satan?—Jesus speaks of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost and identifies those who believe as being members of His family.*

*Mark 4. Jesus gives the parables of the sower, the candle under a bushel, the seed growing secretly, and the mustard seed—He stills the tempest.*

*Luke 7. Jesus heals the centurion’s servant—Jesus raises from death the son of the widow of Nain—He praises John the Baptist as more than a prophet—A woman anoints Jesus’ feet, and He forgives her sins.*

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### Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

#### How do Jews view miracles?

Miracles are usually viewed with public amazement.

Judaism sometimes views miracles as a part of God’s work with His people. The further a people stray from knowing God, the more their explanations of miracles become nebulous. In modern times, the late Israeli General and statesman, Moshe Dyan, was asked if he believed in miracles. He said, “No, we just count on them!” Following is a Jewish commentary about miracles, some of which is contradictory. “Extraordinary phenomena that seem to fall outside the pattern of normal, explainable occurrences are frequently referred to in English as miracles. In the Bible, such events are termed *otot* or *moftim* “wondrous signs”), and in the *Talmudic* literature as *nisim* (“heralds”). The terms point to the fact that both for the Bible and for the rabbis, miraculous events were caused by God and served as clear indicators of His controlling power in the universe. When

the Red Sea parted to enable the Israelites to flee from the Egyptian armies that were pursuing them, and when the “sun stood still” at Gibeon to enable Joshua to be victorious in his battle with the Canaanites, miracles occurred; at a critical moment in human history, God altered the normal workings of physical phenomena (the sea, the sun), and by doing so, revealed His providential relationship to the people of Israel. Later thinkers, for whom “the natural order” had an existence independent of God, were troubled by the question whether biblical miracles were “natural” or “supernatural,” but the Bible makes no such distinction and never questions God’s ability to do anything, by any means.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

#### How did miracles occur, and do they still take place?

“The rabbis of the *Talmud* unquestionably accepted the biblical miracles as related, but they were troubled by the fact that they seemed to imply a lack of perfection in the very act of Creation. They solved

this theological problem by postulating that miracles were, so to speak, provided for already at the time of creation. Thus, although they were "extraordinary" they were still manifestations of the natural order. Many rabbis reversed this perspective and emphasized that the very regularity and harmony of the natural world were in fact "miraculous." It is this thought which is vocalized in the thanksgiving prayer which is part of the daily *Amidah*: "We thank You for Your miracles which are daily with us, and for Your wonders and benefits, which are wrought at all times, evening, morning and night." "The rabbis rejected, however, the belief in "miracle performers" as bearers of religious truth. Once the Torah had been revealed to man, it was no longer "in heaven." It could not be altered by extraordinary means, but only by a natural process of development which was purely in the hands of ordinary human beings. And although the rabbis emphasized the miraculous aspect of the story of *Hanukkah*, they generally believed that by their time the age of miracles had ceased, since only in biblical times were people "willing to sacrifice themselves for the sanctification of the Name of God." "In modern times, some people have attempted to offer scientific explanations for several of the biblical miracles, such as the parting of the Red Sea. Others have "relativized" them by viewing them as natural occurrences which were recorded as if extraordinary and supernatural, because of the crucial role they played at the particular time." "As is the case with all biblical miracles, the ten plagues are natural phenomena; they are miraculous in that they occur in an intensified form at the crucial moment. Every summer when the Nile rises, it is reddened by organisms it carries (blood); swarms of frogs and insects often follow the annual flooding of the Nile; Egyptian boils were proverbial; and hail, although uncommon, has been known to fall in

January, the time indicated in Exodus. Locusts may be blown across the country in winter or spring, and a thick, three-day darkness can be explained by heavy sandstorms raised by the *hamsin* winds of early spring." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

### **How selective – do miracles appear to some people?**

Miracles are best viewed from the perspective of the person involved. Sometimes the event dealt with one or two individuals and sometimes with a group of people. Making the miracles a metaphor or a lesson for everyone might detract from the practical, personal, and mostly intimate precept or blessing as they were intended. However, the metaphors may be extended to teach private lessons far beyond the seemingly public nature of the miracle itself. An example was the blessing of Naaman the Syrian at the time of Elisha the Prophet. On one hand, the children of Israel were obsessed with the thoughts of being occupied. They may have wished harm on their rulers, even though the Lord's instructions had always included a positive attitude about government. "Curse not the king, no not in thy thought;" (**Ecclesiastes 10:20**) ". . . Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's." (**Luke 20:25**) "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work . . ." (**Titus 3:1**) "We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law." (**Articles of Faith 12**)

