

## Gospel According to Matthew

### Bible Study: Session II

#### Last Week's Questions

*I have a question. In Psalm 2:7 is the LORD (YHWH) and the Father in the N.T. the same? Is the Father name YHWH (Yehweh) and the son's name Yeshua?*

Psalm 2, cited in Session I for the phrase “*You are my son (Ps. 2: 7)*”, is David who is speaking and being addressed by God. It is David who asks in verse 2 “*Kings on earth rising in revolt, princes plotting against Yahweh and his Anointed.*” We need to understand that it is the sacred name for God, Yahweh, that was revealed to Moses on Mt. Horeb (Exodus 3:14) and the *Anointed*, in this instance is King David.

David is proclaiming a decree of God when God calls David his adopted son.

Terminology concerning God are: *Yahweh* (or Jehovah, which is the German transliteration of *Yahweh*), which, for Judaism, is God’s sacred and unspoken name (Exodus 3:14) ; *Elohim*, (the plural form of *Eloah* is used to express divine majesty) simply means God (eg. “*In the beginning God–Elohim–created ...*” Genesis:1); *Adonai* (the plural form of *Adon*, is used to express divine majesty) simply means the lord. *Adonai* is frequently spoken aloud in place of the word *Yahweh* when avoiding the speaking of God’s sacred name. Some English translations use LORD (capital letters) when implying *Adonai*.

*Yeshua* (or *Yehoshua*) is simply the Hebrew name translated as Jesus in English. To complicate this, however, depending the use of sub-textual Hebrew notations, it can also mean Joshua.

Hebrew: Yeshua ( יֵשׁוּעַ ) or Yehoshua ( יְהוֹשֻׁעַ )

Greek: Iesou ( Ἰησοῦ )

Latin: Jesu

English: Jesus

For the sacred name *Yahweh*, it is not as simple as Jesus, as it all depends upon the context:

Hebrew: *Yahweh* ( יהוה ) or ( יהוה יהוה )

Greek: *kyrios o theos* ( κυριος ο θεος )

Latin: Lord God (Dominus Deus)

English: *Yahweh* or Lord God (based on context)

Now that I’ve thoroughly muddied the waters, for a simply answer to your two-part question (remember the question?): Yes and yes.

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## Introduction

This might be a tad longer than I had hoped. I had planned on doing the “Testing of God’s Son” in the last session, but that turned into a sermon. So, I added it to this week’s session (not the sermon, just my comments) that was to be solely on the “Sermon on the Mount.” Then I noticed I forgot all about the section getting Jesus back to Galilee. I also apologize that this session is a bit delinquent; it’s been a very long week.

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### Testing of God’s Son Read Matthew 4:1-11

The story is rife with analogies and quotations from the Hebrew scriptures, primarily the BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY—sometimes referred to as the BOOK OF THE COVENANT. For Matthew’s readers, it would also be reminiscent of the 40 days that Moses fasted (“*Then I [Moses] lay prostrate before the Lord as before, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin which you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.*” Deuteronomy 9:18) as well as Elijah’s fasting (“*And he [Elijah] arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.*” 119:8).

It is the Spirit of God that leads him (Son of God) into the wilderness. Trying to locate which wilderness is fruitless because this is basically a retelling of events of the Exodus with a different outcome.

During the forty years that Israel wandered in the wilderness, Israel is repeatedly tested by God so as to learn if they are capable of being faithful to their part of the covenant—to trust in God. As Moses would tell you, they weren’t terribly successful.

In terms of fasting, they complained to God that he should have left them in Egypt because there they had food to eat. When God gives them manna to eat, with little work except gathering it each morning—they soon complain that there’s no meat. God gives them quails—although it’s not in the scriptures, they probably complained that the birds had feathers on them.

Then, when Moses goes up the mountain to receive the ten commandments, the people wander astray, turning to worshipping a golden calf.

When they got thirsty at Massah and Meribah, they tested God by asking “are you with us or not?”

And to make sure that those reading the story see the connection, God’s Son responds to each test with quotations from the BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY—the



section where Moses, near the end of the journey, challenges Israel to learn from its past mistakes in the wilderness and to act faithfully as it enters the Promised Land.

