Matthew 21

Verses 1–7: The end of verse 3 could also be translated “and straightway he will return them.” Does that make any difference to your understanding of the verse?

Verse 5 puts two scriptures together, Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9 (as they appear in the Greek rather than the Hebrew version of the Old Testament). What does “daughter of Sion” mean? Why is it important that the Lord enter Jerusalem on the back of a donkey (rather than on a horse, for example)?

Verses 8–11: Why did the people put their cloaks and branches from the trees onto the road in front of Jesus?

Hosanna means “save, we pray.” Do you think that the people were using it because of its meaning or only as a shout of acclamation (much as we use the word amen without usually thinking about its meaning)?

In Israelite history, who was first called “son of David”? What did that name signify? What does it have to do with the temple?

What does it mean to say “all the city was moved [i.e., shaken]”? 
Why do the crowds describe Jesus as “the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee” rather than with the Messianic title they have been using?

**Verses 12–16:** Though the story of the cleansing of the temple isn’t part of the readings for this lesson, I include study notes for it.

Why does Jesus go to the temple immediately upon entering Jerusalem?

In order to offer sacrifice, people had to be able to buy animals for sacrifice—in particular, the poor had to be able to buy the doves that they used for offerings—and they had to exchange their money for the temple money that was used for offerings. Scholars assume that the animal sales and money exchange occurred in the Court of the Gentiles, an outer court of the temple into which any person could enter. Since selling doves and changing money were necessary to the function of the temple and since it occurred outside the sacred part of the temple, why did Jesus drive out the money changers and the dove sellers?

In verse 13 Jesus combines two Old Testament passages: Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. What do Jesus’s actions show about his authority? To whom do you think Jesus refers when he uses the word *thieves*? Many believe that he is speaking of the high priest and those who rule with him. How might they justify that opinion? The word *thief* is a strong one, comparable to *armed robber*. (It is not the same word that John uses to describe Judas in John 12:6.) Josephus uses it to describe the Zealots and others who waged armed conflict with Rome. Why is it the right word in this
case? Is Jesus’s use of the word here related to his use of the word in John 10:1? What happens in a cave (the King James Version has den) to which armed robbers retreat? What is Jesus saying that those he condemns here have done to the temple?

In verse 15, why does Matthew describe as children the crowds who acclaim Jesus?

Why don’t the chief priests and scribes complain about Jesus’s cleansing of the Court of the Gentiles? Their complaint seems to be that the people are saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David.”

What do you think they mean when they say to Jesus, in verse 16, “Hearest thou what these say?”

Jesus answers them by quoting the Greek version of Psalm 8:3. The word translated perfected means “completed,” but it connotes restoration, putting something back as it was. How have the crowds “perfected praise”?

**Verses 23–27:** Why do the chief priests and elders wait until the day after Jesus has cleansed the temple (see verse 18) to question Jesus’s authority to do what he has done? What things are they asking about—cleansing the temple or what he teaches?

Does Jesus respect the authority of those who question him about his authority? On what evidence do you base your answer?

Why can’t the chief priests and elders answer his question about John’s baptism? Why doesn’t he answer their question?
Verses 28–46: After this confrontation with the chief priests and scribes, Jesus tells them three parables: that of two sons, one obedient and one disobedient; that of the wicked husbandman; and that of the king’s son’s marriage (Matthew 22:1–14). The last of these is not in our reading assignment, but I suggest you read it so that you see this story in its entirety.

As you read those parables, ask what Jesus was trying to teach the priests and scribes. Also ask yourself what the common theme of the three parables is.

Verses 28–32: To whom does Jesus compare the first son? The second?

How do you think the chief priests and scribes responded when Jesus said, “The tax collectors and prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you”? How did he explain that? Can you think of anything that would be a comparable insult in today’s society?

Verse 32 says that John the Baptist taught how to become righteous (he “came unto you in the way of righteousness”). In what did righteousness consist according to John? What have the chief priests and scribes ignored?

Verses 33–44: Compare verse 33 to Isaiah 5:2. What does the vineyard represent in the Isaiah passage? Does it represent the same thing here?

Who do the servants in the parable represent? Whom does the son represent?

What is the irony of verse 41?

