



Mark 12:35-40

The Currency of God Part 2

³⁵While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, “*Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David?*” ³⁶David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: “‘*The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’*”” ³⁷David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?” The large crowd listened to him with delight. ³⁸As he taught, Jesus said, “*Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces,*” ³⁹and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. ⁴⁰They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. *These men will be punished most severely.*” Mark 12:35-40

I. Introduction

A. Apparent Disconnect. At first glance it seems as if the first verses (35-37) have nothing to do with the last verses (38-40), and so it might seem odd to look at them together. There is a connection in an underlying theme related to one’s approach to the Kingdom. Many of the previous sections of Scripture have described conflict between Yeshua and various parts of the Jewish culture. Yeshua had conflict with the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians, all of whom were guilty of misleading the people, and all of whom were threatened by Yeshua. Their approach to spiritual questions was to force them into little boxes of their own design and shaped by their own presuppositions. The time had come for Yeshua to turn his eyes on the Scribes.

1. **Who are the Scribes?** Along with the Pharisees, the Scribes were the official leaders of the people, and along with the Pharisees sat in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish governmental body. Scripture refers to them as Teachers of the Law. Their *raison d’etre* was preservation of the Law. They made their living copying and translating the Law, and were concerned with every jot and tittle of it. They were the lawyers of the day, and as lawyers, they were concerned about precision in everything related to the Law, both written and oral. They were the intellectual and religious elite of Israel. Tradition was equally important as Torah, and Yeshua was frequently in conflict with them because He and his disciples did not observe their traditions.
2. **Temple courts.** Many an attorney has said it’s a fearful thing to present an argument before an Appellate Court, much less before the Supreme Court. The Sanhedrin was the Supreme Court of the day, and the Temple was the courtroom. The Scribes were, essentially, on the bench in that courtroom and Yeshua was presenting a case challenging their understanding of the Messiah.

II. Scribal Tenet of Faith

A. Who is the Messiah? When Yeshua asks why the teachers of the Law say that the Messiah is the son of David, he seems to be placing a basic tenet of the faith in disrepute. This cannot possibly be what is intended. But before we look at that question we have to understand some history.

1. **Son of David.** Many verses in Scripture promise that Messiah will come as a descendent of David, i.e. a son of David. Jeremiah 23:5-6 says the Messiah will be a ‘branch’ of David, and Isaiah 11:1-9 says that he will be a ‘branch’ of Jesse (David’s father). When the blind Bartimaeus heard Yeshua was passing by, he cried out, “Yeshua, Son of David, have mercy on me! (Mark 10:47)” When Yeshua entered Jerusalem in Mar 11:10, the pilgrims arriving with him chanted “Blessed be the Kingdom of our father David which is coming”. The statement that the Messiah will come in the lineage of David was not in question. Further, 2Samuel 7:12-16 says

When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.’ ”

2. **Conquering King.** It was expected then that the Messiah would come from the lineage of David. And it was also expected that the Messiah would come as a conquering King. Isaiah 2:4 says
He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.
 This verse describes such a wonderful time, *the Messianic Age*, that the Jews were eagerly looking for the Messiah to come. But they were looking for the wrong kind of Messiah. They were so eager that any person who, for how so ever brief a time, might look as if he were throwing off whatever oppression was in place was in fact thought to be the Messiah. So it was some 200 years before when Judas Maccabeus threw off the oppression of the Greek Empire for a short period of time. For a period of time the Jews thought **he** was the Messiah.
3. **Scribal supposition.** This idea that the Messiah would be a conquering king in the line of David was firmly founded in the Scribal belief system, but it was so firmly founded that there was no room for variance. The Messiah had to be from the line of David, had to be a warrior, and couldn't be anything else. Because of this restrictive box, the Scribes considered that the Messiah had to come from David, but couldn't surpass David.

