

# Expansions on the Gospel of Saint Matthew

## Introduction

The very thought of undertaking this project was daunting, actually close to a paralyzing experience. That sounds a bit dramatic but has an element of truth. For some time I had in mind assembling reflections on the Gospel of St. Matthew but was restrained by several reasons which at the time were compelling. The most obvious one is that a super-abundance of information exists out there ranging from the scholarly to the devotional. Take your choice. Certainly you have plenty from one end of the spectrum to the other. On top of this many of us are quite familiar with all four Gospels. Whether one is a practicing Christian or not, their stories and parables have sunk deep within our culture, and quite often we refer to them. With this in mind, there's a strong temptation to say "Why bother writing about something so familiar?" Giving into this mentality would come close to a defeatist attitude. At the same time I'd never shake the desire to put down some thoughts that have been percolating for quite a while now. I simply wouldn't feel comfortable until they were out there.

On a personal level, over the years I've taken notes here and there on Matthew's Gospel and posted them on this homepage usually under the heading of liturgical reflections. This extends back to the year 2007. With this in mind, why add more? Such was another excuse. Still, something kept urging me to tackle the Gospel not in bits and pieces but as a whole.

The only way to overcome any hesitancy was to jump in and see what happens. I figure it wouldn't take long to find out. Results of the decision would emerge on their own. As for the approach, it'd be a series of reflections with the intent of expanding the text beyond what's presented while staying within its bounds. Admittedly this is quite unprofessional as anyone can tell from the contents of this document. Nevertheless, I retained a desire to forge ahead, hoping it might be acceptable to some if not all readers. So instead of dilly-dallying I decided to rely upon something deep within, hard to articulate. Socrates would call this a *daimon*, a benevolent guiding spirit within each and every one of us which has immediate access to the unconscious. That, in turn, is unbounded. Somehow a sacred text...scripture...is ideal to give voice to this *daimon* wishing to be heard as long as it's firmly under guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Almost as soon as I began jotting down material on St. Matthew's Gospel, I overcame my hesitation and discovered great pleasure in the process, never tiring of the work. Actually I couldn't label it work but a genuine delight. Also I overcame my fear of familiarity with the text, that is, frequent exposure to hearing the Gospel proclaimed in a liturgical context, chiefly at Mass and in the Divine Office. Actually the project turned out to be pure, unadulterated fun. The guiding principle was clear—let's say coming from that *daemon* of which Socrates spoke—which is in line with the overall goal of this homepage. That principle, of course, consists in reading the text in the slow, deliberate manner of *lectio divina*. Outside this approach I recommend strongly not to bother going further.

Because this document goes through the entire Gospel of St. Matthew, it isn't intended to be read as a book. The intent is to read the text s-l-o-w-l-y in the spirit of *lectio divina*. Thus it isn't to be treated as a book or even commentary. Without this approach...and I say it applies to most documents on this homepage...better to look elsewhere. It's all about putting the Gospel at the service of daily living but backed up with a desire to cultivate a love for contemplative prayer. In this instance you take as much time as you wish to go through the text and simply rest in God. The whole process is one of alteration which never comes to a stop.

Within the document at hand you'll find transliterated Greek and Hebrew words, some with a plus sign (+). That means the word has occurred previously. In most instances it's to preclude inserting a definition multiple times though sometimes that's necessary. Often transliterated Syriac words are included in parentheses with the capital letter S to designate them as such. That is a concession of sorts to the fact that an early translation had been made from the Greek into the Syriac. Personally, Matthew's Gospel reads more naturally in Syriac and for this reason is "more authentic."

Another point to be aware of...very much so...is the frequent use of the conjunctive *kai* translated most of the time as "and." It begins quite a few sentences and serves to move the reader along but more importantly, shows the close connection between events.

## Chapter One

The very first word of Matthew's Gospel is *biblos* or book which evokes something rolled up and hence a scroll. In order to read from such a "book" one has to unroll it

or spread it out. This you can do, depending on how short or long it is plus the space you have. If the scroll longer, you need a much larger table which you'd find in a library. If it's a double scroll where you roll from one spool to another, you can read certain parts of the parchment without taking up much space. This obviously differs from the leaves of a modern book, for a scroll involves more physical participation in how you handle the text itself. Such a method is very much alive today when reading the *Torah* in synagogues.

Also compare *biblos* with *biblion*. The former applies more to the keeping of records whereas the latter to a document, that is, a longer composition. As for the only other reference to *biblion* in Matthew, see 19.7: "They said to him, 'Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to put her away?'" Actually there are fewer New Testament references to *biblos* than to *biblion*. The Syriac<sup>1</sup> translation is *kataw* or simply writing. That, of course, can apply to a scroll or anything else.

The association of *biblos* as the keeping of records fits in well with the keeping of a *genesis* or birth (it also applies to an origin) which here pertains to Jesus Christ. His birth doesn't start off with his immediate parents but goes way back into Israel's history, that is, to Abraham whom we may call its founder. He's associated with King David according to the text which runs as, "son of David son of Abraham." Note the following two: the precedence of David over Abraham to emphasize Jesus as kingly by nature and the lack of a conjunctive (*kai* or and) or the like between the two sons. It's as though they merge into one. Matthew conveys the impression of being so excited that he can't get his words out quickly enough. You could almost hear him blurting out or panting in haste "son of son of."

As for the genealogy, there's a whole string comprised of the conjunctive *de*—actually thirty-seven of them—which connects the descendants together. *De* goes untranslated but its presence acts as guide as we move through one generation after another in this *biblos*. Because the names are given in rapid succession, the reoccurring presence of *de* is a visual reminder that makes the genealogy flow more smoothly.

So right after positing Jesus Christ as being of the lineage of King David and Abraham, Matthew begins with the latter who is the very source or *genesis*-as-origin, if you will. Then midway through he inserts King David. It's of supreme importance

---

1 Although this is not a scholarly document, it's helpful to keep in mind that most likely the Gospel of Matthew was written in Greek. Apparently some have thought it was composed in Aramaic. Nevertheless, it's Semitic by nature and thereby close to Hebrew sensibilities which is why on occasion references to the Syriac text are given. This Syriac connection has the ability to make Matthew's text "more real" than the other Gospels. That's simply an unprofessional opinion.

to establish Jesus right smack in the middle of the genealogy which for Matthew is a turning point...a hinge...upon which the sequence of names turns. Should we open the *biblon* at this point in the genealogy we have two ways to go: either forward where the right spool is thickest <sup>2</sup> or to Jesus' immediate father or backward where the left spool is thinnest or to Abraham. And if we wish to go back to Abraham, we'd have to access another scroll or two or three.

The establishment of Israel's kingship by David is paramount. However, it must be kept in mind that Saul was the first king who came to a tragic end. Even more important, despite the centrality of the kingship, the people's insistence for a king went contrary to the Lord's wishes, actually very much so. As he said to the prophet Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" [1Sam 8.7]. Note the following two observations with regard to this important verse. First Samuel is to listen or *shamah* literally "in (*b-*) the voice of the people." This listening-in will reveal their rejection or *ma'as* of the Lord, the verb connoting an attitude of genuine distaste.

As for the beginning of the *genesis* at hand, the logical place is the source, Abraham or as he was known originally, Abram.<sup>3</sup> Important as he is, the situation at hand takes into consideration his descendants, the first one being Isaac. Now with this first connection being established, all the others can flow easily. That flow continues up to King David where you can almost feel a pause built into the text. Also within this pause you can also feel the hidden presence of Saul, Israel's first king, lurking there although he isn't a part of Jesus' genealogy.

The unrolling of this *biblos* concludes with the immediate parents of Jesus, that is, Joseph who is presented as the husband of Mary "of whom Jesus was born" [vs. 16]. Matthew adds that Jesus is called the Christ which of course means Anointed One or in Syriac, *Mashyach*. End of story physically speaking. There's nothing further to be said of Jesus' lineage. However, should we look more closely, a new type of genealogy is on the threshold of being established which begins with the first

---

2 Left to right, presuming the text is in Greek; right to left if it would be in Hebrew or Syriac.

3 For a detailed analysis of this genealogy, see **The Genealogy of Jesus Christ** posted on this same homepage. In a very real way it can be taken as a filler-in from vs. 2 through vs. 16.

mention of a woman, Mary. As giving birth to Jesus Christ, this new genealogy is rooted in the action of the Holy Spirit.

All the three major periods (Abraham, King David and the Babylonian deportation) of the genealogy we've seen thus far have been played out in the medium of time and space. Hence, all the persons named are relative to a particular place as well as people and are of a different order than with the new form of lineage about to unfold. Now the Holy Spirit is the agent hovering in the background, using Mary's pregnancy to prepare that line of birth which will become the church.<sup>4</sup> Later this same Spirit will give birth to the church at Pentecost whose genealogy will rest, if you will, on the persons of Jesus Christ.

The conjunctive *de* which is found thirty-seven times in the genealogy makes another appearance in vs. 18 and goes essentially untranslated. We could look at it in light as a connective or conjunctive between the physical genealogy and the new one introduced by the *genesis* of Jesus Christ. The first of two sentences in vs. 2 presents it in a straight-forward manner with *houtos hen* or literally "thus was" for "in this way." Actually it's intended as an introduction to the event.

The second sentence of vs. 18 continues through the next verse as an extended sentence starting to fill out the "thus was" just noted, these words being a kind of introduction to it. First we have *mnesteuo* (S *makar*) or Joseph and Mary being betrothed followed by the verb *sunerchomai* with *prin* or before, literally to come together (the preposition *sun-* or with and the common verb *erchomai*, to come). Here it's in the conjugal sense (S *shaoteph*: to associate, have in common, have fellowship). Note the time span. The former has been completed and the latter has yet to reach completion which means some kind of resolution of the tension has to come about.

