

THE SERMON ON THE

Mount

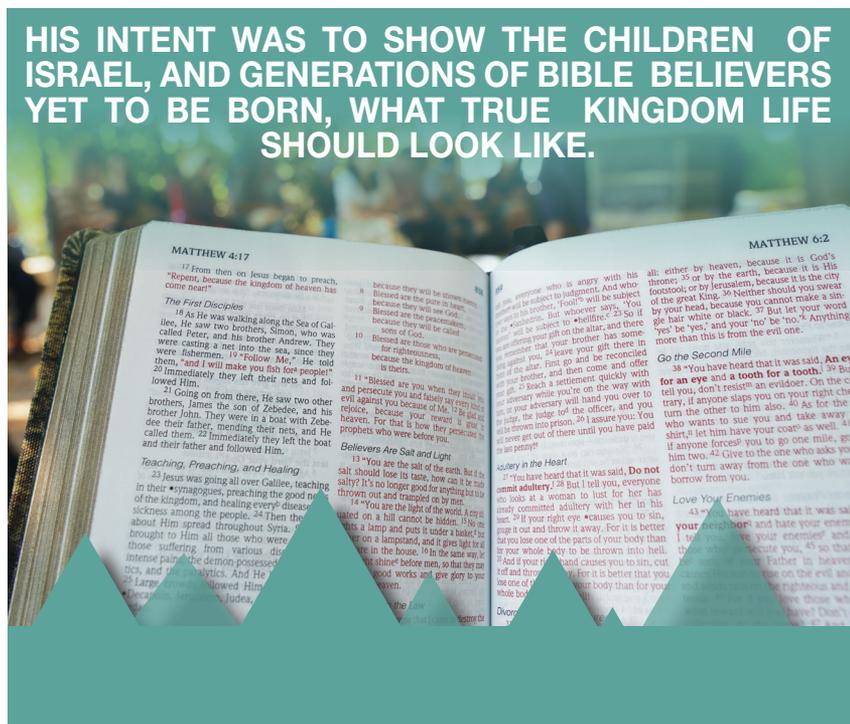
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THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT is a beautiful, poetic portion of Scripture found in the Gospel of Matthew. As I researched the topic, I was amazed to encounter the varied descriptions given to Jesus' (Yeshua's) sermon by Bible teachers and Christian apologists. It has been called Christ's Idea of Righteousness, the Goal of Life, the Ideal Christian Life and the Constitution of Christianity. A.W. Tozer called it a set of "markers on the road to greener pastures" and Chuck Smith declared it our "Christian Manifesto." Unfortunately, although they were right in that the Sermon on the Mount is foundational to the Christian faith, the majority of these Christian leaders believed that Jesus was proclaiming a *new* order, one that replaced the Mosaic law and freed its adherents from the "bondage of Old Testament legalism." Through it, some have said, Jesus turned the law "from negative to positive." Others sadly believe it was a presentation of a "new set of ideals that focus on love and humility rather than force and exaction."

It is important to remember that Jesus' hearers were first-century Jews, part of a community whose lives had been shaped by a powerful living force called Judaism for over a thousand years. Through

HIS INTENT WAS TO SHOW THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, AND GENERATIONS OF BIBLE BELIEVERS YET TO BE BORN, WHAT TRUE KINGDOM LIFE SHOULD LOOK LIKE.



God's oral and written Word, the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) and the prophets, they had been instructed, convicted and encouraged. That Word made it clear that anyone who came in His name purporting to speak for Him could only be authenticated by a love and respect for *Torah*. The Sermon on the Mount does not present a new law, rather an accurate interpretation of Scriptures as familiar to Jesus' listeners as the concepts He drew from daily life to bring clarity to His message. Solomon in all his glory, salt, light, burglars and cities set on hills are all illustrations that brought His words to life. As the master expositor He was, He strengthened them with a deeper understanding and life-application than they had heard from any other rabbi. His love for *Torah* is evident in every word and His intent was to show the Children of Israel and future generations of Bible believers what Kingdom life should look like.

God's Kingdom Come

When reading this sermon, many Christians believe when Jesus (Yeshua) speaks of the Kingdom of God, He is referring to a future kingdom, one that is longed for today but will only be realized at His returning. The Kingdom of Heaven, another phrase used often here, is recognized as that place beyond the clouds. But to His original listeners, His words had a different meaning. The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven were interchangeable references to a very current reality. A kingdom is defined by the presence of a reigning king, and Judaism taught that God's Kingdom was real and present wherever His people were living in submission to Him. Where the King is, where His rule is acknowledged, there is the Kingdom.

In that Kingdom, life would be unique. Every individual would be a reflection of the divine, and God's presence would infuse the community with His love, mercy and goodness. Kingdom life would include the spirit of the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.), not just the letter, and the Kingdom would grow beyond the borders of Israel to include the nations. In Matthew 5, Jesus began His first discourse with eight simple but profound blessings, each of which had its roots in *Torah*.

The Beatitudes

Matthew 5 begins, *“And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.*

WHERE THE KING IS AND WHERE HIS RULE IS ACKNOWLEDGED...

Then He opened His mouth and taught them..." (vv. 1–2). What followed was one of the most important sermons ever preached. Most scholars believe that Jesus' (Yeshua's) trek up the mountain actually served two purposes. It allowed Him time alone with His disciples to emphasize the importance of *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) and instill in them the beauty and necessity of the "spirit of the law." Their righteousness would have to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, He said, for them to enter the Kingdom of Heaven and teach others to do the same. It was the externalism of Pharisaism that kept the people from experiencing true Kingdom life, and as much as Jesus' words would be like daggers in the hearts of some Pharisees, they would be a balm to the masses.