I would also point out that prior to the exile of Judah—the Babylonian captivity in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE—God is the one who tests his people. After the exile, however, the role of “tester” is given by God to the adversary. In fact, in Matthew’s gospel, he uses two Greek words interchangeably: one for “tester” (perirazon—πειραζον) and one for “devil” (diablos—διαβλος). Luke doesn’t do that in his version, but still, the “testing” is done always within God’s purview.

In this section, Matthew implies that each reader must answer the question: have you learned anything?

## **Jesus Begins in Galilee** **Read Matthew 4:12-25**

These few verses basically describe how it is that Jesus gets back to Galilee after his baptism in the Jordan (nowhere near Galilee) and his testing in the wilderness. It is important nonetheless as it describes his return to Galilee as a fulfillment quotation (Mt. 4:15) of the prophet Isaiah (Is.:23-9:2) indicating that Jesus’ entry back into the Galilean territory is in accordance with God’s will.

It also demonstrates Jesus’ charismatic or compelling nature through the calling of his first disciples. Peter, Andrew, James, and John (his eventual ‘inner’ group), respond immediately and totally to what could only be supposed as their understanding of God’s call. They are willing to leave everything (fishing wasn’t a pass-time, but a lucrative business) to follow Jesus.

## **Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29)**

### **Introduction**

**Read Matthew 5:1-20**

**This comment is an Extensive Quote**

The history of the sermon’s interpretation is a miniature history of Christianity. To the present day there are sharply conflicting approaches to it. Rather than attempt to summarize that long and complicated history, I will state some theses that express my own approach: 1) Matthew places Jesus’ teaching in an eschatological framework. Nevertheless, much of Jesus’ teaching concerns appropriate behavior in the present. 2) The sermon is neither a strictly individual ethic nor a blueprint for a social Utopia. Nevertheless, it has implications for both personal and communal life. 3) The sermon is not addressed only to a Christian elite, nor is it so impossible to practice that its only function is to remind people of their status as sinners and their need for God’s grace. 4) The sermon places a compendium of Jesus’

**Halakic:** the totality of laws and ordinances that have evolved since biblical times to regulate religious observances and the daily life and conduct of the Jewish people.

teachings before Jews primarily. The goal is to show how Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets, not to prove superiority of his teaching to Jewish Scriptures or tradition. 5) In it Jesus presents what is for Christians an authoritative interpretation of the *Torah*. The sermon is more concerned with principles and attitudes than with deciding **halakic** matters or laying down laws. (*Sacra Pagina*, D. Harrington, Pg. 76)

### The Beatitudes Matthew 5: 3-12

Matthew's recording of the Beatitudes varies from Luke's version of four beatitudes and four woes. Matthew expands the four into nine blessings: 1) poor in spirit, 2) comforted mourners, 3) the meek, 4) hunger and thirst after righteousness, 5) merciful, 6) pure in heart, 7) peacemakers, 8) persecuted for righteousness sake, 9) persecuted because of Jesus. The satisfaction in each of these Beatitudes is eschatological.

### Six Antitheses Read Matthew 5:21-48

This section of the Sermon on the Mount emphasizes a challenge for Israel to find in Jesus' teachings the authentic interpretation of God's will as revealed in the *Torah*.

The six "antitheses" (a contrast or opposition) are found in a formula similar to "*you have heard it said ... but I say to you*". Matthew uses the 'pattern' of an antithesis (formula) but not the content. Here, however, Jesus frequently agrees with the scriptural content, but urges a deepened understanding of it. His teaching is not to be seen as some sort of law versus gospel, but primarily fulfillment of *Torah*.

**Note:** the dynamic of the antitheses is one of sharpening Torah, getting to the root of what it teaches, moving into the realm of internal dispositions from which evil actions proceed. (*Sacra Pagina*, Pg. 91)

1) "*You shall not kill* (5:21-26)". Jesus teaches that one should attack the root of murder, which is anger and ill will and to seek reconciliation.

2) "*You shall not commit adultery* (5:27-30)". Jesus teaches that similar to murder, one should attack the root of adultery, which is lust.

