

Class Notes

The Messianic Torah

Matthew 5-7

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Jesus looks out at a crowd of the powerless and dispossessed. But instead of dismissing or pitying them, he begins to unveil a vision of God's Kingdom that starts with these people right here. Sit with Jesus on a mountainside as he delivers some of his most well-known teachings, and meditate on the Sermon on the Mount.

Last updated on: October 15, 2025

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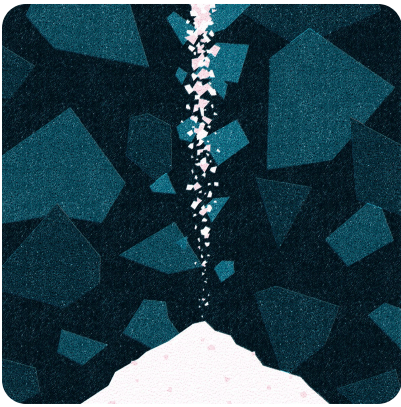
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Module 1: Jesus Announces God's Kingdom

SESSIONS 1-5

Jesus begins his sermon by reimagining who it is that has the good life. Catch Jesus' bold vision for a world shaped by God's character.

Session 1: Philosopher, Teacher, Prophet, Sage

Key Takeaways

- Early audiences of Jesus' teaching in Matthew's gospel saw Jesus as participating in the tradition of ancient philosophical thinkers, who taught and embodied the good life.
- In his teachings, Jesus relies especially on the thought categories of the Hebrew Bible: Torah, prophecy, and wisdom.
- Jesus presents himself and his teachings as a fulfillment of and a step forward in the story of God and Israel.

Jesus Among the Philosophers

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is presented as a great philosopher in the ancient sense, a true lover of wisdom who both teaches and embodies the way to the good life (adapted from Jonathan Pennington, [Jesus the Great Philosopher](#) and Robert Kinney, [Hellenistic Dimensions of the Gospel of Matthew](#)).

In the 3rd century Greco-Roman city of Dura-Europos, there was a Jewish synagogue and a Christian house church located near each other. Both structures have beautifully preserved mosaic paintings of stories from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. There is a fascinating parallel between the synagogue's depiction of Moses and the burning bush and the church's portrait of Jesus healing the paralyzed man (below). Both are portrayed with the dress of ancient Greek philosophers (Greek toga, arm raised, teaching).



Crispian, Crispins (2023). [Wikimedia Commons](#).



Yale University Art Gallery (2019). [Wikimedia Commons](#).

Both Moses and Jesus were imagined to be philosophers in the ancient sense of the word.

“Philosophy in the ancient Greek and Roman world was not primarily theory ... it was a way of life, a way of being in the world. This was rooted in a way of seeing and understanding what the world really is. Philosophers did ponder big and mysterious ideas (the nature of matter and time), but this exploration was always for the purpose of helping people live a certain way ... based on knowing and loving what is truly Good. This is called ‘virtue’ and is all about the development of habits and character that correspond to reality so that one can enter into the fullness of human potential and flourishing, to become fully human.”

Pennington, Jonathan (2020). [Jesus the Great Philosopher](#). Brazos Press. 21-22, 28.

In the 1st century, *philosophia* (love of wisdom) was done in small social groups that gathered around a specific teacher who recruited a community of disciples. These communities were grounded in the body of teaching (*philosophia*) and a community practice, a shared way of life. All of it was focused on shaping one’s life toward the good—one’s thoughts, choices, habits, community, and vocation.

This tradition has been called “Virtue Ethics.”

- The Good Life and Human Flourishing: There is an ideal form of human life (moral choices being just one part) that leads to the most flourishing (Greek: *eudaimonia*).
- Character and Virtue: The focus of education is on a person’s moral character more than teaching a philosophy for making individual moral decisions. It’s about becoming a person who is virtuous, whose life is aligned in the direction of flourishing, not just a person who does the right thing.
- Communal and Formative: These ideal forms of human life that lead to flourishing are primarily communal and cannot be achieved merely on an individual, rational level.

The question driving Virtue Ethics is less “What should I do?” and more “What kind of person should I be?” and “With whom shall I become that kind of person?”

Jesus’ teaching and his way of arguing his points fit into this ancient tradition of moral and ethical teaching.

The sermon regularly touches on the flourishing life that results from following his teachings.

- “Blessing” and being among the happy or fortunate ([5:3-13](#)).
- “Wholeness” that makes one like God ([5:48](#)).

- “Reward” that comes from integrity (6:1-18)
- An anxiety-free life (6:19-34)
- Production of “good fruit” (7:16-18)
- One’s life is like a house built on the rock (7:24-27)

The sermon focuses on people’s character and core motivations, in contrast to external, observable behavior which can be deceiving.

Matthew 5:8 Instructor's Translation

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Matthew 5:21-22 Instructor's Translation

You have heard it said, “Do not murder,” ... and I say to you, everyone who is angry at another is guilty ...

Matthew 5:27-28 Instructor's Translation

You have heard it said, “Don’t commit adultery;” but I say to you, anyone who looks at a woman so he can lust for her has already committed adultery.

Matthew 6:1 Instructor's Translation

Beware of doing your acts of righteousness before people so you can be noticed by them.

Matthew 6:21 Instructor's Translation

Where your wealth is, there your heart will be too.

This is why “hypocrisy” in the sermon does NOT mean “doing the opposite of what you say.” Rather, it means “doing the right thing for the wrong motives.” This sermon comes in the context of Jesus’ mission to form “Kingdom of God communities” in Galilee. He is creating “communities of virtue-formation,” not just lecturing on ethics in the abstract.

The sermon represents a Kingdom of God virtue ethic, in which Jesus argues that the kind of people who live by his ethical wisdom will be the ones who truly flourish as the world is transformed into the new creation.

A Biblical-Theology Approach to the Sermon

When we view the sermon in the context of the unified biblical story, in continuity with what has come before, we get some new perspective. Jesus calls what has come before “the Torah and the Prophets,” his phrase for the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Sermon as Torah

In the sermon, Jesus says he is “fulfilling the Torah and Prophets,” and he speaks these words claiming the authority of Israel’s God.

Matthew 5:17 Instructor's Translation

Don't suppose that I have come to do away with the **Torah or the Prophets**. I have not come to do away, **but to fill them full**.

Matthew 5:21-48 Instructor's Translation

You have heard it said + "Quotes from the Torah" + and **I** say to you ...

Matthew 7:12 Instructor's Translation

So then, everything you desire that people to do to you, so also you do to them; for this **is the Torah and the Prophets**.

Matthew 7:28-29 Instructor's Translation

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at his teaching; for he was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Jesus is presented as a new Moses, teaching a renewed *torah* for the people of God. People are not shocked that Jesus is teaching something foreign or new. They are amazed that he is assuming to have the same divine authority as the God of Israel, summoning Israel to allegiance to him as the way to be faithful to Israel's God.

Jesus presents the sermon as a revelation of God's will for his people to actually live by, not as an unattainable ideal.

The Sermon as Prophetic

Jesus' main message, summarized a few sentences before the sermon begins, is "the Kingdom of God has come near" (Matt. 4:17).

The reign of God was breaking into our world, Heaven was invading Earth, and the sermon represents a view of human relationships and of the world order that aligns itself with the values of this new order. The restorative reign of God, announced by Jesus, was the fulfillment of Moses and the prophets' anticipation of a "new covenant" where God's will, revealed in the Torah, would be "written on the hearts" of his people.

Deuteronomy 30:1-6 LEB

¹ And then when all of these things come upon you,
the blessing and the curse that I have set before you
and you call them to mind among the nations there where Yahweh your God has scattered you,
² and you return to Yahweh and you listen to his voice according to all that I am commanding you today,
both you and your children, with all your heart and with all your inner self,
³ and Yahweh your God will restore your fortunes, and he will have compassion upon you, and he will again
gather you together from all the peoples where Yahweh your God scattered you there. ...

⁶ And Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring
to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your inner self so that you may live.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 Instructor's Translation

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by

the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord.

"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. **"I will put my Torah in their minds and write it on their hearts.** I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Ezekiel 36:26–27 NIV

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And **I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees** and be careful to keep my laws.

This is what Jesus means when he says his interpretation of covenant faithfulness "fulfills the Torah and the Prophets" ([Matt. 5:17](#)). To live by the ethics of the sermon is to live the life of the new covenant, empowered by God's Spirit. It means experiencing a bit of new creation, now and here, in anticipation of the final setting right of all things.

The Sermon as Wisdom

Jesus presents his teachings as the true voice of Lady Wisdom from the book of Proverbs, offering the way to "the good life," also known as the way to "blessing" (the "blessings/beatitudes" in 5:3-11). Jesus takes up the roles of Solomon as the fount of divine wisdom for Israel and of Lady Wisdom (both found in Proverbs 1-9), forcing his generation to make a decision.

Proverbs 3:33–35 (NASB95)

The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked,
but he **blesses** the dwelling of the **righteous.**
Though he scoffs at the scoffers,
yet he gives grace to the afflicted.
The **wise** will inherit honor,
but **fools** display dishonor.

Matthew 7:13–14 (NASB95)

Enter through **the narrow gate;** for the gate is wide and **the way is broad that leads to destruction,** and there are many who enter through it.
For **the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life,** and there are few who find it.

Proverbs 1:7 (NASB95)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Matthew 7:24–27 (NASB95)

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who **built his house on the rock.**
And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.
Everyone who hears these words of mine and does

Proverbs 4:10–11 (NASB95)

Hear, my son, and accept my sayings
and **the years of your life will be many.**

Jesus' Teaching as Lady Wisdom. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

I have directed you in **the way of wisdom**;
I have led you in upright paths.

Proverbs 8:35–36 (NASB95)

For he who finds me **finds life**
and obtains favor from the LORD.
But he who sins against me injures himself;
all those who hate me **love death.**

not act on them, will be like a **foolish man who
built his house on the sand.**

The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds
blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—
and great was its fall.

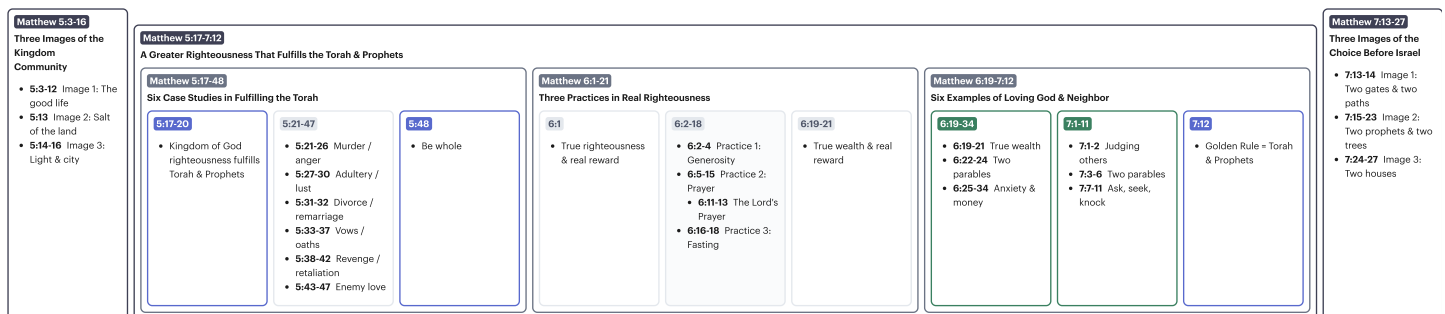
Jesus’ Teaching as Lady Wisdom. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Wisdom literature is an evidence-based worldview. It tells us that living in the fear of the Lord is true wisdom and will lead to a life of flourishing. Jesus is claiming that, counterintuitive as it may be, following his way of fulfilling the Torah and Prophets is the real and only way to flourish.

Jesus’ Sermon Is Messianic Torah-Wisdom

Jesus reveals the divine ideal for living as God’s covenant partners (*torah/instruction*) as he inaugurates the Kingdom of God here on Earth as in Heaven (messianic/prophetic), teaching true wisdom that leads to blessing and life (wisdom).

The Literary Design of the Sermon on the Mount



Matthew 5:3-7:27. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Matthew 5:3-16

Three Images of the Kingdom People

- **5:3-12** The nine-fold good life
- **5:13** Salt of the land
- **5:14-16** Light and city on the hill

Matthew 5:17-7:12

The Greater Righteousness as It Relates to ...

5:17-48

The Torah

A - **5:17-20** The greater **righteousness** that fulfills **the Torah and Prophets**

B - **5:21-47** **Six case studies** in the greater **righteousness**

- **5:21-26** Murder / anger
- **5:27-30** Adultery / lust
- **5:31-32** Divorce / remarriage
- **5:33-37** Vows / oaths
- **5:38-42** Revenge / retaliation
- **5:43-47** Enemy love

A' - **5:48** Be whole-complete

6:1-21

Devotion

A - **6:1** **True righteousness** and real reward

B - **6:2-18** **Three case studies** in genuine devotion

a - **6:2-4** Generosity to the poor

b - **6:5-15** Prayer (**v. 9b-13—The Lord's Prayer: "May your desire be done"**)

a' - **6:16-18** Fasting for God

A' - **6:19-21** True wealth and real reward

6:19-7:12

God and Neighbor

- **6:19-34** Allegiance, wealth, and worry

A - **6:19-21** Allegiance to God or wealth

B - **6:22-24** Two parables: The good & bad eye / Incompatibles: God vs. money

C - **6:25-34** Wealth and worry

- **7:1-11** Loving God and neighbor

A' - **7:1-2** Condemning others

B' - **7:3-6** Two Parables: Beam in the eye / Incompatibles: holy/pearls vs. dogs/pigs

C' - **7:7-11** Asking God

- **7:12** Whatever you **desire** others to do to you, do that to them. This is **the Torah and Prophets.**

Matthew 7:13-27

Three Images of the Choice Before Israel

- **7:13-14** Two gates & paths
- **7:15-23** Two trees & prophets

- **7:24-27** Two houses: on the rock or on the sand

Matthew 5:3-7:27 - Vertical. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Reflection Question

How did you first encounter the words of Jesus? In what ways were your first experiences with and understandings of Jesus' teachings similar to or different from those of Matthew's ancient audience?

Session 2: Jesus Announces the Kingdom of Heaven

Key Takeaways

- Matthew organized his gospel around five teaching sections, beginning with the Sermon on the Mount.
- Matthew weaves Jesus' announcement that the kingdom of the skies has come together with his teachings and healings, emphasizing the interconnectedness of people's daily lived experience, community dynamics, and transcendent spiritual truths.
- Jesus calls people to "Change direction!" because "The kingdom of the skies is near!"—in other words, God's rule is breaking into earthly reality.
- Matthew focuses on how Jesus fulfills prophetic expectations for Abraham's descendants.

The Sermon on the Mount Within the Macro Design of Matthew



Matthew 1-28. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Rise of the Messiah (2024).

Matthew has carefully crafted his account with a matching introduction and conclusion.

- [Matthew 1:1-4:16](#) introduces Jesus as the son of Abraham and David and the son of God: He is born as a human, baptized, and tested on a wilderness mountain, all marked by 7 + 3 quotations from Scripture (seven "fulfillment" quotes + three quotes).
- [Matthew 26:1-28:20](#) brings Jesus' vocation as son of David and son of God to a climactic conclusion: He is tested in a garden, executed (his "baptism"), resurrected, and then commissions his disciples on a mountain, all marked by seven quotations from Scripture.

Between the introductory and concluding frames, [Matthew 4:17-25:46](#) takes the story from Jesus' movement to Galilee to announce God's Kingdom ([4:12-17](#)) to Jesus' final days in Jerusalem ([26:1-28:20](#)). Matthew has organized this section in three large parts, the first and last of which have matching introductions that set the main theme for the unit.

Matthew 4:17 Instructor's Translation

From then on, Jesus began (*ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς*)
to announce and say

“Change-direction!
Because the kingdom of the skies has come near!”

Matthew 16:21 Instructor's Translation

From then on, Jesus began (ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς)
to point out that it was necessary for him to go to Ierosoluma,
and to suffer many things by the elders and chief-priests and scribes,
and to be killed,
and on the third day, to be raised up.

These introductions are coordinated with the conclusions to the five matching conclusions to the speeches.

Matthew 7:28 Instructor's Translation

And it came about when Jesus finished (ἐτέλεσεν) **these words ...**

Matthew 11:1 Instructor's Translation

And it came about when he finished (ἐτέλεσεν) **instructing his twelve apprentices ...**

Matthew 13:53 Instructor's Translation

And it came about when Jesus finished (ἐτέλεσεν) **these parables ...**

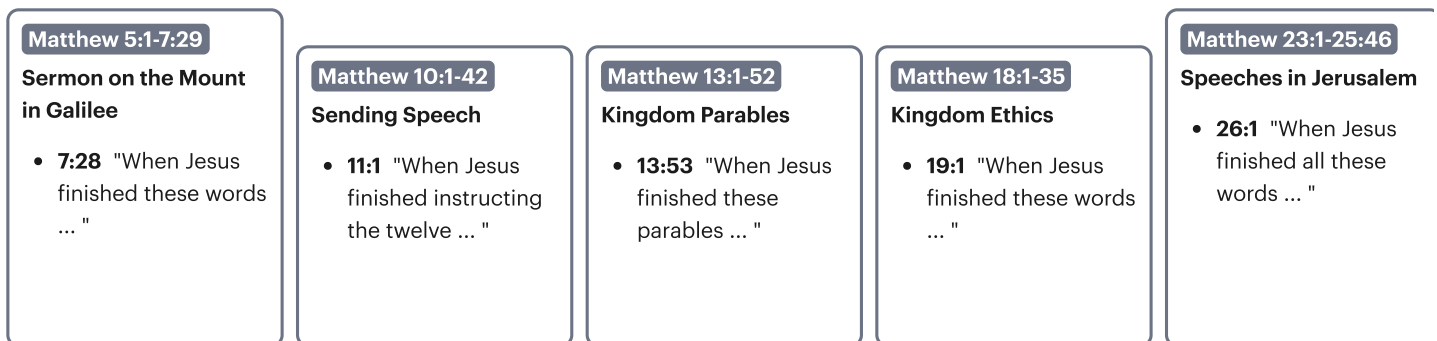
Matthew 19:1 Instructor's Translation

And it came about when Jesus finished (ἐτέλεσεν) **these words ...**

Matthew 26:1 Instructor's Translation

And it came about when Jesus finished (ἐτέλεσεν) **all these words ...**

The five teaching blocks are all arranged in a symmetrical way and with matching themes.



Matthew 5-26. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Rise of the Messiah (2024).

The opening and closing teachings are the longest, and they display matching design and main themes, as summarized in the charts below.

Matthew 5:1-7:27		Sermon on the Mount	Matthew 23:1-25:46		Sermon about Jerusalem's Ruin
Matt. 5:1-16	Matt. 5:1-12	The nine blessings on the disciples	Matt. 23:1-38	Matt. 23:1-12	The seven woes on the Pharisees
	Matt. 5:13			Matt. 23:13-32	
	Matt. 5:14-16			Matt. 23:33-38	
Matt. 5:17-7:12	Matt. 5:17-48	Discourse on new covenant righteousness	Matt. 24:1-50	Matt. 24:1-14	Discourse on the ruin of Jerusalem and the exaltation of the Son of Man
	Matt. 6:1-18			Matt. 24:15-35	
	Matt. 6:19-7:12			Matt. 24:36-50	
Matt. 7:13-27	Matt. 7:13-14	Three parables about the two ways: • Wide and narrow gates • Wolves and sheep • Stable house and unstable house	Matt. 25:1-46	Matt. 25:1-13	Three parables about the culmination of the ages: • Wise and foolish women • Wise and rebel slaves • Sheep and goats
	Matt. 7:15-23			Matt. 25:14-30	
	Matt. 7:24-27			Matt. 25:31-46	

Matthew Sermon Comparison. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Rise of the Messiah (2024).

The three sections that make up the central body of Matthew advance the core themes and narrative claims that are made about Jesus.

- [4:17-11:1](#)—Jesus is the Son of God, bringing the kingdom of the skies down to earth in word ([chapters 5-7](#)) and action ([chapters 8-9](#)), and then sends his disciples out to share in his mission ([chapter 10](#)).
- [11:2-16:20](#)—Jesus' identity is developed and reacted to in different ways:
 - The disciples discern that Jesus is the Son of God
 - The crowds come to see Jesus as the son of David
 - The authorities view Jesus as a deceiver and threat to be destroyed

- 16:21-25:46—Jesus describes his identity as Son of God to suffer and die in Jerusalem for the sins of his people (chapters 16-20), and Jesus goes to the city (chapters 20-21) and engages the authorities (chapters 22-25).

The Sermon on the Mount Within Matthew 4-11

Matthew 4:17-7:29			Matthew 8:1-9:34			Matthew 9:35-11:1		
4:17-5:2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus announces, "Kingdom of the skies is near!" • Teaching & announcing & healing • Calling the apostles 	5:3-7:27 Speech #1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sermon on the Mount • Kingdom of the skies 	7:28-29 Crowds Amazed by Authority	8:1-17 Three Healings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leper purified • Centurion's child • Peter's mother-in-law 	8:18-9:8 Three Wonders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calming the storm • Two demonized men healed • Paralyzed man healed 	9:9-34 Three Healings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two women healed • Two blind men healed • Mute man healed 	9:35-10:1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus announces the kingdom of the skies • Teaching & announcing & healing 	10:2-4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus gives authority to 12 apostles • List of the 12 apostles 	10:5-11:1 Speech #2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioning the apostles to announce, "Kingdom of the skies is near!"

Matthew 4:17-11:1. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Matthew 4:17-7:29

- **4:17-5:2** Jesus **heals, teaches, announces** "Kingdom of skies is near!" + **calling of apostles**
- **5:3-7:27** **Speech #1: Sermon on the Mount & Kingdom of the skies**
- **7:28-29** Crowds amazed by **authority**

Matthew 8:1-9:34

- **8:1-17** Three healings: Leper purified + Centurion's child healed + Peter's mother-in-law
- **8:18-9:8** Three wonders: Calming the storm + Two demonized men healed + Paralyzed man healed
- **9:9-34** Two women healed + Two blind men healed + Demonized mute man healed

Matthew 9:35-11:1

- **9:35-10:1** Jesus **heals, teaches, announces** "Kingdom of skies is near!"
- **10:2-4** Jesus gives **authority** to **12 apostles**
- **10:5-11:1** **Speech #2: Commissioning of apostles to announce "Kingdom of skies is near!"**

Matthew 4:17-11:1 - Vertical. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

The Sermon on the Mount Within Matthew 4-7

Matthew 4:17-5:2

- **4:17** Jesus begins to announce “The kingdom of the skies has come near!”
- **4:18-22** Jesus calls 2 + 2 disciples
- **4:23-5:2** Jesus announces the Kingdom, teaching and healing disciples and crowds

Matthew 5:3-7:27

Sermon on the Mount

- **5:3-16** 3 + 3 + 3 “good life” sayings + 3 metaphors: salt, light, city
- **5:17-7:12** A righteousness that fulfills the Torah & Prophets
 - **5:17-48** 6 case studies in fulfilling the Torah
 - **6:1-21** 3 examples of real righteousness and true reward
 - **6:19-7:12** 6 examples of loving God & loving your neighbor
- **7:13-27** 3 warnings to respond: 2 gates & roads + 2 trees + 2 houses

Matthew 7:28-29

Crowd’s response: “Where did he get such authority?!”

Matthew 4:17-7:29. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Jesus Announces the Kingdom of Heaven

¹⁷ From then on, Jesus began to **announce** and say,
“Change-direction!
Because **the kingdom of the skies** has come near!”

A ¹⁸ Now, while walking **beside the sea** of **Galilaia**,
he saw **two brothers**,
Simon, who is called **Petros**,
and **Andreas** his brother,
throwing a fishing **net** into the sea,
because they were fishers,

B ¹⁹ **and he said to them**,
“Come after me,
and I will make you fishers of humans.”

C 20 And **immediately, leaving** the **nets**,
they followed him .

A' 21 And having moved on from there,
he saw **two other brothers**,
lakobos , **the one of Zebedaios**,
and **ioannes** his brother,
in the boat with Zebedaios their father,
they were repairing their **nets**,

B' **and he called to them** ,

C' 22 and **immediately, after leaving** the boat and their father,
they followed him .

23 And he traveled around in all of **Galilaia**,
teaching in their synagogues,
and **announcing the good news of the Kingdom**,
and **healing** every **sickness** ¹ and every **disease** ² among **the people** .

24 And the report about him went out into all of Syria,
and they brought to him
all who had **illness with any variety of sicknesses**,³
and those suffering **tormenting-pain**,⁴
and the **demonized**,⁵
and those suffering **lunacy**,⁶
and the **paralyzed**,⁷
and he **healed** them.

25 And **many crowds** **followed him** ,
from **Galilaia** ,
and the Dekapolis,
and Ierosoluma,
and Ioudaia,
and beyond the Iordanes ,
^{5:1} and, seeing **the crowds** , he went up onto **the mountain** ,
and sitting down, his disciples came to him,
² and opening his mouth, **he taught them**, saying,

Matthew 4:17-5:2. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

The “Kingdom of God” was the main theme in Jesus’ teaching. He claimed that in his actions, God’s Kingdom was actually becoming reality here on earth.

- [Mark 1:15](#)—“The Kingdom of God has arrived.”
- [Matthew 12:28](#)—“Hey everyone, God is now starting to run the show!”

In the Hebrew Bible, the “Kingdom” of God refers to God’s realm of dominion and authority. In one sense, all of creation is God’s Kingdom.

Psalm 103:19 Instructor's Translation

The Lord has established **his throne in the skies**,
and **his kingdom** rules over all.

Psalm 145:10–13 NASB

All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and your godly ones shall bless you.
They shall speak of **the glory of your kingdom** and talk of your power;
to make known to the sons of men your mighty acts and the glory of the majesty of **your kingdom**.
Your kingdom is an **everlasting kingdom**, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

Daniel 4:2–3 NASB

It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me.
How great are his signs and how mighty are his wonders! **His kingdom** is an **everlasting kingdom** and his dominion is from generation to generation.

Daniel 4:34 NASB

But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored him who lives forever; for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and **his kingdom endures from generation to generation**.

Note: “Kingdom of God/Heaven” does not mean “going to heaven.” It is just the opposite, an announcement that God’s space is coming into contact with our space.

References to God’s “Kingdom” and “will” suggest the idea, “What would it look like if God was running this show?” These ideas evoke the world as the creator intended it to be, and wants it to be again: a place of *shalom*, justice, abundance, community, etc.

The biblical authors use the term “new/renewed creation” to speak of this future hope ([Rom. 8:18-23](#); [21-22](#)), and of how this future hope has begun to infiltrate the present ([2 Cor. 5:17](#)).

The idea of God’s heavenly reign becoming realized on earth is what [Daniel 7](#) is all about.

Daniel 7:13–14 Instructor's Translation

I kept looking in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven

one like a Son of Man was coming,
and he came up to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And **to him was given dominion** (שָׁלֹטָן),
glory and **a kingdom** (מְלֻכּוּת),
that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language
might serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
which will not pass away;
and **his Kingdom** is one
which will not be destroyed.

Daniel 7:18 Instructor's Translation

But the saints of the Highest One will receive **the Kingdom**
and possess **the Kingdom** forever,
for all ages to come.

Daniel 7:27 NASB*

Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; **his kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions** will serve and obey Him.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

In the Gospel of Matthew, the story begins with a conflict of kingdoms, as the first three uses of the word make clear.

Matthew 3:1–2 Instructor's Translation

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying,
“Repent, for **the kingdom of the skies** has come near.”

Matthew 4:8–9 Instructor's Translation

Again, the slanderer took him to a very high mountain and showed him all **the kingdoms of the world** and their glory; and he said to him, “All these things I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.”

Matthew 4:17 Instructor's Translation

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for **the kingdom of the skies** is at hand.”

The word “kingdom” (Greek: *basilea*) occurs 55 times in Matthew’s account of Jesus’ teaching and is used in a variety of ways. Jesus presents the Kingdom of God as both present in and through himself, but also as a future reality.

Sayings in which Jesus presents the Kingdom of Heaven as present reality for himself and his listeners:

Matthew 4:17 Instructor's Translation

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of the skies **has come near.**”

Matthew 10:6-7 NASB*

but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
And as you go, preach, saying, "The kingdom of the skies **has come near.**"

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Matthew 12:28 NASB

But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God **has come upon you.**

Matthew 18:3-4 NASB*

Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, **you will not enter** the kingdom of the skies. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of the skies.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Matthew 19:23-24 NASB*

And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man **to enter** the kingdom of the skies. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man **to enter** the kingdom of God."

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Matthew 21:31 NIV

"Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes **are entering** the kingdom of God ahead of you."

Sayings in which Jesus presents the Kingdom as a future reality:

Matthew 8:11 Instructor's Translation

I say to you that **many will come** from east and west, and **will recline** at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the skies;

Matthew 13:43 NASB

Then the righteous **will shine** forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Matthew 16:28 NASB

Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death **until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.**

Matthew 26:27-29 NASB

And when he had taken a cup and given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.
But I say to you, **I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.**"

Good News for Israel

Matthew has carefully shaped the descriptions of who came to hear Jesus and where those people came from. If we compare Matthew's version with his source in Mark, a number of important clues emerge as to the identity of the people coming to hear Jesus.

Matthew 4:23-25	Mark 1:14, 1:28, and 3:7-8
<p>²³ And he traveled around in all of Galilaia, teaching in their synagogues, and announcing the good news of the Kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people,</p> <p>²⁴ and the report about him went out into all of Syria.</p> <p>And they brought to him all who had illness with any variety of sicknesses, and those suffering tormenting-pain, and the demonized, and those suffering lunacy, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.</p> <p>²⁵ And many crowds followed him, from Galilaia, and the Dekapolis, and Ierosoluma, and Ioudaia, and beyond the Iordanes,</p>	<p>¹⁴ ... Jesus went into Galilee, announcing the good news of God ...</p> <p>²⁸ Immediately the report about him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.</p> <p>⁷ Jesus withdrew to the sea with his disciples, and a great multitude followed; from Galilee and also from Judea, ⁸ and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon ...</p>
<p><i>Good News for Israel in Matthew and Mark. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).</i></p>	

Matthew omitted the mention of Idumea and Tyre and Sidon, and he has added the Dekapolis. By these changes, Matthew has focused the stage of Jesus' activity on precisely the settlement area of the 12 tribes (see [Joshua 13-19](#)), that is "from Dan to Beersheba" (see, for example, [Judges 20:1](#) or [1 Samuel 3:20](#)).

"The region of Decapolis added by Matthew covers the northern area of the east Jordan tribes (Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh; see [Numbers 32](#) and [Deuteronomy 3:12-20](#)). Tyre and Sidon, as well as Idumea (i.e., Edom) are deleted as Gentile territories. [Matthew portrays] the large crowds from all Israel responding to the appearance of Jesus. In [verse 24](#), it is the report about Jesus, not Jesus himself, that goes into all of Syria. ... These changes by Matthew about the crowds' geographical origin ... can be seen as his sketch of the 'land of Israel' ([Matt. 2:20-21](#))."

Konradt, Matthias (2020). [The Gospel according to Matthew: A Commentary](#). Baylor University Press. 62.



Logos contributors (2025). Map of the Middle East.

Calling All Apprentices

Matthew highlights how Jesus summoned four of his first disciples (Greek: *mathetes* / μαθητής) in two short and stylized narratives that are clearly modeled after one another.

- Both involve calling sibling sets: Simon Peter & Andrew and James & John.
- All four were fishermen, which provides Jesus' main metaphor for calling them to participate in this mission. They are going to "fish for people," a creative image for the missionary endeavor he has in mind for them. This theme will be developed later in [9:36-11:1](#) and [28:16-20](#).
- This twin pattern of calling and following creates a model of discipleship that will be repeated in the same words later in the calling of Matthew in [9:9](#).

Simon Peter & Andrew	James & John	Matthew
<p>Matthew 4:18-20 ... he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Petros, and Andreas his brother, throwing a fishing net into the sea, because they were fishers. And he said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of humans." And immediately, leaving the nets, they followed him.</p>	<p>Matthew 4:21-22 And having moved on from there, he saw two other brothers, Iakobos, the one of Zebedaios, and Ioannes his brother, in the boat with Zebedaios their father, they were repairing their nets, and he called to them. And immediately, after leaving the boat and their father, they followed him.</p>	<p>Matthew 9:9 And when Iesous moved on from there, he saw a man, sitting at a tax-collecting- station, called Matthaios, and he said to him, "Follow me." And getting up, he followed him.</p>
<p><i>Calling All Apprentices. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).</i></p>		

Matthew has clearly shaped these three scenes to mirror one another. It is likely that Matthew wants us to see something normative for his audience as well: If one is an apprentice of Jesus, when he calls, we are to follow. The motif is repeated in Matthew's own call narrative in [9:9](#).

Matthew's Compositional Strategy in Matthew 4:23-25

Matthew has drawn together the summary of Jesus' daily ministry from multiple texts in his main source, the Gospel according to Mark. Below is a table that illustrates Matthew's compositional method at work.

<p>Matthew 4:23 And he traveled around in all of Galilaia, teaching in their synagogues, and announcing the good news of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.</p>	<p>Mark 1:39 And he went into all Galilee announcing in their synagogues and casting out demons.</p>
<p>Matthew 4:24 And the report about him went out into all of Syria, and they brought to him all who had illness with any variety of sicknesses, and those suffering tormenting-pain, and the demonized, and those suffering lunacy, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.</p>	<p>Mark 6:6 ... and he was going around among the villages teaching.</p> <p>Mark 1:28 Immediately the report about him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.</p> <p>Mark 1:32-34 ³² ... they began bringing to him all who were ill and those who were demonized ... ³⁴ And he healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons ...</p>
<p>Matthew 4:25 And many crowds followed him, from Galilaia, and the Dekapolis, and Ierosoluma, and Ioudaia, and beyond the Iordanes.</p>	<p>Mark 3:7-8 Jesus withdrew to the sea with his disciples, and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and also from Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great number of people heard of all that he was doing and came to him.</p>
<p><i>Matthew's Compositional Strategy in 4:23-25. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).</i></p>	

Scriptural Background to the Kingdom of God

Statements of Yahweh as Israel's king

- Exodus 15:18 The conclusion to the Song of the Sea: This is significant because the first statement of "Yahweh as king" is over his newly redeemed people. God's kingship is demonstrated when slaves are freed and evil is confronted.
- Numbers 23:21 This is Balaam's oracle.
- Deuteronomy 33:5 A poetic recollection of King Yahweh coming to his people from Sinai.
- Judges 8:23 Gideon's refusal to rule because Yahweh rules over Israel.
- 1 Samuel 12:12 Yahweh is king of Israel, therefore their demand for a king is full of mixed motives.

Prophetic developments

- Isaiah:
 - He sees king Yahweh in the temple (Isa. 6:5).
 - He depicts Yahweh as king and ruler of Israel (33:22).
 - In Isaiah 40-55, Yahweh is king and redeemer (41:21; 44:6).
 - The announcement of good news is directly connected to Yahweh as king (52:7).
 - The apocalypse of Isaiah in 24:21-23 has a scene where Yahweh defeats rebellious kings on earth and the hosts of heaven by throwing them all in a pit, and Yahweh becomes king in Jerusalem.
 - This is key: In Isaiah, the good news is that God is present (40:9) and that God is king (52:7).
- Jeremiah depicts Yahweh as the one and only king (Jer. 10:6-7, 10) in contrast to idols.
- Zechariah describes a vision of Yahweh as universal king (Zech. 14:9, 16).

Yahweh's kingship in the Psalms

- Fully complete depiction of Yahweh as king: He sits on a throne (29:10, 47:8); he wears royal garb and robes (93:1); his throne is over the ark in the temple (99:1); as king he brings justice to the poor (74:12, 96:10); Zion is his capital city with its temple (48:2).

Yahweh's rule is connected with "good news"

- Isaiah 40:3 and then 52:7 are key here. Yahweh is coming to rescue, save, and become king. This is good news.
- Daniel's depiction of God's Kingdom elevates it to a cosmic level:
 - The struggle of God's Kingdom against evil is linked to the struggle of Israel's kingdom against its oppressors (Isa. 10:13-14).
 - This is linked to the tradition that begins in Deuteronomy 32:8-9 where Yahweh rules Israel, but other nations have other gods ruling them; Daniel 10:13-14 links the prince of Persia with evil spiritual forces.
 - This is key: In Daniel and Isaiah 24, we have the only two places where the conflict of God's Kingdom is with forces of evil behind human kingdoms. These themes are significantly developed in other Second Temple literature: Jubilees, 1 Enoch, and The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs
 - There is an eschatological, temporal element of the Kingdom in Daniel: Human kingdoms controlled by spiritual evil will come in succession until they are all destroyed by God's Kingdom (2:44). The Kingdom will be given to the Son of Man as Daniel saw it given to holy ones of the Most High (7:18, 22, 27). Daniel must seal up the scroll and wait for the Kingdom to come (12:1-4).

“In Scripture God is understood as king, as ruling over a kingdom, which is understood as both the place and the event of his presence, his sphere of glory and power. The rule of God is regarded as the content of ‘good news’, and it is a rule that is anticipated soon, as the grand finale of all human kingdoms. It is also a rule that has and will encounter deadly opposition from Satan. For God’s rule to triumph, Satan’s rule will have to be shattered.”

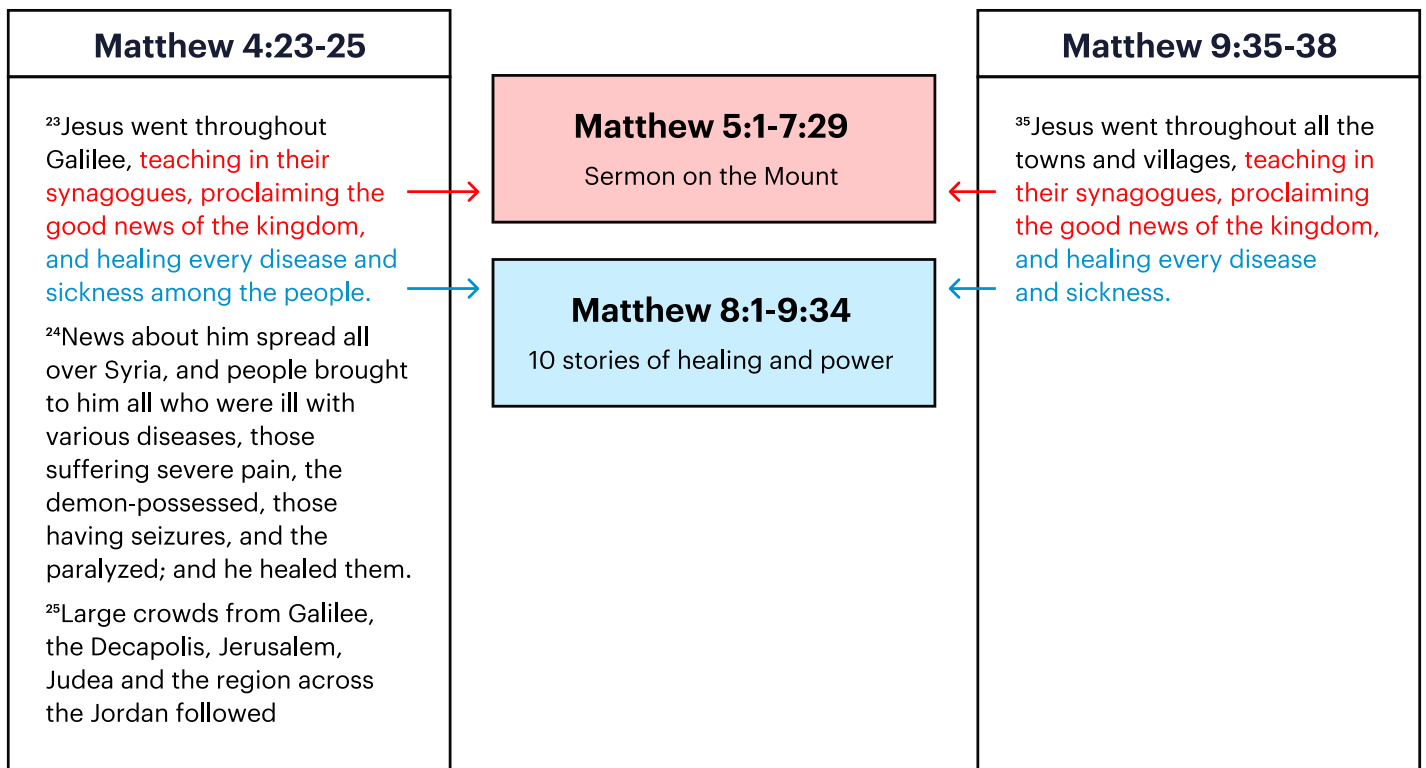
Evans, Craig (2005). “Inaugurating the Kingdom of God” in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* vol. 15.1. 49-75.

Jesus’ announcement of the Kingdom

- Mark 1:14-15 (see also Matt. 4:17): The Kingdom has come near. The language is drawn from Daniel 7:22 after the Most High decides in favor of the holy ones: “The time came and the holy ones possessed the Kingdom.” (Dan. LXX Theodotian uses ο καιρος εφθασεν και την βασιλειαν κατεσχον οι αγιοι).

Jesus’ inauguration of the Kingdom has a focus on combatting spiritual evil.

- The temptation of Jesus
- Jesus’ exorcisms
- Sending the 12
- Jesus’ healings



Jesus’ Teachings and Healings. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Reflection Question

How does Matthew's organizational structure contribute to the overall message of his gospel?

Session 3: The Good Life

Key Takeaways

- The Greek word *makarios*, often translated as “blessed,” describes someone who has the good life, as seen from a third-person perspective.
- Being “poor in spirit” means lacking vital life-energy or being powerless.
- Jesus subverts cultural norms and common wisdom about who is truly blessed. It's not the powerful and wealthy, but those in need who have the good life.

Matthew 5:3-16—The Introduction

The introduction to the sermon has been given two simultaneously overlapping literary design structures. Seeing the introduction from both perspectives illuminates features of the speech.

Matthew 5:3-12

3 + 3 + 3 Good Life Sayings

- **5:3-5** **How good is life for** [the **social status** of the good life] theirs is **the kingdom in the skies**
 - The poor in spirit
 - The grieving
 - The unimportant
- **5:6-8** **How good is life for** [the **character** of the good life]
 - Those hungry for **righteousness**
 - The pure in heart
 - The merciful
- **5:9-12** **How good is life for** [the **conduct** of the good life]
 - The peacemakers
 - The **persecuted** for **righteousness**
 - **Y'all** who are **persecuted by people** for my sake

Matthew 5:13

Salt

- **Y'all** are the salt of the land
 - Be salty or be stepped on **by people**

Matthew 5:14-16

Light & City

- **5:14a** **Y'all** are **light** of the world
- **5:14b-15** A city on a mountain can't be hidden, nor a **light** put under a basket
- **5:16** **Y'all** let your **light** shine **before people**, so they can honor **your Father in the skies**

Matthew 5:3-16—Perspective 1. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

From this perspective, the sermon's introduction consists of 12 key statements about the surprising identity of those experiencing the good life from Jesus' point of view.

The overall unit has been framed by an emphasis on the skies, with the opening "kingdom of the skies" in 5:3 and the closing "Father in the skies" of 5:16.

The nine good life sayings are shaped in three triads, based on thematic similarity, focusing on the **social status, character, and conduct** of those experiencing the good life.

- 5:3-5—the powerless, the grieving, the unimportant = **social status**
- 5:6-8—those desiring righteousness, purity, and mercy = **character**
- 5:9-12—those who make peace, do righteousness, and are persecuted = **conduct**

The ninth and final good life saying (5:11-12) is a hinge between the good life sayings that are stated as third-person plurals ("those who" in 5:3-10) and the three metaphors to follow, which are stated in second-person plural ("y'all" in 5:13-16).

Notice the introduction of those outside the Jesus community, who are hostile or looking on, the "people" (*ἀνθρώπων*) who are implied in 5:11-12 and explicitly mentioned in 5:13 and 5:16. Jesus is naming the response that his followers will likely receive within their communities. These notes frame the end of the first and last sections, as well as the middle.

Matthew 5:3-10

4 + 4 Good Life Sayings

- **5:3-6** **How good is life for** [the **social location** of the good life]
 - The poor in spirit
 - The grieving
 - The unimportant
 - Those hungry for **righteousness**
- **5:6-10** **How good is life for** [the **character** of the good life]
 - The pure in heart
 - The merciful
 - The peacemakers
 - The **persecuted** for **righteousness**

Matthew 5:11-12

9th Good Life Saying

- **How good is life for y'all**, when you are **persecuted** by people for my sake

Matthew 5:13-16

Salt, Light, & City

- **5:13 Y'all** are the salt of the land
 - Be salty or be stepped on by people
- **5:14-15 Y'all** are the light and the city on the hill
- **5:16 Y'all's** light needs to shine in front of people

Matthew 5:3-16—Perspective 2. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

From this perspective, the sermon's introduction consists of 12 parts that are bundled into three units.

- 5:3-10—eight good life sayings for “those who” (third-person plural)
- 5:11-12—one good life saying for “y'all” (second-person plural)
- 5:13-16—three metaphors for “y'all” (second-person plural)

The middle unit, 5:11-12, functions as a hinge that pivots between the eight good life sayings and the three metaphors.

- 5:11—picks up “How good is life for ... ” and “persecution” from 5:3-10
- 5:11-12—also shifts from the third-person plural of 5:3-10 - into second-person plural that links forward to 5:13-16

The first four good life sayings focus on the **social location** of Jesus' followers (5:3-6), while the second group of four sayings focuses on their character and life practice (5:6-10). This links directly to Jesus' announcement of God's heavenly Kingdom that is arriving first for the poor and powerless (Matt. 4:17-25).

The ninth good life saying (5:11-12) is a hinge that repeats the main idea of persecution from the eighth good life saying (5:10) but shifts to the second-person plural address (y'all). This allows a smooth shift into the three metaphors in 5:13-16, which are all cast in the second-person plural. But even more, this hinge saying allows Matthew to introduce the theme of hostility toward the message of Jesus and his community that will be picked up in the next large teaching block (Matt. 10:5-43).

The three metaphors are adopted from the Torah and Prophets, where they describe the righteous remnant within Israel, those with whom God will renew the covenant to fulfill Israel's purpose among the nations.

Matthew 5:3-12—Nine Good-Life Sayings

Social Status

- ³ **How good is life for** the powerless,

because theirs is **the kingdom of** **the skies** .

4 **How good is life for** those who grieve,
because they will be comforted.

5 **How good is life for** the unimportant,
because they will inherit **the land** .

Character

6 **How good is life for** those who hunger and thirst for **righteousness** ,
because they will be satisfied.

7 **How good is life for** those who show mercy,
because they will be shown mercy.

8 **How good is life for** the pure in heart,
because they will see God.

Conduct

9 **How good is life for** the peacemakers,
because they will be called children of God.

10 **How good is life for** those who have been **persecuted**
on account of **righteousness** ,
because theirs is **the kingdom of** **the skies** .

11 **How good is life for** **you all**
when they insult **you**
and **persecute you** ,
and speak any evil lies against **you**
on account of me.

12 Celebrate and shout for joy,
because **your** **reward** is great **in** **the skies** ,
because this is how they **persecuted** the prophets before **you all** .

Matthew 5:3-12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Interpreting the Beatitudes: What Are They Doing?

Key issues in understanding the Beatitudes

- What does “blessed,” here translated as “the good life,” mean?
- Why would Jesus begin with these, and how do they “announce the good news of the Kingdom of God” ([Matt. 4:23](#))?
- What is the logic of these nine “How good is life for ... because ...” sayings?
- Why are there nine?
- What does each one mean by itself, and how do they relate to each other?
- How is their meaning deepened by studying hyperlinks to the Hebrew Bible and to Matthew’s entire narrative about Jesus?

Jesus begins by announcing *makarios*, “how fortunate/blessed/happy/flourishing are” By beginning the sermon this way, Jesus taps into a very biblical and Jewish way of talking about the ideal vision of human existence that is explored in the Sermon on the Mount.

Greek *makarios* (μακάριος) “ascribes happiness or flourishing to a particular person or state. A makarism is a pronouncement, based on observation, that a certain way of being in the world produces human flourishing.”

Adapted from Pennington, Jonathan T. (2017). [The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary](#). Baker Academic. 42.

Makarios is the standard Septuagint Greek translation of the Hebrew word ‘*ashrey* (אשרי) Both of these words have been translated as “blessed” in the English tradition, leading to lots of misunderstanding about their meaning.

What Does “the Good Life” or “Blessed” Even Mean?

With this word, Jesus is tapping into the Wisdom tradition of Israel’s Scriptures. To fully understand Jesus’ meaning, we need to understand the Hebrew words and concept of “blessing.”

1. ‘*ashrey* (אשרי) = “happy/flourishing”
 - This word is based on human observation and declares that a certain way of being in the world is a picture-perfect definition of “the good life,” a state of being that is desirable, and an image of true human flourishing.
 - This word ‘*ashrey* occurs 45x in the Hebrew Bible (26x in Psalms, 8x in Proverbs, 11x elsewhere). Its etymology likely comes from either a Proto-Semitic or Egyptian root ‘*shr*, meaning “prosperity, good fortune, happiness.”
 - In the Hebrew Bible, the phrase “how good is life for...” is usually followed by an idealized state or behavior that is portrayed as desirable and as an example of the good life.

1 Kings 10:8 Instructor's Translation

‘**Ashrey** are your people! ‘**Ashrey** are your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!

Queen of Sheba to Solomon

Deuteronomy 33:29 NIV

'Ashrey are you, Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will tread on their heights."

Moses about Israel

Psalm 32:1-2 NIV

'Ashrey is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

'Ashrey is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.

David about himself and others

Psalm 128:1-2 NASB

'Ashrey is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways.

When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands,

'ashrey are you; it will be well with you.

In these examples, the state of idealized goodness describes a state that someone is already in (like Solomon's courtiers or saved Israel or David's forgiven state, fearing the Lord), and they are being held up as an example of what constitutes the good life.

'Ashrey statements do not invoke God's blessing upon a person. Rather, they are a wisdom-based observation that certain behaviors or states are an ideal picture of what true God-centered human flourishing looks like.

Translation Note: The earliest complete English translation of the Bible, the Wycliffe Bible (late 14th century), rendered 'ashrey as "blessed." And it has stuck in the tradition until some of the 20th century translations that render "happy" (Christian Standard Bible; Common English Bible).

2. **barek/baruk** (ברך/ברוך) = "to bless/blessed"

- This word describes the gift of God's own life-presence that changes a person's life circumstances, resulting in abundance, fertility, security, and peace.
- This word is used 398x in the Hebrew Bible (327x as a verb; 71x as a noun).
- This word is used most often to describe how God declares or changes a person or group's life circumstances, resulting in abundance, fertility, security, influence, and peace. People can also announce or invoke God's blessing over others, but it is fully assumed it is God's blessing they are speaking over others (Example: the priestly blessing of Aaron in [Numbers 6:24-26](#)).
- The opposite of "blessing" is "curse": God declares or brings about circumstances of scarcity, instability, oppression, exile, or hostility.

Genesis 24:34-36 Instructor's Translation

So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. The Lord has **blessed** my master abundantly, and he has become wealthy. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys.

My master's wife Sarah has borne him a son in her old age, and he has given him everything he owns."

Deuteronomy 28:2-6 NASB

All these **blessings** will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God:

Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country.

Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.

Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

Blessed shall you be when you come in, and **blessed** shall you be when you go out.

Deuteronomy 28:15-19 Instructor's Translation

However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you:

You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country.

Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed.