That mountain hike also helped reinforce in the minds of both the multitudes and the disciples as well Jesus' connection to the *Torah*. Just as Moses climbed the mountain and brought the Ten Commandments to the Children of Israel, so Jesus climbed the mountain and taught the *Torah* with a power they had never seen. They were awestruck, not because Jesus spoke some new theology, but because of who He was and the simplicity and authority with which He spoke.

Much of the Sermon on the Mount, but particularly the Beatitudes, could be identified as wisdom literature in the tradition of the writers of the *Tanakh* (OT). Proverbs, Psalms and some of the prophetic books were written in a poetic form typical of Semitic literature of the day and Matthew clearly follows the same pattern. His use of parallelism is also typical of Hebrew poetry, as is his use of mental pictures and poetic imagery. Whether quoting Jesus literally or choosing to use the literary construct as he put Jesus' words to paper, Matthew further strengthened the connection between Jesus and the *Torah*.

...THERE IS THE KINGDOM.

The term “beatitudes” does not appear in the Bible, but is derived from the Latin word *beatus*, the word for blessed, happy or fortunate. Each of the verses in Matthew 5 begin with its Greek counterpart, *makarios*. None of them, however, contain a verb in the original language. Further, there are many verses in the *Tanakh* that use the same sentence structure: blessed are you, blessed is he, blessed are they, etc. Such statements can be found in many psalms as well as Proverbs 8:32, Isaiah 32:20 and Daniel 12:12. The Hebrew word translated blessing is *ashre* and the verb is absent. Most scholars agree that *ashre* is difficult to translate into English. It is used to express congratulations and happiness, coming from a root that means to walk righteously in joy. With the verb removed, a Hebrew–English translation of the Beatitudes is said best as, “O, the gladness of...”

Even that is hard to grasp, however, so the following example is given: Imagine for a moment the pain and dread that filled Abraham’s heart as he journeyed to Mount Moriah with his beloved son Isaac, knowing that death awaited his child, a death that he, Abraham, would be responsible to inflict. Now imagine the unbridled elation, relief, joy—the gladness—that filled his heart when God intervened, and he was saved from having to kill his child!

O, the Gladness of...

Sitting with His disciples on a mountainside in the Galilee, Jesus (Yeshua) began His proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven by speaking of the poor in spirit, a phrase known to refer to the lowly. The word translated poor is derived from a root that means to crouch as a helpless beggar. Those that are poor in spirit are painfully aware of their overwhelming need for God, of their own helplessness and insufficiency. Like the apostle Paul, they are aware

that only in their weakness are they strong. This theme can be found throughout Scripture and is at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount.

[O, the gladness of] *“the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt. 5:3).

“For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones’” (Isa. 57:15).

Matthew 5:4 also speaks of those who are brokenhearted, mourning or wailing over a catastrophe, a loss or even over sin—their own or those of their nation. Like the first beatitude, the mourner is poor in spirit, aware of his or her need for God as the only source of real comfort.

[O, the gladness of] *“those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”* (Matt. 5:4).

“To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning” (Isa.61:2–3a).



The third beatitude also deals with humility. The meek will inherit the earth, we are told, a direct quote from Psalm 37:11. The Hebrew word here is *anaw* and means humble and lowly, even poor. It is the same word that is used of Moses in Numbers 12:3, where we are told that he was very humble, more than all men on earth.

[O, the gladness of] *“the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”* (Matt. 5:5).

“But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Ps. 37:11).

Jesus’ (Yeshua’s) statement in Matthew 5:6 that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be satisfied finds a counterpart in Psalm 42:2. The next four beatitudes (vv. 7–10) also reflect Kingdom truths expressed in the *Tanakh* (OT): the merciful will obtain mercy is found in Psalm 18:25; the pure in heart in Psalm 24:4–5; the peacemakers in Psalm 34:14; and those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake who will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven are promised life, righteousness, mercy and honor in Proverbs 21:21.

Kingdom Life

In this, Jesus’ (Yeshua’s) first of several discourses during His ministry, He took every opportunity to establish Himself as a lover of the *Tanakh* (OT). The sermon contains direct quotations from what some call the “Old Testament,” and allusions to its teachings. In His overall ministry, Jesus quoted the *Tanakh* 78 times, the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) 26 times and the Psalms 11 times. There could be no doubt that He fulfilled the requirement for the one who would speak for God as stated in Deuteronomy 13:1–5.

His main purpose, however, was to create a vivid, compelling word picture of Kingdom life and draw His listeners into the community of the redeemed. Some have suggested that the Beatitudes are negative in content and glorify suffering. Nothing could be further from the truth! The focus is not on the problem being faced, but on the reward being given. Nor is Jesus speaking of individual groups of people, for example, those who mourn separate from those who are poor in spirit separate from those who are meek, etc. He is presenting a list of characteristics to be possessed by all those who would be citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Beatitudes paint a picture of a Kingdom built on selfless love, humility and genuine brotherly care for all mankind. These few short verses describe an attitude of heart which compels the believer to Kingdom behavior. It is perpetually significant, as important for you and I as it was for those multitudes on the hillsides of ancient Israel. Through the Beatitudes, Jesus urges us to emulate the characteristics He and the Father possess—and promises that those who do will be blessed for all eternity. O, the gladness!

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TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God’s chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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