

The Book of Matthew Study Guide

Chapter 5

5:1-2

Yeshua has been basing His ministry out of *K'far Nachum* (Capernaum). The mountain cited here is the hill rising above the Sea of Galilee.

Chapters 5-7 make up the Sermon on the Mount. This is the only place that the sermon appears in the four Gospels. The reason is the issue of emphasis. Each of the Gospel writers had his unique emphasis on which he was reporting. It is like multiple reporters covering an event with each one focusing on a particular topic.

The primary emphasis or topic in the Gospel of Matthew is the kingdom of God (also called the kingdom of heaven). It was heralded by John and we are told in 4:23 that Yeshua was going about proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. So His first sermon, understandably, would be on the subject of the kingdom of God.

5:3-11

He begins with a series of blessings, which is consistent with the Jewish culture. But it is not just a way of introducing his subject, there is something much more significant to this approach. We have to understand the symbolism inherent in the Heb word *barak* – “bless” or *baruch* – “blessed.” The word is derived from *berek* – “the knee.” It comes from the posture of a subject before a king. The king has the authority and the resources while the subject has none. So the way that the subject makes an appeal of some kind will contribute to the willingness of the king to grant the request or meet the need.

A similar sense is conveyed in the NT by the Greek word *makarios* that is also translated as “blessed.” *Makarios* comes from the root *mak*, meaning “large, long, or expanded.” It is where we get the word, “macro.” Inherent in this term is the concept of someone’s rights and privileges or possessions being expanded or enlarged. And who could grant such an occurrence? A king. The *Tanakh* describes situations like that.

i.e. 1 Chronicles 4:10

“Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, ‘Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from harm that it may not pain me!’ And God granted him what he requested.”

So both the Hebrew and the Greek words originate from kings dealing with subjects. And by using the term blessed, Yeshua is acting in the manner of a king to His subjects. He is demonstrating His authority and right of granting citizenship in the kingdom, including all of its benefits.

We also need to recognize that He is confronting a popular interpretation of the nature of the kingdom in that day – that it would come about politically or militarily. Yeshua brings it back to the purity of the heart and soul of people that the *Tanakh* had always emphasized regarding the kingdom.

v. 3 – “poor in spirit” (*ptochos*) = a realization of our spiritual helplessness on our own.

v. 4 – “those who mourn” = having sorrow for ones sins and the sins of others.

v. 5 – “the gentle” (KJV “meek”) = having an attitude that is free from arrogance.

- v. 6 – “hunger and thirst after righteousness” – the Greek structure indicates a continual desire for God’s righteousness.”
- v. 7 – “the merciful” = having empathy for those who face the consequences of sin.
- v. 8 – “the pure in heart” = a continual spiritual cleansing (note that the association with seeing/perceiving God).
- v. 9 – “the peacemakers” = not just working to resolve conflict between people, but bringing the peace of God to others.
- v. 10 = “those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness.” When you are persecuted, who pays the price for the sinful act? You do. And who paid the price for our sins? Yeshua did. His death was in the form of substitutionary atonement (justice is paid on behalf of others). And He says in v. 11 that our persecution is on account of Him. So Yeshua is linking our persecution to that which He would later face and would lead to His death on the cross. He is just calling the people to identify with His suffering, even to share in it. But ultimately it is about His atoning sacrifice. And when we have that realization, he declares, “theirs (ours) is the kingdom of heaven.”

5:13-16

It is important to note the identity of the subject of the four metaphors in vv. 13-16:

“the salt of the earth” – “the light of the world” – “a city on a hill” – “a lamp.” Based on the use of pronouns in Scripture, it links to the previous use of the word, “you,” which is the beatitude verses in 3-12. So it is a call to action for the people of the kingdom of God because they are blessed.

5:17-20

Yeshua then declares His relationship to the Torah and the Prophets, which is a reference to the *Tanakh*. In v. 17 He says He did not come to abolish it (KJV destroy). The term literally means “to loosen down, which has the sense of “throwing down and smashing something to pieces.”

In keeping with the Hebraic style of repetition for the sake of emphasis, He says something similar in v. 18, but with more detail. The core statement is “the smallest letter or stroke shall not pass away from the Law” (KJV “jot or tittle”). The Greek words are *iota* (the letter “i”) and *keraiia* (“horn”). But you have to think about the nature of Hebrew because that is the language of the Torah. The equivalent letter to the Greek ι (*iota*) is the Hebrew י (*yud*). And although it is a tiny character when written, it is just as important as any other letter. Hebrew letters have different kinds of horns. For example, the letters ד (*dalet*) and ר (*resh*) are very similar, but the top stroke of the ד (*dalet*) is offset slightly to the right, creating a horn shape. That tiny distinction can make a significant difference in meaning, such as the difference between אֶחָד (echad, meaning “one”) and אֲחֵר (acher, meaning “other”). For that reason careful consideration has traditionally been given to the way the Shema is written and verbalized. It would be highly inappropriate to write or say the Hebrew equivalent of “the Lord our God is another.” That is the importance of a simple thing like the horns on Hebrew letters.

