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## Blessings and Consequences of Righteousness or Unrighteousness

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## Chapter 6

# Blessings and Consequences of Righteousness or Unrighteousness

The final major part of the Sermon leads hearers into its highest and most sublime sections. Having passed through the previous parts—from the altar and the stipulations of the law to the higher order of fasting, prayer, and devotion to God—the inductees are now taken into the third chamber, as it were, of the structure of the Sermon on the Mount. As the Temple and its cosmology were tripartite with its highest part modeling the heavens in its Holy of Holies, the Sermon on the Mount now moves its devotees the final step closer to entering into the innermost presence of God. Entering his presence would be the ultimate blessing promised to those who are faithful to the Lord in all things.

To those progressing along the pathway that ascends into the presence of God, many blessings are promised along the way. Given to them are the necessities of life, glorious garments, answers to their admission-seeking petitions, the gift of life, eternal fruits, and reception into the heavenly kingdom. They are assured that the house wisely built upon this rock will not fall.

To those who digress or regress, going out through the broad gate and on down the comfortably spacious way, curses are imposed. Those on this descending road will receive the harsh realities of the final judgment, a violent death for treating the holy thing lightly or indiscriminately, destruction at the jaws of dogs and ravening wolves, painful and worthless fruits, exclusion from the presence of God, and utter collapse and washing away.

All of these blessings and curses draw on temple motifs.

### **Stage 17. Promised Blessings of Physical Care and Glorious Clothing (6:25–34)**

First in this sequence, Jesus strongly assures his disciples that, with the Lord as Master, his created earth will provide for their physical needs. At this point in the Sermon, it would appear that worries needed to be calmed—anxieties or concerns that came perhaps less from the ordinary stress of their daily lives than from the feeling of vulnerability that came from having just turned everything completely over to the Lord in stage 16. Accordingly, the followers are counseled, “Do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear (*endusēsthe*)?’ For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all” (Matthew 6:31–2). Jesus’

listeners are promised that they shall have sufficient for their needs, just as they had previously requested in stage 13: “Give us this day bread ‘sufficient for our needs’ (*epiousion*),” as one translator has rendered it.<sup>1</sup> The people of the Lord shall be blessed. “Worldly concerns are not to be ignored; . . . God will provide what is needed for life’s necessities,”<sup>2</sup> just as such blessings were traditionally seen as flowing forth from the House of the Lord.

The Temple was seen by many people in ancient Israel as the main avenue through which God maintained the created order and channeled blessings to earth, both spiritual and physical: “When heaven is shut up and there is no rain . . . if they pray toward this place, and acknowledge thy name, and turn from their sin, . . . then hear thou in heaven, and . . . grant rain upon thy land. If there is famine in the land, . . . whatever supplication is made by any man . . . stretching out his hands toward this house; then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and render to each whose heart thou knowest, according to all his ways” (1 Kings 8:35–9). The spiritual and physical blessings of peace and prosperity expected to come from the Temple are legendary: “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever” (Psalms 23:5).

At a cosmic level, it was the Temple’s reconciliation of God and man to each other that mitigated the estranged condition between them that derived from the blighting effects of the Fall of Adam and Eve. This theme of primordial restoration aligns well with Matthew 6. Whereas Adam was cursed to eat his bread in the sweat of his face (Genesis 3:18), Jesus looked to the birds of the heaven who, unlike Adam, do not plant, reap, or gather crops into barns, and to the gloriously arrayed lilies of the field, who likewise do not exhaust themselves (*kopiōsin*) or spin (*nēthousin*). Just as Adam and Eve were given garments (*chitōnas*) and the Lord clothed (*enedusen*) them (Genesis 3:21), so God will clothe and nurture his children now (Matthew 6:31), for they are indisputably “of more value than” the plants and animals (Matthew 6:26, 30), the lesser life forms that were created in the creative days before the formation of Adam and Eve.

In this stage of the Sermon on the Mount, the verb *merimnaō* (to be anxious, to care for) appears six times, always in a negative or deficient sense. By way of contrast, the pagans worry about banquets, wine, and togas, while the righteous people of God must be concerned with more important things. This word appears infrequently in the Jewish background literature, but often enough to attest that its semantic range of meaning in Matthew 6 relates to temple themes. God will

<sup>1</sup> This translation is offered by R. ten Kate, ‘Geef üns heden ons ‘dagelijks’ brood,’ *NedTT* 32 (1978): 125–39; see Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, 1957), pp. 296–7. The meaning of this cryptic word is widely debated and is by no means certain, as discussed above.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Minneapolis, 1995), p. 483.

alleviate the worries and anxieties of his people if they will be concerned with (1) sacrificing, (2) doing God's will, (3) confessing, and (4) harboring no sin or evil. Thus, when the Israelites in Egypt said that they wanted to make sacrifices to God, Pharaoh countered in opposition, "Let heavier work be laid upon the men that they may care about (*merimnatōsan*) this work and not care about (*merimnatōsan*) empty words" (Exodus 5:9 LXX). After the Conquest, the Lord promised that he would appoint a place for Israel where "they will not worry (*merimnēsei*) any more" (2 Samuel 7:10 LXX). In Israel it was understood that "when judging, we should be concerned (*merimnōmen*) only about God's goodness" (Wisdom of Solomon 12:22); that "anxiety (*merimna*) may beset even a wise man, but only fools carry on conversations (*dialogiountai*) with evil" (Proverbs 17:12 LXX); and that not only does worry not add to one's lifespan but "anxiety makes you old before your time" (Sira 30:24). How did one eliminate such anxiety? In the Temple. There one was told to "cast your burden (*merimnan*) on the Lord, and he will sustain you" (Psalms 55:22; compare 1 Peter 5:7); and there one declared, "I will confess my iniquity, and I will be concerned about (*merimnēsō*) my sins" (Psalms 38:18 LXX).

In this context, the meaning of two words in Matthew 6:27 "has always been debated,"<sup>3</sup> usually being translated "which of you by being anxious can add one cubit (*pēchun*) to his span of life (*hēlikia*)," following the Vulgate, "adicere ad aetatem suam cubitum unum." But this rendition still is uncertain. Being a metaphor, its meaning remains symbolically obscure. In general, of course, the instruction counsels listeners not to worry about adding something to something else, whatever they may be. Betz understands this as encouraging listeners to accept the future, because God alone "calls each new day into being" and "measures out the periods of one's life . . . Thus, human anxiety over the future is presumptuous. The future is divine creation, continuous creation."<sup>4</sup> The theme of the creation—its perfect beauty and continuous renewal—was a dominant feature of the Temple, with its daily rituals and offerings regenerating life.

As far as the word *hēlikia* is concerned, it appears rarely in the Septuagint. It can mean long life, stature, or something else, depending entirely on the context in which it is used. In Job 29:18, the Hebrew and Greek texts are quite unrelated, but both have to do with living a long time. The Greek expresses this as "my age (*hēlikia*) shall continue as the stem of a palm tree; I shall live a long time." Used as a negative term in a way similar to Matthew 6:27, Ezekiel 13:18 condemns "women who make things to pile on top of heads of every height (*hēlikia*) to pervert souls." Here *hēlikia* is a translation of the Hebrew *qômâ*, height or stature.

But a person's *hēlikia* can have broad reference in any number of ways to a person's magnitude, size, age, strength, importance, or excellence. This quality was not to be found numerically, but qualitatively: "For honorable age (*polia*) is not found in its length of time, and it is not measured in its number of years.

<sup>3</sup> Johannes Schneider, "Hēlikia," in *TDNT*, vol. 2, p. 942.

<sup>4</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 476.

Intelligence is ‘old age’ for men, and the *hēlikia* of old age (*gērōs*) is an unspotted life” (Wisdom of Solomon 4:9). Thus, the use of the term *hēlikia* fits nicely into any context that addresses the futility of trying to add anything to something that cannot be improved upon in quality (such as the Temple). For instance, in extolling the impeccable virtue of a good wife, Sira 26:17 uses the word *hēlikia* in temple terms, comparing the beauty of how she arranges the order (*kosmos*) of her household to the rising of the sun “amidst the most exalted beings (*hupsistois*) of the Lord”; the radiance of her face in “maturity steadfast (*hēlikiai stasimēi*)” is compared with “the light that beams forth upon the holy menorah;” and the effect of her righteous feet upon well-grounded hearts to “golden pillars set upon foundations of silver.” The word *hēlikia* is also used in this sense of unimprovable excellence in Ephesians 4:13, until all members of the body (or temple) of Christ come “to mature manhood (*andra teleion*), to the measure of the stature (*eis metron hēlikias*) of the fullness of Christ.”

