



Type: Book Chapter

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## The Creation of a New Covenantal Relationship

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Source: *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*

Published: Farnham, UK; Ashgate, 2009

Pages: 67–113

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**Abstract:** No abstract available.

## Chapter 4

# The Creation of a New Covenantal Relationship

After giving initial promises of ultimate blessings in the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount turns its attention to the creation of a new covenant relationship between God and his people. If the followers of Jesus are to claim the promises and blessings offered in the Beatitudes in the initial stage of the Sermon on the Mount, thereby becoming able to see God, being confirmed as sons of God, and inheriting the kingdom of heaven, they must become new creatures, to use Paul's words.<sup>1</sup> Their metamorphosis will be part of a larger transformation of the entire cosmos, in which this creation will become "a new heaven and a new earth," complete with a new heavenly temple, as John envisions in Revelation 21–2,<sup>2</sup> so that everything may be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). As with the Beatitudes, temple themes and elements continue to permeate this process, inasmuch as the Sermon on the Mount re-conceives the creation of the world, re-creates the covenant between God and Israel, and re-forms the community of the Lord's own personal people, whom God has called "out of darkness into his marvelous light," as Peter will say (1 Peter 2:9). In its next stages, the Sermon on the Mount commissions the people to stand in a new relationship with God and introduces the first set of stipulations required by that covenant relationship. Here, the Sermon on the Mount "spells out the tasks to which the community addressed is committed."<sup>3</sup>

### **Stage 2. Becoming the Salt of the Earth (5:13)**

The Sermon on the Mount abruptly begins its programmatic<sup>4</sup> process by offering the people a special status, with a caution. The text both declares and commissions, "You are the salt of the earth," and at the same time warns, "if salt has lost its taste,

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<sup>1</sup> See 2 Corinthians 5:17 ("if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come") and Galatians 6:15 ("for neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation").

<sup>2</sup> See Revelation 21:1.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Minneapolis, 1995), p. 158.

<sup>4</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 155 (these sayings "formulate programmatically" the role and tasks of the SM's adherents).

how shall its saltness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden underfoot by men” (Matthew 5:13). This passage is easily understood as an invitation for this audience to become a certain kind of people and to serve the Lord and the world in a certain kind of way.

This text also contains more than a declaration that these people are already the salt of the earth, for that status carries with it serious responsibilities and consequences if the duties of that status are not carried out. Because serious obligations of this nature and magnitude are not created without some form of voluntary consent, one may assume that, either before or at this point in the Sermon on the Mount, the hearers had received a calling from the Lord to become “the salt of the earth” and that they had accepted that calling or would in connection with their acceptance of this teaching enter into a covenant relationship with the Lord to take up that commission. Thus, being identified as the salt of the earth carried with it a solemn warning that those who violate this covenant will lose that which is most essential to their very nature and will be rejected as useless by all men. These themes—making or renewing the covenant of belonging to the Lord, the issuance of warnings that dire consequences will curse those who fail to keep the covenant, the image of using salt in connection with the sacrifices of the covenant, and expelling and trampling underfoot those who disregard these sacred things—all bring to mind correlative functions at the Temple.

In the word “salt” in Matthew 5:13, one may find reference to the idiom “salt of the covenant” in Leviticus 2:13, which sets forth rules for proper sacrifice in the Temple: “You shall season all your cereal offerings with salt; you shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be lacking from your cereal offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.” As Jacob Milgrom points out, this idiom was used in biblical times “to refer to the binding character of the priestly perquisites (Num. 18:19) and of the David dynasty (2 Chr. 13:5),” presumably because the preservative qualities of salt “made it the ideal symbol of the perdurability of a covenant” throughout the ancient Near East.<sup>5</sup> A neo-Babylonian text uses the image of tasting salt to refer to one’s “covenantal allies. Loyalty to the Persian monarch is described as having tasted ‘the salt of the palace’ (Ezra 4:14);” in Arabic, “to salt” means “to make a treaty;” and “it is likely that in Israel as well salt played a central role at the solemn meal that sealed a covenant (e.g., Gen. 26:30; 31:54; Exodus 24:11).”<sup>6</sup> Thus, when the Sermon on the Mount refers to people as the salt of the earth, evidently some type of covenant between Jesus and his followers, seen as benefiting themselves, the kingdom of heaven, and of all the earth, is implied or understood.

Among biblical commentaries, a wide variety of meanings has been attributed to Jesus’ use of this particular metaphor, such as blending into the flesh of the sacrifice, being plain and ordinary, or symbolizing an agent of purification and preservation (Exodus 30:35; 2 Kings 2:19–23). Most often, these meanings draw

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (New York, 1991), p. 191.

<sup>6</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 191.

on temple practices. Herman Hendrickx emphasizes that salt was used in various ways in the temple cult, including that of sprinkling it on offerings (see also Ezekiel 16:4; 43:24).<sup>7</sup> Wolfgang Nauck presents evidence, largely from rabbinic sources, that the reference to salt in Matthew 5 was “taken from a certain code of instruction for the disciples of Scribes,” requiring them to be “modest and [of] humble spirit, industrious and salted, suffering insult and [they should be] liked by all men.”<sup>8</sup> The concept of salt, according to his view, demands sacrifice, suffering, purification, and wisdom of the true disciple. Alfred Edersheim emphasizes the incorruptibility of sacrifices preserved with salt as he writes:

We read in Mark 9:49: “For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt”; that is, as the salt is added to the sacrifice symbolically to point to its incorruption, so the reality and permanence of our Christian lives will be brought out by the fire of the great day, when what is wood, hay, and stubble shall be consumed; while that which is real shall prove itself incorruptible, having had the fire applied to it.<sup>9</sup>

However, as permanent and as incorruptible as salt is supposed to be, it is possible, Jesus warns, for this unusual “salt of the earth” somehow to lose its savor, to become useless, dull, insipid, or foolish (*mōranthei*), in which case it loses the might or strength to do anything at all (*eis ouden ischuei*). Metaphorically speaking, in just the same way, if a disciple turns away from this covenantal commission to be the “salt of the earth” and thereby becomes useless to the Lord, this person will be “cast out (*blēthēnai exō*),” or cut off from the circles of worthies.

The one place that salt is mentioned in the Psalms comes in the superscription at the beginning of Psalm 60, about the time when Joab defeated Edom in the Valley of Salt. After this head note, the psalm commences with a fear that God has cast off his people and shaken the earth, and then gives reassurance that God has spoken in the Temple and will succor his people: “O God, thou hast rejected us (*apōsō*), broken our defenses; thou hast been angry; oh, restore us. Thou hast made the land to quake, thou hast rent it open; repair its breaches, for it totters . . . . That thy beloved [ones] may be delivered, give victory by thy right hand and answer us! God has spoken in his sanctuary. . . . Hast thou not rejected (*apōsamēnos*) us, O God? . . . O grant us help against the foe” (Psalms 60:1–2, 5–6, 10–11). Here is a confluence of the ideas of salt, being rejected (albeit *apōtheō*, pushed aside, thrust away, or expelled), the earth, God speaking, and the threat of enemies—ideas that are not far removed from the elements in Jesus’ statement about the salt of the earth.

<sup>7</sup> Herman Hendrickx, *The Sermon on the Mount* (London, 1984), p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Wolfgang Nauck, “Salt as a Metaphor in Instructions for Discipleship,” *ST 6* (1953): 165–6; see 165–78; italics deleted.

<sup>9</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ* (updated edition, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1994), p. 78.

The expression *ballein exō* is semantically equivalent to *ekballein*, literally to throw away, which in the context of a covenant community means to be expelled from the fellowship, rejected by God, and banned from entering sacred places or spaces.<sup>10</sup> In the Psalms, this word is used in reference to Israel casting the Canaanites out of the land (Psalms 44:2 LXX; 78:55; 80:8), and in cursing an opponent with having his family expelled from its property (Psalms 109:10). Along the same lines, the word is used four times in the Gospel of John in the sense of excommunication or disfellowshipment: first in reference to the ruling that anyone who agreed that Jesus was the Christ would be expelled from the synagogue (John 9:22), and second when Jesus himself was expelled with double emphasis (*exebalon auton exō*; John 9:34). The practice of expelling people from the synagogue would surely have been known to the audience listening to Jesus as he gave the Sermon on the Mount, making it likely that they would have understood this expression to mean that if they were not themselves faithful to their commission from Jesus they would be expelled from associations with him. In the third instance, Jesus assured the multitude in his Bread of Life sermon that he would exclude from his presence none whom the Father had caused to come to him (John 6:37); and in the fourth, Jesus says that whoever does not abide in him is cast out (*eblēthē exō*) and will wither, be gathered, and be burned as a severed branch (John 15:6). Further evidence that people in the first century understood the idea of being cast out in the sense of being excluded from a congregation or *ekklesia* is found in 3 John 1:10, when the local church leader Diotrephes refused to receive the apostle John and his brethren, spoke malicious words against them, forbade others to receive them, and cast out (excommunicated, *ekballei*) anyone who did.<sup>11</sup> Those expelled from the synagogue or congregation would be all the more barred from entering the Temple, for they would pollute the holy place (see Acts 21:28).

Being disdainfully “trodden underfoot (*katapateisthai*)” (Matthew 5:13; see also 7:6) was a fate or punishment of utter contempt. Various scriptures make use of this image to convey God’s judgments upon the proud and those who break the covenant or disregard the Temple.<sup>12</sup> They deserve to be trodden underfoot because they themselves have trodden underfoot the holy things, the Temple, or the judgments of God. To mention a few instances where this image appears, those who desecrate the Sabbath will be trodden underfoot (2 Esdras 23:15), and Ephraim will be oppressed and trodden underfoot for having trampled judgment underfoot (Isaiah 28:3; Hosea 5:11 LXX). That the Temple will be trampled underfoot is prophesied in Daniel 8:13 LXX, and 3 Maccabees 2:18 speaks of the Temple being trodden down by proud Gentiles. Judas Maccabeus called upon the Lord to look upon all those who had been trodden down and also to take pity on the Temple that

<sup>10</sup> Contaminated stones in a leper’s house are cast out in Leviticus 14:40; idols are thrown away in Isaiah 2:20.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Hauck, “*ballō*,” in *TDNT*, vol. 1, pp. 527–8.

<sup>12</sup> See generally, Georg Bertram, “*pateō*,” in *TDNT*, vol. 5, p. 941.

had been profaned (2 Maccabees 8:2). At the same time, the Psalmist deeply fears that he himself will be trodden down by the evil forces of darkness (Psalms 7:5; 55:1–2; 56:3; 138:11), being trodden underfoot of men. There is hope only if the Lord is the one who does the treading: “He will again have compassion upon us, he will tread our iniquities underfoot. Thou wilt cast our sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19). If the righteous are accountable to be the salt of the earth for the benefit of mankind, however, it is talionically fitting that those who fail in their covenantal responsibility should then be trodden into the earth by mankind.

### Stage 3. Letting There Be Light (5:14–16)

Having committed the hearers to serving as the salt of the earth, the Sermon on the Mount places on them the responsibility of becoming the light of the world: “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill (*epanō orous*) cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand (*epi tēn luchnīan*), and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (5:14–16). Several elements in this charge reverberate with temple themes.

One can only imagine that Jesus’ audience would have been stunned by the words “You are the light of the world.” The common Jewish culture of the day saw God as the light of the world, a strong theme in the Psalms: “The Lord is my light” (Psalms 27:1); “O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honor and majesty, who coverest thyself with light as with a garment” (Psalms 104:1–2). To people who thought of God as the source of light, it is certainly not hard to imagine that it could well have seemed shocking, almost blasphemous, to say that men are the light of the world.

On hearing this, one would naturally wonder, How is it possible that people would become a source or conveyer of such light? How would they share in this divine function? This would only be possible if the one who lights that lamp is God himself, as psalmist imagery anticipated: “Yea, thou dost light my lamp” (Psalms 18:28); “in thy light do we see light” (Psalms 39:9). The Beatitudes had also set the stage for the answer to these questions: by seeing God (Matthew 5:8), as did Moses or Enoch and the other angelic beings in the Temple, one can take on and radiantly transmit that light, for as John later will state, “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

The Temple was understood as the principal place where this transmission of light occurred. Notable descriptions of this glorious light are found in the temple visions recounted in the books of 1 Enoch and Daniel; each of these visions paints a picture of fire and light surrounding God, his throne and his earthly/heavenly Temple.<sup>13</sup> As the dwelling place of God, who is the light of the world, the Temple

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament* (Edinburgh, 1995), pp. 19–22.

itself enshrined and radiated light. Conspicuously, the Temple was the house of light that had been placed by God on his holy mountain, a beacon to the world.

Thus, when Jesus said, “A city set on a hill cannot be hid,” his words can be taken, as with all of his parables, either at face value as making an ordinary ethical observation, or they can be understood as presenting an allegorical (or anagogical) statement about the Temple. In the latter sense, the “city” represents the Holy Temple City, which does not simply happen to lie on a gentle hillside but has consciously been placed (reading *keimenē*, as does Jerome, in the passive, not the middle, voice) way up on the very top (*epanō*<sup>14</sup>) of a significant mountain (*orous*). Meanings of the word *keimenē* include having been set, appointed, or destined, which readily brings to mind the following lines from the song that Moses and all Israel sang to Yahweh in the wilderness: “Thou wilt bring them in, and plant them on thy own mountain, the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thy abode, the sanctuary, Lord, which thy hands have established” (Exodus 15:17). Notwithstanding Nolland’s comment to the contrary,<sup>15</sup> Jesus’ statement draws much of its extraordinary strength by understanding that this mountain was not an ordinary hill. Indeed, Theodoret of Cyrus of the early fifth century referred to Matthew 5:15 in his discussion of Psalms 48:2, in which he saw a clear reference to the city of Jerusalem, “beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King.”<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Betz concludes that this city on the top of a mountain which “cannot be hid” is likely Jerusalem: “The observation that cities often are situated on the top of mountains is true of many ancient cities, but one can hardly have any doubt that here it refers to Jerusalem. This city is of great importance to the SM; it is the only city that is mentioned several times.”<sup>17</sup> It may also prefigure the eschatological Heavenly Temple-City of Revelation 21:22,<sup>18</sup> drawing upon the full ancient imagery of the house of God situated on the summit of the cosmic mountain.

This Temple-City is not to be hidden. God did not establish this city to be placed under a bushel (*modios*), particularly a Roman bushel (the Greek *modios* being a direct loan word from the Latin, *modius*). Instead, this divine light was to

<sup>14</sup> Reminiscent of the mountain top in Exodus 19:20.

<sup>15</sup> Nolland claims that “it is almost certainly a mistake to find a specific link to Jerusalem here.” John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2005), p. 214. The absurdity of the image of a person building a city on a hill and then putting it under a bushel only becomes more absurd when that temple-city is divinely destined for cosmic pre-eminence.

<sup>16</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. Robert C. Hill (Washington, DC, 2000), 1.278.

<sup>17</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 161.