The means for this resolution is the verb *heurisko* ('was found') in the aorist passive which implies that in time Mary was noticed as being pregnant. In the small village life of the day all it took was one person, perhaps a teenage contemporary or friend, to spread the word. By the end of the day this *heurisko* was everywhere, having

---

<sup>4</sup> With regard to this shift from a human to a spiritual genealogy, consider the remarkable underlined words of St. Leo the Great: (PG #54: **Sermo in Nativitate Domini** xxvi, caput 2): *Quisquis enim hominum in quacumque mundi parte credentium regeneratur in Christo, interciso originalis tramite vetustatis, transit in novum hominem renascendo.* The English is rather bland: "For any believer in whatever part of the world that is re-born in Christ, quits the old paths of his original nature and passes into a new man by being reborn." **The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers** Volume XII, p. 137. In other words, the *genesis* from Abraham through David to Jesus Christ is terminated. With Jesus Christ a *genesis* of a wholly different order comes into existence.

spread like a virus. As for the Holy Spirit or *Pneuma* + (S *Ruoch*), coming to grips with that was beyond the reach of such villagers. So we have two extremes pitted against each other in young Mary: a pregnancy considered of doubtful origin and this strange, supernatural intervention. Some may even have thought the addition of the Holy Spirit could be a cover up of sorts, trying to pin a religious significance to sexual intercourse outside marriage. As for Mary dealing with these events, she may even have pondered an abortion but obviously was afraid to let anyone else in on it.

Vs. 19 continues from the previous verse as an extended sentence seamlessly shifting from Mary to Joseph, her husband-to-be, the noun *aner* fundamentally as man compared with a youth. His reputation was just the opposite of Mary's which comes across to her contemporaries as somewhat suspicious and rightly so from their point of view. Nothing, in fact, escaped the close scrutiny associated with village life. Joseph is called *dikaios* (S *ki'na'*) or a just man. That sounds pretty generic but connotes an integrity that must have been recognized in the fishbowl-like environment in which he as well as Mary had lived all their lives. This rather generic quality comes to greater clarity when he refused to make a public fuss over sending Mary away. The verb is *apoluo* or literally to loose (S *shara'*, the same meaning) from with the adverb *lathra* translated as quietly but also implies stealth. The same applies to the Syriac *matshya'eyth*, in a clandestine fashion. As for Joseph's attitude, it's reflected in the verb *boulomai*, to wish or be willing and shows more deftness and restraint than the **RSV's** translation, "resolved." This preference for discretion is reflected in the verb *deigmatizo*, Joseph's wish not to expose Mary, that is, to make a public example of her. Besides, that would reflect badly on him and his family for having allowed himself to be duped.

This *apoluo* or loosening-from is a commonly accepted practice in such a situation. What makes it stand out is the adverb *lathra* or quietly. Most other men would make a public show to proclaim their own feigned *dikaios* compared with Joseph who in this few words proves himself to be the genuine article. Given the village culture in which Mary and Joseph lived, it's no surprise that the two got together. There must have been a limited supply of marriageable youths to go around, Mary's family also being attracted to Joseph's inherent *dikaios*. All these factors in the fishbowl life of such a culture served to heighten tension for them both as well as for their respective families. Pressure too was being applied by the villagers, a kind of extended family. Joseph had to act now or never.

The first word of vs. 20 in the **RSV** and **NIV** is "but," another instance of the connective *de* which serves to set in motion an action that will save the day. The

tension of this moment is captured by the verb *enthumeomai* (S *raha'*: to think, suppose, be willing), to reflect upon. The noun *thumos* in the root basically means principle of life prefaced with the preposition *en-* or *in*. In sum, Joseph is doing some serious soul searching. Taking into consideration the parochial nature of their environment, he had to consider Mary's family and their future interaction with his own family should he not go ahead with the marriage.

So in the very process of Joseph's *enthumeomai* we have a sudden interruption heralded by *idou* which isn't in the Syriac. Joseph was wholly absorbed in himself and needed a wake-up call which took the form of an angel or *aggelos* being an envoy or one who is sent (S *malaka'*). The text doesn't reveal his identity, just the fact that he's acting in accord with his nature. This angel didn't appear or *phaino* (to bring to light; S *chaz'*:, to make visible, to heed) to Joseph in dramatic form. He comes across pretty much as a practical man, typical of his village, and preoccupied with making a living presumably as a carpenter. This demanded from the heavenly envoy a different approach. He decided upon a dream or when Joseph would be passive and more amenable to respond. The angel had been delegated by the Lord to contact Joseph, but the means by which do it was left up to him.

So one night—it had to be fast lest Joseph give in and send Mary away—the angel appeared to Joseph literally “according to (*kata*) a dream” or *onar* (S *chelam*: the verbal root means to be healthy, to heal). *Kata* represents a stealth way by which the angel comes in...we could almost say glides in...to do his thing without causing a major interruption. Otherwise, his appearance would frighten Joseph. The Syriac verb for the noun, *chelm* means to be whole or sound, thereby giving the nature of a dream a positive, curative effect. In order to make sure that Joseph recognized the angel as genuine, not evil or a simple fantasy, the angel calls him “son of David.” That, of course, reminds him of his royal lineage. While true, Joseph is living in a village compared with Jerusalem where you'd expect such persons of royal lineage to reside. Although this bloodline is genuine, it seems that Joseph had a relatively vague connection. This might be through belonging to an extended family and family line, not uncommon at the time.

The very first thing the angel does is to put Joseph at ease by telling him not to fear taking Mary as his wife, *phobeo* and *paralambano*. The Syriac for the former is *dakel*, also to dread; the latter literally to take beside or have Mary be *para-* Joseph. Note the way the angel describes her pregnancy, “that which is conceived” or the aorist passive of *gennao* or to beget, to become the parent of, with the phrase “in (*en*) her.” That lifts the fear Joseph had of taking her as a wife, of someone who may have had

sexual relations with another man. If she did and it was discovered after the marriage, it was a sure-fire way to bring shame not only upon the righteousness of Joseph but his family. As for “*en* her,” it has a direct correspondence with the *ek* or “from the Holy Spirit” or *Pneuma* +. This *Pneuma*, of course, was mentioned earlier, but at the time Joseph was completely unaware of its action.

Vs. 21 continues as an extended sentence with the angel speaking. As for Mary, she’ll give birth to a son. It’s up to Joseph to name him, that is, Jesus, for he will save not so much the people but save his people from their sins. The verb is *sozo* and the noun, *hamartia*, two words which are rather generic and all-inclusive. As for the latter, it points to a condition opposite of what characterizes Joseph, that is, *dikaios*. It has affected the people as a whole and thus requires a remedy, Joseph being an ideal candidate to assist with the restoration. The Syriac doesn’t convey this; instead, it has the verb *chay*, fundamentally to live or as here, to make the people alive which sin (S *chta’* as that which has missed) had prevented them from being as such.

With regard to this angelic visit in a dream in vs. 23 we have reference to a prophet who goes unnamed. Matthew, of course, knows that it’s Isaiah and is unconcerned whether his readers know it or not, wishing to keep his identity as secondary. What’s important is the fulfillment or *pleroo* (S *malal* or to conclude, to satisfy) of the prophecy at hand, this verb as to make up for something that is lacking. The object of *pleroo* is *to rheten* or that which has been said, *lego* through the unmentioned prophet.

Vs. 23 contains the prophecy at hand. First we have the version at hand followed by the original from Is 7.14:

“Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel.” *Idou* + or behold serves to get attention concerning the following two things Lord is about to say: 1) that a *parthenos* or a woman of marriageable age (S *btul*) is literally “to have in her stomach.” 2) That she is to beget a son, *tikto*.

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel. The person being addressed is King Ahaz and the occasion is when the Syrians under King Rezin were besieging Jerusalem but failed to capture it. Within this context Ahaz refused a sign or ‘*oth*’ from the Lord which consists of a young woman or *halmah*, a girl of marriageable age (compare with *betulah* or a virgin, not the same). Her identity isn’t given which is secondary to the child to whom she will give birth. Perhaps Matthew

and some of his listeners see in the person of King Rezin and the Syrian army a sign...another kind of 'oth...of the Romans occupying their land.

After presenting this verse from the prophet, Matthew adds a brief note as to the meaning of the proper name Emmanuel, that is, "God with us." The verb is *methermeneuo* also as to translate, the preposition *meta-* prefaced to the root meaning to explain or expound which connotes an accompanying-with. And so it comes as no surprise that the angel who visited Joseph in a dream presented this image of King Ahaz and the prophet Isaiah.

Upon waking from this dream—chances are that by reason of its extraordinary nature Joseph did so in the middle of the night—he followed through on the angel's command, *protasso* also as to give instructions, the direct nature of which is indicated by the preposition *pros-*, direction towards-which. As for this *pros-*, it's immediate object is Mary who is called his wife.

Vs. 25 concludes Chapter One which follows as an extended sentence beginning with vs. 24. The conjunctive *kai* translated as "but" plays an almost out-sized role by reason of an addendum to the dream and the prophecy it contained. Joseph did not know his wife, *ginosko* which parallels the Hebrew *yadah*, to know intimately or to have sexual intercourse. Then comes *heos* or "until" which can be taken as the two having marital relations until after Mary gave birth to Jesus. Finally Joseph calls the name of this son Jesus or *Iesous* which he had received from the angel in a dream. Actually Jesus is a fairly common name so later when he grew up, he didn't stand out as someone special.

## Chapter Two

The birth of Jesus is put forth in a matter-of-fact way, that he had come into existence in the village of Bethlehem when Herod was the local ruler, a client king of Rome. Actually the juxtaposition of these two names already casts an ominous shadow over the chapter which is about to unfold. As to offset this and to encourage his readers, Matthew introduces the wise men<sup>5</sup> by *idou* + or behold. That is to say, we have an intervention out of the blue which will save the day or more accurately, prevent Jesus and his family from being annihilated. Even the very name *magos* signals that help has arrived. However, it hasn't come locally but from afar...really far off...from a place which isn't specified but as the text puts it vaguely, from the

---

<sup>5</sup> The RSV has capital letters.

East. Actually East in and by itself has a mystique about it. Anyone who comes from there is endowed with a certain mysterious quality difficult to define and destined to have a lasting impact.

The word *magos* is of Persian origin which helps narrow it down a bit. As for who they are, it is a combination of astrologer and interpreter of dreams. Some folks may be uncomfortable with this in the Gospel, taking it as a tacit acknowledgment of their practices. On the other hand, their inclusion and coming to the new-born Christ is a sign of their submission to him, their powers included. All in all, we're dealing with genuine mystery-men who over the centuries have given birth to endless speculation.

As for how the magi perceived this birth and how it related to them in such a distant land we can only guess. Again, keep in mind that they got word in the East, that magic-mystical place just described where everything and anything is possible. As for the number of these mystery-men, that too isn't given. The same applies to their names. So instead of causing confusion, it has the opposite effect of creating a sense of mystery and excitement. Even their arrival is sudden and unexpected, coming to two young parents in a backwater village occupied by Rome. Note, however, that the magi didn't go to Bethlehem directly. They hadn't the slightest idea of their final location. Because they came from such a distance, it was only natural to make their way to the capitol, Jerusalem.

