

# The Unpardonable Sin

📖 Matthew 12:22-32

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We are studying Matthew 12. This is a pivotal chapter in the Gospel of Matthew. Dr Arnold Fruchtenbaum says, "...his whole ministry underwent a radical change in chapter twelve."<sup>1</sup> The radical change began in 11:20 when Jesus began denouncing whole cities of Israel for rejecting His authenticating miracles. In 11:25 a clear shift is seen in that from this point forward truths would be hidden from the Pharisees and revealed to those who followed Him. In 12:1 the Pharisees opposition to Him starts to come out into the open as they accuse His followers of breaking Pharisaic traditions regarding Sabbath. Jesus masterfully defends them proving that their traditions regarding Sabbath contradicted the Scriptural teaching of Sabbath. In 12:9 the Pharisees challenge Jesus regarding the legality of healing on the Sabbath.

We pick up here to review this incident and how Jesus handled it. The major point is that it was this incident that resulted in the Pharisees deciding once and for all to destroy Him. At this point the rejection of the King becomes irreversible. They will reject Him and they will destroy Him. The only thing that remains is how to destroy Him. In 12:9 it was another Sabbath and Matthew says Jesus went into "their synagogue." We noted that He does not say "our synagogue." Jesus made no claim to their synagogue. It was their school where their doctrine was taught, not His. In 12:10 they had evidently planted a man there whose hand was withered due to some disease or damage. They knew that Jesus was able to heal and compassionate and so would, even on a Sabbath. So they questioned Him, asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" The purpose of the question was that they might catch Him teaching things contrary to their traditions and they may be able to accuse Him in a court of Law. Jesus responded to the question in 12:11-12 with a question of His own. "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep!" The Talmud permitted helping an animal on Sabbath. If it was permitted to help an animal then why was it not permitted to heal a man on Sabbath? Man is made in the image of God and more valuable than an animal. "So then," Jesus concludes, "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Rather than dispute with them about how much help one could give an animal on Sabbath without it becoming work Jesus took it to the more basic level of simply doing good. His point is that it is never unlawful to do good, not even on the Sabbath. In Mark 3:4 it reports that they could not give an answer to Jesus' response. Mark also

indicates that He gave them time to answer and when they gave no answer He looked at them with fury and grieved at their hardness of heart. It was evident that they had great concern for the letter of the law but had missed the spirit of the law. Having answered all objections to healing on the Sabbath in 12:13 He went ahead and healed the man saying, "Stretch out your hand!" He stretched it out and it was restored to normal, just like the other. This was a creation miracle done by the Spirit of God through the Son of God at the discretion of the Father as later verses indicate. At that time, according to Luke 6:11, the Pharisees became enraged. In 12:14 the Pharisees decided to destroy Him. Mark 3:6 adds that they joined with the Herodians to determine how to destroy Him. In light of the opposition in 12:15 Jesus withdrew from there and many followed Him, both Jew and Gentile. He showed great power and compassion by healing them all. These miracles continued to authenticate His person as the Messiah in whom men should place their trust and hope but it was clear that something was different in His ministry. In 12:16 He warned them not to tell who He was. This secrecy was designed to keep from arousing opposition because it was not time for Him to die for the sins of the world. In 12:18 a pattern emerges that continues through Matthew's gospel. As Jesus continues His ministry if opposition arises He will withdraw and continue training His disciples. So the pattern is opposition—withdrawal—training. This pattern was interpreted by Matthew as the fulfillment of Isa 42:1-4. In that passage Messiah was predicted to be the Father's chosen servant who would be empowered by the Spirit and would proclaim justice to Gentiles. In 12:19 Jesus would not oppose His aggressors initially but would withdraw. In 12:20 He would be gentle in His training of others. This kind of training would continue until the end of the age when Jesus returns to lead justice to victory in the establishment of the kingdom. Before the kingdom was established 12:21 predicts that Gentiles would find their hope in Him. This opens the door to a new truth about the interadvent age during the postponement of the kingdom; namely the universality of the gospel proclamation and primacy given to Gentile salvation. These things were not understood by Matthew and others at the time but Jesus predicted that later the Holy Spirit would bring them to their remembrance and then they would understand. That understanding comes later as the Book of Acts unfolds. So this was a vital section because it teaches the irreversibility of the rejection. The Pharisees had decided to destroy Him.