<sup>18</sup> The New Jerusalem is described in the Apocalypse as a golden cube—the holy of holies. Also, the Temple Scroll describes how the ideal temple and holy city were to be arranged. Margaret Barker, *Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God* (London, 2007), pp. 100–103.

shine forth at all times to the entire world, as had been long acclaimed with respect to the Temple. The Temple was known as a place of light; it “was built as a temple of the sun with its opening towards the east, so that the sun at the equinoxes shone in straight through the open gates towards ‘the Holy of Holies.’”<sup>19</sup> Pure olive oil was used in the Temple to keep a light burning continually.<sup>20</sup>

Margaret Barker argues that all of this light imagery in the New Testament builds upon the light imagery of the Temple of the Old Testament.<sup>21</sup> To the Israelite mind, she points out, “the great source of light, which dawned upon the people like the sunrise, was actually the glory of the presence of the Lord, described by the prophets and visionaries as a burning throne, surrounded by fiery creatures.”<sup>22</sup> This throne sat in the Holy of Holies, and thus it was from that sacred and veiled place that the light of the Lord shone upon his people.<sup>23</sup> Even the priestly breastplate implements of light and truth were not to remain cloistered within the holy place, but were to go forth: “send out thy light (*urim*) and thy truth (*thummim*)” (Psalms 43:3). This light of the Temple will shine forth, not only as the Temple itself effuses splendor and glory, but also through the lives of the righteous kings, priests, and people who serve and are blessed there. As the Psalms sing: “He will bring forth thy righteousness (*dikaio sunē*) as light” (Psalms 37:6); and from a royal psalm of thanksgiving probably sung in conjunction with ritual sacrifice at the Temple,<sup>24</sup> “Yea, thou dost light my lamp (*luchnos*); the Lord my God lightens my darkness” (Psalms 18:28); “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalms 119:105). In Zion, God has “prepared a lamp for [his] anointed” (Psalms 132:17).

The lampstand that Jesus mentions may, of course, be any indefinite lamp holder; but it is not insignificant that he speaks of placing the lamp “upon *the* lampstand (*epi tēn luchnian*)” and that the word *luchnia* is the specific term used for the seven-branched lampstand of pure gold in Exodus 25:31–7 LXX (where this Greek word memorably appears eight concentrated times) and also for the golden candlestick holding the lamps of the seven churches in John’s Apocalypse (Revelation 1:12, 13, 20; 2:1, 5). The use of this term by Josephus, in *Antiquities of the Jews* 14.72, confirms that this word was ordinarily understood in the first century as, first and foremost, the menorah of the Temple, a prominent feature and symbol of the Temple.<sup>25</sup> The Enoch literature, as well, describes how a high

<sup>19</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (New York, 1962), vol. 1, p. 133.

<sup>20</sup> Abraham Z. Idelsohn, *The Ceremonies of Judaism* (Cincinnati, 1930), p. 84.

<sup>21</sup> Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, pp. 13–25.

<sup>22</sup> Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, pp. 17–19.

<sup>24</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 2, p. 31–2.

<sup>25</sup> Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Indiana, 1985), pp. 156, 208–9, 217–18.



priestly figure entered a place of fire to come into God's presence—and that fire is represented in the Temple by the menorah.<sup>26</sup>

The supernal metaphysics of light was not only operative in the Jewish Temple. It also played important roles in Hellenistic mystical experience, where “light effects play a role in the cult of the dead. Light drives out demons. Esp. instructive are the mysteries, e.g., the Eleusinian.” In early Greek texts, light means an actual epiphany or vision, not just personal illumination, as in the case of an epiphany of Dionysos. In later Greek periods, “the way through the mystery becomes mystical ascent, with interchange between light and darkness.”<sup>27</sup> To people who knew nothing of atoms, electrons, light waves, or photons, the operation and perception of light was itself quite a mystery, making light a natural subject for philosophical speculation and esoteric explanations.

In the Sermon on the Mount, however, light was taken beyond its cloistered contexts. It is of the essence for the Sermon on the Mount that the divine light, which epitomized the Temple, should not remain secluded within the Temple. Just as the light of the fires within the Temple were placed on high so to illuminate everyone and everything in that house,<sup>28</sup> the Lord's city on his mountain cannot be hid from the world. The light is now understood as coming into the world, shining in the darkness, in all the world, and being the light of men (John 1:4–5, 9–10), as the Prologue to the Gospel of John makes manifest, bringing up another correspondence between the light of the Temple and the creation of the world. The Gospel of John sees the incarnation of Jesus as the advent of a new creation, a new Genesis of the world. Its opening phrase, “In the beginning was the word” (John 1:1), echoes the opening lines of the first creation account in Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, . . . and darkness was upon the face of the deep, . . . and God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Genesis 1:1–3). Besides the strong theme of light in Genesis 1 and Matthew 5:16, a grammatical similarity connects the two expressions, “Let shine your light (*lampsatō to phōs*)” which appears here toward the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, and “Let there be light (*genēthētō phōs*)” which stands at the outset of the creation of the world in Genesis.

All of this ties together in the Temple, where the six days of the creation were ritualized, the light of which may be reflected in this part of the Sermon on the Mount. The ordering of the Temple represented the days of the creation. An early Midrash declared: “The tabernacle is equal to the creation of the world.” Day one was represented by the Holy of Holies, day two by the veil, day three the

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London, 2004), pp. 19–20.

<sup>27</sup> Hans Conzelmann, “*phōs*,” in *TDNT*, vol. 9, pp. 315–16.

<sup>28</sup> The feminine *oikia* could also on occasion refer to the Temple, the house of God, although the masculine *oikos* was more common. Daniel M. Gurtner, “Matthew's Theology of the Temple and the ‘Parting of the Ways,’” in Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland (eds), *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007), pp. 130–31.

bronze laver, and day four the seven-branched lamp.<sup>29</sup> “On the fourth day the seven branched lamp was set in place, to represent the great lights set in heaven on the fourth day.”<sup>30</sup> Josephus, Origen, Philo, and the Midrash Tanhuma all thought of the Temple as representing the whole of creation.<sup>31</sup>

In the Temple, particularly in the Holy of Holies, certain people became exalted as beings of light. Enoch in a vision entered the holy cubical, ascending past the sons of God, beings of radiant light who walked on fire and where everything was fire—ceilings, walls, and everything around him.<sup>32</sup> Moses was transfigured when he spoke to God on the mountain,<sup>33</sup> and he was not the only person described this way: “A few chosen people were able to enter the place of light and the experience transformed them. They became a part of that light. They became heavenly beings.”<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, priests and prophets petitioned to have this light shine upon them (see Numbers 6:24–6; Psalms 31:16).<sup>35</sup> When, therefore, Jesus tells his hearers to let their light shine upon others so that they too may be brought to the Father, he employs an image pertinent to the Temple and temple traditions. His words suggest that all true disciples, like Moses, are filled with this special light. As Barker notes, such references to light imagery carried into the New Testament. Barker’s translation of 2 Corinthians 3:17–18 captures the projection of this illumination from the image of Moses descending from Sinai: “And we all, with unveiled faces, reflecting the glory of the Lord are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another.”<sup>36</sup>

What Moses brought down off the holy mount was a treaty, a covenant, between Yahweh and the people of Israel. That covenant was complete with laws and stipulations. Listeners steeped in that tradition could easily have heard a refrain of this same covenant theme in what Jesus said. In hearing Jesus say “you are the light of the world” (5:14), in-group listeners would likely have connected the correspondence between that statement and Isaiah’s similar use of being a “light” to the world in a covenant context: “I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness . . . ; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations” (Isaiah 42:6). That correspondence would have been confirmed as Jesus began to turn his attention next to matters of the law, the commandments, and the way in which people should live within that covenant.

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<sup>29</sup> Barker, *Temple Theology*, pp. 17–19, citing Midrash *Tanhuma* 11.2, translation by S.A. Berman (Hoboken, New Jersey, 1996). Barker, *Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God*, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> Barker, *Temple Theology*, p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> Barker, *Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God*, p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, pp. 21–2; Barker, *Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God*, p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, p. 61.

<sup>34</sup> Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, pp. 61–2.

<sup>35</sup> Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, p. 69.

Implicit in Jesus' words here about the light and the world is not only an allusion back to the creation of the world but also a foreshadowing ahead to the doctrine of the Two Ways (the separation of opposites, light and dark, and heaven and earth).<sup>37</sup> Those under the covenant were to walk in the light, not in the darkness. They were to choose life, not death. This teaching was "emphatically brought home in the earliest Christian literature," proclaiming "that there lie before every human being and before the church itself two roads between which a choice must be made. The one is the road of darkness, the way of evil; the other, the way of light."<sup>38</sup> This principle of opposition is fundamental to the Sermon on the Mount. It will surface again explicitly in the doctrine of the Two Ways, one narrow and the other wide, in Matthew 7:13.

Themes such as these about the creation and covenant were not confined in the Bible to wisdom literature about living a good life in general; they were equally found in ritual. Indeed, there is little doubt that the creation account of Genesis and the law-giving theophany in Exodus played key roles in ancient Israelite temple ritual, although the details often remain obscure.<sup>39</sup>

In Jesus' words, these old symbolisms have been imbued with new, additional meaning. The daily walk of the righteous should not be aimed at currying favor among men, but the qualities of their deeds should shine before men in a particular way, namely in such a way (*houtōs*) that when others see those deeds they will glorify, not the doers, but their Father in the heavens (Matthew 5:16). Understood in this way, there is no tension between Matthew 5:14–16 and being seen of men in Matthew 6:2, 5, 16. Just as the Creator looked at the works of the creation and pronounced those works (*erga*, Genesis 2:2) to be good and beautiful (*kalon* or *kala* in Genesis 1:4, 8, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), even "very good" (*kala lian* in Genesis 1:31), Jesus now invites each disciple to become in his or her own way a creator of "good works (*kala erga*)" (Matthew 5:16), so that when they are seen, people will glorify God. The seat for the glorification of God, it almost goes without saying, is the Temple. There the glory of the Lord shines from his throne, which is on the wings of the cherubim—a reference to the Holy of Holies and the ark of the covenant,<sup>40</sup> as Jesus' listeners would have understood.

<sup>37</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 522–7.

<sup>38</sup> Hugh W. Nibley, *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City, 1987), p. 185.

<sup>39</sup> Discussed in Stephen D. Ricks, "Liturgy and Cosmogony: The Ritual Use of Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East" (Provo, Utah, 1981). Ricks cites Ariele Toeg, "Genesis 1 and the Sabbath [Hebrew]," *BM* 50 (1972): 290; and Peter J. Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25–40," *ZAW* 89 (1977): 375–8. These articles explore the relationships between the creation account and the temple, particularly the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus 25–31. See also Hugh W. Nibley, *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City, 1994), pp. 545–7.

<sup>40</sup> Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, p. 18.

#### Stage 4. Renewing the Commitment to Keep the Law of the Covenant (5:17–20)

Having extended the charge (or invitation) to personally embrace the obligations of God's covenant with his people, the Sermon on the Mount next affirms and requires an unwavering commitment to keep the law of God as that law was fully intended to be lived, even in its most minute details: "Think not that I have come to abolish (*katalusai*) the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill (*plērōsai*) them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished (*genētai*). Whoever then relaxes (*lusēi*) one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17–20).

It has been endlessly debated what Jesus meant by these words and in his other statements about various provisions of the Torah.<sup>41</sup> In some ways Jesus appears to be antinomian, rejecting the law and replacing it with an entirely new system.<sup>42</sup> In other instances and for stronger reasons, it makes better sense to see him as a friendly inside critic who is working from within Judaism, hoping to inspire a more acceptable adherence to the traditional law.<sup>43</sup> Roland Worth cites these

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<sup>41</sup> For items relevant to this passage in the SM, see Robert J. Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge, 1975); Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland, *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007); William R.G. Loader, *Jesus' Attitude towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels* (Tübingen, 1997; reprinted Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002); Phillip Sigal, *The Halakhah of Jesus of Nazareth According to the Gospel of Matthew* (Atlanta, 2007); Benjamin Wisner Bacon, "Jesus and the Law: A Study of the First 'Book' of Matthew (Mt. 3–7)," *JBL* 47/3–4 (1928): 203–31; Bennett Harvie Branscomb, "Jesus' Attitude to the Law of Moses," *JBL* 47/1–2 (1928): 32–40; Roger D. Congdon, "Did Jesus Sustain the Law in Matthew 5?" *BSac* 135 (April–June 1978): 117–25; William J. Dumbrell, "The Logic of the Role of the Law in Matthew 5:1–20," *NovT* 23 (January 1981): 1–21; Robert G. Hammerton-Kelly, "Attitudes to the Law in Matthew's Gospel: A Discussion of Matthew 5:18," *BR* 17 (1972): 19–32; Morna D. Hooker, "Christ: The 'End' of the Law," in David E. Aune, Torrey Seland, and Jarl Henning Ulrichsen (eds), *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 126–46.

<sup>42</sup> Texts that support the idea that Jesus emphasized the inadequacy of usual understandings of the law and demanded a new promulgation or interpretation of halakhic rulings to serve as norms in the new kingdom of heaven include Matthew 5:21–48; 7:12; 8:3; 8:22; 9:10–11; 11:11–15; 11:28–30; 12:1–8, 9–14; 15:1–11; 15:32–9; 16:19; 17:24; 18:3; 19:3–9; 21:12–13; 21:31–2.

<sup>43</sup> Texts in the Gospel of Matthew that support the idea that Jesus essentially accepted the law and encouraged people to comply with the Jewish legal and temple institutions include Matthew 3:8; 5:3–10; 8:4; 9:20; 14:36; 23:2–3; 24:20.

particular verses in the Sermon on the Mount as principal evidence that Jesus was still strongly connected to the Temple itself and to the ceremonies conducted there:

In light of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:17–20, we would expect to find him faithfully following all the provisions of the Mosaic Law—both its moral provisions and its ceremonial elements—and encouraging others to do so as well. We find this to be the case. Jesus takes for granted that gifts would be presented at the altar of the temple in Jerusalem (Mt. 5:23), that alms would and should be given (Mt. 6:2), and that fasting would be practiced (Mt. 6:16).<sup>44</sup>

This is not the place to examine the complex body of New Testament scholarship regarding Jesus' overall attitude toward the law but rather simply to suggest a different approach to all the relevant law-related materials in Matthew 5.

In puzzling over the question of what was meant by the key passage in Matthew 5:17–20, it may be less important to know how Jesus intended particular laws to be observed than to consider what role the law played in the Temple and also in Jesus' early teachings in this text. Had Jesus intended to give an elaborate commentary on the technical applications of certain provisions in the law, he could have done so. But that is not what one finds anywhere in the Sermon on the Mount. So one must look elsewhere for an answer to the question of what Jesus meant when he said that he had come to fulfill the law and the prophets, that nothing in the law would be abrogated, and that keeping and teaching even the minor commandments is essential to one's entering into the kingdom of heaven. Rather than attempting to set forth a detailed commentary on the law, the Sermon on the Mount's intended function is to be instrumental in establishing a covenant relationship between God and the followers of Jesus.