III. Tenet In Conflict with Scripture

- A. Something More.** To highlight the box the scribes put around the heritage of the Messiah, Yeshua asks one of his famously unanswerable questions. He quotes Psalm 110:1, written by David, which says
The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."
1. **True Messiahship.** The words LORD and Lord have different roots in Hebrew; the former translates YHWH, the covenant name of God, while the latter translates *Adonai*, meaning lord as in master. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David is showing God speaking to the pre-incarnate Yeshua and speaking about that pre-incarnate Yeshua as his (David's) Lord. David is saying the One who will receive that promise of God is far greater than himself.
 2. **Fuller fulfillment.** When David wrote Psalm 110 he was King of Israel. He had great political sovereignty. Even so, he was indicating an even greater sovereignty which was the Messiah's. By extension, the Kingdom of Messiah would be much greater than David's kingdom. As the Messiah's Kingdom is much greater, to assume he comes simply as a conquering king restoring the Davidic kingdom is to miss the point.
 3. **Who's Son?** But Yeshua was asking an even more basic question; an even more acrid assault on the Scribal box. Messiah may be a son of David in the sense he is a descendant of David. But his Kingdom is much greater than David's, of much greater scope than David's, and not at all destructible as was David's. So whose son is he? The implied answer: the Son of God.

IV. Character in Conflict with Kingdom

- A. Questionable Character.** The teachers of the Law have placed impenetrable fences around the Law designed to preserve it and prevent change. They have been simplistic and misleading. However, while these things are worthy of criticism, they are only delusional, not damning. What is certain, is that these defenders of the Law, these prescribers of the Law should also have seen the beauty and praiseworthiness of the Law. And what is certain to receive judgement is that the Scribes burdened the people for the Scribe's own betterment.
1. **Loss of perspective.** By Yeshua's day the reverence for the Law exhibited by the forefathers was hard to find in the established leaders. The Scribes were bound up in notions of status and position. Certainly some of it was self-serving, but some was societal also. Scribes were forbidden from receiving pay, so they lived on subsidies. It was not uncommon for Scribes to have *patrons* whose own wealth was sufficient to support a Scribe, and it was considered an act of piety for the general population to show hospitality to them. None the less, societal or not, the Scribes abused the system.
 2. **Abuse of the disenfranchised.** This legally sanctioned support of the Scribes was easily abused. The Scribes wore flowing white robes to call attention to themselves. As they walked down the street, passers-by were required to acknowledge them in reverent tones. They gave long, public pious prayers in order to build their public persona. They sponged on the hospitality not only of the wealthy but also those of limited resources. They

manipulated widows into donating to the Temple and property left them by their husbands. They were placed in places of honor at synagogue, and at feasts they were given places of precedence even over the elderly and over the host's parents.

B. Spiritual Abuse. In spite of their loss of perspective, and in spite of the scribe's abuse of their station, scribes were given great respect and awe. Their words had the force of a court ruling. But the people had clearly seen that Yeshua and the scribes were at odds with each other. The spiritual order of the community was in disarray, and the people were troubled. So it seems the rebukes of the latter half of the passage was intended as a wake-up call. Yeshua was attempting to break the people free of the allure of these 'false prophets'. Yeshua was saying, "Look for yourselves. Does their behavior line up with their words? Are they to be believed?"

1. **Spiritual violations.** Further, the Scribes were breaking the two greatest commandments. Yeshua has just told the Scribes about the greatest commandments (Mark 12:29-31). He said,

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Certainly the Scribes violated the first by heaping on themselves the veneration and praise that rightfully belong to God, and violated the second by taking advantage of the veneration of the people.

V. The Currency of God

A. One's Own Choice. About a month ago we talked about one always has the choice in determining whether to follow the Kingdom of Light or the kingdom of darkness. Also, since each kingdom has its own currency, a person has a choice how one will live. That is, one living in the Kingdom of Light will go about living his life differently than one in the other. How one goes through life depends upon what he considers valuable and how he spends the currency of that kingdom.

1. **Currency of Caesar.** The tendency of people in this kingdom is to live life focused on themselves. Like the Scribes they see themselves as the most important thing. They seek their own glory and greatness. They take advantage of everything and every person. They will especially take advantage of the powerless or disenfranchised. They often can't look beyond their possessions to look at the glory of the Kingdom of God. A familiar example of this in Scripture is the rich young ruler who, while seeking salvation, was challenged by Yeshua to give away his possessions. The young ruler had his own spiritual box as did the Scribes, and in spite of the obvious poverty around himself had not 'Loved his neighbor as himself'. As a 21st century example, I once had a rider in my car who complemented the people of Denver simply because we smile and are really interested when we ask 'How are you?' In contrast, he said, people in Washington D.C. typically ask, 'Who do you work for?' One is an example of the Kingdom of light, the other of darkness.