Tonight we come to the unofficial rejection in Matthew 12:22-37. We refer to this as the unofficial rejection of the King and His kingdom program because it does not immediately result in Him going to His death on the cross. Instead it results in Him withdrawing and training His disciples for the future. The official rejection will only occur when He faces the opposition head on such that He is willingly arrested, falsely tried, condemned and crucified. So this is the unofficial rejection, it is quite public, the people are put in a position to make a final decision regarding His Person and Work and the Pharisees reject and so the people reject. Pentecost says, "We come now to a crucial turning point in the relationship between the Pharisees, the nation, and Christ."<sup>2</sup>

In 12:22 we read, **Then**. This is a common word used by Matthew to depict a change in scene. It does not mean it occurred on the same Sabbath as the prior verses or even that it occurred on Sabbath at all (cf 2:7; 11:20). It simply means sometime after the previous scene. Matthew's point is to show a few scenes that capture the

progression of opposition to the King. On this day **a demon possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus**. Who brought him to Jesus is not stated. It may have been part of the plan that was hatched by the Pharisees and Herodians to bring this very difficult case to Him or it may have been Jesus who had the man brought to Him to take the fight to them. Because the pattern is not Jesus taking the fight to them but withdrawing then it is more likely that this is part of the plan hatched by the Pharisees and Herodians to bring Him out into the open. However, it may simply have been someone else who brought the man to Him because they knew He could heal him. In any case Jesus **healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw**. A similar if not identical situation is found in Matt 9:32ff. Matthew does not seem as interested in the miracle as the response to the miracle. He states the man's problems without much explanation because his audience was Jewish; they already knew how difficult this case was to heal; they already knew that this miracle was nigh unto impossible; they already knew such would be a Messianic miracle. The man had three problems. First, he was **demon possessed**, second he was **blind and** third, he was **mute**. Constable states the relationship as follows, "...his demon possession produced his blindness and dumbness."<sup>3</sup> This relationship is correct as seen by the fact that in v 24 Jesus is said to have healed the man by casting out the demon. That was all that was necessary, then the man could both see and speak. Arnold Fruchtenbaum's extensive background in Jewish thought and customs is illuminating when he says, "Among the many miracles that Jesus performed was the casting out of demons. Judaism also had exorcists who would cast out demons (v. 27). But in Jewish exorcism, one first had to establish communication with the demon in order to find out his name. Then, using the demon's name, the exorcist could cast him out. On other occasions Jesus did use the Jewish method, as in Luke 8:30. When demons speak they use the vocal chords of the person under their control. However, in the case of the dumb demon, Jewish exorcism was to no avail, for communication with that kind of a demon was impossible. But Jewish theology taught that the Messiah, when He came, would even be able to cast out that kind of demon... In verse 22, Jesus was able to exorcise a dumb demon. In verse 23, this caused the people to begin asking the question, "Can Jesus really be the Messiah?" This was one of the key purposes of this miracle, to get them to see that He indeed was the *Son of David*."<sup>4</sup> The people at this point are brought to the point of making a decision. Who was Jesus?

10:23 says, **All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?"**

The word **amazed** is in the imperfect tense and refers to ongoing action in the past, such as "they were continually amazed..." or to the onset of an ongoing action, such as "they began to be amazed..." In any case it was not a momentary amazement but ongoing. The word conveys "the feeling of astonishment mingled w. fear, caused by events which are miraculous, extraordinary, or difficult to understand."<sup>5</sup> What they had witnessed was not an ordinary miracle. It had a particular quality to it that identified Him as the Messiah. As Fruchtenbaum noted, the sons of the Pharisees could cast out demons as long as they could establish communication with the demon and find out his name. This demon was dumb, it could not speak, hence communication with the demon could not be established and his name could not be discovered. Jewish theology taught that the Messiah would