Jesus is less concerned at this stage in the Sermon on the Mount that his hearers know exactly what the law means or how it should be applied in each case than that his followers understand that they will be required to live the law with wholehearted commitment, however those laws will be delivered and explained to them. As members of this sect, they will learn from Jesus or his representatives what the law requires, and they will be committed to live according to the community's understanding of those laws or *halakhic* regulations. At this point in the Sermon on the Mount, however, first-time listeners have no idea what will come next. They may well be surprised at what they will be asked to do or how a provision of the law will be interpreted and applied. They may find to their astonishment and discomfort that Jesus will require them to take certain provisions of the law more seriously than they had ever before imagined; they may find that the law in fact embodies more elevated precepts than they had previously thought. Some listeners at this stage could be expected to embrace this general rule of recognition

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<sup>44</sup> Roland H. Worth Jr, *The Sermon on the Mount: Its Old Testament Roots* (Mahwah, New Jersey, 1997), p. 67.

by which interpretive authority is invested in Jesus. Others, undoubtedly, could be expected to turn away from this regime and walk no further under this arrangement. But for those who would stay, their allegiance would now be to Jesus as the one who had the plenary power to articulate and exemplify the full meaning of the law, that is, to fulfill the law, every jot and tittle of it. The Sermon on the Mount at this stage constitutionally assures that no other interpretations of the law will be allowed within the sect, and that those who try, even in the least degree, to supplant the fullness of the law and the prophets that Jesus will institute shall be themselves counted as the least in this community, now and forever. What is of most concern at this stage is to establish the organic nature of this new community. The Sermon does this by laying down the fundamental article of Jesus' authority, that he has come to fulfill the law and the prophets, that his words and ways will be determinative. In contrast, the followers of Jesus shall not be beholden to the Scribes or the Pharisees. In the end for these people it will be Jesus who speaks "with authority" and not "as their Scribes" (Matthew 7:29).

Grounding a new voice of authority, of course, is easier said than done, and here is where the traditional role of the law in treaty and covenant making can be drawn into service. Just as the Ten Commandments and the Covenant Code function in the text of Exodus 19–24 at Sinai as the stipulations comprising the substance of the covenant between Yahweh and the house of Israel, so the legal contents of the Sermon on the Mount define the elements of the restored covenant renewed on this occasion between God and the followers of Jesus. Hence, this section in the Sermon on the Mount has rightly been "compared to the preamble of a new treaty that relates what will be in force from now on but based on an existing foundation. No hints in the text indicate that this verse needs to be understood as a demand for a special Law-observant piety."<sup>45</sup> Rather, the new arrangement, as the prophet Jeremiah had said, is to be a new covenant according to which the law of God will not be written on tablets of stone but in the inward parts of the heart:

This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord. (Jeremiah 31:33–4)

In several ways it would appear that this prophecy in Jeremiah 31 supplied elements that appear in the blueprint of the constitutional preamble to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:17–20, with its emphases on having the law in one's heart

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<sup>45</sup> Roland Deines, "Not the Law but the Messiah: Law and Righteousness in the Gospel of Matthew—An Ongoing Debate," in Gurtner and Nolland (eds), *Built upon the Rock*, p. 75.

(compare Matthew 5:8, 28; 6:21), teaching one's neighbor correctly (compare Matthew 5:19), and wanting to include everyone from the greatest to the least (compare Matthew 5:19), so that they will know the Lord and hence be known to the Lord (compare Matthew 7:21–3). Most of all, Jeremiah 31 foresees the creation of a new covenant (*diathēkē kainē*, Jeremiah 38:31, the same words being used in 1 Corinthians 11:25 and several manuscripts of Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24 and Luke 22:20), or in other words a new treaty relationship between God and his people. Perhaps this linkage between Matthew 5 and Jeremiah 31 led some people to say of Jesus, according to Matthew's account, that he was Jeremiah (Matthew 16:14).

Here, too, a prominent temple theme relating to the law of God comes into play, for promulgating, inculcating, and enshrining the law and the Decalogue (contained in the ark of the covenant) were among the principal functions of the Temple in Jerusalem. The essence of the covenant between God and Israel was fundamentally tied to the law and, hence, to the Temple. A reading of the entire law occurred at the Temple every seventh year during the Feast of Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 31:10–12), and on those occasions the covenant was renewed at the Temple. As Moshe Weinfeld has stated: “The view has become increasingly accepted that the event at which God pronounced his words at Sinai was not regarded as a once and for all event but as an occurrence that repeated itself whenever the people of Israel assembled and swore allegiance to their God,”<sup>46</sup> and thus “it should be assumed that the Decalogue was read in the sanctuaries at ceremonies of covenant renewal; and the people would commit themselves each time anew”; particularly, “in Second Temple times, the Decalogue was read daily in the Temple, together with the Shema<sup>c</sup> prayer, close to the time of the offering of the Daily Offering” and “all those present would commit themselves to them by covenant and oath.”<sup>47</sup> Thus “the reading of the Decalogue and the Shema<sup>c</sup> prayer every morning were considered acceptance of the yoke of the heavenly kingdom, a kind of commitment by oath,” and accordingly this set of obligations “constituted a kind of binding foundation-scroll of the Israelite community.”<sup>48</sup> Hence, Jesus' positive attitude toward the law and his explicit use of three of the Ten Commandments is clearly understandable as an element in his formation of a new community of committed followers.

Worth has argued that, given the context in which Jesus taught, it would have been “vital for him to impress upon his listeners that no matter how much what he said departed from what they had been taught, it in no way departed from what the Mosaic Law itself demanded. In doing this, he was defying the religious traditions

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<sup>46</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, “The Decalogue: Its Significance, Uniqueness, and Place in Israel's Tradition,” in Edwin R. Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss, and John W. Welch (eds), *Religion and Law: Biblical Judaic and Islamic Perspectives* (Winona Lake, Indiana, 1990), pp. 26–7.

<sup>47</sup> Weinfeld, “Decalogue,” 34 (citing Tamid 5:1) and 37.

<sup>48</sup> Weinfeld, “Decalogue,” 36–7.

that had evolved, but he was opposing nothing that came from God.”<sup>49</sup> Even in Jesus’ later cleansing of the Temple, Jesus did not reject the law or the Temple; instead, he protected the sanctity of the Temple by driving out the inappropriate business practices that had developed in those sacred precincts, “subvert[ing] the central purpose of the temple.”<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, when Jesus later prophesied that every stone of the Temple would be torn down (*kataluthēsetai*, Matthew 24:2; Mark 13:2), he used a word that reverberated with his statement in Matthew 5:17, giving assurance that he never intended to abolish (*katalusai*) even the least provision of the law itself. The stones of the Temple would fall by the hands of others, but his desire was to see that the laws behind the Temple were fully kept and fulfilled.

Another conspicuous point worth mentioning in this connection is the way in which the Decalogue was used in the Temple, an awareness of which would have drawn Jewish listeners further into the surroundings of the Temple. The Decalogue had a pervasive presence in the Temple because these ten statements served implicitly as requirements for entering the Temple. Worthiness or purity was required to enter into sacred space (echoing the preparations required of Moses and the people as they contemplated entering the holy mountain in Exodus 19), and in all likelihood the Ten Commandments functioned in ancient Israel as temple entrance requirements. Gerhard von Rad and Klaus Koch have argued that the Ten Commandments and related texts served as a temple entrance liturgy, “a ceremonious encounter or interview on the Temple Mount between a priest and a pilgrim, in which the requirements for entrance into the holy area were laid out.”<sup>51</sup> One can see such an entrance examination standing in the background of Psalm 24, which asks questions of anyone seeking admission to the temple precinct: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?” The answer is, “He that has clean hands, a pure heart, has not set his mind on falsehood, nor borne false witness.” The interdiction against bearing false witness echoes the Decalogue’s ninth commandment.

Such temple entrance requirements were not unique to Israel. The Egyptian Book of the Dead requires that the soul upon arrival at the hall of Maat, goddess of righteousness and judgment, recite a series of thirty-seven negative confessions concerning offenses against the gods or man in order to be admitted in purity before the god. Among these apodictic-like confessions are several that parallel the Decalogue: “Not have I despised God. Not have I killed. Not have I fornicated. Not have I diminished the offerings. Not have I stolen,” and so on.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Worth, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 37.

<sup>50</sup> Worth, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 68.

<sup>51</sup> Klaus Koch, “Tempeleinlassliturgien und Dekaloge,” in Rolf Rendtorff und Klaus Koch (eds), *Studien zur Theologie der alttestamentlichen Überlieferungen* (Neukirchen, 1961), pp. 45–60. The relevant publications of von Rad are listed in n. 2.

<sup>52</sup> E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (London, 1895; republished New York, 1967), pp. 194–7.



What can be counted as ten entrance requirements were posted in front of a first-century B.C.E. private sanctuary in Philadelphia, in Asia Minor. These requirements, listed below, were issued by the goddess Agdistis to Dionysius in a dream from Zeus, and all visitors must swear each month to keep these ten standards, not just in the sanctuary but everywhere:

1. Thou shalt not deceive
2. Not use poison harmful to men
3. No harmful spells
4. No love potion
5. No abortions
6. Not rob
7. Not murder
8. No ill-intentions toward this sanctuary
9. No cover-up of any such doing by others
10. No sexual relations except with wife.<sup>53</sup>

Thus the potent use by Jesus of representative commandments from the Decalogue may well have sparked memories of the Temple in the minds of its listeners, especially when these words in Matthew 5:21–37 followed right after the warning in Matthew 5:20 that those who do not keep these commandments shall in no way “enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Entrance to the Temple and entrance into the kingdom of God were, in several ways, virtually tantamount to each other. As Herman Hendrickx writes, the idea of entering into the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 5:20 and 7:21 may be directly connected either to the image of Israel entering the promised land (whether historically or eschatologically) or to the image of “ritual purity and ethical righteousness for entrance through the Temple gate or the city gates of Jerusalem,” and “the latter seems to be more important in Mt. 5:20.”<sup>54</sup> Accordingly, Hendrickx has concluded that Matthew 5:20 has rightly “been form-critically classified both as a ‘provision of sacred law’ (*Satz heiligen Rechtes*) and as an ‘entrance-requirement’ (*Engangsbedingung*). The verse has a double function: it sums up everything that precedes it and is also an immediate introduction to the antitheses, while Mt. 5:17–20 as a unit constitutes the larger introduction to the antitheses”<sup>55</sup> which immediately follow.

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<sup>53</sup> Cited in Weinfeld, “Decalogue,” 34–6; first published in O. Weinreich, *Stiftung und Kultsatzungen eines Privatheiligtums in Philadelphia in Lydien* (Heidelberg, 1919). See further Moshe Weinfeld, “Instructions for Temple Visitors in the Bible and in Ancient Egypt,” *ScrHier* 28 (1982): 224–50. Compare also Didache 2.2–6, similarly prohibiting murder, adultery, pedophilia, stealing, magic, potions, abortion, coveting, swearing false oaths, perjury, curses, grudges, greed, hypocrisy, and pride.

<sup>54</sup> Herman Hendrickx, *The Sermon on the Mount* (London, 1984), pp. 55–6.

<sup>55</sup> Hendrickx, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 56.

Providing the backbone for the succeeding stages of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus thus speaks next of at least five laws from the Pentateuch: three come from the Decalogue, namely the commandments against (a) murder, (b) adultery, and (c) swearing falsely by the name of God. Another deals with (d) the essential principle of talionic or restorative justice which is central to the Covenant Code (see Exodus 21:23–5) and also to the basic Israelite concept of justice (see Leviticus 24:17–21). The final law that is interpreted in this sequence comes from the heart of the Holiness Code in its commandment (e) to love one’s neighbor: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:17–18). By speaking of these five key provisions of the law, Jesus elliptically embraces and epitomizes the totality of the law, just as Psalm 24 mentioned four such requirements and Psalm 50:18–20 listed three of the Ten Commandments (namely theft, adultery, and bearing false witness), but in doing so these psalms were understood as embracing the law in its fullness and completeness.

At the same time, because the Sermon on the Mount mentions these laws as representative requirements for entering into the kingdom of heaven, Jesus does not take the time in this setting to go into all of the possible questions that might arise about the meaning and application of these rules. While it is true that Jesus interprets these *halakhic* texts from the Torah, it is less important to the logic of the Sermon on the Mount how these texts are reworked than how those reworked texts are put to use. Jesus’ statements about the law are used in Matthew 5:21–47 in two ways: first, as an iconic list representing all the stipulations of the covenant used in rituals of covenant renewal in the Temple; and second, as entrance requirements assuring that the participants are ready and worthy to enter further into the sacred space and into the holy observances which continue to be unfolded in the stages of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 6 and 7.

### **Stage 5. Prohibition against Anger, Ill-Speaking, and Ridicule of Brethren (5:21–2)**

The first of these requirements pertains to murder. No one can enter the Temple with hands that are stained with innocent blood, with hearts that yearn for revenge, or with tongues that spew out damning invectives: “You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill (*phoneuseis*); and whoever kills shall be liable (*enochos*) to judgment.’ But I say to you that every one who is angry (*ho orgizomenos*) with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council (*tōi sunedriōi*), and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be liable to the hell of fire (*eis tēn geennan tou puros*)” (Matthew 5:21–2).

This statement at the beginning of this section of the Sermon on the Mount also stood at the top of the second tablet of the law with its prohibition against murder (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17). Jesus interpreted the law of homicide to

include an underlying prohibition against becoming angry or speaking derisively or critically about one's brother. Not limiting its attention to the physical conduct of homicide, this intensification of the law addresses some of the underlying causes of murder, namely anger, insults, and ridicule. Sin can be rooted out if it can be eliminated at its internal source, at the heart of the matter, so to speak. For this reason, those who enter the Temple or answer the call of the covenant must have clean hands and also a pure heart (Psalms 24:4).

In cases of unintentional homicide, the Temple served the manslayer as a place of refuge from the vengeance of the redeemer of blood but only in cases where the manslayer had not acted in hatred or had been lying in wait with premeditation to inflict harm (Exodus 21:12–14; Numbers 35:25–8; Deuteronomy 19:4–10; Joshua 20:2–6). Thus, in the Temple in particular, the connection between anger and guilt worthy of death (*enochos*; as this strong word is used in Leviticus 20:27) are closely linked, for if a man had previously been angry with his brother or had insulted or ridiculed him, it would be very difficult for that angry person to plead for sanctuary and clemency should his brother die under conditions that the manslayer somehow controlled. Proof of previous anger or hatred expressly vitiated the slayer's right to the protection in the Temple or in one of the designated cities of refuge (Numbers 35:20, 22–3; Deuteronomy 19:4, 6; Joshua 20:5).

