The new NIV on Matt 11:12, 16 and 19

(Iver Larsen, revised October 2026)

I am happy to see that the NIV2011 has kept the TNIV rendering of Matthew 11:12 as opposed to the old NIV. It says: *"From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it."*

While it is not clear to me what **raiding** the kingdom of heaven means, I suppose the readers may get the idea of people attacking it and trying to get rid of it. The Greek verbs are present tense, which is lost in the RSV and other versions influenced by it, like NIV2011. Herod stopped John the Baptist from announcing the kingdom by putting him in jail, and Jesus has many opponents in these chapters of Matthew. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians opposed Jesus for each their own reasons. What they had in common was a rejection of Jesus as the Messiah as well as much of his teachings and actions. The English "until" is also misleading, but that is another topic in itself (See the article: The implications of until in English and Greek.)

I am not really surprised (though a bit disappointed) that the NIV2011 is close to TNIV and still essentially a literal translation, but this verse is one place where NIV2011 is better than NLT and most other English versions.

V. 16 is very unclear and misleading: *"To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others."* Jesus often used a special phrase to refer in an oblique way to those in his audience who lacked faith and opposed him. The phrase has come into Greek as τὴν γενεὰν ταύτην. The phrase does **not** mean *this generation*. (For any who are interested, there is an article about it called *Generation is a wrong translation choice for Greek genea.*) Jesus is referring to those opponents who are attacking both John the Baptist and himself in various ways.

The introduction of the parable is also misleading. The parable or illustration talks about two groups of children. One group is inviting another group to either a festive or sombre event. The other group refuses to join them in both cases. The festive invitation is from Jesus: listen to the good news of God's kingdom, while the sombre invitation is from John the Baptist: Repent and turn from your sinful life! The children who refuse are a picture of the people characterised as "this generation" (i.e. some people). They accuse Jesus of being a glutton and drunkard, and accuse John of being crazy. They will not join either of them.

Finally, in v. 19, NIV2011 says: *But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.* One problem here is with the genitive *her deeds*. A person or the personified wisdom can not testify about itself. It is not wisdom who does any deeds/actions. It is people who act as a result of hearing words of wisdom. It is a genitive of source, acts resulting from wisdom. The parallel in Luke 7:35 has "all her children". It may well have been a proverbial saying. The intended association with children is probably obedience as well as likeness to parents. A possible translation could be: *And wisdom is vindicated by those who follow it*. Even though there are many who reject the wisdom of John and Jesus, there are some who believe and follow the wisdom they brought, and it is those people who will realize that it was in fact wisdom. They will understand that John was not crazy, and Jesus was not a glutton and drunkard.