The presence of these magi in Jerusalem wouldn't have attracted much attention, that city being at the crossroads between east and west as well as north and south. All sorts of people passed through there. However, the magi drew immediate attention when they asked about the king of the Jews. You'd think the capitol would be the natural place to find him. Even the way these strangers spoke is provocative, evoking a certain naivete. Rome occupied the land and would be suspicious of anyone calling a local inhabitant a king. A few verses later we have Herod getting wind of this but thankfully no Roman official. However, surely word must have reached them. As for those the magi asked, we have no information but presume it was from both clerical and secular authorities.

Being versed in astrology and divinization, the magi may have sought out those like them which also roused suspicion in some quarters. Although such practices may have been common among the Israelites at the time—just look at the contentious history between the Lord and Israel over idol worship—a good many contemporaries must have continued these practices albeit in secret. So when those in charge got

wind of all this, no doubt they were alarmed and rightly so. If the magi were simply passing through, they wouldn't have garnered attention. So it seems the contacts they made in Jerusalem unwittingly turned out to be the ones contributing to make the magi suspect.

As for the contact between magi and their counterparts in Jerusalem, their talk about having seen the star of a king was like adding fuel to the fire. Although they had come from the East, indeed a long way from Jerusalem, something local to have attracted their attention indeed was disturbing. If that weren't bad enough, when the magi expressed their intent to worship this newly born king of the Jews, they were inviting disaster. Most likely those whom they had encountered in Jerusalem must have thought them quite naive. Clearly they had no idea about their paranoid ruler. What made it worse was that these men let it be know they came to worship the newly born king, *prosskuneo* also meaning to give reverence, something that belongs to God alone. It was only a matter of time...very brief, a nanosecond in fact...that King Herod got a report about these strangers. We don't know if he or any member of his court had encountered such visitors before but can presume they knew about them, having their ears close to the ground. All in all, the magi didn't get off on a good footing.

As vs. 3 has it, Herod was troubled or *tarasso*, which means to cause movement by shaking. The same applies to the Syriac *zuh* which is more graphic by reason of the violence and apprehension implied. Note that King Herod heard, that is, he did so plainly and simply, followed by *tarasso*, the two being synonymous. The same applies not just to Jerusalem but to "all Jerusalem," the two happening at the same incredible speed. Even a casual visitor to the capitol would feel the foundation quaking beneath his feet. When it subsided, everyone knew something not good was brewing though they couldn't pinpoint its source.

Interestingly King Herod didn't summon the magi which reflects not just hesitation but genuine fear of a potential threat to his rule; even worse was the potential of retaliation from his Roman overlords. Also he must have been embarrassed at receiving word of a newly born king of the Jews from foreigners, not locals. How could such event in his own back yard go unnoticed? We can be almost certain that such neglect set in motion a purge of those members responsible for keeping tabs on such vital matters. So without missing a beat, Herod assembles (*sunago*) all the chief priests and scribes. Again, note "all" as in "all Jerusalem." As for the scribes, they're described as "of the people" which means their ears are supposed to be close to the

ground and are supposed to provide the most accurate information about these strange visitors.

As for the chief priests and scribes, Herod inquired of (*para*) them, *punthanomai* or to determine something (S *sha'el*: to ask). We can be fairly certain this wasn't simply a consultation but given Herod's state of mind—his *tarasso* as well as that of all Jerusalem—it must have been very intense. He pressed each and everyone present as to where the Christ or the Anointed One was to be born. In unison the chief priests and scribes blurted out that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem. How or where they got this information isn't given. One source might have been the local soothsayers who had come in contact with the magi. Both groups collaborated as to the exact place of Jesus' birth and ended up with a typical Hebrew solution, a quote from one Israel's prophets.

The chief priests and scribes decided upon using traditional religious language because it was tried and true and therefore free from any taint of astrology or divinization. Even better, to protect themselves they could hide behind the words, “it is written.” No one could contest that. As for the quote, compare the one at hand with the Hebrew. It should be noted that each begins with the conjunctive showing they are related to the verse before which deals with a siege. In other words, that should be taken into account while reading the two quote from Micah 5.2 as follows:

”But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel whose origin is from old, from ancient days.” Ephrathah is an alternate name for Bethlehem which translates as fruitful. Although the adjective *tsahyr* describing it can designate inferiority, it doesn't apply by reason of this village giving birth, if you will, to a ruler or the verbal root *mashal* whose alternate meaning is to make like, to assimilate. Note the words “for me” as applied to the Lord. Despite this unknown mysterious ruler's origins in a place called “fruitful” and “house of bread,” his origins are literally “from before” (*qedem*) and “from days long past” (*holam*). If Herod was aware of that—and thankfully he wasn't—those consulting him would be in deep trouble.

“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.” *Elachistos* is the adjective for least and can apply to time (shortest) as well as number (fewest). The Syriac *bezyra'* connotes that which is despised. Despite all this, a ruler will emerge (*exerchomai*: to come forth), the participle *hegeomai*, to be in a supervisory

position or in sum, to lead or to guide. The Syriac has *raha'* which also means to pasture as with sheep. The function of this ruler will be to guide Israel which the Lord designates as "my people," the verb being *poimaino* which essentially means to pasture and is parallel with the just mentioned Syriac *raha'*.

We have no response from King Herod with regard to the chief priests or scribes whom he had summoned. At least he didn't put them to death. Instead, he accepted their response. As noted above, they accessed the most reliable source possible, the scriptures. Fortunately for them that satisfied their master who at once (*tote*, then) summoned the wise men but did so in secret, *lathra* +. The verb is *kaleo* or to call with *akiboo* which means to make a detailed inquiry. The adjective *akbribes* derived from this verb has the same idea but in a painful sort of way.

We can be sure that Herod acted accordingly. As for the Syriac, the verb is *yeleph* (to learn) with the adverb *matshyayth*, or clandestinely. The reason for this secrecy? Herod wanted to avoid several potential power kegs: fear that he had acquiesced to strangers from a distant land and their magic arts which would go against sensibilities of the priestly class. Above all, he didn't want to rouse the local population who'd rush off to Bethlehem and see this king. Above all else and beyond all else he didn't want to upset his Roman overlords. We can assume that this obsessive desire for secrecy as well as security extended to most if not all his court.

No doubt, King Herod had employed both flattery and coercion when he summoned (*kaleuo*) the magi secretly. In this way he was better able to know when the star had appeared and tried every way possible to shield it from his subjects. Note that he heard about this star in relation to Bethlehem, that its appearance in the far-off land from which the magi came led them directly to Jerusalem. Did Herod share any information about the Micah verse with the magi? Most likely he did which is why he sent them off to Bethlehem. That must have made the magi uneasy, for now they could see that their host was taking advantage of them. Indeed, up to the present they had acted in a naive sort of way and regretted it. At last, however, their eyes were open and took the necessary precautions to protect themselves. Yes, they had asked freely about the newborn king upon their arrival in Jerusalem but now could not do a thing about it. The cat was out of the bag and too late to regret having not kept their inquiries discreet.

After this tense interview with King Herod which was held in secret, the magi set off to Bethlehem with orders to search diligently. *Exetazo* is the verb, the preposition *ex-* or from implying that such a search would be done with the utmost

thoroughness. Almost certainly Herod sent some of his agents to keep track of the magi who were well aware of this. As for *exetazo*, it's a kind of overkill because Bethlehem is a small place. So once the magi had discovered the child, they were instructed to inform him, *apaggello* also as to give an account. This would be followed by King Herod himself going to Bethlehem and worshipping the child, *proskuneo* + which is similar to the Syriac *sagad*, to give reverence. Obviously he said this tongue-in-cheek expecting the magi to believe him, again taking advantage of their naivete which by now had dissipated. The magi played along, having learned the hard way. Actually you'd think that Herod would have killed the newly born child then and there. However, he was wily and willing to wait for a more suitable time. Again, currying favor with Rome was always in the back of his mind.

Vs. 9 reads "when they had heard (*akouo*) the king," words which convey a lot more than face value. That is to say, the magi dutifully listened to all that King Herod had said, keeping in mind his intent to deceive them. Their ability to engage in astrology and related practices endowed them with greater sensitivity than most people. This enabled them to see right through the king and how he was manipulating them. At the same time they realized it was better to maintain an appearance of their original naivete so as not to rouse any suspicion.

As soon as the magi left (and did so with great relief) they saw the star, the same star which had brought them all the way to Jerusalem. *Idou* + or behold introduces the presence of this star which suggests two things. First, the meeting with King Herod took place under the cover of night. Second, it was visible to the magi alone, not to others nor to any agents of Herod who certainly were following them. *Idou* also suggests that the star had been invisible and appeared as soon as the magi left.

The star led the magi, *prosago* with the preposition *pros-* indicative of directness, of direction towards-which. Actually it was very easy to follow this star because it was the only object that moved according to its own way in the sky. And so the journey between Jerusalem and Bethlehem which normally would take five days was accomplished in one night or more accurately, almost at once. What makes it all the more remarkable is that part of the night was taken up with the magi meeting King Herod. Such was the miraculous power of this movable star, being able to compress space and time. Finally it came to rest or *histemi*, the common verb meaning make to stand. This *histemi* was extremely accurate in its position over Jesus and his parents. The Syriac equivalent is *qum*, fundamentally as to rise, to stand firm, to exist and gives a more dynamic air.

Were Mary and Joseph aware of this star? Surely they were, having seen it directly overhead for some time now. Instead of all the stars revolving around the North Star, they were revolving around the one directly above. Not only did Joseph and Mary marvel at this, but the local population must have done the same, especially shepherds who were out in the fields at night. Though not accounted for in Matthew's Gospel, the shepherds to whom an angel appeared in Luke's account must have been the only ones with an idea of what this was all about.

In vs. 10 the magi see the star. Compare with the previous verse when this same star had gone before them and rested over the place where Jesus was. The seeing at hand isn't different except in intensity; it was almost alive and reveals that the magi couldn't restrain themselves out of sheer joy. This response which is natural enough has the none-too exaggerated words of *chairō*, *chara*, *megalos* and *sphodros*: to rejoice, joy, great and excessive. Jam all them all together and you have something inexpressible. The Syriac has *chada'*, *chadōtha'*, *rava'* and *tav*, the last two literally as "great of good." As for the magi perceiving the Christ child, all the text says is that he is a new born king...not God incarnate or the like. While that might be beyond the ability of the magi to comprehend, they seem to have an inkling that this baby was destined to be more than a mere earthly king.