The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

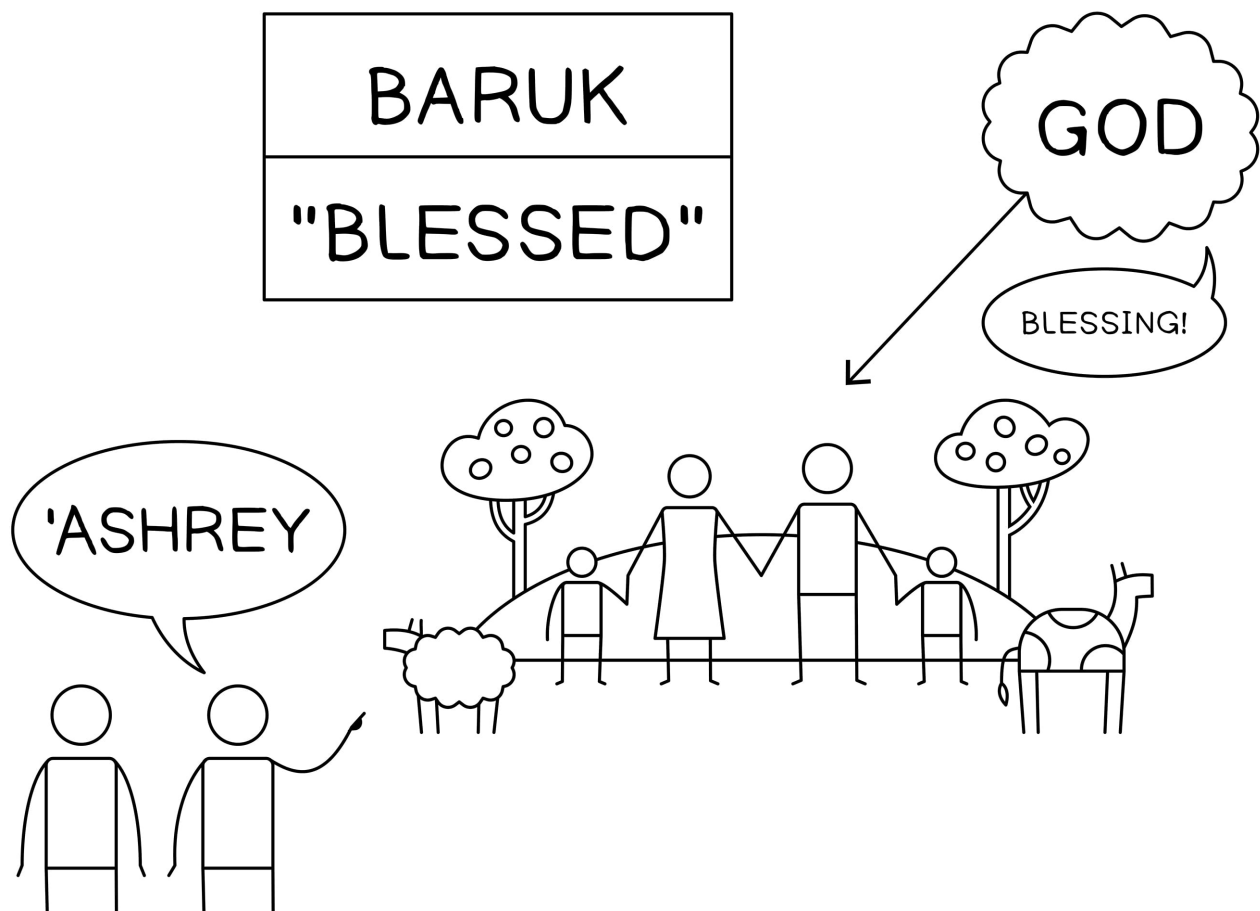
You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.

There is an important relationship between these two words, *'ashrey* and *barek*, but they are not synonymous. They do not mean the same thing, but they are connected (see Pennington's discussion, [The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing](#), p. 47-53).

- To be "blessed" is to receive from God's generosity life circumstances that are abundant and pleasant.
- When a "blessed" person's state of being is described by someone else, a third-party observer, and held up as an example or a desirable state, they are called *'ashrey*.

"*Ashrey* is a description of the state of happiness, privilege, or fortune that is upon someone who is being observed by another, a bystander who is not the one who is providing or bringing about the blessing ... [In the Hebrew Bible] one never prays to become *'ashrey*. ... In contrast, *baruk* speaks of being empowered as the recipient of God's generous favor, because in biblical thought, all blessing comes from God alone."

Adapted from Pennington, Jonathan T. (2017). [The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary](#). Baker Academic. 48-49.



Relationship Between 'Ashrey and Baruk. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

The state of blessing comes from God alone. One can definitely pray for or announce God's blessing upon another, but it is asking for a state of flourishing that only God can grant.

Being called *'ashrey* is to take up the perspective of an outside observer, who looks upon someone else's "blessed" circumstances and declares that their situation is desirable, ideal, a picture of flourishing that others should find exemplary.

The opposite of *'ashrey* is not "cursed," but a proclamation of woe.

- Matthew's nine *makarisms* that open [Matthew 5-7](#) (Jesus' first teaching block) are matched by his seven woes on the Pharisees in [Matthew 23](#) (the opening of Jesus' fifth and final teaching block).
- In the Hebrew Bible, we find that "woe" statements provide nearly identical contrast statements to Jesus' *makarisms*: These statements do not call down disaster upon people. Rather, they make a public pronouncement that the position of these people is not envious and exemplifies an undesirable state of affairs because of the terrible circumstances that are present or future or both.

Isaiah 3:11 Instructor's Translation

Woe (אוי / oy) to the wicked! It shall be go bad for him,
for (כי) what his hands have dealt out shall be done to him.

Jeremiah 45:3 Instructor's Translation

Ah, **woe** is me!

For the Lord has added sorrow to my pain ...

Hosea 7:13 NASB

Woe to them,

for they have strayed from me!

Destruction is theirs,

for they have rebelled against me!

Lamentations 5:16 NASB

The crown has fallen from our head;

Woe to us,

for we have sinned!

Ezekiel 24:6–8 Instructor's Translation

Woe to the bloody city,

to the pot in which there is rust ...

For her blood is in her midst ...

So that anger rises up to bring recompense ...

Why Does This Matter?

This distinction between *'ashrey* and *baruk* can help us understand why *'ashrey* statements are what they are.

Psalms 1:1-3 NIV

'Ashrey is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.

This is not a pronouncement of God's blessing upon this person, nor does the blessing bring about a state of flourishing. This person is already flourishing and experiencing the good life! The poet is advocating a certain way of life that results in being blessed by God, and holding it up as a model of human flourishing.

"Psalm 1 is ... an inspirational vision for the wise way of being in the world that will result in what all humans desire—human flourishing. It is a poetically crafted form of implicit invitation to consider the best way of being in the world and to pursue it. Like Proverbs, Psalm 1 offers a vision of human life ... that inspires them to live in such a way that will lead to it ... [*'Ashrey* statements] are an imaginative call to be a certain way in

the world not just because God demands it ... nor out of a mechanistic tit-for-tat view of God (read your Bible and don't hang out with bad people and God will bless you). Rather, this is based on an appeal to human flourishing for one's own sake."

Pennington, Jonathan T. (2017). [*The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*](#). Baker Academic. 52.

How To Translate 'Ashrey?

- Some scholars/translations keep with "blessing" (NIV, ESV, NAS, NRSV).
- The Latin title for these sayings, "Beatitudes," comes from *beatus*, which means "happy, blissful," not "blessed."
- Good options could be:
 - "How fortunate are ... " (But Fortuna is an ancient Roman goddess; do we really want to invoke her?!)
 - "How happy are ... " (But the English word "happy" refers primarily to an internal emotional state, not an internal and external state of affairs.)
 - "The truly flourishing are ... " (This could work, though "flourish" is not a common English word, and Jesus used a very common figure of speech to formulate these sayings.)
 - "Oh the good life of ... " OR "the good life belongs to" OR "the good life is for ... " OR "How good is life for ... "

Why Does Jesus Say That Undesirable States Are Actually True Flourishing?

Notice the logical structure of each of the nine sayings:

Matthew 5:3-8 Instructor's Translation

Oh the good life of those who ...
because ...

The first line involves a claim about who possesses the good life. The second line is the supporting evidence. This reveals a startling set of claims.

- How good is life for ...
 - The powerless, the mourning, the unimportant
 - Who long for justice and show mercy from a pure heart and seek peace
 - Who are mistreated and publicly shamed
- because ...
 - They are the ones reigning with God and who will inherit the new creation
 - They will find comfort, mercy, and their desires will be met
 - They will see God face to face like Moses and the prophets

Jesus is combining the Wisdom traditions discussed above with the Apocalyptic traditions of the Hebrew Bible.

An example of this is apocalyptic reversal. The biblical prophets all anticipated a time when the God of Israel would bring about a great reversal in history, when injustice and evil is confronted and judged and when those who are oppressed and forgotten will be vindicated and exalted.

Isaiah 65:11, 13-14, 16-17 Instructor's Translation

¹¹ But you who forsake the Lord,
who forget my holy mountain ...

¹³ Behold, my servants will eat,
but you will be hungry.

Behold, my servants will drink,
but you will be thirsty.

Behold, my servants will rejoice,
but you will be put to shame.

¹⁴ Behold, my servants will shout joyfully with a glad heart,
but you will cry out with a heavy heart,
and you will wail with a broken spirit. ...

¹⁶ ... Because the former troubles are forgotten,
and because they are hidden from my sight!

¹⁷ For behold, I create new skies and a new land;
and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.

This is precisely the “new creation,” the renewal of God’s Kingdom, that Jesus claims to be ushering onto the scene in [Matthew 4:23-25](#). As he does so, Jesus reveals just how distorted and upside-down our social value systems really are. Jesus is upending our concepts of who or what kind of life counts as truly flourishing and in a state of being blessed by God.

This is closely connected to the Upside-Down Kingdom theme elsewhere in Jesus’ teachings.

- The last will be first, and the first will be last.
- The one who wants to lead must become a servant to others.

Jesus’ Beatitudes as Apocalyptic Surprise

Because *‘ashrey* statements express the speaker’s perception of what constitutes the good life, they are culturally contingent and can morph over time based on what a particular culture values.

As a result, these statements in the Hebrew Bible and in Jewish culture of Jesus’ day slowly began to create a two-tier system of Jewish piety.

Proverbs 3:13-18 Instructor's Translation

‘Ashrey is the one who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding,
for her profit is better than the profit of silver and her gain better than fine gold.

She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her.

Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.

Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace.

She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,

and **‘ashrey** are all who hold her fast.

Wisdom of Ben Sira 25:7-11 NABRE

There are nine whom I would call **'ashrey**,
and a tenth my tongue proclaims:

'Ashrey is the man who can rejoice in his children;
'ashrey is the man who lives to see the downfall of his foes.
'Ashrey is the man who lives with a sensible wife ...
'ashrey is the one who does not sin with the tongue,
'ashrey is the one who has not served an inferior.
'Ashrey is the one who finds a friend,
'ashrey is the one who speaks to attentive listeners.
Greatest is the one who finds wisdom,
and none is superior to the one who fears the Lord.

4QBeatitudes (4Q525, lines 1-4)

[**'ashrey** is the one] ... with a pure heart, and does not slander with his tongue.
'Ashrey are those who adhere to the laws [of Torah], and do not adhere to perverted paths.
[**'Ashrey**] are those who rejoice in Wisdom, and do not burst out in paths of folly.
'Ashrey are those who search for Wisdom with pure hands ...
'ashrey is the man who attains Wisdom, and walks in the law of the Most High ...

The Beatitudes Are Apocalyptic-Wisdom Reversal Announcements!

Notice the contrast with Jesus' elevation of the poor, the afflicted, and those on the margins of society.

- Jesus offers a vision of the upside-down value system of the Kingdom. He is announcing who is "in" the Kingdom, and it's all the wrong kinds of people!
- Jesus here gives a radical revisioning of who are the people of God. Not the saints, or the leaders, or the Torah-teachers, or the Maccabean martyrs.
- The poor and unimportant who show generous mercy and who suffer, these are the kinds of people whom God favors and has invited into the new covenant Israel formed around the Messiah Jesus.

These are not the "be-attitudes," that is, commands to have a certain kind of "attitude." There is nothing inherently virtuous about mourning or being persecuted. Jesus is not telling us to cry all the time and make efforts to get persecuted.

Instead, **they are an announcement of reversal**, that people whose lives are marked by these negative and undesirable traits and circumstances are in the ideal place to discover the power and reality of God's Kingdom.

"Too often these characteristics [of the Beatitudes] ... are turned into ideals we must strive to attain. As ideals, they can become formulas for gaining honor and prestige, rather than descriptions of the kind of people to whom Jesus brings the Kingdom of God. Thus Jesus does not tell us that we should try to be poor in spirit, or meek, or peacemakers. He simply says that many who find themselves in such circumstances will surprisingly find that they have received the honor to be the first among those called into the kingdom."

Hauerwas, Stanley (2012). [*Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir*](#). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 38-39.

The Beatitudes are reversals: They announce God's blessing on people who many would consider hopeless. They force the listener to revise, to expand and limit what kinds of people are "important" and have status in God's Kingdom.

The Beatitudes are, in fact, a poetic embodiment of the message of good news that Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61, connected to other important passages in Isaiah and the Psalms.

Isaiah 61:1-3 NIV

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to **the poor**.
He has sent me to bind up **the brokenhearted**,
to proclaim freedom for **the captives**
and release from darkness for **the prisoners**,
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort **all who mourn**,
and provide for **those who grieve** in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.

Isaiah 57:15 Instructor's Translation

For thus says the high and exalted One
who lives forever, whose name is holy,
who dwells on a high and holy place
and also with **the crushed and those low of spirit**
in order **to bring life to the spirit of the low**
and **to bring life to the heart of the crushed**.

Psalms 34:18 Instructor's Translation

The Lord is near to **the broken of heart**
and saves those who are **crushed in spirit**.

Psalms 51:16-17 Instructor's Translation

For you do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;
you are not pleased with burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are **a broken spirit**;
a broken and a crushed heart, O God, you will not despise.

The Structure of the Beatitudes

These nine sayings have been designed in two overlapping arrangements.

Social Status

3 **How good is life for** the powerless,
because theirs is **the kingdom of the skies** .

4 **How good is life for** those who grieve,
because they will be comforted.

5 **How good is life for** the unimportant,
because they will inherit **the land** .

Character

6 **How good is life for** those who hunger and thirst for **righteousness** ,
because they will be satisfied.

7 **How good is life for** those who show mercy,
because they will be shown mercy.

8 **How good is life for** the pure in heart,
because they will see God.

Conduct

9 **How good is life for** the peacemakers,
because they will be called children of God.

10 **How good is life for** those who have been **persecuted**
on account of **righteousness** ,
because theirs is **the kingdom of the skies** .

11 **How good is life for you all**
when they insult **you**
and **persecute you** ,
and speak any evil lies against **you**
on account of me.

12 Celebrate and shout for joy,
because your reward is great **in the skies** ,
because this is how they **persecuted** the prophets before **you all** .

Matthew 5:3-12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

The literary features that point toward two sets of four are as follows.

- There are eight statements that begin with the identical phrase “the good life belongs to ...” (*makarios hoi ...*).
- Statements one and eight have an identical ending “because theirs is the kingdom of the skies.”
- The ninth is clearly linked to the preceding eight, but also different: “the good life is for y’all ...” (*makarios este*).
- The eight statements are identical in form, while the ninth breaks the pattern but expands the content of the eighth.
- Both speak of persecution on account of the skies.
- Each set of four sayings has exactly the same number of Greek letters (see Dale C. Allison Jr., [Studies in Matthew](#), p. 174-175).

The meaning of two sets of four:

- Sayings one through four promise a reversal for the poor and unfortunate, while sayings five through eight promise rewards for the virtuous (Mark Allan Powell, [God with Us: A Pastoral Theology of Matthew's Gospel](#), p. 119-140).
- Sayings one through four pertain to loving God, while sayings five through eight pertain to relationships with other people (David Garland, [Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary](#), p. 54).
- Sayings one through four explore the mindset and attitudes of the righteous, while sayings five through eight focus on relational conduct of the righteous (William Dumbrell, [The Logic and Role of the Law in Matthew 5:1-20](#) p. 4).

3 + 3 + 3—Three sets of three

- This is a common rhetorical communication technique in ancient Jewish literature. Bundling things into threes makes them easy to remember and allows effective use of parallelism, similarity, and contrast.

The literary features that point toward three sets of three are:

- There are technically nine makarisms, each beginning with *makarioi*.
- The third of the third set is climactic, taking up the ideas of the eighth but also developing them.
- The last of the nine is a link-hinge, binding the makarisms to the three images that follow about the salt/light/city.

Scot McKnight points out that sayings one through three focus on the humility of the poor (poor in spirit, mourners, the meek), sayings four through six focus on those who pursue justice (those who desire justice, the merciful, the pure in heart), sayings seven through nine focus on those who create peace (peacemakers, persecuted, the insulted). The three moral themes are humility, justice, and peace (McKnight, [Sermon on the Mount](#), p. 37-38).

- Sayings one through three: **Their social status**—The powerless, those who suffer loss, and those of low social status.
- Sayings four through six: **Their character**—They long for justice, they're merciful, and they have a single desire (for God).

- Sayings seven through nine: **Their conduct**—They make peace, they're persecuted, and they're rejected for doing justice.

Reflection Question

What does it mean to be "poor in spirit"?

Session 4: Longing for God's Kingdom

Key Takeaways

- Jesus explains that those who mourn have the good life because they will be comforted. This mirrors the words of Isaiah 61:2, where comfort is promised to those mourning over Israel's covenant unfaithfulness.
- The first three beatitudes highlight hope for those who are powerless, who grieve over corruption, and who are often overlooked, having no voice or influence. This emphasizes God's focus on the marginalized.
- The second triad of beatitudes highlights the character of people longing to see their world reflect God's heart through right relationships, mercy, and pure hearts.

A Close Reading of the Beatitudes: The Poor in Spirit

Matthew 5:3 Instructor's Translation

How good is life for the poor in spirit,
because theirs is the kingdom of the skies.

Powerless

To be "poor in spirit" (*οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι*) means to be powerless.

1. "Spirit" (*πνεύμα*) here has its Hebrew meaning (*ruakh* / רוח) of a person's inner vitality and energy, that comes as a gift from God (and can be taken away by God).

Job 12:10 Instructor's Translation

In God's hand is the **life-being** (*nephesh*) of every creature,
and the **ruakh** of all humanity.

Genesis 7:15 NASB

So they went into the ark to Noah, by twos of all flesh in which was **the breath of life**.

Job 17:1 NASB

My spirit is broken, my days are extinguished, the grave is ready for me.

2. In Hebrew, to say someone is "X of spirit" is to describe the quality of their life-vitality or life-energy.
 - [Psalm 34:18](#) "crushed of spirit" means the life energy is crushed and diminished
 - [Job 7:11](#) "distressed of spirit" means his life-energy is under duress, squeezed

- Genesis 26:35 “bitter of spirit” (מרת רוח) means sour, bitter in one’s vital energy
- Isaiah 54:6 “pained of spirit” (עצובת רוח) means one’s vital energy is in distress, cut short
- Ezekiel 3:14 “bitter and hot of spirit” means sour and angry
- Proverbs 15:4 “broken of spirit” (שבר רוח) means one’s energy is broken, drained

3. To be “poor in spirit” means to be impoverished of energy and vitality. Our word “**powerless**” would be a good translation. “Poor” (Greek: *ptokhos*) means those without economic stability or security, dependent on others.

Matthew 19:21 NASB

Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be complete, go and **sell your possessions and give to the poor**, and you will have treasure

Mark 12:42 NASB

A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent.

Luke 16:20–21 NASB

And a **poor** man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.

The Greek word *ptokhos* is one of the standard Septuagint translations of the Hebrew word ‘*aniy* (עני), which refers to low social status, someone who is looked down upon by those in powerful social roles. Their low status is often a result of poverty, though not always.

Amos 2:6-7 Instructor's Translation

For three sins of Israel, even for four,
I will not turn back its punishment,
because they sell the innocent for silver,
and the **needy** (*‘evyon*) for a pair of sandals.
They trample on the heads of the **poor** (*dal*) as on the dust of the ground
and deny justice to the **‘anivim**.

4. “ ... of spirit.”

Jesus is here adopting language from Isaiah and Proverbs to describe the “poor” and powerless among the low social status in Israelite society. These are people of low social status, unable to change their circumstances and oppressed by religious and political powers over them.

Isaiah 61:1–3 NASB

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the afflicted;
he has sent me to bind up **the broken of heart**,
to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners;
to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD

and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn,
to grant those who mourn in Zion,
giving them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of **gladness instead of mourning,**
the mantle of praise instead of **a spirit of fainting.**
So they will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

Isaiah 66:1-2 Instructor's Translation

Thus says the LORD,
"Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool.
Where then is a house you could build for me?
And where is a place that I may rest?
For my hand made all these things,
thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD.
"But to this one I will look,
to him who is **poor and broken of spirit,** and who trembles at my word.

Proverbs 16:19 Instructor's Translation

It is better to be **low of spirit with the poor** than to divide the spoil with the proud.

Jesus is adopting the language of Isaiah 61 that was also adopted by the Dead Sea sect, to describe their own sectarian identity in contrast to their Israelite kinsmen. In the Qumran hymnbook (1QHodayot-a, 23:14-15), the poet describes himself as a herald to their group.

a herald [...] of your goodness, to proclaim **to the poor** the abundance of your compassion, [...] ... from the spring [... **the bro]ken of spirit, and the mourning** to everlasting joy.

ל[היות] כאמתכה מבשר [...] טובכה לבשר ענוים לרוב רחמיכה
ממקור [...] דכ]אי רוח ואבלים לשמחת עולם [...] 15

García Martínez, Florentino & Tigchelaar, Eibert J. C. (1999). [*The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition \(transcriptions\)*](#). Eerdmans. 198-199.

And in another fragment (4Q521 Frag. 2, col. 2:5-8), we find [Isaiah 61](#) again being used to refer to the apocalyptic hope of the group.

⁵ For the Lord will consider the pious, and call the righteous by name,
⁶ and his spirit will hover upon **the poor**, and he will renew the faithful with his strength.
⁷ For he will honour the pious upon the throne of an eternal kingdom,
⁸ freeing prisoners, giving sight to **the blind**, straightening out the twis[ted.]

⁵ כי אדני חסידים יבקר וצדיקים בשם יקרא
⁶ ועל ענוים רוחו תרחף ואמונים יחליף בכחו
⁷ כי יכבד את חסידים על כסא מלכות עד
⁸ מתיר אסורים פוקח עורים זוקף כ[פופים]

García Martínez, Florentino & Tigchelaar, Eibert J. C. (1999). [The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition \(transcriptions\)](#). Eerdmans. 1044-1045.

“It must be stressed that the religious meaning of ‘poor’ does not exclude the economic meaning. Rather, the two go together. With probably the majority of Jesus’ audience, the religious state of poverty was matched by an outward condition: they suffered literal poverty and experienced first-hand economic inequities. They knew the meaning of need because they were poor in spirit and poor in fact.”

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2000). [A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, vol. 3 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark. 443.

Scot McKnight points out that “poor in spirit” means an economically, physically impoverished or oppressed person who not only recognizes her or his need but also trusts in God for full redemption.

- Luke only has “poor” in [Luke 6:20](#). You have to say that Matthew has “spiritualized” the saying or that Jesus meant two different things. Is “spirit” an adverb, leading to “spiritually poor,” recognizing your spiritual poverty?
- Jesus didn’t separate physical and spiritual poverty. He saw them as linked. In both cases, circumstances compel people to see their need for God. Also, we have to remember Jesus’ actual historical setting: mostly lower class Jewish farmers, fishermen, and traders, scraping by under the harsh economy of Roman rule. The only wealthy Jews were ones who were aligned with Rome, and so spiritual and economic poverty went hand in hand in the Galilee of Jesus’ day.

“... Because theirs is the kingdom” (lit. “of them is the kingdom”)

- This doesn’t mean that it belongs exclusively to them. Rather, these “because” statements communicate the reversal. These powerless folks, who would normally never be associated with God’s heavenly power are, in fact, the first ones to be receiving Jesus’ announcement of the arrival of God’s reign on Earth as in Heaven.
- The outcome of the final judgment is brought here and now into the present. The poor will be given the Kingdom, to the surprise of all those who thought it actually belonged to them.

Those Who Mourn

Matthew 5:4 Instructor's Translation

How good is life for those who grieve,
because they will be comforted.

“To grieve” (Greek: *pentheo*, to mourn, cry with grief) is the standard biblical word for public displays of mourning and grief when one has suffered loss, usually death.

Genesis 23:1-2 Instructor's Translation

Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. She **died** at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to **mourn** for Sarah and to **weep** over her.

Genesis 37:33-35 NIV

Jacob recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces."

Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and **mourned** for his son many days.

All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but **he refused to be comforted**. "No," he said, "I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave." So his father wept for him.

Genesis 50:3-4, 10 NASB

³ Now forty days were required for it, for such is the period required for embalming. And the Egyptians **wept for him seventy days**.

⁴ When **the days of mourning** for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your sight, please speak to Pharaoh, saying ..."

¹⁰ When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with **a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed seven days mourning for his father**.

Jacob's mourners

These stories of personal grief become paradigms for the Israelites who lived through the devastation of exile, a condition that continued on into the Second Temple period under persecution from tyrants without and corrupt Israelite leaders within. Their voices are heard all over the Psalms and Prophets.

Isaiah 61:1-3 NASB

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the afflicted;
he has sent me to bind up **the broken of heart**,
to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners;
to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn,
to grant those who mourn in Zion,
giving them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of **gladness instead of mourning**,
the mantle of praise instead of **a spirit of fainting**.
So they will be called oaks of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

Isaiah 66:1-2 Instructor's Translation

Thus says the Lord,
"Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool.
Where then is a house you could build for me?
And where is a place that I may rest?
For my hand made all these things,
thus all these things came into being," declares the Lord.

“But to this one I will look,
to him who is **poor and broken of spirit**, and who trembles at my word.

Ezra 10:6 NIV

Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While he was there, he ate no food and drank no water, because he continued to **mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles**.

Nehemiah 1:3–4 NIV

They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. **The wall of Jerusalem is broken down**, and its gates have been burned with fire.” When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I **mourned** and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

“God’s own are on the bottom, the wicked on the top. So mourning is heard because the righteous suffer, because the wicked prosper, and because God has not yet acted to reverse the situation. ... The people of God have yet to see the kingdom of God in its fullness. They are persecuted, and God’s will is not done on earth as it is in heaven. The righteous cannot but mourn until the eschatological reversal; it is not possible to be content with the status quo. To those who understand the truth about the present age, grief cannot be eliminated; it is, in fact, accentuated.”

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2000). [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, vol. 3 \(International Critical Commentary\)*](#). T&T Clark. 448.

The Afflicted/Unimportant

Matthew 5:5 Instructor's Translation

How good is life for the unimportant,
because they will inherit the land.

Two important notes for understanding this saying:

1. The Greek word *praus* (πραυς) is one of the common ways the Greek Septuagint translated the Hebrew word *'aniy* / עני, which means the “poor and afflicted.” In other words, this word is a close synonym with “poor in spirit.”

 - To translate this word as “meek” or “humble” is misleading. A survey of this Greek word in the Old Testament makes this clear.

Psalms 76:8–9 NASB

You caused judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared and was still when God arose to judgment, to save all the **afflicted** (עני / πραυς) of the earth. Selah.

Psalms 147:6 NASB

The Lord supports the **afflicted** (עני / πρᾶυς); he brings down the wicked to the ground.

Job 24:3-4 NASB

They drive away the donkeys of the orphans;
they take the widow's ox for a pledge.
They push the needy aside from the road;
the **afflicted** (עני / πρᾶυς) of the land are made to hide themselves altogether.

Job 36:15 NASB

He delivers the **afflicted** (עני / πρᾶυς) in their affliction, and opens their ear in time of oppression.

Isaiah 26:5-6 NASB

For he has brought low those who dwell on high, the unassailable city;
he lays it low, he lays it low to the ground,
he casts it to the dust.
The foot will trample it, the feet of the **afflicted** (עני / πρᾶυς), the steps of the helpless.

2. Jesus is adopting the language of Psalm 37:11 here, which paints the portrait of “the afflicted” in clear terms. [Psalm 37](#) is itself linked to a whole network of “afflicted” poems in the Psalms scroll. In these texts, we hear the voices of those who gave the Hebrew Bible its final shape, a persecuted, ethnic-religious minority in Jerusalem who hoped in God and suffered at the hands of imperial occupiers.

Psalm 37:7-11 NIV*

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when people succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.
Refrain from anger and turn from hot anger; do not fret—it leads only to bad.
For those who are **evil will be destroyed,**
but **those who hope in Yahweh they will inherit the land.**
A little while, and **the wicked** will be no more;
though you look for them, they will not be found.
But **the 'any will inherit the land** and enjoy *shalom* and *tov*.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalm 76:8-9 NIV

From heaven you pronounced judgment, and the land feared and was quiet—
when you, God, rose up to judge, **to save all the afflicted of the land.**

Psalm 147:2-6 NIV

The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers **the exiles of Israel.**
He heals **the brokenhearted** and binds up their wounds.
He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.
Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.
The LORD sustains **the afflicted** but casts the wicked to the ground.

Psalm 149:2-4 NIV

Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King.
Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with timbrel and harp.
For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns **the afflicted** with victory.

The “afflicted poor” are non-influential people, those deemed unimportant. There are two ways that “meek” has been interpreted.

1. Those who think of themselves as unimportant = meek, unassuming, not overly self-important. This is what most modern English translations assume. This comes from a handful of uses of the word *'aniy* where it can describe someone who doesn't act like they're influential.

Numbers 12:1-3 NASB

Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman);
and they said, “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us as well?”
And the Lord heard it.
(Now the man **Moses was very 'aniy**, more than any man who was on the face of the land.)

2. Those who are treated as unimportant by others = the afflicted-poor: This makes sense of the second clause (“they will inherit the land”). These are people who don't demand or have the ability to demand that they be taken seriously or that they be noticed; these are the neglected and overlooked and those taken advantage of.

“ ... because they will inherit the land” (Ps. 37:11, 22, 34)

Psalm 37:10-11 NIV

A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But **the afflicted will inherit the land** and enjoy peace and prosperity.

Psalm 37:21-22 NIV

The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously;
those the Lord blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be destroyed.

Psalm 37:34 NIV

Hope in the Lord and keep his way.
He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are destroyed, you will see it.

Jesus is speaking in very real terms here to Galilean Jews and impoverished people who don't own any land or whose ancestral lands have been taken from them. While the Romans are in charge, seizing land right and left, land means land.

Summary 1st-3rd Beatitudes

How good is life for the powerless who grieve over the corrupt and ruined state of Israel, who are often overlooked and taken advantage of, and who have no voice or influence. God's Kingdom, which has arrived

here on earth in the mission of Jesus, belongs first and foremost to them and offers a promise of comfort and a future Eden blessing when all things are made right.

Those Hungry for Justice

Matthew 5:6 Instructor's Translation

How good is life for those who hunger and thirst for right-relationships, because they will be satisfied.

What does “righteousness” (Greek: δικαιοσύνη) mean here? There are a few compelling options for the particular nuance of meaning here.

Defining Righteousness: Nuance 1

Acting in ways that are “right/appropriate” to a specific relationship; relational actions that align with God’s ideal vision for human relationships. This equals “doing right by each other.” This is a standard meaning of “righteousness” in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament.

Jeremiah 22:3 NIV

This is what the LORD says: **Do justice and righteousness.** Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.

Deuteronomy 24:10–13 NASB

When you make your neighbor a loan of any sort, you shall not enter his house to take his pledge. You shall remain outside, and the man to whom you make the loan shall bring the pledge out to you. If he is a poor man, you shall not sleep with his pledge.

When the sun goes down you shall surely return the pledge to him, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you; and **it will be your righteousness,** before the Lord your God.

Proverbs 11:4–6 NASB

Riches do not profit in the day of wrath,
but **righteousness** delivers from death.

The **righteousness** of the blameless will smooth his way,
but the wicked will fall by his own wickedness.

The **righteousness** of the upright will deliver them,
but the treacherous will be caught by their own greed.

Psalms 11:7 NIV

For the LORD is **righteous, he loves righteousness;** the upright will see his face.

Matthew 5:20 NIV

For I tell you that unless **your righteousness** surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Nuance 1 is by far the most dominant meaning of “righteousness” in Matthew.

Matthew 3:15 NASB

But Jesus answering said to [John the immerser], “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to **fulfill all righteousness.**” Then he permitted him.

Jesus sees his baptism as a necessary act of “doing right by God and neighbor,” specifically, his act of identifying in solidarity with sinful Israel, which needs a ritual cleansing to prepare for God’s new creation act of salvation.

Matthew 5:10 NASB

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of **righteousness**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:20 NASB

For I say to you that unless your **righteousness** surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 6:1 NASB

Beware of practicing **your righteousness** before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 6:33 NASB

But seek first his kingdom and **his righteousness**, and all these things will be added to you.

Matthew 21:32 NASB

For John came to you in **the way of righteousness** and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

In favor of nuance 1 (“humans doing right by God and each other”) is [Matthew 5:10](#) in the immediate context (“How good is life for those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness”), which assumes the right conduct is something these disciples are already doing and are persecuted for.

Defining Righteousness: Nuance 2

“God’s actions by which he does right by his human covenant partners, proving true to his character and promise.”

Psalms 31:1 NASB

In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be ashamed;
in your righteousness deliver me.

Psalms 103:6 NASB*

The Lord performs **righteous acts (lit. “righteousnesses”)** and judgments for all who are oppressed.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalm 24:3-5 NASB

Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in his holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully.

He shall receive a blessing from the Lord
and **righteousness** from the God of his salvation.

Psalm 24:5. “to receive ... righteousness from the God of salvation,” means that in the final judgment (or earlier, one could hope) one can expect that God will “do right by you” by declaring you to “be in the right,” over against anyone else’s evaluation of you (like the Satan’s) because of one’s own righteous deeds.

When God “declares righteous,” it is God “doing right by” his promises and bringing the great reversal. Two examples are Simeon and Anna, who longed to see the age of the messiah come.

Defining Righteousness: Nuance 3

A combination of the above two: “a longing for humans to fulfill God’s will for their conduct as well as to see God fulfill his own promises in bringing justice and reversal.” (Manson, T.W. [Sayings of Jesus](#), 48)

Isaiah 56:1 NIV*

This is what the Lord says:

“Maintain justice and do **righteousness [nuance 1]**,
for my deliverance is close at hand
and **my righteousness [nuance 2]** will soon be revealed.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

“They will be satisfied”: Divine passive, “by God.” How and with what these are “filled up” is not clarified. They will be filled by the messianic banquet (cf. [Isa. 25:6-8](#)).

Conclusion: “To hunger and thirst for righteousness” means that one looks out at the world and longs to see justice and peace [nuance 1], and is in a constant state of dissatisfaction when there is injustice. It also means that one lives in deep longing and anticipation of the time when God brings ultimate justice on human evil and sets things right once and for all [nuance 2].

The Merciful

Matthew 5:7 Instructor's Translation

How good is life for those who show mercy,
for they will be shown mercy.

The Greek word *eleos* is a common way the Greek Septuagint translated the Hebrew words *khesed*, “loyal love,” as well as *khanan*, “to show favor, grace.”

Jesus uses this word often in his teachings on forgiveness and generosity, but it’s clear that he also incorporates the nuance of “loyal-love to Israel’s God” as well.

The conclusion to the parable of the ungrateful servant who wouldn’t forgive one who owed him little.

Matthew 18:32–33 NASB

Then summoning him, his lord said to him, “You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.

Should you not also have **shown** mercy to your fellow slave, in the same way that I **showed** mercy to you?”

Matthew 23:23 niv

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, **mercy** and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

In Matthew, “mercy” is not just forgiveness but any act of kindness, generosity, or service meant for another’s benefit. Jesus is regularly called upon to show mercy, and he always does.

Matthew 9:27 NASB

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying out, “**Have mercy on us**, Son of David!”

Matthew 15:22 NASB

And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, “**Have mercy on me**, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed.”

Matthew 17:15 NASB

“Lord, **have mercy on my son**, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.

Jesus doesn’t have an existing relationship with these people, but they can, as fellow Israelites, make a request that he show them kindness and address their terrible circumstances.

Jesus explained his own emphasis on forgiveness and generosity to outsiders by appealing to the word *eleos* rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Matthew 9:11–13 NASB

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?”

But when Jesus heard this, he said,

“It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means:

'I desire *e/eos*, and not sacrifice,'
for I did not come to call the **righteous**, but sinners."

"ἔλεος connotes the idea of loyalty within a relationship. (Matt. 9:13 and 12:7 cite Hosea 6:6, in which *hesed* = ἔλεος clearly involves covenant loyalty.) Hence, it would seem, the evangelist was persuaded that while Jesus and his followers, in their acts of mercy and loving-kindness, were demonstrating their loyalty to God ... 'Justice and mercy and faith'—these were 'the weightier matters of the law' neglected by Matthew's opponents. ... Throughout Matthew (including 5:7), 'mercy' and its cognates imply that merciful action is the concrete expression of loyalty to God, and that what God demands is not so much activity directed Godward ('I desire ... not sacrifice'), but loving-kindness benefiting other people."

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (1988). [Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark. 455.

The Pure in Heart

Matthew 5:8 Instructor's Translation

How good is life for the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

The phrase "X of heart" (similarly to "X of spirit") marks a quality or character of the person's mind, will, and center of thought and feeling:

- [Psalm 90:12](#) "heart of wisdom" = a wise heart, wisdom at the core of one's being
- [2 Chronicles 29:34](#) "upright of heart" = people of integrity, principled
- [Psalm 109:16](#) "broken of heart" = someone whose mind and will have been diminished, not functioning rightly due to suffering or pain
- [Psalm 24:4](#) and [73:1](#) "pure of heart" = someone whose mind, will, and desire have been purged of all other influences and are purely dedicated to God

The idea of the "pure of heart seeing God" is an allusion to a network of psalms that explore a key idea from the Hebrew Bible: the return to Eden where one can gaze upon the divine glory and beauty.

Psalm 24:3-6 NASB

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?

And who may stand in his holy place?

He who has clean hands and **a pure heart** (בר לבב / καθαρός τῆς καρδίας),

who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood

and has not sworn deceitfully.

He shall receive a blessing from the LORD

and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

⁶ This is the generation of those who seek him,

who seek Your face—even Jacob.

Selah.

Psalm 51:10 NIV

Create in me **a pure heart**, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Psalm 73:1 NASB

Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are **pure in heart!**

“Pure” (בר) is from ברר, “to purify, clean, purge from impurities” and metaphorically, “to select, choose.”

Isaiah 52:11 NASB

Depart, depart, go out from there,
touch nothing unclean;
go out of the midst of her, **purify** yourselves,
you who carry the vessels of the LORD.

Jeremiah 4:11 NASB

In that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem, “A scorching wind from the bare heights in the wilderness in the direction of the daughter of my people—not to sift and not **to cleanse**,

Ezekiel 20:38 NASB

and I will **purge** from you the rebels and those who transgress against me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the LORD.

Daniel 11:35 NASB

Some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, **purge** and make them pure until the end time; because it is still to come at the appointed time.

In the Hebrew Bible, “purity of heart” is the result of a long process of sifting through one’s desires, discarding or deprioritizing any desire that does not lead one to the ultimate source of life itself: the creative power and majesty of God’s presence.

“So purity of heart ... involve[s] integrity, a correspondence between outward action and inward thought (cf. 15:8), a lack of duplicity, singleness of intention, and the desire to please God above all else. More succinctly: purity of heart is to will one thing, God’s will, with all of one’s being.”

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (1988). [*Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)*](#). T&T Clark. 456.

The rest of the Sermon on the Mount will fill out the meaning of this phrase: Their heart motivations are sincere. They are not concerned with being seen by others, but rather for a personal connection with the Father. Their greatest values are matters of the heart, not accumulation of wealth and prestige. Their behavior is fully consistent with their inward motives: a lack of duplicity and a desire to please God above all else.

“ ... Because they will see God” is a reference to the vision of God in the heavenly temple, the cosmic Eden. Jesus will later describe how right now, in the present, the heavenly angels see God.

Matthew 18:10 NASB

See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that **their angels in heaven continually see the face of my Father who is in heaven.**

This alludes to the tradition of “guardian angels” that is rooted in the biblical traditions of the angel of Yahweh appearing to people in distress (Hagar in [Gen. 16](#), Jacob in [Gen. 28, 31-33](#)) and rescuing them (see [Ps. 34:7, 9:11](#)). This idea was developed in Second Temple literature so that certain groups of angels were called “angels of the face.” That is, angels who stand in God’s presence and look upon his face (see Tobit 12:15: “I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand ready and can enter the glorious presence of the Lord.”) (For discussion, see Dale Allison, *God*, p. 47-50.)

To see God in the temple or in the holy space is a biblical image for a desire to return to Eden, to ascend to the cosmic mountain. This is a common image in the psalms and in the new Eden hope of Isaiah.

Psalm 63:2-3 NIV

I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.
Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

Psalm 27:4 NASB

One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD and to meditate in his temple.

Psalm 11:7 NASB

For the LORD is righteous,
he loves righteousness;
the upright will behold his face.

Psalm 16:8-11 NASB

I have set the LORD continually before me; because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will dwell securely.
For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will you allow your Holy One to undergo decay.
You will make known to me the path of life; **with your face is fullness of joy;**
in your right hand there are pleasures forever.

Psalm 17:15 NASB

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; **I will be satisfied with your likeness** when I awake.

Psalm 42:2 NASB

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and **be seen before God?**

Isaiah 66:18-20 NASB

For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to **gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see my glory.**

I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have neither heard my fame nor seen my glory. And they will declare my glory among the nations.

Then **they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations** as a grain offering to the LORD, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels, **to my holy mountain Jerusalem.**

Summary 4th-6th Beatitudes

How good is life for those who long to see justice and right relationships become the norm in all levels of human society, and who do their part by showing loyalty and generous mercy to others. They live this way because of their pure and genuine desire to experience God's presence and do his will. In due time, God will give them vindication, mercy, and fulfillment of what they most desire.

The Peacemakers

Matthew 5:9 Instructor's Translation

How good is life for the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

There is an important thematic background for peace (Hebrew: *shalom*) in the Hebrew Bible.

In [Isaiah 9:6](#), the messiah is called "Prince of Peace" (שר שלום). His rule can be described as a new Eden ([Isa. 11:1-10](#)). Later in Isaiah, this new Eden is described as an exalted city with "peace like a river" flowing in ([Isa. 66:12](#)).

Micah 5:5 Instructor's Translation

This one (the messiah) will be our peace.

The Greek word "peacemaker" (εἰρηνοποιος) appears only here in the New Testament, though Paul uses the verbal form "making peace" to describe how Jesus "reconciled" all creation to himself through the cross ([Col. 1:20](#)).

Colossians 1:20 NET

and through him to reconcile all things to himself by **making peace** (εἰρηνοποιήσας) through the blood of his cross, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

The word describes someone who aids in bringing about a condition of peace. They take an active posture toward conflict between others, whether that conflict is between others or with themselves (as Jesus later describes in the sermon, [Matt. 5:27-30](#)).

The preceding beatitudes make clear that these surprise-citizens of God's Kingdom live in a world of oppression, injustice, and inequity that bothers them to the core. And if one allows holy discontent to motivate action, the kinds of behaviors generated will be peace-seeking and peace-making.

Jesus is saying these words in a fraught political context. In the 1st century, he and his people lived under Roman occupation. Throughout the 30s-70s, Israelite communities were surging with religious resistance to Rome, though it took different forms:

- Withdrew (Qumran)
- Compromised with Rome (Sadducees)
- Increased their piety and holiness (Pharisees)
- Fought back against Rome (Zealots)

Jesus says the good life belongs to those who neither withdraw nor violently resist. Rather, he speaks of putting yourself in the middle of the conflict, where you could be fired on from both sides, and speak for peace in an attempt to broker peace.

Someone who is at peace with God loves peace and knows that God loves peace. When such a person sees conflict, they put themselves in the middle to help mediate and create peace. Peacemakers do not minimize difference or conflict, but neither do they encourage mere toleration. Rather, they promote loving relationships that create affection and communion across those differences.

The peacemaker brokers to create a venue where forgiveness is possible and creates a new future.

“They will be called sons of God”: Jesus will repeat this idea in [Matthew 5:45](#).

Matthew 5:44–45 NASB

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven**; for he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

To be “sons of God” is to reflect the likeness of the Father; the familial language highlights membership and participation in the family character. Such people show themselves to be part of God’s own family by their pursuit of peace.

The Persecuted, Part 1

Matthew 5:10 Instructor's Translation

How good is life for those who are persecuted on account of doing-what-is-right for theirs is the kingdom of the skies.

Jesus needs to prepare his disciples for the reality of being misunderstood and mistreated. People who make peace, that is, who confront injustice by peaceably placing themselves in the middle of the conflict, pointing out the failures that generate hostile conflict on all sides—such folks should expect resistance in the extreme.

Jesus will later bring up the hostility that his disciples are likely to face as they represent him to Israel.

Matthew 5:44 LEB

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who **persecute** you,

Matthew 10:23 LEB

And whenever they **persecute** you in this town, flee to another, for truly I say to you, you will never finish going through the towns of Israel until the Son of Man comes.

Jesus will later claim that the hostility of Jerusalem’s leaders against him is part of a long legacy of persecuting prophets.

Matthew 23:34–35 NASB

Therefore, behold, **I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes**; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and **persecute** from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Jesus is here appealing to a biblical tradition that began in the Torah and Prophets, focusing on the motif of Israel's disregard and rejection of the prophets who accused them of violating their covenant with Yahweh.

2 Kings 17:13-14 NASB

Yet **the LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets** and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments, my statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through my servants the prophets."

However, **they did not listen**, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God.

2 Chronicles 36:15-16 NASB

The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but **they continually mocked the messengers of God**, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, until there was no remedy.

Nehemiah 9:26 NASB

But they became disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their backs and **killed your prophets** who had admonished them, so that they might return to you, and they committed great blasphemies.

The murdered or persecuted prophets in mind here are:

- Jeremiah and Uriah ben Shemaiah (see Jer. 26:20-23)
- Zechariah ben Yehoiadah (2 Chron. 24:20-22)
- The prophets in the days of Elijah (1 Kgs. 18:4)

Peter will later apply this saying of Jesus to the persecuted followers of Jesus in Asia Minor.

1 Peter 3:13-14 LEB

And who is the one who will harm you if you are a zealous adherent for what is good?

But **even if you might suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed (*makarios*)**. And do not be afraid of their intimidation or be disturbed,

The Persecuted, Part 2

Matthew 5:11-12 Instructor's Translation

How good is life for y'all

when people insult you
and persecute you
and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad,
for your reward is great in heaven,
for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The “insults” (ὀνειδισμός) refer to public defamation and shame brought upon someone. This is a key motif in the Psalms (where ὀνειδίζω often translates חרף), describing David in his wilderness exile. Saul’s “persecution” of David becomes the template for the persecution of the righteous in the Psalms, and so the afflicted ones of the Psalms look to David as their model.

Psalm 42:10 NIV

My bones suffer mortal agony **as my foes taunt me**, saying to me all day long, “Where is your God?”

Psalm 44:15-16 NASB

All day long my **dishonor** is before me
and my **humiliation** has overwhelmed me,
because **of the voice of him who reproaches and reviles**,
because of the presence of **the enemy** and the avenger.

Psalm 69:8-9 NASB

I have become estranged from **my brothers**
and an alien to my mother’s sons.
For zeal for your house has consumed me,
and the **reproaches** of those who **reproach**
you have fallen on me.

Psalm 102:7-8 NASB

I lie awake, I have become like a lonely bird on a housetop.
My enemies have **reproached** me all day long;
those who deride me have used my name as a curse.

Jesus is saying that living by his manifesto will likely result in them being persecuted by their fellow Israelites and the culture at large. The difficult circumstances will be painful and unpleasant (think of the early chapters of Acts of the Apostles), and so his disciples will constantly need to reframe such hardship. Persecution, Jesus says, is not a sign of divine disapproval—just the opposite. It is a sign of honor, showing that the message of Jesus’ Kingdom is confronting the powers and provoking a predictable response of hostility.

Notice how this blessing and the previous conflate “righteousness” and “on my account.” To follow Jesus and his Kingdom claims is “doing righteousness” that aligns with the will of God.

Notice also that here Jesus is anticipating the path that he himself will walk to the cross.

Chrysostum (*Homilies on Matthew*, 15.7) has a great line here:

“Lest you should think the mere fact having evil spoken of you makes you blessed, note the two limitations: when it is for his sake, and when the things said are false: for without these, the one who has evil spoken of them is, instead of being blessed, actually miserable.”

Saint Chrysostom. [Homilies on Matthew](#).

“Persecution of the prophets”: This places Jesus’ statement in a long line of statements about Israel’s persecution and rejection of the true prophets of Yahweh.

Summary of 7th-9th Beatitudes

How good is life for those who engage the conflicts that divide our world and our relationships, seeking and brokering peace in the midst of a hostile world. This will inevitably create misunderstanding that leads to ill-treatment and public dishonor. But this is a cause for deep joy because it means that the God of Israel is challenging the powers through his messianic people.

Summaries of the Beatitudes

“We can compare the work of the beatitudes to that of a plow in the fields. Drawn along with determination it drives the sharp wedge of the plowshare into the earth and carves out, as the poets say, a deep wound, a broad furrow. ... In the same way the beatitudes penetrate us ... in order to break up our interior soil. It cuts through us with the sharp edge of trials and with the struggles it provokes. It overturns our ideas and projects, reverses what seems obvious, thwarts our desires, and bewilders us, leaving us poor and naked before God. All this, in order to prepare a place within us for the seed of a new kind of life.”

Pinckaers, Servais (2011). [Pursuit of Happiness](#). Wipf and Stock. 36-37.

Scot McKnight has a helpful way of making the Beatitudes stick in a modern context.

“I wonder if we should examine the standards used to measure people according to the ‘Christian standard.’ How should we measure piety, or spirituality, or true Christianity? Jesus measures it by the standard of whether a person loves God, loves self, and loves others. Look at who Jesus blesses here:

- those who are the humble poor
- those who pursue righteousness and justice
- those who create peace

His standard and our standard are often at odds. In my experience in churches, I see these sorts of standards to measure followers:

- those who read their Bible and pray daily
- those who attend church regularly
- those who tithe
- those who know a lot about the Bible
- those who preach well
- those who exercise the spiritual gifts
- those who exercise the spiritual disciplines

- those who evangelize
- those who have great stories of conversion
- those who write books, especially ones about Jesus
- those who separate themselves from the world
- those who have succeeded in business and fund Christian ministry
- those who run for public office

But here's the problem: By what standard do we measure these things as spiritually superior? ... Are these things the standard of evaluation that Jesus advocates? ... The Beatitudes of Jesus are nothing short of a revolution of evaluation. We see in those whom Jesus blesses those who truly are the Jesus people of this world."

Adapted from McKnight, Scot (2013). [*Sermon on the Mount \(The Story of God Bible Commentary\)*](#). Zondervan Academic.

Reflection Question

How would you describe the status and character of the people Jesus identifies as having the good life in the first six beatitudes?

Session 5: The Peacemakers and the Persecuted

Key Takeaways

- Peacemakers work towards *shalom* (“wholeness”) by seeking reconciliation between parties in conflict.
- Those who follow Jesus and work towards making peace can expect persecution.
- Jesus likens his followers to salt: preserving, flavoring, and purifying the world around them.
- Jesus casts a vision for a kingdom where those who are normally left outside and those who typically do the excluding come together to live by a new set of values, becoming an example of God’s goodness for the world—a city on a hill.