Moreover, in a community that is regulated by temple precepts, no vengeance is permitted except as the Lord might allow, for anger and vengeance belong only to the Lord. In the Psalms, anger is the Lord's. "Arise, O Lord, in thy anger (*en orgēi*), lift thyself up against the fury of my enemies; awake, O my God; thou hast appointed a judgment" (Psalms 7:6). It is the Lord's prerogative either to repay people for their crimes and "in wrath (*en orgēi*) [to] cast down the peoples" (Psalms 56:7), or to withdraw his "hot anger (*orgēs thumou*)," to "put away [his] indignation," and not to "prolong [his] anger to all generations" (Psalms 85:3–5).

One of the functions of the Temple was to mitigate anger by reducing anxiety and envy and giving assurances that the Lord will prosper those who serve him: "Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over him who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! Refrain from anger (*apo orges*), and forsake wrath (*thumon*)! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the wicked shall be cut off; but those who wait for the Lord shall possess the land" (Psalms 37:7–9). Roland Worth notes a parallel between Matthew 5:21–2 and the attitude that is conveyed here in Psalms 37:8 with the words "refrain from anger, and forsake wrath."<sup>56</sup> The use of Psalm 37 as a "thanksgiving Psalm," as Mowinckel has concluded,<sup>57</sup> which was sung by temple singers on behalf of individual worshipers offering thank-offerings, would have given prominence in the minds of temple worshipers to this prohibition against fierce anger and to the Temple's assuaging system of sacrificial thank-offering that helped to put worshipers in a spirit of gratitude and forgiveness that vitiated wrath, hostility, and

<sup>56</sup> Worth, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 143.

<sup>57</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 2, p. 31–2.

anger. Moreover, by being slow to anger, the sons of God imitate the divine Father: He “is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,” and when he is angry, even he “will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger for ever” (Psalms 103:8–9; see also Psalms 145:8).

In addition, in a community of priesthood brothers, the Sermon on the Mount’s edict that prohibits evil speaking against a brother takes on added significance. In effect, the final two statements in this saying prohibit all manner of evil or unholy speaking against any brother, and *a fortiori* even more so against any of the community leaders. Anyone who is angry with a fellowman may find himself in danger of judgment (*krisēi*) before the town’s synagogue of elders (compare *enantiōn tēs synagōgēs eis krisin*, Joshua 20:3, 6). Anyone who calls his brother “Raca” is in danger of being brought before “the council (*tōi sunedriōi*),” that is, the Sanhedrin, which convened in the Temple. And those who persist in such misconduct and speak insulting invectives against a brother a second time will find themselves in danger of being cast out of the community or kingdom of heaven into Gehenna, the valley of smoldering fire. Since the word “Raca” means “empty-head,” the thrust of that injunction would seem to be that mocking or laughing at a brother’s foolishness (that is, what to some may seem to be foolishness) is strictly prohibited; and since the word “Fool (*Mōre*)” will appear again at the end of the Sermon on the Mount to describe the foolish man who does not hear and do the words of the Lord (Matthew 7:26), calling a brother a “fool” is tantamount to calling him an apostate or unfaithful member of the community.

Such provisions and disciplinary procedures are especially pertinent to a community of covenanters, as evidence marshaled by Manfred Weise and others regarding rules of discipline at Qumran and in the earliest Christian community tends to show.<sup>58</sup> According to one of the rules of the Dead Sea community found in the *Manual of Discipline* 7:8, “anger against a fellow-member of the society could not be tolerated under any circumstances,” and a punishment was applied “in any case of a member harbouring angry feelings.”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, *Manual of Discipline* 1:16–2:18 concludes its covenant-making ceremony by subjecting those who enter the covenant unworthily to judgments of the community council and to punishments similar to those mentioned in Matthew 5:21–2. One may find evidence of similar early Christian councils in New Testament passages such as Matthew 18:15–17 (“If your brother sin against you, . . . tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector”), 1 Corinthians 5:4–5 (“when you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh”), and 1 Timothy 1:20 (delivery of offending brothers “to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme”); and in the writings of Ignatius, who used the same

<sup>58</sup> Manfred Weise, “Mt. 5:21f—Ein Zeugnis sakraler Rechtsprechung in der Urgemeinde,” *ZNW* 49 (1958): 116–23; italics deleted.

<sup>59</sup> P. Wemberg-Møller, “A Semitic Idiom in Matt. V. 22,” *NTS* 3 (1956): 72; italics deleted.

word “council (*synhedrion*)” in reference to a council of the apostles.<sup>60</sup> These texts specifically speak of inspired councils meeting for the purpose of disciplining those who have affronted Christ by insulting those people in whom Christ’s spirit dwells. In Weise’s opinion, such deprecations are “not merely chidings in a banal sense, rather they insult to the core the community of God, viz., the covenant-community (*Verbundenheit*) of God. Therein lies their seriousness.”<sup>61</sup>

### Stage 6. Reconciliation of All Animosities (5:23–6)

Because brotherly harmony is integral to righteous unity, the ban in the previous stage against violence, anger and insult leads directly into the next stage of the Sermon on the Mount, which requires reconciliation of any known hard feelings or animosities between members of the community. In Matthew 5:23–4, Jesus explains that if anyone desires to come to the altar, he or she should have no hard feelings against any brother or sister that have not been resolved: “So if you are offering your gift (*dōron*) at the altar (*thusiastērion*), and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled (*diallagēthi*) to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23–4). Beyond making the general statement that no disciple can properly offer a gift—let alone advance further toward God’s presence—without first being reconciled with his fellowmen, these words are unmistakably at home in the Temple in several ways.

Some scholars have seen this passage as an intrusive interruption in the flow of thought in the Sermon on the Mount because it breaks up the rhythm of the antitheses between the old and the new in Matthew 5:21, 27, 33 and 38. However, laying down the prerequisite of pre-sacrificial reconciliation at this point makes logical sense both as the practical application of the previous principle about eschewing anger or hard feelings and also as one of the traditional requirements of those going forward ritually toward the altar of the Temple. Indeed, the Sermon on the Mount tells the disciple to leave his sacrifice on the altar and go and reconcile himself with his brother before proceeding, and so the positioning of this saying in the presentation of the Sermon on the Mount expects that other ritual actions will follow.

Most deeply related to the Sermon on the Mount’s requirement of pre-sacrificial reconciliation is the law of Leviticus 6:1–7, which requires that a person reconcile with his neighbor before coming to the Temple to make a trespass offering at the altar. In particular, this temple law required that if anyone had committed any act of disloyalty, deception, robbery, fraud, perjury, or swearing falsely, then before bringing the priest his guilt offering, he must first “restore what he took by robbery,

<sup>60</sup> Eduard Lohse, “*synedrion*,” in *TDNT*, vol. 7, p. 871, where Ignatius is cited as using *synhedrion* three times in his epistles to mean “council.”

<sup>61</sup> Weise, “Mt. 5:21f.—Ein Zeugnis sakraler Rechtsprechung,” 123.

or what he got by oppression, or the deposit which was committed to him, or the lost thing which he found, or anything about which he has sworn falsely; he shall restore it in full, and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs,” upon which he is permitted to bring an unblemished ram to the altar so that the priest can “make atonement for him before the Lord, and he shall be forgiven for any of the things which one may do and thereby become guilty” (Leviticus 6:4–7). The trigger that requires anyone who has thus sinned to make restitution and reconciliation is the feeling of guilt: “He shall pay it to its owner as soon as he feels guilt” (Leviticus 5:24, Milgrom’s translation); “it is their consciences that subsequently disturb them.”<sup>62</sup> Matthew 5:23 conveys the same idea. Its phrase “and there remember” reflects a twinge of conscience. Thus, Worth rightly states that

there is but a modest step from this [Leviticus 6:1–7] to what Jesus demands: In Jesus the sacrifice is interrupted by the reconciliation and then completed afterwards; in Leviticus the reconciliation occurs and then the sacrifice. What Jesus seems to have in mind is that the very act of religious worship has caused the individual to openly confront his own responsibility. Recognizing the guilt, he moves to heal the breach, and then offers the sacrifice in the spirit God intended.<sup>63</sup>

Actually, Jesus’ requirement goes beyond the pre-sacrificial requirement of Leviticus in two ways: First, as Worth points out, they differ in time and place. In Leviticus 6, the twinge of conscience occurs outside the Temple; Matthew 5:23 operates at the altar. Second, Leviticus 6 contemplates only the situation where a person is making a guilt offering for having stolen or misappropriated property (in which case the property plus a punitive twenty percent supplement must be paid to the injured party before the guilt offering is made), whereas Matthew 5 covers any type of offense or hard feeling that impairs brotherly love in any way, that is, any remembrance “that your brother has something against you (*echei ti kata sou*)” (Matthew 5:23). Thus, the requirement imposed by the Sermon on the Mount arises even after commercial reparations have been paid; if the person coming to the altar still feels that his brother has anything against him, the sacrificial offeror is obligated to halt the process and complete the reconciliation at the interpersonal level before proceeding further.

Because of the occurrence of the two temple terms “altar” and “gift” in Matthew 5:23–4, commentators commonly recognize that this passage clearly reflects Jesus’ attitude toward the law of Moses and, hence, the Temple. Roland Worth sees the reference to an altar as a clear example of Jesus following and even explaining the law of the old covenant: “We could hardly ask for better evidence than this that Jesus’ teaching in this antithesis was aimed at those living under and

<sup>62</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 319, 338.

<sup>63</sup> Worth, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 146–8.

practicing the Mosaic Law. The individual is assumed to have brought some type of sacrifice to the Temple in Jerusalem—sacrifices could not properly be offered elsewhere.”<sup>64</sup> Though Worth asserts that Jesus was not “initiating new practices and doctrines,” he nevertheless clearly recognizes that the passage connects these teachings of Jesus to the law of the Torah and of the Temple.<sup>65</sup> Betz concurs, “If the SM conforms to Jewish practice in the Jerusalem Temple, this text contains important information about the Temple worship around 50 CE by Jerusalem Christians.”<sup>66</sup>

As listeners to the Sermon on the Mount heard these particular sentences, the Temple would easily have come most sharply into focus. Certainly, the great altar of the Temple was one of its most distinctive features. The word *thusiastērion* appears rather conspicuously in such texts as Exodus 27:1; 30:1; 40:5; and throughout Leviticus chapters 1–9; and although *dōron* can mean gifts of people to each other, it is widely used in the Septuagint to refer to sacrificial offerings in the Temple (for example, Leviticus 2:1ff; 3:1ff; 4:23–4; 5:11; 7:13ff; Numbers 6:14; 7:3ff; Deuteronomy 12:11), and its primary usage in the New Testament, and certainly in this passage in the Sermon on the Mount, refers to sacrifices (see Matthew 8:4; 15:5; 23:18–19; Hebrews 5:1, 8:3–4; 9:9; 11:4; compare Genesis 4:4), or gifts of money in the Temple (Luke 21:1, 4). If they had begun wondering if they were correctly catching all of the Sermon’s temple allusions, any remaining doubts would have been dispelled in their minds by the appearance of this explicit temple terminology.

This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that the Didache also required reconciliation before the early Christians could partake of the Eucharist, so that their sacrifice might be pure: “Let no one engaged in a dispute with his comrade join you until they have been reconciled, lest your sacrifice be profaned.”<sup>67</sup> Commentators rightly see this provision in the Sermon on the Mount or its application in the early Christian tradition as having influenced this passage in the Didache.<sup>68</sup> Although the Didache does not use the words *thusiastērion* or *dōron*, it uses *thusia* (sacrifice), effectively conjoining them both; and, in addition, Matthew 5:24 and Didache 14:2 both use forms of the catchword *diallassomai* (to reconcile), namely *diallagēthi* and *diallagōsin*, respectively.

In his final directive in this section on reconciliation, Jesus admonished his people to settle their controversies quickly in order to avoid going to court. Several reasons make this advice attractive. For one thing, secular judges are unpredictable. Once a matter is submitted to judicial determination, the parties

<sup>64</sup> Worth, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 144.

<sup>65</sup> Worth, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 144.

<sup>66</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 223.

<sup>67</sup> Didache 14:2, in Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache* (Minneapolis, 1998), 194; on the relation between this text and Matthew 5:23–4, see pp. 198–9.

<sup>68</sup> For example, see Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis, 1989), p. 289 n. 62; Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 224.

lose control of their destiny—settlement is not always possible. Beyond that, once a claim has been filed, counterclaims can be raised. If the character of the defendant has been disparaged by the accusation, the character of the accuser is likely to be drawn into question as well. But most of all, the judge mentioned here, who controls a court-guard and a prison, likely refers to the Roman institution of imprisonment of debtors,<sup>69</sup> and thus this rubric not only requires its followers to settle their debts and disputes quickly among themselves but also to avoid especially the use of Roman or other non-Jewish tribunals, a point that Paul will develop further in Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 6:1–11). In other words, for present purposes, the Sermon on the Mount again draws upon temple conventions: those who go to court in a secular forum will need to make the normal pre-judicial sacrifices to other gods and to swear the required authenticating or exculpatory oaths in the names of those other gods, something that would be disabling if not unthinkable for pious, temple-observant Jews. And by settling quickly, the parties qualify themselves to make their sacrifices without delay, thereby satisfying the legal requirement to make temple sacrifices promptly, that “you shall not delay to offer from the fullness of your harvest and from the outflow of your presses” (Exodus 22:29). In the end, settlement looks forward to the day of divine judgment, which will be far more important than any earthly day in court.

### Stage 7. Commitment to Sexual Purity and Fidelity in Marriage (5:27–32)

The next subject addressed in the Sermon on the Mount is chastity, beginning with the commandment “You shall not commit adultery” (5:27), quoted from the Decalogue in Exodus 20:14, and ending with a brief comment about divorce. At this stage, the Sermon on the Mount makes three points about adultery, structured in a balanced, four-part chiasmic a-b-b-a arrangement:

(a) You have heard that it was said (*errethē*), You shall not commit *adultery* (*ou moicheuseis*). I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed *adultery* with her in his heart.

(b) If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away (*bale apo sou*); it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

(b') And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

(a') It was also said (*errethē de*), Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity (*parektos logou porneias*), makes her an *adulteress*; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits *adultery*. (Matthew 5:27–32)

<sup>69</sup> Bernard S. Jackson, *Theft in Early Jewish Law* (Oxford, 1972), p. 144; Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 227.



Although the precise meaning of these brief lines in the Sermon on the Mount remains notoriously unclear,<sup>70</sup> reading these lines in a temple context sheds new light, in several ways, on why and how the Sermon on the Mount particularly addressed the subject of adultery, a topic that was of considerable interest and importance to the Temple. If the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount was not to define or legislate ethical principles in minute detail for all human circumstances, but rather to elevate the spiritual aspirations and to purify the inner desires of those who seek first and foremost after God and his righteousness, then these brief lines become fully adequate. Their immediate point is to ask the hearers again, Are you willing to enter into a covenant-relationship with the Lord? Are you worthy to ascend into the mountain of the Lord? A person can discover the answer to these questions by examining how well one observes and values the covenant-relationship with one's spouse.