be so great that when He came He would be able to cast out dumb demons. The people knew this and had the double response of astonishment mixed with fear. That is why they **were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?"** At this point all the attention was fixed on Jesus. Who was He? This work could be done by none other than the Son of David? Was He the Son of David? The Son of David was the Messiah, the rightful heir to David's throne and kingdom. Was He the Messiah? Was He the King of Israel? The wording of the question demands a negative response.<sup>6</sup> As Pentecost says, "Their question, "Could this be the Son of David?" (Matt. 12:23), expected a negative answer."<sup>7</sup> The basic reason their question demanded a negative response even in light of such tremendous clarity is because the Messianic profile they had been taught by the Pharisees was incomplete. The Pharisees taught that the Messiah would do astonishing miracles and lead a revolt against Gentile kingdoms<sup>8</sup> in order to defeat His enemies and establish the kingdom. Jesus was doing astonishing miracles but He was not leading a revolt against Gentile kingdoms in order to defeat them. They had misunderstood the OT Messianic profile that required them to receive Him as their King before He would lead that revolt. There were also other things that the Pharisees Messianic profile did not account for that were characterized by Jesus. The bottom line is everything was not lining up. But the fact that He did such an astonishing miracle at least led them to bring up whether He was "the Son of David." Constable says, "The Jews expected Messiah to perform miracles (v. 38), but other things about Jesus, for example His servant characteristics, led them to conclude that He was not the Son of David."<sup>9</sup> So the Messianic profile that the Pharisees had taught the people could not account for all that Jesus did and was. Because of this the people are looking for some explanation of this miracle.

Who are the people looking to? The Pharisees. Pentecost says, "Having been taught that they were sheep who should follow the shepherds, they could not conceive of accepting Christ apart from the approval of the Pharisees...They professed a willingness to accept Christ if the Pharisees approved but felt they must reject Him since the Pharisees disapproved."<sup>10</sup> In their minds the Pharisees knew more than them and they would receive Him only if they rejected Him. This is why I keep saying that the people of Israel always follow the leadership of Israel such that if the leadership of Israel accepts or rejects the King then the people will accept or reject the King. There is a slavish following of the Pharisees. This slavish following is mirrored in the Roman Catholic religion where the people slavishly follow the interpretations of the priests, bishops, pope without question...In fact, as we have gone through this it has been pointed out to me that there are many linkages between the Pharisees and the Roman Catholic priestly hierarchy.

By 11:23 the people have witnessed the miracle and have at least brought up **the Son of David**. But surely that connection could not be correct because the Pharisees were not identifying Him as **the Son of David**. What then was the explanation for how Jesus had done this miracle? In 11:24 the Pharisees immediately jump into the fray to give explanation. **But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons."** There are several things to observe about the explanation. First, they did not question whether He could cast out demons. It was clear that He could do it. He had done it many times.