Salt, Light, City

Salt

13 **Y’all** are **the salt** of the land.

But if **the salt** loses flavor/is foolish,
with what can it be **made salty** again?

It’s useful for **nothing** (οὐδέν),
except to be thrown out and stepped on **by people**.

Light and City

14 **Y’all** are **the light** of the world.

It is not (οὐ) able to be hidden, **a city** that is set up on a mountain,
15 and they **don’t** (οὐδὲ) light **a candle** (λύχνον) and place it under a basket.
Rather, upon a **candle-stand** (λυχνίαν),
and it **will shine** on everyone in the house.

16 In the same way, **let your light shine** before people,
so that they can see **your** good works,
and so they can give honor to **your** Father who is **in the skies**

These two short parables are parallel addresses to Jesus' audience of disciples. If the Beatitudes described the surprising and ideal character of Jesus' Kingdom community, he now moves on to talk about the role of this community among Israel.

There is an important link back to the Beatitudes, which all begin with the phrase, "Flourishing are those who/the one who ..." but only the last beatitude shifts to, "Flourishing are you all who are persecuted."

This establishes a close connection between the warning of persecution and these two parables about the role of Jesus' community in the world. They are, as it were, explaining why his followers must go out into a world where they will be resisted and persecuted. It's because their role is to be salt, light, and a city.

He uses three metaphors, bound up in two parables: salt, light, and a city.

Salt of the Land

Davies and Allison surveyed the entire history of interpretation of this verse, and collected 11 different interpretations.

"As to what is meant in this passage by salt, the options are many. The following considerations are pertinent.

1. In [Lev. 2:13](#) and [Ezek. 43:24](#) salt is prescribed as an element to be added to sacrifices (cf. [Ezra 6:9](#); Jub. 21:11; 11QTemple 20; m. Mid. 5:3).
2. In [Num. 18:19](#) and [Lev. 2:13](#) the 'salt of the covenant' is mentioned (cf. [2 Chr. 13:5](#); Jub. 21:11; 11QTemple 20:13; Sipra on [Num. 18:19](#)).
3. In [2 Kgs. 2:19–22](#) Elisha performs a miracle and uses salt in order to purify bad drinking water. The connexion between salt and purity is also found in [Exod. 30:35](#) (the salt mixed with incense is called 'pure and holy') and perhaps [Ezek. 16:4](#) (where infants are rubbed with salt; cf. b. Šabb. 129b).
4. In [Job 6:6](#) salt is a condiment for food (cf. Plutarch, De garrul. 23, 514–15; [Col. 4:6](#); b. Ber. 34a).
5. In Ignatius, Magn. 10 salt is a preservative. Compare Diogenes Laertius 8:1:35: salt 'should be brought to table to remind us of what is right; for salt preserves whatever it finds, and it arises from the purest sources, sun and sea'. Note also b. Ketub. 66b and ARN 17: 'the salt of money' is 'diminution' (that is, charity preserves wealth).
6. In Eccles 39:26 we find this: 'Basic to all the needs of man's life are water and fire and iron and salt ...'. Compare Pliny, Nat. hist. 31:102: 'there is nothing more useful than salt and sunshine' (cf. 31:88). In these two texts salt is a necessity.
7. In [Ezra 4:14](#) those who eat the salt of the palace cannot be witnesses against the king. To eat salt with someone is therefore a sign of loyalty (cf. the 'salt of the covenant').
8. In [Mk. 9:50](#) salt is linked with peace: 'Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another'. Salt and friendship are also associated in Philo, Som. 2:210.
9. [Col. 4:6](#) reads: 'Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one'.
10. In rabbinic texts salt is sometimes associated with wisdom, as in m. Soṭa 9:15: 'the wisdom of the scribes will become insipid'.

11. In the Greek tradition salt is 'beloved of the gods' (Homer, *Il.* 9:214; Plato, *Tim.* 60E) and often spoken of as being the 'spice' (= wit) of conversation (Plutarch, *Mor.* 514 F; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 18:13)."
Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [*Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)*](#). T&T Clark International. 472-473.

These interpretations can be summarized as ...

1. Salt as a preservative is associated with endurance over time. Salt as a symbol of endurance explains the phrase "the salt of the covenant" ([Lev. 2:13](#); [Num. 18:19](#); [2 Chron. 13:5](#)), i.e., a covenant that endures.
2. Salt as a flavor-enhancing seasoning (see [Job 6:6](#); [Col. 4:6](#), "let your speech be seasoned with salt").
3. Salt as a purifying agent: Salt could be used to purify water ([2 Kgs. 2:21](#)), or to wash blood from a newborn ([Ezek. 16:4](#)), or to ensure the purity of something, like the holy incense used in the tabernacle ([Exod. 30:35](#)).

The problem: Salt had many symbolic associations in the ancient world, so how do we know which nuance Jesus is activating here?

The interpretation that takes the 1st century Jewish setting most seriously, and takes the key Hebrew Bible hyperlinks in [Matthew 5:13-16](#) into consideration has been summarized well by Jonathan Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, p. 162-168; and Charles Quarles, *the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 77-83.

Jesus doesn't simply use the salt metaphor here, here uses three parallel images that are mutually illuminating:

- Salt of the land
- Light of the world
- City on a mountain

These three images are not random, but part of a dense network of scriptural images at work in the book of Isaiah's portrait of the new covenant people of God who carry on the work of "God's servant."

Light & City

Light is a key metaphor in Isaiah, drawn from day one in [Genesis 1:3-6](#), as an image of God's deliverance and new-creation power released into the world through God's appointed representatives. Israel was called to become a city through which God's light would shine into the world.

Isaiah 2:2-5 NASB

Now it will come about that in the last days
the mountain of the house of the LORD
will be established as the chief of the mountains,
and will **be raised above the hills;**
and all the nations will stream to it.
And many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us concerning his ways

and that we may walk in his paths.”

For the law will go forth from Zion

and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

And he will judge between the nations,

and will render decisions for many peoples;

and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will not lift up sword against nation,

and never again will they learn war.

Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.

This image develops as Israel fails to be this light and city on the hill, and so God appoints a “servant” who will be this on his people’s behalf and thus fulfill God’s covenant promises.

Isaiah 42:6-7 NASB

I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,

I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you,

and I will make you a covenant of the people,

as a light to the nations,

to open blind eyes,

to bring out prisoners from the dungeon

and those who dwell in darkness from the prison.

Isaiah 49:5-6, 8 NASB

⁵ And now says the LORD, who formed me from the womb to be his servant,

to bring Jacob back to him, so that Israel might be gathered to him

(For I am honored in the sight of the LORD,

and my God is my strength),

⁶ he says, “It is too small a thing that you should be my servant

to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel;

I will also make you a light of the nations

so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

⁸ Thus says the LORD, “In a favorable time I have answered you,

and in a day of salvation I have helped you;

and I will keep you and **give you for a covenant of the people,**

to restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages;

This theme culminates in Isaiah 60, where the new Jerusalem is a community of people who follow the servant and participate in his new covenant witness to the nations.

Isaiah 60:1-3 NASB

Arise, shine; for your **light** has come,

and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

For behold, darkness will cover the earth

and deep darkness the peoples;

but the LORD will rise upon you
and his glory will appear upon you.
Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Isaiah 60:14 NASB

The sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you,
and all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet;
and they will call you the city of the LORD,
the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

So what does any of this have to do with salt? Salt was involved in the traditional ways to enact a covenant ceremony, including Israel's sacrifices that reinforced their covenant bond with Yahweh.

Leviticus 2:13 NASB

Every grain offering of yours, moreover, **you shall season with salt**, so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking from your grain offering; **with all your offerings you shall offer salt.**

Numbers 18:19 NASB

All the offerings of the holy gifts, which the sons of Israel offer to the LORD, I have given to you and your sons and your daughters with you, as a perpetual allotment. It is **an everlasting covenant of salt before the LORD** to you and your descendants with you.

2 Chronicles 13:4-5 NASB

Then Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, and said, "Listen to me, Jeroboam and all Israel: Do you not know that the LORD God of Israel gave the rule over Israel forever to David and **his sons by a covenant of salt?**"

Notice how this last passage in 2 Chronicles 13 takes up the theme of God's eternal promise to the house of David (see 2 Sam. 7; Ps. 89, 132) but describes it in the language of Numbers 18:19. In other words, this shows how the Chronicler sees salt as a metaphor for "enduring" or "eternal" which makes it an apt image for describing God's covenant promise to David of an eternal messianic kingdom from his lineage.

Jesus is bringing together all of the key themes of the Torah and Prophets regarding Israel's role among the nations. Israel was called to be the kingdom of priests, in eternal covenant with Yahweh, so that through them the Eden blessing could spread out to all of the nations (Gen. 12:1-5; Exod. 19:4-6).

The prophets, specifically Isaiah, developed the imagery describing Israel's vocational calling into an image of a glorious heaven-on-earth city on top of a tall hill, shining divine light out to the nations who would come and learn God's wisdom, resulting in a new era of peace, and of the worship of Yahweh.

Notice how the final line, "so they will see your good works and glorify your father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16), takes up the images from Isaiah and Jeremiah about the new Jerusalem as the site of an international pilgrimage where the nations worship and give glory to Yahweh.

Isaiah 40:4-5 NASB

Let every valley be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
and let the rough ground become a plain,
and the rugged terrain a broad valley;
**then the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all flesh will see it together;**
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Isaiah 52:9–10 NASB

Break forth, shout joyfully together,
you waste places of Jerusalem;
for the LORD has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
The LORD has bared his holy arm
in the sight of all the nations,
**that all the ends of the earth may see
the salvation of our God.**

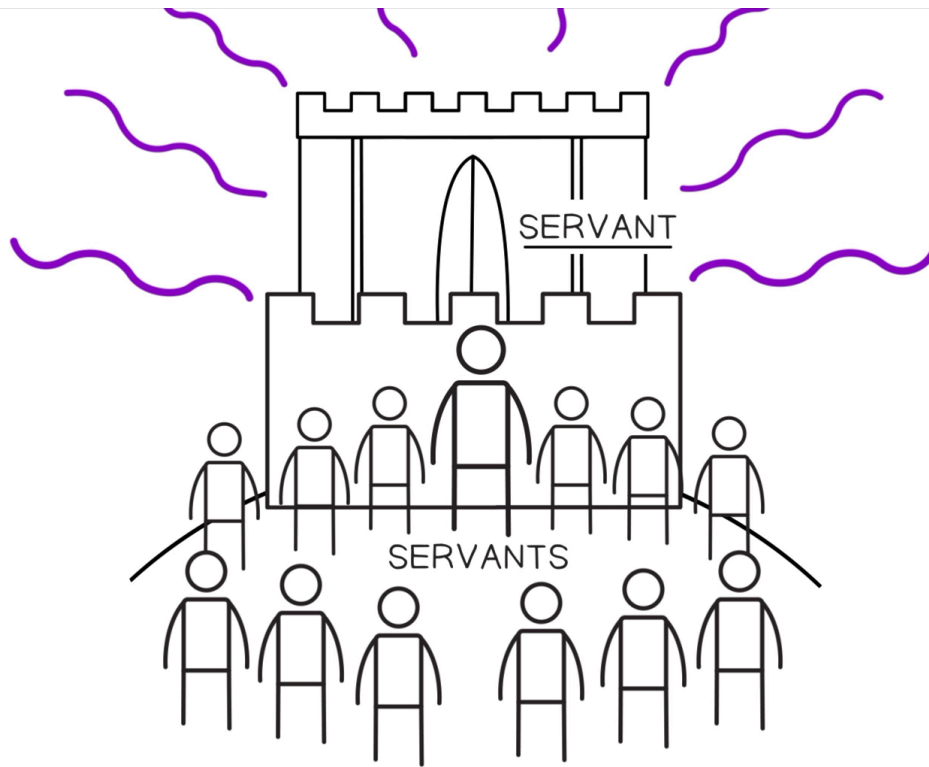
Isaiah 66:18–19 NASB

For I know their works and their thoughts; **the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues.**
And they shall come and **see my glory.**
I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech,
Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have neither heard my fame nor **seen my glory.**
And they will declare my glory among the nations.

“Taken together, the salt and light metaphors, with the flavors of Isaiah everywhere, result in a clear and powerful statement about the future new covenant coming through Jesus. This combination of metaphors ... evokes the biblical storyline and hope for the new covenant time when God will return and bring his comfort throughout the world. Jesus is the great prophet and suffering servant of Isaiah, bringing light and grace to the world. By extension, then, Jesus’ disciples are likewise heralds of this new covenant message ... and they embody this ‘salt and light’ effectiveness through good works that are visible and bring honor to their and Jesus’ heavenly Father.”

Pennington, Jonathan T. (2017). [*The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*](#). Baker Academic. 165-167.

The Servants as the City



The Servants as the City. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Reflection Question

What does it mean for Jesus to call his followers “the salt of the earth”?



Module 2: You Have Heard It Said

SESSIONS 6-12

Jesus addresses the religious wisdom of his day, unveiling the heart of God's commands and giving his followers fresh vision for living in God's Kingdom.

Session 6: Jesus Fulfills the Torah

Key Takeaways

- Jesus does not reject the laws of the Hebrew Bible. Instead, he follows the tradition of the Hebrew prophets who point to the need for a new covenant and a new heart so that people can follow the laws.
- Jesus teaches that even the smallest commands of the Torah are part of God's will for his people. They point beyond individual behaviors to deeper heart change and a greater vision for what his Kingdom is like.

A Righteousness that Fulfills the Torah & Prophets

Matthew 5:17-20

Jesus fills-full the Torah

- **5:17** Jesus has come to **fill-full (πληρώω)** the Torah and Prophets
- **5:18-19** The Torah's commands are authoritative and to be kept *during this age*
- **5:20** Jesus' apprentices are to do-what-is-right in a way that **far surpasses (περισσεύω)** Israel's current leaders

Matthew 5:21-47

Six case studies in filling-full the Torah

- Case study 1: Murder & anger
- Case study 2: Adultery & lust
- Case study 3: Divorce & remarriage
- Case study 4: Oaths & truth-telling
- Case study 5: Retaliation & nonviolence
- Case study 6: Loving your enemy

Matthew 5:48

Conclusion

- Become **complete-whole (τέλειος)**, as your Father in the skies is complete

Matthew 5:17-48. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Jesus Fulfills the Torah

17 Don't suppose that I have come to **do away with** the **Torah (νόμος)** **or the Prophets** .
I have not come to **do away with** ,
but to **fill them full (πληρώω)** .

- a 18 **Because**, truly, I tell you:
b **until** **the sky** and the land pass on,
c not one dot or one squiggle will pass on from the **Torah** ,
b' **until** all things have taken place.

- a 19 **Therefore**, whoever **undoes** one of the least of **these commands** ,
b and then they teach people to do this,
c that person will be called least in **the kingdom of the skies** .
a' And whoever does [**these commands**],
b' and then teaches [people to do this],
c' this person will be called great in **the kingdom of the skies** .

20 **Because**, truly, I tell you:
unless your **doing-of-what-is-right** **far surpasses (περισσεύω)**
that of the **Scribes** and **Pharisaions** ,
you won't be entering into **the kingdom of the skies** .

Matthew 5:17-20. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

In this paragraph, Jesus anticipates a host of criticisms from his fellow Israelite rabbis about the relationship of his teachings to the covenant commands in the Torah. Jesus anticipates such objections and then responds with the six case studies that will follow in [5:21-48](#). The phrase “do not suppose” assumes that some of Jesus’ contemporaries were confused or concerned by Jesus’ exalted claims about himself and his authority in relation to the Torah. These concerns will grow into a full-on conflict with the scribes and Pharisees as Matthew’s account develops.

Jesus’ Sabbath practices and his disputes about the “traditions of the fathers”:

Matthew 12:2 Instructor's Translation

But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look, your disciples do **what is not-authorized [by the Torah]** to do on a Sabbath.”

Matthew 15:1-2 Instructor's Translation

Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, "Why do your disciples **break the tradition of the elders?** For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

We know that Jesus' followers were later subject to the same criticism from their Jewish compatriots.

Acts 6:11 Instructor's Translation

We have heard [Stephen] speak blasphemous words **against Moses and against God.**

Acts 6:13-14 Instructor's Translation

This man [Stephen] incessantly speaks **against this holy place and the Torah;** for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.

Acts 21:28 Instructor's Translation

[Paul] is the man who preaches to all men everywhere **against our people and the Torah and this place;** and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.

The rhetorical design of Jesus' words invites us to compare the various parts of the statement that are linked by parallelism and wordplay.

- The opening "do away with" (Greek: *kataluo*) links forward to "undoes" (Greek: *luo*) in that both words come from the same root. Jesus does not at all want to be associated with Jewish movements that abandon Torah-faithfulness. Just the opposite, he claims that his teaching is, in fact, the "fulfillment" of the Torah and Prophets. However, what exactly does it mean to be faithful to a fulfilled Torah and Prophets? This is what Jesus will turn to in the paragraphs that follow.
- Do away with (*kataluo*) = dismantle, dissolve, abolish, destroy a building [See word study list below.] To do this to an authoritative text is to declare it is no longer valid. The issue is the relationship of his claims and teachings to the existing authority of Scripture.

The potent but ambiguous "fill them full" (Greek: *plerosai*, often translated "fulfill") of the Torah is matched by the "far surpasses" (Greek: *periousei ... pleion*). In other words, the fulfillment of the Torah and Prophets will be a kind of behavior that surpasses other contemporary interpretations of the Torah. This is what Jesus is going to describe in [5:21-48](#) in six case studies. And the sixth and final case study links back to this idea: "And if you greet only your brothers, what more (Greek: *perisson*) are you doing than others?" ([5:47](#)).

Matthew 24:2 NASB

And he said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be **kataluo.**"

Matthew 26:61 NASB

and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to **kataluo** the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'"

Acts 5:38-39 NASB

So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be **kataluo**; but if it is of God, you will not be able to **kataluo** them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.

Romans 14:20 NASB

Do not **kataluo** the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense.

“Fulfill Them” (Plerao)

Jesus’ fulfillment is contrasted with “do away with,” which shows the issue is not just observance or obedience to the Torah (in which case, he would say, “I haven’t come to abolish, but to teach obedience to Torah”). Rather, the issue is about the role that the Torah and Prophets play within the ongoing purpose of God now that Israel’s messiah has arrived.

“Fulfill” has been used already by Matthew in chapters 1-4, showing how Jesus is bringing the story of the Scriptures and of Israel to its culminating fulfillment or purpose: Jesus is bringing about that to which Scripture pointed.

Matthew 1:22–23 NIV

All this took place **to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:** “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

Matthew 2:14–15 NIV

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was **fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet:** “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Matthew 2:16–18 NIV

When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through **the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:** “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”

Matthew 2:22–23 NIV

But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was **fulfilled what was said through the prophets,** that he would be called a Nazarene.

Matthew 3:13–15 NIV

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this **to fulfill all righteousness.**” Then John consented.

Matthew 4:12–16 NIV

When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— **to fulfill what was said through the prophet** Isaiah:

“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

Notice that “fulfillment” has to do with the prophets, which is exactly what Jesus says in [5:17](#). In other words, Jesus reads the Torah and Prophets as a unified whole that reaches forward to something that needs to be fulfilled.

Israel’s inability to fulfill their role as Yahweh’s covenant partners is a major theme in the Torah and Prophets. Specifically, the scriptural narrative shows that Israel consistently fails to live faithfully by Yahweh’s wise covenant commands. All of the major prophets anticipate a day when that inability will be reversed.

Isaiah 50:4 NASB

The Lord God has given me the tongue of **disciples**,
that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word.
He awakens me morning by morning,
he awakens my ear to listen as a **disciple**.

Isaiah 51:7 NASB

Listen to me, **you who know righteousness**,
a people **in whose heart is my Torah**;
do not fear the reproach of man,
nor be dismayed at their revilings.

Isaiah 54:13 NASB

All your sons will be taught/disciples of the LORD;
and the well-being of your sons will be great.

Jeremiah 31:33–34 NASB

“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD,
“I will put my Torah within them and on their heart I will write it;
and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
They will not teach again, each man his neighbor
and each man his brother, saying,
‘Know the LORD,’
for they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD,
“for I will forgive their iniquity,
and their sin I will remember no more.”

Ezekiel 36:26–28 NASB

Moreover, I will give you **a new heart and put a new spirit** within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes,

and you will be careful to observe my ordinances.

You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers;

so you will be my people, and I will be your God.

These key prophetic texts are in the immediate background of Jesus' claim to "fulfill" the Torah and the Prophets. In the sermon, Jesus is announcing that he is bringing in the new era of fulfillment to create a renewed Israel that will be transformed by God's Spirit to become faithful covenant partners.

"The one who fulfills the law and prophets displaces them in so far as he must become the center of attention."

Davies, W. D. & Allison, Dale C., Jr. (2004). [Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 487.

"Fulfill" here doesn't simply mean how Jesus relates to the Torah and its observance, but rather the way Jesus fulfills a pattern and purpose laid down in the Torah and Prophets themselves.

Note that Jesus fulfills "law and prophets," so the question isn't just about Torah observance but about how he brought all of Scripture to its culminating purpose.

Matthew 5:17-21 is a four-part statement that moves forward in a logical progression:

1. Assertion (5:17): I haven't come to set aside Torah-faithfulness. Rather, my teachings call people to fulfill what the storyline of the Torah and Prophets are all about.
2. Because (5:18 = logical grounds for the previous statement): The Torah is an eternal statement of the divine will for Israel. It will never be non-relevant for the people of God.
3. Therefore (5:19 = the logical conclusion of the above statement): The Torah has abiding divine guidance to offer God's people. How someone responds to that guidance plays a determining role in one's standing before God.
4. Because (5:20 = the logical grounds for the above statement): One's standing before God is determined by an even greater standard of Torah-faithfulness than what is currently being taught by Israel's religious leaders.

This paragraph is anticipating a possible objection to the teaching and authority of Jesus that is presumed in the stories of Matthew 4:23-5:2, and specifically his teaching about the Torah.

"[Matthew] 5:17-19 ... anticipates an incorrect interpretation of 5:21-48, ... and it states in advance the truth, which is that Jesus comes not to abolish but to fulfill the law. Positively, 5:20 announces what 5:21-48 is really all about, the greater righteousness ..."

Allison, Dale C., Jr. (2005). [Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present](#). Baker Academic. 181.

Paraphrase of Matthew 5:17-20

“Far from wanting to set aside the Torah and Prophets, it is my role to bring into being that to which they have pointed forward, to carry them into a new era of fulfillment.” (From R.T. France, [Matthew](#))

Interpretive Notes on Matthew 5:17-20

Matthew 5:17 Instructor's Translation

Because truly I tell you:

until **the sky** and the land **pass on**,
not one dot or one squiggle will **pass on** from the **Torah**,
until all things have taken place.

“truly I say” = *amen lego*

- This use of amen is unique to Jesus. There is no evidence of any other Jewish teacher who talked like this. Amen = true, reliable, faithful. Jesus says it 30 times in Matthew, particularly in teachings that he expects people to find surprising or uncomfortable.

“until heaven and earth pass away”

- The biblical authors sometimes contrast Yahweh’s eternal nature to the passing nature of the cosmos. But their point is to highlight the creator/creation distinction and the superior value of God’s creating word. The purpose of the statement is not to predict the dissolution of the universe.

Psalm 102:25–27 NIV

In the beginning you laid the foundations of the **land**, and the **skies** are the work of your hands.

They may perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded.

But you remain the same, and your years will never end.

Isaiah 51:6 NIV

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at **the land beneath; the skies will vanish like smoke, the land will wear out like a garment** and its inhabitants die like flies. **But my salvation will last forever**, my righteousness will never fail.

Isaiah 54:9–10 NIV

“To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again.

Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

It is common in the Hebrew Bible to compare God’s covenant promises to the enduring order of creation.

Psalm 89:35–37 NIV

Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—that his line will continue forever and his throne **endure before me like the sun;**

it will be **established forever like the moon**, the faithful witness in the sky.

Jeremiah 31:35–37 NASB

Thus says the LORD,
who gives the sun for light by day
and the fixed order of the **moon** and the **stars** for light by night,
who stirs up the **sea** so that its waves roar;
the LORD of hosts is his name:

“If this fixed order departs

From before me,” declares the LORD,
“then the offspring of Israel also will cease
from being a nation before me forever.”

Thus says the LORD,
“If the heavens above can be measured
and the foundations of the earth searched out below,
then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel
for all that they have done,” declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 33:19–21 NIV

The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah:

“This is what the LORD says: ‘If you can break **my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night**,
so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time,
then my covenant with David my servant—and my covenant with the Levites who are priests ministering
before me—can be broken and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne.

“Until all things have taken place” (ἕως ἃν πάντα γένηται)

- Why two “until” clauses? If you take either one away, the sentence makes sense. Is the authority of the Torah permanent (first until clause), or will its authority change once “all things come to pass” (second until clause)?
- The two “until” clauses are not in competition but form a restatement and clarification of [5:17](#). The implied verb in the second until clause is not “pass away” (the jots and tittles are not discarded in what Jesus came to do). Rather, “all things coming to be” is a reference to “fulfill” in 5:17, and speaks of eschatological fulfillment.
- “all things coming to pass” reoccurs in [Matt. 24:34-35](#).
- “Heaven and earth” passing away refers to the passing of the current world order. “All things” refers to the same, but highlighting God’s redemptive purposes.

Paraphrase of Matthew 5:18

“The Torah, down to its smallest details, is more permanent than heaven and earth, and will never lose its significance; on the contrary, all that it points forward to will in fact become a reality.” (R.T. France, [Matthew](#))

Now that Jesus has brought the fulfillment, the details of Torah will be seen in a new light, but they cannot be discarded.

The burden of [5:21-47](#) will be to illustrate how the laws may function in this new role, where they serve not as a binding rule of conduct but as pointers to a “greater righteousness” that Jesus is bringing into being.

- *iota* (“smallest letter, jot”) = *yod*: smallest Hebrew Letter.
- *keraiā* (lit. “horn”) denotes the small projection that distinguishes *aleth* and *resh*, or *heh* and *taw*, or *beth* and *kaph*.

Conclusions About Matthew 5:18

Jesus is not offering a prediction about a future catastrophic disintegration of the cosmos. He’s using a figure of speech to heighten the importance of God’s will revealed in the Torah: God’s word in the Torah is, by definition, more enduring than what God created by that word (the land, skies, seas, lights).

Even if creation were to disintegrate, God’s word, which authored order and integration, will not pass away.

Jesus is raising the stakes on the importance of God’s will revealed in the Torah (a point with which many Jewish teachers of his day would agree) and then taking the next step. But what kind of behavior truly does conform to God’s will? This is what he’s about to address in [5:21-48](#).

Greatest and Least in Matthew 5:19

Matthew 5:19 Instructor's Translation

Therefore, whoever **undoes** one of the least of these **commands**,
and then they teach people to do this,
that person **will be called least** in the **kingdom of the skies**.
And whoever **does** [the **commands**],
and then teaches [people to do this]
this person **will be called great** in the **kingdom of the skies**.

The emphasis here is not on the doing of the commands of the Torah as such but on someone teaching others to do or not do the commands of the Torah.

“The issue is ... not primarily obedience to the commandments, but undermining their authority by teaching that they can now be ignored. ... Behavior is not excluded, of course ... but it is teaching the value of the commandments which is the true converse of setting them aside. ... But are the commandments to be ‘done’ in the same way as before Jesus came? In the light of the emphasis on fulfillment which has introduced this passage and which will be central to what follows we can only suppose therefore that [Jesus] had in mind a different kind of ‘doing’ from that of the scribes and Pharisees, a ‘doing’ appropriate to the time of fulfillment. That will mean, in effect, the keeping of the law as it is now interpreted by Jesus himself, and it will be the role of [vv. 20–48](#) to explain what this means in practice. See further [Matthew 28:20](#), where it is the ‘commandments’ of Jesus, not those of the Torah, which are to be the basis of Christian discipleship.”

France, R. T. (2007). [The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament](#). Eerdmans. 187-188.

That last comment by France, “not those of the Torah,” is a bit too strong, in my view. Notice that Jesus derives his own “and I say to you” teachings by means of wisdom reflection on the laws of the Torah. It is precisely the commands of the Torah that invite the disciples of Jesus to meditate on the deeper wisdom underneath the command that points to new ways of “fulfilling” its moral vision. One needs both the command itself (“you have heard it said”) and Jesus’ exposition (“and I say to you”) to carry forward Jesus’ commission in [Matthew 28:20](#).

Greatest or Least in the Kingdom

“The graphic language derives from a play on words between the ‘smallest’ commandments and the ‘smallest’ reputation of the careless disciple. It is not helpful to press it into supporting a view of the kingdom of heaven as a social structure within which there are first- and second-class citizens, a view which Matthew seems at pains to discourage in the parable found in [20:1–16](#), not to mention the idea that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven are the lowest (see [18:1–4](#) and [20:25–27](#)). The dynamic sense of the kingdom of heaven as God’s rule suggests rather that to be called great or small in the kingdom of heaven means to be high or low in God’s esteem, to be a more or less worthy representative of those who acknowledge him as king.”

France, R. T. (2007). [The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament](#). Eerdmans. 188.

Righteousness in Matthew 5:20

Matthew 5:20 Instructor's Translation

Because truly I tell you:

unless your **doing-what-is-right** **far surpasses** that of the **scribes** and **Pharisees**, you won't be entering into the **kingdom of the skies**.

For Matthew, the word “righteousness” has the same meaning it does in the Hebrew Bible (to do *tsedeq/tsedaqah* צדקה/צדק): To do right by someone; treating another person in a generous, equitable way that is appropriate to the relationship.

In Matthew’s ethical worldview, this means doing right by one’s neighbor, which is at the same time doing right by God. It is human action that aligns with the will of God.

Love Fulfills the Torah

[Matthew 5:17-20](#) introduces a theme that is picked up again in Matthew’s account, in [22:35-40](#).

Matthew 22:35–40 Instructor's Translation

One time, a Torah-scholar asked him a question, testing him, “Teacher, which is the great **commandment** in **the Torah**?”

And he said to him, “You shall **love** the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’

This is the great and first **commandment**.

The second is like it, 'You shall **love** your neighbor as yourself.'

On these two **commandments** depend **the whole Torah and the Prophets**."

In Jesus' mind the twin-call to love and devote oneself to God and one's neighbor is the heartbeat of all of the commands in the Torah, but also the essence of the Torah and Prophets. This idea in Jesus' teaching was developed in the teaching of the apostles and in the broader context of Second Temple Judaism.

Galatians 5:14 NASB

For the whole **Torah is fulfilled** in one word, in the statement, "You shall **love** your neighbor as yourself."

Romans 13:8-9 NASB

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to **love** one another, for whoever **loves** others has **fulfilled the Torah**. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "**Love** your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus' second-first command from the Torah has an important relationship to the golden rule: You shall love your neighbor as yourself ("as you love yourself").

The implied "as you love yourself" was interpreted in various ways in Second Temple Jewish literature.

Aramaic Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Lev. 19:18 "You shall love your neighbor, so that what is hateful to you, you shall not do to him. I am the Lord."

Adapted from Cathcart, Kevin, et al. eds. (1994). [Targums Neofiti 1 and Pseudo-Jonathan: Leviticus \(The Aramaic Bible\)](#). Michael Glazier.

This interpretive translation has a direct relationship to a famous teaching of Rabbi Hillel, one of the most influential Rabbis in the time of Jesus (quoted in Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31).

"There was another case of a gentile who came before Shammai. He said to him, 'Convert me on the stipulation that you teach me the entire Torah while I am standing on one foot.' He drove him off with the building cubit that he had in his hand.

He came before Hillel: 'Convert me.'

He said to him, "'What is hateful to you, to your fellow don't do.'" That's the entirety of the Torah; everything else is elaboration. So go, study."

Neusner, Jacob (2011). [The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary](#). Hendrickson Publishers. 127.

James (Ya'akov) the apostle made this direct connection from Jesus' teaching.

James 2:8 Instructor's Translation

But **if you fulfill the royal law** as expressed in this Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing good.

So then, what Jesus goes on to explore is precisely how love is expressed in six different case studies. For Jesus, genuine love is righteousness. If we practice the way of love, we will, by nature, do right by other

people.

Reflection Question

How would you describe Jesus' relationship to the Torah?

Session 7: Murder and Contempt

Key Takeaways

- The command “do not murder” addresses the surface-level behavior. But God’s desire isn’t simply to keep us from killing others but for us to truly value others.
- The "valley" (Hebrew: *gey*) of Ben-hinnom, transliterated through Aramaic and Greek into the New Testament’s Gehenna, is the place where God returned the fiery horror of Israel’s idolatry back upon its leaders. It serves as an analogy for the way God will hold all of humanity accountable at the culmination of history.
- Jesus’ followers throughout the centuries have held to a diversity of interpretations about the meaning and nature of the final judgment described in the Bible.

“You Have Heard It Said ... ”

In these six teachings, Jesus first quotes from commands in the Torah, or alludes to popular teaching that is based on the Torah. The fact that he’s describing the Torah as it’s popularly taught is signaled by the phrase “You have heard ... ”

1. [Matthew 5:21](#) **“You have heard that it was said to the ancients,** ‘Do not murder.’”
2. [Matthew 5:27](#) **“You have heard that it was said,** ‘Do not commit adultery.’”
3. [Matthew 5:31](#) **“And it has been said,** ‘Whoever divorces a woman must give her a certificate.’”
4. [Matthew 5:33](#) **“Again, you have heard that it was said to the ancients,** ‘Don’t violate your oaths ...’”
5. [Matthew 5:38](#) **“You have heard that it was said,** ‘An eye in place of an eye ...’”
6. [Matthew 5:43](#) **“You have heard that it was said,** ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”

After this, Jesus follows with an additional teaching with comments, always signaled by the same phrase:

- Greek: ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν
- English: “and/but I say to you ...”

What exactly this phrase signals has been a matter of debate. This is where interpreters have parted ways throughout history.

1. Antithesis: Jesus is offering a counter-teaching that supersedes the Torah. Translation: “but I say to you ...”
2. Agreement: Jesus agrees with the command as stated, and goes on to show what it looks like to follow this command faithfully. Translation: “and I say to you ...”
3. Fulfillment: Jesus agrees with the command as stated, but goes on to show how his “love God, love neighbor” ethic seeks to live by the unstated deeper values underneath the law, thus fulfilling the

command in a deeper way. The emphasis is on Jesus' unique take on the underlying divine purpose that motivates the command in the first place. Translation: "and I say to you ..."

David Daube, in his classic 1956 study of Jesus' teaching style in the context of early Rabbinic Judaism ([The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism](#)), drew attention to a common style of biblical exposition in which two biblical texts were juxtaposed in a manner very similar to Jesus' six case studies here in Matthew 5.

"'Honor your father and mother' - I have heard [= that it means] 'with words'. But instruction/Talmud says, it is written 'Honor *ha-shem* with your wealth' (Prov. 3:9). Just as there (in Proverbs) 'with wealth' so also here (in Exodus 20)."

Mekhilta of Rabbi Yishmael, on Exodus 20:12.

The phrase "I have heard" introduces a quotation from a biblical text that has been insufficiently understood. And so an additional biblical text is called in to show that "honor" means more than verbal affirmation, but sharing one's money.

"In Rabbinic discussion, *shome'a ani*, 'I hear,' or rather 'I understand,' introduces an interpretation of Scripture that, though conceivable, must be rejected as inadequate. ... The interpretation introduced by 'I hear,' is too narrow and literal compare with the interpretation accepted instead. ... There is good reason, then, for translating the first part of the Matthean form [of the case studies] by 'You have literally understood.' ... In other words, the phrase does not necessarily introduce a strict quotation, but a quotation provided with comment."

Adapted from Daube, David (1994). [The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism](#). Hendrickson Pub. 55-56.

The phrase "But/and I say to you ..." is a common form used in rabbinic texts, where one biblical text is quoted according to a narrow or literal interpretation that is rejected, and the favored interpretation is introduced by the phrase "one says/you can say"

"'And *Ha-Shem* descended upon Mount Sinai' - I have heard [= that it means] 'upon all of it.' But Talmud says 'upon the head of the mountain' [Exod. 20]"

Mekhilta of Rabbi Yishmael, on Exodus 19:20.

Case Study 1: Murder & Anger

- a 21 You have heard that **it was said** to the ancients,
 - b "You shall not commit **murder**,"
- a' and "Whoever commits **murder**
 - b' **will be guilty** by the **court**."

- a 22 **And I say** to you,

- b that everyone who is **angry** with **his brother**
c **will be guilty** by the **court** ;
b' and whoever says to **his brother** , “ **You good-for-nothing** ,”
c' **will be guilty** by the **Sanhedrin** ;
b'' and whoever says, “ **You fool** ,”
c'' **will be guilty** for the **gehenna of fire** .

- a 23 Therefore **if** you are **presenting your offering** at **the altar** ,
b and there remember that **your brother** has something against you ,

a' 24 leave **your offering** there before **the altar**
b' and go, first be reconciled to **your brother** ,

c and **then** come and **present your offering** .

- 25 Settle matters in a friendly way with your **legal opponent** ,
while you are with him on the way ,

so that your **opponent** doesn't hand you over to the **court-judge** ,
and the **court-judge** to **the officer** ,
so you're thrown into **prison** .

26 Truly I say to you,
you will not come out of there
until you have paid up the last coin.

Matthew 5:21-26. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Jesus quotes the sixth of the Ten Commandments. He immediately affirms the validity of the command, and takes things to the next level, in a three-part stair-step riddle that increases the intensity of the command.

- Murder > anger > contemptuous insults
- “Good-for-nothing”: Greek *raqa'* = Aramaic ריקא “empty-one” [An Aramaic word spelled in Greek letters]
- “Fool”: Greek *moreh* [a Greek word]

Notice how the progression decreases in intensity of the action, but increases in the intensity of the consequences.

Decrease in intensity →			
Murder	Anger	“Good for nothing!”	“Fool!”
Guilty in court	Guilty in court	Guilty in Sanhedrin	Guilty in <i>gehenna</i>
Increase in intensity →			
<i>Intensity of Actions and Their Consequences.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).			

This is an excellent example of Jesus’ tongue-in-cheek style of hyperbole and overstatement, the purpose of which is to grab your attention and force you to think. By making the consequence for anger the same as the consequence for murder, he is not equating the two actions in terms of their social impact but in terms of their inner-source within the self. Jesus invites us to meditate on the deeper source of both murder and anger, which means focusing on our view of the worth and value of another’s life.

Jesus wants us to see that murder is the most extreme form of a much deeper reality that also expresses itself through name-calling: contempt for another that results in devaluing their life and dignity.

Contempt is underneath all of these forms of abuse. To show contempt through verbal abuse, through cultivation of angry resentment, or through violence or murder, these are all manifestations of the same core mindset.

To murder is to take up the role of God in deciding that this person has no value or that their life has no rightful place in our world. Angry contempt, and even flippant contempt, is a manifestation of the same mindset: To insult another human is to set oneself up as the evaluator of their dignity and worth.

Jesus, Murder, and the Torah

Jesus is not offering a counter-teaching to the Torah. (God said don’t murder, but I say it’s okay!)

“Jesus does not abolish, but rather shows the deepest sense and consummated reality of the commandment (= fulfillment). He gets to the heart of the matter by saying that the real issue underneath murder is not the act itself—and it is a wrong, devastating act—but the heart or inner disposition of the actor. ... Not committing the physical act of murder is good and right, but it is not the true litmus test of alignment with God’s will and coming kingdom. One must examine one’s attitudes and language about other people, which are just as important.”

Pennington, Jonathan (2017). [The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing](#). Baker Academic. 183.

Consider the progression of the three punishments.

1. “The court”: This must be a figure of speech, even humor, to sustain the parallel with [Matthew 5:21](#) that a murder trial is settled in civil court. How can anger be settled in a court trial?! By using the same

consequences (a court trial) for murder and anger, Jesus shows the equation of the two acts in terms of their deeper motive.

2. "The Sanhedrin": Here, Jesus intensifies the nature of the civil beyond that of a civil trial, and into the realm of the synagogues' religious court. The Sanhedrin refers either to a local synagogue's body of Torah authorities (as in [Matt. 10:17](#)) or to the ruling body of temple officials in Jerusalem ([Matt. 26:59](#)).
3. "The gehenna of fire": Here, the image shifts from a human court of evaluation to a divine court, which issues the sentence of "the gehenna of fire." "Gehenna" (Greek τῆν γέενναν) is a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic and Hebrew phrase, referring to a valley surrounding ancient (and modern) Jerusalem on its west and south sides.

The Gehenna of Fire

- Hebrew: בְּנֵי-הַנֶּחֱם (א) / *gey' ben hinnom*
- Aramaic: גֵּיְהִינָם / *geyhinnam*
- Greek: γέενναν / *ge'enan*
- English: hell / gehenna

This valley is described as a feature around ancient Jerusalem.

Joshua 15:8 NASB

Then the border went up **the valley of Ben-hinnom** to the slope of the Jebusite on the south (that is, Jerusalem); and the border went up to the top of the mountain which is before the valley of Hinnom to the west, which is at the end of the valley of Rephaim toward the north.

Nehemiah 11:30 NASB

Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages, Lachish and its fields, Azekah and its towns. So they encamped from Beersheba as far as **the valley of Hinnom**.

In the later history of the Davidic monarchy that ruled in Jerusalem, this valley became the site of a number of altars on which Israelite children were sacrificed on fiery pyres, called *tophet* in Hebrew.

2 Chronicles 28:1-3 NASB

Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do right in the sight of the LORD as David his father had done.

But he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel; he also made molten images for the Baals.

Moreover, **he burned incense in the valley of Ben-hinnom** and burned his sons in fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had driven out before the sons of Israel.

2 Chronicles 33:1-6 NASB

¹ **Manasseh** was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem.

² He did evil in the sight of the LORD according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed before the sons of Israel.

³ For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he also erected altars for the Baals and made Asherim, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.

⁴ He built altars in the house of the LORD of which the LORD had said, "My name shall be in Jerusalem

forever.”

⁵ For he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.

⁶ **He made his sons pass through the fire in the valley of Ben-hinnom;** and he practiced witchcraft, used divination, practiced sorcery and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger.

Josiah’s reforms in Jerusalem were enacted in order to defile the site so that it could no longer be used.

2 Kings 23:10 NASB

He also defiled Topheth, which is in **the valley of the son of Hinnom**, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire for Molech.

2 Kings 23:13–14 NASB

The high places which were before Jerusalem, which were on the right of the mount of destruction which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the sons of Ammon, the king defiled.

He broke in pieces the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherim and filled their places with human bones.

After Josiah’s reforms, his successors revived the ritual slaughter of children in the valley of Hinnom, and so Jeremiah railed against them, announcing a reversal and doom for the city and the valley.

Jeremiah 7:30–33 NASB

“For the sons of Judah have done that which is evil in my sight,” declares the LORD,
“they have set their detestable things in the house which is called by my name, to defile it.

They have built **the high places of Topheth**,
which is in **the valley of the son of Hinnom**,
to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire,

which I did not command, and it did not come into my mind.

Therefore, behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD,

“when it will no longer be called **Topheth**,

or **the valley of the son of Hinnom**,

but **the valley of the Slaughter**;

for they will bury in **Topheth** because there is no other place.

The dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the sky and for the beasts of the earth;
and no one will frighten them away.”

Jeremiah 19:2–6 NASB

² Then go out to **the valley of Ben-hinnom**, which is by the entrance of the potsherd gate,
and proclaim there the words that I tell you,

³ and say, “Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem:

thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,

‘Behold I am about to bring a calamity upon this place,

at which the ears of everyone that hears of it will tingle.

⁴ Because they have forsaken me and have made this an alien place

and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods,

that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had ever known,

and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent

⁵ and have built the high places of Baal

to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal,

a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter my mind;

⁶ therefore, behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD,

'when this place will no longer be called **Topheth or the valley of Ben-hinnom,**

but rather **the valley of Slaughter.**'"

Jeremiah 32:33–35 NASB

[The sons of Israel] have turned their back to me and not their face; though I taught them, teaching again and again, they would not listen and receive instruction.

But they put their detestable things in the house which is called by my name, to defile it.

They built the high places of Baal that are **in the valley of Ben-hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech,** which I had not commanded them nor had it entered my mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

The imagery of fiery altars consuming children offered in sacrifice represents the height of Israel's heinous violation of their covenant with Yahweh. And so Yahweh will reverse the entire situation, so that the valley of Hinnom will become a place of fiery death for the Israelites who perpetrated these crimes against children.

Notice the inversion role that this valley plays.

- The fires that these leaders started to consume the innocent ...
- ... will one day be turned back to consume those leaders.

The image of a valley filled with the corpses of those who die in the coming Babylonian siege is described in [7:32-34](#). The fire-altar (*topheth*) that Israel lit to burn their children will now be the place where animals consume them. The idea of unburied corpses is revolting in light of the purity practices of ancient Judaism.

Important side note: It is often repeated in older commentaries that Gehenna was a trash dump where garbage was incinerated. There is, however, no ancient evidence that ever states this.

"The standard view, namely, that the valley was where the city's garbage was incinerated and that the constantly rising smoke and smell of corruption conjured up the fiery torments of the damned, is without ancient support. ... Perhaps the abode of the wicked dead gained its name because children had there been sacrificed in fire to the god Molech ([2 Chr. 28:3; 33:6](#)), or because Jeremiah, recalling its defilement by Josiah ([2 Kgs. 23:10](#); cf. [21:6](#)), thundered against the place ([Jer. 7:31-32; 19:2-9; 32:35](#)), or because it was believed that in the valley was the entrance to the underworld home of the pagan chthonian deities (cf. b. 'Erub. 19a)."

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 515.

This imagery is metaphorically developed in Isaiah, in portrayals of God's ultimate act of justice that will purge the wicked from the new Jerusalem/new creation.

Isaiah 1:27–31 NASB

Zion will be redeemed with justice and her repentant ones with righteousness.

But transgressors and sinners will be crushed together, and those who forsake the LORD will come to an end.

Surely you will be ashamed of the oaks which you have desired, and you will be embarrassed at the gardens which you have chosen.

For you will be like an oak whose leaf fades away or as a garden that has no water.

The strong man will become tinder, his work also a spark. Thus they shall both burn together and there will be none to quench them.

Isaiah 66:15–17 NASB

“For behold, **the LORD will come in fire**

and his chariots like the whirlwind,

to render his anger with fury,

and his rebuke **with flames of fire.**

For the LORD will execute judgment **by fire**

and by his sword on all flesh,

and those slain by the LORD will be many.

Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go to the gardens,

following one in the middle,

who eat swine’s flesh, detestable things and mice,

will come to an end altogether,” declares the LORD.

Isaiah 66:22–24 NASB

“For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before me,” declares the LORD,

“so your offspring and your name will endure.

And it shall be from new moon to new moon

and from sabbath to sabbath,

all mankind will come to bow down before me,” says the LORD.

“Then they will go forth and look

on the corpses of the men

who have transgressed against me.

For their worm will not die

and their fire will not be quenched;

and they will be an abhorrence to all mankind.”

Whether Jesus took this divine fire of justice to be a (a) cause of eternal conscious torment or (b) destructive agent that brings a creature’s existence to an end or (c) purging experience that removes evil and restores a creature to purity, this is a matter worth studying in greater detail. However, for the moment, it’s sufficient to say that in Jesus’ teachings, it represents the ultimate moment of divine justice on human and spiritual evil.

Two Parables

1. Parable #1: Matthew 5:23-24—Worship and one’s brother

This is related by the link-word “brother,” who received the anger and insults of Jesus’ earlier statement. This parable assumes that the “you offering your gift” has gotten angry with and insulted his “brother.” Jesus emphasizes that if you have treated another person with contempt, your strained relationship with them horizontally is matched by a strained relationship vertically, with God.

This parable is absolutely designed to echo the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4: Brothers are offering gifts on the altar. One brother gets angry and “wrongs” (murders) his brother.

The health and quality of my relationship with God is directly connected to the health and quality of my relationships with people. If my relationships with people are unhealthy, my relationship with God is unhealthy.

2. Parable #2: Matthew 5:25-26

This parable picks up the link-word “court/judge” imagery from Matthew 5:22. The parable is about settling a legal dispute (in which you are the accused): If you’re guilty, do whatever it takes to settle the matter, because you don’t want to face the court in your current, guilty status.

Reflection Question

How does Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:21-26 deepen the commandment to not murder?

Session 8: Adultery and Lust

Key Takeaways

- Jesus explains that adultery and lust come from a common source. Just because we don't commit adultery doesn't mean we are free from the root problem.
- Jesus directly confronts the public social dynamic of men staring at women in order to stir up desire, emphasizing that in his Kingdom, women are to be safe.
- The eye and the hand are used together as a common Hebrew Bible idiom to represent both our focus and what we do in response to our ingrained patterns of thinking.
- By identifying the problem as one of the heart, Jesus makes it clear that he's not commanding self-mutilation when he speaks of tearing out your eye or cutting off your hand. Instead, he's using an arresting image to make a clear point: At all costs, don't let a habit of the mind or body prevent you from doing what is clearly best for yourself and others.

Case Study 2: Adultery & Lust

- a ²⁷ You have heard that **it was said**,
b "You shall not **commit adultery**";

- a' ²⁸ **and I say** to you that
b' everyone who **goes on looking** at a woman in order to cultivate lust for her,
he has already **committed adultery** with her in **his heart**.

- a ²⁹ If your **right eye** **causes your downfall**,
b tear it out and **throw** it from you;

- a' for it is better for you to lose **one of your body-parts**,
b' than for **your whole body** to be **thrown** into **gehenna**.

- a ³⁰ If your **right hand** **causes your downfall**,
b cut it off and **throw** it from you;

- a' for it is better for you to lose **one of your body-parts**,
b' than for **your whole body** to **go off** into **gehenna**.

Matthew 5:27-30. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Jesus quotes the seventh of the Ten Commandments. He does not offer an antithesis (“but I say adultery is fine”), but neither does he simply comment on adultery as such. He delves deeper, revealing the subterranean character issues at work “in the heart.” Jesus’ language has several nuances that are often missed on a first reading.

- “goes on looking” (ὁ βλέπων γυναῖκα, present tense participle): The action is on-going, sustained, and prolonged. He is addressing “the stare,” where one’s purpose is to use another for personal pleasure and satisfaction.
- “in order to lust after her” (πρὸς τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσαι αὐτήν, infinitive purpose clause)
 - Jesus is not referring to the casual look, where someone notices a sexually attractive person. He is referring to the stare that is intentionally prolonged in order to form an image in one’s mind and create a fantasy.
 - This is often translated as an adverb, “lustfully” (NIV), “with lust” (NASB, NRSV). This is not helpful, as it can refer to the unintentional desires that are activated. Jesus uses an expression of purpose, “with intent to lust” (ESV) or “in order to lust” (KJV). This emphasis should be preserved in translation if we want to understand him.

In parallel with the previous teaching about how murder begins with angry contempt, so also adultery begins with the lust-filled stare. Jesus locates adultery at the level of distorted desire, and the choice to continue fueling that desire through the stare. The stare denigrates the dignity and value of the other, treating them as a sub-human, passive object that exists for my pleasure and purposes. It is the ultimate form of dehumanization.

“We should not make the bowstring too taut here, as if anyone who is tempted to look with lust is eternally damned for it. ... ‘I cannot keep a bird from flying over my head. But I can certainly keep it from nesting in my hair or from biting my nose off.’”

Luther, Martin (2017). [Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount](#). Lexham Press.

The Right Eye / Right Hand

“If your right hand/eye ... ”: Because the majority of people are right-handed, it became a common saying, assuming that the right hand (or whichever is used most) is the most useful. The point is to highlight the extreme nature of the action. Even what is most useful is to be sacrificed when one’s life is at stake.