As has been discussed above with respect to the law of homicide, the Sermon on the Mount shifts the attention concerning adultery from outward conduct to the inward heart of the adherent. This focus on the heart as the fountain of either righteousness or wickedness is articulated most clearly as a general principle in the Gospel of Mark, which mentions three terms that figure prominently here in the Sermon as well: "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication (*porneiai*), theft, murder, adultery (*moicheiai*), coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy (*ophthalmos ponēros*), slander, pride, foolishness" (Mark 7:21–2).

For the Sermon on the Mount, lust is to adultery as anger is to murder. Just as being angry with a brother will destroy the unity of the covenant-community of worthy and righteous worshipers, looking lustfully at another woman will destroy the unity of that which God has put together in the covenant-relationship of marriage which puts a man and a woman together as a single body. Just as homicide spills guilty blood upon hands of the murderer, defiles the land, and precludes the impure from entering into the presence of the Lord or seeking the protection of his sanctuary, so the defilement caused by any of the prohibited sexual relations listed in Leviticus 18 and 20 prevents the parties from standing in a holy state (Leviticus 20:26). As in the case of murderers, the consequence to those who commit adultery is that they "shall be cut off from among their people" (Leviticus 18:29; 20:17) and, no longer being under the aegis of the Lord's covenant and his Temple, "the land [will] vomit [them] out" (Leviticus 18:28).

Prominent concern with purity of heart brings to mind again the requirement of temple entrance in Psalms 24:4, "he who has clean hands and a pure heart," and also the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel about the new covenant relationship that will be established between God and his people. As mentioned above, Jeremiah

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<sup>70</sup> Besides the ethical and ecclesiastical questions left unanswered about what constitutes "adultery in the heart" or a justifiable "ground of *porneia*," the complexity of interpreting verse 32 is compounded by the array of textual variants that appear here also in Matthew 19:7, 9 in the Greek New Testament manuscripts.

prophesied that a covenant was to be made with the house of Israel according to which the law would be written “upon their hearts,” and on this condition the Lord “will be their God, and they shall be [his] people” (Jeremiah 31:33). Ezekiel likewise prophesied in a context that discusses temple rituals of purification and blessing: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. You shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Ezekiel 36:25–8). If one falls into the faithlessness of committing adultery in one’s heart against the wife of his youth, how can he be counted on to remain faithful to such a covenant between him and the Lord God that must be written likewise upon the living flesh of a new heart?

Marriage itself was understood under Hebrew law as a complex process resulting in a covenant that joined and united the man and the wife.<sup>71</sup> Besides creating bonds between the bride, the groom, and often their fathers, the Lord himself was intimately involved in marriages: He had approved the institution of marriage in general, and as a witness to the marriage vows, he watched over the fulfillment of the marriage covenant between husband and wife. In response to the question why the Lord paid no attention to their sacrifices, Malachi answered, “Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant” (Malachi 2:14).

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount strongly subscribed to this view: “The sanctity of God-ordained marriage is so important for Jesus that already the lustful look” is destructive.<sup>72</sup> While it goes beyond our present purposes to consider all of the nuances in the New Testament regarding marriage,<sup>73</sup> it is sufficient to note that Jesus’ most important words about marriage are found in Matthew 19, where he takes the discussion back to the beginning, to the Garden of Eden, to insist that “what therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:6). The Garden of Eden represents not only an ideal state in the creation of the mankind but also the ideal order of the world enshrined in the Temple’s representation of the six days of the Creation.

Thus, it may well be that the kind of enduring, ideal faithfulness required by the Sermon on the Mount between the righteous husband (lord, Hebrew *baʿal*) and wife is not the standard expected of all people on earth. All people, even the Gentiles, were required by the Noachide laws to avoid adultery and fornication (see Jubilees

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<sup>71</sup> Ze’ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times* (2nd edn, Provo, Utah, 2001), p. 144.

<sup>72</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, pp. 296–7.

<sup>73</sup> For a lengthy bibliography and extended discussion, see Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 230–59.

7:20–21; 3 Baruch 4:17; Acts 15:29), to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 9:7), and to avoid evil imaginations of the heart (Genesis 6:5); but the man who is a true lord to his covenantal wife behaves at a higher level, being as true to his wife as the Lord God is to his bride and his people (see Ezekiel 16:6–14). Thus, Jesus said to the Pharisees, who thought they were living a higher moral law than ordinary people, that their understanding of divorce had not been so “from the beginning” (Matthew 19:8), and that, except in cases of unchastity, marrying another after a divorce constitutes adultery (Matthew 19:9). After this saying about the ideal permanency of the eternal bond of marriage, Jesus acknowledged that this saying was not necessarily to be received by all men (Matthew 19:11), any more than the Lord’s covenant with Israel was necessarily to be received by all peoples. In other words, having and preserving an indissoluble marriage is not intended for all, but only for “those to whom it is given” (Matthew 19:11).

With similar force and effect, biblical law prohibited priests in the Temple of Jerusalem from marrying widows, divorcees, or women who had been defiled (Leviticus 21:7, 13–15). For temple priests, to whom a heightened state of holiness had been given, ordinary latitude with respect to divorce was not allowed. In a comparable (though not identical) manner, those to whom it had been given by Jesus to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth would be expected to observe a higher standard of righteousness than was practiced by other people, explicitly the scribes and the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20).

The Sermon on the Mount, however, does not say how this elevated covenant or condition of marriage was given or would be given to the followers of Jesus. The fact that the statements in the Sermon on the Mount about adultery are themselves elliptical may indicate that the readers or hearers had already been instructed in these further details and were thus in a position “to supply from memory and perception that which is left unstated,”<sup>74</sup> or perhaps they had been told to watch for further instructions that would be given later to clarify the meaning and application of this order of marriage that would be unbreakable by man alone. At a minimum, however, one might presume that the listeners would have understood that—whether by his divine beneficence or through those to whom he had delegated authority to bind on earth and in heaven—whatsoever God had ordained and given in such a marriage, only God or his duly constituted agents could worthily loose and lawfully take apart (Matthew 16:19; 18:18).

Because God’s covenant with Israel and a husband’s covenant with his wife are both covenants, adultery was widely used in the Old Testament as a metaphor for the unfaithfulness of Israel, breaking their covenant with Yahweh (see Ezekiel 16:15; Hosea 4:15–19; Malachi 2:14–16). Thus the New Testament extends the meaning of “adulterous” (*moichalis*) to become a figurative expression for total unfaithfulness toward God. Jesus used this word in rebuking sign seekers as a wicked and adulterous generation (Matthew 12:39); likewise James warned

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<sup>74</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 230.

“unfaithful” people (*moichalides*) that becoming too friendly with the world made them enemies of God (James 4:4).

Similarly, adultery was frequently seen as something closely akin to idolatry, “playing the harlot after other gods” (see Exodus 34:15–16; Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 31:16; Judges 2:17; 8:27; Psalms 73:27; Ezekiel 6:9). In a single breath, Ezekiel links adultery and the worship of false gods: “For they have committed adultery, and blood is upon their hands; with their idols they have committed adultery; and they have even offered up to them for food the sons whom they had borne to me” (Ezekiel 23:37). “Since the prophetic movement found it appropriate to describe the relationship between Yahweh and Israel in terms of the relationship between husband and wife, it likewise characterizes religious transgression as adultery,” and the word *nā’ap* was used to refer both to idolatry and adultery.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, this passage in the Sermon on the Mount about adultery is not to be understood simply as addressing matters of sexual propriety or as protecting chauvinistically the marital interests of husbands. Much more is at stake here, including the very foundation of a righteous people’s relationship with their Lord. In the mind of the Temple, those who committed adultery were irrefutably presumed to be disloyal to Yahweh. Thus the Psalms warn that even though people may well offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, make solemn vows, supplicate pious prayers, and glorify God (Psalms 50:14–15), if they steal, commit adultery, speak evil or tell lies they will be torn in pieces and none will deliver them, “for you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you. If you see a thief, you are a friend of his; and you keep company with adulterers” (Psalms 50:18–19). Hence, avoiding adultery at all costs was of utmost importance to the efficaciousness of the entire cultic system and temple order.

In the temple context, the subject of adultery (introduced at the beginning of this stage in the Sermon) logically brought up the closely related subject of divorce (with which the stage concludes). Just as the hearers of the Sermon on the Mount knew that the sacrifices of an adulterer would avail him nothing, so they were also fully aware that any temple offerings made by a man who had been unfaithful to his wife by severing the marriage covenant were equally unacceptable to God: “May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob” and he “no longer regards the offering” of the man who wrongfully divorces such a wife (see Malachi 2:12–13). And just as God was heartbroken over adultery and infidelity, he recoiled whenever possible from divorce. Although the Lord sent the northern kingdom of Israel away with its bill of divorcement (Jeremiah 3:8), no such writ was issued even to an unfaithful Judah (Isaiah 50:1). “For I hate divorce, says the Lord the God of Israel. . . . So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless” (Malachi 2:16). Jesus’ statement against divorce in the Sermon on the Mount echoes the same sentiment. Perhaps the odiousness of divorce in this context would have

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<sup>75</sup> David Noel Freedman and B.E. Willoughby, “*nā’ap*,” in *TDOT*, vol. 9, pp. 116–17.

sounded even louder in Jewish and Greek ears than to modern listeners, for in the biblical languages the terms for a bill of divorcement literally mean in Hebrew a “scroll of cutting off (*sefer keritut*)” (Deuteronomy 24:3), as if she were being excommunicated, blotted out, or exterminated (*kārat*), or in Greek a “book of divorce (*biblion apostasiou*)” (Deuteronomy 24:3 LXX), as if she were now an apostate or in apostasy (*apostasía*).

It is true that most readers of this part of the Sermon on the Mount have occupied themselves with the practical questions raised by its strong disapproval of letting a wife go (the word used in Matthew 5:31 for divorce is *apoluō*, to set free, release, pardon, dismiss, send away), except for the reason of some unchastity (*porneia*, meaning “sexual immorality of any kind.”<sup>76</sup> Answers to the questions that devolve from this brief statement, asking when, why, and how divorce is lawful or under what conditions divorcees may properly remarry, are anything but clear from this text, even after centuries of discussion.<sup>77</sup> About all that one can safely conclude about this statement about divorce is that the Sermon on the Mount rejects the approach of those who take divorce too casually. It is important to note that Matthew 5:31 does not attribute this casual view about divorce to the venerable ones of old times, and it does not quote Deuteronomy 24. After making the central point that it is better for one part of the body to be lost than for the entire body to be destroyed, Matthew 5:31 simply states, “In spite of this, it is said (*errethē de*),” whoever would dismiss his wife, let him give to her a divorcement, as if getting a divorce is a very simple thing. Deuteronomy 24:1–4 may well stand somewhere in the background behind this apparently popular practice that was then being

<sup>76</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2nd edn, New York, 1989), p. 771.

<sup>77</sup> For an array of various interpretations concerning this section’s passage on divorce, see, for example, David Daube, “The New Testament Terms for Divorce,” *Theology* 47 (1944): 65–7, reprinted as “Terms for Divorce,” in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, 3.13, and in *Collected Works of David Daube* vol. 2, p. 281–8; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some New Palestinian Evidence,” *TS* 37 (June 1976): 197–226; Thomas V. Fleming, “Christ and Divorce,” *TS* 24 (1963): 106–20; Wilfrid J. Harrington, “The New Testament and Divorce,” *ITQ* 39 (1972): 178–87; William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce: The Problem with the Evangelical Consensus* (Nashville, 1985); Bernard S. Jackson, “‘Holier Than Thou’? Marriage and Divorce in the Scrolls, the New Testament and Early Rabbinic Sources,” in *Essays on Halakhah in the New Testament* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 167–225; Stanley B. Marrow, “Marriage and Divorce in the New Testament,” *AthR* 70 (1988): 3–15; James R. Mueller, “The Temple Scroll and the Gospel Divorce Texts,” *RevQ* 10 (1980): 247–56; V. Noam, “Divorce in Qumran in Light of Early Halakhah,” *JJS* 56/2 (2005): 206–23; V. Norskov Olsen, *The New Testament Logia on Divorce: A Study of Their Interpretation from Erasmus to Milton* (Tübingen, 1971); David Parker, “The Early Traditions of Jesus’ Sayings on Divorce,” *Theology* 96 (1993): 372–83; Bruce Vawter, “Divorce and the New Testament,” *CBQ* 39 (October 1977): 528–42; Ben Witherington, “Matthew 5:32 and 19:9: Exception or Exceptional Situation,” *NTS* 31 (October 1985): 571–6.

advocated by some, but anyone who reads Deuteronomy 24 as supporting such leniency has already misread that text. It contemplates and justifies no such simple approach to no-fault divorce.

Much rather, the Sermon on the Mount takes the marriage relationship very seriously, as did the Temple. Indeed, the theme of dealing with issues of marital infidelity was very familiar to the Temple, with the cult itself providing an elaborate ritual for proving the guilt or innocence of a wife suspected of adultery. In Numbers 5, the well-known temple ritual of the bitter waters is spelled out. For present purposes it is not necessary to review all the steps involved in proving the guilt or innocence of a wife suspected of adultery, but it is relevant to point out that if a man ever wondered whether his wife was guilty of some *porneia* that warranted, if not required, him to separate himself from her, the temple cult provided the ritual mechanism for making that determination, and perhaps this explains why Jesus did not define *porneia*; he took this exception and its provability for granted.

The temple procedure was known as “the law in cases of jealousy, when a wife, though under her husband’s authority, goes astray and defiles herself” (Numbers 5:29). The wife may or may not have committed adultery; the jealousy could arise if the husband suspected that she had “gone astray” or acted in any way “unfaithfully against him” (Numbers 5:12). The concern that she might thereby have somehow become “defiled” appears to have presented the greatest problem for the husband, who by continuing living with her, assuming that she had become defiled, would himself then contract impurity from her. This concern over defilement seems to be the main concern necessitating the conduct of this divination procedure (the word appears seven times in Numbers 5:11–30, just as the problem of defilement is also the fundamental issue in Deuteronomy 24:4). If the wife is thereby found to be defiled, divorce would certainly be justified in the case of an ordinary husband; it is mandatory in the case of a husband who is a priest.<sup>78</sup>

This underlying concern about purity and hence worthiness to enter the Temple seems to stand in much the same way behind Jesus’ statement about the *porneia* exception for divorce in Matthew 5. Except for the reason of *porneia* (any kind of unlawful sexual relationship outside of marriage) on the part of the woman (in which case she is already responsible for her defilement), the man “makes her to commit adultery/unfaithfulness” (Matthew 5:32), if he sends her out without justification. Just as a man obeys the commandment against murder by avoiding anger, so he keeps the commandment against adultery by not lusting after other women or by divorcing his wife who is sexually pure, for either will likely lead the man or the woman to further sexual defilement, for example, if a man (Matthew 19:9) or a woman (Mark 10:12) were to remarry after an invalid divorce, essentially being still married. Whatever the practical interpretations of the divorce texts in the Bible might have been, the common similarity between them ties into the concern

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<sup>78</sup> If the defilement has involved adultery or some other capital offense, the death penalty may have been involved (see Deuteronomy 22:22), in which case divorce was not really the matter in issue.

about purity. By committing adultery, one way or any other, the result is impurity and defilement. Purity in a ritual sense is at stake here,<sup>79</sup> for the dichotomy is either to stand pure in the presence of the Lord or to be cast impure into hell.

