

Matthew 11:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

Analysis

'Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.' Following His defense of John and Himself (v.7-19), Jesus pronounces judgment on Galilean cities that witnessed His miracles yet refused repentance. The verb 'upbraid' (όνειδίζειν/oneidizein) means to reproach, rebuke, censure harshly. These cities—Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum (v.21-23)—saw 'most of his mighty works' (αἱ πλεῖσται δυνάμεις/hai pleistai dynameis)—healings, exorcisms, nature miracles, resurrections. Yet they 'repented not' (οὐ μετενόησαν/ou metenoēsan). Greater revelation brings greater responsibility and greater judgment for rejection. Reformed theology emphasizes this principle: those exposed to clear gospel truth who persistently reject face severer judgment than those with less light (Luke 12:47-48, Hebrews 10:29). Miracles don't guarantee repentance—even dramatic evidence can be resisted by hardened hearts. This verse destroys the notion 'if only God gave more evidence, people would believe.' The problem isn't insufficient evidence but spiritual deadness requiring regeneration.

Historical Context

Chorazin and Bethsaida were Galilean towns near Capernaum where Jesus concentrated His early ministry (Matthew 4:13). Most of His miracles occurred in

this region: healings in Capernaum (Matthew 8:5-17, 9:1-8), feeding 5000 near Bethsaida (Luke 9:10-17), numerous exorcisms and healings. Yet these cities as communities rejected Him. After Pentecost, Christianity spread quickly in other regions but apparently made little impact in these Galilean towns. Archaeological evidence confirms their later decline and destruction. Jesus's pronouncement proved prophetic: they faced temporal judgment and eternal consequence. The contrast He draws (v.21-24) with pagan cities Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom is shocking: those notoriously wicked cities would have repented if they'd seen what Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum saw. Greater privilege means greater accountability. This warns against assuming that growing up in Christian contexts, hearing gospel regularly, or witnessing God's work guarantees salvation. Response to revelation determines destiny.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What 'mighty works' of God have you witnessed that should produce repentance and faith in your life?
2. How does exposure to clear biblical teaching increase your responsibility and potential judgment if you don't respond?
3. What does this passage teach about the relationship between miracles, evidence, and faith—why doesn't more evidence automatically produce belief?

Interlinear Text

οὐαί σοι Χοραζίν, οὐαί σοι Βηθσαϊδάν· ὅτι εἰ
! woe unto thee Chorazin ! woe unto thee Bethsaida ! for if
G3759 G4671 G5523 G3759 G4671 G966 G3754 G1487

ἐν Τύρῳ καὶ Σιδῶνι γενόμεναι αἱ δυνάμεις αἱ
in Tyre and Sidon had been done which the mighty works which
G1722 G5184 G2532 G4605 G1096 G3588 G1411 G3588

γενόμεναι ἐν ὑμῖν πάλαι ἀν ἐν σάκκῳ καὶ σποδῷ
had been done in you G3819 long ago in sackcloth and ashes
G1096 G1722 G5213 G302 G1722 G4526 G2532 G4700

μετενόησαν
they would have repented
G3340

Additional Cross-References

Job 42:6 (Repentance): Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

Mark 6:45 (Parallel theme): And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people.

Matthew 15:21 (Parallel theme): Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

John 12:21 (Parallel theme): The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.

Luke 9:10 (Parallel theme): And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.

Acts 12:20 (Parallel theme): And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country.

Mark 3:8 (Parallel theme): And from Jerusalem, and from Idumaea, and from beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him.

Mark 7:31 (Parallel theme): And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis.

Mark 8:22 (Parallel theme): And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him.

Matthew 18:7 (Parallel theme): Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org