



Matthew Lesson 6

May 12, 2020

Scriptures from TLV
"The Megillah of Matthew"
5:1-12

Matthew chapter 5 opens with the verses which are usually called "The Sermon on the Mount" and also "The Beatitudes." There is a possible alternative name based upon the Hebrew language. What was Yeshua really saying as He taught on the mountain? Once again, we will see the Jewishness of these verses as we consider again the suggestion that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew.

At various times over the years, I have spoken to you about the possibility that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew. An early church father, Papias, said in the 2nd century: "Matthew collected the oracles, (the sayings) of Jesus in the Hebrew language. A similar statement was made by Origen in the early 3rd century, by Eusebius in the early 4th century, by Epiphanius in the late 4th century and by Jerome a few years later in the 4th century. The modern man who was most influential in bringing forth this theory, at least in my mind, was Robert L. Lindsey. I have also spoken in the past about the book, *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*, authored by David Bivin and Roy Blizzard. Dr. Lindsey was the mentor of both of these men. He spent the majority of his adult life living in Jerusalem as the pastor of the Narkis Street Baptist Church, but also as a lifelong Hebrew student who devoted his scholastic life to bring forth a better understanding of the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Dr. Lindsey first came to Israel in 1939 when it was called Palestine. He had just graduated from the University of Oklahoma and he went to Israel because as a Baptist "preacher" he realized that he could not fully understand Scripture unless he learned Hebrew more fully. He lived in Jerusalem, learning the language for a period of time, and then returned to the United States where he married and had two children. Then he and his family returned to Israel in 1945 when he was appointed pastor of the Baptist House on Narkis Street in Jerusalem. Incidentally, the Messianic Congregation with whom we celebrated Passover in 2008, was meeting there. We had our *seder* there. The Lindseys eventually had four more children, who all grew up in Israel attending Israeli schools and speaking Hebrew like all the other youngsters.

As Dr. Lindsey became more proficient in Hebrew he undertook to translate the "New Testament" into Hebrew. The Book of Mark in 1969 was his first. He did that because general understanding at that time suggested that Mark was one of the sources for the writing of Matthew and Luke, or, Markan priority, as it is called. As he continued his studies, he began to believe that scholars had been wrong in their thinking when they suggested that both Luke and Matthew copied part of their story from Mark. He eventually came to the conclusion that the truth was that Luke wrote his Gospel first and that Mark then wrote his with the help of Luke's story. Matthew came later and used Mark for part of his material. His approach is called Lukan priority. Of course, opinions regarding this are still very divided in the Biblical scholastic community.

After he had been in Jerusalem a few years, he met Professor David Flusser, an orthodox Jew and a scholar at Hebrew University. Although he was not a Christian, Professor Flusser's

field of expertise was early Christianity and he taught it in modern Hebrew. The two men became close friends and colleagues who worked together for years at Hebrew University. They spent many hours together studying the Greek texts and searching the *Tanakh* for words and phrases which might have been underlying. Together, they founded the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research, which continues today under the direction of David Bivin, one of the authors of *Understanding The Difficult Words of Jesus*, and whom I had the privilege of meeting during *Beit Shalom's* trip to Israel in 2003. Beginning with Lindsey's suspicions and Flusser's contributions, the modern theory that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew began to develop. Explained very simply, the Hebraic form of sentence structures in Matthew, combined with the presence of numerous Hebrew idioms, was what first caused Lindsey to pursue this study. His book, *Jesus, Rabbi, and Lord* published in 1990, Dr. Lindsey explains how he came to his conclusions. I am using information from this book to present tonight's lesson about the Hebraic foundation of the Sermon on the Mount.

As we begin to look at Yeshua's words tonight, we once again see Him as the second Moses. In Matthew Lesson 4, we described Yeshua as "the prophet like Moses," who was described in Deuteronomy 18. As the prophet like Moses, we might expect that Yeshua would do some similar things. The opening words bring a comparison: *1 Now when Yeshua saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain* (5:1a). Exodus 19: 3 says: *3 Moses went up to God, and Adonai called to him from the mountain saying, "Say this to the house of Jacob, and tell Bnei-Yisrael,..(Exodus 19:3)*. It is suggested that by Yeshua's saying "the" mountain and not "a" mountain, He was inviting a comparison of this mountain with Mount Sinai. It is very easy to see Yeshua as sitting on Mount Sinai and proclaiming *Torah*, the words which He taught His disciples. *1...And after He sat down, His disciples came to Him* (5:1b). Some have suggested that Moses sat down on Mount Sinai, but the Scriptures don't confirm it. But, we do see Yeshua's sitting down to teach as the very Hebraic way that rabbis of that day taught their disciples. "Sitting at the feet of" described a disciple listening to their teacher. *Miryam*, the sister of *Marta*, sat at the feet of Yeshua (Luke 10:39) and *Sha'ul* sat at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). And, there are other examples in the Scriptures. The next verse confirms that Yeshua was teaching His disciples and not the huge crowd which had gathered around Him.