At the center of this section of the Sermon on the Mount is the pair of lines about the offending right eye and offending right hand, stating that they should be cut off or plucked out and cast away from you if they offend. This arresting, yet obvious, point emphasizes the seriousness of the commitment that the Sermon expects, if not requires: It is better that a member be thrown away than that the entire body be cast into the smoldering garbage pit of Gehenna. As Jesus' audience would have recognized, the valley by that name, which lies to the southwest of Jerusalem just outside the Dung Gate and not far from the Temple, was one of the main city dumps outside the walls of Jerusalem and had been the scene of the worship of the fire-god Moloch during the First Temple period (2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6); that use made it a ready image, both physically and typologically, for the place where all impurities should land when thrown out of the holy city and the temple precinct.

This difficult saying has caused trouble in the minds of many biblical commentators, because Jewish attitudes around the time of Jesus were strongly set against any punishment that took the form of bodily mutilation.<sup>80</sup> It is unlikely, of course, that Jesus demanded actual self-mutilation of his disciples, for it does not speak in any way here of actual bodily mutilation; the mode of expression appears to be figurative. At a minimum, such hyperbolic speech served to impress upon listeners the importance of the commandment. Roland Worth explains:

Even into the twentieth century the Aramaic adage about 'cut[ting] off your hand' was never taken literally but as a demand that one stop one's offensive conduct. For example, one would demand that you 'cut off your hand from my vineyard,' and that meant 'do not gather grapes from my vineyard.' Stay out of it. Stay away from it.<sup>81</sup>

Symbolically, it may be even more significant in a temple context that the Sermon on the Mount goes out of its way to specify the excision of the right hand and the right eye. The right hand was one of the main tools of priestly power. For example, when a leper was cleansed, the officiating priest would use his right hand to sprinkle the oil before Yahweh; he would then touch the leper's right ear, the thumb of the right hand, and the big toe of the right foot (Leviticus 14:15–26). The right hand was also used in gestures, especially treaties or oaths (Genesis 14:22). On other occasions, the right hand was associated with blessings and priestly

<sup>79</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, p. 306.

<sup>80</sup> J. Schattenmann, "Jesus and Pythagoras," *Kairos* 21 (1979): 215–20.

<sup>81</sup> Worth, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 105–6, citing George M. Lamsa, *Gospel Light: Comments on the Teachings of Jesus from Aramaic and Unchanged Eastern Customs* (Philadelphia, 1939), p. 53.

officiating. When Jacob blessed his sons, he blessed Ephraim with his right hand and Manasseh his left, implying that Ephraim would receive the greater blessings (Genesis 48:13), and kings after the order of the priest Melchizedek sat at Yahweh's right hand (Psalms 110:1). "Since time immemorial, the 'right hand' has been used figuratively in the sense of 'power' or 'might.'"<sup>82</sup> With Yahweh's right hand he created the heavens and the earth (Isaiah 48:13) and redeemed the Israelites from the Egyptians (Exodus 15:6, 12); with his right hand he will redeem the oppressed (Psalms 16:7), punish the enemies of the righteous (Psalms 20:8), and will always aid his people (Psalms 59:5; 62:8); when he withdraws his right hand his people suffer (Psalms 74:11). Moses was powerful when God's glorious arm went on his right hand (Isaiah 63:12). Christ will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left (Matthew 25:31), paralleling his own ascension to the right hand of God (Acts 2:34). To cut off one's right hand, in this temple culture, would symbolize the cutting off of one's own access to many of the highest blessings and benefits that come from having divine power at and in one's right hand.

While the idea of the right hand would have conveyed many sacred connotations to the audience of the Sermon on the Mount, one can only wonder what they might have made of the reference to the "right eye." Losing one eye would impair one's depth perception, but it would not prevent the left eye from still looking upon a woman lustfully. Perhaps there was some idea that the right eye was a stronger channel of perception, while the left eye was already something of an "evil eye." Such a theory of vision might be reflected in Matthew 6:22, which speaks of the eye (singular) as "the lamp of the body," able to fill the entire body with light, while the other eye, being evil, fills the body with darkness. The general importance of light in the Temple, as discussed above, also comes to mind with these references to the eye.

But beyond that, this metaphorical language about cutting off and throwing away communicated the seriousness of the consequences of violating the law of chastity. Physically, the death penalty could be imposed under the law of Moses for adultery (see Deuteronomy 22:22), but even more fearsome would be the consequences of spiritual destruction in this life and in the world to come. In early Christianity, the punishment of those violating this covenant of chastity probably took the form of excommunication, understanding the idea of being cut off in Matthew 5:30 as "a communal parable."<sup>83</sup> No matter how important the person might have been to the community or how painful it would be to cut off relations with that person, the righteous must cast out impure offenders from their midst who remain intransigent. In the Enoch literature, even the angels who fall from heaven are not immune from this excision. As Margaret Barker recounts: "As a result of the teachings of the fallen angels—the abuse of women, the manufacture of weapons, medicine and abortion, the cosmetics and jewelry of the fashion industry which led to fornication and corruption, . . . 'there arose much godlessness . . . and

<sup>82</sup> J.A. Soggin, "yamin," in *TDOT*, 6:101.

<sup>83</sup> Helmut Koester, "Using Quintilian to Interpret Mark," *BAR* 6 (May/June 1980): 44–5, although the words *bale apo* are used here, not *bale exō* as in Matthew 5:13.



as men perished they cried and their cry went up to heaven' (*1 Enoch* 8.2, 4). . . . On the future day of judgment, Azazel would be cast into the fire,"<sup>84</sup> just as the Sermon on the Mount warns.

The strictness of this penalty makes sense in the context of the high standard expected of those who became priests or participants in the ordinances of the Temple of Jerusalem. In light of the select group of people that Jesus had taken with him up into the mountain, this very graphic mental image of the excision of violating members may likewise be understood as having something to do with the higher expectations required of the people in that audience. Thus, for many reasons connected with temple imagery and cultic observances, it is perfectly suitable for the Sermon on the Mount to mention adultery and divorce, as it strove to build a celestial community first between men and brothers, and second between husbands and wives. As with the previous stage regarding anger and brotherhood, the context of this stage of the Sermon on the Mount is also related to the Temple. In the summation of J. Duncan M. Derrett concerning Jesus' teaching about adultery and divorce, "in effect all Israel must practise the scrupulousness of the priests,"<sup>85</sup> which qualifies them to serve in the house of the Lord. This, more than the legalistic particulars of what constituted adultery or justified divorce, was the driving point behind this stage of the Sermon on the Mount.

### Stage 8. Oaths to Be Sworn by Saying "Yes, yes" or "No, no" (5:33–7)

The next stage presented in the Sermon on the Mount is quite readily connected with the Temple, for it was the pre-eminent place of swearing oaths and making vows, often accompanied by offerings and oblations (Leviticus 22:18). In this section, Jesus gave instructions principally regarding oaths, not vows: "Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not swear falsely (*epiorkēseis*), but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn (*tous horkous sou*).' But I say to you, Do not swear (*omosai*) at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say (*ho logos humōn*) be simply 'Yes' (*nai nai*) or 'No' (*ou ou*); anything more than this comes from evil" (Matthew 5:33–7).

The prohibition against swearing falsely is, of course, related to another commandment in the Decalogue, this time the law against perjury (Exodus 20:16; see also Deuteronomy 19:16–21). It is also associated with the provision in the Holiness Code in Leviticus 19:12 that "you shall not swear by my name falsely." But in the Sermon on the Mount the concern is much less about offering false testimony in court or in a business transaction than about making an oath in the

<sup>84</sup> Barker, *Temple Theology*, pp. 45–6. Azazel is the leader of the fallen angels.

<sup>85</sup> J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament* (London, 1970), p. 374.

name of God (*tōi kuriōi*)<sup>86</sup> and then not performing what was promised. Several texts in the Old Testament sternly caution people against failing to perform the things they have solemnly sworn by God that they would do. Even more serious is the problem of not completing a votive offering that one has promised to pay to the holy place in reciprocation for the receipt of God's blessing connected with their pledge (discussed further in connection with Matthew 6:19–20 below).

To Jesus' audience, all this was emphatically clear: Either if "a man vows a vow (*euxētai euchēn*) to the Lord, or swears an oath (*omosēi horkon*) to bind himself by a pledge (*horisētai horismōi*), he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth" (Numbers 30:2). Psalm 50 spoke to the same effect: "Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice! . . . Pay your vows to the Most High" (Psalms 50:5, 14). Moreover, the law required that one should not delay in completing these obligations fully: "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not be slack to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin in you" (Deuteronomy 23:21), and if one chooses to make an oath or a vow, "you shall be careful to perform what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth" (Deuteronomy 23:23).

Not every oath involved the Temple, but all vows and many oaths did. "The biblical texts amply document the temple as a place to swear oaths."<sup>87</sup> Oaths and covenants were closely associated, for a covenant "by definition is an agreement solemnized by an oath."<sup>88</sup> Of the 215 oaths attested in the Old Testament, a majority involved "legal-religious oaths, often connected with vows, [or] theological oaths, especially the covenantal oath sworn by Yahweh and Israel. Yahweh himself is the guarantor of oaths, which means that taking oaths is in principle a good thing. Breaking oaths, therefore, is a form of sacrilege."<sup>89</sup>

The problem, of course, was rashly making excessive oaths or vows. Thus, the law recognized that the swearing of such oaths and vows, and the making of accompanying freewill offerings, was entirely optional. One was under no obligation to incur vows or swear oaths at all, should one not desire to do so: "If you refrain from vowing, it shall be no sin in you" (Deuteronomy 23:22). Longstanding wisdom held that "it is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay" (Ecclesiastes 5:5).

<sup>86</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 266.

<sup>87</sup> Marty E. Stevens, *Temples, Tithes, and Taxes: The Temple and the Economic Life of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, Massachusetts, 2006), p. 137, citing "If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath, and comes and swears his oath before thine altar in this house" (1 Kings 8:31; 2 Chronicles 6:22).

<sup>88</sup> Ann Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* (New York, 1996), p. 246.

<sup>89</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 262.

One way to avoid the risk of nonperformance of an oath was simply to “swear not at all” (Matthew 5:34). But there were other options as well. Nonperformance was most grievous if God’s name or his holy things had been invoked when the oath was sworn, which meant that the Divine would be demeaned and his holiness would be compromised by any failure of the oath. Thus, a second way to avoid the risk of offending God in making oaths was simply not to invoke God’s name or his holy things when swearing an oath. And this is what the Sermon on the Mount recommends.

When a person made an oath, especially in the Temple, an almost irresistible urge would have been felt to swear by the things that were in plain view in the holy precinct. Jesus names four such things, instructing his listeners to swear neither “in [the name of] the heaven (*en tōi ouranōi*),” nor “in [the name of] the earth (*en tēi gēi*),” nor “unto Jerusalem (*eis Hierosolyma*),” nor “in [the name of] your head (*en tēi kephalēi*).” All four of these elements have strong temple connections.

The heaven is not only the heavenly realm where God dwells above the earth, it is also the holy place where God resides within the Temple. The heaven is equated in Matthew 5:34 with “the throne of God,” and the earth with the cushion under his feet, a direct quotation from Isaiah 66:1, “Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool.” This headline from Isaiah evokes the entire final chapter of the book of Isaiah and its strong temple orientation, speaking of the return to Zion; there all nations and tongues shall gather, see God’s glory, bring offerings into the house of the Lord on the holy mountain of Jerusalem, and even provide priests and Levites from their ranks (Isaiah 66:18–21). Once again, those who heard or used the Sermon on the Mount may well have seen themselves among the eschatological ranks of these priests and Levites of whom heightened degrees of righteousness and sanctity would be required.

When Isaiah saw the Lord, this theophany occurred in the Temple and the Lord was seated on its throne: “I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple” (Isaiah 6:1). In Ezekiel’s vision, the four cherubim “represent nothing less than a throne for God.”<sup>90</sup> Thus, the images of the throne and footstool invoked in this passage in the Sermon on the Mount readily recall the Temple’s Holy of Holies, where God was said to be enthroned, with the ark serving as his footstool.<sup>91</sup> R.E. Clements discusses the ark-footstool in detail, and among his conclusions are these ideas: (1) that the ark, though not a throne, was associated with the “cherubim-throne”; (2) that the cherubim were associated with Israelite ideas about the presence of God; (3) that “it is not impossible that [the ark] was thought to serve as a pedestal for the invisible deity who guarded the covenant-law at his feet.”<sup>92</sup> Likewise, the Psalms also speak often of the

<sup>90</sup> Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*, p. 251. “Where God’s throne and footstool are, there is his house. . . . The whole temple is sometimes designated ‘throne’ or ‘footstool,’” p. 256, citing among others Isaiah 66:1; Psalms 99:5; 132:17.

<sup>91</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 1, p. 176.

<sup>92</sup> R.E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford, 1965), p. 35.

throne of God, connecting (if not equating) the temple on earth with the throne in heaven: “The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord is on his heavenly throne” (Psalms 11:4, my translation). Because the throne in the temple connects heaven and earth, serving as the place of God’s observation, judgment, and power, an enduring seat established of old and built up to all generations (Psalms 9:4; 45:6; 47:8; 89:4; 93:2), it would have been a very natural focal point in the minds of people in swearing their oaths, needing to invite God’s eternal watchful eye, his righteous assessment, and the execution of any appropriate penalties regarding any nonperformance of their oath or vow.

Swearing by Jerusalem also brings holiness and God into the imprecatory formula. Over the centuries, Jerusalem has been called the Holy City for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that its name in Greek, *Hierosolyma*, begins with the word *hieros*, meaning “holy,” together with *hieron* meaning “temple” and *hiereus* meaning “priest.” When Jesus referred to Jerusalem as “the city of the great King (*polis estin tou megalou basileōs*)” (Matthew 5:35), he used a phrase that appeared on coins of the day issued by kings, such as Agrippa I (37–44 CE), but Jerusalem could hardly have been thought of as a city of a great king a decade earlier. More likely, Jesus’ audience would have heard in this phrase an unmistakable verbal echo from the Psalms, which used virtually this same phrase in singing praises to “Mount Zion . . . the city of the great King (*hē polis tou basileōs tou megalou*)” (Psalms 48:2). References to Zion and to Jerusalem generally imply the Temple,<sup>93</sup> and of this particular Psalm Mowinckel states that the “poet glorifies the sanctuary on the mountain of God,” for “he that sits enthroned in the Temple is the one who sits enthroned [in heaven].”<sup>94</sup> The “great King” in this temple context is no political potentate but God himself.