The point Yeshua is making is that every aspect of the Torah is meaningful. The question, then, is how long is that true? Yeshua gives two clauses in v. 18 about its duration tied to the word “until” (*heōs*):

- “until heaven and earth pass away”
- “until all is accomplished”

? What does that say about the nature of the Torah now? It is still intact because the universe is still intact and the implementation of God's plan has not fully been completed. But the way that we relate to it has changed because of Yeshua. He came to fulfill it (*pleroo*). Remember, from 1:22 the word picture for *pleroo* is a container that is filled to the top or even overflowing. Yeshua is overflowing the law—He is filled with every aspect of it. And the same is true regarding the teachings of the prophets—whatever the prophets foretold, Yeshua is filled with that truth completely. What did that mean for the people of Yeshua's day who heard those words?

- They should look to Him and follow His example in observing the aspects of Torah that are concerned with godly living.
- They should anticipate that He would satisfy the aspects of the Torah that are concerned with sin and sacrificial atonement.
- And they should expect Him to match perfectly all of the attributes and actions of the Messiah.

Then what about us? Since He did not come to annul the Law but to fulfill or overflow it, what does it mean for ourselves?

- His life is our example regarding the aspects of Torah that are concerned with godly living.
- We must acknowledge His death as satisfying the aspects of the Torah that are concerned with sin and sacrificial atonement.
- We must search the Scriptures and compare what was foretold by the prophets and what was written about Yeshua in the NT and then believe that it is true.

In so doing, all of these Scriptures are neither smashed to pieces and meaningless, or impossible to keep on our own. They find their fulfilled or overflowing meaning in Yeshua.

According to v. 20 we must have a righteousness that surpasses or is greater than any religious person. In other words a limited human effort of trying to keep the Law will not do. We have to receive the righteousness of Yeshua. And that secures our citizenship in the kingdom, which will be reflected by the having the characteristics described in the beatitudes.

5:21-48

Yeshua immediately begins to show how he fulfills the Law by teaching with authority but not with legalism. And yet at the same time He is upholding an even higher standard that is based not on external observance, but inner self-control. The imagery is powerful: Yeshua is overflowing not just with faithfulness to the principles of the Law, but with true godly motivation that arises from the heart. It is consistent with the prophecies of Jeremiah (31:33) and Ezekiel (36:26-27) that God would write His Law on the hearts of the redeemed.

So when we believe in Yeshua as Messiah and Savior, and we become transformed by the Holy Spirit. God changes our ability to think more righteously. And we are given the ability to live out the principles found in the Torah in even more spiritually mature ways than mere religious observance. Overflowing means more, not less, fresher not stale.

The indicator of His teaching with authority is the phrase “You have heard...” coupled with the words, “But I say to you...” That is a marker that He is about to give His interpretation or teaching on a particular subject that will be distinctive from what others are teaching. In this

sermon Yeshua goes through a series of these principles drawn from the Torah in this manner.

- v. 21 – The law forbids murder. But what is the deeper expectation of Yeshua as an overflowing of that principle? Do not kill relationships with others because of anger.
- v. 27 – The Law forbids adultery. Yeshua affirms a standard overflowing from the heart that might be characterized by saying, “Don’t even think about it.”
- v. 31 – The Law makes divorce easy (all that was need was for a man to give a woman a dismissal certificate). But Yeshua gives an exhortation not to be so hasty. Think it through the implications, which are damaging.
- v. 33 – The Law forbids false vows but permits legitimate ones. Yeshua says it is better just to be true to your word and not to embellish it with vows that can complicate matters.
- v. 38 – The Law permits justice based on equitable punishment. The overflowing expectation of Yeshua is not to demand justice. Instead, find a way to restore broken relationships in other ways.
- v. 43 – The Law does say to love your neighbor. But it does not say to hate your enemies. That was a conclusion held by some rabbinical authorities using a misguided form of logic—the opposite of loving your neighbor must be hating your enemies. Yeshua redirects the focus by simply redefining the term “neighbor” to include people who persecute you, sinners, despised tax-gatherers, and Gentiles, all of whom God blesses with light and rain, along with yourself.

All of these points demonstrate an even higher standard of righteousness than what the Law set forth, not less. In fact, Yeshua says in v. 48 – “you are to be perfect.” Can you imagine being on that hillside on that day and hearing such a challenge? Who could possibly meet it? Who can possibly meet it today? That’s where grace and forgiveness come in. And the power of the Holy Spirit, which you do not have if you are not a believer. All this to say that citizens of the kingdom of God have a higher standard of righteousness to uphold, but also a greater empowerment and ability to live it out.