The measure mentioned in Matthew 6:27 happens to be a *pēchus* (cubit, forearm). One might ask, why was this particular measure mentioned? Why does it ask, who can add a “forearm” instead of a “head” or any other expression of measurement? One possible answer suggests itself, because the word *pēchus* was saliently connected with the construction of the Temple and Tabernacle. To be sure, this word can occur in other contexts, but its connection with the Temple far outstrips its usage everywhere else. It dominantly appears scores of times in Exodus 25–7, 37–8, 1 Kings 6–7, 2 Chronicles 3, and Ezekiel 40–43, all of which deal with the measurements of the holy space and its many implements and ornaments. Since the Temple was seen as being perfect down to its precisely revealed measurements, no one would be presumptuous enough to add a single cubit to any part of the Temple. That being so, how much more should one trust the arm of God in his creation of the world and his nurturing of human life.

The lilies of the field are mentioned next (Matthew 6:28), especially because they do not toil or spin. If the use of the word *pēchus* had brought the construction of the Temple to mind, the word “spin” (*nēthousin*) would equally have echoed the spinning of fabrics for the Temple. Forms of the word *nēthein* unforgettably appear exactly ten times in Exodus 26:31; 35:25 (twice), 26; 36:35, 37; 38:18; 39:2, 24, 29, as the workers, who were wise and willing-hearted, spun cloths of blue, purple, scarlet, and linen for the Tabernacle’s veil, holy garments, curtains, door hangings, and the ephod. The word never appears again in the entire Septuagint or New Testament, except in the parallel saying in Luke 12:27.

With the Temple in mind, the references in this section of the Sermon on the Mount to food, drink, and clothing take on elevated significance. Because God regularly provides the food and drink for the priests and Levites in the Temple, as was commonly understood, would he not similarly provide sustenance for all others who stand in his service, especially for his emissaries as they go out into the world as his servants proclaiming the coming of his Kingdom? And if God is the one who is providing that food, what servant should worry either about the quantity or the type of food that God will provide?

Regarding clothing (*endumata*, Matthew 6:25, 28), Jesus assured, “Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory (*en pasēi tēi doxēi*) was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes (*amphiennusin*) the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?” (Matthew 6:29–30). Several points are implicit in this saying: garments will be given by God; they will pertain to the lasting eternities, not to this passing temporality; they will be glorious; and their glory will exceed even that of the royal-temple garments of King Solomon. Each of these points discernibly targets the Temple through the glorious robes of the priests and the High Priest.

In general, the words *enduō* and *enduma* can, of course, refer to any ordinary clothing, but the raiment or garments of which Jesus speaks here may also be richly symbolic. In biblical usage, it is just as likely as not that these words refer to priestly or other extraordinary robes. Over thirty of the one hundred times they occur in the Septuagint, these words refer to the robes of priests, especially the garments of Aaron and his sons;<sup>5</sup> on several other occasions they refer to the king’s robes or royal armor<sup>6</sup> or have some other holy metaphorical referent.<sup>7</sup> In expressions using these particular words, God himself is said to be clothed (Isaiah 6:1). He is robed in honor (Psalms 93:1; 104:1) or with a breastplate (Wisdom of Solomon 5:18); and the divine beings who appeared to Daniel were clothed in linen garments of pure white (Daniel 7:9; 10:5). On God’s day of vengeance, he will appear wearing garments dyed red from his having trod the winepress alone (Isaiah 63:1–3; see also 59:17). In all of these cases, the word *enduō* or *enduma* appears.

Using this traditional terminology, God himself is sometimes said to perform the dressing, as he also does in Matthew 6: God clothed the priests of Zion with salvation (Psalms 132:16), and the spirit of God enveloped Zechariah the son of the priest (2 Chronicles 24:20). If God dresses the grass and wildflowers (which symbolize the transience of mortal life in Psalms 37:2, 90:5–6, 102:11, and 103:15<sup>8</sup>), he will certainly clothe, even more so, his children who are blessed to enjoy the permanence of eternal life.

The garments promised in the Sermon on the Mount will be glorious, another link to the Temple. Using the same word (*doxa*) as in Matthew 6:29, biblical texts coupled the highest attributes of glory and honor with the robes of the priests and the garments of righteousness: “And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your

<sup>5</sup> For example, Exodus 28:37; 29:5, 8, 30; 40:13; Leviticus 6:10, 8:7, 13; 16:4, 23, 32; 21:10; Numbers 20:28; 2 Chronicles 5:12; 6:41; Psalms 133:2; Ezekiel 9:2, 3, 11; 10:2, 6, 7; 1 Esdras 5:40; Ben Sirah 45:8, 13.

<sup>6</sup> For example, 2 Chronicles 18:9; Esther 6:9–10; 1 Kings 22:30 (armor).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Isaiah 52:1 (Zion to put on her garments); Daniel 5:7, 16, 29 (a purple robe given to the prophet who can interpret the dream); Baruch 5:1 (Jerusalem to put on garments of glory).

<sup>8</sup> See Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount.—A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, Texas, 1982), p. 340.

brother, for glory and for beauty (*timēn* and *doxan*)” (Exodus 28:2). Job is told by God to “clothe (*amphiasai*) yourself with glory and splendor (*doxa* and *tima*)” (Job 40:10 [40:5 LXX]).

Moreover, in emphasizing the glory of these sacred vestments, the Sermon on the Mount promises that God will clothe the disciples even more gloriously than David’s son, King Solomon himself. Here another allusion to the Temple is evident, for Solomon was famous for building the most splendid temple of all. But in any event, even after fully combining all the imagery of kingship and priesthood, the arraying glory was God’s, not Solomon’s. The text does not read “in all *his* glory” but “in all *the* glory (*en pasēi tēi doxēi*).”

From Second Temple sources, “there seems to have been a particular fascination among ancient Jews with the priestly garb . . . [which] cast an otherworldly impression,”<sup>9</sup> and so this promise of garments more glorious than Solomon’s, or in other words the high priest’s, would have communicated to listeners an obvious reference to temple vestments and sacred spheres. As Margaret Barker vividly explains, when the high priest performed his duties in the Temple, he wore a robe whose colors matched the colors of the veil and represented the totality of God’s creation:

Woven from the four elements [i.e. four colors representing fire, air, water and earth], the veil which concealed the Glory of God represented matter, the stuff of the visible creation. An exactly similar fabric was used for the outer vestment of the high priest, which he wore in the hall of the temple, but not in the holy of holies, where he wore the white linen of the angels. The coloured vestment was therefore associated with his role in the visible creation, and although the Hebrew Scriptures say nothing of the meaning of the high priest’s vestments, Philo and Josephus reveal that the outer vestment represented the created world. The book of the Wisdom of Solomon, perhaps a century earlier than Philo and Josephus, has simply “On Aaron’s robe the whole world was depicted” (Wisd. 18.24). Thus the high priest was an angel who had emerged from the holy of holies into the visible creation, and vested himself in the stuff of the creation.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 114–15, citing Aaron’s “perfect splendor” (Wisdom of Ben Sira 45:8), the high priest appearing as a man from outside the world (Letter of Aristeas 99), and the cosmic symbolism seen in the priestly garb (Wisdom of Solomon 18:24); on the temple symbolism on the priest’s robe, see also G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 2004), pp. 39–40.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), p. 30 (citing Josephus, *Antiquities* 3.184; Philo, *Special Laws* 1.95–6; translations of both in Loeb Classical Library). See also Margaret Barker, *On Earth As It Is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament* (Edinburgh, 1995), p. 41 (explaining that the priest entered the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement wearing “white linen, the dress of angels”).

This creation symbolism of the high priest's clothing is mirrored in the Sermon on the Mount at 6:24–34, as Jesus mentions the lilies of the field, the grass, food, and drink in promising that God will clothe his children more gloriously than he has clothed anything in this world.

These ideas were apparently common enough that Jesus' listeners could easily have caught these allusions to the Temple. For example, Barker discusses a passage in *2 Enoch* in which Enoch stands as a high priest before the mercy-seat in the Holy of Holies and is dressed by the Lord "in the garments of glory," after which he "sees himself transformed into an angel."<sup>11</sup> In yet another temple reference to being gloriously clothed, Barker mentions an account of "the high priest Simon 'coming out of the house of the veil', the Holy of Holies. . . . The reappearance of the high priest is described as a theophany; Simon emerges like the morning star, like the moon and the sun, clothed in perfection and making the sanctuary glorious with his presence."<sup>12</sup>

In much the same sense, Jesus anticipates that his disciples will ultimately emerge clothed in perfection and glory when he uses this word in Luke 24:49 to tell his apostles to remain in the holy city "until you are clothed with power from on high." The Greek word *enduō* has two meanings, both of which are active in these texts. The first is "to dress, to clothe someone" or "to clothe oneself." The second is, figuratively, to take on "characteristics, virtues, intentions."<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, Todd Klutz notes that Luke uses the word *enduō* on another occasion in Luke 8:27 to describe the unclothed state of a naked man afflicted with demons.<sup>14</sup> As Klutz explains, *enduō* in the New Testament sometimes describes a "'putting on' of spiritual protection for the purpose of succeeding in conflicts against the spirits of wickedness"<sup>15</sup> and in a similar manner the Septuagint sometimes uses this word "to refer to act of clothing that equips one for success either in priestly service, prophetic ministry, or situations of conflict."<sup>16</sup> Thus,

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<sup>11</sup> Barker, *Temple Theology*, p. 57. See also Margaret Barker, *The Risen Lord: The Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, 1996), p. 17. In *The Risen Lord*, Barker also refers to the clothing of Enoch, as follows: "[2 Enoch] describes how Enoch the wise man ascended to heaven into the presence of the Lord. Michael was told to robe him in a garment of Glory and he became like one of the glorious ones (2 En. 22)."