### **How are miracles understood, or not?**

There were many lepers in Israel at the time of Naaman. He, the occupying military commander, was also cursed with leprosy. Yet, the commander received the blessing of health. This came through the faith of his Israelite servant who

suggested he go to the Prophet Elisha to be healed. The King of Israel “did not get it” as he saw this as political intrigue. The prophet did not even meet with Naaman; instead, he sent a message for Naaman to bathe in the Jordan River seven times. Naaman “did not get it,” yet followed the counsel of his simple servant to do as the prophet instructed. He was healed and still “did not get it,” sending a treasure to the prophet as a reward. (2 Kings 5) Elijah returned the reward, but the prophet’s servant, Gehazi, wanted to keep something of the treasure for himself. Oh, he “got it” and was even allowed to keep the part he coveted, but he also “got” the leprosy that Naaman had! It is not good to mock the prophet! The miracle had nothing to do with political intrigue or approval of Naaman’s pagan life. It was a lesson of Naaman’s simple servant’s faith and its reward and of not following the prophet’s instruction and its punishment. Get it? “Persons who, without actually being Jewish, follow Jewish practices or claim to be Jews are termed Judaizers. The model of the Judaizer was Naaman, minister to the king of Syria around 850 B.C.E. who, after being cured of leprosy by the prophet Elisha, worshiped the God of the Jews while continuing outwardly to pray to the idols of the state religion.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

### **What was the Savior’s purpose in making miracles?**

Jesus showed his personal compassion and individual love in His miracles. They were used to confirm the private, personal faith of those involved. Does it seem out of his nature to use miracles to prove His divinity and power? Was it those observing that interpreted His miracles as such? “And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.”

(Mark 1:27) “But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)”

(Mark 2:10) This last account in Mark of the palsied man had another subtle yet powerful lesson. Connect the meaning of this event with others. For example, most people that witnessed Jesus heal the withered hand, (Matthew 12:12, Mark 3:1, Luke 6:6) or heal the woman with an issue of blood, (Mark 5:25) saw it as a sign of His power over ailments. Yet, His responses often included a broader lesson. “And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace and be whole of thy plague.” (Mark 5:34) He was a “Whole-istic” healer. For example, a palsied man was told that his sins were forgiven. Consider the man with his withered hand. What happened to the rest of his body and spirit? The blood issue of the woman, unclean for twelve years, (untouchable under Mosaic law) was last in His healing. She was told that she was whole, to go in peace and then, be healed of her “plague.” Is it possible that Jesus knew that her distress of bleeding was in fact the lesser of her challenges in life? She may not have had a hug, a touch or caress in twelve years! Sometimes we are sick one way so that the Lord can bless us another way. Often, the Lord sent the multitude away and asked that the miracle be kept private. It was His nature to ask that “no one know;” it was his way of showing the personal nature of His salvation. Viewing miracles in their private context will give us a greater insight to His mission--of saving each one of us.

### **What can I learn from the “story behind the story?”**

To sense the personal gracious nature of Jesus’ relationships, let’s consider the account of a Roman centurion whose servant was gravely ill. “Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion’s servant, who

was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been Sick.” (Luke 7:1-10) According to Jewish practices in those days, it was not proper for a Jew to come into the house of a foreigner. (Peter reiterated that custom when he spoke to another centurion in Caesarea.) “Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation.” (Acts 10:28) However, Jesus graciously acquiesced to come to the centurion’s house. The Roman graciously constrained Jesus from compromising Jewish custom by asking Him to bless his servant from a distance. His belief was so strong that he trusted the Savior’s power. His love for the Jews was so strong that he built their meeting house. Even today the remains of the synagogue at Capernaum reveal the Roman construction and style.

Archaeology confirms the written scriptural account.