So armed, the magi entered the house (*oikia*) where they saw Mary with her child, Joseph not being mentioned who may have been out at the moment. Note that they simply went in. No need to knock on the door, for the star had informed Mary of their presence. Besides, their joy as just described was so great that it did away with the usual formalities. As for the house, perhaps it belonged to Joseph or to some member of his family. No cave nor manger are involved which suggests that this incident had occurred some time after Jesus' birth. As soon as the magi saw Jesus, they did the following almost simultaneously: *pipto* or fell down which suggests worship, sudden amazement, *proskuneo* + or worshiped (S *naphal* and *sagad* +) and opened their treasures, *thesauros*.

As everyone knows, these gifts are gold, frankincense and myrrh which have received endless speculation as how they related to the new born babe. Apart from all this, Mary (and later Joseph who had entered the house) hadn't a clue as what to do with these things. We can assume that after they had overcome their astonishment, the magi did all the explanation as to the gifts as well as using the opportunity to reveal their true identity. At the same time they were keenly aware of King Herod monitoring their every move through spies. What, then, did Joseph and Mary do with the three precious gifts which were way, way beyond imagining for such two

peasants? Chances are they distributed some discreetly but at a later time because the magi informed them that King Herod was out for Jesus' blood. Also they must have kept most for their own needs. Indeed, the three gifts would provide a comfortable life in Egypt to where they were about to flee including accommodations and so forth along the way down and back.

Vs. 12 concludes this episode with the magi by saying they were warned in a dream about what was to happen. This suggests as guests of Joseph, Mary and their newly born son they may have stayed the night or perhaps a bit longer. Who wouldn't ask such generous strangers to stay as long as they wished? Besides, it was part of the local custom to care for strangers. Almost certainly the magi didn't linger because they had promised a report to King Herod as noted in vs. 8. However, they were warned against this, the verb *chrematizo* (the Syriac is *chaza'* or simply to see) suggesting divine intervention as by some kind of revelation which here turns out to be a dream, *onar +*.

There's no word about an angel. Perhaps the star had something to do with this which from here on isn't mentioned because it had fulfilled its mission. The magi picked up and left for home by a different way. Despite the inconvenience, they took a circuitous route to avoid detection. Upon reaching home, many friends and associates inquired as to their trip which they had taken pains to conceal under the guise of some diplomatic mission. Once that was out of the way, the magi settled in for a long wait, one for which they were prepared, to monitor developments with regard to the child they had visited. However, most likely they didn't live long enough to see Jesus active in his ministry some thirty years later. The only unfortunate news they heard was that indeed Herod had tried to dupe them and slew all male children in Bethlehem. However tragic this had been, it came as no surprise. Also they were delighted that Joseph took his family to Egypt and remained there until the death of King Herod.

Once the magi had departed (*anachoreo*, also as in vs. 12), an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph literally "according to a dream," *kata* with *onar +*. We don't know if it was the same *aggelos +* (*S malaka'*) who appeared in 1.20 encouraging Joseph to take Mary as his spouse, the verb *phaino* being used in both instances. It'd come as no surprise that before departing, the magi informed this would happen to Joseph, so he was prepared. In fact, they were tempted to take him along with Mary and Jesus, but the journey would be too long. Besides, they knew an association had to be made between the family and Egypt. In this way their stay there would concur with biblical expectations.

In vs. 13 this angel or essentially messenger told Joseph to rise and to do so in the literal sense in order to take his wife and child with him. The verb is *paralambano*, literally as to take along side or *para-*. They are to flee to Egypt and to do so that very night and remain there until the angel tells Joseph when to return. All this had to be done under the cover of darkness. The family literally had to sneak out of town without rousing anyone's attention, especially any of King Herod's spies. These spies were at the ready to send a military detachment of some sort to kill Jesus, *apollumi*, a word connoting utter destruction and would not allow any obstacle to stand in the way.

Perhaps Joseph decided to leave at the same time as the magi, disguising himself and Mary as part of that group. A little out of town one group would head south and the other east. When in the morning the families of both Joseph and Mary discovered they had suddenly picked up and vanished, they were left utterly clueless as to why. However, that didn't last long because Herod was about to inflict terrible destruction upon the local community in his attempt to kill Jesus. Any survivors or neighbors quickly drew an association between this slaughter and Joseph's family, a grudge they would hold against them for life. As noted above, thankfully Joseph and Mary had the gifts from the magi to facilitate their sudden departure as well as to provide for settling in Egypt. In fact, some of that must have been used as bribes to keep people quiet. Although the time frame is secondary, their time in Egypt seems to be approximately three and a half years. By the time they left, Jesus was four years old and barely could recall his life there. As for the specific location, none is given nor is that of any significance for the narration at hand. The time certainly wasn't long enough to establish lasting ties there.

Word of King Herod's death spread like wildfire which meant some kind of political shift was about to take place. On top of everyone's minds was that Rome would be involved which spelled trouble. However, that didn't mean much for people like Joseph and Mary. On a larger scale, their sojourn in Egypt was meant to fulfill the *rhethen* + or what was spoken by the prophet who goes unidentified, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." The Hebrew text reads in full as "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" [Hos 11.1]. Obvious reference is to Moses who led Israel from the bondage of Egypt across the Red Sea and into the Sinai wilderness. However, the verses which follow have a dark side with vs. 2 summing it up well. The more the Lord called (*qara'*), the more the people withdrew from him. In other words, *qara'* had an inverse effect. While this doesn't apply to Joseph, Mary and Jesus, it suggests they had a role in countering it. Throughout

Israel's history something much larger, albeit hidden in the background. That consists of the tendency to stray from the Lord just as dominant as it had been at the time of the Exodus and for many years thereafter.

Vs. 16 finally brings us to what everyone had feared all along, namely, King Herod taking out his wrath. We saw seeds of this back in vs. 3 with him being troubled or *tarasso* and that extending to the whole of Jerusalem. Much of it had to do with having been duped by the magi instead of the other way around, the verb being *empaizo*, to subject to derision. The verbal root is *paizo* or to play like a child, to sport. With the preposition *em-* or "in" is prefaced to it, we have something especially negative in terms of deriding (S *bazach* or to mock, insult).

Thus *empaizo* leads automatically to the following two responses. First, *thumoo* or to be angry where one's deepest passions are aroused (S *chamath*: to burn with anger). Second, killing all the male children under two years of age in Bethlehem and surrounding areas. One can imagine the guilt Joseph and Mary much have experienced for the rest of their lives, the birth of their son being directly responsible for such an unprecedented slaughter. It'd come as no surprise that their sojourn in Egypt would contribute to this, having fled in the dead of night. However, as noted earlier, this was bound to fuel all sorts of speculation among the locals.

While Joseph, Mary and Jesus were on the way to Egypt or perhaps already in Egypt, they couldn't but recall the pharaoh ordering the Hebrew midwives to kill all the male children (cf. Ex 1.16). As for this age, Herod ascertained it from information he got from the magi who unwittingly gave it to him. Such attention to details reveals the true character of King Herod. Couple this with *thumoo* or intense anger mentioned above and obsessive attention to detail, you have a genuine loose canon. When the magi learned of it, it was bound to be a source of regret and pain for the rest of their lives. The only comfort they derived was having been instrumental in allowing Joseph, Mary and Jesus to escape.

Unknown to Herod, the magi, Joseph, Mary and the respective families a much larger force at work in all this. At the same time you can't help but wonder if they ever made the association between the tragedy that befell them and how it tied in with Jeremiah's prophecy. As for this prophecy and as in most cases, it consists in a certain fulfillment, *pleroo* and *rhethen* (both +), this being the first time where Matthew actually names the person. Although the two verses are fairly similar, they are paralleled as follows; first comes the one from Jeremiah 31.15 followed by the one at hand:

“Thus says the Lord: ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children because they are not.’” This verse is situated within the larger context of the restoration of Israel and is inserted in order to show that the Lord is concerned for his people and that they shouldn’t weep. This he does in an authoritative fashion by prefacing his words with “Thus says the Lord.” Matthew surely was aware of this context which is why he picked out the verse. Note the impersonal way *qol* or voice is presented even though it belongs to Rachel. It makes her weeping or *bakah* all the more poignant which is described as both lamentation and bitter weeping, *noah* which connotes wailing and *bakah* as *marar*, to be bitter. In other words, Rachel refuses to be consoled for the death of her children, *nacham*, whose alternate meaning is to lament. Their death is presented in the starkest possible terms, ‘*eynenu* or “they are not.” Plain and simple, they do not exist. The situation refers to Rachel, mother of Joseph and Benjamin, lamenting their exile.

“A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled because they were no more.” *Klauthmos* and *odurmos* are the nouns echoed in Rachel’s weeping or *klaio*, to weep bitterly. Note the verb *thelo* or to wish, a less stronger word for refusing with the negative *ouk* along with *parakaleo*, literally to call to one’s side, *para-*. Also the Greek *ouk esin* or “not is” is equivalent to the Hebrew ‘*eynenu* above, “they are not.”

Vs. 19 begins with good news. That is, it uses the verb *teleutao* or to die with regard to King Herod...good news in that this verb implies more than just dying but a difficult period of time coming to an end. In this case the end is beneficial for Joseph, Mary and Jesus. However, they probably wanted to wait some time before returning home to make sure that the next ruler didn’t carry through on his Herod’s plans. However, the Lord soon informs Joseph that it’s okay. Still, this idea of a king of the Jews having been born was unsettling for any ruler in Jerusalem. As noted several times earlier, the real issue was how this would go over with Roman authorities which is why most likely the local authorities tended to squelch any report of a king.

As soon as Herod died—*teleutao* or came to an end—we have the exclamation *idou* + or behold which goes both ways, if you will. Backward in the sense of relief at Herod’s death and forward in the sense of good news. At first the Lord was prepared to send one of his angels or *aggelos*, perhaps the same one who had appeared to Joseph on two separate occasions. Then he changed his mind. The Lord too was excited at the death of Herod and decided to step in and appear (*phaino* +) himself. After all, Jesus is no

ordinary person. It'd come as no surprise that the Lord thought of Joseph's predecessor by the same name and noted for his dreams and which got him into big trouble with his family. However, eventually that Joseph rescued Egypt from famine. Right away the Lord told Joseph to rise just as the angel did in vs. 13, that he's to take his family and flee from Herod's impending wrath. Note that the Lord doesn't mention King Herod, referring instead to those who had sought Jesus' death which suggests that he wasn't unaided in his vindictiveness.

