

Matthew 21:14-17

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Jesus heals the blind and lame in the temple as the children shout Hosanna to the Son of David. The priests were angered by this, and asked Jesus if He heard and approved of what they were saying. Jesus did approve of their praise and He asked them if they understood what Psalm 8 meant. He then left Jerusalem with His disciples to spend the night in the nearby town of Bethany.

The parallel gospel account of this event is found in Mark 11:18-19. Similar but indirect parallels may include Luke 19:38-40; Luke 19:47 and Mark 11:11; share some significant similarities.

After driving away the exploitative money changers and the *temple* merchants from His Father's House, *Jesus* performed public miracles of healing on *the temple* grounds. Matthew recorded that people who were *blind* and who were *lame* came to Him in the temple. The phrase *in the temple* could mean inside *the temple* proper, where the court of Israel was, or it could mean the larger complex which included the court of the Gentiles. ([See Map.](#))

As Jesus healed the blind and the lame in the temple, the people were amazed at the wonderful things He was doing. Even the children were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David."

The term, *Hosanna* is simultaneously a declaration of joy and praise as well as a desperate, urgent cry for rescue. It is a Hebrew expression that means "Oh Save us!" and "Praise to the Savior." The term *Son of David* was an overt Messianic label. It came from a divine promise to *David* as prophesied through Nathan that God would give David a descendant whose throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 12-13). This forever king was believed by the Jews to be the Messiah. *Jesus* was a descendant of *David* (Matthew 1:1) and *He* was the Messiah (Matthew 1:14). *The children* were practically shouting to *Jesus* "Messiah save us!" and "Praise to *Jesus*, our Messiah!" These *children in the temple* were likely repeating what they had heard their parents saying or what they had heard when *Jesus* rode into Jerusalem a short while earlier.

The children who were shouting in the temple greatly angered the chief priest and scribes. The chief priests belonged to the party of the Sadducees. *The temple* was under their control. It was the seat of their power. It was highly distressing to *them* to see a man forcibly drive out their money changers and merchants and then perform *wonderful* miracles that drew people unto Himself. When the Sadducees heard what *the children* were saying about *Jesus* in "their" temple, and saw His wonderful miracles of healing, and how the people were flocking to Him, *they became indignant*. Mark adds that they were also angry over Jesus accusing them of turning His House of Prayer into a robbers' den (Mark 11:17).

From their perspective, they saw *Jesus* as a usurper who acted as though *the temple* belonged to Himself and was deceiving the masses into thinking that he was the Messiah. And perhaps worst of all, from their perspective, *Jesus* was acting on His own authority and His behavior was

beyond their control. But like the Pharisees before *them*, in their indignation, *they* never seemed to consider if *Jesus* might actually be the Messiah.

They perceived *Jesus* as a threat to their power. *They* “began seeking how to destroy Him for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching” (Mark 8:11). The people now *came to Him (Jesus)* in “their” temple, instead of to *them*. It would be logical for the Sadducees to conclude that, if this behavior was permitted, it could erode their place of honor in Jewish society. Or it could lead to greater disturbances that would invite the Roman authorities to intervene and remove *them* from power (John 11:48). With this perspective, *they* could not let this happen. *They* reacted.

The chief priests and the scribes confronted *Jesus*. *They* indignantly asked *Him*, “*Do You hear what these children are saying?*” Their rhetorical question was designed to shame *Jesus* and take control of the situation. *They* expected *Jesus* to deny having heard or understood the Messianic shouts *the children* were *saying*, then to try and force *Him* to publicly reject the Messianic hopes the people were putting on *Him*.

Jesus did not repudiate *the children* as *they* expected. *He* repudiated *the priests and scribes* instead.

He boldly responded in simple truth. *Yes*. His *yes* was to their question if *He* was hearing *what the children* were *saying* about *Him*. *Yes He* had heard *the children* calling out to *Him* as *the Son of David*; moreover *He* approved of *them* identifying *Him* as the Messiah. This was likely a shocking response to *the chief priests’* attempt to gain the upper hand. But *Jesus* did not stop there.

He asked *them* a rhetorical question of His own: *Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself?’*” The structure of *Jesus’s* question is harsh. Its negative construction—“*Did you never...?*”—presumed that the priest and elders *never* had *read* this passage *in the Scriptures*. Or if they did read it, they have *never* understood it. As those who were supposed to be experts in the Bible, this would likely have been perceived as a public slight.

The quote *Jesus* offered comes from Psalm 8. As *priests and scribes*, *they* had likely *read* this psalm many times over and would have instantly recognized it as Psalm 8. And if required, they probably would have been able to quote the entire psalm by heart.

Psalm 8 begins and ends with the famous line “O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth!” (Psalm 8:1; 8:9). The psalm’s central lines and main point marvel at how God chose lowly man (lower than the angels) to be elevated to reign over His creation, and in doing so silence His adversary, Satan (Psalm 8:4-6). But it is from the second verse of Psalm 8 that *Jesus* quotes. “*From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength*” (Psalm 8:2). *Jesus* paraphrased this to say *prepared praise* instead of “established strength.”

Jesus’s pithy response had three barbs for *the chief priests and scribes* and it boomeranged the shame *the scribes* intended for *Jesus* back upon themselves.

First, the construction of His question “*Have you never read...*” implied that *they* had not *read* (or forgotten the meaning of) Psalm 8. How could these professional *scribes* not know what their own scriptures said?

Second, by quoting this verse *Jesus* not only validated *the children’s shouting* that *He* was the Messiah, *He* also made it apparent to everyone present that untrained *children* knew more about this psalm and the God it spoke of than *the chief priests* did.

Third, *Jesus* inferred that *the chief priests and scribes* who indignantly questioned *Him* were God’s adversaries and on the side of Satan. When *Jesus* quoted Psalm 8:2, *He* left out the second half of the verse. The unspoken lines read: “Because of your adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease” (Psalm 8:2). This omission served as a visceral meme to label the priests and scribes as opposing God.

The children’s proclamations of “*Hosanna to the Son of David*” had silenced *the chief priests and scribes* who were acting as God’s enemies. The parallel is that humans (lower than angels) silence Satan when they praise God by serving as faithful stewards of His creation (including loving others as we love ourselves). In the same way, *the children* (lower than priests) were silencing Satan’s agents (who exploited rather than served) when they praised *Jesus* (who is God) by acknowledging Him as the Messiah.

Matthew does not record any response from *the chief priests or scribes*. After such a scathing and unexpected humiliation, it is possible that *they* needed a moment to recompose themselves before confronting *Jesus* again. *They* did not wish to be publicly embarrassed any further and needed time to develop a strategy to stop Him.

According to Mark, it was late in the day when this encounter occurred (Mark 11:11; Mark 11:19). For His own part, *Jesus left them and went out of the city*. Instead of staying in Jerusalem, *Jesus went to the nearby village of Bethany, and spent the night there*.

Bethany was located about two miles from Jerusalem along the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives (John 11:18). Mark reports that *Bethany* was where *Jesus* and His disciples returned to spend each *night* throughout their visit to Jerusalem for the Passover (Mark 11:19). It is possible that they stayed in the home of their friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus who lived in *Bethany*. During the daytime of Passover-week they were active in *the city*, usually around the temple.

Biblical Text

21:14-17 And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they became indignant and said to Him, “Do You hear what these children are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself?’” And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.