Jesus believes that distorted sexual desire is a matter of serious consequence, which is why he uses the phrase “cause to stumble” (Greek: *skandalizomai*). The kind of “fall” Jesus has in mind is not a minor slip, but a crash to the ground.

He’s talking about sexual desire taking over your life and shipwrecking your ability to make wise choices. Sin is the inward turn and the destruction of outward living and healthy relationships.

Jesus is not denigrating sex or sexual desire. There’s an entire book of his Bible dedicated to the celebration of love and sexual desire (Song of Songs). What Jesus addresses here is distorted desire that is aimed at

someone you don't love or have any commitment to. Sexual desire apart from covenantal commitment allows people to use each other.

Jesus is not suppressing sexuality, but telling us that some things matter more than gratifying our sexual desires, like the dignity of people who are made as the image of God.

Self-Mutilation

Jesus clearly isn't commanding self-mutilation; rather, he's using an arresting image to make a clear point: At all costs, don't let a habit of the mind and body prevent you from doing what is clearly best for yourself and others.

The command is not to be taken literally, as if Jesus thinks that amputation can curb sexual passion. Not to mention the fact that he doesn't mention the body part that, for men, would be the first thing to amputate in order to solve the problem. The body is not the problem. That is way too simplistic. The problem is not with the body itself, but "in the heart," as he said in [Matthew 5:28](#).

Jesus' point is to take decisive action against that habit, thing, or person that, though pleasurable and perhaps seemingly indispensable for living, is in fact ruining our lives (see Bruner). Life in the Kingdom will require some degree of loss, of denial, of withdrawing from things that seem fine or even good.

Notice that Jesus focuses on men. Not that women aren't included, but Jesus puts extra emphasis on this teaching aimed at men. Jesus wants to emphasize that in his Kingdom, women are to be safe.

Reflection Question

What are the implications of Jesus' teaching to tear out your eye or cut off your hand if they cause you to stumble?

Session 9: Divorce and Remarriage

Key Takeaways

- Jesus’ teaching about marriage and divorce engages a debate, still raging in his 1st-century context, about the interpretation of the command in Deuteronomy 24:1.
- Jesus sides with the interpreters teaching that a man may not divorce his wife for just any reason he chooses. He calls out the harm that is done to women in this scenario by identifying them as the victims of adultery.
- Jesus’ teaching on marriage and divorce provides wisdom for all but is limited in scope by the context of the debate he’s addressing. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul gives us some examples of how this wisdom can be applied in circumstances that don’t fit the specifics of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5.

Case Study 3: Divorce & Remarriage

³¹ It has also been said,

“Whoever **sends away his wife**,
he must give her a certificate of divorce.”

³² And I say to you that

everyone who **sends away his wife**,
—except on the ground of sexual immorality—
he makes her a **victim of adultery**,

and whoever marries a **sent-away-woman**
he **commits adultery**.

Matthew 5:31-32. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Jesus quotes others who themselves quote one short line from a paragraph in [Deuteronomy 24:1-4](#), assuming a whole background of historical and cultural context. Importantly, Jesus is very succinct here, but Matthew has included another story where these same words are unpacked in more detail ([Matt. 19:1-9](#)), and here Jesus highlights the same issues at work in case studies 1 and 2.

Matthew 19:3-9 Instructor's Translation

³ Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing him and asking,
"Is it lawful for a man to send his wife for any reason at all?"

⁴ And he answered and said,
"Haven't you read that he who created them from the beginning
made them male and female,

⁵ and said,
'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh'?

⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh.
What therefore God has joined together, let no human separate."

⁷ They said to him,
"Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

⁸ He said to them,
"Because of **your hardness of heart** Moses permitted you to divorce your wives;
but from the beginning it has not been this way.

⁹ And I say to you,
whoever divorces his wife,
except for sexual immorality,
and marries another woman commits adultery."

Jesus' words on divorce and remarriage are a response to a very specific question, related to a very specific debate going on in the 1st century among Jewish rabbis. Scholars refer to this as the "any cause divorce" debate. This is a loaded set of texts, with loaded implications. To do it justice, we have to consider a number of factors.

Factor 1: Jesus Is Being Drawn Into a Contemporary Debate

In [Matthew 19:3](#), Pharisees are "testing him," meaning this is a leading question designed to trap Jesus into saying something that will discredit his public reputation. This makes it clear that it is a loaded question about a hot topic.

"Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 9:10

1. The House of Shammai says, "A man should divorce his wife only because he has found grounds for it in unchastity, since it is said, 'Because he has found in her **indecentcy** in a thing' ([Deut. 24:1](#))."

2. And the House of Hillel says, "Even if she spoiled his dish, since it is said, 'Because he has found in her indecentcy of a **thing**.'"

3. R. Aqiba says, "Even if he found someone else prettier than she, since it is said, 'And it shall be if she find no favor in his eyes' ([Deut. 24:1](#))."

Neusner, Jacob (2011). [The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary](#). Hendrickson Publishers. 404.

This debate was based on the wording of one of the two Torah commands regarding divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1.

Deuteronomy 24:1 LEB

If a man takes a woman and marries her,
and it comes about that she does not find favor in his eyes,
because he found in her some **nakedness of a matter**,
and he writes for her a scroll of cutting-off,
and he gives it into her hand,
and he sends her out from his house

“Nakedness of a matter” (Hebrew: ערוות דבר, *’ervat davar*) is a unique and ambiguous phrase that combines the words “nakedness” and “a thing.” Literally, “nakedness of a thing.”

The phrase is only used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in an adjacent chapter.

Deuteronomy 23:12-14 LEB

And there shall be for you a designated place outside the camp;
and you shall go there to relieve yourself,
and a digging tool shall be included in addition to your other utensils for yourself;
and then when you relieve yourself outside the camp you shall dig with it,
and then you shall turn, and you shall cover your excrement.
For Yahweh your God is walking about in the midst of your camp
to deliver you and to hand your enemies over to you before you,
and so let your camp be holy,
so that he shall not see in it any **nakedness of a matter**,
and he shall turn away from going with you.

Here the phrase “nakedness of a matter” refers to actual physical nakedness when one is exposed to poop.

The rabbis quoted above all come to different interpretations and different practical conclusions based on their understanding of this key phrase.

Notice that the Pharisees do not ask, e.g., “Are there legitimate grounds for divorce?” Rather, they word their question precisely to draw Jesus into this debate: Does he endorse the house of Shammai or the house of Hillel?

The implication here is that whatever Jesus’ response may be, it does not represent an exhaustive or complete treatment of this topic. Jesus does state his entire view on the matter, but only in addressing the specific debate at hand.

Factor 2: There Are Very Few Laws About Divorce in the Torah

There are only two texts in the Torah that explicitly treat the topic of divorce! In these texts, divorce could be initiated by a man or by a woman, for reasons of neglect, or “the nakedness of a thing.”

Exodus 21:10-11 Instructor's Translation

If [a man] takes to himself another wife, he may not reduce [his previous wife’s] food, her clothing, or her rights to have sex. And if he will not do these three things for her, then she shall go out ...

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 Instructor's Translation

If a man takes a woman and marries her,
and it comes about that she does not find favor in his eyes,
because he found in her some nakedness of a matter,
and he writes for her a scroll of cutting-off,
and he gives it into her hand,
and he sends her out from his house,
and if she goes out from his house,
and goes and becomes the wife of another man,
and if the other husband hates her
and writes her a scroll of cutting-off,
and he gives it into her hand,
and sends her out from his house,
or if he dies,
then her first husband who divorced her,
he is not allowed to again take her to be his wife,
after she has been defiled,
because that is detestable before Yahweh,
and you are not to cause the land to sin,
the land which Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance.

Factor 3: In 1st Century Judaism, Only Men Could Initiate Divorce

Jewish sources from the 1st century indicate that women could not initiate divorce.

1st century Jewish historian Josephus:

“according to the Jewish laws; for with us it is lawful for a husband to do so; but a wife, if she departs from her husband, cannot of herself be married to another, unless her former husband put her away.”

Whiston, William (1980). [*The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*](#). Hendrickson Pub. 414.

Jesus was certainly aware of this. Because he included many women among his disciples, especially women whose relationships with men or their husbands were likely tenuous ([see Luke 8:1-3](#)), we should not be surprised that he is aware of the oppressive dynamics at work.

Factor 4: Jesus Reads the Laws of the Torah in Light of the Eden Ideal

Notice how Jesus situates the laws of Moses in their narrative context, where the Israelites to whom Moses speaks are “hard of heart.” This is an important theme in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 5:29 NASB

Oh that they had such **a heart** in them, that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!

Deuteronomy 9:5-6 NASB

It is **not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart** that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for **you are a people stiff of neck.**

Deuteronomy 10:16 NASB

So **circumcise your heart**, and **stiffen your neck** no longer.

Notice also that Jesus appeals to the Eden ideal by quoting from Genesis 1 and 2 as a combined statement on God's ideal for human marriage.

Jesus ignores their question and moves right to the heart of the issue from his perspective. Instead of debates about legitimate grounds for (men) initiating divorce, he responds by pondering the symbolic meaning of marriage within the Scriptures, and what it tells us about God's will.

As an illustration, if someone asked you, "So, if someone uses a hammer to smash a window or to dent a car door, how much should the penalty be?" And you responded, "Stop: What is a hammer for in the first place? Do you even know what it's actually designed to do? If you did, you wouldn't be asking me this question!"

For Jesus, marriage between a man and woman is an image of God (Matt. 19:4-6), meant as a display of the life-giving oneness of the creator.

Their response in 19:7, "Why did Moses command to give a divorce certificate?" triggers Jesus. He disputes their interpretation of Deuteronomy 24 and makes a fascinating distinction: Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is not a command, but a concession to Israel's sinful disobedience.

In Jesus' mind, the laws of the Torah are one window into the will of God, but not the only one in the Scriptures. Jesus reads the Eden narrative as a statement of God's ideal will for humanity. Marriage is an image of God. The fact that God allows and offers guidance about divorce does not mean that divorce is "commanded" in any situation.

In Jesus' mind, the entire "any cause divorce" debate is built on a rotten foundation: that men could treat women as discardable when the woman no longer suits his fancy.

Factor 5: Jesus' Teaching on Divorce Needs To Be Understood in This Biblical and Historical Context

Only after clarifying his view on the meaning of marriage, and only after elevating the dignity of Jewish women by protecting their marriage status, does Jesus state his own view.

Jesus sides with the "house of Shammai," that sexual immorality is the grounds for divorce referred to in Deuteronomy 24:1. The "adultery exception" does not represent a comprehensive statement about divorce, but is a specific response to a specific question about the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-2.

Jesus remains silent about other legitimate grounds for divorce, because he was never asked about that topic.

We do know that Paul the apostle was aware of both Jesus' teaching on the grounds for divorce and also [Exodus 21:10-11](#), because he too thinks that neglect and abandonment are legitimate grounds for the dissolving of a marriage ([1 Cor. 7:15](#)).

Exodus 21:7-11 NIV

⁷ If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as male servants do.

⁸ If she does not please the master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to foreigners, because he has broken faith with her.

⁹ If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter.

¹⁰ **If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights.**

¹¹ **If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money.**

1 Corinthians 7:13-15 NIV

And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.

For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.

Factor 6: Jesus' Focus in his Teachings on Marriage and Divorce Is About the "Heart"

For Jesus, divorce in his day, initiated by Jewish men, was a sign of the "hardness of heart." Here we return to the main theme at work in case studies 1 and 2.

The heart of a man who can casually divorce a woman, placing her in an economically and socially vulnerable position, for "any cause," is the ultimate sign of a human turned in on themselves. It is another example, along with murder/anger and adultery/lust, of treating another person as less than an image of God.

Jesus' response doesn't focus on the loopholes about grounds for divorce. He believes that if one understands the true purpose of something, it would make the debate unnecessary and meaningless. "If you guys really understand what marriage is about, based on God's ideal from [Genesis 1-2](#), we wouldn't even need to have this stupid debate."

Factor 7: Jesus Portrays Men as the Primary Perpetrators and Women as Victims

Notice that when Jesus describes the impact of an illegitimate divorce on both the man and woman, he uses different forms of the verb "to commit adultery" (Greek *moikheuo/μοιχεύω*).

Matthew 5:32**Greek Translation Notes**

And I say to you that

everyone who **sends away his wife,**
—except on the ground of sexual immorality—
he makes her a victim of adultery,

Passive: **μοιχευθῆναι**
Literally, “He makes her to be adulterated against.”

and whoever marries **a sent-away woman,**
he commits adultery.

Active/Middle: **μοιχᾶται**

Jesus’ Views on Illegitimate Divorces. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

The phrase “to make her a victim of adultery” (ποιεῖ αὐτὴν μοιχευθῆναι) is a difficult one, normally understood as “causes her to become an adulteress” and explained in terms of the practical need and near inevitability of the wife’s remarriage. But this has never seemed very satisfactory. It seems better to note that each of the other forms of this tradition includes, at this point, an assertion that the man (as he subsequently remarries) is guilty of adultery against his first wife.

Matthew 19:9 Instructor's Translation

And I say to you,
whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality,
and marries another woman commits adultery.

Such a thought was novel in the 1st century world, where adultery was an offence against the rights of a married man, and neither the Hebrew nor the Greek language was receptive to its expression.

“The verb here, μοιχεύειν, is normally used in the active of a man committing adultery and in the passive of a woman committing adultery. But the active could refer to a woman’s role in adultery, especially in a statement that did not intend to be gender-specific. This opens up the possibility that the passive form, obviously available to express the idea that a man might be the victim of adultery through the action of his wife, might also be used to express this new thought that the woman as well might be the victim of adultery through the action of her husband. ... What is being asserted, then, is that, in divorcing, the man is not creating a clean slate with freedom to remarry; on the contrary, his establishment of a new relationship will be an act of adultery against his spurned wife.”

Nolland, John (2005). [The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text \(New International Greek Testament Commentary\)](#). Eerdmans. 243–244.

“In Jewish thought this second ‘one-flesh’ union was understood to violate the original one so radically that the subsequent continuation of the original marriage was unthinkable; it was officially dissolved (m.Yebam. 2:8; cf. Soṭah 5:1; Ketub. 3:5). ... The termination of a marriage already destroyed by the act of adultery was thus not so much ‘divorce’ (a man’s voluntary repudiation of his wife) as the necessary recognition that the

original marriage no longer existed, that a new 'one-flesh' union was already a fait accompli. ... Against such a background it can be argued that when in Mark and Luke Jesus forbids divorce tout simple this is understood to mean the voluntary breaking of a marriage which is hitherto intact, it being assumed that in the case of porneia by the wife the marriage was already destroyed and could not be allowed to continue. On that view, Matthew is merely making explicit what was assumed by Mark and Luke to be already obvious to their readers. This interpretation perhaps gains support from the way the prohibition of divorce is here expressed, as the initiation of adultery. With regard to the woman, it makes her the victim of adultery, either in that the husband's repudiation of a marriage which is intact is itself equated with an act of adultery (since adultery destroys a marriage), or in that when she subsequently remarries (as is provided for in the divorce certificate and is assumed as the sequel to her divorce) she will be placed by her husband's act in an adulterous relationship, since the original marriage remains valid in the sight of God. So both the divorced wife (the victim of the first husband's unjust act) and her subsequent husband are involved in an act of adultery. ... Moreover, to terminate a marriage where adultery has not in fact occurred is to treat the repudiated wife as if she had herself committed adultery (after which annulment of the marriage would have been automatic); to thus brand her unjustly as an adulteress may also be part of what is meant by to 'make her the victim of adultery.'"

France, R. T. (2007). [*The Gospel of Matthew \(The New International Commentary on the New Testament\)*](#). Eerdmans. 210-211.

Reflection Question

What is the broader historical context of Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage? How does Paul's writing in [1 Corinthians 7](#) help us understand how to apply Jesus' teaching in [Matthew 5:31-32](#)?

Session 10: Oaths and Vows

Key Takeaways

- Jesus doesn't quote a single command about vows and oaths. Instead, he summarizes and adapts various regulations from the Torah.
- The words translated as "oath" and "vow" have slightly different meanings, but together they encapsulate all the ways people try to add greater weight to a promise made to God or other humans.
- Jesus condemns the way people leverage religious language to manipulate others in order to get their way, calling on his followers to love and honor others through simple truthfulness.

Case Study 4: Oaths & Truth-telling

³³ Again, **you have heard that it was said** to the ancients,
"Do not break your **oath**,"
and "Repay to the Lord your **vows**."

³⁴ **And I tell you** ,
do not swear an oath at all:
not by the sky ,
because it is God's throne;
³⁵ **not by the land** ,
because it is the stool of his feet;
not by Jerusalem ,
because it is the city of the Great King.
³⁶ And **do not swear by your head** ,
for you cannot make even one hair white or black.

³⁷ But let your word be "Yes, yes" or "No, no";
anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Matthew 5:33-37. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Jesus doesn't quote from any one place in the Torah. Rather, his words are a paraphrase of multiple passages about oaths and vows.

Numbers 30:3 Instructor's Translation

If a man makes a vow (נדר / εὐξεται εὐχὴν) to the Lord, or takes an oath (שבועה / ὁμώσει ὄρκον) to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

Leviticus 19:11–12 Instructor's Translation

Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another.
Do not swear an oath falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am Yahweh.

Deut 23:21-23 Instructor's Translation

When you make a vow (נדר / εὐξῆς εὐχὴν) to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God will surely require it of you. However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised.

Psalms 50:14 NASB

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and pay your vows (שלם נדריך / ἀπόδος...τὰς εὐχὰς σου) to the Most High;

Vows are promises made to God about sacrifices or offerings that will be made if prayers are answered.

For example, in [Genesis 28:20-22](#), Jacob makes a vow that if God is with him and keeps him safe, then upon returning to the land, Yahweh will become his god, he will make Bethel a place of worship to Yahweh, and he will give one-tenth of his wealth to Yahweh.

These are voluntary ([Deut. 23:22](#)), but once made, they are binding ([Deut. 23:23](#)).

Genesis 28:20–22 NASB

Then Jacob made a vow, saying,
“**If** God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take,
and will give me food to eat and garments to wear,
and I return to my father’s house in safety,
then the LORD will be my God.

This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God’s house,
and of all that you give me I will surely give a tenth to you.”

Judges 11:30–31 NASB

Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said,
“**If** you will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand,
then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.”

Oaths are promises made to other people, invoking God’s name as a guarantor of the trustworthiness of one’s promises or words. Invoking God to guarantee the truthfulness of one’s promise is what makes it so serious: to break that promise is a misuse of God’s name ([Exod. 20:7](#)), defiling it ([Lev. 19:12](#)).

Genesis 24:2-4 Instructor's Translation

Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, "Please place your hand under my thigh, and **I will make you swear and oath** (השביע) **by Yahweh**, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

Exodus 22:10-11 Instructor's Translation

If a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep for him, and it dies or is hurt or is driven away while no one is looking, **an oath** (שבועה) **before Yahweh** shall be made by the two of them that he has not laid hands on his neighbor's property; and its owner shall accept it, and he shall not make restitution.

In summary, oaths and vows were not necessary, nor are they ever commanded in the Old Testament. But the Old Testament laws recognize that people will make them, and they attempt to regulate the practice in order to prevent abuse.

Jesus gives four examples of oaths in [Matthew 5:34-36](#). In Jesus' day, there developed a practice of avoiding the use of the name of God or the word "God" (Elohim) in oaths and vows. Instead, other "valuable" substitutes were put in its place: the skies, the land, Jerusalem, your own head.

The practice Jesus alludes to is described in the Mishnah.

"Mishnah, Shavuot 4:13

A (1) "I impose an oath on you," (2) "I command you," (3) "I bind you,"—

look, these are liable.

B "By heaven and earth,"

look, these are exempt.

C (1) "By [the name of] Alef-dalet [Adonai]" or

(2) "Yud-he [Yahweh],"

(3) "By the Almighty,"

(4) "By Hosts,"

(5) "By him who is merciful and gracious,"

(6) "By him who is long-suffering and abundant in mercy," or by any other euphemism—

D look, these are liable."

Neusner, Jacob (1991). [The Mishnah: A New Translation](#). Yale University Press. 629.

Jesus refers to this practice later in Matthew.

Matthew 23:16-22 Instructor's Translation

¹⁶Woe to you, blind guides! You say,

"If anyone swears an oath by the **temple**, it means nothing;

but anyone who swears by **the gold of the temple** is bound by that oath.”

¹⁷You blind fools! Which is greater: **the gold, or the temple** that makes the gold sacred?

¹⁸You also say,

“If anyone swears by **the altar**, it means nothing;

but anyone who swears by **the gift on the altar** is bound by that oath.”

¹⁹You blind men! Which is greater: **the gift, or the altar** that makes the gift sacred?

²⁰Therefore, anyone who swears by **the altar** swears by it and by everything on it.

²¹And anyone who swears by **the temple** swears by it and by the one who dwells in it.

²²And anyone who swears by **the skies** swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it.

People had developed loopholes, based on the relative value of the object used in the oath. For example, “I swore by the temple that I would help you move your wagon today, but, gotcha, I didn’t swear by the gold of the temple! So, it wasn’t really a valid oath!”

The whole system just ticks Jesus off. He counters this practice by showing that all of these “lesser” substitutes for God are actually still invocations of God’s honor, after all.

The statement, “the skies are God’s throne and the earth is God’s footstool,” is derived from [Isaiah 66:1](#).

“Jerusalem is the city of the great king,” is from [Psalm 48:2](#). Finally, Jesus brings the examples close to home—the head you think is “yours.” In reality, you have no control over it (e.g., your hair color). Rather, your head is a gift from the creator, so you’re still using God in your vow.

Jesus also tells us that when we swear by our own head or life, we have not left God behind. For our physical life is not really our own; even the time for our hair to turn gray is in God’s hand. In other words, we are presumptuous to think we can enlist ourselves as warranty for our promises, as if we had final control over our lives. Even when we swear by ourselves, we are in fact invoking God, since it is God who will either keep us in the picture or take us out altogether (see Bruner).

The Heart of the Matter

“The essence of swearing oaths that Jesus targets here is about invoking something or someone else, especially God, to make your words seem more significant and weighty. The aim is to impress others with your seriousness or piety so that you get what you want. It’s a device of manipulation designed to override the judgment or input of others in order to possess them for our purposes. It’s manipulation, or, as we say in our culture, “spin.” Jesus says it’s evil: instead of loving and honoring others with truthfulness, the intent is to get one’s way by verbal manipulation of the thoughts and choices of others.”

Adapted from Willard, Dallas (1998). [The Divine Conspiracy](#). Harper.

Instead, Jesus advocates a simple truthfulness that doesn’t seek to manipulate others or siphon off of the integrity or honor of others. It is much easier to control people than to love them with transparency. It is much easier to manipulate other people’s perception of you than it is to be honest with others.

“God requires truthfulness. A simple Yes or No should be all that’s needed. As soon as it is necessary to bolster it with an oath in order to persuade others to believe what is said, the ideal of transparent truthfulness has been compromised.”

France, R. T. (2007). [*The Gospel of Matthew \(The New International Commentary on the New Testament\)*](#). Eerdmans. 216.

Matthew 5:37 “yes, yes and no no” (ἔστω δὲ ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν ναὶ ναί, οὐ οὐ)

- NIV: All you need to say is simply “Yes” or “No”
- ESV: Let what you say be simply “Yes” or “No”
- NASB: But let your statement be, “Yes, yes” or “No, no”
- Instructor's Translation: Let your word be “Yes, Yes” or “No, No”

James 5:12 is a summary of Jesus’ words here: Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear oaths—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple “Yes” or “No” (ἤτω δὲ ὑμῶν τὸ ναὶ ναὶ καὶ τὸ οὐ οὐ). Otherwise you will be condemned.

“Although one may well doubt whether Jesus intended his words about oaths to be an absolute rejection of all oaths instead of a polemic against ‘the evil habit of swearing incessantly and thoughtlessly about ordinary matters’ (Philo, Decal. 92) or a memorable way of requiring total honesty in every situation, it must be admitted that Matthew 5:33–37 has been taken from early times—and is still taken by some Quakers and many Anabaptists in our own day—as a blanket prohibition.”

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [*Matthew, vol. 1, \(International Critical Commentary\)*](#). T&T Clark International. 535.

Reflection Question

What is a reason people make oaths and vows that Jesus would reject?

Session 11: Retaliation and Nonviolence

Key Takeaways

- Jesus commands his followers to “not resist in the same manner” as one who does evil against us. He calls us instead to a form of active response that overcomes dehumanization by reasserting our humanity, though at great cost.
- In Matthew 5:39, the Greek word *antistenai*, often translated as “resist,” is a compound of *anti*+*stenai*. It echoes the use of *anti* (“in place of”) from the previous verse, giving the sense of “resist-in-kind.”
- In Jesus’ context, a backhanded slap on the right cheek was a degrading insult, whereas an openhanded slap on the left cheek was less dishonoring. Turning the left cheek would confront the one slapping by rejecting the dishonor and challenging them to face the humanity of the one they sought to demean.
- The case studies about the coat and the mile refer directly to laws in Jewish and Roman societies, respectively.

Case Study 5: Retaliation & NonViolence

- a 38 You have heard that it was said ,
b “An eye **in recompense for** (ἀντί) an eye,
b and a tooth **in recompense for** (ἀντί) a tooth.”

- a' 39 And I say to you ,
b' do not resist **-in-kind** (ἀντί) an evil person.

- a But **whoever** slaps you on your right cheek,
b turn the other **to him** also.

- a' 40 and **to the one who** wants to sue you and take your shirt,
b' release **to him** also your coat,

- a" 41 and **whoever** forces you to go one mile,
b" go **with him** two.

- a 42 **To the one who asks of you,**
b **give** ,

- a' **And to the one who wants to borrow from you,**
b' **don't turn away .**

Matthew 5:38-42. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Jesus quotes from a law governing the bounds of retaliation that appears three times in the Torah. It comes the closest to Jesus offering a “counter” teaching to the Torah, a true “antithesis.”

Exodus 21:22–25 NIV

If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows.

But if there is serious injury, you are to take **life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.**

Leviticus 24:18–20 ESV

Whoever takes an animal’s life shall make it good, life for life. If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, **fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.**

Also see [Deuteronomy 19:20-21](#)

This is referred to in Latin as *lex talionis*, “law of retaliation,” by which the guilty party suffers the same damage that the injured party experienced.

Jesus actually quotes a version of this idea later in the Sermon ([Matt. 7:2](#)), and it was widespread in the ancient Near East, as well as in Judaism.

Matthew 7:2 NIV

For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged,
and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

This principle was already ancient by the time of Jesus, and even of ancient Israel. We find it in the earliest law codes of the oldest human civilizations, including those of Sumer (the laws of Ur-Nammu and Eshnunna) and Hammurabi.

There is an ancient debate about whether the penalty was literal or financial, and examples of both can be found in the Bible and in the ancient Near East.

“These verses formulate the law of talion, or exact equivalence for injury, usually understood to mean identical physical injury inflicted in retaliation for physical injury suffered. This legal principle was first introduced by Hammurabi and finds expression in such laws as these:

If a lord has destroyed the eye of a member of the ruling class, they shall destroy his eye.

If he has broken a lord’s bone, they shall break his bone.

If a lord has knocked out a tooth of a lord of his own rank, they shall knock out his tooth.

Prior to Hammurabi, monetary compensation, not physical retaliation, was the rule for inflicting bodily injury. This principle is operative in the laws of Ur-nammu, Eshnunna, and the Hittites, as well as in the Middle Assyrian laws.

With the growth of urbanization and centralized government as well as the increased importance of maintaining domestic tranquility, the state more and more tended to encroach upon the private domain. Physical violence became an issue of public welfare, and the state began to regulate the payments for various types of injuries. In a revolutionary development, Hammurabi categorized assault and battery as criminal conduct to be prosecuted by the state. The central government took on the responsibility of protecting the public and preserving the security of its citizens. The *lex talionis* strove to achieve exact justice: only one life for one life, only one eye for one eye, and so forth. In pursuit of this goal, however, the laws allowed physical retaliation and vicarious punishment and did not accept the principle of equal justice for all but, rather, adjusted penalties according to social class.”

Sarna, Nahum M. (2003). [*The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus*](#). Jewish Publication Society. 125-126.

Although this legal principle may sound negative to us, people of the time viewed it as a positive and useful ideal.

“The rule of *lex talionis* ... was designed to prevent two wrongs—(1) severe retribution that did not fit the crime and also (2) self-appointed vigilante action and blood-feuds. It is all too easy for revenge to get out of hand ... and for well-intentioned actions to become violent and do more damage than the original crime, spiraling into more violence and instability. This is why the *lex talionis* exists and why it continues to be a part of our own justice system in the West.”

Pennington, Jonathan (2017). [*The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*](#). Baker Academic. 195-196.

We will only imagine Jesus as rejecting or countering this law if we view it as negative or as a command that one must exact retribution on enemies. However, the law was designed to prevent violence from escalating. It was not a command that one had to demand recompense for any and every wrong suffered.

Jesus’ recommended response to wrongdoing functions similarly to the first two case studies, which isolate a deep heart value, a character disposition that manifests itself in public behavior.

- Contempt > Murder
- Lust > Adultery
- Desire for justice > Self-defined violent retribution

The idea of letting God avenge on your behalf instead of taking vengeance into your own hands is a consistent theme in the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 32:35 Instructor's Translation

It is **mine to avenge; I will repay.**

Psalms 94:1 Instructor's Translation

Yahweh is **the elohim who avenges.**

1 Samuel 24:12 Instructor's Translation

May the Lord judge between you and me. And may **Yahweh avenge** the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you.

Romans 12:19 NIV

Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but **leave room for God's wrath**, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

"What Jesus is rejecting here is vengeance executed on a personal level ... The law of reciprocity is not utterly repudiated, but taken out of human hands to be placed in divine hands."

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [Matthew 1-7 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 540.

Retaliation vs. Nonviolent Response

Jesus' response to this teaching is to expand upon it, revealing the deeper character issues at work beneath this law. Jesus' choice of words is determined by the word of the *lex talionis* law.

Matthew 5:38-39 Instructor's Translation

You have heard that it was said,

"An eye in place of/in recompense for (ἀντί) eye,
and a tooth in place of/in recompense for (ἀντί) tooth."

And I say to you, do not resist-in-kind (ἀντι στῆναι) an evil person;

antistemi = anti- "against", -stemi "stand" or "resist-in-kind"

Jesus (and Matthew as translator into Greek) chose an interesting verb to describe "opposition," *antistemi*.

The verb can be generally used for "oppose/stand against" (as in [Acts 6:10](#), [13:18](#)). But also "to set up in opposition" or "to match with, compare" (See [Liddell-Scott](#) on *anthistemi*).

In this context, the verb seems chosen because of the retaliatory nuance of the word *anti*, meaning "in exchange for." In other words, Jesus is addressing forms of retaliation where you do back ("resist in kind") to your offender what they did to you.

"The first syllable in the Greek verb *anti-stenai* translated as 'resist' corresponds to the preposition in the phrase 'an eye for (anti) an eye,' so that there is a direct connection ... to be recognized. Verse 39b then states that one should not resist the evildoer ... by repaying in the same coin. [It is a] rejection of the principle repaying evil with evil (see Proverbs 20:22; 24:29)."

Konradt, Matthias (2020). [The Gospel according to Matthew: A Commentary](#). Baylor University Press. 93.

He is not describing confronting injustice through legal means, nor is he advocating for civil disobedience or protest. He addresses situations where an injury damages my honor, and in my quest for restored honor, I seek revenge and retaliation.

This is how the apostles understood Jesus' teaching.

1 Thessalonians 5:15 NASB

See that no one **repays** (ἀποδίδωμι) another with (ἀντι) evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.

Romans 12:14–21 NASB

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse ...

¹⁷ Never **pay back** (ἀποδίδωμι) evil for (ἀντι) evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the anger of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

²⁰ "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Jesus is expressing an ideal ethic that requires us to look deep inside and then look out at those with whom we have conflicts. Jesus wants his followers to be people who break the spiral of violence, who resist the urge for payback, and come up with new, creative responses that force the matter toward resolution.

Our translations, "do not resist," unfortunately, do not capture this nuance of meaning in the Greek. As a result, it sounds like Jesus is saying, "Do nothing in response." However, after examining his four examples, it is clear he does not mean "do nothing."

Slap / Turn the Cheek

"Slap on the right cheek, offer the left." The slap (Greek: *hrapidzein*) is not about significant physical injury, but a public insult. To slap someone was not to physically harm them, but to damage their honor and public reputation.

2 Corinthians 11:20 NIV

In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or **exploits** you or **takes advantage** of you or exalts themselves or **slaps you in the face**.

Job 16:10 NIV

People open their mouths to jeer at me; they **strike my cheek in scorn** and unite together against me.

Lamentations 3:30 NIV

Let him **offer his cheek** to one who would **strike** him, and let him be filled with **disgrace**.

The mention of the "right hand" and "left cheek" is specific and intentional. A slap to the right cheek required the slapper to use the back of the right hand, doubly dishonoring and a worse insult. Jewish tradition viewed

the backhand slap as more dishonorable than the forehand slap.

“Mishnah Bava Qamma 8:6

A He who boxes the ear of his fellow pays him a sela.

B R. Judah says in the name of R. Yose the Galilean, “A maneh.

C [If] he smacked him, he pays him two hundred zuz.

D [If] it is with the back of his hand, he pays him four hundred zuz.

E [If] he (1) tore at his ear, (2) pulled his hair, (3) spit, and the spit hit him, (4) pulled off his cloak, (5) pulled apart the hairdo of a woman in the marketplace,

F he pays four hundred zuz.

G This is the governing principle: Everything is in accord with one’s station.”

Neusner, Jacob (1991). [The Mishnah: A New Translation](#). Yale University Press. 521.

“Matthew evidently mentions the right cheek in order to make plain that the reference is to the backhanded insult (cf. Mishnah Bava Qamma 8:6; to strike the right cheek with the right hand, one must hit backhandedly).”

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 543.

“A backhanded blow to the right cheek did not imply shattered teeth (‘tooth for tooth’ was a separate statement); it was an insult, the severest public affront to a person’s dignity (see [Job 16:10](#); [Lam. 3:30](#); Mishnah Baba Qamma 8:6; Plut. Platonic Questions 9.4, Mor. 1010F). God’s prophets had sometimes suffered such ill-treatment ([1 Kgs 22:24](#); [2 Chron. 18:23](#); [Isa. 50:6](#); Jeremias 1963: 29), as Jesus would himself ([26:67](#); cf. [Mic. 5:1](#)). Yet though this was more an affront to honor, a challenge, than a physical injury, ancient Near Eastern societies typically provided legal recourse for this offense within the lex talionis regulations (e.g., Hammurabi 202–6; cf. Gaius Inst. 3.220).”

Keener, Craig S. (2009). [The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary](#). Eerdmans. 197-198.

“By freely offering one’s other cheek, one demonstrates that one does not value human honor. In a sense, this could constitute a form of resistance by showing contempt for the value of the insulter’s (and perhaps the onlookers’) opinions (Sall. Invective against Marcus Tullius 1; Diog. Laert. 6.2.58; Diogenes Ep. 20). ... Even in a society obsessed with honor and shame (e.g., Sir 1:30), a disciple must be so secure in his or her status before God that he or she can dispense with human honor. Such a person need not avenge lost honor because this person seeks God’s honor rather than his or her own (5:16; 6:1–18).”

Keener, Craig S. (2009). [The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary](#). Eerdmans. 198.

Jesus says to forgo the insult, but he doesn’t say, “Do nothing!”

“Turning the other cheek” is a bold response that challenges the entire honor-shame system. In that act, you declare their insult to be meaningless. It’s a demonstration that your true honor is rooted in something deeper than your slapper’s evaluation of you.

This is the Selma, Alabama, civil rights march in March 1965. When John Lewis led 600 marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, they were sprayed with fire hoses and attacked by police dogs. They didn’t fight back

to gain revenge, but neither did they run away. It was a refusal to recognize the legitimacy of violent white supremacy. They stood tall and sang hymns about God's love and justice in the face of their oppressor.

Sued for Shirt / Give Your Cloak

The saying takes for granted the fact that the standard form of dress in Jesus' time and place consists of two garments:

- An inner garment/shirt or tunic of linen or wool worn next to the skin, called a *khiton* / χιτών in Greek and *ketonet* / כתנת in Hebrew.
- An outer garment, robe, or cloak made of heavier wool called a *himation* / ἱμάτιον in Greek and *begeh* / בגד or *simlah* / שמלה in Hebrew.

Jesus' saying assumes this is a legal case, a lawsuit. Someone is suing you and trying to take your one main piece of clothing. (It was valuable; most people only had one.)

In Jewish legal tradition in the Torah, it was wrong to sue someone and take their outer cloak (think "jacket") because it doubled as a sleeping blanket and was part of survival (Exod. 22:25-27; Deut. 24:12-13).

Exodus 22:25–27 NASB

If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest.

If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to me, I will hear him, for I am gracious.

Deuteronomy 24:10–15 NASB

¹⁰ When you make your neighbor a loan of any sort, you shall not enter his house to take his pledge.

¹¹ You shall remain outside, and the man to whom you make the loan shall bring the pledge out to you.

¹² **If he is a poor man, you shall not sleep with his pledge.**

¹³ **When the sun goes down you shall surely return the pledge to him, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you;** and it will be righteousness for you before the LORD your God.

¹⁴ You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns.

¹⁵ You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he will not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin in you.

Jesus assumes this is a wrongful suit: It was common for poor people to put up their only belongings, like their clothes, as collateral on a loan. However, Jesus is painting the scene of an unjust lawsuit, brought by someone who is so greedy and selfish that they would take even your shirt.

It's important to see the shock value in Jesus' words, "give him your coat also." If one's tunic has been taken in a wrongful lawsuit, and if you then give them your outer robe, you end up naked, by your own actions!

In other words, Jesus says, don't dig in and try to beat him at his own game by suing him back, which you probably don't have money for anyway. Rather, use radical and shocking generosity to subvert the system of

legal exchange.

But that scandalous generosity will also have a clear interpersonal effect as well, as it will draw public attention (public nakedness usually does!) to your legal opponent's selfish behavior: "What!? He sued that man and left him naked?!"

Jesus is advocating a method of shocking your oppressor's conscience into awareness of their oppressive actions.

"[Jesus' recommended] practice would lead to nudity, an intolerable dishonor in Palestinian Jewish society. Many peasants had only one outer cloak and pursued whatever legal recourse necessary to get it back if it were seized; without the cloak a person would be naked and cold. Because the outer cloak doubled as a poor man's bedding, biblical law permitted no one to take it even as a pledge overnight ([Ex. 22:26-27](#); [Deut. 24:12-13](#)); Jesus demands that one surrender the one possession the law explicitly protects from legal seizure. Jesus provides a shockingly graphic, almost humorous, illustration of what he means by nonresistance to force his hearers to consider their values. They value honor and things more than they value the kingdom."

Keener, Craig S. (2009). [The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary](#). Eerdmans. 198.

Compare this to Paul's exhortation to rather be wronged or defrauded than initiate a lawsuit ([1 Cor. 6:7](#)).

Forced To Go a Mile / Go Two Miles

"Forced to go" (Greek: *angareusein*), is only used elsewhere to describe when Roman soldiers force a stranger to carry something.

Matthew 27:32 Instructor's Translation

As they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom **they forced into service** to bear his cross.

Forced to carry baggage by a Roman soldier. Jesus' example is specific to the 1st century Roman occupation of Palestine. A Roman soldier had the legal right to enlist any member of the subject population for forced labor.

One mile was apparently the legal limit, but Jesus calls on the disciples to offer another. To do this for anyone is remarkable; to do it for an enemy is more than remarkable.

"The verb *aggareuō* is technical. It is a Persian loanword, having reference originally to compulsory service in the postal system. It is found in a number of imperial documents in connection with the commandeering of pack animals and grain boats for the conveyance of military supplies, and it occurs as a loanword in the rabbinic literature with the same meaning. There is ample evidence that soldiers were frequently guilty of abusing their right to impress local civilians and that this was a cause of great resentment. Apart from [Matt. 5:41](#) the only allusion to the practice in the New Testament is found in [Mark 15:21](#) and parallels, where Simon of Cyrene is impressed into carrying Jesus' cross. ... It is significant, however, that the unit of distance here specified is the Roman milion (from which our English "mile" is derived), not the Greek stadion that is used for longer distances everywhere else in the New Testament (e.g., [Luke 24:13](#); [John 6:19](#)). Even Josephus, in his many discussions of Rome's war with the Jews, consistently uses stadion, never

million, despite the fact that he writes in Rome under the patronage of the emperor! Jesus' use of "mile" would have sounded as foreign to his audience as "kilometer" in an American conversation. His hearers undoubtedly perceived therein an allusion to the occupying power."

Hare, Douglas R. A. (1993). [Matthew](#). Westminster John Knox Press. 56-57.

"Jesus advocated a response to the Roman occupation which not only full-blown Zealots but even the ordinarily patriotic populace would have found incomprehensible."

France, R. T. (2007). [The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament](#). Eerdmans. 222.

To carry the load is an act of scandalous generosity; it subverts the power dynamics of the relationship and creates a human connection.

Carrying the load two miles is both a demonstration of generosity and a testament to your control over your body, not the oppressor. You have the dignity to choose what you will do, and you will use that power to serve.

This response disrupts the power inequity and the value gap that exist between the soldier and the occupied.

Give to the One Who Asks

Be generous way beyond your normal habits and comfort zone. Crazy stuff happens.

"A virtue-ethics approach makes best sense of what Jesus is saying here. ... He is not offering a new legal principle that overturns the Mosaic law. Rather, Jesus offers ethical wisdom. ... A decontextualized, literalist reading of Jesus' illustrations don't require us to cultivate the wisdom needed in real life situations where we encounter violent evil, situations that require resistance ... These illustrations are just that; they are not to be applied without wise exceptions. The command to turn the other cheek does not envision the situation of a child and an abusive parent, for example. ... Jesus offers a vision of virtue, how to be in the world that aligns with God's will, but working it out in individual lives, this requires wisdom."

Pennington, Jonathan (2017). [The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing](#). Baker Academic. 197-198.

"Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon, which cuts without wounding and ennobles the man who wields it. It is a sword that heals. The ultimate weakness of violent retaliation is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. So it goes. Returning evil for evil multiplies evil, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that. Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend."

King Jr., Martin Luther (2010). [Strength to Love](#). Beacon Press.

"Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time: the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and violence. Man must evolve for all

human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.”

King Jr., Martin Luther (1964). Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech. Oslo, Norway.

Reflection Question

How do you understand the meaning of Jesus’ words, “do not resist-in-kind an evil person” in Matthew 5:39?
How do the examples he gives afterwards help clarify his teaching?

Session 12: Love Your Enemy

Key Takeaways

- Jesus calls out a misinterpretation of the idea that hating enemies is in line with the Torah. The Torah calls for loving neighbors, yes, but also for loving the immigrant and showing kindness to enemies.
- The Greek word *teleios*, often translated as “perfect,” means to be “whole,” “complete,” and “fulfilling one’s purpose.”
- Jesus’ call to radical enemy love is an invitation to become more truly human, which is the path to becoming more like God.

Case Study 6: Loving Your Enemy

a 43 **You have heard that it was said,**

b “You shall **love** your **neighbor**

b and **hate** your **enemy**.”

a' 44 **But I say to you,**

b' **love** your **enemies**

b' and pray for those who persecute you,

45 **so that you may be children** of **your Father who is in the skies** ;

for he causes his sun to rise on the **evil** and the **good** ,

and he sends rain on the **righteous** and the **unrighteous** .

a 46 **For if** you **love** those who **love** you,

b **what** reward do you have?

c **Do not even** the tax collectors do the same?

a' 47 **And if** you greet only your brothers,

b' **what** more are you doing than others?

c' **Do not even** the nations do the same?

48 **Therefore you are to be whole/complete** ,

as **your Father in the skies** is **whole/complete** .

Matthew 5:43-48. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

In many ways this is a pair with the previous teaching: If Jesus' followers are to reject personal retaliation and revenge, they are to practice love as a symbolic act. This shows the disciple's identity and sense of security is grounded in something other than their culture's system of honor, status, and possession.

Love Your Neighbor

Matthew 5:43, "Love your neighbor," is from Leviticus 19:18, which was programmatic for Jesus, as he cited it as part of his greatest command teaching in Matthew 22:37-40. (Notice he omits "as yourself". He takes this as axiomatic, that is, self-evident based on the axiom his listeners presumably all know.)

Leviticus 19:17-18 Instructor's Translation

You shall not hate your brother in your heart,
but you shall reprove-reprove him,
lest you incur sin because of him.
You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people,
but you shall love your neighbor as yourself:
I am Yahweh.

Matthew 22:35-40 NASB

³⁵ One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him,
³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"
³⁷ And he said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'
³⁸ This is the great and foremost commandment.
³⁹ The second is like it, '**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**'
⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

The second phrase, "but hate your enemy," shows that Jesus is doing more than just quoting Leviticus 19:18, but rather referring to how it has been popularly understood, an understanding which he will challenge.

"Neighbor" is a frequent term in the Torah for "fellow member of the covenant community." Leviticus 19:17-18 makes the restrictive sense of neighbor clear.

Leviticus 19:17-18 Instructor's Translation

You shall not hate **your brother** (אָחִיךָ) in your heart; you may surely reprove your **neighbor** (עִמִּיתְךָ), but shall not incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against **the sons of your people** (בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ), but you shall love **your neighbor** (לְרֵעֶךָ) as yourself; I am the Lord.

As it stands, the context of Leviticus 19:18 makes it clear that inter-Israelite relationships are in focus here.

The related question of the Israelites' attitude to non-Israelites is not raised in Leviticus 19:17-18, but later in the same chapter of Leviticus 19.

Leviticus 19:33-34 Instructor's Translation

When an **immigrant** lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The **immigrant** living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. **Love him as yourself**, for you were **immigrants** in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

Exodus 23:4-5 Instructor's Translation

If you come across **your enemy's** ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you **help him** with it.

These passages make it clear that Jesus' "love your enemy" is not a repudiation of Old Testament ethics. Rather, the Torah presented various perspectives on the call to love one's neighbor, and this generated a huge amount of debate within the Judaism of Jesus' day: Who counts as a neighbor? Whom am I obligated to love?

"And Hate Your Enemy"

Who is the enemy? Jesus likely has the words of David close at hand.

Psalms 139:21-22 Instructor's Translation

Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?

And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

I hate them with the utmost hatred;

they have become my enemies.

Between Moses' and David's words to Israel and Jesus' day, Israel has had its rise and fall, and has been oppressed at the hands of non-Jewish empires for nearly 600 years: Babylon, Persia, Greece, Egypt, and now Rome.

Many Jews would feel hatred for these idolatrous empires as a patriotic duty. It was, of course, to be complemented by the communal loyalty expressed by Leviticus 19:18, but this love would not have to include one's oppressors.

We don't know if "hate your enemy" came from a known source that Jesus' hearers would be aware of, but there is little doubt that many would have taken this line as the natural pair to loving your Israelite neighbor.

1QRule of the Community 1:10-11: "All the sons of light are to hate all the sons of darkness, each according to its guilt at the time of God's vengeance."

Manual of Discipline (1Q). 1:10-11.

In Matthew 5:44, "I say love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you," Jesus makes the "enemy" a broad and open-ended reference.

"Love" here is the word *agapao*. The word refers to a chosen attitude and the resulting action, rather than primarily an emotion or feeling. Notice how "love" is paired with prayer and providing food and water in 5:44-45, and later greeting and hospitality in 5:47. These are "love" actions.

This love extends beyond simply non-retaliation (as in the previous teaching), but goes one step further, as Jesus says to actively seek the good of their persecutors. It's not just refraining from revenge or retaliation, but taking a positive action.

“Love your enemies was not advice for the Stoic who must remain even-tempered in the face of a fickle world. Nor is it prudent wisdom, to the effect that, just as it takes water, not fire, to put out a fire, so it takes love, not hate to overcome hate. Jesus does not promise that love will turn enemies into friends. He is instead calling for a love which does not depend on something else. Jesus' words go far beyond a call to give up vengeance and require positive action. In short, 'Love your enemies' seems to contain what may have been a novel demand: do good to the enemy, despite the circumstances and the results.”

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [Matthew 1-7 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 552.

“Love of enemies and renunciation of retaliation were joined together for Jesus. ... The demand to forgo retaliation is understood as an active behavior. ... The point lies in the voluntary doubling of the suffered wrong. By inviting the voluntary increase of wrong suffered, it places before one's eyes the order of violence and counter-violence that stands against the reign of God and simultaneously breaks through it symbolically ... it makes clear the absurdity of violence. Love of enemies thus consists in confronting the enemy with the order of the reign of God that is also an offer of salvation to him or her.”

Schröter, Jens (2014). [Jesus of Nazareth: Jew from Galilee, Savior of the World](#). Baylor University Press. 144-145.

Jesus' love did not prevent him from verbally challenging and exposing his opponents ([ch. 23](#)); it's not simply being nice to people, but can motivate rebuke.

The motivation for loving enemies in [Matthew 5:45](#) reflects the character of the Father.

It will be the proper outworking of being in relationship with the Father of Jesus. People who do good or evil are both in God's good world, and he doesn't target his favorites in providing natural resources ([France, 226](#)). This should give us pause when we pray God's "discriminatory benevolence" to his people.

Notice how, after meditating on the wisdom of Torah, Jesus then turns to meditate on weather patterns and what rainfall teaches us about the character of God. This is classic wisdom mode ("Look at the ant, you lazy man!" [Proverbs 6](#)) of accumulating observations from all of life and bringing them to bear on the present.

In [Matthew 5:46-47](#), Jesus highlights that benevolence restricted to one's tribe is no more than what the rest of the world expects and practices.

- Note that "greet" and "love" are parallel: It is about an accepting welcome. Love welcomes others into one's life.
- Tax collectors, gentiles: traditional Jewish terms for those at the bottom of the moral scale. Everyone looks after their own.

"Be *Teleios*"

In [Matthew 5:48](#), Jesus says, "be *teleios*, just as your heavenly Father is *teleios*."

Jesus is forming a community of new humans, whose nature reflects that of their creator. Jesus looks behind the laws into the very heart and character of God.

The Greek word *teleios* has a range of meaning:

- “perfect” = without moral flaw (Jas. 3:2)
- “mature” = grown up (1 Cor. 14:20, “don’t be like children, in your thinking become *teleios*”; Eph. 4:13, “to become one *teleios* human”; Col. 1:28, “so that we can present everyone as *teleios* in the Messiah.”)
- “whole/complete” = to fulfill one’s purpose (Jas. 1:4; 1 John 4:18)

Matthew 19:21 NIV

Jesus answered, “If you want to be ***teleios***, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

James 1:4 NIV

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be ***teleios*** and complete, not lacking anything.

The sentence structure of Jesus’ command is surely an allusion to, “you all shall be holy as I am holy” (Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26).

“The use of *teleios* (perfect) instead of ‘holy’ ... is a wider term than moral flawlessness, and is used for spiritual ‘maturity,’ for example, in 1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20; Phil. 3:15 ... Matthew will use *teleios* again in 19:21 to denote the higher level of commitment represented by the rich man’s selling his possessions in contrast with his merely keeping the commandments (including again Lev. 19:18). It is thus a suitable term to sum up the “greater righteousness” of v. 20, a righteousness which is demanded not only from the spiritual elites but from all who belong to the kingdom of God. ... [Jesus invites us to] look behind the laws of the Torah to the mind and character of God himself. Whereas any definable set of rules could, in principle, be fully kept, the demand of the kingdom of heaven has no such limit—or rather its limit is perfection, the perfection of God himself.”

France, R. T. (2007). [*The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*](#). Eerdmans. 228.

Reflection Question

What does Jesus mean when he tells his followers to “be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48)?