Without missing a beat, Joseph informs Mary (Jesus still too young to grasp what's going on), both packing up and leaving Egypt. We have no details as to what they did for some three plus years but most likely lived off income from the gifts of the magi. Indeed Joseph put aside some money for the return trip which started at once. Both the trip to and from Egypt must have gone along the coast, the quickest way. While in Egypt, the three didn't rouse any attention, for the Egyptians were used to foreigners in their midst. In fact, Joseph must have associated with a local synagogue for the duration, they thinking him nor Mary and her child as anything special.

When you first take a look at vs. 22 you'd think that the Lord had misled Joseph. Yes, those who did seek his son's death are no more. However, Herod's son Archelaus took over which made Joseph justifiably hesitant to return to Bethlehem. Besides, what kind of reception would he get after having disappeared into the night some three and half years ago? Even worse, people haven't forgotten the trauma King Herod had brought upon their community by slaying so many of their young male children. As noted earlier, they'd be quick attribute that to the birth of their son and those strange visitors called magi. As for the presence of Archelaus on the throne, it had one benefit for Joseph. It provided an excuse for him to avoid Bethlehem and opt for somewhere else.

So with this in mind, it was time for the Lord to intervene with another dream. By now Joseph had come to expect guidance from this. Mary understood and did her best to support her husband. Around this time the significance of their son was growing stronger which remained a difficult thing around which to wrap their heads. The verb for providing a warning is *chrematizo* as in vs. 12 which revealed Nazareth as a safe area in which to settle. Neither an angel nor the Lord are connected with this dream which turns out to have greater significance than Joseph could imagine, for it's tied in with fulfilling a word, *pleroo* and *rhethen* (both +) he was unaware of at the time.

A footnote in the NIV points out that Nazareth isn't mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures. One possible connection is the judge Samson noted in Judg 13.6-7: "Then the woman came and told her husband, 'A man of God came to me, and his countenance was like the countenance of the angel of God, very terrible; I did not ask him whence he was, and he did not tell me his name; but he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son; so then drink no wine or strong drink and eat nothing unclean for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth to the day of his death.'" In light of this association, we can say that the frightful events of Chapter Two come to a successful though sobering conclusion and prepare the way for Jesus' public ministry.

### Chapter Three

The opening words of this new chapter, "in those days," can be taken as representing the vantage point of Pentecost when people were looking back to when Jesus began his ministry. There's a certain fondness in referring to them much as one would look back at the early years of a beloved family member. Actually "in those days" is an invitation to make a story, freely and knowingly embellishing it out of love. As for the time frame, there are two major periods. The first is backwards from Pentecost as just noted and the second is from the event at hand or Jesus' baptism onward. That consists of some thirty years from where we had left off with Chapters One and Two. How much of the early years of Jesus are remembered by the current generation is up for grabs. The same applies to the visit by the magi. Surely those old enough to recall that mysterious event must have wondered how they made out upon returning home. No one seems to have any information about them which most likely is what the magi would want. We can assume that the star which guided them to Bethlehem never departed but kept them informed in a mysterious, non-verbal fashion regarding subsequent events.

And so with Chapter Three things really get under way concerning what Jesus is destined to accomplish and the fate that befell him. At the same time the thirty year interval cannot be overlooked or willfully forgotten. They act as a silent witness throughout the entire ministry of Jesus right up to his ascension into heaven. Also these years provide a key to unlock the concentrated three years of this ministry from where we derive our information about Jesus, some 99.9% of it. So at this point we can set before us the concluding verse of St. John's Gospel, "But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."

Vs. 1 of Chapter Two opens with a certain flourish, John the Baptist making his appearance as designated by the verb *paragignomai*, literally to be present or to be nearby, *para-*. His appearance is just as sudden as Jesus, the two coming on the scene almost as one man. Their connection goes way back to John leaping in the womb of his mother Elizabeth upon her greeting Mary who likewise was pregnant. The verb *skirtao* is revealing. It applies to the bounding of young sheep out of joy. Was there a connection between the two men growing up? Almost certainly, this continuing pretty much up to the present even though it might seem otherwise. However, there was a change when John went off into the desert which marks a time when the two men went their separate ways. While continuing along in Nazareth Jesus was well aware of John living in the wilderness as what amounts to his own herald. Word either about John or directly from him must have reached Jesus though one gets the impression that each man respected the other's way of life and remained separate. Only in this way would their future meeting be eventful. It should be noted that despite any physical separation, the *skirtao* by John in his mother's womb and Jesus acknowledging it is where their bond truly lies.

As for John, he was engaged in preaching or *kerusso* (S *karaz*: to proclaim, teach, recite) which had a definite public quality about it. Originally it took place in isolation in the wilderness of Judea, *eremos* being the noun for such a deserted or empty place. That means people went out there, not the other way around or John coming to them. So did John start his *kerusso* or did he have a disciple inform people that he was doing it? Let's stick with the former though it's known that John had followers, some of whom later contacted Jesus. John would be out there physically isolated and one day cry out but not loudly what the text at hand records. This cry was of a kind that was low meaning it reverberated far beyond the wilderness, penetrating all the inhabited areas of the area. No place was immune to this reverberation.

The first word John uttered aloud all by himself was *metanoeo*, literally to put one's mind (*noos*) behind or after, *meta-* (S *tuv*: to return). In sum, his was a message of a need to first experience remorse and then make amends. All he had to do was to say this one word out loud. Once set loose, this word acted like a magnet and drew people to him while he didn't have to budge an inch. In close association with this message of *metanoeo* is the kingdom of heaven being at hand. The verb *eggizo* (S *qarev*: to be near, complete) connotes a drawing near or approach which is pretty much continuous. *Basileia* obviously has implications of royalty and hierarchy with regard to this order, and *ouranos* the place where the person embodying such royalty

resides. So in essence John's insight is that such a transcendent form of governance is in the process of coming to each person. Although most people didn't realize it, all this was extraordinary. As for that coming, it requires putting one's mind after (*meta-*) all obstacles standing in the way of its approach. If John were to speak such in Jerusalem, he'd run into trouble at once because that was the seat of kingship or rule, that in turn being subject to Rome.

John's words pertain to a conversion which at once remind Matthew of the prophet Isaiah. Here he's following the time-honored Jewish practice of appealing to scripture pretty much as did the chief priests and scribes when dealing with King Herod. This appeal to Isaiah is just about the highest authority available which puts John the Baptist pretty much on the same level. Also it gives indirect insight...not direct, of course...into the bulk of John's preaching. Like a rabbi, we can assume with some certainty that he spent his time not so much preaching in the way we take it but sitting down and engaging in passionate give-and-take with those who came to him.

Here are the two verses from Isaiah (40.3):

“A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’” This is the second mention of *qol* + or voice, the first being in vs. 2 of which Matthew was aware. Note that it's presented in an impersonal way though obviously attributed to the Lord. In both instances he wishes to stand back a bit instead of coming off with it directly. Such indirectness is a more subtle and hopefully lasting way the Lord will get attention. It just might make people pause a moment while rousing their curiosity. And so the Lord decides to try it out not once but twice in rapid succession. Here *qol* is in the constant act of calling or *qara'* + and does so in the wilderness or *midbar*. Although *midbar* superficially seems to be derived from *davar* or to speak in the sense of giving utterance, it is not. However, you can't but help make an association. Thus *qol* is like a beacon but only made of sound which goes out continuously to reach people wherever they happen to live.

The function of this voice calling is twofold, the first to prepare or *panah* which means to turn. Here it's with regard to *derek* which applies to a going or journey with regard to the Lord. Secondly, it's to make straight or *yashar* which also is a making level with regard to a *mesilah*, more as an embanked or raised highway suggestive of traversing swampy areas. It's location is not in *midbar* but in *haravah* which is suggestive of sterility.

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” The very sound of the verb *boao* for crying is more suggestive than *qara’*, a kind of prolonged utterance coming from deep within the person doing it. The three words of note are *eremos* + or the general noun for wilderness which isn’t as evocative as *midbar* or *haravah*, *etoimazo* or to prepare as well as to make ready and *euthus* or straight as in a line.

Vs. 4 presents a well-known image of John with a garment or *enduma* in the general sense made of camel hair, a leather belt and food as locusts and wild honey followed by *tote* + or “then.” This introduces vs. 5, almost as though the image of John formed by his *qara’* was the agent that beckoned people to him. More precisely, *qara’* is put in terms of “Jerusalem and all Judea” not to leave out the region around the Jordan. Taken literally, that would be a significant amount of people. Most likely they streamed out to the wilderness over an extended period of time which is what the verb *ekporeuo* suggests (*ek-* from). John couldn’t handle this alone, so over time he recruited disciples who like Jesus shortly afterwards helped him out. However, they never achieved status like the latter but most likely drifted toward them upon John’s death. Despite the unforgiving desert landscape, there was sufficient water because John had taken up his position by the Jordan River. That means people could have stayed longer than usual while taking in John’s message before returning home.

Vs. 6 continues from the previous verse, the two being linked with the conjunctive *kai*. Not only did people listen to John preaching, he baptized them, *baptizo* (S *hamad*: to dive, penetrate) which originally means to dip and is not mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures. Simultaneous with this *baptizo* is the confession of one’s sins, *exomologeio* being an admission of wrongdoing. The preposition *ex-* (from) makes the root *homologeio* (to speak together) all the more forceful (S *yedah*: to know, perceive). As for any follow-up to all this, it isn’t mentioned once the people have returned to their regular lives. To be sure, the Romans authorities took notice. Though there’s no record of them doing anything about John as well as the constant stream of people visiting him, this silence suggests that they wrote it off as another Jewish sect doing its thing. To interfere might aggravate the situation unnecessarily.

Among the constant stream of people coming and going two groups in particular got John’s attention, namely, the Pharisees and Sadducees. They just stood there, watching and not making any move to get closer. It was easy to see who these men were by their distinctive religious garb. Most people gave them the cold shoulder, knowing they came not to listen nor to be baptized but to keep an eye out on them.

Chances are these Pharisees and Sadducees took note (literally) of some people they knew or knew about and reported them to the chief priest back in Jerusalem.