What they had seen was really happening and not a trick. Second, they had to have an explanation. They were the leadership of Israel. If they didn't have an explanation how were they going to stop the people from going after Him? If people went after Him they would lose their positions. Third, their explanation is that He **casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons**. The name **Beelzebul** was mentioned earlier in 10:25. The term is clearly used of **the ruler of the demons** who is Satan. Jesus confirms this interpretation in verse 26 where He says, "If Satan casts out Satan..." Clearly then the Pharisees are claiming that Jesus cast out demons by Satan. However, the meaning of the term **Beelzebul** is difficult to establish. One suggestion is that it is derived from the OT Hebrew "baalzebub" which means "lord of the flies." This was a term of mocking which was a deliberate distortion of "baalzebul" which means "prince of Baal." In other words, they were connecting Jesus with a pagan god of the Phoenicians. Another suggestion is that it derived from another mocking expression "lord of dung." Glasscock says, "Probably the best understanding is that it derives from *ba'al zibbul*, "from post-O.T. Heb. *Zebel*, manure, dung; *zibbul* meaning an idolatrous sacrifice." Thus the term was used as a slander against the Devil (god of dung) and the Pharisees wished to associate Jesus with the Devil. Still another view is that it is a translation of *oikodespotes* ("head of the house," NIV). Carson says, "...the real head of the house, Jesus, who heads the household of God, is being willfully confused with the head of the house of demons. The charge is shockingly vile—the Messiah himself rejected as Satan!"<sup>11</sup> These several suggestions all have one thing in common. They all connect Jesus with Satan. That Satan could do miracles is a clear OT teaching that was accepted by Jewish theology at the time of Christ. Satan may have worked through the sorcerers and magicians of Egypt and through false prophets that went to the house of Israel. However, it is quite possible that more than this is being claimed. Mk 3:22 confirms that they were saying he was possessed by Beelzebul. As Edersheim says, "They regarded Jesus, as not only temporarily, but permanently, possessed by a demon, that is, as the constant vehicle of Satanic influence. And this demon was, according to them none other than Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. Thus, in their view, it was really Satan who acted in and through Him; and Jesus, instead of being recognized as the Son of God, was regarded as an incarnation of Satan."<sup>12</sup> Since this is the case then they were claiming that Jesus was the "Anti-Christ" in the sense of later NT theology predicts of the one to come. Some consider the one to come is to be viewed as what they reaped for claiming that He was that one. 2 Thess 2:9 would appropriately describe this reckless identification of Him as "...the one who's coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness..." This dreadful accusation sets the stage for Jesus' response.

In 12:25 we read, **And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. <sup>26</sup>"If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? <sup>27</sup>"If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? For this reason they will be your judges. <sup>28</sup>"But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>29</sup>"Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong *man*? And then he will plunder his house.**

Jesus' response involves three arguments that invalidate their argument that He was doing His miracles by the power of Satan.<sup>13</sup> The first argument, in 12:25-26, precedes off the principle that division within a realm will result in eventual destruction of that realm. Jesus says, **Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand.**<sup>26</sup> **If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?** Verse 25 is the principle; **any kingdom...any city...any house** that is **divided against itself will not stand** but go to destruction. The principle that division within a realm will result in eventual destruction of that realm is universally known. If a kingdom or nation's inhabitants are divided against themselves then that kingdom or nation will go to destruction. If a cities inhabitants are divided against themselves then that city will go to destruction. And if a home's inhabitants are divided against themselves then that home will go to destruction. In verse 26 Jesus applies this to their claim that He was **Satan** incarnate casting out His workers. He had not just cast out one demon but man. If this kept up then **Satan casts out Satan**, showing **he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?** The **if** + indicative is a 1<sup>st</sup> class condition which shows that a 1<sup>st</sup> class condition does not show that something is true but that it assumes that something is true for the sake of argument. Jesus is simply saying, **if**, for the sake of argument what you are saying is true, that I am **Satan** incarnate, then my casting out of Satan's workers is division within Satan's realm and his kingdom will certainly self-destruct. Logically Satan would not do this. Therefore Jesus was not Satan incarnate.

The second argument, in 12:27, highlights the conflicting interpretations of exorcisms by the Pharisees. Jesus says **If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges.** Constable says, "The Pharisees' "sons" cast out demons occasionally. These "sons" were probably their disciples or less likely the Jews more generally. In either case some Jews in Jesus' day could cast out demons (cf. Acts 19:13)."<sup>14</sup> Jesus' point is a logical one. The **if** + indicative is another 1<sup>st</sup> class condition that assumes for the sake of argument that Jesus was exorcizing demons **by Beelzebul**. If that was their interpretation of His exorcisms then didn't that imply that their **sons** were exorcizing them by Beelzebul too? Of course the Pharisees did not interpret them as exorcizing by Beelzebul. Pentecost says, "Some in Israel could cast out demons, and Israel deemed them to be God's gifts to the nation. Even the Pharisees acknowledged this manifestation of God's power and thanks Him for the gift of the exorcists."<sup>15</sup> If they recognized their exorcisms as sourced in God's power why did they *not* recognize His exorcisms as sourced in God's power too, particularly when it was a greater exorcism?<sup>16</sup> This conflict of interpretations exposes the Pharisees inconsistency in interpreting exorcisms. By contrast He suggests in verse 28, **But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.** This is another 1<sup>st</sup> class condition assuming for the sake of argument that it is true that Jesus cast out demons by the Spirit of God. In this case, as the context indicates, it is true that He was. Jesus did many of His miracles by means of **the Spirit of God**. He also did some by His own divine nature, as for example, when He said, if you destroy this temple I will raise it up in three days. This miracle was done by the Spirit of God. And since the Spirit had done it Jesus says, **then** it evidenced that **the kingdom of**