<sup>12</sup> Barker, *Risen Lord*, p. 72.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, 1957), p. 263. Thus, Job put on judgment or the virtue of prudence (Job 29:14).

<sup>14</sup> Todd Klutz, *The Exorcism Stories in Luke—Acts: A Sociostylistic Reading* (Cambridge 2004), pp. 100–101.

<sup>15</sup> Klutz, *Exorcism Stories in Luke—Acts*, p. 100 (citing Romans 13:12, 14; 1 Corinthians 15:53–4; Ephesians 6:11, 14; 1 Thessalonians 5:8).

<sup>16</sup> Klutz, *Exorcism Stories in Luke—Acts*, p. 100 (citing Exodus 28:41; 29:5–8; Leviticus 8:5–13; 16:4–32; 21:10; Numbers 20:26, 28; 1 Chronicles 12:18; 2 Chronicles



its use in introducing the naked demoniac “has powerful connotative effects. It suggests vulnerability, defenselessness against alien oppression, and unfitness for any kind of divine service.”<sup>17</sup> This state of nakedness is overcome when Jesus casts the demons out, after which the man appears fully clothed. By this act, Jesus “reverses the harsh effects of the demonic legion’s presence and equips the man to speak, with his own voice, about how much God has done for him.”<sup>18</sup> In short, by clothing the man, Jesus empowers him. Therefore, in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus can be understood as promising more than garments that offer physical protection for the body against the physical elements (although garments do this too); his garments will “endow” disciples with spiritual powers in this life and eternal attributes more glorious than Solomon’s.

This section concludes, “but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Matthew 6:33). Similar promises of blessings in exchange for keeping the commandments are also found in the Psalms: “Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalms 37:4). Ultimately, the Christian who escapes rebuke is promised a place sitting with God on his throne, wearing “white garments . . . to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen” (Revelation 3:18). By seeking the kingdom of God, disciples may gain royal entrance, as symbolized in temple visions in which “Man” or the “Son of Man” is brought to the throne of God. Such visions, as Barker argues, paralleled the high priest’s entrance into the Holy of Holies surrounded by clouds of incense which represented the clouds of heaven. “It is likely that the Man was *offered* before the throne . . . and then was given ‘dominion and glory and kingdom’: he was enthroned.”<sup>19</sup> Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, therefore, urges each disciple to realize these royal temple visions and symbols by seeking “first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Matthew 6:33). For all these reasons, therefore, one need “not be anxious about tomorrow” (Matthew 6:34). Not only is there more than enough to worry about today; but empowered and clothed in this way, and living within their sphere in God’s created order, the faithful will be “a match for”<sup>20</sup> the evil of every day.

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6:41; 24:20–22; Esther 5:1; Isaiah 59:17–19; 61:10–11; Ezekiel 16:8–10; Zechariah 3:3–4 (4–5); Judith 10:3).

<sup>17</sup> Klutz, *Exorcism Stories in Luke—Acts*, p. 101.

<sup>18</sup> Klutz, *Exorcism Stories in Luke—Acts*, p. 101.

<sup>19</sup> Barker, *Temple Theology*, p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Noting that *arketon* can mean both sufficient and equal to, and that it can relate to things tomorrow (*aurion*) as well as to the evils of today.

### Stage 18. Preparing for the Realities of the Judgment (7:1–5)

With that said, the Sermon on the Mount turns to the theme of judgment. While at one level Matthew 7:1 gives practical, ethical direction that, in ordinary social relations, a person should not judge others, or otherwise others will judge them in return<sup>21</sup>—at a higher level Matthew 7:2 looks forward to a future, conclusive judgment: “For with the judgment (*en hōi krimati*) you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure (*metrōi*) you give will be the measure you get” (Matthew 7:2). Stage 18 discloses the fundamental principle by which the final judgment will be administered.<sup>22</sup> Here again, temple functions and features are in evidence.

Judging (*krinō*) is a common theme of the Temple, particularly divine judgment. As one encounters often in the Old Testament,<sup>23</sup> but most elaborately in the Psalms, God is rightfully the sole judge of the world: “The Lord judges the peoples; judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness” (Psalms 7:8; 35:24). “God is a righteous judge” (Psalms 7:11; see also 9:8). In his appearance, he “has made himself known, he has executed judgment” (Psalms 9:16; see also Psalms 9:8, 19; 10:5; 50:4, 6; 58:1, 11; 72:1–2; 82:8; 96:13; 98:9; 103:6), which brings joy to his people and the whole earth (Psalms 67:4; 96:12–13). For this reason alone, one should not judge, for that is God’s role. Especially in a temple-centered world view, God is the rightful and righteous judge of all mankind. Any other forms of judgment are likely flawed and presumptuous.

Moreover, it is thoroughly understood in the Psalms that the Temple is the premier place where God’s righteous judgment is found. There God dispenses judgment, seated on his throne or mercy seat: “Thou hast sat on the throne giving righteous judgment” (Psalms 9:4); “righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne” (Psalms 89:14; 97:2). The judgments of the Temple are both personal (Psalms 7:8) and cosmic.<sup>24</sup>

In the Second Temple period, the Temple was home to the Great Sanhedrin. It is unclear to what extent the Sanhedrin was viewed as an extension of the justice of God, but the temple venue of this great council certainly added an aura of divine sanction to its rulings. In this respect, the Sermon on the Mount is not necessarily

<sup>21</sup> The Talmud contains the Mishnah, “By that same measure by which a man metes out [to others], *they* mete out to him.” TB, Sotah 8b; TJ, Sotah 1:7 (emphasis added), which contemplates only human reprisal.

<sup>22</sup> See also Matthew 12:36–7, explicitly stating that “on the day of judgment . . . by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

<sup>23</sup> For example, Genesis 18:25; 31:53; Exodus 5:21; 1 Samuel 4:18; 24:12; 1 Chronicles 16:33; Isaiah 3:13; Ezekiel 34:17, 20, 22; Revelation 6:10; 18:8; 19:2.

<sup>24</sup> The little apocalypse in Isaiah 24–7 presents a revelation of the mystery of judgment: it portended the collapse of world, the removal of the veil of mortality, the revelation of the glory of God, the restoration of the earth, its renewal and recreation. Margaret Barker, “Isaiah,” in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (eds), *Eerdman’s Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003), pp. 516–17.

critical of the properly authorized and righteously principled verdicts of that court, but to the extent that even its judgments do not conform to the measured jurisprudential precepts of the Torah, as found in the judicial Decalogue of Exodus 23:1–3, 6–10, those rulings would fall short of representing or effectuating the exclusive jurisdiction of God’s judgment over the affairs of this world.

Even the deceptively simple term *metron* (measure), like its Hebrew counterpart *mādad*, is unexpectedly freighted here with theological and cultic meanings. Going back to Akkadian texts, the gods are said to measure the waters of the sea, to regulate the world, and to magically measure the character of a person. In the Hebrew Bible, the “measure” was not an official yardstick, but could include a wide variety of sticks, reeds, lines, times, or weights, by whatever measure one measured, often in a cultic context. Some forty times the word is used in Ezekiel 40–48 in measuring the millennial temple. It is also used to measure the walls of Jerusalem, the tabernacle curtains, the altar, hewn stones, and clothing. H.-J. Fabry explains how this term “becomes an indirect term of *revelation*,” is prominently used for “measuring a divine work, not a human work, and to that extent this activity takes on the character of a *promise*,” while at the same time has the goal “to *proclaim* Yahweh’s greatness.” “In measured stages the human being draws closer and closer” to the holy presence, and by the process of measuring God “*takes possession* of the temple complex as he enters,” which “could also become a representation of the *rhythm of creation*.”<sup>25</sup> Temple themes abound here. Thus, another reason why one should “judge not” is that God can measure all things, even if man cannot and, therefore, should not (Isaiah 40:12).