Module 3: Seeking God's Kingdom

SESSIONS 13-18

Jesus teaches his followers what God's Kingdom looks like in everyday situations and invites us to be shaped by actively seeking those values.

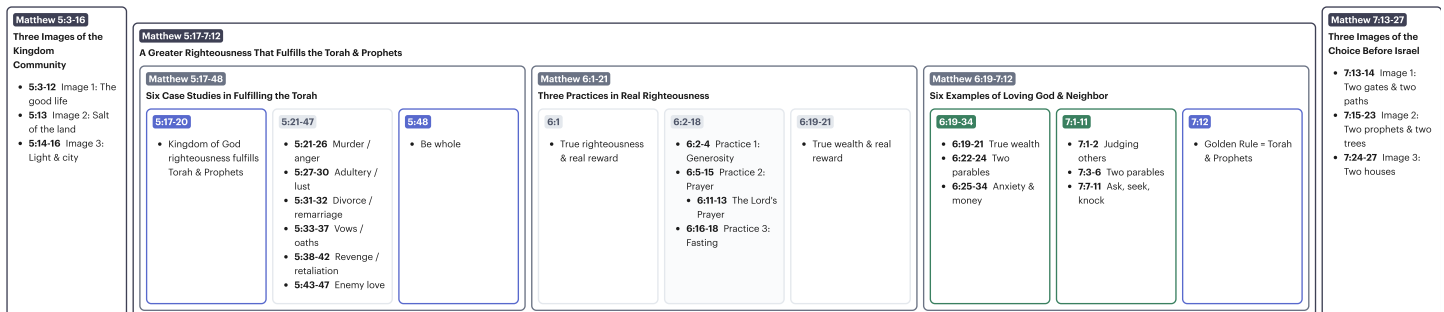
Session 13: Generosity, Prayer, and Fasting

Key Takeaways

- The Greek word *hypokrites*, from which we derive the word “hypocrite,” is the word for a “stage actor.”
- In an imagination shaped by the Hebrew Bible, generosity is about how we relate to God just as much as prayer or fasting is.
- Jesus teaches wisdom in evaluating our motives to assess whether or not our good deeds are done so that others can see.

Righteousness & Religious Practices

As we come to Matthew 6:1-18, we step into the second part of the central movement of the Sermon on the Mount. Notice that in the entire stretch of the sermon from 5:1-7:29, this section of 6:1-21 makes up the center of the center.



Matthew 5:3-7:27. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Jesus has just described the relationship of his Kingdom of God ethic to God's revelation in the Torah (5:17-48). Jesus' main point was that his teaching does not replace or counter God's will revealed in the Torah. Rather, it fulfills God's will and the entire storyline of the Torah and Prophets. In 5:17-48, Jesus showed how “greater righteousness” requires us to reimagine all of our relationships to other people. As we turn to 6:1-18, Jesus begins describing righteousness as the way that we do right by God, that is, how his followers are to express this “greater righteousness” to God. The relationship between 5:17-48 and 6:1-18 could then depicted in the following way.

Matthew 5:20

“If your **righteousness** does not surpass the scribes and the Pharisees, you won’t be entering the kingdom of the skies.

Matthew 5:21-48

6 case studies where **righteousness** = doing right by other people

Anger / Sex / Divorce
Truth-telling / Injustice / Enemy Love

Matthew 6:1-21

3 case studies where **righteousness** = doing right by God

Generosity / Prayer / Fasting

Righteousness and Religious Practices. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

The larger block of Matthew 6:1-21 itself has a three-part flow: It begins with a three-line thesis statement that is illustrated with three case studies, followed by a three-part conclusion.

Matthew 6:1

Thesis Statement

- Be careful, that you don’t do your righteousness in front of people, for the purpose of being seen by them.
If you do, you will have no **reward** from **your Father in the skies**.

Matthew 6:2-4

Generous Giving to Those in Need

- and **your Father** ... he will fully **reward** you.

Matthew 6:5-15

Prayer

- and **your Father** ... he will fully **reward** you.

Matthew 6:16-18

Fasting

- and **your Father** ... he will fully **reward** you.

Matthew 6:19-21

Conclusion

- ¹⁹ Don't store up **treasures** for yourself on the land,
where moth and rust disfigure,
and where thieves can break in and steal.
- ²⁰ Rather, store up for yourselves **treasure** **in the sky,**
where neither moth nor rust can disfigure,
and where thieves can't break in and steal.
- ²¹ Because wherever your **treasure** is,
there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:1-21. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

The opening statement in [6:1](#) links back to Jesus' description of his disciples as the salt and light of the world, and this creates an interesting interplay.

Matthew 5:14-6:1 Instructor's Translation

¹⁴ You all are the light of the world.

A city that is set up on a hill isn't able to be hidden,

¹⁵ and people don't light a candle and place it under a basket.

Rather, upon a candle stand,

and it will give light to everyone in the house.

¹⁶ In the same way, **let your light shine before people (*emprosthen ton anthropon*),**

so that they can see your good works,

and so they can give **honor** to **your Father** **in the skies.**

^{6:1} Be careful, that you **don't do your righteousness front of people (*emprosthen ton anthropon*),**

for the purpose of being seen by them.

If you do, you will have no **reward** from **your Father** **in the skies.**

Jesus opens this new movement on the "greater righteousness," introduced in [5:20](#), with a productive tension that recalls his description of the Kingdom communities from [5:16](#).

The repeated phrase "in front of/before people" (*emprosthen ton anthropon*) in both texts raises a tension: Jesus' followers are supposed to demonstrate an alternate set of values to their neighbors precisely through their publicly visible behavior. However, that responsibility comes with a liability, namely, the human desire for honor and notoriety can corrupt one's righteousness. And no one else will ever know it, except for God.

"Jesus' statement puts us in a quandary: good acts, acts of righteousness and justice, have to have a public impact since, as salt and light, the disciples necessarily relate to the lives of others. How then can people avoid practicing their piety before others? ... If the practice is based in justice, that's fine; if it's based on self-interest, 'in order to be seen by others,' then it is not. As Jesus did with the 'extensions,' he is looking not only at the action but also the motive behind it. When motive and action work in harmony, when the head is aligned with the heart, then a disciple is moving in the direction of 'completion,' or 'perfection.'"

Levine, Amy-Jill (2020). [The Sermon on the Mount: A Beginners Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven](#). Abingdon Press. 55.

Notice that the thesis in 6:1 begins with a negative image of people doing right by God in ways that attract public attention. Jesus brings in the language of “reward” at this point. As the examples will make clear, it is right and good to trust that one’s devotion to God will generate a future benefit. The problem is that religious communities tend to relocate those benefits into the present, which creates a desire to be publicly visible in one’s acts of religious devotion. In contrast, Jesus wants his followers to focus on the benefits that are given not by people, but by his heavenly Father. And if his realm is in the skies (6:1), then so also the future reward will be in the sky realm (as in 6:19-21).

The “treasure in the sky” does not mean that one has to “go to heaven” to get the treasure. Rather, heaven is an ever-present but often hidden reality, the most true reality that there is. To say one’s “treasure” is in heaven is to say that it exists in a more real dimension of reality than we can comprehend. And even more, it means that one day, when heaven and earth are reunited, what Jesus calls the “rebirth of all things” (see Matt. 19:28), then one’s real rewards will be revealed.

The famous saying about “treasures in heaven” is, in fact, a conclusion to this entire sequence of thought. The “treasures,” when understood in this context, are an image for the welcome reception and honor one will receive upon arriving in the new creation.

Jesus has here selected three of the primary ways that faithful Israelites expressed their devotion to God in the 1st century. The list is not exhaustive, as if these are the only three ways a person can honor God. Rather, these three examples are offering ethical wisdom in that they all share a core portrayal of what genuine religious devotion, a genuine “doing right by God,” looks like. The illustrations become wisdom that can guide Jesus’ followers to consider other aspects of religious devotion that Jesus doesn’t mention.

Example #1—Generosity

- a¹ Be careful about **your doing-what-is-right**;
b **don’t do it in front of people**,
c **for the purpose** of being seen by them .

d If you do,
you will have no **reward**
from **your Father in the skies** .

- a² So then, **when you do acts of generous giving**,
b¹ **don’t** signal with a trumpet before you,
like the hypocrites do
in the gathering places and alleyways ,
c¹ **in order that** they can be honored by people.

d¹ Truly, I tell you:
they have fully received their **reward** .

a" 3 But **when you're doing generous giving,**
 b" **don't let your left hand know what your right hand does,**
 c" 4 **so that your generous giving can be in hiddenness,**
 d" and **your Father** who sees what is **in hiddenness,**
 he will fully **repay** you.

Matthew 6:1-4. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

The first example is a classic expression of Jewish devotion to God, which, as it turns out, is entirely aimed at other people. This tight connection between “righteousness” toward God and toward the poor is a unique emphasis of the Jewish-Christian tradition.

The Greek word *eleemosunen* (ἐλεημοσύνην, “generous giving”) comes from the root *eleeo*, “to show mercy, to demonstrate concern,” and was associated with concrete acts of kindness, generosity, and benevolence to people in need.

In Jewish Greek, it became a close synonym of righteousness, and such service to the poor was assumed to be not just an act of kindness, but a necessary demonstration of an Israelite’s loyalty to God.

Proverbs 14:31 Instructor's Translation

He who oppresses the poor taunts his maker,
 but he who is gracious to the needy honors him.

Notice the equation between the poor and Yahweh. Generosity to one is an expression of generosity to the other. They are not different things.

Proverbs 19:17 Instructor's Translation

The one who shows kindness to the poor,
 that one lends to Yahweh,
 he [Yahweh] will repay him his reward.

Proverbs 19:17 Septuagint/LXX

The one who shows kindness (*eleeo*) to the poor,
 that one lends to God,
 according to his gift, he will repay him.

“The one who gives generously to the destitute figuratively gives a loan to the Lord presumably because the Lord’s honor is tied up with the poor for he made them and they too are his image (14:31; 17:5; 22:2). Their just and gracious Creator takes it upon himself to assume their indebtedness and so he will repay the lender in full.”

Waltke, Bruce K. (2005). [*The Book Of Proverbs: Chapters 15–31 \(The New International Commentary on the Old Testament\)*](#). Eerdmans. 111.

This also makes sense of why righteousness has its natural expression in assistance for the poor in the Hebrew Bible.

Job 29:14–16 Instructor's Translation

I put on **righteousness**, and it clothed me;
my **justice** was like a robe and a turban.
I was eyes to the blind
and feet to the lame.
I was a father to the needy,
and I investigated the case which I did not know.

Job 31:16–22 Instructor's Translation

¹⁶ If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary,
¹⁷ if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless—
¹⁸ but from my youth I reared them as a father would, and from my birth I guided the widow—
¹⁹ if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or the needy without garments,
²⁰ and their hearts did not bless me for warming them with the fleece from my sheep,
²¹ if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court,
²² then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint.

Bruce Waltke, in an exhaustive study of *tsedeq* and *mishpat* in the Prophets and Proverbs, offers this summary:

“The righteous are those who are willing to disadvantage themselves to the advantage of their community; the wicked are those who are willing to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves.”

Waltke, Bruce K. (2004). [*The Book Of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15 \(The New International Commentary on the Old Testament\)*](#). Eerdmans. 96.

Jesus is, of course, fully endorsing and expressing this same view, though he warns his followers that one's generosity can be corrupted by the introduction of self-interest and a desire for public honor.

In Jesus' day, as in our own, public acts of generosity were the primary way a person increased their public status and honor. This honor could then be used as leverage over against others as one climbed the ladder of status and prestige.

Luke 7:1–5 Instructor's Translation

When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.”

The earliest synagogue inscription is a memorial plaque for the building's donor.



Zeigarnik, Andrey (2019). [Wikipedia](#).

This is Jesus' first use of the word "hypocrite" (Greek: *hypokrites*), and notice it does NOT mean 'saying one thing and doing another.' Rather, it describes doing the right thing with the wrong motive and desire.

Example #2—Prayer

a ⁵ And **when you pray**,
don't be **like the hypocrites**,

A

b **because they** love to **pray**
while standing in the gathering places and at the corners of wide streets,
for the purpose of **being visible to people** .

c Truly, I tell you: They have fully received their **reward** .

a' ⁶ But **you, when you pray**,

B

b' **enter into your inner-room and shut the door**,
so you can **pray** to **your Father** **in hiddenness** ,

c' and **your Father** , **who sees** what is **in hiddenness** ,
 he will fully **reward** you.

a'' ⁷ And **when you are praying**,
don't use meaningless repetition **like the nations**,

A' b" **because they** suppose
that they'll be heard on account of their many words.

c" 8 So don't be like them,
because **your Father** knows what you need
before you even ask him.

9 Therefore, **when you pray**, do it this way:

a **Our Father** who is **in the skies**,
may your name be recognized as sacred,

b 10 **may your kingdom** come,
and may your will be done,

a' as it is **in the skies**,
so also **on the land**.

a 11 Our daily provision of bread,
b give to us today.

a' 12 And forgive us our debts,
b' just as we also have forgiven those indebted to us.

a" 13 And don't lead us to be tested,
b" but deliver us from the evil one.

a 14 For if you **forgive** people their transgressions,
b **your Father in the skies** will also **forgive** you.

a' 15 But if you will not **forgive** people,
b' then neither will **your Father** **forgive** your transgressions.

Matthew 6:5-15. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Prayer was woven into the life of God's people, and was one of the key ways they "did right by God," through the practice of honoring him for his generosity and many gifts (praise) and through calling out to him for help and deliverance (requests and intercession).

In Jesus' day, prayer was a spontaneous expression of connection to God, and also structured as a fixed rhythm of life. There are hints within the Hebrew Bible that Israelite prayer liturgies took place in the morning, afternoon, and evening.

Psalm 55:16-17 Instructor's Translation

As for me, I call to God, and the Lord saves me.
Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.

Daniel 6:10 Instructor's Translation

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

Acts 2:42 Instructor's Translation

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to **the prayers**.

Acts 3:1 Instructor's Translation

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.

In the period of the exile, we begin to see mention of prayer rhythms three times a day. And if one happened to be out in public, then one's prayer time became a very visible and public reality. This is still common in many cultures today.

"Heard Because of Their Many Words ... Meaningless Repetition"

"Meaningless repetition" is the Greek *battologeō* (βατταλογέω).

There is debate over the origin and meaning of this word, which is paired with "many-words" (*polulogia*).

- "to stutter, or speak in a way that repeats the same words over and over again without thinking." ([BDAG](#))
- Used outside the New Testament, this Greek root is used to describe a speech impediment (*battos*, see Liddell-Scott on βάττος).

"At least three explanations of [this word's] etymology have been offered. It is impossible to decide between them. (1) It might be a hybrid form, deriving from the Aramaic *bāṭēl* ('empty, inane') + *λόγος* (cf. BDF § 40, citing Blass; see sys.h). *bāṭēl* appears in an Aramaic papyrus from Murabba't with the meaning of ineffectual; see Mur 25a 1:7. Also from the Semitic sphere is the Hebrew *bāṭā'* = 'speak rashly, thoughtlessly' (Lev. 5:4; Ps. 106:33). (2) According to Schlatter (p. 206), the non-literary word refers to the futility of gathering bramble twigs and thus to futile exertion in general. *βάτος* = 'bramble' and *λέγειν* can mean 'to gather'. (3) In the opinion of G. Delling (TWNT 1, p. 598) *βατταλογέω* was simply formulated on the analogy of the better known *βατταρίζω* (= 'stammer, stutter') in connection with *-λογεῖν*."

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 587-588.

It is possible that Jesus is tapping into a tradition with roots in the Hebrew Bible, about prayer that is frank, not adorned with fancy vocabulary and long-form rhetorical flourish:

Ecclesiastes 5:2 LEB

Do not be rash with your mouth, and do not let your heart be quick to utter a word before God. For God is in heaven, and you are on earth; therefore, let your words be few.

Sirach 7:14 NRSVCE

Do not babble in the assembly of the elders, and do not repeat yourself when you pray.

There are places where unnecessarily long or repetitive prayers come in for critique in the biblical tradition.

1 Kings 18:26 NASB

Then [the prophets of Baal] took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, "O Baal, answer us." But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made.

Acts 19:34 NASB

But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a single outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

It is not "long-winded prayers that are criticized as such. Rather they are criticized as a means of gaining a hearing with God. The parallel rationale in v. 8b* repeats this scope: the central theme of this saying is not a prayer's length but whether it is heard. Long prayers are not necessary, because God knows what people need before they even ask. The issue is not simply preventing manipulation, nor is it that God knows everything anyway and that prayer is no longer necessary at all; it is that God in his love is with people before they pray and thus relieves them of the need to pray long-winded prayers."

Luz, Ulrich (2007). [*Matthew 1-7: A Commentary \(Hermeneia\)*](#). Augsburg Fortress Publishing. 306.

"Jesus has Gentiles in mind with their piling up of the names of their gods. Sometimes the Gentiles seemed to be hoping a god would be awake or listening—and it is not wrong here to humanize these gods because that is how they come off in texts like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Catullus wrote a poem about the goddess Diana; the fourth line from the end perfectly illustrates the problem Jesus sees in Gentile prayers (put in italics):

*Under Diana's protection,
we pure girls, and boys:
we pure boys, and girls,
we sing of Diana.
O, daughter of Latona,
greatest child of great Jove,
whose mother gave birth
near the Delian olive,
mistress of mountains
and the green groves,
the secret glades,
and the sounding streams:
you, called Juno Lucina
in childbirth's pains,*

*you, called all-powerful Trivia
and Luna, of counterfeit daylight.
Your monthly passage
measures the course of the year,
you fill the rustic farmer's
roof with good crops.
Take whatever sacred name
pleases you, be a sweet help
to the people of Rome,
as you have been of old.*

Jesus' observation about Gentile prayer is common in Judaism: "do not keep on babbling like pagans." The Greek word behind our "babble" is a bit of a mystery when it comes to its origins, but that Greek word (battalogeō) creates the impression of mindless babbling. At the end of this verse the words "many words" (polylogia) is used, and it permits us to combine it with "babble" to see Jesus' criticism directed at a nonstop prattling in the presence of God. Jesus focuses on intent. The pagan intent is the belief that if they are long-winded or pray long enough or if they show their sincerity by going on and on, God will hear them. Pushing Gentile anxiety in prayer was the offendability and capriciousness of the gods. Jesus teaches the goodness and love of God, here speaking of God's loving care of all (5:43–48) and calling God "Father."

Contrary to pagan perceptions of who God is, Jesus' Father knows needs before God's people ask. Perhaps this idea is from one of the predictions about the new heavens and the new earth from Isaiah 65:24:
Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.

This does not say the Father knows what they will ask before they ask but that the Father knows their needs before they make them known. Jesus' intent is not to discourage his followers from petitioning the Father but from thinking they can manipulate or cajole God. This means that the major intent of the Lord's Prayer is to reveal a short prayer in contradiction to the long prayers of the pagans. Few prayers say so much in such few words, but good examples of "short" prayers can be found in the Psalms, none perhaps more notable than Psalm 23."

McKnight, Scot (2013). [Sermon on the Mount \(The Story of God Bible Commentary\)](#). Zondervan. 171-172.

Example #3—Fasting

A 16 And **when you fast**, don't look gloomy like the hypocrites,
for they make their faces look disfigured,

B so that their fasting will be visible to people.

C Truly, I tell you, they have fully received their **reward** .

A' 17 But you, when you fast,
anoint your head with oil,
and wash your face,

B' 18 so that **your fasting** won't be visible to people,

C' but to **your Father** **in a hidden way** .
And **your Father** , who sees what **is hidden** ,
he will fully **reward** you.

Matthew 6:16-18. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Fasting was a standard part of Israelite and later Jewish religious life, and it was an important expression of devotion to God. But what does fasting mean?

Fasting is a whole-body response to a serious and sacred moment in a person's life or community. When a person or group realizes that God was revealing his purposes through a set of circumstances, the normal response is to stop eating for a period of time.

The main misunderstanding most people in the Christian tradition have is that they conceive of fasting as instrumental, an attempt to show God that I am serious about something, and I hope that my fasting will compel him to respond to my need or request.

In the biblical portrait, people fast when something has happened, and that something is viewed as a sacred or grievous moment that requires God's people to stop normal life, to focus on what is most important, and connect to God from a place of total need and surrender.

"Fasting is a choice not to eat for designated period of time because the moment is so sacred and so serious that satisfying one's most basic physical appetite would detract from its seriousness and profane its holy character. ... Fasting is a way of focusing our attention on a serious moment or event in life, and avoiding the indulgence of food makes us remember our fragility and dependence upon God."

McKnight, Scot (2010). [*Fasting: The Ancient Practice*](#). Thomas Nelson. 19-20.

The Sacred Moment Fast

Acts 13:2-3 Instructor's Translation

While the Church at Antioch was worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

The Grief and Turning From Evil Fast

1 Samuel 7:2-6 Instructor's Translation

So all the people of Israel turned back to Yahweh. And Samuel said to all the Israelites, "If you are returning to Yahweh with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods, and commit yourselves to Yahweh and serve him only. ... Then the Israelites put away their idol gods, and served Yahweh only. Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will intercede with Yahweh for you." When they had assembled at Mizpah ... on that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against Yahweh."

Joel 2:12-13 Instructor's Translation

"Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in covenant loyalty

The Tragic Calamity Fast

When someone is sick or has died, or when there has been a major defeat or an outbreak of violence.

2 Samuel 12:15-16 NASB

So Nathan went to his house. Then the LORD struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was very sick. David therefore inquired of God for the child; and **David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground.**

2 Samuel 1:12 NASB

They mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan and for the people of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

Esther 4:15-16 LEB

Esther replied to Mordecai:

"Go, gather all the Jews that are found in Susa and fast for me; **do not eat or drink for three days, both night and day.** I and my young girls will fast likewise, and then I will go to the king, which is not according to the law; if I perish, I perish."

Psalms 35:1, 4, 12-14 Instructor's Translation

¹ Contend, Lord, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me.

⁴ May those who seek my life be disgraced and put to shame; may those who plot my ruin be turned back in dismay.

¹² They repay me evil for good and leave me like one bereaved. ¹³ **Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting.** When my prayers returned to me unanswered, ¹⁴ I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother.

Jesus himself fasted for 40 days after his baptism, during an intense period of discernment and testing about his future vocation.

Matthew 4:1-2 Instructor's Translation

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after he had **fasted** forty days and forty nights, he then became hungry.

Jesus' own fasting echoes the 40-day wilderness fast of both Moses and Elijah.

Exodus 34:27-28 NASB

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."

So he was there with the LORD **forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water.** And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

1 Kings 19:7-8 NASB

The angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched [Elijah] and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you." So he arose and ate and drank, **and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights** to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Notice that in the Sermon, Jesus does not downplay fasting or say it's not important. In fact, the Jewish practices of fasting were wholly adopted in the early Christian communities.

In the earliest mention of fasting outside the New Testament, the Didache (an early church rule of life) calls on new converts to Christianity to fast for one whole day before their baptism, and on a weekly basis.

"7:4 But, before the baptism, let the one who baptizes and the one to be baptized fast, and any others who are able to do so. And you shall require the person being baptized to fast for one or two days."

Glimm, Francis (1947). *"The Didache or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles."* [The Apostolic Fathers \(The Fathers of the Church, vol.1\)](#). The Catholic University of America Press. 177.

"8:1-3 But do not let your fasts be with the hypocrites; for they fast on Monday and Thursday; but you shall fast on Wednesday and Friday. 2 And do not pray as the hypocrites, but as the Lord directed in His Gospel, 'Thus shall you pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth just as in heaven; give us this day our bread from above, and forgive us our debt as we also forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;'" for Thine is the power and glory forever. 3 Three times in the day pray thus."

Glimm, Francis (1947). *"The Didache or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles."* [The Apostolic Fathers \(The Fathers of the Church, vol. 1\)](#). The Catholic University of America Press. 177-178.

Interestingly, throughout history, fasting is a nearly universal phenomenon in human cultures. While it plays a variety of unique roles from culture to culture, there are a few constants.

Fasts are often initiatory, transitional rituals (from happiness into mourning, from life into death), and fasts are a response to or preparation for an encounter with the divine.

Fasting has a variety of effects on the human body and mind, which biologists have long recognized. (See the world of Rupert Sheldrake, [Ways to Go Beyond and Why They Work: Seven Spiritual Practices in a Scientific Age](#), ch. 3 “Fasting”).

- In many species, including humans, reducing the food supply increases lifespan (in fruit flies, mice, and humans).
- Fasting trains our bodies in a very ancient pattern in human development: drawing upon our bodies’ fat stores for energy, because food supply was often intermittent.
- Fasting induces a state of ketosis (when your body starts burning fat for energy instead of glucose from your diet). Ketosis releases a “ketone acid” into the blood (beta-hydroxy butyric acid, BHB), and is similar to gamma-amino butyric acid (GABA), the most important neurotransmitter in the brain.

“GABA is sometimes called a ‘feel-good’ neurotransmitter, and increased levels of GABA may well underlie some of the beneficial effects of ketosis in reducing anxiety and stress, and giving better mental focus.”

Sheldrake, Rupert (2019). [Ways to Go Beyond And Why They Work: Seven Spiritual Practices in a Scientific Age](#). Monkfish Book Publishing. 98.

This all has an interesting connection to the role of fasting as preparing oneself for an encounter with the divine, or creating space for a more intense encounter:

- Jesus’ 40-day fast in the wilderness
- Moses and Elijah’s 40-day fasts before their encounter with God on Mount Sinai
- Daniel’s fast when he was having visions

Daniel 9:1-3 NASB

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans— in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. **So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes.**

Daniel 10:1-3 NASB

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar; and the message was true and one of great conflict, but he understood the message and had an understanding of the vision.

In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks. **I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed.**

In apocalyptic literature of Second Temple Judaism, fasting became a consistent way that visionaries responded to or invited further apocalypses: see 2 Baruch 5:5-57, Ascension of Isaiah 2:7; 2 Esdras 5:13.

a 19 Don't **store up** (θησαυρίζετε) for yourselves **stored-wealth** (θησαυρούς) **on the land** ,

A¹ b **where** moth and nibbler can ruin,
c and **where** thieves break in and steal.

A¹ a 20 But **store up** (θησαυρίζετε) for yourselves **stored-wealth** (θησαυρούς) **in the sky** ,
b **where** neither moth nor nibbler can ruin,
c and **where** thieves do not break in or steal;

B d 21 for **where** your **stored-wealth** is,
there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Reflection Question

How would you describe the difference between Jesus saying “let your light shine before people ... so they can see” in [Matthew 5:16](#) and “don’t do your righteousness in front of people for the purpose of being seen” in [Matthew 6:1](#)?

Session 14: The Lord's Prayer

Key Takeaways

- Jesus wants us to see that every day is another trial before the tree in the garden, and he invites us to seek God's deliverance either from the test or from falling prey to the voice of the evil one.
- The closing doxology to the Lord's Prayer (i.e., "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.") is not present in the earliest available manuscripts of the New Testament and is therefore omitted from many modern translations. However, its use in the liturgical practice of the Church is attested as early as the late 1st century.
- The theme of God's name being recognized as holy runs throughout the whole Bible. God's name is profaned by the unfaithfulness of his people, so Jesus instructs us to ask for God's help in upholding the holiness of his name.
- The story of the Bible as a whole and of Jesus' own life is woven throughout the words and themes of the Lord's Prayer.

The Prayer of Jesus

The Lord's Prayer

Addressed to "You" the Father

Our Father who is in the skies,
may your name be recognized as holy,
may your kingdom come,
and may your desire be done,
as it is in the skies,
so also on the land.

How "We" Can Participate in the Father's Kingdom and Will

Provision

Our daily provision of bread,
give to us today.

Forgiveness

And forgive us our debts,

just as we also have forgiven those indebted to us.

Deliverance

And don't lead us to be tested,
but deliver us from the evil one.

Matthew 6:9-13. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

The prayer is a 12-line poem, divided into two halves of six lines, each a triad of three pairs, with a total of seven requests.

The first half is a series of requests addressed to the Father about his reputation and purposes in the world. The second half is a series of requests by "us/we" focused on three daily realities: survival, relationships, and the challenges of remaining faithful to God's will.

The Form of the Lord's Prayer

The Lord's prayer occurs twice in the New Testament: [Matthew 6:9-13](#) and [Luke 11:2-4](#). The additional elements in Matthew are highlighted:

Matthew 6:9-13 Instructor's Translation

Our Father **in heaven,**
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into the time of testing,
but deliver us from evil.

Luke 11:2-4 Instructor's Translation

Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into the time of testing.

There are multiple explanations for these differences. The two opposite ends of the explanation spectrum are:

1. That Luke preserves an earlier (and shorter) form of the prayer, and that Matthew (or the source which he used) added the extra lines to contextualize it into the themes of his account.

2. That Jesus would have taught a prayer like this on multiple occasions to many different audiences, not always adhering to the same words, but to the basic ideas. Thus, Matthew and Luke preserve two different traditions of the prayer.

“Quite probably, the prayer was handed down in slightly differing versions in churches of different geographic regions.”

Hagner, Donald (1993). [Matthew 1-13 \(Word Biblical Commentary\)](#). Thomas Nelson Inc. 145.

Syriac	Aramaic	Transliterated	Greek New Testament	English Translation
ܐܘܢ ܕܒܫܡܝܐ	ܐܘܢ ܕܒܫܡܝܐ	avun devashmaya'	Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,	⁹ Our Father who is in the skies,
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ	ܢܬܩܕܝܫ ܫܡܕ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ	nethqaddash shemakh te'ethe' malkhuthak nehwe' tsivyonakh	ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου. ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου,	may your name be recognized as holy, ¹⁰ may your kingdom come, and may your will be done,
ܐܘܢ ܕܒܫܡܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ	ܐܘܢ ܕܒܫܡܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ	'aykhana' devashmaya' 'aph ba'r'a'	ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς.	as it is in the skies, so also on the land.
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ	ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ	hab lan lakhma' desunqanan yawmana'	Τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δοῦς ἡμῖν σήμερον.	¹¹ Our daily provision of bread, give to us today.
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ	ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ	washvuq lan khawvanan 'aykhana' de'aph khanan shevaqan lekhayabayn	καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν.	¹² And forgive us our debts, just as we also have forgiven those indebted to us.

The Lord's Prayer in Different Translations. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Syriac	Aramaic	Transliterated	Greek New Testament	English Translation
<p>ܐܠܗܝܢ ܕܢܫܘܢܐ ܕܢܫܘܢܐ ܕܢܫܘܢܐ ܕܢܫܘܢܐ ܕܢܫܘܢܐ</p>	<p>ܐܠܗܝܢ ܕܢܫܘܢܐ ܕܢܫܘܢܐ ܕܢܫܘܢܐ ܕܢܫܘܢܐ ܕܢܫܘܢܐ</p>	<p><i>la' ta 'alan lenesyona' 'ela' phatsa' lan men bisha'</i></p>	<p>καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν, ἀλλὰ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ.</p>	<p>¹³ And don't lead us to be tested, but deliver us from the evil one.</p>
<p>ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܕܠܝܚܐ ܕܕܠܝܚܐ ܕܕܠܝܚܐ ܕܕܠܝܚܐ ܕܕܠܝܚܐ</p>	<p>ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܕܠܝܚܐ ܕܕܠܝܚܐ ܕܕܠܝܚܐ ܕܕܠܝܚܐ ܕܕܠܝܚܐ</p>	<p><i>metul d'dilakh hai malkhuthakh wekhaila wateshvukhtha l'alam almin amen</i></p>	<p>οτι σου εστιν η βασιλεια και η δυναμις και η δοξα εις τους αιωνας αμην</p>	<p>Because to you belongs the kingdom, and the power, and the praise for the age of ages. Amen</p>

The Lord's Prayer in Different Translations. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Note: the Aramaic in this chart—its transliteration and pronunciation in the session—is one attempt at capturing how this prayer would have sounded. Different liturgical traditions render the vocalization of this prayer differently.

Historical and Cultural Background of Jesus' Prayer

In Jewish culture of this period, it was very common for rabbis to teach memorable prayers to their small groups of disciples so that the rabbi's teachings could be easily recalled and summarized. Additionally, liturgical daily prayer was a crucial component of Jewish life. Here, Jesus is adopting language from a Jewish prayer that was recited in Aramaic at the conclusion of synagogue services, known as the Qaddish.

“May his [= God's] great name be exalted and hallowed in the world which he created according to his will.
May he establish his kingdom in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of the house of Israel speedily and soon.
And say, 'Amen.'”

Elbogen, Ismar (1993). [Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History](#). Jewish Publication Society. 92-98.

The Qaddish prayer has many similar themes to the Lord's Prayer: It recognizes that at present, God's reputation and Kingdom are not established in the world. It is a petition that God would act in history to turn his plans into reality. It uses the language of God's “name” (i.e., his reputation) and his “Kingdom.”

The primary difference between the prayers is this: While the Qaddish is a petition that God would act in the future, the Lord's Prayer is for followers who confess that God has already begun to bring his Kingdom in and through Jesus. In other words, the Lord's Prayer is a petition that God continue to do what he has already started in Jesus.

We have evidence from the end of the 1st century that Christians prayed this prayer three times daily (mentioned in the early Christian text, *The Didache* 8:3), just as Jews prayed the Shema (a prayer based on *Deuteronomy 6:4-5*) three times a day.

"2 And do not pray as the wicked [do]; pray instead this way, as the Lord directed in his gospel:

Our Father who are in heaven,
May your name be acclaimed as holy,
May your kingdom come,
May your will come to pass
on earth as it does in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
And cancel for us our debt,
As we cancel [debts] for those who are indebted to us,
And do not bring us into temptation,
But preserve us from the evil one.
For power and glory are yours forever.

3 Pray this way thrice daily."

Niederwimmer, Kurt & Attridge, Harold W. (1998). [*The Didache: A Commentary \(Hermeneia\)*](#). Fortress Press. 134.

Interpretation of the Key Lines of the Prayer

"May your name be recognized as sacred" = "Hallowed be your name"

- Older English for "May your name be considered/recognized as sacred/set apart/distinct."
- "Hallowed/treated/recognized as holy" means that Yahweh's reputation is honored among the nations, so that Yahweh alone is recognized as creator and king.

Psalm 18:49 NASB

Therefore I will give thanks to you **among the nations**,
O LORD, and I will sing praises to **your name**.

Psalm 96:2-3 NASB

Sing to the LORD, bless **his name**;
proclaim good tidings of his salvation from day to day.
Tell of his glory **among the nations**,
his wonderful deeds **among all the peoples**.

Psalm 105:1 NASB

Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon **his name**;
make known his deeds **among the peoples**.

Isaiah 12:4 LEB

And you will say on that day, "Give thanks to Yahweh; call on **his name**.
Make his deeds known **among the peoples**;
bring to remembrance that **his name** is exalted."

The passive "be recognized/treated as holy" (Greek: *hagiastheto*) could be construed in two ways.

1. Divine passive: i.e., an action that God will perform himself. In this case, "make known the holiness, uniqueness of your name", is a plea for God to act in history and make known his power and goodness.
2. A genuine passive: i.e., an action that others will perform. This would play out as, "make your name recognized as holy/unique among Israel and the nations". Probably, Jesus intends both.

The request that God's name be recognized as holy assumes some kind of story in which God's name is not (or not currently) being treated as sacred. The recognition of Yahweh's "name" is rooted in the story of the Old Testament.

When Yahweh delivered Israel out of slavery in Egypt, it was in order that "my name might be proclaimed through all the earth" (Exod. 9:16). Israel's violation of their covenant with Yahweh, and their exile and subjugation among the nations, has resulted in God's name being "profaned, violated, dishonored."

Psalm 74:1-10 NASB

- ¹ O God, why have you rejected us forever?
Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?
- ² Remember your congregation, which you have purchased of old,
which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your inheritance;
and this Mount Zion, where you have dwelt.
- ³ Turn your footsteps toward the perpetual ruins;
the enemy has damaged everything within the sanctuary.
- ⁴ Your adversaries have roared in the midst of your meeting place;
they have set up their own standards for signs.
- ⁵ It seems as if one had lifted up
his axe in a forest of trees.
- ⁶ And now all its carved work
they smash with hatchet and hammers.
- ⁷ They have burned your sanctuary to the ground;
they have defiled the dwelling place of your name.
- ⁸ They said in their heart, "Let us completely subdue them."
They have burned all the meeting places of God in the land.
- ⁹ We do not see our signs;
there is no longer any prophet,

nor is there any among us who knows how long.

¹⁰ How long, O God, will the adversary revile,
and the enemy **show contempt for your name** forever?

Isaiah 52:4-6 NASB

For thus says the Lord God, "My people went down at the first into Egypt to reside there; then the Assyrian oppressed them without cause.

Now therefore, what do I have here," declares the LORD, "seeing that my people have been taken away without cause?" Again the LORD declares, "Those who rule over them howl, and my name is continually blasphemed all day long.

Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore in that day I am the one who is speaking, 'Here I am.'"

Ezekiel 36 is a particularly potent example of this theme.

Ezekiel 36:17-36 Instructor's Translation

¹⁷ "Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. ... ¹⁸ Therefore I poured out my wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols. ¹⁹ Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. ...

²⁰ When they came to the nations where they went, **they profaned my holy name**, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of Yahweh; yet they had to go out of his land.'

²¹ But I had concern for **my holy name**, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went.

²² Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for **my holy name, which you have profaned** among the nations where you went.

²³ I will vindicate **the holiness of my great name which has been profaned** among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am Yahweh," declares the Lord God, "when I prove myself holy among you in their sight.

²⁴ For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be purified. ...

²⁶ Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will be careful to observe my ordinances. ...

³⁰ I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations. ...

³⁴ The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by.

³⁵ They will say, 'This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited.'

³⁶ Then **the nations that are left round about you will know that I, Yahweh**, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, Yahweh, have spoken and will do it."

In other words, Jesus' petition that God's name be reinstated to a place of uniqueness and honor is a request that God act in history to accomplish redemption, to carry out his plan to restore Israel and fulfill his covenant plan that will spread through them to all nations.

Kingdom Come

The "Kingdom of God" was the main theme in Jesus' teaching, and he claimed that in his actions, God's Kingdom was actually becoming reality here on earth.

- [Mark 1:15](#): "the Kingdom of God has arrived."
- [Matthew 12:28](#): "Hey everyone, God is now starting to run the show!"

In the Hebrew Bible, the "kingdom" of God refers to God's realm of dominion and authority. In one sense, all of creation is God's Kingdom.

Psalm 103:19 Instructor's Translation

The Lord has established **his throne in the skies**, and **his kingdom** rules over all.

Psalm 145:10-13 NASB

All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and your godly ones shall bless you.

They shall speak of **the glory of your kingdom** and talk of your power;

to make known to the sons of men your mighty acts and the glory of the majesty of **your kingdom**.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

Daniel 4:2-3 NASB

It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. How great are his signs and how mighty are his wonders!

His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and his dominion is from generation to generation.

Daniel 4:34 NASB

But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored him who lives forever; for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and **his kingdom endures from generation to generation**.

"Kingdom of God/Heaven" does not mean "going to heaven." Just the opposite, it is an announcement that God's space is coming into contact with our space.

God's "Kingdom" and "will": What would it look like if God were running this show? If the world were as the creator intended it to be, and wants it to be again: a place of *shalom*, justice, abundance, community, etc.?

The biblical authors use the term “new/renewed creation” to speak of this future hope (Rom. 8:18-23; Rev. 21-22), and of how this future hope has begun to infiltrate the present (2 Cor. 5:17).

The idea of God’s heavenly reign becoming realized on earth is what Daniel 7 is all about.

Daniel 7:13–14 Instructor's Translation

I kept looking in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
one like a Son of Man was coming,
and he came up to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to **him was given dominion** (שְׁלֹטָן),
glory and **a kingdom** (מְלִכּוּת),
that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language
might serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
which will not pass away;
and **his Kingdom** is one
which will not be destroyed.

Daniel 7:18 Instructor's Translation

But the saints of the Highest One will receive **the Kingdom**
and possess **the Kingdom** forever,
for all ages to come.

Daniel 7:27 NASB

Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven
will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One;
his Kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey him.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the story begins with a conflict of kingdoms, as the first three uses of the word make clear.

Matthew 3:1–2 Instructor's Translation

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying,
“Repent, for **the kingdom of the skies** has come near.”

Matthew 4:8–9 Instructor's Translation

Again, the slanderer took him to a very high mountain and showed him all **the kingdoms of the world** and
their glory and he said to him, “All these things I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.”

Matthew 4:17 Instructor's Translation

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for **the kingdom of the skies** is at hand.”

The word “kingdom” (Greek: *basilea*) occurs 55 times in Matthew’s account.

The Kingdom Is Present With Jesus

Matthew 4:17 NASB

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for **the kingdom of the skies has come near.**”

Matthew 10:6-7 NASB

but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

And as you go, preach, saying, “**The kingdom of the skies has come near.**”

Matthew 12:28 NASB

But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then **the kingdom of God has come upon you.**

Matthew 18:3-4 NASB

and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, **you will not enter the kingdom of the skies.** Whoever then humbles himself as this child, **he is the greatest in the kingdom of the skies.**”

Matthew 19:23-24 NASB

And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man **to enter the kingdom of the skies.**

Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man **to enter the kingdom of God.**”

Matthew 21:31 NIV

“Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the **tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.**”

The Kingdom Is Yet Future

Matthew 8:11 Instructor's Translation

I say to you that **many will come** from east and west, and **will recline** at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob **in the kingdom of the skies;**”

Matthew 13:43 NASB

Then **the righteous will shine forth** as the sun **in the kingdom of their Father.** He who has ears, let him hear.

Matthew 16:28 NASB

“Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death **until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.**”

Matthew 26:27-29 NASB

And when he had taken a cup and given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

But I say to you, **I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.**"

In the teachings of Jesus, the arrival of the Kingdom is not merely a future hope. God has begun to bring his Kingdom into realization here and now in Jesus' actions and teachings (healings, forgiveness, celebration, challenges to injustice) and in the mission of Jesus and the movement he has begun (i.e., the book of Acts and beyond).

"What would it look like if God was running this show?" To this question, Jesus' mission offered a glimpse. There will be a party, with the poor and marginalized invited. It would look like a leper and outcast getting healed and reintegrated into society. It will look like people encountering Jesus and finding out what it means to be human in a fresh, new way.

What does it mean to live this part of the prayer? It is not a petition that allows us to be passive. It is a confession that God's Kingdom, God's way of running the universe, has arrived in Jesus, and we are to follow suit. Not that we can redo what Jesus has done. What Jesus did for the world, he did once and for all. However, we are to implement that accomplishment.

Jesus is a musician who wrote the greatest symphony of all time. We are bit musicians, who have become captivated by his work and now learn to play the symphony in a world full of elevator music and easy listening radio. Or Jesus is the medical genius who has discovered penicillin. We are now doctors who have been cured by the medicine, and we must now go and apply it to those in need.

But what we play must be Jesus' music: "Those who long for God's will on earth in the future should live consistently with that longing in the present, working for God's justice and seeking his will here and now."

When we pray this part of the prayer, we are expressing both the love and grief of the creator for his battered world. It is a prayer for the world's redemption and renewal. We are praying Jesus' prayer that he put into action. If we pray this way, we must be prepared to start living this way.

This is not a prayer of resignation but of commission: Make us a community of healed healers, of Kingdom musicians who listen to the music ourselves in prayer and scripture and then play the music of the cross and forgiveness, of grace and a new chance at life.

Will Be Done

God's "will" (Greek: *thelema*, θέλημα): This Greek word is often used in the Septuagint to render Hebrew *khephets* / כֶּפֶת "desire, intended purpose."

1 Kings 5:8-10 NASB

So Hiram sent word to Solomon, saying, "I have heard the message which you have sent me; I will do **what you desire** concerning the cedar and cypress timber. My servants will bring them down from Lebanon to the sea; and I will make them into rafts to go by sea to the place where you direct me, and I will have them broken up there, and you shall carry them away. Then you shall accomplish **my desire** by giving food to my household."

So Hiram gave Solomon as much as **he desired** of the cedar and cypress timber.

2 Chronicles 9:12 NASB

King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba **all her desire** which she requested besides a return for what she had brought to the king. Then she turned and went to her own land with her servants.

Psalms 1:2 NASB

But his **delight** is in the law of the Lord,
and in his law he meditates day and night.

Psalms 40:7-8 NASB

Then I said, "Behold, I come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.
I delight to do **your will**, O my God;
your Law is within my heart."

Psalms 103:19-21 NASB

The Lord has established **his throne in the heavens,
and his sovereignty rules over all.**
Bless the Lord, you his angels,
mighty in strength, who perform his word,
obeying the voice of his word!
Bless the Lord, all you his hosts,
you who serve him, **doing his will.**

Isaiah 48:14 Instructor's Translation

Assemble, all of you, and listen!
Who among them has declared these things?
The Lord loves him; he will carry out **his desire** on Babylon,
and his arm will be against the Chaldeans.

Isaiah 58:13 NASB

If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing **your own desire** on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own word,

It cannot be coincidence that Jesus here uses a word that activates a theme that began in the Eden narrative, about the "will/desire" of humans that can set itself up in opposition to the will/desire of God.

Genesis 3:6 Instructor's Translation

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food
and **desirable** (Hebrew: תאוה / Greek: ἀρεστός) to see with the eyes,
and **desirable** (Hebrew: נחמד / Greek: ὠραῖος) for gaining wisdom,
then she took and she ate ...

In Matthew in particular, this key word “will, desire” (θέλημά) is repeated at key points in the narrative (which is fascinating, given that this phrase in the Lord’s Prayer is unique to Matthew when compared with Luke).

Matthew 7:21 NASB

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but **he who does the will of my Father** who is in heaven will enter.

Matthew 12:49–50 NASB

And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Behold my mother and my brothers! For **whoever does the will of my Father** who is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

Matthew 18:13–14 NASB

If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. So **it is not the will of your Father** who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

Matthew 21:28–31 NASB

“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’

And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he regretted it and went.

The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, ‘I will, sir’; but he did not go.

Which of the two **did the will of his father?**” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.”

Matthew 26:40–42 NASB

And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “So, you men could not keep watch with me for one hour?

Keep watching and praying that you may **not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing**, but the flesh is weak.”

He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, “My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, **may your will be done.**”

Daily Bread

Note how the prayer begins with a focus on God’s Kingdom, what the creator wants to do with his world. This is a prayer that his plan advances first. Then the prayer turns to our needs.

“Give us today our daily bread” is a declaration of trust in God for one’s life, sustenance, and provision. This is likely an allusion back to the story of the Israelites eating the manna in the wilderness after being redeemed from Egyptian slavery ([Exod. 16](#)).

The manna story became, in Jewish culture, a well-known image of God’s provision for his people in times of hardship. The key line, to which Jesus is alluding here, is found in Exodus 16:4.

Exodus 16:4 NASB

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain **bread from heaven** for you; and the people shall go out and **gather a day’s portion every day**, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in my instruction.”

Exodus 16:22 NASB

Now **on the sixth day** they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses,

Exodus 16:29 NASB

See, the LORD has given you **the sabbath**; therefore he gives you **bread for two days on the sixth day**. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.

“Just as Jesus resisted the first temptation to turn stones into bread by trusting God to supply his bread in the wilderness (Matthew 4:3-4), so also must his followers. This prayer ... expresses dependence on God for daily bread, a willingness to live simply, satisfied with the basics. This prayer is most naturally uttered by the poor, a condition that characterized many Galilean peasants who followed Jesus.”

Keener, Craig S. (2009). [*The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*](#). Eerdmans. 222.

The prayer for daily bread is connected with the passage ahead in [6:31-33](#). If we are truly seeking a Kingdom lifestyle, then our priorities shift, and life necessities become a matter of reliance instead of consumption.

“What transforms society in Jesus’ ideal is knowing God as the utterly reliable and endlessly generous provider of all good, on whom all creatures are completely dependent. ... The kind of trust in God’s provision that Jesus envisaged is enshrined in one petition of the Lord’s prayer: ‘Give us this day our daily bread.’ Adequate provision for material needs, not luxury, and day-by-day provision, not wealth stored up, are all that is asked. It puts the disciple of Jesus in the position of the beggars, who depend day-by-day on charity, or of the day laborer, those agricultural workers who had the least security, employed only a day at a time, never earning more than the next day’s meal. Jesus requires of all disciples, the radical trust that for the destitute is the only sort available.”

Bauckham, Richard (2011). [*Jesus: A Very Short Introduction*](#). Oxford University Press. 79.

There is a long-standing difficulty in understanding the meaning of the Greek word *epiousios*, usually translated as “daily bread,” as it is used only here in the New Testament.

Literally, the Greek reads:

- [Matthew 6:11](#)—Our bread of *epiousios*, give us today (*semeron*).
- [Luke 11:3](#)—Our bread of *epiousios*, give us each day (*kat’ emeran*).

There are a handful of interpretations of *epiousios*:

- “what is necessary for life”
- “for the current day”
- “for the coming day” (realized eschatology interpretation)

Entry *epiousios* from the New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis.

“NT This unusual term is linked with ἄρτος G788, ‘bread,’ in the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:11;

Luke 11:3). Otherwise the word occurs only once in a papyrus of the 5th cent. AD, and even this occurrence is doubtful (see esp. M. Nijman and K. A. Worp, “Ἐπιούσιος in a Documentary Papyrus?” *NovT* 41 [1999]: 231–34). Hence the transl. and interpretation of the term has been a matter of controversy from early times, though the rendering “daily” is found already in Tertullian (2nd cent. AD). Four possibilities emerge from the long debate.

1 Some relate the term to the expression ἡ ἐπιούσα ἡμέρα, “the coming day,” i.e., “the next day” (cf. Acts 7:26 [without ἡμέρα in 16:11 et al.; cf. also Prov. 27:1]; the form here is the ptc. of ἐπιμι G2079, “to come upon, approach”). Jerome claims that the version of the Lord’s Prayer in the Gospel of the Hebrews had the word קָרָמָּ H4737 (“the next day, tomorrow”). In that case ἐπιούσιος ἄρτος would mean “bread for tomorrow.” It may be thought that praying for tomorrow’s bread contradicts Matt. 6:34 (“do not worry about tomorrow”), but the expression perhaps indicates “the coming day” in a general sense (the meaning “pertaining to the coming day” is ably defended by C. J. Hemer, “Ἐπιούσιος,” *JSNT* 7 no. 22 [1984]: 81–94). One should remember, however, that there is no persuasive evidence that the Gospel of the Hebrews preserves the orig. text; it is more likely a retroversion (i.e., secondary transl. from Gk. into Heb.).

2 Origen suggested that the word derives from a different phrase, ἐπὶ τῆν οὐσίαν; the term οὐσία G4045 (orig. the ptc. of εἶμι G1639, “to be”) means “being, existence, substance,” and so, according to this view, the prayer is a request for “the bread necessary for existence.” Origen, one of the greatest scholars of the 3rd cent., spoke Gk. as his mother tongue, so this interpretation should not be dismissed quickly. The idea can certainly be supported by a passage such as Prov. 30:8 (a prayer for קִיָּהּ לִי, “the food that I need” [NRSV]), and it reminds us of the manna, which the Israelites were to gather on a daily basis (Exod. 16:4; cf. Str-B 1:420–21; see μάννα G3445).

3 J. Jeremias (*The Prayers of Jesus* [1967], 98–104) takes the first interpretation and reinterprets it in terms of the final consummation: the morrow that Jesus had in mind is not the next day, but the great morning of the final fulfillment—the day when Jesus with his disciples will eat the bread of life, the heavenly manna, in eternity (Matt 26:29; Luke 22:30; Rev. 2:17). The disciples were to pray for this bread. The church fathers sim. linked the fourth petition with Christ, who imparts himself in the Lord’s Supper as “the bread of life” (John 6:35). Although these gifts for salvation may indeed be included in the fourth petition, it seems difficult to deny, in the light of Matt. 6:25–33, that Jesus was thinking first of all of earthly bread (cf. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [2007], 249).