2 And He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,.. (5:2). The disciples were sitting at His feet. He was teaching them in the rabbinic style of that era. He didn't discourage the people from listening and we would imagine that He also wanted them to hear what he was teaching.

The next ten verses, verses 3-12, are nine declarations spoken by Yeshua. We usually refer to them as "the Beatitudes," usually said to mean "blessed" or "bless-ed," the first word of each of them. Looking at them from a Hebraic standpoint, Yeshua most probably would have said *ashrei*, which means happy. Similar words in Psalm 1 make us wonder if Yeshua was using *remez* and hinting back, at Psalm 1. It begins: *Ashrei ha'Ish*, "happy is the man," (אֲשֵׁרֵי הָאִישׁ). Happy is not an exact translation of *ashrei* and there is not a single English word to use in translating it into Hebrew. It is more properly translated as "how happy." "Blessed" does not convey the deeper meaning of the Hebrew. The Hebrew root אִשַׁר, the root of *ashrei*, conveys the meaning of walking righteously in joy. That is what Yeshua seems to have been saying; when these things happen, you are to walk righteously and joyfully, even happy. The Beatitudes also speak of people who are humble, not prideful. The opposite of *ashrei*, how happy, is not just being sad. In Hebrew the opposite is said to be *oy*, אָוּ. Most English translations render *oy* as "woe," great sorrow or distress; something much more serious than just sad. In modern language, *oy* is Yiddish, short for *Oyveh izmir*, "woe is me." That reminds me of three *bubbes*, three Jewish grandmothers, who were sitting on a park bench. The first

one lets out a heartfelt "Oy!" A few minutes later, the second *bubbe* sighs deeply and says "Oy vey!" A few minutes after that, the third lady brushes away a tear and moans, "Oy veyizmir!" To which the first *bubbe* replies: "I thought we agreed we weren't going to talk about our children!" As followers of Yeshua and regarding these ten proclamations which He made, we are called to continue to be happy, even in the face of adversity, sorrow or distress.

As we begin to try and understand Yeshua's original meaning for His ten proclamations, Dr. Lindsey tells us that there is a tense problem between the Greek and the Hebrew. Looking at these statements in Hebrew, there is no idea of the future tense, but Greek puts them as either future or past. Yeshua was speaking about then, right then, the time in which He was speaking. He was not talking about inaugurating or setting up the Kingdom sometime in the future. It was already in existence at that time. But, many theologians consider Him to be speaking about something coming in the future.

3 "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" This is in the present tense in Greek, so there is no tense problem here. But, there is a problem with the translation of the Greek *auton* as "theirs." Underlying it is the Hebrew *lahem/lahema*, meaning "theirs." Lindsey contends that it should be based upon the Hebrew *meihem/meihema*, meaning "of these." "Happy are the poor in spirit, for of these is the kingdom of heaven" would be a minimal change of the TLV. Lindsey translates it as follows: "Blest are those not dependent on self, for of these God makes up his kingdom." He believes this is better word usage because Yeshua's followers don't possess the kingdom; the kingdom is not theirs, they make up the kingdom.

4 "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*" Dr. Lindsey found a tense problem in this verse. The first phrase is present tense and the second is future. He believes that both should be present tense. Lindsey suggests "Blest are those who mourn for they get comforted." They are comforted now, not sometime in the future.

5 "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*" Lindsey changes "meek" to "humble" and also again notes a tense problem. The second phrase should be present tense rather than future. Lindsey: "Blest are the humble, for they inherit the earth." The humble, those who have a low estimation of their own importance seems better suited than meek, those who are submissive. The humble inherit the earth now, not sometime in the future. Yeshua seemed to be characterizing the multitudes of Israel, the people who were under the oppression and taxation of the Romans.

6 "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*" Again the same tense problem, present tense in the first phrase and future in the second. Both phrases should be present tense. Lindsey: "Blest are those hungry for deliverance, for they get satisfied." Those who put their trust in Yeshua's sacrifice are not satisfied in the future, they are satisfied right now. They are satisfied at the time that they place their trust in Yeshua. Yeshua was telling His disciples that righteousness was here and available right then. Lindsey proposes that these sayings of Yeshua are typical Hebrew proverbs, but must be in the present tense to show that they are proverbial.

7 "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.*" Again, the second phrase should be present tense. Lindsey: "Blest are those who extend mercy, for they get mercy extended to them."

8 "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*" Again, we have a tense problem. The second phrase should be present tense, not future. Lindsey: "Blest are the pure in heart, for they see God." The pure in heart are already in a relationship with God and trust in Him.

9 *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”* Again, the second phrase should be present tense. Lindsey: “Blest are those who make peace, for they get called “Children of God.”