Moreover, the Sermon on the Mount turns once again to the concept of talionic justice. Rewarding or punishing a person in a manner that matches his own being or conduct is mentioned several times in the scriptures as the form of God’s justice both in this world (Exodus 22:22–4) and at the judgment day.<sup>26</sup> The least ambiguous and most important use of the talionic formula can be found in the concept of divine justice—the “ultimate justice, or the effect of a cause from which one simply could not escape”<sup>27</sup>—and in the teachings of prophets about

<sup>25</sup> H.-J. Fabry, “*mādad*,” in *TDOT*, vol. 8, p. 128 (italics in original).

<sup>26</sup> The talionic nature of God’s rewards and punishments is embedded in Matthew 6:4, 6, 14 and 18, as signaled above. On talionic justice, see generally Calum M. Carmichael, “Biblical Laws of Talion,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 9 (1985): 107–26; Bernard S. Jackson, *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law* (Sheffield, England, 2000), pp. 271–97; Philip J. Nel, “The Talion Principle in Old Testament Narratives,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Language* 20 (1994): 21–9; Eckart Otto, “Die Geschichte der Talion im Alten Orient und Israel,” in D.R. Daniels, U. Gleßner, and M. Rösel (eds), *Ernten, was man Sät: Festschrift für Klaus Koch* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1991), pp. 101–30; S. West, “The *Lex Talionis* in the Torah,” *JBQ* 21 (1993): 183–8; and Raymond Westbrook, “*Lex Talionis* and Exodus 21:22–25,” *RevB* 93 (1986): 52–69.

<sup>27</sup> James E. Priest, *Governmental and Judicial Ethics in the Bible and Rabbinic Literature* (New York, 1980), p. 155.

that justice. Warnings that God will adhere to this principle when judging man are plentiful in the Old Testament, and it is fair to say that no principle is more fundamental to the concept of justice in biblical times than the requirement that the punishment should somehow match, relate to, or balance out the nature of the crime or wrongdoing itself. Talionic justice accomplished a sense of poetic justice, rectified imbalance, related the nature of the wrong to the fashioned remedy, and achieved an appropriate measure of punishment or degree of reward. Both divine and human actions, as well as natural consequences, can conform to these talionic principles, but it is more often divine judgment that guarantees that those who dig pits for their neighbors will fall into their own pit or who oppress widows will have their own wives become widows.

Therefore, a primary concern of the truly righteous person should be to develop one's own character, by becoming pure ("take the log out of your own eye"), by serving (actually taking "the speck out of your brother's eye"), avoiding hypocrisy, and thinking and acting toward others in the way that one would have God render judgment in return (Matthew 7:3–5). In a temple sense, judgment process is more reflective than projective.

Two final words are worth noting. The word for "speck" or mote is *karpos* (chip, dry straw, bit of sawdust). It appears only once in the Septuagint, and so Matthew 7:3 may contain a distant but significant allusion to Genesis 8:11, where the dove of peace returns to Noah with a dry twig (*karpos*) of an olive branch in its beak as a sign of God's merciful abatement of the destruction of the land and leading to a covenant of reconciliation. If the *karpos* in a brother's eye is actually an olive branch of peace, especially one of divine peace, covenant and atonement, how much more grievous is the other's inability to be of true assistance.

Curiously, there may be a connection between the "heavy wooden beam" (*dokos*) in the eye of the would-be helper and the *dokoi* or "heavy beams used in the building of the temple."<sup>28</sup> Large beams capable of spanning wide spaces were expensive commodities in antiquity, and they receive notable mentions in the building and refurbishing of the Temple of Solomon (1 Kings 6:15–16; 2 Chronicles 34:11). Perhaps here is a veiled indictment of temple administrators who purported to help the widows and the ordinary man but who were blinded by the ceiling beams of the Temple to see above them into the heavens where they might learn wisdom.

Essentially, this stage of the Sermon and the Temple makes it clear that people may choose to judge others, but if they do they must be prepared to be judged by God by same standards that they have used in judging others. This principle of divine judgment operates universally and impartially, for God is no respecter of persons.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew* (Peabody, Massachusetts, 1991), p. 64, quoting James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (1930).

<sup>29</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 491.

**Stage 19. A Curse on Those Who Breach Confidentiality (7:6)**

Next, the Sermon on the Mount requires its listeners to keep holy things secret: “Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you” (Matthew 7:6). For most commentators, “the original meaning [of this saying] is puzzling.”<sup>30</sup> “The logion is a riddle.”<sup>31</sup> In Betz’s view, the likelihood is that this saying was “part of the pre-Matthean SM; . . . it may have been as mysterious to [Matthew] as it is to us.”<sup>32</sup> This rubric seems badly out of place and hard to explain for most interpreters of the Sermon on the Mount,<sup>33</sup> for after demanding that disciples should love their neighbors, even their enemies, it seems inconsistent to call those neighbors or others “dogs” and “swine” and to withhold pearls from them.

The emphasis here, however, is clearly on withholding certain things that are “holy” and protecting them as sacred. Drawing on Logion 93 in the *Gospel of Thomas*, Strecker identifies one possibility for the holy thing, “that which is holy (*to hagian*)” in Matthew 7:6, as some “gnostic secret knowledge.”<sup>34</sup> The implication is that Jesus has given his hearers something more than what the recorded texts publicly report, something they are required to keep sacred and confidential—an implication consistent with some other interesting conclusions of Jeremias and others regarding the existence of sacred, secret teachings and practices in primitive Christianity.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Betz finds it most likely that this prohibition in verse 6 is

an esoteric saying that the uninformed will never be able to figure out. Finding the explanation is not a matter of natural intelligence but of initiation into secrets. . . . In other words, we are dealing with some kind of secret (*arcanum*). Indeed, the language reminds us of arcane teaching (*Arkandisziplin*) as it was used in the Greek mystery religions and in philosophy. . . . Philo also alluded to the oath

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<sup>30</sup> Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary*, trans. O.C. Dean Jr (Nashville, 1988), p. 146; and Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 494–5.

<sup>31</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis, 1989), p. 418.

<sup>32</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 494.

<sup>33</sup> H.C. van Zyl, “n Moontlike verklaring vir Matteus 7:6 [A Possible Explanation of Matthew 7:6],” *ThEv* 15 (1982): 67–82, collapses this saying into Matthew 7:1–5 as a possible solution to the problem.

<sup>34</sup> Strecker, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 147.

<sup>35</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (New York, 1966), pp. 125–37. P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, “Do Not Give What Is Holy to the Dogs,” *ExpTim* 90 (1979): 341, argues that “dogs” has a nonliteral metaphorical sense of “those who are unbaptized and therefore impure, . . . without shame” and that “holy” might originally have meant “what is precious, what is valuable.” It is possible that the “holy thing” refers to holy food, which would explain the association of this saying with the Eucharist in *Didache* 9:5.

that the initiates of the mysteries had to swear to protect the sacred tradition by not revealing its myths, formulae, rituals, and symbols to uninitiated outsiders. . . . If something specific, the “holy” could be a ritual. . . . Originally, then, the [Sermon on the Mount] was meant to be insiders’ literature, not to be divulged to the uninitiated outsiders. But one should remember that these are possibilities, no more. . . . Remarkably, Elchasai used the same language: “Inasmuch as he considers that it would be an insult to reason that these great and ineffable mysteries should be trampled under foot or that they should be handed down to many, he advises that they should be preserved as valuable pearls saying this: Do not read this word to all men and guard carefully these precepts because all men are not faithful nor are all women straightforward.”<sup>36</sup>

Such a requirement of secrecy is a common feature of ritual initiations or temple ordinances.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Didache 9:5 associates this saying in Matthew 7:6 with a requirement of cultic exclusivity, specifically the prohibition not to let anyone “eat or drink of the Eucharist with you except for those baptized in the name of the Lord” (see Didache 14:1–2, also connecting the gift at the altar in Matthew 5:23–5 with the observance of the Eucharist). Accordingly, Betz concludes that “the ‘holy’ could be a ritual.”<sup>38</sup> In any event, when the body of sacred knowledge is given by the Sermon on the Mount to its recipients,<sup>39</sup> its elements become or produce a string of precious pearls of great price, “*your* pearls,” which are revelations that one would sell all that one has in order to obtain (see Matthew 13:45–6). Once that knowledge is found, one keeps it hidden to protect it (see Matthew 13:44).