The text says that the Pharisees and Sadducees came for baptism (*epi* or upon with the noun *baptisma*). Not true, really, but most likely put on an appearance in order to get closer to John. Some may have gone through with being baptized which means they had to invent sins and then confess them, a dead give-away of their insincerity. However, John stopped them right in their tracks. No small wonder he exclaimed that they are a brood of vipers, *echidna* usually of the poisonous variety. Indeed, those nearby heard this and couldn't agree more heartily.

In the same breath John snapped out that someone had warned them of the wrath to come. The verb *hupodeiknumi* means literally to show by tracing out, the root *deiknumi* or to show prefaced with *hupo-* or under. The object here is *orge* (S *rogaz*) or wrath, most likely coming from God. The Pharisees and Sadducees were stopped at once with this question, rhetorical by nature but penetrating right to the bone. It made them back off at once to a safe distance, fearful that some in the crowd may make a rush at them. On a positive note, there's a chance a few showed their sincerity in wanting to be baptized but did so at a later time when things quieted down.

On the other hand, in vs. 8 John extends hope to both Pharisees and Sadducees, communicating to them the same message of repentance presented to everyone, the noun here being *metanoia*. However, he tacks on a condition, knowing that these men are less open than other who are coming to him. They are literally to make (*poieo*, the common verb to do) fruit which is worthy or *axios* of the *metanoia* at hand. Then in the next verse which is an extended sentence John cautions them not to lean up their religious heritage. That consists of appealing to Abraham as their father. In fact, all those who came out to John can make the same claim. Actually the Pharisees and Sadducees were mortified to be rebuked, the first time someone had the courage to do this. If they were honest enough, they would recognize that John was spot on.

To add insult to injury, John says in an almost casual manner that God is able to make children of Abraham from stones. In other words, no big deal. He then compares these representatives of official Judaism to a tree which fails to yield good fruit and therefore is to be cut down and cast into the fire. The fruit such a tree bears is not good or better, *kalos* which with the negative connotes a lack of beauty in the sense of being elegant.

In vs. 11 John continues to speak with the Pharisees and Sadducees more than any other people who come to him since he wishes them to return to Jerusalem with something to remember him by, and in this he succeeds. Not only does he put his own mission in jeopardy, he speaks of someone who will supersede him. Note that John says he is baptizing you with water, that is, he's doing it to those present, but it's doubtful they acquiesced. Also note the phraseology with the two prepositions *en* and *eis*: "in water into *metanoia* +."

As for the unidentified person to come after him, John doesn't let on who it is although he's fully aware that it is Jesus. Use of the adjective *hikanos* or worthy connotes sufficiency or being adequate when it comes to his baptizing with water as well as the Mystery Man who will be baptizing with the Holy Spirit. The very comparison in and by itself is indicative of this lack of being *hikanos* and intimates a certain provisional nature of the mission in which John is engaged. So while John is very much intent upon baptizing people for repentance, he's doing this with an awareness that it's incomplete and needs to be filled up in some way or another. How that will come about isn't his business nor that of any else, and he has no problem with this.

One thing is certain, however. The two baptisms of which John is speaking require a thorough dipping or immersion, the original meaning of the verb. By its very nature, water rolls off a person. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit or *Pneuma* + first mentioned in 1.18 baptizes with two aspects of its own character. That consists of wind (for *Pneuma* is as such) and more ominously, fire. Also this fire can be taken as blowing through a person. Did the Pharisees and Sadducees know what John was talking about? Holy Spirit has a definite New Testament ring which Matthew has inserted. Indeed the Spirit or *Ruach* plays an important role Jewish religion, but here it's being used with different twist.

The image of wind is also tied in with that of a winnowing fork. It's used to toss grain into the air...into the *Pneuma*...so as to separate the grain from anything superfluous. Once this has been done—and we can assume that fire was part of the winnowing process—the wheat will be gathered into barns and the chaff burned. Note that the fire is not capable of being extinguished or quenched, *asbestos* (S *daka'*: also to make pure). And so John leaves off his discussions abruptly with the Pharisees and Sadducees, turning attention to those on the banks of the Jordan awaiting baptism. We can assume they departed at once, not speaking much with each other, for they were too confused. The problem they faced now was how to report what they encountered to their higher-ups in Jerusalem. We can be assured

that from now on they kept an even sharper eye on John's activity, awaiting the Mystery Man of whom he had spoken.

Vs. 13 begins with *tote* + or "then" which plays an important role, actually a decisive one. Jesus now comes on the scene in order to be baptized by John. Jesus was aware of the contentious encounter between John and the Pharisees and Sadducees, so he must have waited a while until things settled down. His *paragignomai* + or literally coming beside (*para-*) is suggestive of John's baptism with water and Jesus' baptizing with the Holy Spirit though the latter won't happen for a while. Still, it's prefigured through his own baptism. Thus with the meeting of these two we have a definitive transition from water to *Pneuma* and to fire.

Nothing is said as to what prompted Jesus to leave home. We can presume that he took considerable care to prepare his family, not simply walking away. Perhaps he may have joined several others, turning the journey to the Jordan River into a kind of pilgrimage. Now he was going to meet his cousin, the same man who leapt in his mother's womb. Indeed, John must have done the same *skirtao* upon Jesus' arrival. This provided ample warning that Jesus was in the vicinity, yet he remained indistinguishable among so many awaiting to be baptized. Thus this *skirtao* linked Jesus with John while Jesus was still in Galilee and was the agent, if you will, that prompted Jesus to come.

Vs. 14 has John the Baptist toying with the idea of not baptizing Jesus, *diakoluo* being the verb translated as to prevent. The preposition *dia-* or through prefaced to *koluo* suggests greater hesitancy on John's part, a preventing-through, if you will. Although he has the best of all intentions in mind, he's standing in the way and expresses this to Jesus as a need to be baptized by him. We can assume that he has in mind not water but the above mentioned *Pneuma* and fire.

Despite this protestation John relents. It's clear that Jesus doesn't want to engage in an argument or talk down to John. Instead he says simply "Let it be so," the verb *aphiemi* conveying the sense of letting go, of releasing. Not only that, he includes John as a participant; both are to fulfill all righteousness. The verb *prepos* conveys the suitability of the situation and ties in nicely with the notion of *dikaiousune* or righteousness, more accurately "all righteousness" or righteousness in its totality. Using the verb *pleroo* + in conjunction with it suggests that something had been lacking or more accurately, not quite present until the time at hand. Now there's a convergence between John, Jesus about to be baptized and the mission for which he

was baptized. And so vs. 15 concludes with the short sentence, “Then he consented,” *aphiemi* +. The alternate translation? End of story. Time to get on with it.

Vs. 16 simply says that Jesus was baptized, pure and simple. We can assume that he didn't wish to draw attention to himself as someone special. Therefore he took his place in the line waiting to move up. At least the Pharisees and Sadducees weren't around but even if they were, presuming the self-effacing way Jesus comported himself, they wouldn't notice him as standing out. They had a general idea that someone special, a supposed messiah type might show up, and if he did, would make a show of himself. They got this information from John himself who kept on harping in a very public fashion about someone extraordinary who is about to come. As for the Pharisees and Sadducees, no splashy debut = no messiah.

At once Jesus emerged from the Jordan River followed by *idou* + or behold which introduces in somewhat dramatic form the Spirit or *Pneuma* + of God coming down upon him. Note two factors involved here. The first is *euthus* or immediately with regard to leaving the Jordan and the second is that Jesus is the only person Matthew mentions as seeing this *Pneuma*. For this to happen, the heavens or *ouranos* + had to split open, the plural more indicative of the physical sky, not the dwelling place of God. Only then could the *Pneuma* of God descend as a dove and rest upon Jesus, the common verb *erchomai* + with the preposition *epi*.

Vs. 17 is part of an extended sentence beginning with the last verse and has a second *idou* +. In a way, both serve as conjunctives, actually more than conjunctives insofar as they show immediacy and connected-ness between events. As for the one at hand, it consists of a voice from heaven where *houtos* or “this” is like another *idou*. It shows that Jesus is the son of this voice and is *agapetos* or beloved, an adjective with the same meaning as *agape*, that hard-to-define divine word for love. The voice is not impersonal but tied in with the first person singular who is well pleased, *eudokeo* which recognizes that which is good, *eu-* being adverbial form of *agathos* prefaced to *dokeo*, to think or to suppose. So if a son is mentioned, clearly the voice must come from a father.

## Chapter Four

This chapter begins with another occurrence of *tote* or “then” which bears resemblance to a conjunctive because it shows the close connection between Jesus' baptism and his experience in the wilderness or *eremos* +. Was there an interval

between the two events? Temporally speaking, yes in light of *tote*. However, that's incidental because the relationship between Jesus and John is inseparable going all the way back to John's *skirtao* or leaping like a young lamb in his mother's womb. Thus Jesus "brings" John with him into the wilderness. As we know, John the Baptist spent a good number of years in the desert before he began preaching, that having become his natural habitat. It must have been difficult for his parents to accept but given what Luke's Gospel says of them, it was the natural thing to do.

As for Jesus, he simply walked out of the water, dried off and immediately headed for the wilderness. It'd be more accurate to say that he was led there which means something or someone else was doing this *anago*. Everyone who had just been baptized were in what we'd call today an assembly line. As soon as one person was baptized, he or she simply would walk out of the Jordan River followed by the next. Jesus did the same, of course, but there was something different which made him stand out by reason of this *anago*. People could see that he wasn't doing it on his own. Neither was he acting robot-like. He was being guided, not governed, but some mysterious presence which was upon him. Such was the visible effect of the Holy Spirit upon (*epi*) Jesus as noted in vs. 16.

As Jesus gradually disappeared from view, John paused for one final glance while performing his baptism rites, knowing that the two never would see each other again. In fact, there was no need for any dialogue between the two men. Their respective roles had been defined once and for all at the Jordan River. The same applied when they met for the first time and when Jesus simply fell in line to be baptized. It should be noted that going into the desert wasn't far away, for the very location in which he was sufficed to be called a wilderness.

Some among the crowd were struck at the way John greeted Jesus, like two long-lost friends which made them wonder what it was all about. However, Jesus slipped away before anyone could discover their relationship. John had cultivated a formidable appearance, so no one dare approach him. There was simply no need for any conversation between John and Jesus not because both knew each other but that their respective missions transcended the need for words. It's one of those things you either grasp or don't at all. Actually explaining it away is a waste of time and would be detrimental to their relationship.