What does the JST add to our understanding of these verses?
Matthew 22

**Verses 1–14:** Why does Jesus tell the chief priests and scribes, a group that probably also included Pharisees, three parables rather than just one?

What does this third parable add that we have not seen in the previous two?

In the context of these parables, what does “many are called, but few are chosen” mean? Is that meaning different here than it is in other places where we see the same phrase, such as D&C 121:40?

**Verses 15–22:** Why would Matthew’s audience have been shocked by the coalition of Pharisees and Herodians? (To learn about the Herodians, see the Bible Dictionary.) What would the Herodians have thought about the tax (a poll or head tax) in question? How about the Pharisees? What position does verse 16 suggest that they think Jesus will take?

When Jesus asks them whose image is on the coin (verse 20), what point is he making about the coin? Does Jesus answer the question he has been asked?

Many have said that Jesus’s response to the question is an early commandment to keep church and state separate. What do you think of that interpretation?

**Verses 23–33:** Now the Sadducees come to question Jesus. Luke describes them as the party of the high priest (Acts 5:17). Though most Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, the primary difference between them and the other parties was that they thought that Israel should be ruled by the priesthood or, in other words, by them.
The various overlapping political parties of Jesus’s day fought with each other about many things, such as the right relation of Judea to Rome and what was included in the Law, but they agreed in their antipathy for Jesus. Why did they agree on that? What might their agreement teach us about ourselves?

Does Jesus give his listeners any way to decide what belongs to Caesar and what to God? What is the point of his teaching in these verses?

**Verses 34–39:** Jesus’s confrontation with the ruling powers continues.

How is the Pharisees’ question a trial or test of Jesus? If we can infer from what we know of rabbinic teaching in the second and later centuries, the rabbis (scribes in the New Testament) taught that there were 613 commandments in the Law, 248 positive commandments and 365 negative ones. They ranked these commandments in terms of their greatness or heaviness. Do you think they would have disagreed with Jesus about which commandment is the greatest or heaviest (Deuteronomy 6:5)?

Why does Jesus continue the discussion by answering a question that the Pharisees have not asked: “Which is the second greatest commandment?”

What does he mean when he says that the second commandment (Leviticus 19:18) is “like unto” the first?

What does the phrase “the law and the prophets” mean? Is Jesus referring to the parts of Jewish scripture designated
as “the Law” (or Torah) and “the Prophets”—so that the phrase means “scripture”—or is he using it in another way?

What does it mean to say that the law and the prophets hang or are suspended from these two commandments? Can you explain that metaphor?

**Verses 41–46:** The series of confrontations ends with Jesus questioning the Pharisees. He quotes Psalm 110:1 and poses a problem for them to solve. What is the problem that Jesus has raised, and why can’t the Pharisees solve it? What is Jesus trying to show by giving them a problem that they cannot solve?

We can read the text in the first part of verse 44 as saying, “Yahweh said to the Messiah, ‘Sit on my right hand.’”

**Matthew 23**

Where does this sermon occur?

Does Jesus deliver any other public sermons between this one and his death?

Why do you think he makes hypocrisy the topic of his last sermon? Was this sermon particularly important for Jesus’s day but less so for our own?

**Verses 1–12:** In verse 2, what do you think “the seat of Moses” means?

What does Jesus mean in verse 3 when he tells the people to do what the scribes and Pharisees tell them, but not to do what they do? Is the example he gives in verse 4 particularly telling?
What does Jesus say motivates the scribes’ and Pharisees’ obedience (verses 5–7)?

The word *rabbi* means “my master.” Why does Jesus tell them not to use that title (verse 8)? What does it mean that he tells them also not to use the title *father* or the title *teacher* (*master* in the King James Version)? What title or titles are they to use (verse 8)? How do the permitted titles differ from the forbidden ones? Does Jesus’s injunction to the disciples suggest anything about our own practices? How, for example, can we justify some of the titles we use in the Church or in our society at large if we accept these verses? Ought we to rethink some of our use of titles whether in the Church or in the secular world?

How are verses 11–12 an explanation for what Jesus says about titles?

**Verses 13–36:** Jesus pronounces seven woes on the scribes and Pharisees. Why doesn’t he include the Herodians or Sadducees—or does he?