The violation of this obligation of secrecy carries or implies harsh penalties and consequences. If it is violated, the pearls will be trampled, and the one who has disclosed the holy thing will be torn to pieces. This reflects the method of punishment prescribed for covenant breakers in Psalms 50: “who made a covenant with me, . . . Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I rend, and there be none to deliver!” (Psalms 50:5, 22). The Sermon text may also warn against apostasy, apostates, or heretics.<sup>40</sup> In a ritual context, a strict requirement of secrecy is most readily understandable. Of its seriousness the listeners were expressly forewarned

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<sup>36</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 495–6; citations and footnotes deleted, except for final quote from note p. 573. “All that one can say is that ‘the holy’ may indeed indicate that sacred rituals or one such ritual were regarded as constituting something arcane by the SM. . . . This probability would imply that at its earliest stage the SM was regarded as inside information only.” Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 498.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen D. Ricks, “Temples through the Ages,” in *EM*, 4:1463–5; Hugh Nibley, “On the Sacred and the Symbolic,” in Donald W. Parry (ed.), *Temples of the Ancient World* (Salt Lake City, 1994), pp. 553–4, 569–72.

<sup>38</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 496.

<sup>39</sup> “It is conceivable that the saying refers obliquely to the SM itself, admonishing the hearers or readers to keep the document secret.” Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 494.

<sup>40</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 500.

when they were first charged to become the salt of the earth, thereby acquiring great potency but at the same time running the risk of being “trodden underfoot” for losing their strength or of being “cut out” for violating the requirement of chastity (discussed above in connection with Matthew 5:13, 30).

### Stage 20. An Answer to a Threefold Petition (7:7–8)

Having been duly entrusted and warned, the listeners are ready to approach the Father. They are told that if they will, one at a time, ask, seek, and knock (in other words, when a threefold petition is made), “it shall be opened to [them]” (Matthew 7:7). Each one must ask, and each one (*pas*) who asks, having reached this point, will receive and be received (see Matthew 7:8). Here again, the theme of seeking God, as well as another instance of triadic intonation, is reencountered in the Sermon.

The admonition to seek (*zēteite*) God is salient in the Psalms. Psalms 69:32 invites, “Let the oppressed see it and be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive (*ekzētēsanta ton theon, kai zēseste*).” Using Psalms 105:4, “seek the Lord and his strength, seek his presence continually!” as illustrative, Guelich comments that “to *seek* occurs frequently in the Old Testament with God and his will as the object.”<sup>41</sup> Raymond Jacques Tournay hears in the Psalms “an inspired dialogue,” constituting a request by the Levitical singers followed by the divine response: “I cry aloud to the Lord; God answers me from the holy mountain” (Psalms 3:5). This dialogic interchange is a strong theme of the Temple in the Psalms: There are “countless texts in the psalms in which God is asked to reply and does so.”<sup>42</sup> Even if not exclusively, one would dominantly think of seeking the Lord in his Temple in Jerusalem (see, for example, Isaiah 2:3; Zechariah 8:22). Jeremiah prophesied that God would bring the people back “to this place,” that is, to the Temple in Jerusalem, and there “you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find (*heurēsete*) me; when you seek (*zētēsete*) me with all your heart, I will be found by you, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 29:12–13); the Greek, using an even stronger temple term, reads “I will appear to you (*epiphanoumai*).”

Jonathan Draper goes one step further, viewing Matthew 7:7–11 in the context of principles of exclusion or inclusion in the Christian community. He interprets Jesus’ admonition in 7:6 (to not give that which is holy to the dogs or cast pearls before swine) to include the idea that Wisdom, or Christian teachings, are “not to

<sup>41</sup> Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 357. See, for example, Deuteronomy 4:29; 1 Chronicles 16:10; 22:19; 2 Chronicles 11:16; 12:14; 15:12, 13; 16:12; 20:3, 4; Psalm 34:10; 77:2; 105:3.

<sup>42</sup> Raymond Jacques Tournay, *Seeing and Hearing God with the Psalms: The Prophetic Liturgy of the Second Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield, 1991), pp. 160–64, quote on 162.

be entrusted to any except those wishing to enter [the Christian community].”<sup>43</sup> Draper notes the contrast between the restrictiveness of Matthew 7:6 with the openness of verses 7–11:

In ironic contrast to this stands the promise that those who seek will find (7.7–11)—picking up the earlier instruction to “seek first the righteousness of God [and his kingdom]”. Those who knock will find the door opened to them. This refers to admission to the covenant people. Thus outsiders are encouraged to seek admission, despite the stringent restrictions and demands of the Christian life of righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees.<sup>44</sup>

There is little irony, however, in the idea that the promised opening is not extended to all who ask, but to those who seek, ask and knock correctly, which makes particularly good sense in a ceremonial context of those being granted admission into the Christian community. Actual experience shows that the promise extended here (“you will find”) should not be understood as an absolute one: Many people ask, and seek, and knock; yet many do not find. Moreover, there is reason to believe that Jesus expected his true followers to seek or ask for something specific and something out of the ordinary: The second saying that is attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas reads, “Let one who seeks not stop seeking until that person finds; and upon finding, the person will be disturbed, will be astounded, and will reign over the entirety.”<sup>45</sup> The Greek fragment of this text adds, “and reigning, will rest.”<sup>46</sup> It is crucial that a person come to the Father correctly and according to the divine way (as Matthew 7:21 will make particularly clear), and for all who seek and ask at this point in their progression—after believing and living the requirements in the Sermon that precede the invitation in Matthew 7:7—for them it will be opened.

### **Stage 21. Giving Good Gifts as Does the Father (7:9–12)**

Who, then, will be there to open unto the petitioner? The Father: “What man is there of you, whom if his son ask [for] bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask [for] a fish, will he give him a serpent? . . . how much more will your Father which is in heaven give good things to those that ask him?” (Matthew 7:9–10, 11). Asking for “bread” may be the symbolic equivalent of asking for the “daily

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<sup>43</sup> Jonathan A. Draper, “The Genesis and Narrative Thrust of the Paraenesis in the Sermon on the Mount,” *JSNT* 75 (1999): 25–48, 42.

<sup>44</sup> Draper, “Genesis and Narrative Thrust,” p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Garden City, New York, 1987), p. 380.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, “The Oxyrhynchus Logoi of Jesus and the Coptic Gospel according to Thomas,” in *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* (London, 1971), p. 371.



(*epiousion*, supernatural) bread” (Matthew 7:11) or the “bread of life” (John 6:48), with its overtones of the manna or showbread (discussed previously). Asking for a fish, also, may be figuratively asking for eternal life. The fish was a common pre-Christian symbol of health and good fortune that became a familiar symbol of Jesus and baptism early in Christianity. The promise veiled in such symbolism is that those who properly ask for Jesus will not be stoned (suffer death), nor will they encounter a serpent (Satan).<sup>47</sup> Instead, the petitioner will receive good gifts directly from the Father. The gift is eternal life, descending below all things, rising above all heavens, and filling all things (see Ephesians 4:8–10, where *domata*, the Greek word for “gifts” in Matthew 7:11, also appears). The abundant generosity of God providing his people with bread and fish either anticipates or recalls to mind the miraculous multiplication of the fish and the loaves (see Matthew 14:15–21), which may point to a ritual meal in the background behind Matthew 7:9–11. That meal could well have commemorated and relived the feeding of the five thousand. Those who ask for fish and loaves will be fed in miraculous ways.

The Golden Rule, often seen as the sum and substance of the Sermon on the Mount, is added as a conclusion to this stage of the Sermon: “Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them” (Matthew 7:12). Just as a petitioner would want to be given life and not death, so that person should, like the Father, give life and not death to others. Implied in the background of the Golden Rule is the assumption that the petitioner is now prepared to act in a godly manner. Just as the Father gives generously to those who ask, his children should give and do generously to those whom they might want to do something for them. In the collective view of corporate well-being that prevailed among the covenant peoples of Israel, one did not enter into well-being or eternal life alone. In the final analysis, doing good to (or for) others is required to claim the blessings of the Lord for oneself.

The concern behind the Golden Rule, however, has less to do with restating the principle of retaliation or the proper response to stimuli than with a proactive implementation of the divine attitude of abundance.<sup>48</sup> More than borrowing simply on Hellenistic wisdom literature, the Golden Rule implies a background of prayerful petitions in approaching God. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, it was enough for a person to go and reconcile with a brother when one remembered that a brother harbored a grievance against him (Matthew 5:24); now it is incumbent on those who would ask God for a blessing to first do for others what they would have done to them. Earlier in the Sermon, it was sufficient for a person to respond to a request from a neighbor by giving more than was asked (Matthew 5:39, 44); now it is necessary for the would-be petitioners to take the initiative and do voluntarily for others as they would have them do unto them. This will allow the Father to give generously to those who ask. Just as the Father cannot forgive those who do not

<sup>47</sup> Perhaps even more directly indicative of the symbolism of life and death, Luke 11:12 reads “egg” and “scorpion,” in lieu of “bread” and “stone.”

<sup>48</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 514.

forgive others (Matthew 6:14), the Father cannot give fish or bread to others who do not of themselves give. Out of his storehouse of plentitude, God gives not only through nature to all the good and wicked (as was the general point in Matthew 5:44), but now he imparts particularly to those petitioners who give as he gives. By opening the way for God to bless people with peace, prosperity, well-being, and with all that they righteously seek and ask, the Golden Rule and all that leads up to it in the Sermon on the Mount fulfills the overriding purpose behind the entire law and the prophets.