The reason for Jesus having entered the desert was to be tempted by the devil, *peirazo* (S *nasa'*: to make trial of) as to discover the true nature of a person which in the end is what temptation is all about. *Peirazo* didn't happen in a vacuum. The agent

involved is the *diabolos* or devil which derives from the verb *diaballo*, literally to cast through (*dia-*) and thus connotes being at variance as well as to slander. The Syriac equivalent is '*akelqarza*' which means accuser, adversary, slanderer. So when the *diabalos* saw Jesus headed for the wilderness, he was delighted. This, in fact, was his native territory where he'd have the upper hand or so he thought. But before that the devil kept a keen eye on Jesus, how he related with John while being baptized. In this was he was no different from the religious authorities who came from Jerusalem. He was looking for clues as how to get at Jesus. However, he was in for a rude surprise. He realized that he had a strong chance of being defeated when seeing the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus. That means he'd have to deal not with one but with two persons, something he didn't expect.

Vs. 2 mentions Jesus fasting for forty days and forty nights, the number forty being applied equally to both. It's a way of spreading out not so much the time at hand but of drawing attention to its significance instead of just mentioning forty days. Right away the number forty evokes Moses being on "the mountain of God" [Ex 24.13]. It should be noted that before Moses went up, he entered the cloud or *hanan*; more accurately, he went into its very midst, *betok*. From that central position he began his ascent of the mountain, rather, the cloud raised him up effortlessly as an elevator and deposited him on the very top. From this unique vantage point the forty days and forty night formed a kind of enclosure not so much a period of time. And this enclosure, despite being on a mountain top, was the most spacious place on earth.

We can assume the same thing pretty much happened to Jesus, the Holy Spirit acting as that *hanan* to bring him from the Jordan River into the wilderness though there's no specific mention of a mountain. In his case the time at hand applies to his fasting (*nesteuo*) with the somewhat droll observation, "and afterward he was hungry." Apart from the temptations the details of what transpired during that time aren't given nor can they be given. Two things we know for certain. John the Baptist knew what Jesus was in for, and that the end of the time spent there signified the beginning of his ministry just like he had done. Also the devil was watching Jesus all the time, furtively of course, because he knew the Holy Spirit was present as well keeping an eye on him.

When Jesus was hungry the devil figured it might be a good time to make his move. However, he made a fatal mistake. Yes, Jesus was hungry but the Holy Spirit, being a spirit, was not. As for the devil, vs. 3 introduces what seems to be not another spiritual being but the same devil with a different name, *peirazo* +. Here it's a participle which can be rendered as "the one tempting." This captures the devil's true

nature because at all times he's engaged in tempting and never stops doing so. Such constancy is enhanced by the verb *proserchomai* or to come to with the preposition *pros-* prefaced to the common verbal root signifying continuous direction towards-which. The Tempting (using the participle as his name) took this approach knowing that its directness and suddenness may succeed in catching Jesus off guard. More importantly, he hoped this onslaught would bypass the Holy Spirit which had come to rest upon Jesus. If he could pull it off, indeed it would be a major accomplishment.

The Tempting did manage to approach Jesus but while posing his request, he was completely unaware of being watched by the Holy Spirit. This shows how uninformed he was. And so begins the first of three temptations or in sense, five temptations. Why five? Because the Tempting essentially includes two occasions when he calls Jesus Son of God. However, he doesn't use this title in the third one. The devil starts with the obvious. Jesus is to turn the stones into loaves of bread. Given the physical nature of the place, stones were strewn everywhere and being essentially limestone, they bore a certain resemblance to baked bread.

Without missing a beat, in vs. 4 Jesus gives the first of three responses from scripture, the manner in which they're presented being not unlike a Greek chorus. He does so in a matter-of-fact way, neither bothered nor even tempted if we could put it as such but simply wanting to get the Tempting off the scene as quickly as possible. Once that's accomplished, he's freed up to commence his public ministry. At the same time Jesus recognized the importance of this contact with the Tempting, for future generations would find inspiration in how to handle the devil. Again, the Holy Spirit is essential as being the second person who makes all the difference.

To the first proposition posed by the Tempting Jesus responds in typical Jewish fashion, "it is written." That gives the words he's about to say a certain authority but in a mocking fashion which is twofold. First the scripture in and by itself and second, the person saying it. This is the first such incident where Jesus-as-God quotes scripture which means special attention is to be given to these incidents. Obviously Matthew was keenly aware of this as well as the other Gospel writers.

The first scriptural quote is from Dt 8.3, the two versions being as follows:

"And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone but that man lives by everything the proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord."

This fuller version about manna confirms what many readers suspected as soon as they began to read Matthew's account, that Jesus willfully identifies himself with Israel's experience in the Sinai wilderness. Here being hungry has a direct correspondence with being humbled (*hanah* +) which refers to the Lord sending manna and quails when the people grumbled for lack of food and water (cf. Ex 16 +). What's noteworthy is that it occurs shortly after the dramatic crossing of the Red Sea, the defining moment in Israel's history. The important word in the verse at hand is *lemahan*,<sup>6</sup> "that." The reason? *Lemahan* makes a transition from the distress described in the Exodus incident to knowing or *yadah* + where it leads. That consists in man having his primary source of life not so much in God but more specifically in everything that comes from his mouth.

Interestingly there's no mention of *davar* + or word-as-expression coming from the Lord's mouth but "everything" or *kal*, also as all. That "all" implies stuff other than what's verbal. And so the divine mouth both speaks and breathes out what is necessary for human life. Shortly after this incident, the Israelites moved on and found no water to drink. Again, they complained, but the Lord struck a rock for water. The theme in both instances? That the people prefer complaining instead of trusting in God. Such is the default condition of where we are as human beings. It's precisely this is what Jesus had in mind during his wilderness experience.

"Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

Note two instances of the preposition *epi* or upon, with regard to bread as well as *rhema* or word. The distinction between *logos* (*S melal*: also as sentence, precept) and *rhema* is that the former is God's Word objectively recorded in the Bible, whereas the latter is the word of God spoken to us at a specific occasion. As for this *rhema*, it goes forth or *ekporeuo* + through (*dia*) the mouth of God.

The second temptation is when the devil (*diabolos* +) takes Jesus into the holy city or Jerusalem, *paralambano* + (*S davar*<sup>7</sup>: or to lead). Here the *para-* of the verb as beside doesn't necessarily mean the two left the wilderness together for the city. Describing this incident is more a being in Jerusalem by way insight, for both share a distinctly spiritual nature transcending space and time and therefore not requiring place-to-place movement.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Lemahan* is quoted a second time in this verse (RSV) but is not in the Hebrew text.

<sup>7</sup> Not to be confused with the Hebrew *davar*.

Once in the holy city, if you will, the devil literally stands (*histemi* +) Jesus upon the extreme edge of the temple. Such is the meaning of *pterugion*, a position by guaranteed to make anyone dizzy. However, given what's intimated by *paralambano* above, this poses no problem. In this the second temptation the devil calls Jesus the Son of God and taunts him to cast himself off the *pterugion*, assuming he'd just float out there or fly around...quite ridiculous by any standard. At this point it's the devil's turn to quote scripture, that is, Ps 91.11-12:

“For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.”

God will order angels or messengers (*mal'ak*) to attend to the psalmist, that is, *tsava'* as well as order them to act as guards, the verb *shamar* meaning to be watchful as someone on a city wall. They—and the number of messengers in their new role as guards isn't given—are to carry out their mission with regard to all the ways or *derek* + of the psalmist. As for their hands—keeping in mind hands-as-wings as in Is 6.2—they will lift up the psalmist to prevent him from dashing his foot against the stone. Given the situation at hand, these messenger in their role as guards will prevent Jesus from hitting his foot against the *pterugion* or edge of the temple. The lifting up or *nasa'* doesn't necessarily mean that Jesus will fly off the *pterugion* but simply won't fall. As for the angels, they were both deeply insulted at the way the devil had distorted scripture yet saw a vindication of what Jesus effects from it.

“He will give his angels charge of you” and “On their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone.” Here the two verses of Psalm Ninety-One are treated as separate.

*Entello* (S *paqad*: also to entreat, to visit) or to command consists of the verbal root *tello* or to come forth, to accomplish, prefaced with the preposition *en-* or *in*. It pertains to the psalmist, that is, *peri* or around him. Like the Hebrew verse, these angels (*aggelos* +) will lift up the psalmist to prevent him from striking his foot against a stone, *pros* indicative of direction towards-which.

In response, Jesus engages in a scriptural dual, quoting...hurling...another verse back to the devil. Again he uses the authoritative words “it is written” with a direct challenge from Dt 6.16 which runs in full as “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test as you tested him at Massah.” The historical reference is Ex 17.7: “And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah because of the fault-finding (*ryv*,

strife or contention) of the sons of Israel and because they put the Lord to the test (*nasa'*<sup>8</sup>: verb) by saying, 'Is the Lord among or not?'" As for *ryv* and *nasa'*, they fit in well with the devil's intent to subject Jesus to himself. However, Jesus throws them back at the devil as implied in the Deuteronomy verse in which the Exodus reference is included.

Vs. 8 is part of an extended sentence running through vs. 9. It introduces the third and final temptation of Jesus, this time the devil taking him to a very high mountain, *paralambano* +, the same *para-* at work, if you will, as with regard to the pinnacle of the temple meaning the two went there side by side. Again, taking isn't to be understood in the physical sense despite the element of accompaniment. Note that in the devil's two attempts to thwart Jesus height is involved: first the temple's pinnacle and now literally into (*eis*) a mountain described by the adverb *lian*, excessively (high). From this vantage point the devil showed Jesus each kingdom in the entire world as well as the glory (*S shuvcha'*: also praise, honor) proper to them. The verb is *deiknumi* or to show with the intent of being apprehended, and that's exactly what happened. The Syriac is *chava'* or to make manifest or clear. Indeed, the mountain was high enough—and hence the need for it to be *lian*—that Jesus could look down on all kingdoms no matter where they were located on the earth.

In vs. 9 the devil promises to give all the kingdoms to Jesus provided he fall down and worship him. The *pros-* of *proskuneo* (*S sagad*: to render obeisance, to adore) is suggestive of directness which is precisely what he wanted from the very beginning...not simply worship but adoration. Jesus responds by telling him to get lost, *hupago*, the preposition *hupo-* or from under, this suggestive of pulling out from beneath. It's a strong verb but tinged with a certain humor Jesus presented somewhat on the sly to the devil. The reason? Already his Father holds in his hands all the kingdoms of the earth and that in the near future he would suffer death for their redemption.