10 *“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* There is also a tense problem here. The first phrase should be present tense rather than past. Again, Lindsey disputes the use of the Greek *auton* translated as “theirs” and prefers “of these.” We saw the same situation in Matthew 5:3. By saying, “of these,” we do away with the idea that the kingdom is owned by Yeshua’s followers and correctly state that the kingdom is made up of them. Lindsey’s associate Flusser, who had long studied the Essenes, the residents of *Kumran*, argued that “persecuted” is incorrect and that the underlying Hebrew was *nirdefei tzedaka*, meaning “pursue righteousness.” He believed that the meaning was that these people of the Kingdom were inwardly driven to get the saving power of God. Lindsey: “Blest are those who cry for the redemption of the world, for of these God makes up His kingdom.”

Regarding Matthew 5:10, we get some insight from Bivin and Blizzard in their book, *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*. TLV:10 *“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* If we understand it as “persecuted for righteousness sake,” we could logically assume that there is some kind of “religious merit” in being persecuted for the sake of the Kingdom of God. The idea developed in the early centuries, that being a martyr and suffering persecution brought religious merit. But, is this what Yeshua really meant? Can we gain religious merit by suffering persecution? And, are we to seek persecution in order to gain religious merit? No! These authors believe that this is a mistranslation. Here is what they suggest: “How blessed are those who pursue righteousness, for of these is the Kingdom of Heaven.” Comparing it with Lindsey: “Blest are those who cry for the redemption of the world, for of these God makes up His kingdom,” the meaning is essentially the same. Bivin and Blizzard explain that there are actually four mistranslations in this one verse. First, we should not translate as persecute, but pursue. Secondly, “righteousness” is not the best translation to English. Salvation or redemption would be more accurate. Thirdly, the word “theirs” leaves the wrong impression. We do not possess the “Kingdom of Heaven.” The correct translation would be “of these,” or “of such as these.” This is correctly put by the TLV in Luke 18:16- 16 *But Yeshua called for them, saying, “Let the little children come to Me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these”* (Luke 18:16 TLV). And fourthly, as we said before, the Kingdom of Heaven is not futuristic. It is now! In this beatitude, Yeshua is not discussing persecution at all. He is describing people whose chief desire is for ADONAI to redeem the world. In this line of thought, the nine beatitudes taken together are a description of the people who make up the Kingdom of Heaven, those who are submitted to Yeshua and fitting in with his plans.

A moment ago Bivin and Blizzard said that in Matthew 5:10, “persecute” was confused with “pursue?” How could that be? If the underlying text was Hebrew, we can very easily see how this happened. The Hebrew word *radaf* has two meanings: 1) pursue, or chase, and 2) persecute. It would make no sense to translate Isaiah 51:1 as “Listen to me, you who (*radaf*) persecute righteousness...” The context determines the meaning; in this case “pursue.” It’s the same Hebrew word. And this double meaning caused it to be mistranslated in Matthew 5:10.

11 *“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me.”* 12 *“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great! For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”* The ninth *ashrei* is verses 11 and 12. Again, we see the promise of reward for being persecuted which

the authors do not believe was Yeshua's intent. Bivin and Blizzard: "Don't be discouraged when you are cursed or slandered on account of Me, but rejoice, realizing that the prophets before you faced the same kind of persecution."

The primary understanding that we get from both Lindsey and Bivin and Blizzard, is that the Kingdom is not future, but is now. *HaMalchut haShemayim*, "the Kingdom of the Heaven," is not futuristic, but is a present reality wherever ADONAI is ruling. The understanding of the Greek text as translated in most Bibles is that the Kingdom is near, but it has not yet come. But if you put the passages dealing with the Kingdom back into Hebrew, it is apparent that the Kingdom has already arrived, almost the exact opposite of the Greek meaning. *Shamayim*, Heaven, is also an epithet for "G-d," another way of saying "G-d," *Elohim* in Hebrew. The Kingdom of Heaven is primarily used throughout Matthew with the Kingdom of G-d being used throughout Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew does use the Kingdom of G-d four times.

Here is a compilation of the Beatitudes based upon the understanding of Dr. Lindsey and his students, Dr. Bivin and Dr. Blizzard.

1. (5:3) "Blest are those not dependent on self, for of these God makes up his kingdom."
2. (5:4) "Blest are those who mourn for they get comforted."
3. (5:5) "Blest are the humble, for they inherit the earth."
4. (5:6) "Blest are those hungry for deliverance, for they get satisfied."
5. (5:7) "Blest are those who extend mercy, for they get mercy extended to them."
6. (5:8) "Blest are the pure in heart, for they see God."
7. (5:9) "Blest are those who make peace, for they get called "Children of God."
8. (5:10) "Blest are those who cry for the redemption of the world, for of these God makes up His kingdom."
9. (5:11) "Don't be discouraged when you are cursed or slandered on account of Me, (5:12) but rejoice, realizing that the prophets before you faced the same kind of persecution."

Shalom aleichem!