4 K. G. Kuhn (*Achtzehngebet und Vaterunser und der Reim* [1950]) believes that whoever translated Jesus’ Aram. prayer into Gk. chose the otherwise unknown term ἐπιούσιος to bring out a special stress in the orig. prayer. According to this view, the Aram. expression אָרְמִיָּא had a double meaning that could be expressed in Gk. only by combining two terms: ἐπιούσιος, insofar as the bread is needed “for the day,” and σήμερον G3814, “for today.” Then the daily prayer for bread sufficing for the day would not merely be a constant reminder to the disciples of God’s fatherly faithfulness. It would also remind them that in the new age, which had already begun and whose consummation could be expected at any time, prayer for provision for a longer period should no longer concern the disciples. (For other possibilities, see BDAG s.v.)”

Zondervan Academic (2014). [New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis](#).

Zondervan Academic.

Forgiveness

“Forgive us our debts/sins, as we have forgiven ... ”

- “Forgive” = Greek verb *aphiemi* / ἀφίημι “to release, let someone go” or the noun *aphesis* / ἄφεσις “release, letting go”
- “To release from one’s presence”: “Then Jesus released the crowds and went into the house” (Matt. 13:36)
- “To release from obligation, to cancel or forgive a debt”

“The noun ἄφεσις is first attested in Greek literature from the 5th cent. BC, is less common, and its uses are less varied, but the sense “a letting go, release” seems basic and also finds application in legal contexts (Plato Leg. 869d; Demosth. Timocr. [= Or. 24] 45, of remission of debt). It should be noted, however, that the terms are found only in the setting of human relationships and not used in a religious sense.”

Zondervan Academic (2014). [New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis](#). Zondervan Academic.

In the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible, the noun “release” (*aphesis*) is used 50 times, and nearly half of these occur in the translation of Leviticus to render the word “Jubilee” (Hebrew: *yovail* / יבול), referring to the “year of release” when all debts were cancelled in Israel. The appropriate translation here is “freedom, emancipation.”

Matthew’s version has the word “debts” (Greek: *opheilemata*) here, used also of financial debts in day-to-day life. Luke’s version reads “sins” (Greek: *hamartia*). These are two metaphors that describe the same reality.

In early Judaism, the word “debt”, used in describing one’s relationship with God, is equivalent to “sin”. It describes behavior that vandalizes *shalom* in God’s world, that violates other people, and makes one a debtor to the creator. You now owe God for the wrong you’ve done.

“Sin” is to miss the goal, to fail at fulfilling one’s purpose, which is to fully love God and others.

In the Hebrew Bible, Israel’s sins are not simply failure to live up to God’s moral standards. They are violations of their covenant with Yahweh, and so their failures build up a “debt” that must be paid through the consequences for covenant unfaithfulness. In the Torah, these consequences are the covenant curses seen in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Such consequences include:

- Scarcity instead of abundance (famine)
- Sickness instead of health
- Short lifespan instead of long life
- Defeat, slavery, and exile instead of victory, rule, and security

Israel’s prophets viewed the exile and the ongoing oppression under foreign empires after the exile as the ongoing sign that Israel’s sin/debt still needed to be dealt with. In this perspective, forgiveness is both individual and corporate, and fits within the story of Israel’s restoration.

Micah 6:9–16 NLT

⁹ Fear the Lord if you are wise! His voice calls to everyone in Jerusalem: “The armies of destruction are coming; the Lord is sending them.

¹⁰ What shall I say about the homes of the wicked filled with treasures gained by cheating? What about the disgusting practice of measuring out grain with dishonest measures?

¹¹ How can I tolerate your merchants who use dishonest scales and weights?

¹² The rich among you have become wealthy through extortion and violence. Your citizens are so used to lying that their tongues can no longer tell the truth.

¹³ “Therefore, I will wound you! **I will bring you to ruin for all your sins.**

¹⁴ You will eat but never have enough. Your hunger pangs and emptiness will remain. And though you try to save your money, it will come to nothing in the end. You will save a little, but I will give it to those who conquer you.

¹⁵ You will plant crops but not harvest them. You will press your olives but not get enough oil to anoint yourselves. You will trample the grapes but get no juice to make your wine.

¹⁶ You keep only the laws of evil King Omri; you follow only the example of wicked King Ahab! Therefore, I will make an example of you, bringing you to complete ruin. You will be treated with contempt, mocked by all who see you.”

Micah 7:18–20 NLT

Where is another God like you, **who pardons the guilt of the remnant, overlooking the sins** of his special people? You will not stay angry with your people forever, because you delight in showing unfailing love. Once again you will have compassion on us. **You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean!** You will show us your faithfulness and unfailing love as you promised to our ancestors Abraham and Jacob long ago.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 NLT

“The day is coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. **They broke that covenant,** though I loved them as a husband loves his wife,” says the LORD.

“**But this is the new covenant I will make** with the people of Israel after those days,” says the LORD. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, ‘You should know the LORD.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,” says the LORD. “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”

For other, similar descriptions of sin and forgiveness in the prophets, see [Hosea 1-3](#)

Jesus’ emphasis on forgiveness as a key marker of his new covenant communities must be seen in this particular Jewish-biblical context.

We must view the petition for forgiveness in the Lord’s Prayer in the context of Jesus’ mission to Israel. To announce Israel’s long history of failure to fulfill their end of the covenant, a failure that landed them in exile and oppression under empires, this failure has been forgiven. Through Jesus, the Kingdom of God has arrived with a great offer of forgiveness for past wrongs.

This forgiveness theme pervades Luke’s presentation of Jesus.

Luke 1:67–79 NLT

67 Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy:
68 "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people.
69 He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David,
70 just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago.
71 Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us.
72 He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant—
73 the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham.
74 We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear,
75 in holiness and righteousness for as long as we live.
76 And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord.
77 You will tell his people how to find deliverance **through forgiveness of their sins**.
78 Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,
79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace."

Luke 4:16–19 NIV*

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim **aphesis** for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to send out the oppressed in **aphesis**, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Luke 5:23–24 NASB

"Which is easier, to say, '**Your sins have been forgiven,**' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to **forgive sins,**"—he said to the paralytic—"I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home."

Luke 13:11–16 NASB

11 And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all.

12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, "Woman, **you are freed (Greek: *apoluein*) from your sickness.**"

13 And he laid his hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God.

14 But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the crowd in response, "There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day."

15 But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him?"

¹⁶ “And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?”

The comparison “as we have forgiven ... ” highlights a key theme in Jesus’ teaching: Reciprocal forgiveness for all (see the parable in [Matthew 18:21-35](#)).

Forgiveness in Judaism was accomplished by offering sacrifices in the temple. Jesus, on the other hand, claimed to offer God’s forgiveness directly, without going to the temple (see [Mark 2:1-12](#)).

Jesus was essentially saying that God’s forgiveness is available outside of the official religious institutions people had grown up with: the priests in the temple do not have a monopoly on God’s grace.

This part of the prayer is expanded upon in [Matthew 6:14-15](#): “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

This saying is often misunderstood because it seems to attach a condition on God’s grace, namely that we have to forgive in order to be forgiven.

These verses are actually getting at something far more profound: The economy of forgiveness in the Kingdom of God is fully reciprocal.

- God’s forgiveness cannot be received by someone who refuses to forgive others.
- Our ability to forgive others is directly connected to our ability to acknowledge that we need forgiveness ourselves.

The point does not have to do with what one deserves, but with desire. God’s forgiveness, although we cannot earn it, must be received, and someone who refuses to forgive others cannot truly receive forgiveness.

Our ability to extend grace to others is directly connected to our ability to accept God’s grace extended to us. The one is evidence of the other.

Pastoral Clarification on Forgiveness

If we meditate on the teachings of Jesus about forgiveness, especially those found in [Matthew 5](#) and [Matthew 18](#) and [Luke 6](#), you will find that Jesus’ practice of forgiveness is very specific.

For him, forgiveness is NOT:

- ignoring or forgetting
- condoning or excusing
- tolerating or allowing further abuse
- the same as reconciliation or restoration
- allowing the offender to escape consequences

According to Jesus, you never have to be in the same room, you don’t have to forget. You can make sure there are consequences for their wrong ... and still forgive someone. Those things are not the opposite of forgiveness.

In Jesus' teaching on forgiveness in [Matthew 18](#), if someone wrongs you, then you go directly to that person (not to others!) and share honestly. If they don't acknowledge what they've done, bring a small number of others (he mentions two or three), so they can mediate (maybe you're off-base, or maybe the other person is). If that group comes to agree that the other person wronged you, and if the person won't acknowledge it, then separate from that person. You shouldn't be around them at all.

However, all of that said, Jesus says that forgiveness can still take place, even if you can't reconcile with the person.

In the parable about the guy forgiven of a huge debt who won't forgive his friend of a small debt, Jesus locates forgiveness "in the heart" (Matt. 18:35). It's about a heart posture toward another who wronged me, in light of the fact that I also stand in need of forgiveness from others and from God. There is no high ground here from which I can legitimately deny another person forgiveness.

For Jesus, forgiveness is one of the ways God's reign and desire arrive on the land as it is in the skies.

Deliverance From the Test

"Don't lead us into the trial/testing, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:13).

Our English translations are not helpful here, by translating this term as "temptation" (NIV, NAS). The Greek word is *peirasmos*.

- "Temptation" infers (1) someone who is doing the tempting, which in this case would be God, and (2) "tempting" in English means that the "tempter" intends the "tempted" to succumb. This is simply not what Jesus is talking about. (It is likely [James 1:13-18](#) is trying to avoid this misinterpretation of the Lord's Prayer.)
- Temptation=to be enticed to moral failure. The purpose of temptation is negative.
- Testing=to be faced with circumstances that prove one's commitment and character, also known as faithfulness. The purpose of testing is positive, to reveal the truth about one's character.
- A better translation would be "testing," "trial," or "difficult ordeal."

This links into a major theme in the melodic cycle of the Hebrew Bible, where God blesses his chosen ones with abundance, fertility, status, and responsibility. That blessing brings the character to a moment of decision as to whether they will trust God and so retain the blessing.

The decision is often about how they will respond to something God has said, commanded, or promised. The character either succeeds or fails the test, bringing some form of consequence, either negative (death, exile, estrangement, curse) or positive (rescue, provision, security, fertility, blessing).

The Hebrew Bible is a story of generations cycling through this melody: Jesus is here activating a core biblical theme that began with the Eden story: the test.

- Humanity's trust in God's generosity is tested by the command regarding the tree of knowing good and bad ([Gen. 3](#)).
- Noah's trust in God's wisdom is tested by the command to make a box-boat ([Gen. 6](#)).
- Abram's trust in God's ability to bless is tested by his call to leave his land and family and go to a new land to experience blessing ([Gen. 12](#)).

- Israel's trust in God's salvation is tested by the call to walk into the deadly waters (Exod. 14).
- Israel's trust in God's power to bless is tested by the call to journey through the wilderness without food or water (Exod. 15-17).
- The purpose of Israel's testing in the wilderness was a major focus in the Torah. Moses reflects on this in Deuteronomy 8.

Deuteronomy 8:1-5 Instructor's Translation

¹ All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, so that you can live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your forefathers.

² You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you, in the wilderness **these forty years**, in order to humble you,

in order to test you,

in order to know what was in your heart,

whether you would keep his commandments or not.

³ and he humbled you and let you be hungry, and he fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, so that he might make you understand that a human does not live by bread alone, rather a human lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.

⁴ Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years.

⁵ Thus you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you, just as a man disciplines his son.

Within the Hebrew Bible, God gives generous gifts to his chosen covenant partners, but then allows them opportunities to show their loyalty in return.

In Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity, this was a common theme, knowing that sometimes God tests the endurance of his faithful ones.

Hebrews 4:14-16 Instructor's Translation

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been **tested** in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13 NASB

¹ For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea;

² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

³ and all ate the same spiritual food;

⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink,

for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was the Messiah.

⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.

⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play."

⁸ Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.

⁹ **Nor let us test the Lord**, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents.

¹⁰ Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have met together.

¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

¹³ No **test** has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be **tested** beyond what you are able, but with the **test** will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

The Gospel authors depict Jesus, after his baptism, as the Royal-Priest of Israel, enduring Israel's tests on their behalf.

Jesus had to endure a test. The Spirit "led him" into the wilderness, where he faced his first test as he replayed Israel's wilderness wanderings.

4:1 Then Jesus was led into the wilderness by **the spirit**,
to be tested by **the slanderer**,

Test 1

A ² and having **fasted** forty days and forty nights,
afterward he was **hungry**,

B ³ and approaching, **the tester** said to him,
" **If you are the son of God** ,
speak so that these stones become **loaves of bread**."

Deuteronomy 8:3

4 And responding, he said,
C " **It has been written** ,
'Not by **bread** alone does humanity live,
but by every word that comes out from God's mouth.'

Test 2

A' 5 Then **the slanderer** took him into **the holy city** ,
and he stationed him at the upper tip of **the temple** ,

6 and he said to him,
" **If you are the son of God** ,
throw yourself down,
B' **for it has been written** ,
'He has commanded his **messengers** concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you won't strike your foot against a stone.'

Deuteronomy 6:16

C' 7 Iesous said to him,
"Again, **it has been written** ,
'You will not **test** **the Lord your God** .''

Test 3

A'' 8 Again, **the slanderer** took him to **a high mountain** ,
and he showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor,

9 and he said to him,
B'' "All these things I will give to you,
if, falling down, you will **bow down** to me."

Deuteronomy 6:13

10 Then Iesous said to him,
"Be gone, adversary!

For **it has been written**,
'You will **bow down** to **the Lord your God**,
and you will **serve** him only.'

¹¹ Then **the slanderer** left him,
and look, **messengers** approached and ministered to him.

Matthew 4:1-11. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Rise of the Messiah (2024).

Jesus faced another test in Cesarea Philippi, but this time from one of his closest friends.

Matthew 16:13–25 NASB

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he was asking his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

¹⁶ **Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

¹⁷ And Jesus said to him,

"Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven ...

²¹ From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

²² **Peter** took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, **"God forbid it, Lord!** This shall never happen to you."

²³ But he turned and said to Peter,

"Get behind me, Satan! (Greek: *hupage opiso mou satana*),

You are a stumbling block to me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.

²⁵ "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Jesus actually used this language on another occasion, during his greatest test.

Matthew 26:36–42 NASB

³⁶ Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

³⁷ And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed.

³⁸ Then he said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with me.”

³⁹ And he went a little beyond them, and fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; **yet not as I will, but as you will.**”

⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “So, you men could not keep watch with me for one hour?”

⁴¹ Keep watching and praying **that you may not enter into the test;** the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

⁴² He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, “My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, **may your will be done.**”

James’ gives clarification on “testing/tempting” in James 1.

James 1:2-4 NASB*

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various **peirasmos**, knowing that the proving of your faith produces endurance.

And let endurance have its complete result, so that you may be complete and whole, lacking in nothing.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

James 1:12-17 NASB*

¹² Blessed is the one who perseveres under **peirasmos**; for once they have proved themselves, they will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him.

¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself does not tempt anyone.

¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

¹⁷ Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

This is a meditation on the “test” theme in [Genesis 2-3](#), but clarified so that James’ audience doesn’t misunderstand the character of God in the Eden story.

Later manuscripts of Matthew include an additional ending that corresponds to the liturgical use of the prayer in the earliest generations of Jesus’ followers.

Matthew 6:13 NIV

... Because yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever, Amen.

This addition is found in later manuscripts of Matthew, but not in the earliest.

This addition corresponds to the form of the Lord's prayer found in one of the earliest Christian instructions on prayer, the *Didache* (from the 2nd century), which includes the following passage.

Didache 8:2-3

"And do not pray as the wicked do;
pray instead this way, as the Lord directed in his gospel:

Our Father who are in heaven,
May your name be acclaimed as holy,
May your kingdom come,
May your will come to pass on earth as it does in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
And cancel for us our debt,
As we cancel [debts] for those who are indebted to us,
And do not bring us into the test,
But preserve us from evil [or, from the evil one].
For power and glory are yours forever.

Pray this way three times a day."

Niederwimmer, Kurt & Attridge, Harold W. (1998). [*The Didache: A Commentary \(Hermeneia\)*](#). Fortress Press. 134.

"It is important that the *Didache* contains a formulated doxology at the end of the prayer. Clearly, the form of the Our Father handed on by [Jesus] did not yet have such a doxology; it is lacking in the Lukan text and also in the original text of Matthew. Adolf Schlatter and Joachim Jeremias have instructed us, however, that the Our Father was one of the prayers 'with the "seal," i.e., with a freely formulated conclusion.' This means that, from the beginning, the one who prayed such prayers formulated a conclusion to the last petition *ex tempore*. It is in the nature of things that over time 'a fixed form of the doxology' was adopted. Such a fixed form for the doxology appears for the first time here in the *Didache*; it later emerges (although expanded; see below) in the 'majority text' of Matthew 6:13* (Manuscripts L W Θ 0233 f13 m f q bopt). We do not know when and where these doxologies emerged. The passage in 1 Chr. 29:11-12* that is often adduced as the model for them is too far removed in its wording. Rabbinic traditions also offer only analogies. Cf. the doxology: 'praised be the name of his glorious kingdom forever and ever.' This is how the priest and people respond to the great confession of sins in the temple cult (Str-B 1.423). The same benediction was spoken after the beginning of the Shema (Str-B, *ibid.*); compare also the Alenu prayer, whose conclusion is introduced by 'for thine is the kingdom' (Str-B, *ibid.*). The object of the benediction is always the kingdom, as is the beginning of the doxology to the Matthean Our Father as later attested by the 'majority text.' Here we should note that it is precisely this kingdom benediction, with which the later doxology of the Lord's Prayer in Matt. 6:13* in the majority text begins, that is lacking in the *Didache*."

Niederwimmer, Kurt & Attridge, Harold W. (1998). [*The Didache: A Commentary \(Hermeneia\)*](#). Fortress Press. 134.

Reflection Question

How does the Lord's Prayer reflect Jesus' own life?

Session 15: Treasure in Heaven

Key Takeaways

- The word *thesauros*, often translated as “treasure,” means “stored goods” and represents whatever possessions we amass to make ourselves feel safe against an unknown future.
- The good eye and bad eye are metaphors for generosity and stinginess, respectively.
- Jesus does not tell his followers not to store up; instead, he tells them to put their storing-up energy into the things of God’s Kingdom rather than the apparent security of wealth.
- The word *mamonas* in Matthew 6:24 is rather unique and may be derived from the word *amen*, giving it the sense of “a thing that secures our trust.”

Loving God & Neighbor

We here enter the third and final part of the middle movement of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus moves on to explore what this “new covenant righteousness” will look like when it comes to the day-to-day matters of life. Specifically how we deal with money, possessions, and anxiety over our wellbeing (6:19-34), and how we relate to other people and God when we have conflicts (7:1-11), which is then summarized in the famous “Golden Rule” (7:12). There is a forward symmetry at work in the rhetorical design of 6:19-7:12 that groups all of the smaller sayings into three parts.

Matthew 6:19-21

Don’t store up treasures on the land, but in the sky (μή + imperative)

- The inverted nature of treasure on the land or in the sky

Matthew 6:22-23

Parable about two eyes: the clear eye or the bad eye

Matthew 6:24

Parable about two masters: God or *mammon* / wealth

Matthew 6:25-34

Longer teaching about trusting the heavenly Father

- **6:26, 30** “**how much more**” (πολλῶ μᾶλλον) will your Father care for you

Matthew 7:1-2

Don't condemn, so that you are not condemned (μή + imperative)

- The inverted nature of judgment in relationships

Matthew 7:3-5

Parable about the eye: the speck and the beam in the eye

Matthew 7:6

Parable about two kinds: holy-pearls and dog-pigs

Matthew 7:7-11

Longer teaching about trusting the heavenly Father

- **7:11** **"how much more"** (πόσω μᾶλλον) will your Father give good things to you

Matthew 7:12

Do to people what you desire them to do to you (imperative)

- The inverted nature of the golden rule: "This is the Torah and Prophets" (link back to 6:17-20)

Matthew 6:9-7:12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

There are nine total literary units in this final section, arranged in a triad that progresses in a pattern of 4+4+1.

- 6:19-34 is focused on the disciples' relationship with wealth, consisting of three short units and a longer conclusion: (a) a short opening general exhortation (6:19-21), (b) two short parables (6:22-23 and 6:24), and (c) a longer closing exhortation to trust the heavenly Father's generosity (6:25-34).
- 7:1-11 is focused on the disciples' relationships to each other, also consisting of three short units and a longer conclusion: (a) a short general exhortation (7:1), (b) two short parables (7:3-5 and 7:6), and (c) a longer closing exhortation to trust in the heavenly Father's care (7:7-11).
- 7:12 is a fitting conclusion to 7:1-11, as it focuses on personal relationships but it also functions as the conclusion of all of 5:17-7:12, linking back to the greater theme of fulfilling the Torah and the Prophets.

However, when we focus in on the internal design of each of these smaller parts, we see a clear pattern emerging. (The following points develop the insights of Dale Allison, "[The Configuration of the Sermon on the Mount and its Meaning](#)," p. 187-195.)

- A - 6:19-24 consists of three shorter units about wealth, each designed with strong antithetical contrasts: two treasures, two eyes, and two masters.
 - 6:19-21: Treasure on the land vs. treasure in heaven: "Don't store up treasure on the land, but store up treasure in heaven."
 - 6:22-23: The generous eye vs. the evil eye: "If your eye is whole there's light, but if your eye is bad, there's darkness."

- 6:24: God vs. Mammon: “You cannot serve two masters, both God and Mammon.”
- B - 6:25-34 is a concluding exhortation that follows from the previous three units. If the disciples are going to share more generously, this will create a scenario where dependence upon God’s fatherly care will become more necessary. Notice the six-fold repetition of the keyword “anxiety” (Greek: *merimnao / μεριμνω*), three of which are a negative imperative, “do not worry” (Greek: *μη μεριμνατε*, 6:25, 31, 34).
- A’ - 7:1-6 also consists of three shorter units about relational dynamics among the disciples, each designed with strong contrast-inversions and keywords that match the three shorter units in 6:19-24.
 - 7:1-2: Do not judge or you will be judged: The judgment by which you judge is the judgment by which you will be judged.
 - 7:3-5: The beam vs. the speck in the eye: Take out the beam in your own eye before you take out the speck in your brother’s eye.
 - 7:6: Holy-pearls vs. dogs-pigs: Don’t give what is holy-pearls to dogs-pigs who will hurt you.
- B’ - 7:7-11 is a conclusion exhortation that follows from the previous three units. If the disciples are going to sometimes withhold judgment of others’ behavior, but then other times engage in judgment, one will need discernment and wisdom, which requires trust in God’s fatherly generosity. Notice the six-fold repetition of the keywords “ask,” “seek,” and “knock.”

The two longer conclusions, 6:25-34 and 7:7-11 have many important parallel relationships.

- They both argue from the lesser to the greater, using similar vocabulary:
 - 6:25-34: “But if (εἰ δὲ) God so clothes the grass of the field ... will he not much more (οὐ πολλῷ μᾶλλον) clothe you?” (6:30).
 - 7:11: “Therefore if (εἰ οὖν) you, who are bad, know how to give good gifts ... how much more (πόσῳ μᾶλλον) will your heavenly Father give good things?”
- Both paragraphs have been built around thematic keywords, repeated six times in groups of three:
 - 6:25-34 repeats “anxiety” (*μεριμνω*) 6 times (6:25, 27, 28, 31, 34); three times as a negative imperative, “do not be anxious” (6:25, 31, 34).
 - 7:7-11 repeats the three words “ask, seek, knock” two times each, for a total of six repetitions.
- Both use twin-parable illustrations: the birds of the air and the lilies of the field / the son who asks for bread and the son who asks for a fish.
- Both units develop naturally from the logic of the three preceding units:
 - 6:25-34 focuses on the trust in God’s fatherly care that becomes necessary if one follows Jesus’ challenges about money, generosity, and Mammon in 6:19-24.
 - 7:7-11 focuses on the trust in God’s generosity that becomes necessary if one is to follow Jesus’ challenges about using discernment in relational conflicts.

When we consolidate all of these observations, we see that 6:19-7:12 has been carefully designed as two parallel panels with matching parts:

Matthew 6:19-34	Matthew 7:1-11
<p>Matt. 6:19-21 Prohibition: "Don't store up treasure ... " Inversion: Treasure on the land vs. the skies</p>	<p>Matt. 7:1-2 Prohibition: "Don't judge ... " Inversion: You judge and will be judged</p>
<p>Matt. 6:22-23 Parable about the eye: "the eye ... your eye ... your eye ... "</p>	<p>Matt. 7:3-5 Parable about the eye: "the eye ... your eye ... your eye ... "</p>
<p>Matt. 6:24 Parable about incompatible loyalties; God vs. wealth</p>	<p>Matt. 7:6 Parable about incompatible; holy-pearls vs. dogs-pigs</p>
<p>Matt. 6:25-34 The heavenly Father's care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "anxious" repeated 6 times • "If ... how much more ... " (6:30) • "Who among you" (6:27) • "Your heavenly father knows ... " (6:32) • "they seek ... you should seek" (6:32-33) 	<p>Matt. 7:7-11 The heavenly Father's care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "ask/seek/knock" repeated 6 times • "If ... how much more ... " (7:11) • "Who among you" (7:9) • "Your father in heaven knows ..." (7:11) • "you seek ... the one who seeks" (7:7-8)
<p><i>Comparing Matthew 6:19-7:11. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).</i></p>	

Loving God With Our Wealth

New Covenant Righteousness and Wealth

A - Matthew 6:19-21

Don't store up wealth on the land,
rather store up in the wealth in the skies

B - Matthew 6:22-23

Parable about two eyes: the genuine-and-generous eye or the bad-greedy eye

B' - Matthew 6:24

Parable about two masters: God or mammon

A' - Matthew 6:25-34

Don't worry about food and clothing,
rather trust your **Father in the skies**

Matthew 6:19-34. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Two Kinds of Wealth, Two Kinds of Master

A a 19 Don't **store up** (θησαυρίζετε) for yourselves **stored-wealth** (θησαυρούς) **on the land** ,
b **where** moth and nibbler can ruin,
c and **where** thieves break in and steal.

A' a 20 But **store up** (θησαυρίζετε) for yourselves **stored-wealth** (θησαυρούς) **in the sky** ,
b **where** neither moth nor nibbler can ruin,
c and **where** thieves do not break in or steal;

B d 21 for **where** your **stored-wealth** is,
there your heart will be also.

A 22 The **lamp** of **the body** is **the eye**;
so then if **your eye** is genuine-and-generous,
your **whole body** will be **radiant** .

B 23 But if **your eye** is bad-and-greedy,
your whole body will be **dark** .

A' **If then** the **light** that is in you is **darkness** ,
how great is the **darkness** !

A 24 **No one is able to serve** **two masters** ;

a for either he will **hate the one**
and **love the other** ,

b' or he will be **devoted to one**
a' and **despise the other**.

A **You are not able to serve God and wealth**.

Matthew 6:19-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Stored Wealth on Heaven and Earth

In a day before bank accounts, the storage of wealth or “treasure” was an obvious challenge of daily life.

“In a culture where banking was embryonic and little used or trusted (see Jesus’ parable of the talents in [25:25–27](#)), ‘treasures’ were normally kept in goods or hard currency in the home or in a supposedly safe place. ... They were thus liable to physical deterioration or theft, and the insecurity of material goods is a recurrent theme of the wisdom writers (see [Prov. 23:4–5](#), [27:24](#); [Eccles. 5:13–17](#)); for the role of the ‘moth’ in this cf. [Ps. 39:11](#); [Job 13:28](#). Equally obvious is the fact that however carefully material wealth may be preserved, it is of no use beyond this life on earth. ... In place of such dubious acquisitions, ‘treasures in heaven’ are a much more desirable alternative. ... The nature of these heavenly treasures is not spelled out here, but later in the gospel we shall hear of ‘inheriting eternal life’ as the compensation for loss of earthly advantages (19:27–29; cf. 16:25–26), of ‘entering the master’s joy’ ([25:21](#), [23](#)) and of ‘inheriting the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’ (25:34), which is further identified as ‘eternal life’ ([25:46](#)). ‘Heaven’ can of course serve as a surrogate for the name of God (as in “the kingdom of heaven” and e.g., in [21:25](#)), so that ‘treasures in heaven’ might be taken to mean ‘treasures with God’ rather than referring specifically to a future life, but here the direct contrast with ‘on earth’ and the sense of provision for the future implied in ‘store up for yourselves’ strongly suggest an other-worldly focus.”

France, R. T. (2007). [The Gospel of Matthew \(The New International Commentary on the New Testament\)](#). Eerdmans. 258.

France makes many good points. Wealth only serves us in this life, so don’t give it more weight than it is due; it’s very fragile.

The nature of the “heavenly wealth” is not spelled out, but elsewhere in Jesus’ teaching it is described as “inheriting eternal life,” “entering the master’s joy,” and “inheriting the kingdom.” “Heaven” is often a swappable term in place of “God,” so that having “treasure in heaven” can equal the reward of God’s presence itself.

“Moth and Nibbler”

“The eater” (Greek: *brosis* / βρωσις), literally “consumables, food.” This is a general word for food that is similar to our English word “edible,” meaning “that which is subject to being eaten.” Here, in Jesus’ figure of speech, it refers to any possession which is vulnerable to being eaten by the typical cast of creatures: insects, rodents, etc.

Many modern translations recognize that this word has another nuance of meaning that feels like the opposite of “edible,” since *brosis* can also describe a creature who is doing the eating:

Matthew 6:19 NIV

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and **vermin** destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

Matthew 6:19 NET

Do not accumulate for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and **devouring insect** destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

Matthew 6:19 LEB

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and **consuming insect** destroy and where thieves break in and steal,

This nuance of meaning is found in the Septuagint of Malachi 3:11 to refer to locusts eating grain stores.

Malachi 3:10–11 NIV*

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

I will prevent **pests** (Septuagint: *brosis*) from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the Lord Almighty.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Older English translations have the rendering “rust,” which comes from the influence of the parallel passage in [James 5:2-3](#) (moth and rust, Greek: *ios* / *ιος*) and from old Latin translation, the Vulgate, which translated *brosis* as *erugo*, meaning “rust.”

Moth (Greek: *ses* / *σης*): Moths were associated with destroying clothing, especially clothing that is being stored and currently unworn.

Psalms 39:11 NASB

When you rebuke and discipline anyone for their sin, **you consume their wealth like a moth—**surely everyone is but a breath.

Isaiah 50:9 NASB

Behold, the Lord God helps me;
Who is he who condemns me?
Behold, they will all wear out **like a garment;**
the moth will eat them.

Isaiah 51:8 NASB

“For **the moth will eat them like a garment,**
and the grub will eat them like wool.

But my righteousness will be forever,
And my salvation to all generations.”

Job 13:28 NASB

While I am decaying like a rotten thing,
like a garment that is moth-eaten.

Epistle of Jeremiah v. 12

“They dress up their idols in clothes like human beings—gods of **silver and gold and wood!**
12 Although **draped in purple clothes**, these gods **cannot save themselves from rust and moths.**”

Moore, Carey A. (1995). [*Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah: The Additions \(The Anchor Yale Bible\)*](#). Yale University Press. 337.

James 5:1–3 NASB

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.
Your riches have rotted and your garments have become **moth-eaten**.
Your gold and your silver have **rusted**; and their **rust** will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!

“Treasure in the Skies”

“Treasure in the skies” was a common theme in Second Temple literature, developed out of the hope that God had an Eden-like existence in store for all of creation in the future, which would have a totally different economy.

References to this new creation treasure abound.

Tobit 4:8–9 NRSVCE

If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. **So you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity.**

Psalms of Solomon 9:5 NRSVCE

He that does righteousness **lays up** (θησαυρίζει) **for himself life with the Lord**

2 Baruch 14:12 NRSVCE

For the righteous justly have good hope for the end
and go away from this habitation without fear
because **they possess with you a store of good works which is preserved in treasuries.**

2 Baruch 24:1 NRSVCE

For behold, the days are coming, and the books will be opened in which are written the sins of all those who have sinned, and moreover, also **the treasuries in which are brought together the righteousness of all those who have proven themselves to be righteous.**

Wisdom of Ben Sira 29:10-12 NRSVCE

Lose your silver for the sake of a brother or a friend,
and do not let it rust under a stone and be lost.
Lay up your treasure according to the commandments of the Most High,
and it will profit you more than gold.
Store up almsgiving in your treasury,
and it will rescue you from every disaster;

Jesus elsewhere elaborates on this “heavenly reward” for losses suffered on earth, but not in a way that gives us any kind of “literal” explanation.

Matthew 19:16, 20–22 Instructor's Translation

¹⁶ And someone came to him and said,
“Teacher, what good thing shall I do **that I may have eternal life?**” ...

²⁰ The young man said to him,
“All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?”

²¹ Jesus said to him,
“If you wish to be complete,
**go and sell your possessions and give to the poor,
and you will have stored-wealth in the skies;**
and come, follow me.”

²² But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving;
for he was one who owned much property.

Matthew 25:21 LEB

His master said to him,
“Well done, good and faithful slave!
You were faithful over a few things;
I will put you in charge over many things.
Enter into the joy of your master!”

Matthew 19:28–29 NASB

And Jesus said to them,
“Truly I say to you, that you who have followed me,
in the rebirthing, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne,
you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms,
for my name’s sake,
**they will receive many times as much,
and they will inherit eternal life.**”

Matthew 25:34 LEB

Then the king will say to those on his right,
“Come, you who are blessed by my Father.

Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!”

“[W]hile the theme of reward is important in this gospel, we must remind ourselves again that in the parable which most directly addresses the issue (20:1–15) there is a deliberate discrepancy between the effort expended and the recompense received: God does not leave anyone unfairly treated, but his grace is not limited to human deserving. In a kingdom in which the first are last and the last first (19:30; 20:16) there is no room for computing one’s ‘treasures in heaven’ on the basis of earthly effort. Those treasures are ‘stored up’ not by performing meritorious acts (and certainly not only by alms-giving) but by belonging to and living by the priorities of the kingdom of heaven.”

France, R. T. (2007). [*The Gospel of Matthew \(The New International Commentary on the New Testament\)*](#). Eerdmans. 259.

Matthew 20:10–15 NIV

¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.

¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner.

¹² “These who were hired last worked only one hour,” they said, “and you have made them equal to us, who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.”

¹³ “But he answered one of them, “I am not doing you wrong, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?

¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I desire to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you.

¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I desire with what is mine? **Or is your eye bad because I am good?”**

In this sense, Jesus’ teaching is similar to that of Paul, who develops the heavenly treasure image.

1 Timothy 6:17–19 NIV

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

In this way **they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age**, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

It’s probably worth noting that Jesus is not here commanding poverty or the itinerant life for all of his disciples. He elsewhere counsels the strategic use of wealth for navigating life in this world.

Luke 16:9–13 LEB

⁹ And I tell you, **make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon**, so that when it runs out they will welcome you into the eternal dwellings.

¹⁰ The one who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much, and the one who is dishonest in very little is also dishonest in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful with unrighteous wealth (lit. *mammona*), who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who

will give you your own?

¹³ No domestic slave is able to serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and will despise the other. You are not able to serve God and *mammon*.

The Lamp of the Body

The basic idea of this short riddle seems clear-ish on a first reading. Our eyes are like a window into our body, which can lead to inner light or darkness, but also leads to that inner light or darkness radiating out as well.

But how does this metaphor work, actually? And why is Jesus bringing up eyes at all in a section of teaching on wealth and generosity?

There is an important clue in the word Jesus uses to describe the “good” eye in contrast to a “bad” eye.

Matthew 6:22-23 Instructor's Translation

²² “If, however, your eye is **haplous** (Greek ἀπλοῦς) ...

²³ But if your eye is **poneros** (Greek πονηρός) ...

This rare Greek word *haplous* is used only here and in the parallel saying in [Luke 11:34](#). The root word is *haplous* (Greek ἀπλόος), which in [Liddell-Scott's Lexicon](#) has the following nuances of meaning:

1. “single”
2. “simple, plain, straightforward”
3. “simple, as in whole, unmixed,” the opposite of διπλᾶ “two-fold” or “divided”

The word *haplous* means “whole,” with the meaning of “whole and uncompromised” (equivalent to “complete” *teleios* in [5:48](#)). Our English word “genuine” is a good rendering.

The word *haplous* can stand in contrast to “bad” in [6:23](#). So, by inference, it can also mean “a good eye,” which is a figure of speech for “generous,” as discussed below.

The noun related to this root occurs often in the New Testament, *hoplotes*, which can mean “simplicity, sincerity” ([Eph. 6:5](#); [Col. 3:22](#); [2 Cor. 1:12](#)), or also “generosity”.

Romans 12:8 NASB*

Let the one who gives, give with **hoplotes**

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

2 Corinthians 8:2 NASB*

their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their **hoplotes**

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

2 Corinthians 9:11 NASB*

you will be enriched in all things with **hoplotes**, producing gratefulness to God

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

James 1:5 NASB*

If any of you lacks wisdom, let them ask God who gives **haplos** ... and it will be given to him

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

This meaning of *hoplotes* as “generous” is the binary opposite of “a bad eye” in biblical Hebrew idiom (*ra’ ayin*), meaning “jealous stinginess,” and is related to “good eye” (*tov ayin*), meaning generosity.”

Proverbs 22:9 Instructor's Translation

He who is **good of eye** will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor.

Proverbs 23:6-7 NASB

Do not eat the bread of one with **a bad eye**, or desire his delicacies;
For as he thinks within himself, so he is.
He says to you, “Eat and drink!”
But his heart is not with you.

Proverbs 28:22 NASB

A man with **a bad eye** hastens after wealth
And does not know that want will come upon him.

Jesus himself uses the phrase “bad eye” for “stinginess” later in his parable of the delayed laborers.

Matthew 20:15 Instructor's Translation

Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your **eye bad** because I am generous?

Mark 7:21-22 Instructor's Translation

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, **a bad eye (“envy”)**, slander, pride and foolishness.

Jesus is using the common binary phrase of the “good eye” or the “bad eye” as figures of speech for generosity or stinginess. But instead of using the phrase “good eye,” we find *haplous*, which means “genuine, sincere,” as an image of focused generosity.

The Eye is the Lamp of the Body

The “eye as a lamp” metaphor is developed out of a common figure of speech in biblical and later Jewish literature:

- The “light of the eyes” is a mark of happiness. (Prov. 15:30 “Light of the eyes brings joy to the heart”)
- Eyes being enlightened or darkened can be a mark of life and vigor or decline and death.
 - The weary Jonathan’s eyes “brighten” when he tastes honey (1 Sam. 14:27).
 - Ezra asks God to “enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage” (Ezra 9:8).
 - The eyes of divine beings are sometimes described as lamps that shine light out as they look (Dan. 10:6; Zech. 4:2, 10).

Daniel 10:5–6 NASB

I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz. His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, **his eyes were like flaming torches**, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult.

Zechariah 4:1–2 NASB

Then the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me, as a man who is awakened from his sleep. He said to me, “What do you see?” And I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and **its seven lamps on it** with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it;

Zechariah 4:10 NASB

... But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel—**these are the eyes of the LORD** which range to and fro throughout the earth.

Psalms 38:10 NASB

My heart throbs, my strength fails me;
and **the light of my eyes, even that has gone from me.**

The image is strange to us because the “eye is a lamp” metaphor makes one think the eye is a source of light that shines out into the world, making one’s path clear. But that’s not quite what Jesus goes on to say. He rather makes the body the location of light or darkness, as if the eye is some kind of translucent conduit of light or dark.

This has led to two views about the relationship between the light and the eye in this saying of Jesus, and scholars turn to ancient sources to figure out which view was more widely held in the ancient world.

1. The extramission view: The eyes shine out light based on an inner source of light and vitality.
2. The intramission view: The eyes are a conduit for external light/darkness that enters and thus affects one’s well-being.

“[C]ommentators have not been able to agree on how the image works here in relation to the body. A common view that the eye is the “window” through which light enters the body suggests the surprising notion that light is needed inside the body. Or the idea might be that our awareness of light around us comes through the eye, but ‘lamp’ is not the most obvious way to say that. The lamp metaphor more naturally suggests the function of the eye in providing the light which shows the body the way to go, but the following adjectives (light/dark) indicate that it’s the body itself, not its surroundings, which is either ‘illuminated’ or ‘in the dark’ depending on how well the eye functions—see the final comment on ‘the light which is in you’ being darkness. Perhaps we can be no more definite than to say that the imagery depends on light being necessary for the proper functioning of the body (person) and that this light is in some way dependent on the condition of the eye.”

France, R. T. (2007). [*The Gospel of Matthew \(The New International Commentary on the New Testament\)*](#). Eerdmans. 260-261.

“[W]ithin Matthew’s usage one could argue that the strong internal/external person theme is at play here with the idea that the light or darkness inside of a person comes out in one’s actions (being generous or greedy); even as Jesus says elsewhere, it is what is already inside a person, not what goes in, that defiles him or her because this is where the heart is (Matt. 15:10-20). This would accord with the extramission view. On the other hand, one could argue that the way the eye metaphor works in Matt. 6:22-23 is that one’s actions (generous versus stingy) create in us light or darkness, based on the wording ‘will be light/darkness.’ This would be an intromission understanding. ... [T]here is wisdom in not getting stuck in this debate, recognizing that either way the point is that the eye is a metaphorical window between the inside and the outside of a person. This is clearly a major ... theme [in the sermon]—the organic connection between the inside and the outside of the person and the necessity of integration/wholeness for true righteousness.”

Pennington, Jonathan (2017). [*The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*](#). Baker Academic. 241.

“Pre-modern people tended to believe that the eyes contain a fire or light, and that this fire or light is what makes sight possible. ... Ancient Jews were no exception. They spoke of ‘the light of the eyes’ (Prov. 15:30 MT; Tob. 10:5; 11:13), of eyes becoming dimmed or darkened (Gen. 27:1, 48:10; Deut. 34:7; Lam. 5:17; T. Benj. 4:2; Josephus, Ant. 8:268; b. Ber. 16b), and of God ‘enlightening’ or ‘brightening’ the eyes (Ezra 9:8; Bar. 1:12; cf. 1 Sam. 14:24–30 MT; T. Gad. 5:7; b. Yeb. 63a; b. Meg. 12b). They imagined that the eye was like the sun, both being senders of rays (2 Sam. 12:11; Ecclus. 23:19; 3 Bar. 8; Jos. Asen. 14:9), and they told stories in which the light or fire of the eyes actually became so intense that it was visible (Dan. 10:6; Rev. 1:14, 2:18, 19:12; 1 En. 106:2, 5, 10; 2 En. 1:5; 3 En 1:7–8; 9:4; 25:2–3, 6–7; Par. Jer. 7:3; b. B. Meṣ. 59b; b. Šabb. 33b).”

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [*Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)*](#). T&T Clark International. 635.

“A lamp is not a medium through which light from another source is channeled to an otherwise dark place. A lamp is rather its own source of light. From this alone it follows that the eye/lamp comparison would be natural only for one holding an extramission theory of vision. In line with this, in the six Jewish texts which liken the eye to a lamp, namely, in Dan. 10:6; Zech. 4; T. Job 18:3; 2 En. 42:1A; 3 En. 35:2; and b. Šabb. 151b, the comparison never has to do with the eye conveying light to the inward parts. On the contrary, in all six instances it is used to create the picture of a light coming forth from the eye.”

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [*Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)*](#). T&T Clark International. 635-636.

“C. C. Torrey made sense of the words by arguing for an Aramaic original that was imperfectly translated into Greek. According to him, Jesus himself said, ‘If however your whole body is lighted up with no part dark, then all about you will be light, just as the lamp lights you with its brightness’ (Four Gospels, p. 309-10). The key to this reconstruction is the supposition that *ἔσται φωτεινὸν ὅλον* renders (incorrectly) *nahir leh`we kōllā*. This last word, rendered correctly as the adjective in the first clause, is here unquestionably the noun, ‘the whole, everything’. ‘The man who is full of light lights the world about him’ (*ibid*). Now it is hardly possible to show beyond reasonable doubt that Torrey—who was followed by Manson, Sayings (Sayings, pp. 93–4)—was correct in his conjecture. Nevertheless the result is a sentence which recalls other lines in the Jesus tradition (e.g. Mt. 5:14–16 and Gos. Thom. 24). So Torrey may very well have been on the mark. If so, then at least the earliest interpreter of the saying about the eye as lamp, that is, the author of

Lk. 11:36, understood Jesus' words in terms of the extramission theory of vision. This is so because it is natural to judge the sentence, 'If however your whole body is lighted up with no part dark, then all about you will be light,' as an extension of the 'eye as lamp metaphor.' Just as the healthy, good eye sends light into the world, so too do the righteous, filled with the light of God, dispel the shades around them. They are like a lamp that gives light to its environment. Which is to say: the picture is not of light coming in but of light going out. (5) Clement of Alexandria seems to have read our passage as involving the extramission theory of vision. In Paed. 3:11:70 there is this: 'the lamp of the body is the eye, Scripture says, δι' οὗ καταφαίνεται τὰ ἔνδον φωτὶ τῶ φαινομένῳ καταυγαζόμενα'." Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 636-637.

"[I]t seems likely that this saying is meant to indicate that one indication of a person's spiritual health is their generosity or lack of it in the use of their material possessions. So this rather obscure little saying seems to be using a word-play, which the English translator cannot reproduce without extensive paraphrase, in order to commend both single-mindedness (in pursuing the values of the kingdom of heaven) and generosity ... as a key to the effective life of a disciple."

France, R. T. (2007). [The Gospel of Matthew \(The New International Commentary on the New Testament\)](#). Eerdmans. 262.

God and Mammon

A 24 **No one is able to serve two masters ;**

B
 a for either he will **hate the one**
 b and **love the other** ,
 b' or he will be **devoted to one**
 a' and **despise the other** .

A **You are not able to serve God and wealth .**

Matthew 6:19-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

The word translated as "wealth" is an Aramaic word spelled in Greek *mammona* (μαμωνᾶ) which equals the Aramaic מַמְוֹן from מַאמְוֹן. Why Matthew chose to transliterate an Aramaic word here instead of providing a Greek equivalent is not clear. It could have been a popular oral saying in early Christian circles that he wanted to preserve in original form, or it could be to retain the personification aspect of the word, so that *mammon* is pitted against God himself.

Mammon “probably is a maqtāl form of the root ’amen (אמן) with the meaning of ‘that in which one puts trust’, with ‘money, riches’ as a derivative meaning. ... [In Jesus’ teaching] Mammon is personified as an evil and superhuman power that stands in competition to God and by possessing people can even keep them from being devoted to God and make them hate Him.”

van der Horst, P. W. (1999). “Mammon,” [Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible](#). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 542.

Jesus uses the word *mammona* one other time, the parallel saying in Luke 16:11, followed by the parable about the shrewd manager:

Luke 16:10–11 Instructor's Translation

He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous **mammona**, who will entrust the true riches to you?

In this second usage of the word, Jesus does not personify *mammona*, which should perhaps make us hesitate to conclude that *mammona* is an actual spiritual being in Jesus’ imagination. Rather, Jesus personifies *mammona* in order to depict its power over the human will and mind.

“[T]he point is ... that one cannot serve two masters well, giving each his due, because their demands will not always be compatible. This is true above all when the masters are God and mammon. For God, who demands self-sacrifice, commands an exclusive allegiance and obligation which must transcend all other claimants for a person’s soul; while mammon, once it has its hooks in human flesh, will drag it where it wills, all the time whispering into the ear dreams of self-aggrandizement. The marching orders of God and of mammon are in entirely different directions.”

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 641-642.

There are many texts in the Hebrew Bible that contrast one’s trust in wealth with one’s trust in God (see [Ps. 49](#) and [Ps. 52](#)).

Reflection Question

What does Jesus mean when he says to “store up for yourselves stored-wealth in the sky”?

Session 16: Worry and Wealth

Key Takeaways

- Jesus teaches us to shift our mental focus from excessive concern about wealth and security to trusting God and seeking to do right by him.
- The Greek word *merimnao*, often translated as “worry,” can be positive or negative and deals with what we “have concern for.” It is not equivalent to a modern understanding of clinical anxiety.
- This wisdom is difficult, but Jesus models the lifestyle he teaches. He has no home or possessions, and his path leads to (and through) death, but he faithfully trusts his Father in the skies with his whole life.

Do Not Worry

25 Because of this I say to y'all,

- a **do not worry** about your **life-being** ,
b what you will **eat** or what you will **drink** ;
- a' not even about your **body** ,
b' what you will **put on** .

Isn't the **living-being** more than **food** ,
and the **body** more than **clothing** ?

- a 26 **Look at the birds of the air** ,
how they don't sow seed ,
and they don't harvest ,
and they don't gather into barns ;

A

b and yet **your Father in the skies** **feeds** **them** .

a' Aren't you all **much more** valuable than **they** ?

B 27 And who among you is able to add an hour to your life-span by **worry** ?

a 28 And about **clothing**, why are you all **worrying**?

Pay attention to the lilies of the field,

how they grow .

They don't labor ,

and they don't weave cloth ;

A' b 29 but I say to you all,
that not even Solomon in all his honor **clothed** himself like **one of these**.

a' 30 Now, if **the grass of the field**,
which is there today and tomorrow is tossed into the furnace,
is **clothed** this way by God,
won't he **much more** **clothe** you all, who have so little trust?!

A 31 So then, **don't worry**, saying,
"What will we **eat**?"
or "What will we **drink**?"
or "What will we wear for **clothing**?"

B 32 For the nations, they constantly **seek for** **all these-things**,
for **your Father in the skies** knows that you need **all that**.
33 Rather, first **seek** for **the Kingdom of God**
and **doing-right by him**,
and **all these-things** will be added to you.

A' 34 So then, **don't worry** about tomorrow.
Tomorrow can **worry** about itself!
Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Matthew 6:25-34. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

These sayings go back to the opening contrast between "treasure on the land or in the sky." If one's sense of security is based on earthly treasure, Jesus probes into the inner-psychology and experience of basing one's trust on such things. It produces a lot of anxiety.

Freedom from anxiety is rooted in a conception of the universe: that it is a safe place where I'm welcomed by a generous host. The overabundance I see in nature comes from a creator who shows that same generosity towards me. This mindset is what frees me from a scarcity mindset to release resources to others.

What kind of tradition forms a person to speak like this? (You can't just say, "Well, he's Jesus!") How is a person formed who looks at birds and flowers and grass and sees signs of God's generosity and overabundant love? These words sound almost irresponsible to Type-A, hardworking people. With these words, Jesus is articulating a way of seeing the world that is rooted in Hebrew Scriptures and their depiction of God's generosity.

There are also the wise sayings in Proverbs about saving up enough money so that one has provision in the day of need.

Proverbs 6:6-11 NASB

⁶ Go to the ant, O sluggard,
observe her ways and be wise,
⁷ which, having no chief,
officer or ruler,
⁸ prepares her food in the summer
and gathers her provision in the harvest.
⁹ How long will you lie down, O sluggard?
When will you arise from your sleep?
¹⁰ "A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest"—
¹¹ your poverty will come in like a vagabond
and your need like an armed man.

Proverbs 24:30-34 NASB

³⁰ I passed by the field of the sluggard
and by the vineyard of the man lacking sense,
³¹ and behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles;
its surface was covered with nettles,
and its stone wall was broken down.
³² When I saw, I reflected upon it;
I looked, and received instruction.
³³ "A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest,"
³⁴ then your poverty will come as a robber
and your want like an armed man.

Proverbs 10:5 NASB

He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely,
but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully.