Finally, the idea of swearing by one’s head may not have immediately brought the Temple to mind, until the comment was added that a person cannot make a single hair of his head either white or black. Leviticus 13:2–10 contains an extensive section regarding the examination of white hairs as indicators of skin disease and impurity. The priest must examine the skin to see if a hair has changed from dark to white. The words here for the dreaded “white hair” on the spot of leprosy are *tricha leukē* (Leviticus 13:4, 10, alternatively *thrix leukē* in 13:20–21, 25–6), the same words used in Matthew 5:36. The Mishnah imposed similar requirements for the inspection of priests to ensure their continuous state of purity.<sup>95</sup> Because leprosy and other skin diseases were of widespread concern in New Testament times, it is not unlikely that anyone originally hearing these words in the Sermon on the Mount would have thought along these lines. A person whose head was pure could be assured that his or her entire body was ritually pure, and thus an oath by one’s head would have carried great weight as an oath made in purity guaranteed by the Lord’s own definition of purity.

<sup>93</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, p. 7.

<sup>94</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, p. 174.

<sup>95</sup> M. Negaim 4.1–3; M. Bekhoroth 3.3, 7.1.

While the Sermon on the Mount prohibited swearing by the throne or footstool or city or holiness of God, this section instead encouraged Jesus' followers to let their "word" be "Yes, yes," or "No, no," and that anything "more profuse (*perisson*)" than this is superfluous and is of evil. Some biblical commentators have found this section in the Sermon on the Mount odd because it does not continue logically with the sequence of commandments in the Decalogue, as one might expect Jesus to follow if he were simply giving a commentary on the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Moreover, it is hard to see this as a demand of love. But this element in the Sermon on the Mount makes perfect sense if it is understood as an instruction about how sacred commitments are to be made: The swearing of oaths (which often accompanied the making of covenants)<sup>96</sup> should be made simply by saying "yes, yes" or "no, no." That is sufficient. After all, when Yahweh made his covenant with Israel, he simply spoke and it was so. Jesus himself uses a simple *amēn* (truly or verily) five times in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:18, 26; 6:2, 5, 16) to give full force and effect to his prophecies and judgments; for Jesus, this word "guarantees the truth of his statements."<sup>97</sup> In a sacred or ritual context, any more than this is unnecessary and perhaps even devious; more is not required, and is to be avoided. When the Levites heap a dozen curses upon the wicked, all the men of Israel cried out with a loud voice after each curse, "Amen" or "truly, yes" (Deuteronomy 27:15–26); and when the woman suspected of adultery swore her oath of innocence, all she was to say was "amen, amen" (Numbers 5:22). The double "yes, yes" or "verily, verily" carried the weight of divine force and was "a substitute for an oath."<sup>98</sup> The double response, "amen, amen," emphasizes the importance of the commitments being made under oath or by way of covenant. While the words about oaths in this stage of the Sermon on the Mount can apply in numerous life settings, they are most pertinent when people are making, or are about to make, solemn oaths or commitments to the Lord.

With all this in mind, what is to be made of the truncated but very influential line "do not swear at all"? The upshot of what has been said is that Jesus is not opposed to oaths altogether, but only to oaths sworn in certain inappropriate ways that might bring reproach to God by one's untruthfulness or nonperformance. In other words, what Jesus objected to was such casuistry that asked whether one was bound if one swore by temple gold but not if one swore by the Temple, or whether one was bound to an oath by the offering but not to an oath by the altar (see Matthew 23:16–19). To this effect, Worth connects the brief statement about oaths in the Sermon on the Mount with the discussion of oaths in Matthew 23:

<sup>96</sup> J. Schneider, "*horkos*," in *TDNT*, vol. 5, p. 460.

<sup>97</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (New York, 1966), vol. 1, p. 84.

<sup>98</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, p. 317.

In the antithesis of Matthew 5, we find four types of oaths condemned: (a) by heaven; (b) by earth; (c) by Jerusalem; (d) by one's head. In Matthew 23:16–22 we find a variety of oaths mentioned: (a) by the temple; (b) by the gold of the temple; (c) by the altar; (d) by the gift on the altar. It is these types of oaths that Jesus insists must be abstained from. Rather than swear such oaths, one must be content with an emphatic *yes* or *no*: “Whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Mt. 5:37) because it tempts one to engage in the making of subtle distinctions between binding and nonbinding oaths of the kind rebuked in Matthew 23.<sup>99</sup>

Quite clearly, in Matthew 23, which seems to reflect most clearly the fuller historical teaching of Jesus on oaths, “there is no total ban on oaths.”<sup>100</sup> Rather, the prohibition is directed at the practice of swearing euphemistically by some substitute for the divine, thinking that such an oath is somehow less potent than if the oath had been sworn in the name of God. Any oath by anything connected with the Temple or with God is tantamount to an oath by the Temple or by God: “He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by him who dwells in it; and he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it” (Matthew 23:21–2). Thus, all oaths should be approached cautiously and taken equally seriously, for dire corruption follows the breaking of oaths.<sup>101</sup> “All oaths directly or indirectly appeal to God; all are therefore binding since they call on him to guarantee their fulfillment.”<sup>102</sup>

To be sure, some have read the Greek in Matthew 5:34 and James 5:12 as forbidding all oaths or promises of any kind (“swear not *at all*,” “swear *no* other oath”), but this does not capture what appears to be the historical intent of Jesus (as reflected explicitly in Matthew 23),<sup>103</sup> and these two texts can be interpreted otherwise: I read the Greek in James 5:12 as telling Christians not to swear any such oath, meaning one that swears by external things, by heaven, by earth,<sup>104</sup> or by any other such thing (*allon tina*).<sup>105</sup> The problem lies in bringing in “extralinguistic props” and thereby failing to swear by God himself, who dwells in those places

<sup>99</sup> Worth, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 201

<sup>100</sup> Paul S. Minear, “Yes or No: The Demand for Honesty in the Early Church,” *NovT* 13 (1971): 4.

<sup>101</sup> Barker, *Temple Theology*, p. 44, commenting on the disastrous consequences that ensued after the fallen angels broke the eternal oath and corrupted the creation of the world in the Enoch literature.

<sup>102</sup> Minear, “Yes or No,” 5.

<sup>103</sup> Minear finds that the accent originally fell, not on the ban against oaths, but on the demand for radical honesty, “Yes or No,” 3.

<sup>104</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 271.

<sup>105</sup> The Greek grammar in this verse is odd. “By heaven” and “by earth” are in the accusative case, leaving it unclear how to read *allon tina orkon*, which is equally in the accusative: that is, does it mean “an oath by any other thing” or “any kind of oath”? If

and sanctifies those oaths. James admonishes his followers to let their “yes” really be a “yes” and their “no” really be a “no,” and to keep their solemn promises literally “so that they not fall under judgment [of the Lord].”

A rabbinic aphorism suggests a similar sentiment in general speech: “Let your Yes and No both be righteous. Do not speak with your mouth what you do not mean in your heart.”<sup>106</sup> But much more is at stake in the Sermon on the Mount than simply speaking honestly in one’s daily conversation. The use of a mere “yes” or “no” had precedent in “cultic-ritual oracles” in which “a ‘token’ was either of good or of evil omen, [and therefore] would answer either ‘yes’ or ‘no.’”<sup>107</sup> Even the Essenes, who rejected oaths in general, used “the oath at entering the sect.”<sup>108</sup> In a temple context, the Sermon on the Mount is likewise concerned with the complete integrity of oaths made in the name of God and with the full sincerity of vows made to God in the holy place.

### **Stage 9. Do Double-Good and Pray for All People, Including Enemies (5:38–47)**

Having dealt with the problem of oaths, which addresses in one important way the relationship between humans and God, the Sermon turns its attention next to relations between humans and their fellow beings. The instructions of the Sermon on the Mount come in a two-step sequence: first, the hearers are told to avoid certain negative, impulsive responses to certain demands or opposition; and second, they are required to take certain positive steps to love and improve relationships with their neighbor.

The admonition to avoid retaliation relates to one of the central jurisprudential formulas of the law of Moses: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Matthew 5:38; Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21). Instead, one should not set oneself against the evil one: “But I say to you, Do not resist (*antistēnai*) one who is evil (*tōi ponērōi*).” Five examples are then given: (1) “if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also,” (2) “if any one would sue you and take your coat (*chitōna*), let him have your cloak (*himation*) as well,” (3) “if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles,” (4) “give to him who begs from you,” and (5) “do not refuse him who would borrow from you” (Matthew 5:39–40). In cases (1) to (3) one may assume that the aggressor was “an enemy,” but in cases (4) and (5) there is no reason to think that the beggar or the person asking for a loan was an enemy. The latter two cases illustrate the positive obligation, “You shall love your neighbor” (Matthew 5:43; Leviticus 19:18);

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the sense is “neither by heaven, nor by earth, nor by anything in between,” the meaning of James 5:12 is essentially the same as Matthew 23:16–22.

<sup>106</sup> Quoted in Minear, “Yes or No,” 11.

<sup>107</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 2, p. 66.

<sup>108</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, p. 314, citing 1QS 5.8–11.

while the former three raise the question of how one should treat even an enemy. The answer, quite simply, is do not turn an enemy away any more than any other neighbor, and then, most of all, “pray for those who persecute you,” and this is “so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:38–45).

Much has been written about the ethical meanings of these lines and also about the legal posture of the Sermon on the Mount vis-à-vis the law of Moses, attitudes at Qumran, or thoughts of the rabbis.<sup>109</sup> Commentators taking these ordinary ethical or legal approaches have shown that, in many ways, the instructions in the Sermon on the Mount about loving one’s neighbor and being charitable were not radical or novel for the time. For example, making interest-free loans to the poor is required by the Covenant Code (Exodus 22:25), and giving or lending to the poor is required by Deuteronomy 15:7–8, “If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.” Among the attributes required of the righteous man in Ezekiel 18:7 are these: He “does not oppress any one, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment” (see also Proverbs 28:27).

Indeed, lending to the poor was required of the children of Israel as a condition of their covenant, qualifying them to receive God’s generosity. Thus, the Psalms praise those who are willing to lend to those in need.<sup>110</sup> Psalms 112:5 blesses the man “who deals generously and lends,” and Psalms 37:26 similarly extols the righteous who “is ever giving liberally and lending.” Mowinckel identified Psalm 37 as a thanksgiving psalm, sung by temple singers on behalf of individual worshippers who were themselves making thank-offerings.<sup>111</sup> Hannah’s prayer extolled God because he “raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap” (1 Samuel 2:8). Being charitable toward the poor in imitation of God was also one of the principal keys to receiving blessings from God at the Temple, where ancient customs of assisting the poor had relevance to confessions at Yom Kippur, egalitarianism at Passover, prayers for redemption at Shavuot, and in making prayers and offerings more acceptable to God.<sup>112</sup> Here at this stage in the Sermon on the Mount, the focus in items (4) and (5) is on the traditionally

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<sup>109</sup> See generally Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 274–320; Dan Liroy, *The Decalogue in the Sermon on the Mount* (New York, 2004), pp. 151–6; R.T. France, *Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007), pp. 217–27; Brad H. Young, *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus* (Peabody, Massachusetts, 2007), p. 69.

<sup>110</sup> Worth, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 216.

<sup>111</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 2, pp. 31–2.

<sup>112</sup> Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies* (New York, 1980), pp. 174, 218, 257.



accepted and temple-encouraged norms of giving or loaning to those who ask for help from you.

The requirements (1) to offer the left cheek as well as the right, (2) to give the cloak as well as the coat, and (3) to go the second mile as well as the first, however, set standards that go beyond the normal. As listeners were struck by the spiritual and ethical challenges of these new situations, what did they hear? In addition to the ethical or legal implications usually seen in connection with these three requirements, what light might a temple background shed on the meaning of these innovative texts?

(1) Regarding the requirement to turn the other cheek, it is again interesting that the slap is taken on the right cheek. Along with the right eye and right hand as discussed above in connection with Matthew 5:29–30, the right cheek may have signaled the innocence and purity of the person being slapped. The example tacitly assumes that the person being slapped has not provoked the insult or deserved the reprimand. Moreover, the slap on the cheek may echo the year-rite ceremony in which the king was humiliated, had his royal garments taken away, was struck “on his cheeks,” and after a series of confessions was reinstalled on the throne.<sup>113</sup> In this ancient temple ritual, the king obviously did not strike back: when struck on one cheek, he offered the other to show his submissiveness to the will of his god. In a similar way, the righteous man, who himself would be exalted and enthroned as a son of the Heavenly King, must be willing to suffer insult and injury for the sake of his sacred calling and in the name of his god.

(2) In offering one’s outer cloak as well as one’s inner tunic, more would seem to be involved in Jesus’ example than simply the requirement to settle quickly with a person who had sued you in court, for that point had already been made earlier in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5:25–6). Now, in Matthew 5:40, two specific items of clothing are mentioned and, while both may be ordinary pieces of daily apparel, they may certainly have meant and communicated something more specific in a temple context. For one, these were terms used for priestly garments. The “coat” (*chitōn*) was a garment worn next to the skin, as an undershirt or slip. This Greek word, as well as its Hebrew cognate, *kuttōneṯ*, designate it as a garment made of linen. Among the most famous instances in scripture of such items of clothing were the garment which was given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and Joseph’s garment which was envied by his brothers. The priestly garment described in Exodus 28:4 is the *kuttōneṯ*,<sup>114</sup> and some priestly garments, along with the veil of the Temple, were required by the laws of purity to be made of linen (for example, Exodus 25:4; 26:1; Leviticus 6:10). The “cloak” (*himation*) was an outer garment (Hebrew *me<sup>c</sup>il*). According to the priestly regimen, this outer garment was worn over the *kuttōneṯ* (Leviticus 8:7). Thus it was a *himation* that both Elisha and Caiaphas tore in exasperation (2 Kings 2:12; Matthew 26:65), while the robe of Jesus that shone as white as the sun at his transfiguration was also his *himation*

<sup>113</sup> Jacob Klein, “Akitu,” in *ABD*, pp. 138–40.

<sup>114</sup> Fabry, “*kuttōneṯ*,” in *TDOT*, vol. 7, pp. 384–6; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 504.

(Matthew 17:2). The Lord puts on his *me'el*, his garment of vengeance (*himation ekdikēseōs*), as he comes forth to judge (Isaiah 59:17). These are to be thought of as more than ordinary pieces of clothing.