**God has come upon you.** The verb **has come** is *φθαινω* and it is in the aorist tense. This is not as before when both John the Baptist and He preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand using the perfect tense (Matt 3:2; 4:17; et. al.). Before the kingdom was “at hand” in the sense that it had drawn near and remained near as long as the offer of the kingdom was on the table. At this point the kingdom “had come upon” them but there was no longer an offer of the kingdom on the table. Toussaint says, “Whereas the perfect tense had before been used to refer to the condition of the kingdom, the aorist tense is now used. In view of the evident rejection of the King, the kingdom could not now be said to be in the condition of *remaining* at hand. In fact the kingdom is never again preached as having drawn near.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore we might say that just as the King was withdrawing so the kingdom offer was withdrawing. The kingdom did not come. It came near but it did not come here. The kingdom is in postponement because its arrival is contingent on Israel’s reception of their King.

Importantly Matthew uses the expression “kingdom of God” for the first time in this verse. As mentioned in the introduction Matthew usually avoids using “kingdom of God” because his audience was Jewish and they had a sensitivity to overusing the name of God. Instead he typically uses the expression “kingdom of heaven.” While some dispensationalists have seen a difference between kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven Matthew did not see a strict difference since he uses them in Hebrew parallelism in Matt 19:23 and 24. It is the “kingdom of God” because it is God’s reign on earth and it is the “kingdom of heaven” because it comes from heaven to earth. But these are one and the same kingdom. As we see here and three later places, Matthew was not against using the term kingdom of God, only sensitive to using it often (cf 19:24; 21:31, 43). Why did he use it here? Constable suggests, “Matthew probably used “kingdom of God” here rather than “kingdom of heaven” to connect the kingdom with the Spirit.” His disciples get confused later in Acts 1 when Jesus speaks of the coming of the Spirit not many days from now as distinct from the coming of the kingdom which is not for them to know. In any case the work of the Spirit of God was firmly fixed in their minds as connected with the Kingdom of God.

The third and final argument, in 12:29, precedes off the principle that for a thief to steal he must be stronger than the owner. Jesus says, **Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.** The principle that it is not possible to go into a strong man’s house and remove items unless you are stronger than that man is universally known. By application how could Jesus enter into Satan’s stronghold and drive out a demon unless He first bound Satan? Barbieri says, “...by driving **out demons**, He was proving He was greater than Satan.”<sup>18</sup> Pentecost says, “The inference was that if Christ can enter Satan’s stronghold and deliver people from his control as He had just done, then it is evident that He is stronger than Satan.”<sup>19</sup> If Jesus is stronger than Satan then it is evident that He can lock him away for a thousand years as He will do when He returns to establish the kingdom (Rev 20:1-7). If the kingdom is here in any sense now then Satan must be bound in some sense now. According to the rest of the NT that concept is categorically false. Satan is prowling around like a lion seeking someone to devour, working in the sons of disobedience and our arch enemy (Eph 2:2; 6:12; 1 Pet 5:8). There is no kingdom now, no

partial kingdom, no now-not yet kingdom, no already-not yet kingdom, no kingdom running congruent with the church, no kingdom in any sense, otherwise Satan is bound in some sense.

With these three arguments Jesus proved that He had not done the miracles by Satan. His logic was flawless. He left the Pharisees with a lot of explaining to do. If He had not done them by Satan then logically He had done them by the Spirit of God. There are no other options and if the Spirit of God then the kingdom of God had come near to them.