3) "*Whoever divorces his wife* (5:31-32)". A greater discussion based on additional material will be addressed when we get to Matthew 19:1-12. For the time being, although Deuteronomy permitted divorce as the sole discretion of the husband, Jesus refines that to only one reason: sexual irregularity.

4) "*You shall not swear falsely* (5:33-37)". Reminiscent of the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment (Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20) it is most likely from Leviticus (19:12): "*You shall not swear by my name falsely.*" Here Jesus suggests that to avoid swearing falsely, avoid oaths entirely. The text conclusion is a tad unclear for this antithesis because "yes, yes" and "no, no" was a rabbinic form readily construed as

an oath. Apparently, Matthew was embroiled in a debate concerning the propriety of making oaths and vows, and about the formulas associated with such oaths and vows.

5) “*Eye for an eye, and tooth for tooth (5:38-42)*” the *Lex Talionis*, the basis for the saying, was primarily to set parameters on retaliation and to avoid violent escalation (e.g. if someone accidentally killed your donkey, you could not kill the person in retaliation, but could demand that the person replace your donkey). However, Jesus refines the teaching by not only prohibiting violence but that brutality and force be met with abounding goodness.

6) “*You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy (5:43-48)*”. This antithesis is concerned with defining neighbor. Love is to include even enemies, challenging us to avoid restricting love only to those who can benefit us or already love us.

We often hear that *Torah* is the Law. However, the English word “*law*” distorts the Hebrew word “*Torah*” which is derived from the Hebrew word (*yrh*) for instruct. *Torah* was always seen as a gift from God, not a burden. Acting upon the instruction of *Torah* is the privileged way of responding to God.

Matthew does not see Jesus as an enemy of *Torah*, but rather as a path of action to living and fulfilling *Torah*.

### Three Acts of Piety Read Matthew 6:1-18

This section of Jesus’ sermon on the mount is best described as three acts of common Jewish piety: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.

These three acts of piety were important aspects of Jewish religious life. Jesus is not criticizing the acts of piety as such, nor is he speaking against public manifestations of piety. His target is the aberrant style of those who make acts of personal piety into public displays.

**Note:** public almsgiving in order to encourage others to do likewise, is good; doing it solely to impress others, is not good.

Concerning almsgiving, kindness to the poor is praised in the Hebrew Scriptures (Proverbs 14:21, 31; Isaiah 58:6-8), but Jesus contends that if the act of almsgiving is done pretentiously and ostentatiously, then the act is merely an exhibition of hypocrisy. To avoid hypocrisy, do it quietly.

Concerning prayer, Jesus offers a form of prayer in very Jewish terms. Here we find six petitions comprising the prayer. The first three relate to the present time, expressing

the needs of those awaiting the End-Time: 1) may your Name be made holy (9b); 2) may your Kingdom come (10a); and, 3) your will be done (10b).

**Note:** Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer is described as being for gentiles; Matthew’s version is for Jewish Christians.

The next three are for the actual eschatological moment: 1) bread for the coming day of testing (6:11); 2) forgiveness as they have been forgiving (6:12); and, 3) divine protection during the eschatological time of testing (6:13).

It should be noted that some manuscripts add “*For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.*” This is thought to be a later addition although it is very much in keeping with the Jewish practice of “sealing” a prayer (1 Chronicles 29:11-12).

Concerning fasting, it is not to be avoided publicly, but similar to almsgiving and prayer, it is not to be done for show. Jesus is commenting on those that disfigure (aphanizousin, ἀφανιζουσιν) their faces to appear gloomy (skythropos, σκυθροπος) so as to impress the public. Again, to avoid the hypocrisy, do it quietly.

### Other Teachings Read Matthew 6:19-7:12

This lengthy section of what appears to be ‘random’ teachings concerning moral direction is rooted in the Hebrew scriptures, primarily the Wisdom Writings.

**Treasures** (6:19-21) deals with the idea that your goal (or what you consider important) will determine the course of your activity and commitment. **Eye** analogy (6:22): how well we see, ‘colors’ what we see, so we ought to be generous in perceiving the actions of others. **Masters** (6:24) : total commitment cannot be divided, it’s one or the other. The following verses (6:25-34) are an elaboration (illustrations) of where our commitment lies.