Beyond the general association with priestly and royal garments, to have both an inner and outer garment symbolized the complete coverage of the Lord. From this sense of being encircled in the robes of the Lord's righteousness came considerable spiritual joy and satisfaction: "Let my soul rejoice in the Lord; for he has clothed me with the robe of salvation (*himation sōtēriou*) and the garment of joy (*chitōna euphrosunēs*)" (Isaiah 61:10). The occurrence of the two words *chitōna* and *himation* in Matthew 5:40 draws that text into close proximity with the memorable promises and blessings of Isaiah 61:8–10, where the Lord promises that he "will make an everlasting covenant" with his people. If Matthew 5:40 might be alluding to this Isaianic text, as it seems to, then the message added by the Sermon on the Mount would be this: if someone asks a person for the *chitōn* of joy (which God has given to that person), then he should do to the one who has asked just as God has done to him (that is, by giving not only the *chitōn* of joy but also offering him the *himation* of salvation), so that he or she too can be clothed in both as a bridegroom or bride (Isaiah 61:10). The imagery of wedding and heavenly garments in the Apocalypse may likewise build on this passage from Isaiah.<sup>115</sup>

(3) The final example, of being pressed into service for one mile and then going a second, also can have much more than an obvious, literal meaning. Of course, it was possible (but not likely—given the small number of Roman soldiers actually present in Judaea and Galilee) that the followers of Jesus would be asked by a Roman soldier to carry his gear a certain distance; much more likely they would be conscripted by local administrators to work on roads or public projects or by Jewish officials to do agricultural or maintenance work on temple property. The right of kings and rulers to force persons to work for a set number of days in the year was common (and expected) in the ancient world,<sup>116</sup> and in Israel kings could force people to plow and harvest his lands (2 Samuel 8:11–18)—Solomon "raised a levy of forced labor" of thirty thousand men to work on the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 5:13). Within the administration of the Temple, the priests and Levites were divided into courses, and each took their turn rendering

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<sup>115</sup> The book of Revelation prophesies that all the righteous will receive a "white garment" (*leuka himation*, Revelation 3:5, 18; 4:4), and they all are admonished to stay alert and to protect their *himatia* (Revelation 16:15). Ultimately, Jesus will appear in a *himation* dipped in blood and on this robe will be written "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords" (Revelation 19:13, 16).

<sup>116</sup> See entries regarding corvée labor in Raymond Westbrook, *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law* (Leiden, 2003): pp. 368–9 (Old Babylonian period), 525, 553 (sometimes in lieu of taxes or as a punishment in Assyria), 829 (work on local dykes and canals required of free Egyptians under Demotic law).

mandatory service about two weeks each year.<sup>117</sup> As a result, nothing requires that the one who compels (*aggareusei*) someone to go a mile was a Roman, and thus opportunities for “going the second mile” could arise in many contexts, including temple service. Nothing would preclude a priest or Levite from taking an extra turn at the altar or an extra janitorial shift. In that way, the *talionic* formula of “eye for (*anti*) eye, tooth for (*anti*) tooth” is deftly transformed, to “cheek upon cheek, garment upon garment, mile upon mile.” Because the preposition *anti* can have several meanings, including “for, in lieu of, because of, on behalf of,” or “upon” (as in “grace upon grace” in John 1:16),<sup>118</sup> just as its Hebrew original, *taḥat* [can mean “beneath, instead of, as, for, for the sake of, unto,”<sup>119</sup> the old talionic formula had always been the subject of legal interpretation and thus was still ripe for recasting.

In each of these five cases, it is possible that the people slapping, demanding, or asking were in some sense enemies (*echthroi*) of the followers of Jesus’ teachings, but not necessarily. Whether they were enemies or not, the Sermon requires that they be treated well. Good neighbors, of course, should be loved, and even the tax collectors and Gentiles loved those who loved them (Matthew 5:46–7). The perennial question, of course, was “and who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). The Old Testament and Jewish traditions offered certain examples of people helping their enemies, but they were fairly limited. The Covenant Code required all Israelites to treat an enemy kindly, but only to the extent of doing him the favor of returning his stray animal upon happening to come across it: “If thou meet your enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, you shall bring it back to him” (Exodus 23:4, see also Deuteronomy 22:1).<sup>120</sup> Saul expressed the regret that David was “more righteous than I; for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil” (1 Samuel 24:17), and it was considered wise “not [to] rejoice when your enemy falls” (Proverbs 24:17). More typical among all peoples were the contrary sentiments expressed in the Rule of the Community at Qumran, where animosity continued until the enemy repented and walked perfectly:

The multitude of evil men I shall not capture unto the Day of Vengeance; yet my fury shall not abate from men of the Pit, and I shall never be appeased until righteousness be established. I shall hold no angry grudge against those repenting

<sup>117</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia, 1969), pp. 199, 208.

<sup>118</sup> Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, 1957), pp. 72–3.

<sup>119</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, 1980), vol. 2, pp. 967–8.

<sup>120</sup> The law, however, did not require a person to go out looking for the lost animal; and returning the animal was probably in the finder’s self interest, in order to avoid being accused of having stolen it.

of sin yet neither shall I love any who rebel against the Way; the smitten I shall not comfort until their walk be perfected.<sup>121</sup>

The Sermon on the Mount imposes no such conditions on its positive obligation to love even one's enemies.

The Sermon on the Mount may have many reasons for its rejection of hating of one's enemy, and one may well wonder about its motivation, but the best clue in this regard is its explicit requirement of what the righteous person is to do for the enemy, and here the Temple comes into the picture once again. The one thing consistently required in all New Testament manuscripts<sup>122</sup> is to pray for (or on behalf of, *hyper*) those who persecute you. This is the concrete action to be taken to exercise divine love (*agapate*) toward one's enemies. In a temple context, the best thing the righteous can do to love, bless, and do well for another person is to offer prayers in their behalf and for their benefit. While those hearing this instruction might well think of offering prayers outside the Temple, if they wondered where ideally they might best offer such prayers they would readily think of the Temple, the pre-eminent house of prayer.

Offering intercessory prayers on behalf of the wicked was a worthy act of piety exemplified by Abraham (Genesis 20:7), Samuel (1 Samuel 7:5–9), the prophets (Jeremiah 14:11), Jesus (Luke 23:34), Stephen (Acts 7:60), and the early Christians.<sup>123</sup> This is what righteous people do—they pray that God will forgive or show mercy to sinners and persecutors. The Didache, after covering all of the same examples as appear in Matthew 5:39–42 and after listing twenty apodictic commandments, concludes: “You will not hate any person, but some you will reprove, and concerning others you will pray, and some you will love more than your soul” (Didache 2:7). To the same end, the Sermon on the Mount makes it the duty of the righteous to pray for their enemies and then to leave it to God to deal with them.

Betz and Worth astutely argue that the “enemies” referred to in Matthew 5:44 were likely personal enemies from among the Jews, all being part of the people of the covenant. Betz reasons that because “the immediate environment [of the Sermon on the Mount] was Jewish, the persecutors were most likely fellow Jews (see also SM/Matt. 5:11–12), so that intercession for them coincided with the liturgical prayers on behalf of Israel.”<sup>124</sup> Worth states that “the text Jesus cites only has God's then-covenant people specifically in mind, ‘You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of *your* people, but you shall

<sup>121</sup> 1QS 10.19–21, trans. M. Wise, M. Abegg, and E. Cook, in Donald W. Parry and Emanuel Tov (eds), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader, Part 1, Texts Concerned with Religious Law* (Leiden, 2004), p. 39.

<sup>122</sup> Some manuscripts add that one is to bless enemies or do well (*kalōs*) for them, but all include “pray on behalf of them.”

<sup>123</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 312, n. 893.

<sup>124</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 313.

[*not* should] love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord” (Lv. 19:18).”<sup>125</sup> This being so, the Sermon on the Mount’s requirement that all should pray for fellow members of the covenant people, especially in the house of the Lord, becomes even more deeply compelling.

In a temple setting, the petitioner relinquishes to God the task of judging one’s enemies. The Psalms often supplicate the Lord to deal with enemies of righteousness. Almost half of the Psalms mention enemies, making them a very common issue addressed in the Temple. The Lord smites them, turns them back, and cuts them off; vengeance is the Lord’s, as the Psalms frequently say (Psalms 58:10; 94:1; 99:8; 149:7)—a sentiment reflected by Paul: “Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. . . . Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God” (Romans 12:17, 19). Some texts rather grimly encouraged people to be nice to their enemies in order to heap coals of God’s wrath upon their heads (Proverbs 25:21–2), but there is no reason to believe that any such maliciously motivated kindness would influence how God might choose to impose his judgment. Rather, the only purpose of praying for one’s enemies would be to show love, hoping that they will repent or be spared long enough in order to repent. The antithetical actions of taking vengeance and bearing a grudge are the opposite of love, and thus the full verse in Leviticus 19, upon which this entire section of the Sermon on the Mount is based, reads: “You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:18).

Thus, those who then pray for enemies who persecute them are promised that they “may be the sons of your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:45; see also Matthew 5:9, discussed above; and “you are Gods . . . sons of the most High,” Psalms 82:6). Sons of God defer the judgment to God; as sons of God, they also love their neighbor and do unto their fellowmen as God would do unto them, precisely because they live and act in the image of God himself. Indeed, the dominant purpose of the Temple was to enable humans to imitate God. As Jonathan Klawans points out, “Josephus emphasizes *imitatio Dei* as *the* overall motivation and justification for Jewish religious practices.”<sup>126</sup> Standing in a state of ritual purity and participating in holy rites approximated, as far as possible, the condition and activities of God. Several ancient writers express awareness of this idea, notably Josephus in his preface to the *Antiquities of the Jews*: “Moses deemed it exceeding necessary, that he who would conduct his own life well . . . should consider the divine nature, and upon the contemplation of God’s operations, should thereby imitate the best of all patterns, so far as it is possible for human nature to do.” Once Moses had “demonstrated that God was possessed of perfect virtue, he supposed that man also

<sup>125</sup> Worth, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 114.

<sup>126</sup> Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple* (Oxford 2006), p. 115 (emphasis in original).

ought to strive after the participation of it,” and striving in this direction was in no way “disagreeable either to the majesty of God, or to his love to mankind.”<sup>127</sup>

In sum, when injustice occurs, the question, as Betz points out, becomes “What should one do to prevent further injustice and to restore justice?”<sup>128</sup> The legal answer of providing retribution and compensation is generally incomplete and unsatisfactory, because most injuries are irreparable or only approximately replaceable. The ethical answer (of doing unto others as you would like them to have done to you) is also inadequate here, because the application of that rule in such cases would require the injured party to ask himself what he would want to have done to himself, assuming that he were a tortfeasor, overbearing plaintiff, or oppressive commander—an unseemly assumption. More satisfactory is the temple answer: sons of God who believe in his righteous judgment and power do not aggravate their enemies, are cooperative and generous, and then pray to the Lord that he might change the hearts of the offenders and execute proper justice in due course. Thereby the sons of God are able to restore the original covenant, reproducing the paradisiacal state of peace on earth, which was represented in the Temple by the Holy of Holies.<sup>129</sup>

#### **Stage 10. A Promise of Gifts of Sun and Rain as Blessings from Heaven (5:45)**

As a result of the covenant between God and his people, Jesus promises that God will “make his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and send rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). These gifts from God are collective blessings, showered down equally on all who occupy the holy land, including the strangers, friends and enemies. Correlatively, when people are wicked, God withholds these blessings from the land, and all of the people, righteous and wicked, suffer together. Jesus’ audience would not need to be reminded of this fundamental biblical principle of collective responsibility.<sup>130</sup> The covenant people rise and fall together.

Sun and rain were among the main symbols of the covenant relationship between God and Israel. Rain in timely amounts was sent as a blessing to those who obeyed the covenant (see Deuteronomy 11:13–14), and the Temple was the principal place where prayers were offered to God so that such blessings would continue, particularly at the Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>131</sup> Symbolically, the Temple was

<sup>127</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 1.19, 23–4.

<sup>128</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 293.

<sup>129</sup> Barker, *Temple Theology*, p. 48.

<sup>130</sup> For the authoritative treatment of this subject, see Joel S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield, England, 1995).

<sup>131</sup> “There is an ancient tradition that the amount of rain which is to fall during the year is decreed on Sukkot.” Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days* (New York, 1978), p. 46; citing Rosh HaShanah 16a.

the conduit between heaven and earth, able to open the windows of heaven so that blessings might pour down on all its people. Thus, at the dedication of the First Temple, Solomon made the following plea:

When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against thee, if they pray toward this place, and acknowledge thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them, then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, thy people Israel, when thou dost teach them the good way in which they should walk; and grant rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people as an inheritance. (1 Kings 8:35–6)

Solomon's dedicatory prayer similarly consecrated the Temple so that it would be an agent of answers to prayers, forgiveness for sin, validation of oaths sworn at its altar, victory over enemies, and protection against famine and pestilence (1 Kings 8:28–53).

Rites of the Temple in Jerusalem specifically recognized rain as a blessing of the covenant. As Mowinckel explains, "When water from the holy spring Gihon in the valley of Kidron is poured over the altar at the autumnal festival, this signifies that the rainy season will bring rain in plenty; . . . the fact that [Yahweh] is there, in his Temple, means that the earth is once more firm, in spite of the furious uproar of the primeval ocean."<sup>132</sup> The divine presence signified renewal and the pouring out of promised blessings: "Yahweh's appearance as king involves a promise; he has renewed the covenant with his people. . . . In Jerusalem the festival was celebrated before the rainy season—and, originally, to cause it; when Yahweh has come, faith knows that blessing and crops and wealth will come also, if king and people but keep the covenant."<sup>133</sup> The enthronement festival thus dealt with the renewal of the earth. During this festival, "life, 'the World,' is created anew. The bond made with the deity in the harvest festival causes the rains to return, so that the curse of drought and death is overcome, dormant nature revives and life awakens, to the benefit of mankind (cf. Ps. 65)."<sup>134</sup> The Temple sat between the primordial waters below and the rains falling from above. From that place, the earth was renewed, as was God's covenant with his people. There the heavens were opened and God poured out rain and knowledge upon his covenant people (see Malachi 3:10). According to Raphael Patai, "the most elaborate yearly ritual performed in the Second Temple of Jerusalem, . . . the so-called 'Joy of the House of Water Drawing,'" was celebrated each year at the beginning of the rainy season to ensure

<sup>132</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 1, p. 20; see also vol. 1, p. 187.

<sup>133</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 1, p. 164.

<sup>134</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 1, p. 113. This festival may have originated in Canaanite temple traditions. For Mowinckel's discussion of the enthronement festival occurring in Canaanite temples and its "conversion to a feast of Yahweh," see vol. 1, p. 134.

the blessing of rainfall.<sup>135</sup> The Psalms, always pertinent on such an occasion, acknowledged these powers of God over all of nature: “He covers the heavens with clouds, he prepares rains for the earth, he makes grass grow upon the hills” (Psalms 147:8); “the Lord is a sun and shield” (Psalms 84:11), in truth for the benefit of the entire world.

Thus, in concluding this part of the Sermon on the Mount in which the stipulations of the new covenant between God and his people have been set forth, Jesus ends with a promise and a paradigm. The promise is that righteous acts of the disciples will bring down from heaven the blessings of sun and rain upon all people in the land (the good and the evil, the righteous and the unrighteous). The paradigm is that true disciples, as sons of God, will do like God, likewise loving both the good and the evil, both their friends and their enemies. Having completed all of this level of instruction, the disciples are prepared to encounter the next level of perfecting temple principles and ordinances.

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<sup>135</sup> Raphael Patai, *Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual* (New York, 1947), p. 24.