He now warns the people of the consequences of not rallying to Him and pronounces the Pharisees sin as the unpardonable sin that the people should not commit by identifying with their response. In 12:30, **He who is not with Me is against Me; and He who does not gather with Me scatters.** There could be no neutrality. Some of the people may be thinking that they had not really come to a decision yet but Jesus says that no decision was a decision **against** Him. The people needed to decide whether they were with Him or the Pharisees. The expression **and He who does not gather with Me scatters** is an OT picture of the harvest. The wheat was taken to the threshing floor and the grain was gathered into the barn while the chaff was scattered by the wind. The ones who gathered with Him would ultimately avoid judgment and be brought into the kingdom but those who did not would be scattered by the judgment and not participate in the kingdom. The people had a critical decision to make. Did Jesus do miracles by Satan or by the Spirit? Would they follow the Pharisees or Jesus? Keep in mind that the people of Israel always follow the leadership of Israel.

Jesus now states the seriousness of the offense of claiming His miracles were done by Satan. Strictly following His argument is essential or else mass confusion will result. In 12:31, **Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.** <sup>32</sup>**Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.** I take it that Jesus is giving the people a very strong warning here and that they need to seriously consider what they're saying if they decide to follow the Pharisees. Follow the argument closely and then we'll discuss briefly whether the unpardonable sin can be committed today. First, in 12:31 the principle is set forth that all sins are forgivable except one. **Any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.** What Jesus is trying to do is highlight the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as something particularly horrible. They really need to think through what they are saying by identifying with the Pharisees in the blasphemy against the Spirit? Second, what's the blasphemy against the Spirit? The word blasphemy means "extreme slander." The extreme slander is defined in v 24 as saying that Jesus' miracles were done by Satan. It's something that is said, not done and that's a key for 12:34-37 where judgment is based on the words that come out of one's mouth, not something done but said. So the unpardonable sin was a sin of the tongue, the sin of saying that Jesus' miracles were done by Satan. Every sin can be forgiven but that sin. Third, the sin was limited to being committed by that generation. Only that generation, in fact, for only about three and a half years, did anyone on the planet ever see

these miracles. It was claiming that what they saw with their own eyes was done by Satan when it was done by the Spirit that constitutes the sin. And therefore the sin could only be committed by that generation.

In verse 32 we make some further observations. This verse is similar in structure to verse 31 but here He applies the principle of verse 31 directly to the Son of Man so it's perfectly clear. **Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.** Fourth, note that one can **speak against the Son of Man**. This is surprising, particularly when Matthew's gospel is so christologically driven. One would think it would say the reverse, a word spoken against the Spirit will be forgiven but a word against the Son of Man will not. But that is not what the text says. Why was this sin so grievous? Hagner says, "The gravity of the blasphemy against the Spirit...depends upon the Holy Spirit as the fundamental dynamic that stands behind and makes possible the entire messianic ministry of Jesus himself . . ." <sup>20</sup> They had gone way too far. It was one thing to speak against Jesus as the Son of Man but it was infinitely worse to blaspheme the Spirit. They needed to think through what they were saying by identifying with the Pharisees in this explanation. They had seen the greatest miracles in the history of the world with their own eyes and by assigning them to Satan they set their own judgment. In all truth in verse 34 it was not Jesus who was demon possessed but the Pharisees. They were a brood of vipers. Did they want to identify with a brood of vipers? Fifth, the final expression, **it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come** refers to the age of Israel and the age of the Messiah to come. The Church age is not included because it was still a mystery. In OT theology there are only two ages, the age of Israel and the age of the Messiah when the kingdom comes. Pentecost says, "Forgiveness of this sin could not occur in this age—that is, the age in which the kingdom was being offered, nor in the age to come, that is, the age in which all their messianic hopes would be realized."<sup>21</sup> Very simply the expression means that not only would it not be forgiven now but it wouldn't be forgiven later either. Ultimately they would not be partakers of the Messianic kingdom.

When did the judgment for the unpardonable sin come? The judgment was a temporal one that foreshadowed their final one. The temporal judgment came in AD70 when the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and left their house desolate. Three early church historians report that when the believing Jews saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies they fled the city and were not destroyed. Those who had committed the unpardonable sin remained and were destroyed.