How do the scribes and Pharisees shut up (in other words, lock up) the kingdom of heaven (verse 13)?

Is he saying anything about priesthood keys? What do they lock up? (Compare Luke 11:52.) What parallel might we find in our own lives for what he accuses the scribes and Pharisees?

Though after the destruction of the temple in AD 70 the Jews no longer proselyted, there is evidence that they were actively proselyting at the time of Christ. What might verse
15 condemn? Do we ever do anything like that? If so, how so? How can we avoid doing this?

What problem does Jesus identify in verses 16–22, the third woe? Is there a contemporary equivalent?

What practice does Jesus criticize in verses 23–24? How is this condemnation connected to his teaching in Matthew 22:39–40?

The fifth and sixth woes (verses 25–26 and 27–28) are similar in structure. What is their point? How would we avoid the sin that Jesus describes in them? Remember that dead things were considered impure, so anything that touched them was impure. That means that the interior of a tomb was as impure as anything could be.

Given the similarity of these two woes, why do you think Jesus pronounced both of them? Why not leave it at six woes by omitting one of these two?

The concluding woe (verses 29–36) is the longest of the seven. What does Jesus condemn in it, and why does he keep it for last and make it longest? Is there anything in our contemporary worship practices like this?

What does it mean to say that they witness to themselves that they are descended from prophet-killers (verse 31)? How is that relevant to Jesus’s situation?

Explain what verse 32 means.

What does Jesus mean when he says that the blood of the righteous from Abel to Zechariah will come on them (verse 35)? (In the Hebrew Bible of the time, the first victim of murder mentioned was Abel, and Zechariah [2 Chronicles...
24:20–22] was the last. We no longer arrange the books in the order that was used in Jesus’s time.) When would early Christians have thought this prophecy had been fulfilled? (Consider verse 36.) Does it have a latter-day fulfillment?

What is the point of verse 37? Does it teach anything that applies to us? How does verse 38 explain prophecies such as that in Jeremiah 22:5? When will Israel see Jesus again (verse 39)?

**John 12:1–8**

**Verses 1–3:** Why is it important that we notice that what follows happens shortly after the raising of Lazarus, as verse 1 reminds us? Is it important that we know this happened in Bethany, or is that merely an incidental detail? If the latter, why did John include it?

Do you see any significance in the fact that this dinner is given for Jesus seven days before his death and resurrection, probably on Friday evening, at the beginning of the Sabbath?

Why is it important to John that he tell us what roles Mary and Martha played at the dinner? How is this story related to the two earlier stories that involve these two women? Does the fact that Martha serves at this dinner help us understand better the story in which Jesus remonstrates with her for being troubled about many things in her serving (Luke 10:38–42)?

The custom seems to have been to anoint the head of a guest with oil (though sometimes feet were anointed after
being washed), but Mary and the Galilean woman (Luke 7:38) each anoint Jesus’s feet (rather than wash them), and they dry his feet with their hair rather than with a towel. The work of washing feet was a servant’s job, and it was probably unseemly for a respectable Jewish woman to let her hair down in public. What is the symbolic significance of what Mary does? The literal meaning of “the house was filled with the odour of the ointment” is obvious. What is its symbolic significance?

Verses 4–8: Isn’t Judas’s objection a reasonable one? Would it have been reasonable if Judas had been a person of good character? How can his character be relevant to our judgment of the reasonableness of his objection?

We could restate verse 6 loosely in this way: “Judas did not say this because he cared for the poor but because he was a thief and was in charge of the disciples’ money.” Does John give one reason or two for Judas’s complaint? Does he intend us to remember John 10:1 or 10:8 when he describes Judas as a thief?

Why was it important for Jesus to explain the symbolic significance of Mary’s act to his disciples (verse 7)?

What are we to make of Jesus’s paraphrase of Deuteronomy 15:11: “The poor always ye have with you” (verse 8)?

Over and over again we have seen Jesus’s love for those who are excluded from the community, those the Pharisees called sinners, most of whom would have been poor. Does what he says here contradict that love and concern? If not, why not?
Verses 9–11: Do you see symbolic significance in the fact that the Jewish leaders want to kill the person whom Jesus has raised from the dead?