Proverbs 20:4 NASB

The sluggard does not plow after the autumn,
so he begs during the harvest and has nothing.

Psalm 104:10–17 LEB

¹⁰ **You are the one who sends** forth springs into the valleys;
they flow between the mountains.

¹¹ They give drink for every beast of the field.
The wild donkeys [quench] their thirst.

¹² Along them **the birds of the heavens** abide.
From among the branches they [sing].

¹³ **You are the one who [waters]** the mountains
from his upper chambers.

The earth is full with the fruit of your labors:

¹⁴ **who causes** grass to grow for the cattle
and herbs for the service of humankind,
to bring forth food from the earth,

¹⁵ and wine that makes glad the heart of man,
so that their faces shine from oil,
and bread that strengthens the heart of man.

¹⁶ **The trees of Yahweh** drink their fill,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted,

¹⁷ where birds make their nest.

The stork has its home in the fir trees.

Worry or Anxiety or What?

The Greek word used for “worry” here is the verb *merimnao* (μεριμνάω), related to the noun “worry” (*merimna* / *μέριμνα*). These words appear 25 times in the New Testament and have a wider range of meaning than the English word “worry.”

The word *merimna* can have a positive meaning, in the sense of “concern” that is appropriate and good.

Philippians 2:19–20 NASB*

But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be ***merimnao*** for your welfare.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

1 Corinthians 12:25 NASB*

so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same ***merimna*** for one another.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

2 Corinthians 11:28 NASB*

Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of ***merimna*** for all the churches.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The word *merimna* can also have a negative effect, steering the mind into a posture of fear and anxiety.

Philippians 4:6-7 NIV*

Do not be **merimnao** about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Matthew 10:18-19 NASB*

and you will even be brought before governors and kings for my sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they hand you over, do not **merimnao** about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Luke 8:14 NASB*

The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with **merimna** and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Luke 21:34 NIV*

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the **merimna** of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

So the act of showing concern is not negative in and of itself. Rather, good concern develops into unhealthy concern depending on the degree and the object of our concern. Notice how Paul uses the flexibility of this word in the same paragraph.

1 Corinthians 7:32-34 NASB*

But I want you to be free from *merimna*. One who is unmarried is **merimnao** about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is **merimnao** about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is **merimnao** about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is **merimnao** about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Reflection Question

What does Jesus mean when he tells us, "Do not worry," in [Matthew 6:25-34](#)?

Session 17: Do Not Judge

Key Takeaways

- The Greek word *krino* (“to judge”) ranges in meaning from a positive discernment to a negative condemnation.
- Jesus knows we will face moments when we think we need to make a judgment. He wants us to see these as opportunities to first examine ourselves, then to consider whether the situation we are facing will benefit from our discernment or whether making a determination will only stir up conflict.
- The words “pig” and “dog” were commonly used in Jesus’ time to negatively refer to non-Israelites, but Jesus’ interactions with non-Israelites (see Matthew 15:21-39) should guard against an overly simplistic reading of how he used those words.

Loving Your Neighbor

Matthew 7:1-6

7:1-2

A - **Don't** condemn, so that you are not condemned ($\mu\eta$ + imperative)

- The inverted nature of judgment in relationships
- With the measure you measure it will be measured to you ($\acute{\upsilon}\mu\iota\nu$)

7:3-5

B - **Parable about two eyes:** the speck and the beam in the eye

7:6

A' - **Parable about two kinds:** **Don't** give holy pearls to pig-dogs

Matthew 7:7-11

B'' - Ask, seek, knock, because your Father loves to give good gifts

Matthew 7:12

A' - **Do** to people what you desire them to do to you (imperative + $\acute{\upsilon}\mu\iota\nu$)

- The inverted nature of the golden rule: "This is the Torah and Prophets" (link back to **Matt. 6:17-20**)

Matthew 7:1-12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

a 7:1 **Do not judge**,
b so that you will not **be judged**,

A a' 2 because with the **judgment** that you **judge**
b' you will **be judged**,

a" and with the measure that you **measure**
b" it will **be measured** to you.

a 3 Why do you **see the speck** in **the eye of your brother**,
but you don't **perceive the beam** in your eye!

b 4 Or, how can you say to **your brother**,
"Allow me **to take out the speck** from **your eye**."

B c And look, **the beam** is in **your eye**!

b' 5 Hypocrite! First **take out the beam from your eye**,
a' and then you can **see-clearly the speck** in **the eye of your brother**.

a 6 **Do not give** what is holy to **dogs**,
b and don't throw your pearls in front of **pigs**,
b' so **they** don't trample them with their feet,
a' and turning around, **they** will tear you apart.

A a 7 **Ask** and it will be **given** to you,
b **seek** and you will **find**,
c **knock** and it will be **opened** for you,

a' 8 for everyone who asks will receive,
b' and the one who **seeks** will **find**,
c' and to the one who **knocks** it will be **opened**.

- B a ⁹ Or, what person is among you
b who, when **their son** asks for bread,
c will he **give** him a rock?

- B' b' ¹⁰ Or, when he asks for a fish,
c' will he **give** him a snake?

- C a ¹¹ So then, if you all are bad,
b but you know to **give good gifts** to **your children**,
a' how **much more** **your Father in the skies**,
b' he will **give good things** to those who ask.

¹² So then, everything you desire
that **people to do to you**,
so **also you do to them** ;
for this is the **Torah and the Prophets**.

Matthew 7:1-12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Do Not Condemn

- A a ^{7:1} **Do not judge**,
b so that you will not **be judged**,
a' ² because with the **judgment** that you **judge**
b' you will **be judged**,
a'' and with the measure that you **measure**
b'' it will **be measured** to you.

Matthew 7:1-12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Jesus begins with a general prohibition, which is intentionally open-ended. The generality is clarified and unpacked in the parable that follows in [7:3-6](#). However, it's important to first take in what this opening

statement means on its own.

“Do not judge” (Greek: *μὴ κρίνετε*) is a rhetorically powerful and categorical statement aimed at addressing all areas of life and relationships. He intends his words about judging to have a universal scope. However, given what he is about to say, this cannot possibly be a comprehensive prohibition that forbids all forms of decision making and moral judgments. The closest evidence for this claim is the list of clarifications that follow in [7:3-6](#), which is all about making moral evaluations of oneself and others. To evaluate “the beam in one’s own eye” requires a judgment, just as discerning whether or not to offer wisdom to another person requires careful judgment. While the rhetorical purpose of this opening line is extreme, it’s clear from the immediate context that Jesus is prohibiting a specific way or manner of making moral judgments.

In Matthew, Jesus is portrayed as someone who lives out his own teachings with total consistency, and Jesus clearly made judgments about the behavior of other people (like the Pharisees and Bible scribes in [Matthew 23](#), for example).

Jesus also makes clear in the following parables that there is an appropriate time and place for “taking out the speck” of your brother’s eye ([7:3-5](#)) and for deciding that your feedback won’t be received well ([7:6](#)). The import of these parables is that only after a lot of self-critical judgment should one undertake to evaluate the behavior of others.

People often use wide-scale prohibitions as a rhetorical device to make clear how seriously we mean what we say. As an illustration, if a parent tells their child, “Do not yell at your sibling,” it’s clear that they mean yelling out of anger or frustration. But if the child sees their sibling running into a busy street and no parent is around, it is definitely okay to yell, “Look out! Come back!”

So what is the specific manner of judgment that Jesus is prohibiting here?

The word “judge” is the Greek word *krino* (*κρίνω*), and the noun “judgment” is *krima*, which in Second Temple Jewish Greek corresponds to the Hebrew words *shapat* (*שָׁפַט*), “to judge,” and *mishpat* (*מִשְׁפָּט*), “judgment.”

Krino is the most general word for evaluating someone’s behavior and forming a judgment about it. That is, making a decision or conclusion based on that evaluation.

Within this general idea, there are more specific nuances to the word *krino* as used in the New Testament and the Old Greek Septuagint.

Moral Discernment: Deciding Between Good or Bad, Right or Wrong

Acts 4:19–20 NASB*

But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the one to ***krino***; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Making a Decision Based on Multiple Alternatives: Good vs. Best

Acts 15:19 NASB*

Therefore it is my **krisis** that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Acts 20:16 NASB*

For Paul had **krino** to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Making a Pronouncement About Someone's Status in a Court or Social Setting

John 8:10–11 NASB*

Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one **condemn (katakrino)** you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not **judge (krino)** you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

John 18:31 NASB*

So Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves, and **krino** him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death,"

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Acts 25:9–10 NASB*

But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and be **krino'd** before me on these charges?"

But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be **krino'd**. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know."

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

God's Verdict on a Person/Group

John 12:47–48 NIV*

If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not **krino** that person. For I did not come to **krino** the world, but to save the world.

There is a **krino** for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will **krino** them at the last day.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Acts 17:30–31 NASB*

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because he has fixed a day in which he will **krino** the world in righteousness through a man whom he has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Passages That Bring Various Meanings Together

Romans 2:1–3 NASB*

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who **passes judgment**, for in that which you **judge** another, you **condemn (katakrimo)** yourself; for you who **judge** practice the same things.

And we know that the **judgment** of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.

But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the **judgment** of God?

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Romans 14:4–5 NASB*

Who are you to **judge** the servant of another?

To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One person **judges** one day above another, another **judges** every day alike.

Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

It seems clear that Jesus had this last nuance of meaning in mind: Jesus is prohibiting the act of taking upon oneself the prerogative to pronounce final or ultimate judgment on another person, presuming to have a divine vantage point on a person's character and motives.

This saying of Jesus was clearly influential on early Christianity, as the apostles regularly adopted and adapted the teaching in various ways, always clarifying what they understood Jesus to mean.

Romans 14:10 NASB

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

1 Corinthians 4:5 NASB

Therefore do not go on **passing judgment** before the time, but **wait until the Lord comes** who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness **and disclose the motives of men's hearts**; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

2 Corinthians 5:10 NASB

For we must all appear before **the judgment seat of Christ**, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

James 4:11–12 NASB

Do not **speak against one another**, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or **judges** his brother, speaks against the law and **judges** the law. ... There is only one Lawgiver and **Judge**, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who **judge** your neighbor?

The problem James is addressing is Christians taking it upon themselves to pronounce God's judgment on another person.

“James warns his readers that when they begin to judge (condemn) others, they are assuming the posture of God, not the posture of humans. In assuming that posture, they have usurped the role of God and begun to be the ones who determine what is right and wrong, and who is right and who is wrong.”

McKnight, Scot (2013). [Sermon on the Mount \(The Story of God Bible Commentary\)](#). Zondervan.

“Jesus warns his disciples against setting themselves over others and making a pronouncement of their guilt before God. We should be careful in making these kinds of judgments, because we too will be judged for committing a sin worse than that which we are accusing.”

Wilkins, Michael J. (2003). [Matthew \(The NIV Application Commentary\)](#). Zondervan Academic. 308.

“‘Do not judge’ (μὴ κρίνετε) implies that the individual, acting upon what Luther called ‘self-centered wisdom’, is playing the judge (cf. Jn. 5:30). He is taking up a role he should not be playing because it is reserved for the only capable judge, God. (Cf. 13:36–43, 47–50, where the sorting out of evil from good awaits the great assize). Thus κρίνω is almost synonymous with κατακρίνω = ‘condemn’ (cf. 12:41–42; 20:18; Rom. 2:1, 3). This inference is borne out by the meaning of the verb in the second half of the present clause. ‘Do not judge, lest ye be judged’, means, ‘Do not judge, lest ye be condemned [by God at the final judgement]’.”

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 668-669.

However, Jesus is not telling his disciples to never exercise moral discernment and make decisions as a result. One could not follow any of the other teachings of Jesus without such discernment. Dallas Willard (in *The Divine Conspiracy*) captured well the precise nuance that Jesus is going after here:

“What is it, exactly, that we do when we condemn someone? We really communicate that he or she is, in some deep and just possibly irredeemable way, bad—bad as a whole, and to be rejected. He or she is not acceptable. We sentence that person to exclusion. ... Now, to be fair, we rarely intend such total rejection, but that is what usually comes across. And to correct another person without making that happen requires great spiritual and personal maturity.”

Willard, Dallas (1998). [The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God](#). Harper. 218.

“Note Paul’s expression of Jesus’ teaching in Galatians 6:1: ‘Brothers, if someone really is caught in a sin, the spiritual ones among you are the ones to restore him. Do it in a humble and non-presumptuous spirit, considering yourselves, lest you too be put to the test. Feel the weight others are feeling, and thus you will fulfill Christ’s teaching.’

1. Don’t try to correct someone unless you are absolutely sure. If love ‘hopes all things’ (1 Cor. 13), and there is any lack of clarity, assume you’re wrong.
2. Correction is reserved for those in whom God’s spirit has produced the fruit of humility and gentleness.
3. Only what serves the purpose of helping them see clearly the teachings of Jesus should be mentioned.
4. The one attempting to correct should know certainly that they themselves could be caught in the same trap; i.e., any sense of self-righteousness is absent; the motive is purely compassion and that person’s well-being. This is the point of ‘feeling their burden.’

Condemnation always involves some degree of self-righteousness and distancing ourselves from the one we're condemning. ... Contempt is a major part of condemnation, and when we drop contempt from our soul, condemnation rarely occurs.

We must beware of the idea that it's okay for us to condemn as long as we are condemning the right things. It's not so simple as all that. I can trust Jesus to go into the temple and drive out those who were distorting its purpose with a whip. I cannot trust myself to do so."

Adapted from Willard, Dallas (1998). [*The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God*](#). Harper. 221.

Condemnation most often results in shame, not restoration.

Matthew 7:1: " ... so that you will not be judged."

- The passive verb "be judged" is likely a "divine passive." Meaning, God will hold us accountable based on the criteria by which we have evaluated others.
- God will hold you accountable for how you treat people. This idea is fleshed out in the following explanation.

This last line also introduces the idea that any and all of our judgments are always provisional and could be incorrect, given that we don't know the depths of people's hearts and the details of their stories.

If you evaluate the behavior of others by a double standard, judging their behavior as wrong but not applying that same standard to yourself, you will be held accountable.

"The measure by which you measure" (Greek: *metron* / *metreo*): In this line, Jesus uses vocabulary from the marketplace, measurements of grain or commodities, but he also adopts a well-known traditional saying from Second Temple and later rabbinic Judaism.

Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 100a:

"In a related matter, it is taught in a baraita that Rabbi Meir says: In accordance with the measure that a person metes out for others the heavenly court metes out for him, i.e., the response is commensurate with the action."

Neusner, Jacob (2011). [*The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*](#). Hendrickson Publishers.

2 Enoch 44:5 NRSVCE

Because on the day of the great judgment, every weight and every measure and every set of scales will be just as they are in the market. That is to say, **each will be weighed in the balance**, and each will stand in the market, **and each will find out his own measure and in accordance with that measurement** each shall receive his own reward.

The Speck in the Eye

a ³ Why do you **see** **the speck** in **the eye of your brother** ,
but you don't **perceive** **the beam** in your eye!

b ⁴ Or, how can you say to **your brother** ,
"Allow me **to take out** **the speck** from **your eye** ."

B

c And look, **the beam** is in **your eye** !

b' ⁵ Hypocrite! First **take out** **the beam from** **your eye** ,
a' and then you can **see-clearly** **the speck** in **the eye of your brother** .

Matthew 7:1-12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Vivid parable using images from the carpenter's workshop: speck (tiny dust speck), splinter, chip, plank (beam, stud).

"The robust imagery ... makes two related points: (1) the inappropriateness of drawing attention to another's failing when your own is much greater and (2) the insincerity of an offer to help, until your own greater problem has been dealt with. It is not wrong to notice or to try to help with another's failing, but the person who ignores or is unaware of their own greater failing is in no position to do so."

France, R. T. (2007). [*The Gospel of Matthew \(The New International Commentary on the New Testament\)*](#). Eerdmans. 275.

What exactly does the metaphorical "beam" refer to?

- Your own sin, of a different kind or degree from the other ([France](#))
- Your critical eagerness to find fault with another ([F.D. Bruner](#), [Willard](#))

Here, "brother" means another disciple in the community. This is key. Jesus' disciples are to hold each other up to the standards of Jesus' teaching and help each other do so. It says nothing about people's behavior outside the community.

[Matthew 7:5](#) makes clear that Jesus does expect that his disciples will "judge" one another's behavior and initiate conversation about it. But the process of recognizing your own "plank", owning up to it fully, and beginning to deal with it marks a person, humbles them, and gives them a mercy that invites transparency from the other.

Before setting out to hunt mole hills in faraway places, one should be able to see the mountain before one's face. ([Davies & Allison, 673](#))

"Human beings unhappily possess an inbred proclivity to mix ignorance of themselves with arrogance towards others." ([Davies & Allison, 673](#))

Jesus' teaching here draws upon common themes in Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism.

Babylonian Talmud, Qiddishin 70a:

"And Shmuel says: If one habitually claims that others are flawed, he disqualifies himself with his own flaw. The flaw he accuses them of having is in fact the one that he has."

Neusner, Jacob (2011). [The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary](#). Hendrickson Publishers.

Babylonian Talmud, Arakin 16b:

"R. Tarfon said, I wonder whether there is any one in this generation who accepts reproof, for if one says to him: Remove the mote (qêsām) from between your eyes [or: teeth], he would answer: Remove the beam (qôrā) from between your eyes."

Neusner, Jacob (2011). [The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary](#). Hendrickson Publishers.

Holy Pearls and Pig-Dogs: A Riddle

A' a 6 Do not give what is holy to dogs ,
b and don't throw your pearls in front of pigs ,
b' so they don't trample them with their feet,
a' and turning around, they will tear you apart.

Matthew 7:1-12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

As a conclusion to all that has gone before in [7:1-5](#), Matthew now adds a short riddle from Jesus that mixes things up. If, when evaluating the behavior of others, one is not to be arrogant and severe toward them (as in [7:1-2](#)) or ignorant about one's own flaws (as in [7:3-5](#)), then neither is one to be totally indiscriminate and careless.

We need to exercise prudence and discernment about whether the person we're talking to will even receive what we have to offer. Jesus draws upon a set of well-known motifs and crafts his own riddle in response.

Who or What Are the Dogs and Pigs?

In ancient Judaism, dogs and pigs were often matched as a pair of ritually impure animals, not to be eaten by Torah-observant Israelites. Dogs were not primarily known as pets, but as wild scavengers that roamed the streets looking for refuse. Calling someone a dog was a form of insult or a denigrating way to describe a hostile person.

1 Samuel 17:42-43 NASB

When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, and ruddy, with a handsome appearance. The Philistine said to David, **"Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?"** And

the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

Psalm 22:20 NASB

Deliver my soul from the sword,
my only life from **the power of the dog.**

Psalm 22:16 NASB

For **dogs have surrounded me;**
a band of evildoers has encompassed me;
they pierced my hands and my feet.

Psalm 59:6 NASB

They return at evening, they **howl like a dog,**
and go around the city.

They were also considered impure in Jewish tradition, primarily due to their scavenging eating habits, and so a contrast to the sacred.

Exodus 22:31 NASB

You shall be holy men to me, therefore you shall not eat any flesh torn to pieces in the field; you shall throw it to the **dogs.**

1 Kings 14:11 NASB

Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city **the dogs will eat.** And he who dies in the field the birds of the heavens will eat; for the LORD has spoken it.

1 Kings 21:19 NASB

You shall speak to him, saying, "Thus says the LORD, 'Have you murdered and also taken possession?'" And you shall speak to him, saying, "Thus says the LORD, 'In the place where **the dogs licked up the blood** of Naboth **the dogs will lick up your blood,** even yours.'"

Proverbs 26:11 NASB

Like a **dog** that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.

Isaiah 66:3 NASB

But he who kills an ox is like one who slays a man;
he who sacrifices a lamb is like the one who breaks a **dog's neck;**
he who offers a grain offering is like one who offers a **pig's blood;**
he who burns incense is like the one who blesses an idol.
As they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations,

2 Peter 2:22 NASB

It has happened to them according to the true proverb,
"A **dog** returns to its own vomit," and,

“A **pig**, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.”

In Second Temple Jewish literature, the word “dog” could be used as a term of contempt, showing the animal-like character of a person.

Philippians 3:2 NASB

Beware of the **dogs**, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;

Revelation 22:15 NASB

Outside are the **dogs** and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.

Odes of Solomon 28:13-15 NRSVCE

Because I continually did good to every man I was hated.

And **they surrounded me like mad dogs**, those who in stupidity attack their masters.

Because their mind is depraved, and their sense is perverted.

It was a common theme in later Jewish rabbinic literature that the sages were not to waste Torah-meditations on non-Israelites who were not interested or who did not value the Scriptures.

Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 13A:

“And said R. Ammi, Teachings of the Torah are not to be handed over to gentiles: ‘He has not done so with any nation, and as for his ordinances, they have not known them.’ (Ps. 147:20).”

Neusner, Jacob (2011). [The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary](#). Hendrickson Publishers. 52.

Tanhuma B

TanḥumaB 6 §יא (44B):

R. Judah the Levite b. Shalom (ca. 370) said, “Moses desired that the Mishnah (here = oral, traditional teaching) also be given in writing. But since God foresaw that one day the nations of the world (here = Christian world) would translate the Torah and read it in Greek and say, ‘We are (the true) Israel,’ He said to Moses, ‘If I wrote down for you the whole fullness of my teaching, in that case they (the Israelites) would be esteemed as the stranger’ (Hos. 8:12, so the Midrash). And all this why? Because oral teaching is the secret of God, and his secret God delivers only to the pious; see ‘The secret of God to those who fear him’ (Ps. 25:14).”

Strack, Hermann L. & Billerbeck, Paul (2022). [A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud & Midrash](#). Lexham Press. 499-500.

Sometimes non-Israelites were called “dogs” in later rabbinic literature:

Midrash Psalm 4, section 11 (24A):

R. Joshua b Levi (ca. 250) said, “Like a king who held a meal and had the guests enter and sit down at the entrance of his palace. When they saw how the dogs came out with pheasants and heads of capons and calves in their mouth, they began to say, ‘If this is for the dogs, how much more at the banquet itself!’ And the nations of the world are like the dogs, as it says, ‘The dogs are very greedy’ (Isa. 56:11). If they exist in comfort in this world, will this all the more be the case with Israel in the future?”

Strack, Hermann L. & Billerbeck, Paul (2022). [A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud & Midrash](#). Lexham Press. 824.

“Pirque Rabbi Eliezer 29: Whoever eats together with an idolater is like one who eats together with a dog; as the dog is uncircumcised, so too the idolater is uncircumcised.”

Strack, Hermann L. & Billerbeck, Paul (2022). [A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud & Midrash](#). Lexham Press. 825.

While “dogs” is sometimes used for non-Israelites in Second Temple Jewish literature, it does not seem likely that this is its meaning in [Matthew 7:6](#), despite the title “little dog” given to the Canaanite woman in [15:26-27](#).

- More likely, it is a reference to the mixed character of the disciple community (explored again in [13:24-30](#)), where there may be followers, even leaders, whom Jesus doesn’t recognize (as in [7:21-23](#)).

What Are the Holy Things and Pearls?

The “holy things” and “pearls” are likely references to Jesus’ teaching or the gospel about the Kingdom (recall that “pearl” was a metaphor for God’s Kingdom in [Matthew 13](#)), or, more specifically, the constructive criticism a disciple might offer to another based on the moral worldview taught by Jesus.

In later rabbinic literature, “pearls” was a common image for wisdom sayings from the sages.

Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 3A:

“R. Yohanan b. Beroqah (ca. 110) and R. Eleazar (ben) Hosma once went to greet (their teacher) R. Joshua (ca. 90) in Peqiin. He said to them, ‘What was new today in the house of teaching?’ ... and he said to them, ‘A beautiful pearl (מרגלית טובה) was in your hand, and you wanted to deprive me of it!’”

Strack, Hermann L. & Billerbeck, Paul (2022). [A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud & Midrash](#). Lexham Press. 825.

The contrasting metaphor pair “holy-dogs” was used elsewhere in Jewish literature of the same period:

Mishnah, Temurah 6:5: “No one redeems a holy thing to feed it to the dogs.”

Strack, Hermann L. & Billerbeck, Paul (2022). [A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud & Midrash](#). Lexham Press.

Babylonian Talmud, Bekhorot 15a: “We may not redeem a sacrifice that has been dedicated [to God] only in order to feed it to dogs.” (quoted later in Pesakhim 29a)

Strack, Hermann L. & Billerbeck, Paul (2022). [A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud & Midrash](#). Lexham Press.

In these passages from the Talmud, “the holy thing” equals “sacred meat” from a dedicated and holy sacrifice. Jesus appears to be adopting this well-known image, but adapting its meaning to refer to the purity-impurity that depends upon the state of a person’s heart, and thus affects their ability to hear personal criticism.

Matthew 15:11 Instructor’s Translation

It is not what enters into the mouth that makes a person impure, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this makes the person impure.

How does [Matthew 7:6](#) relate to all of [7:1-6](#)?

The saying in Matthew 7:6 is a “counterbalance to the prohibition of one-sided criticism in [v. 1-5](#): There may be times and situations when a responsible assessment of the likely response requires the disciple to limit their instinctive generosity, so that the holy things are not brought into contempt.” ([France, 277](#)).

The disciples’ shaking the dust from their feet in response to rejection is a possible example ([in 10:14](#)), also practiced by Paul ([in Acts 13:46](#)).

“While we should not prejudge who may receive one’s message, neither should one try to force it on those who show no inclination to accept it.”

Keener, Craig S. (2009). [The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary](#). Eerdmans. 277.

What exactly is the contrast?

- “Dogs vs. sacred”: contrasting ritually impure vs. pure [cf. [Exod. 22:31](#), where impure meat is thrown to dogs.]
- “Pigs + pearls”: contrasting impure, unvalued animals vs. valuable and precious items. Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a pearl ([Matt. 13:45-46](#)), a supremely precious thing.

What does the “trampling” refer to? The image is wholly within the parable, but the idea of harm or danger does seem to be the key idea of the metaphor. People who don’t discriminate between what they share and who they share it with are liable to get hurt, not to mention sharing the message with someone who’s not ready to care.

“The saying is an admonition about the necessity to discerning how much time and energy we direct towards people we know are resistant to direct conversations about the kingdom of God. The gospel of the kingdom—in [13:45-46](#) the kingdom is a pearl—was to be preached to all; but its heralds were also instructed to shake the dust off their feet when they were not received into a house or town ([10:14](#)). They were not to throw away wittingly the words of the gospel. They were not to give that which is holy to dogs or to throw pearls before swine (so Luther). There has to be an economy of truth.”

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 676.

When considering all of [7:1-6](#) together, one is reminded of the rhetorical puzzle in Proverbs 26:4-5, which places two opposite sayings next to each other, forcing the reader to meditate on the difference.

Proverbs 26:4-5 NASB

Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
or you yourself will be just like him.
Answer a fool as his folly deserves,
that he will not be wise in his own eyes.

Reflection Question

What is the flow of thought in Matthew 7:1-6, and what is Jesus trying to teach us about judgment?

Session 18: The Golden Rule

Key Takeaways

- Jesus' teaching on prayer is linked by literary design to his command to "seek first the Kingdom of God" in Matthew 6:33. Our asking, seeking, and knocking are to be shaped by a pursuit of God's values.
- As many teachers of the Second Temple period sought to summarize the Torah, a negative counterpart to Jesus' teaching, "Do not do unto others what you would not want done to you," was well-known. Jesus' positive "Do unto others" summary opens up a limitless universe of loving and generous acts.
- Studying the Bible along the contours of its native literary design takes hard work, but putting in the effort to understand what God and the biblical authors are trying to communicate is an act of love towards them.

Ask, Seek, Knock

A

a 7 **Ask** and it will be **given** to you,
b **seek** and you will **find**,
c **knock** and it will be **opened** for you,
a' 8 for everyone who asks will receive,
b' and the one who **seeks** will **find**,
c' and to the one who **knocks** it will be **opened**.

B

a 9 Or, what person is among you
b who, when **their son asks** for bread,
c will he **give** him a rock?

B'

b' 10 Or, when he **asks** for a fish,
c' will he **give** him a snake?

C

a 11 So then, if you all are bad,
b but you know to **give good gifts** to **your children**,
a' how **much more** **your Father in the skies**,
b' he will **give good things** to those who **ask**.

Matthew 7:1-12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

What is the connection between [7:7-11](#) and [7:1-6](#)?

Some scholars have given up seeing any connection, assuming that Matthew simply brought together traditions that were combined in his sources.

However, if the careful attention to compositional arrangement in the sermon so far is any clue, there is deep intentionality here. If anything, like the riddle in [7:6](#) about pearls and pigs, Matthew is inviting us to meditate on the compositional arrangement and see here a deeper meaning under the surface.

In the immediate context, the preceding unit of [7:1-6](#) is all about the complexity of relationships within the community of disciples, especially when there is need for constructive criticism. One must be discerning about when to judge and when not to, when to gently rebuke and when to refrain. This all requires great wisdom and a dynamic dependence upon God's guidance.

This seems to be how James understood the "Ask, seek, knock" sayings of Jesus.

James 1:5-7 NASB

But if any of you **lacks wisdom**, let him **ask** of God, who **gives** to all generously and without reproach, and it **will be given** to him. But he must **ask** in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will **receive** anything from the Lord,

James 1:17 NASB

Every good thing given and every perfect **gift** is from above, coming down from **the Father** of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

[Matthew 7:7-11](#) picks up the theme of confidence in God's provision from [6:25-34](#). There, the focus was trust for basic necessities. Here, the focus is on asking God for "good things" which requires wisdom, but also basic necessities ([7:9-10](#), [bread and fish](#)). In this way, [7:7-11](#) also links back to [6:25-34](#). The many shared key phrases from [Matthew 6:25-34](#) found in [Matthew 7:7-11](#) show there is a clear relationship.

Matthew 6:19-34

Matt. 6:19-21

Prohibition: "Don't store up treasure ..."
Inversion: Treasure on the land vs. the skies

Matthew 7:1-11

Matt. 7:1-2

Prohibition: "Don't judge ..."
Inversion: You judge and will be judged

Comparing Matthew 6:19-7:11. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Matthew 6:19-34	Matthew 7:1-11
<p>Matt. 6:22-23 Parable about the eye: “the eye ... your eye ... your eye ... ”</p>	<p>Matt. 7:3-5 Parable about the eye: “the eye ... your eye ... your eye ... ”</p>
<p>Matt. 6:24 Parable about incompatible loyalties; God vs. wealth</p>	<p>Matt. 7:6 Parable about incompatible; holy-pearls vs. dogs-pigs</p>
<p>Matt. 6:25-34 The heavenly Father’s care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “anxious” repeated 6 times • “If ... how much more ... ” (6:30) • “Who among you” (6:27) • “Your heavenly father knows ... ” (6:32) • “they seek ... you should seek” (6:32-33) 	<p>Matt. 7:7-11 The heavenly Father’s care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “ask/seek/knock” repeated 6 times • “If ... how much more ... ” (7:11) • “Who among you” (7:9) • “Your father in heaven knows ...” (7:11) • “you seek ... the one who seeks” (7:7-8)
<p><i>Comparing Matthew 6:19-7:11. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).</i></p>	

“The emphasis is not ... on the skill or even the persistence of the seeker in prayer, but on the character of kindness of the heavenly Father. ... Since it is apparent that inconsistent and flawed fathers (here hyperbolically described as ‘evil’) naturally give good gifts to their children, why would the disciples expect anything less from their good heavenly Father? Note also ... as wisdom literature this saying is not making an absolute and universal promise that no child of God will ever suffer, but is instead casting a hopeful vision that forms our understanding of God’s character.”

Pennington, Jonathan T. (2017). [The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing](#). Baker Academic. 265.

Matthew 7:7-11 invites Jesus’ disciples to explore the extent of God’s generosity, trusting that whatever is good comes from God.

“For many of us, the problem is not that we are too eager to ask for the wrong things. The problem is that we are not nearly eager enough to ask for the right things. ... If he’s a father, let’s treat him as a father, not a bureaucrat or dictator who wouldn’t want to be bothered with our concerns. When he says he’s still got time, space, and love to spare for each of us, we should take him at his word.”

Wright, N. T. (2004). [Matthew for Everyone](#). Westminster John Knox Press. 72-73.

In the Lord’s Prayer, we are called to pray for the movement of the Kingdom, as well as our daily provision and well-being. If the prayer is a guide for our requests, it makes sense that we should trust God for such things.

Matt. 7:7-8: Note the increasing scale of engagement in the triad of sayings—asking, then getting up to seek, then interrupting the one we ask by knocking on their door.

- “Ask”: humility and openness, conscious of a need.
- “Seek”: links prayer to searching for God’s guidance in making a way forward.
- “Knock”: an initiating posture not waiting for everything to align, but making forward momentum.

These lines reflect the emphasis on optimistic prayer in Jesus’ teaching ([Matt. 18:19-20, 21:22](#); [John 14:13, 15:7, 16:23-24](#)) and do not speak to the reality of unanswered prayer, which is boldly the focus of the Gethsemane story where Jesus’ prayer is not answered (cf. [Matt. 26:36-46](#)).

Matthew 18:19-20 Instructor's Translation

Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

Matthew 21:22 Instructor's Translation

If you trust God, you will receive what you ask for in prayer.

John 14:13-14 NKJV

Whatever you ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

John 15:7 NASB

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

John 16:23-24 NASB

In that day you will not question me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in my name, **he will give it to you.**

Until now you have asked for nothing in my name; **ask and you will receive**, so that your joy may be made full.

Doing all this is not an interruption for God. Rather, asking/seeking/knocking is encouraged and desired by God.

- Archbishop William Temple: “When I pray, coincidences happen. When I stop praying, the coincidences stop happening.” ([Wright, 73](#))
- God is bringing the Kingdom into reality in our world like an artist, and prayer is the way some of the artist’s raw materials cooperate with the artist instead of resisting him. ([Wright, 73](#))

In [Matt. 7:9-11](#), the “father” images prompt an illustration from parenting. Jesus recognizes that even flawed human parents still have a valid sense of the good for their children. No loving parent would give what is either useless (a stone) or harmful (a snake).

The Golden Rule

¹² So then, everything you desire
that **people do to you**,

so **also you do to them** ;
for this is the **Torah and the Prophets**.

Matthew 7:1-12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

This famous line of moral wisdom from Jesus plays a key role in the sermon, both in its overall ethical vision for the human good life and also in the rhetorical flow and design of the entire speech.

The Golden Rule Within the Paragraph of 7:1-12

Within the immediate context of Matt. 7:1-12, Jesus is exploring the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. He calls his disciples to never “judge” others, that is, to evaluate their behavior, assuming that one knows their motives and has complete and final knowledge about the person’s character. This kind of judging can be called “condemning,” which is a potential meaning of the Greek word *krino*.

Jesus will go on in 7:3-11 to show how all human relationships require a different posture of “judgment.” One can evaluate another’s behavior from a posture of humility, assuming that I do not have complete knowledge of the person’s character or motives, nor do I have total awareness of my own motives for evaluating them in the first place!

This is why Jesus invites us to create a new default response before we approach anyone about their behavior, and that is to use the fault I see in the other as an opportunity to evaluate myself on that same issue. Only once I have done some serious soul searching should I approach another with a humble posture and a desire to help.

In 7:1-2, Jesus names the primary reason why we should never judge another person in a condemning way: The way we treat others is how we ourselves will be treated. He repeats this three times over in the b-line.

a 7:1 **Do not judge**,
b so that you will not **be judged**,

A a' 2 because with the **judgment** that you **judge**
b' you will **be judged**,

a" and with the measure that you **measure**
b" it will **be measured** to you.

Matthew 7:1-12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Jesus often uses the passive verb to describe God’s agency or activity in the world and in human lives, and it seems that this is what he means here. However, it’s important to recognize that he doesn’t say so. This opens

the possibility that Jesus is not only talking about God as the final judge who will treat us the way we treat others, but that he could also have the reciprocity of human relationships in mind.

After the three units about interpersonal relationships that follow in [7:3-11](#), it is fascinating to see how [7:12](#) (the Golden Rule) returns to this same reciprocal theme, but in a way that highlights the human layer of this reciprocity.

A - Matthew 7:1-2

Divine Reciprocity

- Do not judge, because how you judge or measure others, “you will be judged,” and “it will be measured **to you** (ὕμιν)”

B - Matthew 7:3-11

- **7:3-4** Parable of the speck and the log in the eye
- **7:6** Riddle of the holy pearls and pig dogs
- **7:7-11** Ask, seek, knock and it will be given, found, opened

A' - Matthew 7:12

Human Reciprocity

- Whatever you desire that people do **to you** (ὕμιν), do that also to them

Matthew 7:1-12 - Rhetorical Design. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

This rhetorical design invites the reader to see [7:1-2](#) and [7:12](#) as an inclusio structure, highlighting the mirror nature of how we treat others.

The Golden Rule Within the Sermon on the Mount

In [5:17-7:12](#), we transition into the heart of Jesus’ announcement. It’s marked by a clear opening thesis ([5:17-20](#)), a body with three movements ([5:17-48](#), [6:1-21](#), [6:19-7:12](#)), and the final line acts as an inclusio around the entire body:

Matthew 5:17-20

Opening Thesis Statement

- “Don’t think I came to set aside the **Torah and Prophets** ... I came to fulfill them.”

Matthew 5:17-48

Movement 1

- Jesus’ version of righteousness & the Torah

Matthew 6:1-21

Movement 2

- Jesus’ version of righteousness & Jewish devotion

Matthew 6:19-7:12

Movement 3

- Jesus’ version of righteousness & the world (money and relationships)

Matthew 7:12

Closing Summary

- “What you want others to do to you, do it to them. This is the **Torah and Prophets.**”

Matthew 5:17-7:12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Notice that [5:17-20](#) is simultaneously the introduction to all of [5:17-7:12](#), and also the introduction to [5:17-48](#).

Also, notice that [7:12](#) is simultaneously the conclusion of [6:19-7:12](#) and the conclusion of the entire body of [5:17-7:12](#).

When we meditate on these two bookends of the sermon, it is clear that Jesus' ethical vision in the sermon is precisely his answer to the puzzles stated in the sermon's introduction.

- What does the "greater righteousness" (that must surpass this generation of Israel's practice of the Torah) actually look like in day-to-day life and relationships?
- If one "hungers and thirsts for righteousness," what kind of moral action will result, according to Jesus?
- What does it mean for "salt" to truly "be salty" and endure in its purpose (which is enduring covenant faithfulness)?
- How exactly will Jesus' followers shine the light of their "good works" as the Isaiah-like city on the hill that will display Yahweh's honor to the nations?

In Matthew [5:21-7:11](#), Jesus has been exploring what his vision of "covenant faithful righteousness" looks like in relationship to the laws of the Torah ([5:21-48](#)), how it is expressed through the classic practices of pious devotion in Second Temple Judaism ([6:1-21](#)), and how such a vision reshapes one's relationship to money and to one's neighbor ([6:19-7:11](#)).

In other words, the Golden Rule within the sermon functions as a summary or epitome of the entire thrust of Jesus' argument up to this point.

"Mention of 'the law and the prophets' takes the reader back to [5:17](#) and thereby establishes an inclusio within which Matthew has treated the Torah ([5:17-48](#)), given rules for the Christian cult ([6:1-18](#)), and offered instruction and encouragement for life in the world ([6:19-7:11](#)). This would seem to indicate that 'whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them' is—in true rabbinic fashion—a general rule which is not only the quintessence of the law and the prophets but also the quintessence of the sermon on the mount and thus the quintessence of Jesus' teaching in general."

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 685-686.

"Within the context of the First Gospel, the Golden Rule is not a principle from which all of the law's commands can be deduced, nor is it the hermeneutical key to interpreting the law or for determining the validity of different commandments; it is instead simply the most basic or important demand of the law, a demand that in no way replaces the Torah but instead states its true end."

Allison Jr., Dale (2012). "The Configuration of the Sermon on the Mount and Its Meaning," [Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present](#). Baker Academic. 194, footnote 44.

The Golden Rule Within Second Temple Jewish Discussion of the Torah

Jesus was not alone in attempting to summarize the ethical vision of the covenant laws in the Torah. This was a regular practice among Jewish rabbis in the Second Temple period.

Philo of Alexandria, On the Decalogue, 18-19: "And first of all, I will speak of those [laws] which rather resemble heads/summaries of laws (*κεφαλαι νομων*), of which in the first place one must admire the number, as they are completed in the perfect number of the decade, which contains every variety of number ... "

Yonge, Charles Duke (1993). [*The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*](#). Hendrickson Publishers. 519.

Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 63A: "Bar Qappara gave an exposition, 'What short passage of Scripture contains the principles of the Torah? "In all your ways know him and he will direct your paths"' (Prov. 3:6)."

Neusner, Jacob (2011). [*The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*](#). Hendrickson Publishers. 429.

Rabbi Simelai argued

"Micah came and reduced [the laws of the Torah] to three: 'It has been told you, man, what is good, and what the Lord demands from you, (i) only to do justly and (ii) to love mercy, and (iii) to walk humbly before God' (Micah 6:8)."

"Isaiah again came and reduced them to two: 'Thus says the Lord, (i) Keep justice and (ii) do righteousness' (Isaiah. 56:1).

"Amos came and reduced them to a single one, as it is said, 'For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel. Seek Me and live.'"

"Habakkuk further came and based them on one, as it is said, 'But the righteous shall live by his faith' (Habakkuk 2:4)."

Neusner, Jacob (2011). [*The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*](#). Hendrickson Publishers. 121-122.

Also interesting is the question of how the Golden Rule in [Matthew 7:12](#) relates to Jesus' summary of the "most important command" in the Torah in Matthew 22.

Matthew 22:34–40 Instructor's Translation

³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. ³⁵ One of them, a Torah-scholar, asked him a question, testing him, ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

³⁷ And he said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' [Deut. 6:5] ³⁸ This is the great and first [*protos*] commandment, ³⁹ and the second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' [Lev. 19:18] ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend the whole Torah and the Prophets."

Jesus' second-first command from the Torah has an important relationship to the Golden Rule: You shall love your neighbor as yourself ["as you love yourself"].

"The implied 'as you love yourself' was interpreted in various ways in Second Temple Jewish literature: Aramaic Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Lev. 19:18, 'You shall love your neighbor, so that what is hateful to you, you shall not do to him. I am the Lord.'"

Cathcart, Kevin, Maher, Michael & McNamara, Martin eds. (1994). [Targum Neofiti 1: Leviticus and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Leviticus \(The Aramaic Bible\)](#). Michael Glazier. Page.

This interpretive translation has a direct relationship to a famous teaching of Rabbi Hillel, one of the most influential rabbis in the time of Jesus (quoted in Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31A).

“There was another case of a gentile who came before Shammai. He said to him, ‘Convert me on the stipulation that you teach me the entire Torah while I am standing on one foot.’ He drove him off with the building cubit that he had in his hand. [The gentile then] came before Hillel: ‘Convert me.’ He said to him, “‘What is hateful to you, to your fellow don’t do.” That’s the entirety of the Torah; everything else is elaboration. So go, study.”

Neusner, Jacob (2011). [The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary](#). Hendrickson Publishers. 127.

James (Ya’akov) the apostle made this direct connection from Jesus’ teaching:

James 2:8 Instructor's Translation

But if you fulfill the royal law as expressed in this scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing good.

The apostle Paul also inherited from Jesus this formulation about love fulfilling the Torah.

Galatians 5:14 Instructor's Translation

For **the whole Torah is summed up** in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Romans 13:8–10 Instructor's Translation

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for **the one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the Torah**. For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore **love is the fulfillment of the Torah**.

“The saying ‘Love your neighbor’ was understood as a positive commandment, and the words ‘as yourself’ as having the negative commandment included within it. You are not to treat your neighbor with hatred, because you would not like him to treat you in that way. ... [B]y means of the parallels, we are able to see how the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12) and the commandment to love our neighbor (Matt. 22:39) are related within Jesus’ ethical teaching.”

Flusser, David (2007). [The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus’ Genius](#). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 60.

“[Leviticus 19:18](#) generated a long history of Jewish reflection, so that the golden rule was actually a very common distillation of its message:

- Tobit 4:15: ‘And what you hate, do not do to anyone’
- Wisdom of Ben Sira 31:15: ‘Judge your neighbor’s feelings by your own, and in every matter be thoughtful’
- Letter of Aristeas, 207: ‘As you wish that no evil should befall you, but to be a partaker of all good things, so you should act on the same principle towards your subjects and offenders ... ’

- Philo, Hypothetica, quoted in Eusebius, Preparation for the Gospel, 8:7:6 (358d): 'Let no man himself do what he hates to have done to him'
 - Testament of Naphtali 1:6 (Hebrew): 'None should do to his neighbor what he does not like for himself'
 - 2 Enoch 61:1-2: 'And now, my children, keep your hearts from every injustice which the Lord hates. Just as a man asks for his own soul from God, so let him do to every living soul ...'
 - Sextus, Sent. 89: 'As you wish your neighbours to treat you, so treat them' (so also 210b)
 - Didache 1:2: 'Everything that you desire not to happen to you, so you don't do to another' / *πάντα δὲ ὅσα ἐὰν θελήσῃς μὴ γίνεσθαι σοι, καὶ σὺ ἄλλω μὴ ποίει* (cf. Acts 15:20, 5:1; 15:29, 5:1.)
 - Avot deRabbi Natan 15: "'Let the honour of thy fellow be as dear to thee as thine own.'" How so? This teaches that even as one looks out for his own honour, so should he look out for his fellow's honour. And even as no man wishes that his honour be held in ill repute, so should he wish that the honour of his fellow shall not be held in ill repute'
 - Sent. Syr. Men. 250-1: 'All that is hateful to you, you should not wish to do that to your neighbour'
 - Greek and Roman parallels include Herodotus 3:142; Isocrates, Nicocles 61; and Diogenes Laertius 5:21. For a full list of parallels see Dihle (v).
 - The idea of doing to others as one wishes to be done to is, it should be remembered, almost a universal sentiment. It can be found in Buddhist, Confucian, and Islamic texts (e.g. Confucius, Analects 15:23)."
- Adapted from Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 686-687.

"[In light of the many parallels to the Golden Rule in Second Temple Jewish teaching] was Jesus' formulation of the golden rule in any sense creative? In the judgment of many, while first-century Palestinian Judaism was acquainted with a negative version which prudently warned not to harm one's neighbour, Jesus himself advanced a positive version which required an absolute demonstration of love (e.g., J. Jeremias, *Theology of the NT*, p. 212). There is much room for doubt about this. ... [T]he differences between the negative and positive formulations are perhaps not as significant as has sometimes been made out (cf. Moore 2, pp. 87-8). The negative formulation does not always presuppose a calculating attitude with its own selfish ends in view: it too can be rooted in a genuine concern for one's fellows. It also bears remarking that the negative and positive versions appear in early Christian literature with little discussion of their differences. Lastly, the command to love one's neighbour as oneself (Lev. 19:18, 34; cf. Exod. 23:4-5) already implies the content of the golden rule, so the claim to find in the synoptic logion profound originality seems ill-conceived and probably stems more from Christian apologetic than from an objective examination of the texts."

Adapted from Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 687-688.

"Didache 1:2: *Πάντα δὲ ὅσα ἐὰν θελήσῃς μὴ γίνεσθαι σοι, καὶ σὺ ἄλλω μὴ ποίει.*"

Strack, Hermann L. & Billerbeck, Paul (2022). [A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud & Midrash](#). Lexham Press. 514.

Babylonian Talmud Šabbat 31A: "Once a gentile came to Shammai (ca. 30 BCE); he said to him, 'Receive me as a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one leg.' He thrust him away with a building measure that he had in his hand. He went to Hillel (ca. 20 BCE); he received him as a

proselyte. He said to him, ‘What is unlovely to you, do not do to another; this is the whole Torah and the other (rest) is explanation; go and learn!’”

Neusner, Jacob (2011). [The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary](#). Hendrickson Publishers.

“What is unlovely to yourself, do not do to him (your neighbor).”

Targum Yerušalmi, Leviticus 19:18.

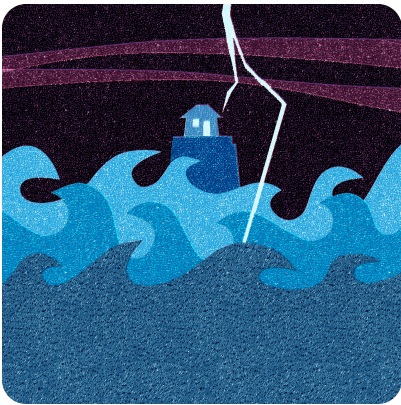
“What is the teaching of wisdom? He (the one questioned by the king) said, ‘If you do not want evil to happen to you, but want to experience all good, do likewise to your subjects and to those who err.’”

Τί ἐστὶ σοφίας διδαχὴ; ὁ δὲ ἕτερος ἀπεφήνατο· καθὼς οὐ βούλει σεαυτῷ τὰ κακὰ παρεῖναι, μέτοχος δὲ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ὑπάρχειν ἀπάντων, εἰ πράσσεις τοῦτο πρὸς τοὺς ὑποτεταγμένους καὶ τοὺς ἀμαρτάνοντας

Strack, Hermann L. & Billerbeck, Paul (2022). [A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud & Midrash](#). Lexham Press. 514-515.

Reflection Question

Jesus’ perspective on prayer may seem idealistic and unbelievable. How do you reconcile radical claims like, “Whatever you ask in my name, that will I do” (John 14:13 NASB), with the experience of unmet prayer requests? What wisdom can Jesus’ life and teaching offer?



Module 4: The Sermon Ends, the Kingdom Endures

SESSIONS 19-22

Jesus concludes his teaching with warnings for his followers, preparing them to stand strong in the face of coming troubling times.

Session 19: The Wide and Narrow Gates

Key Takeaways

- Jesus' warnings are addressed to the generation of Israelites living during his lifetime. To best understand the importance of Jesus' warnings for us today, we must first consider what his words meant for the people he was speaking to.
- Biblical prophets used cosmic language to describe what was happening in their time and place, showing how those events were participating in a cosmic narrative.
- Jesus echoes the Hebrew Bible theme of the two paths, which stretches all the way back to the exile from the garden of Eden in Genesis 3.

Three Warnings

Just as the sermon began with three sets of three blessings and three hopeful images that described the ancient vocation of Jesus' disciples (5:3-16), now the sermon concludes with three warnings that balance the introduction. Here, Jesus will challenge his listeners to take his words seriously as a high-stakes decision is placed before them.

We must remember the historical and social location of Jesus' warnings.

"Jesus ... predicted that judgment would fall on the nation in general and on Jerusalem in particular. That is to say, he reinterprets a standard Jewish belief (the coming judgment which would fall on the nations) in terms of a coming judgment which would fall on impenitent Israel. The great prophets had done exactly the same. Jerusalem, under its present regime, had become Babylon. ... Jesus seems to have adopted the theme from John, who predicted 'wrath to come', saying that membership in physical Israel was no guarantee of a share in the age to come. Very much in the mold of Amos, or indeed of Qumran, John insisted on redrawing the boundaries of Israel; for him, only those who repented and submitted to baptism would be included. The story Jesus told about Israel's immediate future seems to have developed directly from this point. ... The warnings ... are manifestly and obviously, within their historical context, warnings about a coming national disaster, involving the destruction by Rome of the nation, the city and the Temple. The story of judgment and vindication which Jesus told is very much like the story told by the prophet Jeremiah, invoking the categories of cosmic disaster in order to invest the coming socio-political disaster with its full theological significance. The 'normal' way of reading these passages within the Christian tradition has been to see them as references to a general post mortem judgment in hell; but this betrays a fairly thorough lack of historical understanding. ... [Even] though such warnings, echoing as they did a centuries-long prophetic tradition, could in principle have been articulated at any time in Israel's history, Jesus' own warnings carried a constant reference to the present generation. ... Jesus seems to have stressed 'the signs of the times': the story he was telling was not about some general or abstract truth, of

which the present moment just happened to be one example. His message was specifically directed to that very moment in Israel's history."