Various forms of the Golden Rule are to be found, of course, in many cultures throughout the world.<sup>49</sup> The underlying concept, however, did not enter Judaism late or through aphorisms from other societies, for the similar idea of treating others in the same manner as you would treat yourself was already embedded in the command “you shall love your neighbor (*plēšion*) as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). Praising those who treated their neighbors respectfully and certifying that one had not dealt dishonorably with one’s neighbor is found several times in the Psalms. For example, Psalm 15 begins by asking who may tarry in the tabernacle or temple of the Lord: “Who shall sojourn in thy tent? Who shall dwell on thy holy hill?” The answer includes, one who “does no evil to his neighbor (*plēšion*)” (Psalms 15:1, 3; see also 24:4). Thus, it is fitting that the Sermon on the Mount reiterates this element, one of the fundamental requirements for entering the Temple, as it turns its attention to entering through the gates that open into the presence of God.

## **Stage 22. Entering through a Narrow Opening That Leads to Life (7:13–14)**

The necessity of entering next through a certain narrow opening arises because, as Matthew 7:13–14 makes clear, there is only one gate that opens into life: “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” The doctrine of the Two Ways—the one path to life or the other road to destruction—was a salient teaching in early Christianity as well as at Qumran,<sup>50</sup> one of its most famous occurrences being in these two verses. This motif, as Robert Guelich writes, “has its root in the Old Testament,” and among a host of verses he cites Psalms 1:6, “for

<sup>49</sup> See the discussion and sources cited in Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 508–15.

<sup>50</sup> 1QM 1:1; 1QS 1:9–10; 3:18–26; 4:16–19. See, for example, Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 522; Paul Winter, “Ben Sira and the Teaching of the Two Ways,” *VT* 5 (1955): 315–18; M. Jack Suggs, “The Christian Two-Ways Tradition: Its Antiquity, Form, and Function,” in David E. Aune (ed.), *Studies in the New Testament and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honor of Allen P. Wikgren* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 60–74; Hugh W. Nibley, *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City, 1987), pp. 183–6; and Hugh W. Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, 1989), pp. 462–3, 550–51.

the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”<sup>51</sup> “I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19); “Thus says the Lord: Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death” (Jeremiah 21:8); “the way of peace they know not, . . . they have made their roads crooked” (Isaiah 59:8). The good way of life and of the Lord certainly ran through the Temple; the evil way of death and destruction did not. This dichotomy is as primordial as the temple-related creation account, with its flaming sword that guards the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24).

According to Luz, the gate envisioned here in the Sermon on the Mount is not that of a door to a house (*thura*), but “the gate of a city or a temple (*pulē*).”<sup>52</sup> References to the gates of the Temple are found in Psalms 24:7–10; 118:19–20.<sup>53</sup> Psalms 118 was among those sung at the Feast of Tabernacles,<sup>54</sup> for as Mowinckel writes, “Ps. 118 . . . starts before the Temple and resounds while the ‘procession’ (*hagh*) marches through ‘the Gate of Righteousness’ and encircles the altar of burnt offerings in the temple court.”<sup>55</sup> Mowinckel further asserts that the gate of Psalms 118 is “very likely the innermost temple gate, through which only ‘the righteous’ . . . are allowed to enter.”<sup>56</sup> The word *pulē* would have carried strong temple overtones. The word is used in five locations in reference to the gate of the Tabernacle (Exodus 27:16; 38:15–17, 30; Numbers 3:26; 4:32). Ezekiel, on his extended tour through the celestial temple, pays special attention to its gates (*pulēs*), the word being used 33 times in Ezekiel 40–47, always with reference to the temple gates.

Entrance to the Temple was carefully regulated. As Clements explains, “One of the priests, acting as ‘door-keeper’, was entrusted with the important task of declaring the conditions of entry into Yahweh’s temple, so that no undesirable person should come into the presence of God, or be regarded as one of his covenant people.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Koole has argued that Psalms 15 was an entrance liturgy

<sup>51</sup> Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 387.

<sup>52</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, p. 435. The word *pulē* is also used when Jacob sees the “gate of Heaven” (Genesis 28:17). The earthly Temple may have been primarily intended, which of course instantiated the heavenly Temple. Betz reads this text as eschatological, “behind the gates comes first of all the last judgment,” *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 523, although he finds “no indication that the heavenly Jerusalem is thought of,” even if “it would be suggestive,” p. 521.

<sup>53</sup> Connection between these verses discussed by Herman Hendrickx, *The Sermon on the Mount* (London, 1984), pp. 161–2.

<sup>54</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (New York, 1962), p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, p. 180.

<sup>57</sup> R.E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 74–5. See also the discussion of Psalm 24 and the Beatitudes above.

“used in the royal accession to the throne.”<sup>58</sup> Likewise, only a few, even of the priests, could enter into the innermost courts of the Temple, where the blood of the atonement was connected to the *life* it represents for the people.<sup>59</sup> In short, the idea that only a few of royal or holy quality will enter the narrow gate would have made considerable sense in the Temple, where it would have been a familiar image.

### Stage 23. Recognizing and Bearing the Fruits of the Tree of Life (7:15–20)

In order to stay on the narrow path, a person must be careful to follow the voice of the true shepherd and not succumb to the enticements of those who purport to be true followers of the Lord but in fact are to be avoided: “Keep your distance from the false prophets (*prosechete apo tōn pseudoprophētōn*), who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (7:15). This stage of the Sermon continues to draw heavily on echoes of familiar texts trenchantly associated with the Temple.

The Sermon on the Mount’s warning against “false prophets” reverberates in 2 Peter 2:1 (now as in ancient times there are both true and false prophets), in 1 John 4:1 and Didache 11:5–10 (many false prophets are gone out into the world, and they need to be judged by their conduct), and in Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10 (the beast and the false prophet are cast into a lake of burning sulfur), but the idea of false prophets is not original with the Sermon on the Mount: “the concept itself goes back to the Hebrew Bible.”<sup>60</sup> The book of Jeremiah saliently mentions *pseudoprophētoi* nine times. Jeremiah 6 contains a judgment prophecy of the time when the Lord, “like a grape-gatherer,”<sup>61</sup> will glean the remnant of Israel as if it were a vine; Jeremiah singles out for condemnation “the priests and false prophets,” and he admonishes the people to seek and “ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is (*hē hodos hē agathē*); and walk in it” (6:9; 13, 16). The concatenation of “the way,” false prophets, and grapes links Matthew 7:13, 15 and 16 back into Jeremiah 6, and thus associates the false prophets in this stage of the Sermon with their traditional accomplices, the temple priests. Three other passages in Jeremiah speak, in one and the same breath, of “the priests and the false prophets” as the ones who heard Jeremiah speaking in the Temple and brought a legal action against him (26 [33 LXX]:7, 8, 11, 16), who spoke to Jeremiah in the Temple (35 [28 LXX]:1), or who had taken over leadership of the

<sup>58</sup> Clements, *God and Temple*, p. 75, n. 4 (citing J.L. Koole, *Psalm 15 — ein königliche Einzugsliturgie?* [Oudtestamentische Studien XIII, Leiden, 1963], pp. 98–111).

<sup>59</sup> Barker, *On Earth As It Is in Heaven*, p. 45.

<sup>60</sup> Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 534.

<sup>61</sup> The word used by Jeremiah is “*ho trugōn*.” Although Matthew 7:16 uses *sullegousin* to cover the gathering of both grapes and figs, the parallel text in Luke 6:44 uses *sullegousin* for the figs and *trugōsin* for the grapes, thus echoing Jeremiah 6:9 even more closely.

Temple but had spoken falsely in the name of the Lord (36 [29 LXX]:1, 8, 23, 26; see also 34 [27 LXX]:9).

Outside of Jeremiah, the only occurrence of term *pseudoprophētoi* in the entire Septuagint is in Zechariah 13:2, which is also indirectly relevant to the Temple and Matthew 7:15. Zechariah looks forward to the day when “there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness” (13:1). The first order of business on that day will be for the Lord to cleanse the cult, to purge the land of idols and of “false prophets (*pseudoprophētas*)” (Zechariah 13:2), for they lead people away from the Temple’s correct understanding of the atoning peace that alone heals the people’s breach of the covenant (Jeremiah 6:14). The false prophets appear to be sacrificial lambs, but in reality are ravenous wolves.

In asking, “Are grapes gathered from thorns (*apo akanthōn*), or figs from thistles (*apo tribolōn*)?” the Sermon on the Mount alludes clearly to Genesis 3:19, where, as a result of their transgression, Adam and Eve were told that “thornbushes and thistles (*akanthas kai tribolous*) shall [the earth] bring forth to thee.” Grapes and figs, symbolic of life, are not to be found in the fallen world, but are to be found in the restored conditions of Eden represented by the innermost courts of the Temple.