**Note:** The term ‘Mammon’ in both Hebrew and Aramaic texts means ‘wealth, money, property’ in a collective sense.

**Judgment ... measure ... hypocrisy** (7:1-3): These references are made in rabbinic teaching as well as from Leviticus concerning the importance of ‘reasoning’ with one’s neighbor.

**Dogs** and **pigs** (7:6): Admittedly this section is a bit of a mystery. It appears that Jesus is saying that you shouldn’t deal with non-Jews when teaching, but perhaps when simply seen in the context of the preceding verses of traditional Jewish wisdom, Jesus is merely suggesting that inappropriate behavior will not get you what you want (dogs may attack you, pigs will trample the teaching).

**Prayer of petition** (7:7-11): Although it appears that the faithful will get everything they want, once again, it must be seen in the context of this entire section. What is to be prayed for is to be faithful, committed, generous, and wise.

Ultimately, this entire section (6:19-7:11) is linked together by a summary verse frequently known as the ‘golden rule’: “*Therefore everything that you wish that people would do to you, so also do to them. For this is the Law and the Prophets. (7:12)*”. This is completely in agreement with the Hebrew scriptures. It can be found in both a positive and negative form: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Leviticus 19:18)*” and “*Do to no one*

**Note:** If you are trying to find the “Book of TOBIT” in your bible and can’t find it? Check the Apocrypha.

*what you yourself dislike. (Tobit 4:15)”*

Just as an aside: “Once there were two revered rabbis, Shammai and Hillel. A certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him: ‘Rabbi, make me a proselyte on condition that you teach me the whole *Torah* while I stand on one foot.’ Shammai refused saying that it was impossible. Then the man went before Hillel and said: ‘Rabbi, make me a proselyte on condition that you teach me the whole *Torah* while I stand on one foot.’ Hillel accepted the challenge and said, ‘What is hateful to you do not to your neighbor, that is the whole *Torah*, while the rest is commentary on it; go and learn it.’”

Most likely Jesus knew this story.

### **Warnings** **Read Matthew 7:13-29**

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five “speeches” found in Matthew which use an ending phrase “*When Jesus finished these words... (7:28)*”, elevating Jesus’ status via Moses. Near the end of Deuteronomy, a similar formula is used: “*When Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel... (Deuteronomy 32:45)*.” Again, this Moses reference would not have been missed by Matthew’s readers.

This final section very much is in conjunction with all the common premises in Jewish writing concerning the End-Time. This eschatological theme is highlighted by four contrasts:

1) **The narrow gate** (7:13-14) In cities such as Jerusalem, most gates were narrow and difficult to enter through, but they were easily defended. The wider gates were usually considered a path toward destruction. The Greek word for ‘hard’ (τεθλιμμενη) is frequently used in connection end-time tribulations.

2) **Fruit tree ... prophets** (7:15-20) Just as a tree is identified by the fruit that it produces, so too will people be known. The bad fruit being burned in the fire in the end-time.

3) **Father’s will** (7:21-23) Only those who do the Father’s will can expect to enter the kingdom of heaven, whereas those who do not—whatever other achievements they have—will not enter.

4) **Hearing ...Doing** (7:24-27) Hearing Jesus’ words and doing them provides a firm foundation for the “storm”, those lacking such a foundation will experience a great fall.

Each unit contrasts two kinds of people: the two ways, the two trees, those who do God’s will and those who do not, and the two foundations. However, the two being contrasted ought not to be seen as being between Jews and Gentiles, nor between Jews and Christians (there weren’t two separate religions at this time). The contrast is between Jews who accept Jesus’ interpretation of *Torah* and those who don’t.

### **Summary**

The thesis of the Sermon on the Mouth is that Jesus came not to abolish but fulfill the Law and

the Prophets. Matthew seeks to show the reader what fulfillment entails. It's not about doing away with *Torah*, but in some cases going to the root of the *Torah's* teaching or going beyond the letter of the Law.

I would remind you that I've moved through a lot of material this session, so if I skipped something you want to know more about, ask your questions.

Whew! End Session II