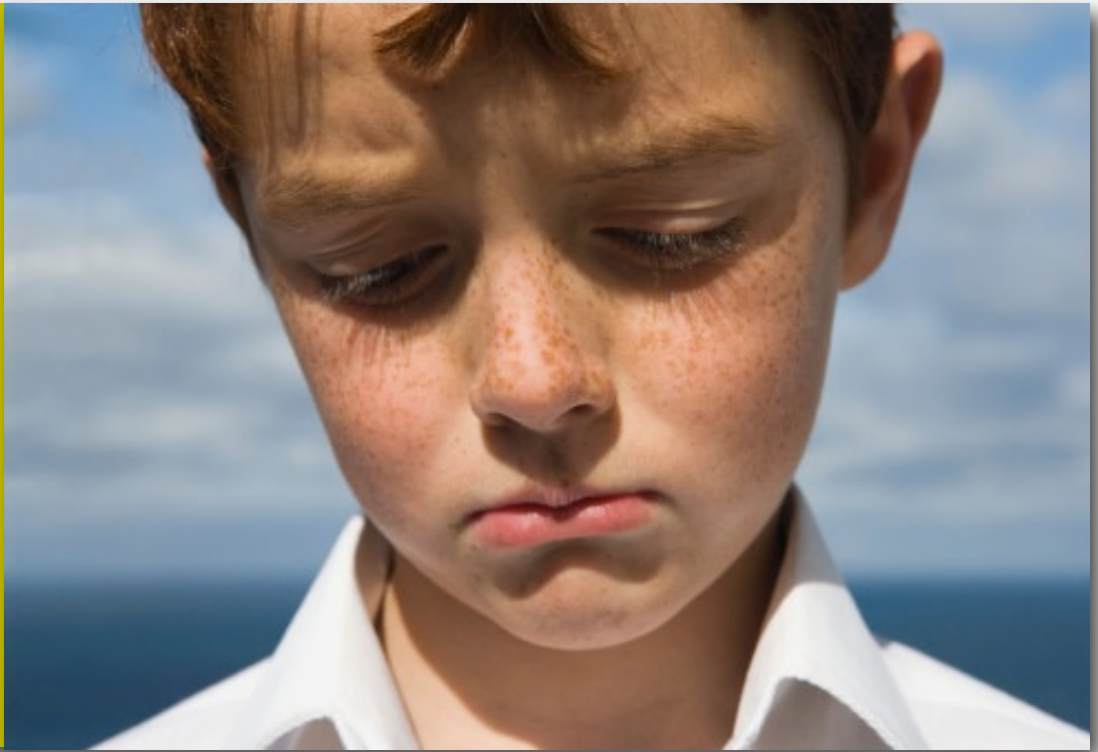


# MESSAGE MINDER

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Are You the expected One, or shall we look for someone else?

Matthew 11:3



## Great Expectations

By Jonathan Stone

It is easy for us to read the New Testament and criticize the Jewish believers who failed to recognize Jesus as the very fulfillment of that on which they had been waiting. However, a closer look at the biblical history can help us realize that we may have been prone to the very same blindness had we been in their place. A reading of the Scriptures that the Jewish people had at the time (the Old Testament) reveals a picture of a messianic restoration that would give most of us expectations that Jesus seemingly failed to meet. Therein lays the critical point, that they had certain expectations. It was not that it was wrong to have expectations, but that they failed to overcome their unmet expectations.

It helps to keep in mind that God had promised to establish David's throne forever. When Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed in 586 B.C. the seemingly unthinkable had happened. Some

seventy years later the Israelites were released from exile. Some years after that they were able to rebuild the city and the Temple. Yet, something was missing. There was still no true monarchy, no political power, and no mighty military. Israel was back as a people, but not as a kingdom. So, they waited for God to reestablish his throne, rightly discerning that He would do that through His chosen Messiah. When that happened Israel would be more than God's chosen people, it would be the very Kingdom of God.

Four hundred years later Jesus shows up, born from an unspectacular lineage under suspicious circumstances. As people begin to wonder if He really could be the Messiah He begins to teach that "the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). He eventually helped His disciples see themselves as the true Temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16). Perhaps

our response would have been, "That sounds nice, but I believe God has bigger plans than that!" If we were already questioning His seemingly narrow vision then His sudden apparent demise on a Roman cross would have finalized our doubt in Him and His message.

If that is not enough consider John the Baptist, of whom Jesus said there had been no one greater. He once proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom with power and justice. Yet, as he sat alone in a dungeon he began to question why his expectations had not yet been filled and had his disciples ask Jesus, "Are you the expected one, or shall we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3). Yes, it could happen to us. In fact, it probably has. What kind of expectations do you have today? More importantly, how will you overcome your unmet expectations when they crash in on you? Is it possible they are actually part of God's plan?

## Are Your Expectations Causing You to be Offended?

From a dungeon John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus about their expectations that seemed to be going unmet. They asked, “Are you the *expected* One, or shall we look for someone else?” (Matt. 11:3). After pointing John’s disciples to the fruit of His ministry Jesus gives this poignant advice, “And blessed is he who does not take *offense* at me” (Matt. 11:6). Indeed, the root issue of offense is unmet expectations.

John the Baptist was hardly the first person to take offense at unmet expectations. In 2 Kings we are told about Naaman, the captain of the army of the King of Aram, who had contracted leprosy. When the King of Aram wrote a letter to the prophet Elisha asking him to receive Naaman that he might be healed, Elisha told him to come. As Naaman was approaching Elisha sent a message instructing him to simply go and wash in the Jordan river seven times (2 Kings 5:10). This was not the reception that Naaman expected, and he was clearly offended by his unmet expectations. We read: “But Naaman was furious and went away and said, ‘Behold, I thought, ‘He will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.’ ‘Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?’ So he turned and went away in a rage” (2 Kings 5:11-12). Luckily for Naaman, his servants talked some sense into him and he eventually agreed to wash in the Jordan and was healed.

Similarly, we see that many who initially followed Jesus eventually became offended at Him and His teachings. In John 6 we read that great multitudes of people had begun to follow Jesus because of the signs and miracles that He was performing. It was here that Jesus began to teach that eternal life would come from eating His flesh and drinking His blood (see John 6:54). When Jesus’ disciples heard this teaching they knew that Jesus was offending the great crowd of people. On hearing it they said, “This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?” (John 6:60). Instead of easing their offense Jesus took it one step further and said that no one could come to Him unless God the Father permitted it (John 6:65). What was the impact of His teaching? The Scripture states, “As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore” (John 6:66).

We do not know how John the Baptist responded to the report from his disciples. Presumably he overcame his unmet expectations, just as Naaman eventually did. But we see a pattern here. Expectations go unmet, which leads to offense and anger, which leads to withdraw. That is the great question here. All of us develop expectations. All of us will feel disappointment and frustration at God and/or others. The question is how will we respond? Will we withdraw like Naaman and so many of Jesus’ followers initially did? Perhaps there are more pressing questions for you today. Are you offended by someone? Are you going to withdraw in anger? Is there a better way?