The best-known feature of the Garden of Eden were its two trees, a tree of life and a tree of death (Genesis 3:3, 22). Those trees were no ordinary trees, and just as Adam and Eve were allowed to choose between them, the Sermon on the Mount opens the way for its adherents to partake of the fruit of life or the fruit of death.

These trees are ultimate religious symbols. Each tree’s fruits are either “evil” (*ponērous*, “sick, wicked, worthless, degenerate, malicious”), for it is “corrupt” (*sapron*, “decayed, rotten, evil, unwholesome”), or it is a “good tree” (*agathon*, “fit, capable, of inner worth, moral, right”) and its fruits are “good” (*kalous*, good, beautiful). These trees are symbolic of whether one will have eternal life or be “hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 7:19).

The good tree represents the tree of life, an important feature in the landscape of all temple literature.<sup>62</sup> “No mortal could touch the tree until after the great judgement, when its fruit would be given to the chosen ones, and the tree itself transplanted again into the temple.”<sup>63</sup> It is to the tree of life that the difficult path leads.

Sometimes, early Christian allegories saw only one tree of eternal life, the living cross, with Jesus being the root and righteous people becoming the branches

<sup>62</sup> John M. Lundquist, “The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East,” in *The Temple in Antiquity: Ancient Records and Modern Perspectives*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Salt Lake City, 1984), pp. 67–71; and John M. Lundquist, “Temple, Covenant, and Law in the Ancient Near East and in the Old Testament,” in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1988), p. 293; Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven* (London, 1991), pp. 90–5.

<sup>63</sup> Barker, *Temple Theology*, p. 88.

(see John 15:1–5). Ritually, early Christians prayed in the “cruciform” position, with their hands raised, “stretched out towards the Lord.” This “extension,” they said, “is the upright cross.”<sup>64</sup> Originally, this signified the passion of Christ and was a gesture used in confessing Christ at baptism; it imitated the cross, death, and a mystic unification and life with Christ.<sup>65</sup>

Other times, by partaking of the fruit of the tree of life, a person becomes a fruitful tree planted in God’s paradise, growing up unto eternal life and yielding much good fruit. This imagery owes much to Psalms 1:1–3, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, . . . but [whose] delight is in the law of the Lord. . . . He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season.” This idea flourishes in Isaiah 61, proclaiming that the Spirit of the Lord will grant to those who mourn in Zion a garland, the oil of gladness, and the mantle of praise, “that they might be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord” (Isaiah 61:3). The idea of righteous individuals becoming paradisiacal trees became even more fully expressed in the early Christian Syriac hymns: “Blessed, O Lord, are they who are planted in Thy land, and who have a place in Thy Paradise; and who grow in the growth of Thy trees” (*Odes of Solomon* 11:18–24).

At the same time, the Sermon on the Mount makes it emphatically clear that its disciples are to avoid those whose “fruits” are evil. The warning that an evil tree will be cast into the fire may well reflect a criticism of those who mismanage the Temple, and may foreshadow Jesus’ action in cleansing the Temple. Geoffrey Troughton observes that the account of Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple, as it is described in Mark 11:12–26,

is intercalated within the episode of the withered fig tree, so that each event provides a mutual commentary on the other. Thus, the action in the Temple and the withering of the fig tree are each seen to be symbolic prophetic actions enacting destruction; the absence of fruit provokes the action against the fig tree, while the absence of “true fruit” in the Temple (or “fruit” of the wrong kind), is the catalyst for action.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> *Odes of Solomon* 27:3; 35:7; 37:1, in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols, Garden City, N.Y. 1983–85), vol. 2, pp. 759, 765–6. “The Odist refers to the early cruciform position for praying,” James H. Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon* (Oxford, 1973), p. 125, n. 10. See 1 Timothy 2:8: “I will therefore that men pray every where lifting up [raising] holy hands.” In the Greek tragedians, *hosioi cheirēs* are “hands which are ritually pure.” Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Philadelphia, 1972), p. 44.

<sup>65</sup> D. Plooiij, “The Attitude of the Outspread Hands (‘Orante’) in Early Christian Literature and Art,” *ExpTim* 23 (1912): 199–203, 265–9. One early artwork shows the figures with “the stigmata Christi in their hands” (p. 268).

<sup>66</sup> Geoffrey M. Troughton, “Echoes in the Temple? Jesus, Nehemiah, and Their Actions in the Temple,” *JBS* 3/2 (April 2003): 8, available at <http://journalofbiblicalstudies.org/Issue7/Echoes%20in%20the%20Temple.pdf> (citations omitted).

Jesus' cursing of the fruitless fig tree echoes this teaching in the Sermon on the Mount about knowing a tree by its fruits, and the juxtaposition of the withered fig tree and the temple cleansing draws an analogy between fruit-bearing trees and correct temple administration.

#### Stage 24. The Privilege of Entering into the Presence of the Lord (7:21–23)

Brought to this point, the participant is ready to encounter the Lord himself, calling on his name: "O Lord, I beseech thee, save my life!" (Psalms 116:4). Some will say, "Lord, Lord," and they will be allowed to "enter the kingdom of heaven," realizing the promise given to them in Matthew 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."<sup>67</sup> But many others will be turned away, for the Lord will say, "I never knew you: depart from me, you evildoers (*hoi ergazomenoi tēn anomian*)" (Matthew 7:22–3). This strong declaration is precise: "I never knew you (*oudepote egnōn humas*)," not even once.

One must wonder, in what sense does the Lord not know them? Since God knows all, he cannot be unaware of these people. Indeed, he knows them all too well.<sup>68</sup> So, admission must be denied because he does not know them in some other sense. The idea of "knowing" reflected in Hebrew word *yada*<sup>C</sup> has a broad range of meanings. One of them is covenantal: "You only have I known of all the families on earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). Yahweh recognized Israel alone as his legitimate servants; only to them had he granted the covenant.<sup>69</sup> Others—even though they claim to prophesy in the name of the Lord, drive out demons by calling upon the name of the Lord, or issue powerful curses or perform mighty works by invoking the name of the Lord—all lack covenantal status, and thus their works are outside the law (*anomia*).<sup>70</sup> The Sermon on the Mount, therefore, seeks to restore the old

<sup>67</sup> Early Christians understood that only the followers of Jesus would "enter in" through the gate to obtain the secrets of the Kingdom. Clement of Alexandria wrote of the others: "They do not enter in as we enter in, through the tradition of the Lord, by drawing aside the curtain." Barker, *Temple Theology*, p. 21 (citing Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 7.17; translation in *The Ante Nicene Fathers* [Grand Rapids, Michigan 1979–86], vol. 2).

<sup>68</sup> The problem cannot be, as Betz suggests, that the Lord is barred from serving in court as the advocate for these people because of "the legal principle that one cannot serve in court as an advocate, bailman, or witness for someone to whom one is a total stranger," *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 544, 551–4; these evil doers would be anything but total strangers to him.

<sup>69</sup> Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore, 1969), p. 122. See Hillers' discussion of the use of the word *know* in connection with ancient Near Eastern treaty terminology (pp. 120–24).

<sup>70</sup> If it appears "in a context which people already associated with supernatural forces," the phrase "workers of iniquity" in the Psalms may denote those who use "supernatural or

covenant between God and Israel, by which God knew (or recognized) Israel and the Israelites knew God (see Hosea 13:4; Jeremiah 24:7).

In telling the evildoers to depart (*apochōreite ap' emou hoi ergazomenoi tēn anomian*), the Sermon on the Mount veritably quotes Psalms 6:8 which reads, “Depart from me, all you workers of evil (*apostēste ap' emou pantes hoi ergazomenoi tēn anomian*).” According to this Psalm, the power to expel these evils comes only after intense crying to the Lord: “Every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye wastes away because of grief, it grows weak because of all my foes. Depart from me, all you workers of evil; for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord accepts my prayer” (Psalms 6:6–9). Efficacious prayer must take on temple proportions: “Let my prayer be counted as incense before thee, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice!” (Psalms 141:2)—in order for the righteous to be separated from the company of “men who work iniquity (*hoi ergazomenoi tēn anomian*)” (Psalms 141:4). Isaiah 59:6–9 likewise makes it clear that darkness shall come upon those whose works are works of iniquity (*erga anomias*), whereas the righteous will enjoy the security of the Temple, there seeing the king in his heavenly beauty, being judged of the Lord and given bread and water (Isaiah 33:14–22).