Wright, N. T. (1997). [*Jesus and the Victory of God \(Christian Origins and the Question of God\)*](#). Fortress Press. 323–325.

Two Gates and Roads

A 13 Enter through the **narrow gate** .

a Because **wide is the gate** , and broad

B' b **is the road that leads to ruin** ,

c and those who enter through it are many.

A' a' 14 How **narrow is the gate** , and constricted,

b' **is the road that leads to life** ,

c' and those who find it are few.

Matthew 7:13-14. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Within the Hebrew Bible, there is a traditional metaphor of the two paths (the two ways) that express the two life-trajectories a person can experience, one that leads to life, and one that leads to ruin.

In biblical wisdom, the emphasis can be on the present or future fulfillment of a person's life trajectory.

Psalm 1:6 NASB

For the LORD knows **the way** of the righteous,
but **the way** of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 119:1 NASB

How blessed are those whose **way is blameless**,
who walk in the law of the LORD.

Proverbs 2:6–13 NASB

⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. ...

⁸ Guarding **the paths** of justice,
and he preserves **the way** of his godly ones. ...

¹¹ Discretion will guard you,
understanding will watch over you,

¹² to deliver you from **the way** of evil,

from the man who speaks perverse things;
13 from those who leave **the paths** of uprightness
to walk in **the ways** of darkness;

Proverbs 16:25 NASB

There is a way which seems right to a man,
but its end is the **way of death**.

The imagery of the two paths is developed out a view of reality that all trajectories lead to either life and flourishing or ruin and destruction.

Psalms 16:10-11 LEB

for you will not abandon my soul to Sheol;
you will not give your faithful one to see the grave.
You will make known to me **the path of life** (אֶרֶץ חַיִּים).
Before your face is fullness of joy.
At your right hand are pleasures forever.

Psalms 139:23-24 Instructor's Translation

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
try me and know my anxious thoughts;
and see if there be any **hurtful way** in me,
and lead me in **the way of the age** (דֶּרֶךְ עוֹלָם).

Isaiah 59:7-8 NASB

Their feet run to evil,
and they are **quick** to shed innocent blood;
their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity,
devastation and destruction are **in their highways**.
They do not know **the way of peace**,
and there is **no justice in their tracks**;
they have made **their paths crooked**,
whoever **treads on them** does not know peace.

Isaiah 65:2-3 NASB

I have spread out my hands all day long to a rebellious people,
who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts,
a people who continually provoke me to my face,
offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on bricks;

These texts are all developed out of a foundational image in the garden of Eden story, namely the mention of a "path" in and out of the garden, as well as the "gate/door" that marks the boundary.

Genesis 3:24 NASB

So he drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden he stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard **the way** (הדרך) to the tree of life.

Genesis 4:7 Instructor's Translation

If you do good,
won't there be exaltation?
And if you don't do good,
sin is a croucher at **the door** (פתח),
and its desire is for you,
but you can rule it.

To go “out through the door” means leaving Eden into the land of dust and death. To go “inside through the door” means entering Eden.

These two images—the gate-door and the path that both lead out of or into Eden—seem to lie at the fountainhead of these biblical images of the two gates and the two paths within the Hebrew Bible.

If that is so, it makes good sense that Jesus would draw on these foundational images as the lead warning.

The Door-Gate Motif in the Torah and Second Temple Literature

The door of Eden is a motif that begins with Genesis 3:22-24 and 4:7, with Eden's “gate” being described as an “entrance door” (פתח) or a “gate” (שער).

This image is developed throughout the Torah, as other Eden-like places are often marked by a door/gate entrance.

- The door of the ark (Gen. 6:14 “place the door of the ark in the side of it” and 6:17, 20 “I will establish my covenant with you and you will enter into the ark ... to preserve life”): Inside the door is rescue and life, outside the door is ruin and death.
- The door of Lot's house in Sodom (Gen. 19:6, 11): On the outside of the door is darkness and blindness, on the inside of the door is safety, refuge, and preservation of life.
- The Heaven-on-Earth stair-ramp that Jacob encounters at Bethel is called “the gate of heaven” (Gen. 28:17).
- The house on Passover: On the inside of the door with the blood is the preservation of life (Exod. 12:22-23), on the outside of the door is death.
- Tabernacle: At the boundary of the tabernacle courtyard is the “doorway” (פתח) (Exod. 26:36, 29:4), also called “the gate” (שער: Exod. 27:16, 35:17, 38:15) through which only priests and pure offerers may come. Moses stands at the “door” of the tent to intercede for Israel (Exod. 33:9-10).
- Sacrifices: In Leviticus, the altar is in front of the “door” so that all offerings are made “at the doorway of the tent of meeting” (Lev. 1:3, 5; 3:2; 4:4, 7, 18, etc.)

The imagery of a “door-gate” of death appears occasionally in the Hebrew Bible and in Second Temple literature.

Psalm 107:17-18 NASB

Fools, because of their rebellious way,
and because of their iniquities, were afflicted.
Their soul abhorred all kinds of food,
and they drew near to **the gates of death.**

Job 38:16–17 NASB

Have you entered into the springs of the sea
or walked in the recesses of the deep?
Have **the gates of death** been revealed to you,
or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?

Matthew 16:18 NASB

I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church;
and **the gates of the grave** (Greek: *hades*) will not overpower it.

3 Maccabees 5:51 NRSV

and [the Israelites] cried out in a very loud voice, imploring the Ruler over every power to manifest himself
and be merciful to them, as they stood now at **the gates of death.**

“^{4*} For he showed him many warnings together with the ways of the Law and the end of time, as also to
you; and then further, also the likeness of Zion with its measurements which was to be made after the
likeness of the present sanctuary. ⁵ But he also showed him, at that time, the measures of fire, the depths of
the abyss, the weight of the winds, the number of the raindrops, ⁶ the suppression of wrath, the abundance
of long-suffering, the truth of judgment, ^{7*} the root of wisdom, the richness of understanding, the fountain
of knowledge, ⁸ the height of the air, the greatness of Paradise, the end of the periods, the beginning of the
day of judgment, ⁹ the number of offerings, the worlds which have not yet come, ¹⁰ **the mouth of gehenna,**
the standing place of vengeance, the place of faith, the region of hope,”

Charlesworth, James H. (1983). [The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha](#). Yale University Press. 642.

Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 19A:

“They acknowledge the justice of their punishment and say before him, ‘Lord of the world, you have judged
well, you have condemned well, you have properly assigned Gehenna for the wicked and the Garden of
Eden for the righteous.’ But is that so? And didn’t R. Simeon b. Laqish say, ‘Even **at the gate of Gehenna** the
wicked don’t repent’”

Neusner, Jacob (2011). [The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary](#). Hendrickson Publishers. 92–
93.

Conversely, the “gate to life” also appears in Second Temple Jewish literature.

Revelation 22:14–15 NASB

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to **the tree of life,** and **may enter
by the gates into the city.** Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the
murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.

Testament of Abraham 10:14-15:

“¹⁴ But I made the world, and I do not want to destroy any one of them; but I delay the death of the sinner until he should convert and live. ¹⁵ Now conduct Abraham to **the first gate of heaven**, so that there he may see the judgments and the recompenses and repent over the souls of the sinners which he destroyed.”

Charlesworth, James H. (1983). [*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*](#). Yale University Press. 887-888.

The Two Paths in Second Temple Jewish Literature

The Qumran community developed this metaphor in multiple directions:

1QRule of the Community 3:17-21:

“¹⁷ He created man to rule ¹⁸ the world and **placed within him two spirits so that he would walk with them** until the moment of his visitation: they are the spirits ¹⁹ of truth and of deceit. From the spring of light stem the generations of truth, and from the source of darkness the generations of deceit. ²⁰ And in the hand of the Prince of Lights is dominion over all the sons of justice; they walk on **paths of light**. And in the hand of the Angel of ²¹ Darkness is total dominion over the sons of deceit; they walk on **paths of darkness.**”

García Martínez, Florentino & Tigchelaar, Eibert J. C. (1997-1998). [*The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition \(translations\)*](#). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 75.

Other Second Temple Jewish literature developed the image as well.

Testament of Asher 1:3-5:

“³ God has granted two ways to the sons of men, two mind-sets, two lines of action, two models, and two goals. ⁴ Accordingly, everything is in pairs, the one over against the other. ⁵ The two ways are good and evil; concerning them are two dispositions within our breasts that choose between them”

Charlesworth, James H. (1983). [*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*](#). Yale University Press. 816-817.

One of the earliest Christian documents after the apostolic writings is the Didache, which begins as follows.

“1. There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways.
2. Now this is the way of life: first, ‘you shall love God, who made you’; second, ‘your neighbor as yourself’; and ‘whatever you do not wish to happen to you, do not do to another.’”

Holmes, Michael William (1999). [*The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, Updated ed.*](#). Baker Books. 251.

Later Rabbinic Literature also developed the image.

“^{2:9} He said to them, ‘Go and see what is **the straight path** to which someone should stick.’
- R. Eliezer says, ‘A generous spirit.’
- R. Joshua says, ‘A good friend.’
- R. Yose says, ‘A good neighbor.’
- R. Simeon says, ‘Foresight.’

- R. Eleazar says, 'Good will.'

He said to them, 'I prefer the opinion of R. Eleazar b. Arakh, because in what he says is included everything you say.'

He said to them, 'Go out and see what is **the bad road**, which someone should avoid.'

- R. Eliezer says, 'Envy.'

- R. Joshua says, 'A bad friend.'

- R. Yose says, 'A bad neighbor.'

- R. Simeon says, 'Defaulting on a loan.' ...

- R. Eleazar says, 'Bad will.'"

Charlesworth, James H. (1983). [*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*](#). Yale University Press. 676-677.

However, there are a number of Second Temple and later Jewish texts that see in the "two paths" imagery a recall of the gate and path into and out of the garden of Eden.

4 Ezra (= 2 Esdras) 7:11-14:

"¹¹ For I did make the world for their sakes and when **Adam** transgressed my orders what was made was judged. ¹² **The ways of this world have been made narrow**, painful and difficult; they are few and evil, full of perils and fraught with great hardships, ¹³ but **the ways of the greater world are spacious** and secure and produce the fruit of immortality. ¹⁴ If, therefore, those alive do not really enter [through] these narrow and vain things they will be unable to obtain the things stored up [for them]."

Myers, Jacob M. (2008). [*I and II Esdras: A New Translation \(The Anchor Bible, vol. 42\)*](#). Yale University Press. 206.

"R. Akiva: The words of Him who brought the world into being are not to be contested, for all of them are in accordance with truth and justice.

R. Pappus expounded (Genesis 3:22) ('and the Lord G d said:)

Behold, **the human** has become like one of us' — as one of the ministering angels.

R. Akiva: 'Enough Pappus!'

Pappus: 'And how do you understand it?'

R. Akiva: The Holy One Blessed be **He gave him two paths**: one of **life** and one of **death**, and he chose **the path of death**."

Mekhilta de Rabbi Yishmael on Exodus 14:29.

Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 28B:

"before me are **two paths**, one to **the Garden of Eden** and the other to **Gehenna**, and I do not know by which path I shall be brought,"

Neusner, Jacob (2011). [*The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*](#). Hendrickson Publishers. 189.

The Narrow / Persecuted Way

The phrase in [Matthew 7:14](#), "narrow is the way" in Greek is *τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδὸς* / *tethlimmene he-hodos*. The participle comes from the root *θλίβω* / *thlibo*, which literally means "to press hard against" or "to constrict"

and metaphorically means “to cause trouble for, to oppress.”

The noun derived from this verb is θλίψις / *thlipsis* “oppression, tribulation, persecution,” which Matthew often uses to describe hostile resistance to Jesus and his disciples.

Matthew 13:20–21 NASB*

The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when ***thlipsis*** or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Matthew 24:9 NASB*

Then they will deliver you to ***thlipsis***, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Matthew 24:21 NASB*

For then there will be a great ***thlipsis***, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.

Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Jesus is almost certainly activating both meanings of this word in describing the “way” of following his teachings:

1. Within his parable, “the way” is narrow and constricted. That is, it requires intentionality and effort to stay on the path, in contrast to the wide and broad path.
2. Within Jesus’ social context, his “way” will lead to “oppression.” That is, hostility from Israel’s leaders and from community members who misunderstand who Jesus is and what he’s all about.

“Opposite the broad way is the “difficult way” (ὁδὸς τεθλιμμένη). That does not mean, as is usually maintained, simply the narrow, small way. It is true that τεθλιμμένος can mean “made narrow,” but in the sense that the passage becomes crowded in, for example, a city or a house when there are too many people. That is not what it means here, however, because only a few people are on the way that leads to life. Thus it is better to understand τεθλιμμένος as a reference to the tribulations (θλίψεις) that Matthew mentions in several places for the time before the eschaton (24:9, 21, 29; cf. 13:21). Already 5:10–12, 44 speak of the persecution the community experiences. Thus the way to life is full of hardships.”

Luz, Ulrich (2007). [Matthew 1–7: A Commentary \(Hermeneia\)](#). Augsburg Fortress Publishing. 372.

The Many and the Few

Davies and Allison have an important discussion about the “many” and “few” in [Matthew 7:14](#).

“Is [the line ‘few are those who find it’] rhetorical, an invitation to make a decision, or ... is it a calculation, a statement that the masses of humanity will be damned? In favor of the second view, one could cite [Matthew 22:14](#) (‘Many are called but few are chosen’); but against it one could refer to [Matthew 8:11](#) (‘Many

shall come from east and west') and [20:28](#) ('the son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many'). If the issue cannot be resolved with certainty, this is so for two reasons. (1) First, Matthew has not made an attempt to be systematic and perfectly consistent in preserving these sayings. This is why one verse can speak of the salvation of a few, another of Jesus ransoming many. (2) Secondly, one does well to keep in mind the Semitic habit of making hyperbolic declarations as a means of exhortation. Consider Mishna Qiddushin 1:10: 'If a man performs a single commandment, it shall be well with him and he shall have length of days and shall inherit the land; but if he neglects a single commandment it shall be ill with him and he shall not have length of days and shall not inherit the land'. It would be perverse to take these words literally. They are exhortation. A person should act as if the fulfilment of one commandment meant everything. Similarly, the true meaning of [Mt. 7:13-14](#) could be: act as if only a very few will enter through the gates of paradise. On this reading, one would do wrong to find in this passage an objective numerical estimate. (Note that in [Lk. 13:23-24](#) Jesus does not directly answer the question, Will those who are saved be few? He instead throws the question back at his listeners by commanding them to strive to enter the narrow door.)"

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 700-701.

There are sayings of Jesus where it seems he held an optimistic view that the majority of humanity will be enfolded within the saving purpose of God. (These sayings about "the many" are all hyperlinked to a key text in the suffering servant poems of Isaiah.)

Matthew 8:10-11 NASB

Now when Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that **many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;**"

Matthew 20:28 NASB

just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and **to give his life a ransom for many.**

John 12:31-32 NASB

Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **all people** to myself.

Isaiah 53:11 NASB

As a result of the anguish of his soul,
he will see it and be satisfied;
by his knowledge **the Righteous One,**
my Servant, will declare righteous the many,
as he will bear their iniquities.

There are other sayings of Jesus where it seems that Jesus held a pessimistic view of the same point.

Matthew 22:14 NASB

For **many** are called, but few are chosen.

One critical note about the above topic is that it would be easy at this point to think that Jesus' words about the two gates and two roads are about the individual's life-journey to a destiny of eternal life with God after death, or of ruin and destruction after death.

This would be to misunderstand the historical setting of Jesus' warnings and of their reference. Jesus had a clear understanding of what his warnings of judgment were about: a coming disaster for the nation of Israel that would be another repetition of the Scriptural covenant cycle of unfaithfulness leading to defeat at the hands of oppressive empires. Elsewhere in Matthew, Jesus uses the same language we find in [Matthew 5-7](#) to describe the downfall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans.

Matthew 24:1-5 NASB

¹ Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when his disciples came up to point out **the temple buildings to im.** ² And he said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." ³ As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?" ⁴ And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. ⁵ **For many will come in my name**, saying, 'I am the Christ,' **and will mislead many.**"

See [Matthew 7:15-23](#)

Matthew 24:9 NASB

Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and **you will be hated by all nations because of my name.**

See [Matthew 5:10-12](#)

Matthew 24:10-13 NASB

At that time **many will fall away** and will betray one another and hate one another. **Many** false prophets will arise and will **mislead many**. Because lawlessness is increased, the love of **many** will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

See [Matthew 7:13-14](#)

Matthew 24:21-22 NASB

For then there will be **a great trial**, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

See [Matthew 7:13-14](#)

Matthew 24:24 NASB

For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

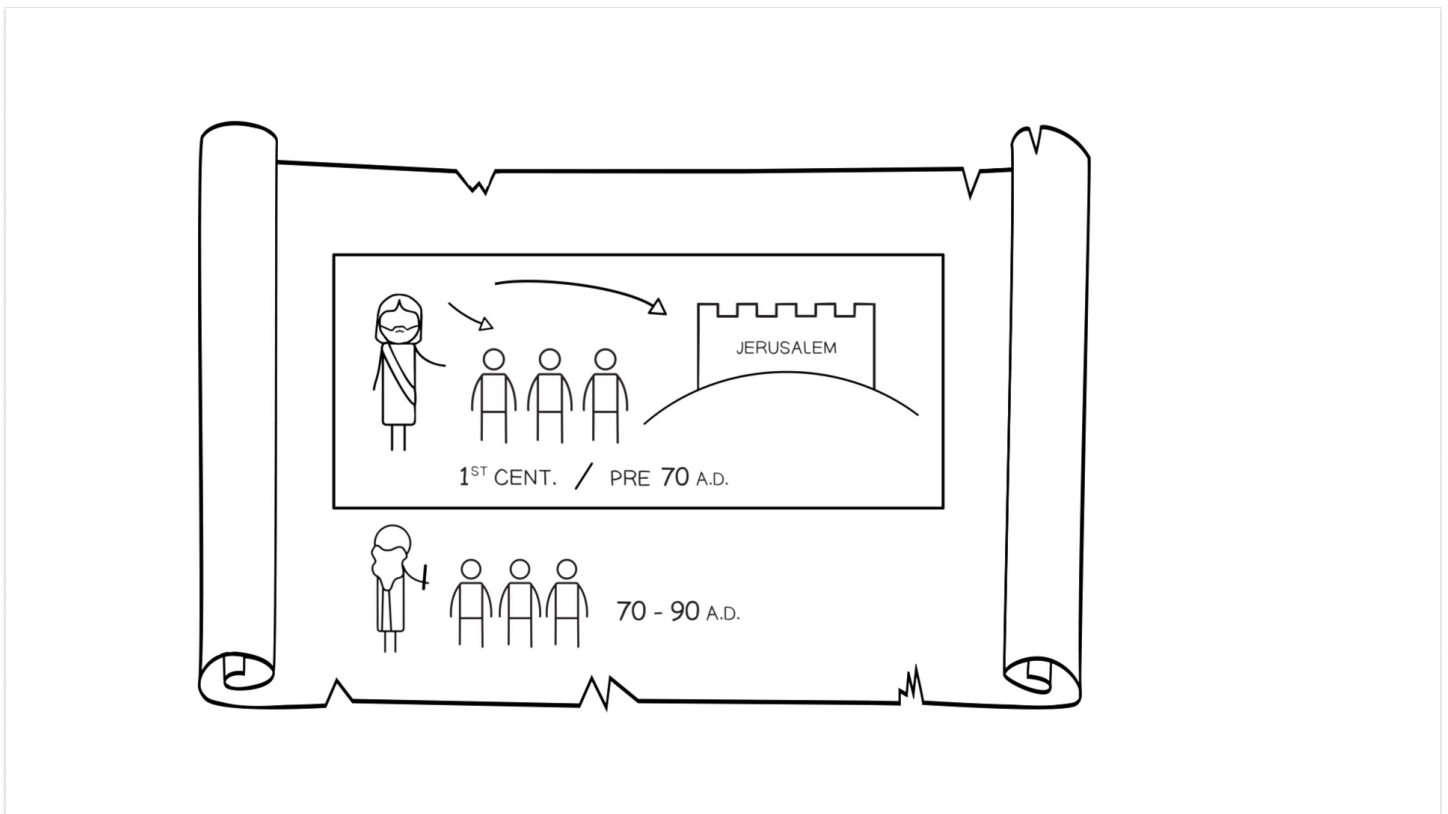
See [Matthew 7:15-23](#)

Matthew 24:37-39 NASB

For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

See [Matthew 7:24-27](#)

Narrative Perspective of Matthew



Narrative Perspective of Matthew. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Reflection Question

Who is Jesus addressing in his warnings in [Matthew 7:13-14](#)? How might this shape our understanding of his words and what they mean for us today?

Session 20: Wolves, Sheep, and Trees

Key Takeaways

- Jesus takes up common Hebrew Bible criteria for judging the legitimacy of prophets, recasting them in Eden imagery.
- The trajectory and results of a person's life will tell a certain kind of truth that is often more reliable than their words.
- Being a vehicle for divine power in the world isn't the most defining thing about our identity. There are some who do mighty works for God but whose hearts are far from him.

Two Prophets and Two Trees

¹⁵ Watch out for illegitimate **prophets**, who come to you in the clothing of **sheep**, but inside they are **wolves** who snatch.

A a ¹⁶ **By their fruits you will recognize them.**

b Do people gather **grapes** from **thorn-bushes**, or **figs** from **thistles**?

c ¹⁷ Similarly, every **good** tree produces **good fruit**,

d but the diseased tree produces **bad fruit**.

B

c' ¹⁸ A **good** tree is not able to produce **bad fruit**,

d' and diseased can't produce **good fruit**.

b' ¹⁹ Every tree that doesn't produce **good fruit**, it is cut down and thrown into **the fire**.

A' a' ²⁰ **So then, by their fruit you will recognize them.**

²¹ Not **everyone who says to me**,

A “Master, master!”
will enter into the kingdom of the skies,
but rather the one who does the desire of my Father in the skies.

22 Many will say to me on that day,
“Master, master,
A didn’t we prophesy in your name,
and cast out demons in your name,
and do many mighty acts in your name?”

B 23 And then I will confess to them,
“I have never known you;
go away from me,
you who act as if there is no law.”

Matthew 7:15-23. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Illegitimate Prophets in the Hebrew Bible

The theme of illegitimate prophets was an old one, rooted in the prophetic traditions of the Hebrew Bible.

Jeremiah 23:16–22 NASB

¹⁶ Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD.

¹⁷ They keep saying to those who despise me, ‘The LORD has said, “You will have peace”’; and as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, ‘Calamity will not come upon you.’

¹⁸ But who has stood in the council of the LORD, that he should see and hear his word? Who has given heed to his word and listened?

¹⁹ Behold, the storm of the LORD has gone forth in wrath, even a whirling tempest; it will swirl down on the head of the wicked.

²⁰ The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has performed and carried out the purposes of his heart; in the last days you will clearly understand it.

²¹ I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied.

²² But if they had stood in my council, then they would have announced my words to my people, and would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds.”

Ezekiel 13:1–8 NASB

¹ Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,

² “Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy from

their own heart, 'Listen to the word of the LORD!

³ Thus says the Lord God, "Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing.

⁴ O Israel, your prophets have been like foxes among ruins.

⁵ You have not gone up into the breaches, nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the day of the LORD.

⁶ They see falsehood and lying divination **who are saying, 'The LORD declares,' when the LORD has not sent them;** yet they hope for the fulfillment of their word.

⁷ Did you not see a false vision and speak a lying divination when you said, 'The LORD declares,' but it is not I who have spoken?""

⁸ Therefore, thus says the Lord God, "Because you have spoken falsehood and seen a lie, therefore behold, I am against you," declares the Lord God.

Ezekiel 22:26-28 NASB

Her priests have done violence to my Torah and have profaned my holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they hide their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. Her princes within her are **like wolves tearing the prey**, by shedding blood and destroying lives in order to get dishonest gain. **Her prophets** have smeared whitewash for them, seeing **false visions and divining lies** for them, saying, "Thus says the Lord God," when the LORD has not spoken.

In the historical context of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (they lived at the same time during the Babylonian threat to Jerusalem; Jeremiah in Jerusalem and Ezekiel in Babylonian exile), these prophets claimed that Yahweh was giving his people over into the hands of the Babylonians. However, other prophets denied this claim and appealed to the fact that Yahweh had rescued the city from Assyria in the days of Hezekiah.

There were different views on what would happen to the city, and different prophets lined up on either side, all claiming to speak for Yahweh.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel, both prophets who suffered for their unpopular message, announced that Jerusalem would fall and that a remnant would emerge out on the other side to become the seed of a new humanity.

This was a problem in ancient Israel, as it is still today in Jewish and Christian traditions: Who speaks for God?

Jeremiah 23:16-18 NASB

Thus says the LORD of hosts,
"Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you.
They are leading you into futility;
they speak a vision of their own imagination,
not from the mouth of the LORD.
They keep saying to those who despise me,
'The LORD has said, "You will have peace";
and as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart,
they say, 'Calamity will not come upon you.'
But who has stood in the council of the LORD,

That he should see and hear his word?
Who has given heed to his word and listened?"

Amos 3:6-8 NASB

If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?

Surely the Lord God does nothing unless he reveals his counsel to his servants the prophets.

A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?

Jesus' actions and words show that he viewed the events of his day in Jerusalem as an analogy to the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which is why he quoted from them.

Matthew 21:12-13 NASB

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. And he said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; **but you are making it a den of rebels.**"

Quoting from [Jeremiah 7](#)

Luke 19:41-44 NASB

When he approached Jerusalem, he saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."

Hyperlink to [Ezekiel 4:2](#), [21:27](#), [26:8](#)

Who are the false prophets Jesus refers to? It seems there are two levels of meaning to this teaching:

1. Level 1: Within the narrative world, Jesus speaks of rival representatives of the God of Israel in his own day of the early 1st century (Scribes and Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, etc.), when he was sending out representatives for his Kingdom of God movement.

Matthew 10:40-41 NASB

He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. **He who receives a prophet** in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

Matthew 23:34-36 NASB

Therefore, behold, **I am sending you prophets** and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

2. Level 2: In Matthew's world, Jesus speaks of both (a) Israelite leaders who are hostile to the messianic Jesus movement, and (b) rival leaders within the messianic Jesus movement of the later 1st century and beyond (the rival leaders in Acts, who are for or against Torah observance for non-Israelite followers of Jesus.)

In other words, Matthew has taken up these words of Jesus, which were spoken before the messianic Jesus communities spread outside of Israel, and applied them by analogy to the social dynamics of the Jesus movement in his own day of the later 1st century.

Within Level 1, Jesus will explore later in his parables that the community of his followers will be mixed (as Israel was in the Torah and Prophets) until the great reckoning, when a great sorting will take place (see the true and false wheat in [Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43](#)). Notice in [Matthew 13:41-42](#), there are key hyperlinks back to this teaching in the sermon.

Matthew 7:19, 21-23 NASB

¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is **cut down and thrown into the fire**. ...

²¹ Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter.

²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?'

²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who act as if there is no Torah.'

Matthew 13:40-43 NASB

So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and **will throw them into the furnace of fire**; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

It is also possible that Matthew, in his narrative, identifies the Pharisees and scribes with one aspect of these wolves, as [Matthew 23:13](#) hyperlinks back to Jesus' teaching about the gate and the path.

Matthew 7:13-14 NASB

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are **many who enter through it**. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and **there are few who find it**.

Matthew 23:13 NASB

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because **you shut off the kingdom of heaven** from people; for **you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in**.

Doing Signs and Wonders in Jesus' Name

Within Level 1, we know that Jesus was not the only messianic figure trying to get Israel's attention in his day, and there were others who tried to ride off the momentum of his popularity.

Mark 9:38–40 NASB

John said to him, “**Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name**, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not hinder him, for there is no one **who will perform a miracle in my name**, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For he who is not against us is for us.”

Matthew 24:4–5 NASB

And Jesus answered and said to them, “See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many.”

Acts 19:13–16 NASB

But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, “I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.” Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. And the evil spirit answered and said to them, “I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

On Level 2, Matthew is also referring to the dispersed activity of the leaders in the messianic Jesus movement of the later 1st century.

“The recognition that miracles and other seemingly supernatural phenomena are not infallible signs of saving faith is common to several NT authors, and it is what makes possible the expectation that the last days will see even evil figures doing great wonders (Mt. 24:23–28; 2 Th. 2:9–10; Rev. 13:13–15; etc.). In Lk. 10:20, for instance, Jesus declares, ‘Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice in that your names are written in heaven’. And in 1 Cor. 12–14, the apostle Paul puts tongues and other spectacular manifestations in their place by calling for decency and order in worship and by exalting love above everything else as the more excellent way. ... What Jesus has called for is obedience to his Torah (5:17–48), sincere practice of the Christian cult (6:1–18), and a right attitude towards the things of this world (6:19–7:12). He has beckoned his followers to travel down a very difficult road (7:13–14), a road without the promise of fame and glory, a road which instead holds forth the prospect of persecution (5:10–12), with reward coming only in the future (6:4, 6, 18, 19–21).”

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [*Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)*](#). T&T Clark International. 716.

“Depart From Me ... ”

Jesus’ words in [Matthew 7:21-23](#) express an exalted view of his own identity:

- Jesus is the one who allows (or doesn’t allow) entry into the Kingdom of Heaven. (Not post-mortem, but present and future.)
- It is in Jesus’ name that signs and wonders are performed. (This is the role of Yahweh’s name in the Hebrew Bible.)
- Jesus is the one who “confesses” (*homologeō*) people’s “known” identity before God. This is a public, legal confession.

Jesus is drawing here on the “Son of Adam” traditions found in Daniel, 1 Enoch, and 4 Ezra, which depict a divine-human figure who sits beside the ancient of days and is invested with divine authority to bring justice to the cosmos.

Daniel 7:9–11 NASB

I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his vesture was like white snow and the hair of his head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, its wheels were a burning fire.

A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before him; thousands upon thousands were attending him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before him; the court sat, and the books were opened.

Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until **the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire.**

Daniel 7:13–14 NASB

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, And he came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

And to him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and his kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.

1 Enoch 46:1-5 NRSVCE

¹ At that place, **I saw the One to whom belongs the time before time. And his head was white like wool, and there was with him another individual, whose face was like that of a human being. His countenance was full of grace like that of one among the holy angels.** ² And I asked the one—from among the angels—who was going with me, and who had revealed to me all the secrets regarding the One who was born of human beings, “Who is this, and from whence is he who is going as the prototype of the Before-Time?” ³ And he answered me and said to me, “**This is the Son of Man**, to whom belongs righteousness, and with whom righteousness dwells. And he will open all the hidden storerooms; for the Lord of the Spirits has chosen him, and he is destined to be victorious before the Lord of the Spirits in eternal uprightness. ⁴ This Son of Man whom you have seen is the One who would remove the kings and the mighty ones from their comfortable seats and the strong ones from their thrones. He shall loosen the reins of the strong and crush the teeth of the sinners. ⁵ He shall depose the kings from their thrones and kingdoms.

People and Trees

A a ¹⁶ **By their fruits you will recognize them.**

b Do people gather **grapes** from **thorn-bushes**,
or **figs** from **thistles**?

¹⁷ Similarly, every **good** tree **produces good fruit**,

B
 d but the diseased tree produces bad fruit .
 c' 18 A good tree is not able to produce bad fruit ,
 d' and diseased can't produce good fruit .
 b' 19 Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit ,
 it is cut down and thrown into the fire .

A' a' 20 So then, by their fruit you will recognize them .

Matthew 7:15-23. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

There are a few main points made here by Jesus, drawing on an analogy between people and trees, and people's choices and fruit.

In 7:16 and 7:20, people's choices reveal their nature (trees are known by their fruit).

- Trees that are "bad" or inedible (thorn bushes or thistles) don't produce "good" edible fruit.
- Good trees don't produce bad, nor do bad trees produce good.

Trees that are bad will eventually be exposed for what they are and thrown into the burn pile.

Notice the Eden language here:

- Trees of good and bad fruit (the tree of knowing good and bad and its fruit)
- Fig tree (Adam and Eve covered themselves with fig leaves)
- The tree of knowing good and bad presents humanity with a choice. Outside of Eden, people present choices of good and bad to each other. People become trees of decision.

Jesus is taking up a common Hebrew Bible set of criteria for judging the legitimacy of prophets, but has recast them in Eden imagery.

- Deuteronomy 13:1-6: A true prophet is known by whether his words are true, predictions come true, and if he claims to represent Yahweh; a false prophet is known by whether his predictions don't come true or if he represents other deities.
- Jeremiah 23:9-15: The ethical character of a prophet will show who they really are.

Jeremiah 23:14-16 NASB

Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing:

The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood;
 and they strengthen the hands of evildoers,
 so that no one has turned back from his wickedness.

All of them have become to me like Sodom,
 and her inhabitants like Gomorrah.

Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets,
 "Behold, I am going to feed them wormwood
 and make them drink poisonous water,

for from the prophets of Jerusalem
pollution has gone forth into all the land.”
Thus says the LORD of hosts,
“Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you.
They are leading you into futility;
they speak a vision of their own imagination,
not from the mouth of the LORD.”

Reflection Question

How do you reconcile the seeming contradiction of Jesus' words in Matthew 7:18, "a diseased tree can't produce good fruit," and 7:22, "Many will say to me on that day, ' ... didn't we ... do many mighty acts in your name?'"

Session 21: The House on the Rock

Key Takeaways

- The rain and flood are strongly established biblical themes representing the moment in the cyclical pattern when God's judgment de-creates the status quo in order to bring about new creation.
- The house on the rock is a stock biblical image for the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus links the people of God's Kingdom to a house God is building on a rock, which can withstand the coming flood.
- Biblical apocalyptic literature teaches us to view the world through the lens of a recurring cycle of themes, ultimately pointing to the final purpose toward which God is steering all creation.

Two Houses

A 24 So then, **everyone who hears these words of mine**,
and does them,
they will be like a wise man,
who built his house on the rock,

B 25 **and the rain came down,**
and the rivers came,
and the winds blew,
and they fell upon that house,

C but it did not fall,
because its foundation was on the rock.

A' 26 And **everyone who hears these words of mine**,
and does not do them,
they will be like a foolish man,
who built his house on the sand,

B' 27 **and the rain came down,
and the rivers came,
and the winds blew,
and they fell upon that house,**

C' and it fell,
and its falling was huge.

Matthew 7:24-27. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

The rhetorical design of this final warning is easy to discern. The two builders are compared and contrasted in obvious ways:

- Doing the words vs. not doing the words
- Wise vs. foolish
- House on the rock vs. house on the sand
- House doesn't fall vs. house does fall

Moses, Lady Wisdom, and Jesus

Notice that this final unit is all about how one responds to the words of Jesus. This feels similar to the conclusion of the Torah, which focuses on the final words of Moses and makes Israel's response to them determinative for their future destiny.

Deuteronomy 32:1-2 NASB

Give ear, O heavens, and **let me speak;**
and let the earth hear **the words of my mouth.**
Let **my teaching** drop as the rain,
my speech distill as the dew,
as the droplets on the fresh grass
and as the showers on the herb.

Deuteronomy 32:5-6 NASB

They have acted corruptly toward him,
they are not his children, because of their defect;
but are a perverse and crooked generation.
Do you thus repay the LORD, **O foolish and unwise people?**
Is not he your Father who has bought you?
He has made you and established you.

Deuteronomy 32:28-30 NASB

For they are a nation **lacking in counsel,**
and there is no understanding in them.

Would that they were wise, that they **understood this**,
that they would **discern** their future!
How could one chase a thousand,
and two put ten thousand to flight,
unless their Rock had sold them,
and the LORD had given them up?

Wise or Foolish

“Foolish” here is the Greek *moros* / *μωρός*, from which we get the English word “moron.”

Jesus first used this word in a subtle wordplay on the “salt of the land” metaphor at the opening of the sermon. In this way, Matthew ensures that the motif of “wisdom/folly” appears at the bookends of the sermon.

Matthew 5:13 Instructor's Translation

But if the salt becomes **foolish** (*moranthe*), it is good for nothing.

By using “wisdom/folly” vocabulary, Jesus also activates the scriptural wisdom traditions, placing himself in the role of Lady Wisdom from [Proverbs 1-9](#).

Proverbs 1:20-22, 24-27 NASB

²⁰ **Wisdom** shouts in the street,
she lifts her voice in the square;
²¹ at the head of the noisy streets she cries out;
at the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings:
²² “How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded?
And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing and fools hate knowledge?
²⁴ Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention;
²⁵ and **you neglected all my counsel and did not want my reproof**;
²⁶ I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes,
²⁷ **when your dread comes like a storm
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.**”

Also important is the echo of the “city on the mountain” and the “light of the world” images from the sermon’s introduction. These come from Isaiah and other prophetic traditions about the pilgrimage of the nations.

Isaiah 2:1-2 NASB

The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
Now it will come about that in the last days
the mountain of the house of the LORD
will be established as the chief of the **mountains**,
and will be raised above the hills;
and all the nations will stream to it.

So here, at the matching bookend of the sermon, we find the language of the “house” on the “rock,” which are core scriptural images for Mount Zion and the temple. The “flood/storm” images are stock images in the prophets for attacking foreign nations.

Isaiah 8:7-8 NASB

Now therefore, behold, the Lord is about **to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates, even the king of Assyria and all his glory; and it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks.**

Then it will sweep on into Judah, **it will overflow and pass through**, it will reach even to the neck; and the spread of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.

Isaiah 28:16-17 NASB

Therefore thus says the Lord God,
“Behold, I am laying **in Zion a stone, a tested stone,**
a costly cornerstone **for the foundation,** firmly placed.
He who believes in it will not be disturbed.
I will make justice the measuring line
and righteousness the level;
then hail will sweep away the refuge of lies
and the waters will overflow the secret place.”

Jeremiah 6:22-23 NASB

Thus says the LORD,
“Behold, **a people is coming from the north land,**
and a great nation will be aroused from the remote parts of the earth.
They seize bow and spear;
they are cruel and have no mercy;
their voice roars like the sea,
and they ride on horses, arrayed as a man for the battle
against you, O daughter of Zion!”

Ezekiel 13:10-14 NASB

¹⁰ It is definitely because [the false prophets] have misled my people by saying, “Peace!” when there is no peace. And when anyone **builds a wall,** behold, they plaster it over with whitewash;

¹¹ so tell those who plaster it over with whitewash, that it will fall. A flooding rain will come, and you, O hailstones, will fall; and a violent wind will break out.

¹² Behold, when the wall has fallen, will you not be asked, “Where is the plaster with which you plastered it?”

¹³ Therefore, thus says the Lord God, “I will make a violent wind break out in my anger. There will also be in my anger a flooding rain and hailstones to consume it in anger.

¹⁴ So I will tear down the wall which you plastered over with whitewash and bring it down to the ground, so that its **foundation** is laid bare; and **when it falls,** you will be consumed in its midst. And you will know that I am the LORD.

Psalm 48:1-8 NASB

¹ Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised,
in the city of our God, his holy mountain.

² Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth,
is **Mount Zion** in the far north,
the city of the great King.

³ God, in her palaces,
has made himself known as a stronghold.

⁴ For, lo, the kings assembled themselves,
they passed by together.

⁵ They saw it, then they were **shocked**;
they were terrified, they fled in alarm.

⁶ Panic seized them there,
anguish, as of a woman in childbirth.

⁷ **With the east wind**
you break the ships of Tarshish.

⁸ As we have heard, so have we seen
in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God;
God will establish her forever. Selah.

Joel 2:1-2 NASB

Blow a trumpet in **Zion**,
and sound an alarm on **my holy mountain!**

Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
for **the day of the LORD is coming**;
surely it is near,

a day of **darkness** and **gloom**,
a day of **clouds** and **thick darkness**.

As the dawn is spread over the mountains,
so there **is a great and mighty people**;
there has never been anything like it,
nor will there be again after it
to the years of many generations.

Joel 2:32 NASB

And it will come about that **whoever calls on the name of the LORD
will be delivered**;
for **on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
there will be those who escape**,
as the LORD has said,
even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

Jesus will later compare the downfall of the Jerusalem temple to a coming storm like the flood.

Matthew 24:1-2 NASB

Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when his disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to him. And he said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, **not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.**"

Matthew 24:37-39 NASB

For the coming of the Son of Man will be **just like the days of Noah**. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

In Luke's version of this same speech, Jesus explicitly brings up the cosmic storm imagery to describe the downfall of Jerusalem.

Luke 21:20-26 NASB

²⁰ But **when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies**, then recognize that her desolation is near. ²¹ Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; ²² because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled. ²³ Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; ²⁴ and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

²⁵ There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the **roaring of the sea and the waves**, ²⁶ men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

"Consider [the parable of the house of the rock], for example, remembering that, within his culture, the word 'house' could easily evoke the idea of 'Temple', and that the 'rock' or 'stone' would readily be identified as the foundation-stone of that Temple. ... Jesus, like some other Jewish sectarians, was inviting his hearers to join him in the establishment of the true Temple. The Jerusalem Temple was under judgment, a judgment that would fall before too long. The demons, as we saw, would return, and the last state of the 'house' would be worse than the first. Falling masonry, as when the tower of Siloam fell, will be the fate of the unrepentant. The 'house' is left, abandoned, desolate, unprotected against enemy attack. It is in this context that Jesus' dramatic action in the Temple makes perfect sense: it was an acted parable of judgment, of destruction."

Wright, N. T. (1997). [*Jesus and the Victory of God*](#). Fortress Press. 334.

In his Jewish context, this reflected the high estimation Jesus has of his words and authority. By contrast, similar parables were often told about how Israel responds to the words of the Torah.

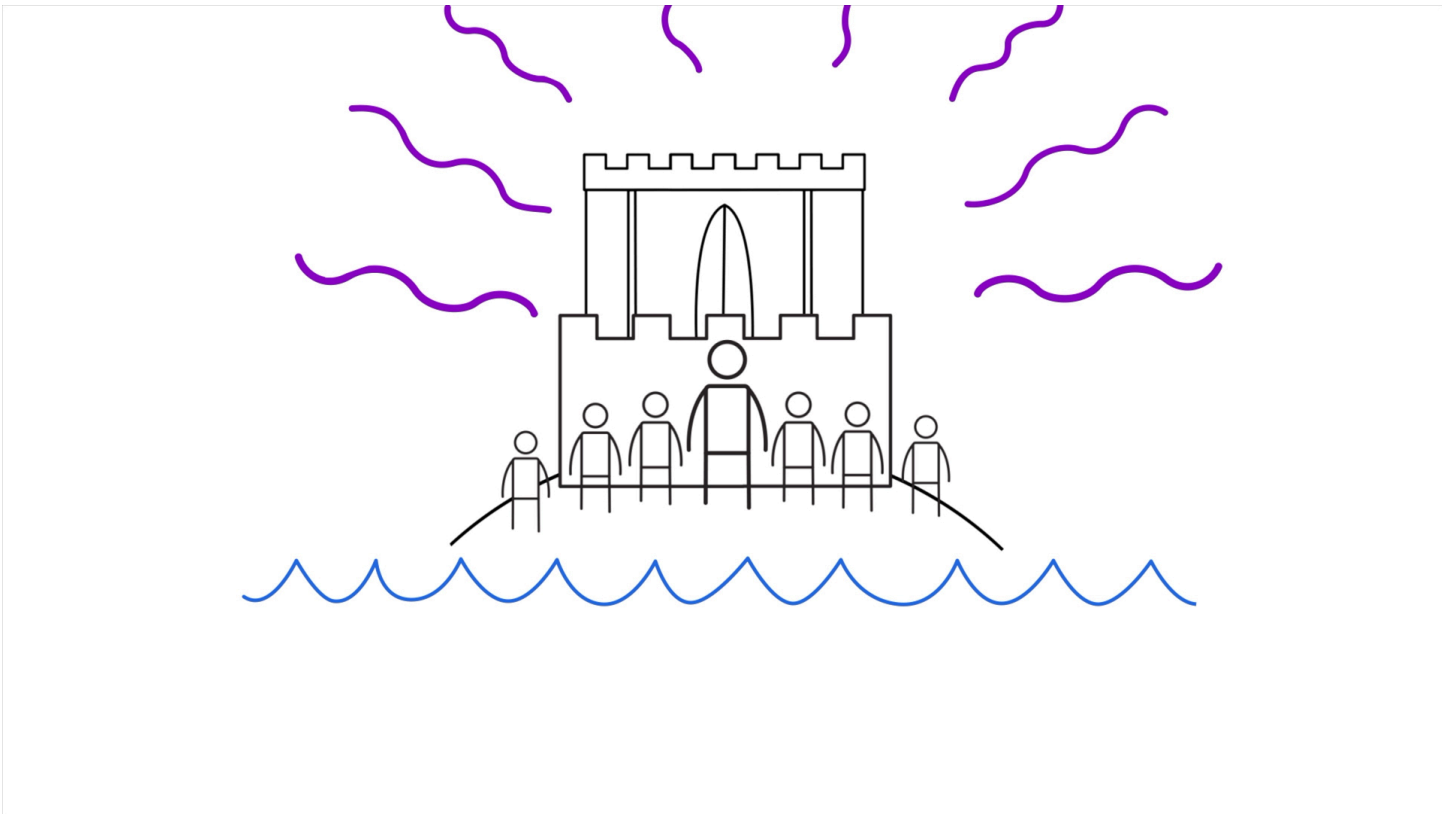
'Avot de Rabbi Nathan ch. 24 (appendix to the Babylonian Talmud):

Elisha b. Abbuyah (ca. 120 AD) said, "A person who has many good works and has studied much Torah, to what can he be compared? To a person who builds with stones at the foundation and then with bricks (unbaked, only dried in the sun); even if many waters come and remain on their sides, they do not dissolve

the solid stones from their place. But a person who has no good works and studies Torah, to what can he be compared? To a person who builds first with bricks and then with stones; even if only small amounts of water come, they topple them immediately.”

Strack, Hermann L. & Billerbeck, Paul (2022). [A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud & Midrash](#). Lexham Press. 525.

The Servant and the Coming Flood



The Servant and the Coming Flood. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: The Messianic Torah (2024).

Reflection Question

How is Jesus’ parable of the house in the rain connected to themes from the Hebrew Bible?

Session 22: Reflecting on Jesus' Teaching

Key Takeaways

- Matthew highlights the response of the crowd, inviting us to examine our own response and reflect on the words we just heard.
- The astonishing authority of Jesus is a thread that runs throughout the book of Matthew.
- Jesus' teaching is not simplistic, and it invites us into a lifetime of meditation.
- Studying Scripture in community is transformative. Sharing in the perspectives of others builds us up as the Bible invites all of us to be people of God's Kingdom.

Jesus Teaches With Authority

Matthew 7:28-29 Instructor's Translation

And it came about when Jesus finished these words, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, because he was teaching as one having authority, and not like their scribes.

It Is Finished ... For Now

This is the first of five coordinated conclusions throughout the main body of Matthew's account of Jesus. Each one has been modeled after the conclusion of Moses' main speeches in Deuteronomy, and is part of a larger strategy to portray Jesus as Israel's messianic greater-than-Moses. But the conclusion to Matthew 5-7 is unique among these five conclusions, as it is the only one that does not immediately transition into the next story.

Matthew 7:28 Instructor's Translation

And it came about when Jesus **finished** (ἐτέλεσεν) these words, the crowds were astonished ...

Matthew 11:1-2 Instructor's Translation

And it came about when he **finished** (ἐτέλεσεν) instructing his twelve apprentices, he moved on from there, to teach and to announce in their cities, and Ioannes, having heard in prison about the works of the Messiah ...

Matthew 13:53-54 Instructor's Translation

And it came about when Jesus **finished** (ἐτέλεσεν) these parables, he went away from there, and having gone to his homeland, he was teaching them in their synagogue,

Matthew 19:1-2 Instructor's Translation

And it came about when Jesus **finished** (ἐτέλεσεν) these words, he went away from Galilaia, and he went into the regions of Ioudaia, beyond the Jordanes, and many crowds followed him, and he healed them there;

Matthew 26:1-2 Instructor's Translation

And it came about when Jesus **finished** (ἐτέλεσεν) all these words, he said to his apprentices, “You know that Paskha happens after two days, and the son of the human is to be handed over to be crucified.”

“Despite the significant parallels with the conclusions to the other major discourses, 7:28–9 stands out as atypical. This is because it is the only conclusion which does not carry the story forward. 11:1; 13:54; 19:1; and 26:1 all immediately immerse the reader back into the narrative flow. Only after the sermon on the mount is there a pause in which to catch one’s breath. This circumstance undoubtedly advertises the uniqueness of 5–7 for the evangelist’s work. Matthew’s readers are expected to stop and ponder what has been said; they are to realize, however dimly, that the great sermon hides a multitude of profound ramifications and that it is accordingly something to be returned to again and again.”

Davies, W. D. & Allison Jr., Dale C. (2004). [Matthew, vol. 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)](#). T&T Clark International. 725.

Teaching With Authority

Matthew registers the powerful effect Jesus’ teaching had on the (mainly) Israelite crowds who heard his teaching. There is a contrast with the kind of Torah-teaching they normally hear. Matthew does not tell us what exactly they heard that struck them in a new way, but he links it to the word “authority” (Greek: *exousia* / ἐξουσία).

With this word, Matthew begins a golden thread throughout his account, which will portray Jesus as having a unique, divine authority as he challenges Israel’s leaders. It is also related to the word “permitted” or, more literally, “authorized,” (Greek: *exestin* / ἐξεστίν).

Matthew 9:6-8 LEB

“But in order that you may know that **the Son of Man has authority on earth** to forgive sins,” then he said to the paralytic, “Get up, pick up your stretcher and go to your home.” And he got up and went to his home. But when the crowds saw this, they were afraid and glorified God who had given such **authority** to humans.

Matthew 10:1 LEB

And summoning his twelve disciples, he gave them **authority** over unclean spirits, so that they could expel them and could heal every disease and every sickness.

Matthew 12:2-4 Instructor's Translation

But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Behold, your disciples are doing what it is not **authorized** to do on the Sabbath!” So he said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and

those with him, how he entered into the house of God and ate the bread of the presentation, which it was not **authorized** for him or for those with him to eat, but only for the priests?

Matthew 21:23 LEB

And after he arrived at the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him while he was teaching, saying, “By what **authority** are you doing these things? And who gave you this **authority**?”

Matthew 28:18 LEB

And Jesus approached and spoke to them, saying, “All **authority** in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

There is another layer to this comment, however. In 1st century Jewish culture, where Torah-teaching was very much a communal and multi-generational endeavor, novelty was not a virtue when it came to teaching Torah in Israel. Rather, the legitimacy of a rabbi’s teaching was shown by the lineage of ideas from teacher to student, as embodied in the famous saying about one of the most influential rabbis of the 1st century:

Pesakhim 6:1:33a The Jerusalem Talmud

“Rabbi Hillel lectured on the matter all day long, but they did not receive his teaching until he said, ‘Thus I heard from Shemaiah and Abtalion.’”

“Whereas scribal rulings were based on the tradition of earlier interpreters of the law, Jesus has in 5:17–48 set himself up as an authority over against that interpretive tradition, on the basis not of a formal training or authorization but of his own confident, ‘I tell you.’ It was that sort of inherent ‘authority’ that the people missed in their scribes, even though their office commanded respect. When to that remarkable claim is added Jesus’ assumption that he himself is the proper object of people’s allegiance and the arbiter of their destiny (5:11–12; 7:21–23, 24, 26), the crowd’s astonishment is hardly out of place.”

France, R. T. (2007). [*The Gospel of Matthew \(The New International Commentary on the New Testament\)*](#). Eerdmans. 299.

Reflection Question

Take some time to reflect on the insights you learned in this class.