In conclusion, the unpardonable sin was the sin of saying that Jesus' miracles done by the Spirit were done by Satan. The sin could only be committed by that generation because only that generation saw the miracles done by the Spirit. As an important aside, it is better to not say that it was a national sin because that implicates each individual in the nation including those who believed. It is much better to view it as a sin that the unpardonable sin could only be committed in that generation. Verses 39, 41 and 42 refer to the inevitable judgment of those in that generation that committed this sin, not the entire nation. The distinction in the AD70 destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple attest.

Can the unpardonable sin be committed today? No. Pentecost says, "The necessary circumstances do not exist today and, consequently, this same sin cannot be committed today."<sup>22</sup> Christians often say that not believing in Jesus is the unpardonable sin today but the text does not say that. The idea that not believing in Jesus is an unpardonable sin is a false construct with some egregious theological errors. If you make unbelief a sin then you inevitably make belief righteousness. Once you have done that you have made belief meritorious. Scripture views faith in a category all by itself, neither sin, nor righteousness. So you cannot say that lack of faith is sin or faith is righteousness. What you can say is what the Bible consistently says about faith. First, you can say that faith is credited as righteousness (Rom 4:3). It does not say that it is righteousness. Second, you can say that if you don't believe you will die in your sins (John 8:24). But you can't say that lack of faith itself is sin. Third, you can say that whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Rom 14:23). But you can't say lack of faith itself is sin because it implies that faith is righteousness and that's a wrongheaded idea. Faith is not meritorious, it's in a category all by itself and that's why the unpardonable sin has nothing to do with not believing in Jesus Christ today. The unpardonable sin is a sin that could only be committed during one generation, the generation that saw for about three and one half years the most fantastic miracles of God the Spirit through Jesus Christ and claimed they were done by Satan.

In conclusion, in 12:22 a man who was demon possessed and therefore blind and mute was brought to Jesus and He cast out the demon by the Holy Spirit. In 12:23 this was recognized as a Messianic miracle since the demon was dumb and his name could not be identified so as to cast him out. The people recognizing that the Son of David could do such miracles nevertheless were not believing in Him because their leaders, the Pharisees were not believing in Him. In 12:24 the Pharisees gave the explanation that "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." Mk 3:22 adds that they said He was possessed by Beelzebul. They were saying that Jesus was possessed by Satan continually. In 12:25-29 Jesus responded with three arguments. First, in 12:25-26 Jesus argued from the principal that a divided house cannot stand but will go to destruction. If He was possessed by Satan and casting out members of Satan's house then Satan's house would eventually go to destruction. Second, in 12:27 Jesus argued that the Pharisees were inconsistent in their interpretations of exorcisms. If their sons casting them out was viewed as a great gift of God why did they interpret His casting them out as Satanic? Third, in 12:29 Jesus argued from the principal that to steal from a strong man one had to be strong enough to bind the strong man. His point is that if He could go into Satan's stronghold and remove people from demon possession then He was stronger than Satan. In 12:30-32 Jesus now turns to the people and warns them against deciding with the Pharisees. They need to think long and hard about the consequences of siding with their explanation of this miracle. They may speak against Him and be forgiven by believing in Him but if they spoke against the Spirit of God who was the dynamic behind Jesus' entire ministry they were going way too far. They would be positioning themselves for judgment, a judgment which temporally took place in AD70 and which foreshadowed ultimate judgment and not partaking of the Messianic kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, p 294.

<sup>2</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 205.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 12:22.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, p 295.

<sup>5</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 350.

<sup>6</sup> See BDAG entry on *μητι*, "a marker that invites a negative response to the question that it introduces."

<sup>7</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 205.

<sup>8</sup> See Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, p 268.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 12:23.

<sup>10</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 205.

<sup>11</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 253.

<sup>12</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Volume 1*, p 574-5.

<sup>13</sup> Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 46.

<sup>14</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 12:27.

<sup>15</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 206.

<sup>16</sup> Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 46.

<sup>17</sup> Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 164.

<sup>18</sup> Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 46.

<sup>19</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 206.

<sup>20</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 12:31.

<sup>21</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 207.

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<sup>22</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 207.