Who are these grievous workers of intense lawlessness? In Matthew’s explanation of the parable of the wheat and the tares, they are the enemy within the kingdom, apostates, false prophets, “all causes of sin and all evildoers (*tous poiountas tēn anomian*)” (Matthew 13:41). In the forecast of apostasy, Satan is this man of *anomia*, who shall sit for a time illegally in the Temple itself (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4). Not everyone who simply invokes the name “Lord, Lord” will enter into the kingdom, but everyone who enters the kingdom will have sworn loyalty to the Father and faithfully will have done his will.

### **Stage 25. Concluding Admonition to Build upon the Rock (7:24–27)**

The Sermon on the Mount concludes with a final admonition and warning. Its last four verses compare those who accept and obey these teachings to a man who “built his house upon the rock (*epi tēn petran*); and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.” Those who hear and perhaps even initially embrace these teachings but do not obey them are “like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it” (Matthew 7:24–7).

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magical power” or “words or incantations to harm or kill people.” Ann Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* (New York, 1996) pp. 102, 104.



The wise man (*phronimos*) is the one who grasps his ultimate heavenly character.<sup>71</sup> The foolish man (*mōros*) is the blind guide who cannot distinguish the Temple from the gold one swears by in the Temple (Matthew 23:17), or a foolish bridesmaid who is unprepared for the marriage supper of the Lord (Matthew 25:2). The coupling of these two words would have been familiar from the Psalms: “Fools (*mōroi*), when will you be wise (*phronēsate*)?” (Psalms 94:8).

While the parable of the wise and foolish people who build on the rock or sand can certainly be understood in the context of the preceding warning against following false prophets<sup>72</sup> or blind guides, it also says more than this. Not only must the community be “built on the sound foundation of good works of the Torah, which will never pass away (Mt. 5.18) [in order to] stand the test of the judgment,”<sup>73</sup> but also this parable presupposes the construction of a building of everlasting strength, which again takes the hearer to several images of “the rock,” which represent the Lord and his house, the Temple.

Matthew 7:24 and 25 do not speak of a man who built his house upon any nondescript rock, but upon *the* rock. This expression occurs at one key juncture in the Old Testament that relates to this concluding parable. In the wilderness, Moses spoke “to the rock (*pros tēn petran*)” and struck “the rock (*tēn petran*),” out of which much water poured forth (Numbers 20:8–11). This rock prefigures the rock in Matthew 7:24–5 in several ways: it enshrined the deity (and thus could be equated by Paul with Christ himself in 1 Corinthians 10:4); it was a source of rescue from impending death; and it gave forth great amounts of water: “He made streams come out of the rock, and caused waters to flow down like rivers (*hōs potamous*)” (Psalms 78:16) that “gushed forth” (Psalms 105:41). Because many of the occurrences of the word *petra* in the Septuagint occur in passages that refer to this event, a first-century Jew hearing about the wise man who built his house on the rock would readily have recalled this story. By inviting his disciples to liken his life-giving words to this life-giving rock, Jesus not only affords a concluding parallel between himself and Moses but also between his words and the source of salvation in the Temple.

Moreover, the rock served as a euphemism for an altar of sacrifice in days before the construction of the Temple by Solomon, and it continued to serve as a metaphor for the Temple in the Psalms. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah to herald the birth of Samson, Manoah took a kid and “offered it upon the rock (*epi tēn petran*) to the Lord” (Judges 13:19). In Psalms 27, the rock is used as a strong image of the protective safety found especially at the Temple. The Lord’s

<sup>71</sup> Most often in the words of Jesus, the wise man (*phronimos*) describes a person “who has grasped the eschatological condition of man (Mt. 7:24; 24:45; 25:2, 4, 8, 9; Lk 12:42)” and not the person who is intelligent or prudent in the practical worldly sense of the word. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* (London, 1971), p. 172, n. 21.

<sup>72</sup> Draper, “Genesis and Narrative Thrust,” p. 44.

<sup>73</sup> Draper, “Genesis and Narrative Thrust,” p. 44.

tent or tabernacle stands in synonymous parallelism with the rock, just as the Temple stands inseparably atop its mountain: “He will conceal me under the cover of his tent, he will set me high upon [or *in*] a rock (*en petrai*)” (Psalms 27:5).

In contrast to the stability of that rock and the controlled waters that flow from it, the Sermon on the Mount juxtaposes the coursing torrents and raging floods (*potomoi*) that are archetypical images of the forces of evil. The contrast between those waters of destruction and the immovable solidity of the Lord is never expressed more clearly than in Psalms 93. This Psalm, constructed in an A-B-A pattern, celebrates, at the beginning and at the end, the Lord who is securely ensconced in his holy Temple, clothed in his garments (*enedusato*) of power (*dunamin*), seated on his throne, and issuing his everlasting decrees. At the center of this Psalms, even the three-fold primordial floods (*potomoi*, which are echoed in Matthew 7:25 and 27 by the three-fold rain, floods, and winds) fail to match the mighty strength of the Lord:

A The Lord reigns; he is robed in majesty.  
The Lord is robed, he is girded with strength.  
Yea, the world is established; it shall never be moved  
Thy throne is established from of old; thou art from everlasting.

B The floods have lifted up, O Lord,  
The floods have lifted up their voice  
The floods lift up their roaring  
Mightier than the thunders of many waters  
Mightier than the waves of the sea,  
The Lord on high is mighty!

A Thy decrees are very sure.  
Holiness befits thy house,  
O Lord, for evermore. (Psalms 93:1–5)

God’s control over the rivers and waters hearkens back to the primal history and the establishment of the world (Psalms 93:1), and thus to the primordial mountain, where heaven and earth meet and from whence these cosmic waters flow (Genesis 2:10). Because the Temple symbolized Eden, where God reigned in peace over the waters of chaos, the summary injunction at the end of the Sermon on the Mount to be wise by building upon the mountain of the Lord would easily have evoked images of the Temple and its eternal stability.

Contrariwise, when evil reigns the floods rise up, as they did in the days of Noah, threatening to overcome God’s world order. Only by the ark (and, by extension, by the ark of the covenant) was mankind saved. As Mbuvi has observed in commenting on 1 Peter 3:20, “Noah’s ark was associated with temple imagery—both were built with the help of angels, both are refuges where one can escape the wrath of God,” and both “functioned as symbols of God’s redemptive

act (and judgment) in the cosmological history of the nation of Israel,”<sup>74</sup> which adds another link between Matthew 7:24–7 and the Temple.

More specifically, the rock may refer not only to the Temple in general but to the engravings of the words of God in the Holy of Holies.<sup>75</sup> The Holy of Holies was directly associated with the Shetiyyah-stone, the rock on which the Temple was built.<sup>76</sup> When God created the heaven and earth, “he also created the stone over the Deep, and engraved on it the Ineffable Name consisting of forty-two letters, and fixed the stone over the Deep in order to keep down its waters.”<sup>77</sup> Barker points to Isaiah 24:4–6 as teaching that “when [the laws and statutes of the ancient covenant] are broken, the earth withers away and the creation collapses.”<sup>78</sup> She argues that these “statutes” were the inscription of the divine plan housed in the Holy of Holies:

These engravings were known as *surot*. . . . This word *surot*, which is a plural form, only occurs in post biblical texts, but the singular form *sur* appears throughout the Old Testament, where it is translated “Rock,” a word with the same consonants. Sometimes “rock” is an appropriate translation, but there are many places where “rock” does not appear in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, and so the bilingual translator must have known that at that point the word had another meaning. Thus in Isaiah 30.29 “Rock of Israel” became in the Greek “God of Israel” or Isaiah 44.8 “Is there a God beside me? There is no Rock. I know no other,” became in the Greek “There is no God except me.” This means that the familiar Rock of ages (Isa. 26.4), in the Greek “the great eternal God,” was probably “the *sur* of the holy of holies.”<sup>79</sup>

Thus, to build one’s house upon the rock would mean to base it on the Lord, his plan, statutes and covenants in the Temple.

In sum, every section of the Sermon on the Mount has been seen to contain temple elements. This text is completely at home in the Temple. This leaves us, next, to explore several potential implications of a temple setting for the Sermon on the Mount.

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<sup>74</sup> Andrew M. Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile, and Identity in 1 Peter* (New York, 2007), p. 113.

<sup>75</sup> Barker, *Temple Theology*, pp. 38–40.

<sup>76</sup> O. Cullmann, “*petra*,” *TDNT*, vol. 6, p. 96, summarizes the symbolic meaning of the rock as the foundation (see Job 38:6) of the world in the depths of the primal flood: “The rock in the holy of holies is thus the origin of the creation of the world and the supreme point of the earth. It is the gate of heaven and belongs to the future Paradise” (citations omitted).

<sup>77</sup> Raphael Patai, *Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual* (New York, 1947), p. 57; see also Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, pp. 18–20.

<sup>78</sup> Barker, *Temple Theology*, p. 39.

<sup>79</sup> Barker, *Temple Theology*, p. 40.