

Explaining The Chosen: Season 2, Episode 8: Beyond Mountains

From HebrewRootsMom.com (copyright 2023, all rights reserved)

In the last episode of Season 2, we see Jesus's followers making preparations for Jesus to deliver his sermon to a vast crowd. The curiosity of the Romans and suspicion of the Jewish leaders continues to grow as the disciples navigate their ministry and disputes among themselves.

Selling the land

In the opening scene, men claiming to be descendants of Simeon negotiate a land purchase from a descendant of Reuben. They lied to say they were descendants because they knew they would not get the sale otherwise.

It must have been known then, even outside the Jewish community, that the nation of Israel would not sell land to outsiders. Not willing to sell the land may sound selfish, but it's out of obedience to God.

The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me.

Deuteronomy 25:23

There's a heated dispute (and has been for thousands of years) about who the land of Israel belongs to, but those who believe the truth of the Bible take God at His word. God says the land is His, and He promised that Abraham and his descendants would live there, so we know the Jewish people are its rightful owners (Gen. 15:18-21 and other verses).

Hellenism

John says that Simon the Zealot's obsession with exercise "smacks of Hellenism." He's referring to the pagan Greek influence that had begun to creep into Jewish life.

Exercise doesn't sound like a concerning threat to the Jewish people, but there were worse consequences of Hellenism.

Greek and Jewish cultures were very different, but the Greeks (and Greek-like Macedonians) lived in the same areas at this time, so there was an incentive to assimilate. Some Jewish people adopted a Greek way of life, including worshipping idols and other practices forbidden by God.

The attraction to assimilate was strong, not just because it led to more peaceful cities or for political reasons. Sometimes it was forced. The story of the Maccabees that led to the *** link celebration of Hanukkah tells of a horrific time when the Jewish people were heavily persecuted and forced to abandon their religious practices.

But remember, we live in a fallen world and know that those who worship the one true God will be persecuted. Jesus knew this persecution would happen and gave us some encouraging words.

Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Matthew 10:28

Unfortunately, God's people have experienced persecution throughout history, do currently, and will in the future too. If you follow God and His Son, know you may be mistreated because of your faith. Jesus warned that they persecuted him and that following him would come with the possibility that we would also be.

When you experience actual persecution, know that it's because you're on the right side of the eternal perspective. It's right to follow God's Word, even if those around us don't understand why we do what we do.

They all want to follow in the right way

After we see Ramah and Mary studying Psalm 139, Thomas and Tamar consider the disciples' arguing. Thomas comments, "They all love our rabbi and want to follow him in the right way. They just can't agree on what that right way is."

His comment reminded me of what I see going on in so many circles of Believers today. We all have a heart to follow God in a way that pleases Him, but we often disagree on how it should be done. Instead of focusing on what unites us, we allow our differences to divide us.

It takes determined intentionality to ensure we don't get onto this path. A fallen world surrounds all Believers, but we must not get distracted and start acting like the world. We must respect each other as we respond to the guidance and conviction of the Spirit in how we're led. We can lovingly wrestle with differences in Scriptural interpretation and humbly hold each other accountable when we stray. The human tendency is to let our pride take hold and cling to our side, but we must focus on eternal things and keep unity as one of our highest priorities.

The House of Shammai

Shmuel and Yanni spoke with Shammai about their concerns about Jesus and his ministry, and he seemed to relish in the friction it would cause. As I explained in Episode 5 of Season 2, the two prevailing schools of thought in Jewish leadership at the time were the houses of Shammai and Hillel. These two rabbis had differing perspectives on how Biblical laws should be lived out. Shammai tended toward more strict adherence to the commandments, while Hillel aimed to reform these rigid views with a more compassionate and people-centered interpretation of Scripture. Jesus was more on the Hillel side, as he demonstrated when he challenged the Pharisees on some aspects of Jewish law.

These two schools of thought tended to be aggressive toward one another. This disagreement even resulted in fighting at times. Hillel essentially won over most Jewish leadership, as modern Judaism now leans more toward the Hillel.

The healing of the world

When Jesus and Matthew are writing the sermon, Jesus points out that he wants his people to participate in the healing of the world, not its destruction.

There's a concept in Judaism called Tikkun Olam, meaning "repair the world." In response to our broken world, this concept encourages people to do whatever's within their capability to fix the world around them. Tikkun Olam inspires people to care for the environment, foster healthy relationships, give to charity, etc., to restore the earth to the state of the Garden of Eden.

Although we won't be able to reach the perfect state of the Garden, there are things we can all do to improve the world around us for ourselves, others, and future generations. The theme of Tikkun Olam is that we do all in our power to do what we can to improve the world we live in.

And that wraps up the final episode of Season 2! I look forward to covering Season 3, so follow Hebrew Roots Mom on social media or sign up for the newsletter to find out when new articles are published. Find all my articles Explaining The Chosen at HebrewRootsMom.com.