2. **Currency of God.** In contrast, the currency of God is involved in looking out for the welfare of others. It means looking beyond the current situation or one's transitory struggle to see the big picture. It sees humility as a worthy goal, not aggrandizement. In Mark 8:36-37 Yeshua points out the absurdity of seeking the world at the risk of losing one's soul, and in 10:42-45 He points out that greatness in the Kingdom of God is measured by the degree to which we help one another.

B. Choose Wisely. None of us actually chooses the Kingdom of Darkness. When we are adolescents, we don't one day say, 'I think I'll be a thief when I grow up' or 'I think I'll be a prostitute when I grow up.' The small steps I talked about a month ago work the other way too. Every day is filled with a series of decisions. The Scribes were rebuked by Yeshua because they had made a series of self-justifying decision which resulted in a hypocritical and predatory lifestyle. When facing each of those daily decisions, we should ask, 'Will this be the first step on the slippery slope?'

1. **White Sepulchers.** Every one of us has erected a spiritual box around some area in our life. In that sense we have become just like the Scribes. Inside those boxes are white sepulchers, tombs of the dead. We don't like what we are like in that place. That's why the box is there—to protect our sense of self. Yeshua made that

withering rebuke of the Scribes to wake up the people and to protect them. But those verses are in Scripture for us in the 21st century too. He knows the old axiom: ‘the disciple becomes just like the master.’

2. **Cleanup the box.** So often I find myself operating on remote; just coasting through the day, not paying much attention to events, and reacting to situations on instinct. This will never allow us to clean up the box because instinct is what created the box in the first place. We have to allow Yeshua to take charge in our lives. We have to be with Yeshua not just every day, but every moment. Not an easy task certainly, but Messiah helps.
 - Romans 12:1-2 *I urge you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice— holy, acceptable to God— which is your spiritual service. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God— what is good and acceptable and perfect.*
 - 2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore if anyone is in Messiah, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*
3. **How?** Those are really nice verses, but do they really help? What does it mean to ‘renew your mind’? What does it actually mean to be a ‘new creation’? This is where the small steps come in. Giant leaps can often miss the goal. Small steps allow one to adjust along the way. Again Scripture helps:
 - James 1:21-22, 27 ²¹*So put away all moral filth and excess of evil and receive with humility the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²²But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. ²⁷Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*
 - James 4:17 *Therefore whoever knows the right thing to do and does not do it— for him it is sin.*
 - 1 Cor. 15:33 *Do not be deceived! Bad company corrupts good morals.*
 - Proverbs 4:23 *Guard your heart diligently, for from it flow the springs of life.*
 - Hebrews 12:1-2 *Therefore, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also get rid of every weight and entangling sin. Let us run with endurance the race set before us, focusing on Yeshua, the initiator and perfecter of faith.*

These verses teach us to keep ourselves out of situations, or away from people who take us away from God. The obvious things are vulgar things or language or people. But the subtle things are more dangerous. Is it wrong to watch one hour of TV every day? Probably not. How about three? Probably yes. The reason is that then almost every non-working, waking hour is spent in frivolous activity and not spent in Kingdom business. That takes us away from God, away from personal growth, away from intimacy with God.

- C. **Beware!** Do you wonder why Yeshua didn’t say beware the thieves and prostitutes? Almost everyone recognizes the danger such people present to us. It’s not so easy to spot the deceitful. Or the misleading false prophet. We have to be aware that we don’t live our lives in isolation. We all have people near to us, watching us. How do we act in this circumstance, or in that dilemma? Did we take the easy road or the proper road? The small steps, with help of the Holy Spirit, help us live holy and righteous lives. Remember, the small steps are not just for us: they’re also for the ones close to us.
- D. **Spend Wisely.** Wisely spending the currency of God means actively living in the moment, not living on instinct. It means that when your friend asks you to a bar for drinks, you decline because the temptation to sin is high in such places. It means that when someone cuts you off in traffic you don’t reflexively respond because you don’t want to reflect badly on the image of God in your heart. In the 80’s there was a movement called WWJD what would Jesus do. It still applies. We should ask ourselves that question every time we are faced with a decision. Try it; it works!

VI. References

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