### **What was biblical capital punishment based on and how was it done?**

Stoning is a capital punishment indicated in the Mosaic Law. Biblical punishments were based on the crime, unlike today’s punishments, which are based on the person or the circumstances. Stoning was the punishment for a number of capital sins including murder (Numbers 35:30), adultery (Deuteronomy 22:22-24), blasphemy (Leviticus 24:16), breaking the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-35), apostasy (Deuteronomy 13:6-10), and rebellion against parents (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). A better insight to capital punishment can be seen in the *Talmud* (written Jewish biblical interpretations). Rabbinic interpretations of the ancient Jewish law of stoning indicate that it was required that the convicted person be thrown over a cliff. One of at least two witnesses (and thereby accusers) was responsible for making sure the criminal was dead. The aversion to directly taking another’s life would motivate having the fall cause the death of the accused. A witness/accuser always had to cast the first stone and then all the others threw stones to cover the body (the burial). Abandoned quarries like the one that was the scene of Jesus’ crucifixion location (where the “stone was rejected”) would be likely locations for such rare executions.

### **How did Jesus react to an accusation of a capital offence?**

There is a village called Turan, close to Nazareth and Cana in Galilee, that is the traditional spot where Jesus was accused of not preventing His disciples from harvesting, threshing, and winnowing grain on the Sabbath day. They were doing this for their own nourishment, needing to eat. There is still a huge stone quarry at Turan which provides a visual connection to the Pharisees and their

“death accusation.” “And he said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27-28) Several times in the New Testament, Jesus is identified as the Lord of the Sabbath. “For the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day.” (Matthew 12:8) “And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.” (Luke 6:5)

### **How was the Sabbath made holy in ancient times?**

An integral part of ancient Sabbath observance has been the pouring and blessing of wine followed by the breaking and blessing of bread. There is a specific order to dignify the Sabbath and remind us to make it holy. “The table is set for the festive meal, with the Sabbath candles glowing in polished holders. The family stands and the father raises the brimming silver cup to say *Kiddush*, the blessing and sanctification over wine. This age-old ceremony is in fulfillment of the biblical command, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). “Remember it,” said the rabbis, “over wine,” for wine is the symbol of joy.” “Two loaves appear on the Sabbath table. They recall the double portion of manna which the Israelites in the desert gathered on the eve of the Sabbath for the next day.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

### **What are reasons to keep the Sabbath holy?**

Let us also examine three major symbolic reasons and meanings for the Sabbath. (1) The Sabbath is to be kept in remembrance of the creation. “Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it

shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed. (Exodus 31:13-17) (2) The Sabbath is to be kept in remembrance of being delivered from bondage in Egypt. “But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.”

(Deuteronomy 5:14-15) (2) The Sabbath is to be kept in remembrance of the atonement. “So important is *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) that it is the only fast day which may be observed on the Sabbath and is never postponed until the next day. Moreover, the *Torah* describes the holiness of *Yom Kippur* by calling it the “Sabbath of Sabbaths.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

### **What has been a center function on Sabbath days?**

To the Jews who commemorate the first two reasons for the Sabbath, a sip of wine (or water) is partaken, followed by bread. The prayers recited include a recollection

of the past great deliverance from Egypt, with an eye to the future where an even greater deliverance is anticipated. "The Sabbath bears record of Christ: from Adam to Moses it was the 7th day to signify that our Lord rested on that day from his creative labors (**Ex. 20:8-11**); from Moses to Christ, the Sabbath day was a different day each year to commemorate our Lord's leading of the children of Israel out of bondage (**Deut. 5:12-15**); and from the apostolic day until now, the Sabbath has been the first day of the week to point attention to our Lord's resurrection on his holy day." (**Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, Pg.452**) In this sense, it is a chiasmas that focuses on the atonement in the center. The Savior's atonement began with suffering and bleeding from every pore, (symbolized by wine) and then followed by giving his body,

(symbolized by broken bread). To those who truly believe in the Messiah, the Sabbath day is commemorated by partaking of a morsel of bread followed by a sip of wine water). The prayers are in remembrance of the greatest deliverance eternity will ever know. Repeating: old rendition of the ordinance, wine and bread (in anticipation) then a new rendition of the ordinance, bread and wine (in remembrance); these are the symbols of the Sabbath, a joyful thought of redemption! "The Sabbath and the festivals are particularly times of joy, and indeed it is a positive commandment, often difficult to observe, to be happy on them. The joy required is not frivolity but, contradictory though it may sound, a serious happiness." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)