This last temptation gives rise to a final quote Jesus takes from scripture again using the authoritative words "it is written" quoting from Dt 6.13:

"You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him and swear by his name."

---

<sup>8</sup> Not to be confused with *nasa'* above or to lift up, the letter "s" being *shin* with the dot over the left side.

The previous verse is worth keeping in mind, for it sets the tone of what we have here. That is to say, Moses bids the people not to forget the Lord who brought them from Egypt commonly called a house of bondage or literally “servants,” a fancier name for being a slave. Such warnings against forgetfulness are numerous in the Hebrew scriptures and pretty much on the same plane as the three commands in the verse at hand: *yare’*, *havad* and *shavah* or fear, serve and swear. *Havad* is the verbal root for *havadyim* or servants as in house of bondage just noted.

After having been rebuked three times and having heard the threefold command of the last verse, the devil said to himself “enough.” While vs. 11 has *aphiemi* + or to leave, it’s more like a slithering away. This shameful retreat is why Matthew has *idou* + or “behold.” It serves to introduce angels or messenger first to come or *proserchomai* +, the *pros-* being indicative of direction towards-which-and and then minister to Jesus. Once this *pros-* has happened (and it does so immediately), the angels commence their *diakoneo*. We don’t know how many angels were present but since Jesus is the person involved, it’s easy to assume that a real tussle in heaven ensued so as to be counted among their number. Who could blame them for fighting over the privilege, and who wouldn’t long to be witness to this? Most likely *diakoneo* (note the *dia-* or through connoting thoroughness) consisted in bringing food and drink. So when the angels vied mightily, they racked their brains to prepare the best possible meal one can imagine. One thing is for certain. They didn’t just drop off a food basket.

In vs. 12 Jesus hears that John the Baptist had been arrested, *paradidomai* (S *shalam* or to deliver, to give up, to come to an end) which contains a *para-* representing a giving over or giving beside which unfortunately has happened. The time frame is rather fuzzy. Jesus had just spent forty days and forty nights in the desert dealing with the devil also known as the Tempting after which angels came to minister to him. Apparently during this interval the arrest took place, Jesus having heard of it later most likely through John’s disciples. Given the tone he had adopted from the beginning of his ministry, John anticipated his arrest and informed his disciples to pass word on to Jesus should he be taken into custody. That’s it. No details about who or why, but certainly the Pharisees and Sadducees are suspect in bringing this about because they’re the ones from Jerusalem who came to spy on John at the Jordan. While the text doesn’t explain why John was arrested, we know it’s because he had denounced King Herod for his marriage which was outside Jewish law. Also nothing is said about the throngs who had come to him for baptism. It seems they simply melted away which is exactly what the Jewish authorities had wanted.

As for the Pharisees and Sadducees who have played a role in John's arrest, calling them a brood of vipers must have been a part of it. Their attention had been directed against John, of course, not Jesus who at this point wasn't on their radar screen. However, soon he'll take center stage. The only response from Jesus is that he withdrew to Galilee, the verb being *anachoreo* (S *shana'*: to change, remove, transfer), the preposition *ana-* suggestive of back-ness prefaced to *choreo*, to separate. As for Galilee, that's the place he came from. Note too that Joseph went there, having been warned in a dream (cf. 2.22).

Vs. 13 continues as an extended sentence with Jesus leaving Nazareth and taking residence in Capernaum, the verb *katoikeo* (S *hamar*: also to settle), meaning to live in a certain place for an extended period of time. The preposition *kata-* as down suggests settling in. There doesn't seem to be a reason for the move as from a threat. However, Jesus feels a pull to remain in this area of Zebulun and Naphtali so he can identify with the verses about that place of which Isaiah had written. And so this is the first scriptural passage where Jesus perceives a direct connection between himself and the scriptural heritage of his nation. The only way to see if these verses resonate is to actually go ahead and make the move and see if something happens. It may not which is secondary. What counts is a growing awareness or connection with that tradition and oneself.

To start off with the prophet Isaiah is no small thing given how highly regarded he is in Israel's heritage. In light of this the verb *katoikeo* fits in just right because Jesus had to be in this place a while so as to absorb the significance of Zebulun and Naphtali as it pertains to himself. Associations as this one, of course, will occur throughout Jesus' ministry, so it's important to become aware of this and future examples. If Jesus establishes this right now at the threshold of his ministry, he'll become more comfortable with further scriptural associations when they present themselves. An essential ingredient is the verb *pleroo* (S *malal*: also to complete, satisfy) along with *rheten*, both having been mentioned earlier. This *pleroo* isn't done in isolation, as something Jesus' contemporaries or Christians later saw but as having been inserted almost in a physical manner with regard to Jesus himself. While this is unique to Jesus, certainly it bears imitation through participation.

As for the scriptural passage at hand (Is 9.1-2<sup>9</sup>), it runs as follows:

“But there will be no gloom for her that was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter

---

9 This verse is 9.1-2 in the Hebrew text.

time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.”

*Muhaph* is the noun for gloom, the only use of the term in the Bible whose verbal root suggests darkness. It signals the presence of anguish or *mutsaq* (note similarity in sound) which has two other biblical references, Job 36.16 and 37.10. The Lord singles out Zebulun and Naphtali, both of which had suffered the most during the Assyrian invasion and had been brought into contempt or *qalal*. This verb suggests having been cursed, that is, by the Lord through the agent of the Assyrians.

Note the contrast between two times or *heth* which is not unlike the Greek *kairos*, a proper time or opportunity where the notion of temporal duration is secondary or that which is former and that which is latter. As for the verb *kaved* as “will make glorious” with respect to the *derek* + or way of the sea, it applies to travel and the transport of merchandise across the Mediterranean Sea. This making *kaved* will start there and extend inland, hence the mention of Galilee beyond the Jordan, that region designated as “of the nations,” *goy* often applying to non-Israelites.

Compare darkness or *choshek* with *muhaph* of the previous verse which is more in reference to the light of the sun. To have walked in such darkness is not to know where one is going. As for the light (*‘or*), nothing is said regarding its source but seems to appear not at once illuminating the darkness but more as a guiding beacon even though it’s called great. A second category, if you will, follows those who walked in darkness, persons who dwelt in a land of deep darkness or *tsalmaveth* which is a compound of *tsel* (shadow) and *maveth* (death). They may be called residents of Sheol or the underworld. For persons in this *tsalmaveth* the same light or *‘or* has shined upon them, the verb being *nagah*. Here the light is above shining below compared with the people who have seen a great light, that is, from a distance.

"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali toward the sea across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

Note the two uses of the verb *kathemi* or to sit down, *kata-* being the preposition for down. Similarly, *phos* or light occurs twice. To the first belongs a more comprehensive or general *skotia* or darkness. While in that *skotia*, the people have seen a great light or *phos*. With regard to the second, it’s comprised of death and has two parts: *chora* or region which is a larger expanse and shadow, *skia* applying to the presence of someone or something with a limited range. In other words, death isn’t

as comprehensive as first imagined. Here *phos* is active compared with the active seeing of the first group. That is to say, *phos* has dawned, *anatello*, this verb having the same root *tello* as found earlier but prefaced with the preposition *ana-*, above or upon.

Go back a bit, if you will, to the *katoikeo* or dwelling in vs. 13 associated with Jesus taking up residence in Capernaum. It connotes a certain domesticity compared with the almost prison-like nature of *kathemi*, that is, sitting down in darkness. Both verbs have the same preposition *kata-* prefaced to them but inferring two very different though parallel states. In addition to this, the *katoikeo* of Jesus becomes a means by which he perceives his relationship with those who are *kathemi*. It should be noted that the two verbs—sitting down and being in one place—belong to two very different realities which concur in a mysterious fashion.

Vs. 17 brings to a certain conclusion this part of Chapter Four, that is, everything is now in order for Jesus to begin his ministry which is why Matthew has *apo tote +*, literally “from then.” It enables Jesus to proceed backed up with authority resting upon the prophet Isaiah. There’s a close association between *kerusso* and *lego* (both +). *Kerusso* or to preach is that which is within Jesus and associated with the presence of the Holy Spirit which has come down upon him at his baptism. *Lego* or to say is that which flows from his mouth. The *kerusso/lego* is identical word-for-word to that of John the Baptist in 3.2, the key words being *metanoeo*, *eggizo* and *basileia* associated with heaven. When we hear such a sentence either from John or from Jesus sometimes we think that’s it, nothing more. In the case at hand it’s better to consider Jesus’ words more as a summary where each of the three verbs (plus heaven) are dissected to a greater measure in accord with the capacity of those hearing them.

After John had been arrested, news of it spread like wildfire. Now they hear the same words from this relatively unknown man who seems to enjoy a special relationship with John. No small wonder that many thought John had escaped or was set free. Indeed, a confusing time, even a mistake of sorts on Jesus’ part that he had to correct. Perhaps that’s why right away we move into his calling of the first disciples which represent a necessary pause in the action to make sure Jesus has trusted followers who’d back support his claim to be different from his cousin John.

The remaining verses of Chapter Four, that is, vss. 18-25, signal a major shift in the Gospel. What we’ve witnessed before this point is a lead-up to Jesus’ ministry, a necessary set of details that makes him uniquely qualified. Now we see all this put in motion by a somewhat casual image of Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee, the verb

being *peripateo* with the preposition *para*. That is to say, Jesus is literally walking around-beside or *peri-* plus *para*. He has a hunch that something is destined to come of this particular walking but doesn't know exactly what it is nor does he care to know. He's confident that it will reveal itself to him at the appropriate time after which he'll take it from there. Perhaps Jesus had done this *peripateo para* a number of times earlier, this being the first one recorded. On these walks there was plenty of scenery to take in as well as observing many of the locals engaged in fishing and in related activities. Early on he caught sight of the two sets of brothers and decides then and there that he'll summon them at the appropriate time.

So on one walk or *peripateo para* Jesus happened to see Simon and Andrew, the former designated as Peter, a name that even now before Jesus meets him signifies the important role he will have later on. Actually Jesus meets the two at work casting nets into the sea. Apparently they are doing this from the shore, not on a boat, perhaps because it was early in the morning when the fish were within easy reach. Jesus, who doesn't know a thing about fishing, isn't struck by this fact. However, there was a certain earnestness with which the two brothers worked, most likely being assisted by some hired help.

Simon and Andrew must have seen this man many times walking (*peripateo para*) the lake. There was something different about him, the way he watched them work which made them feel self-conscious. They didn't engage in any conversation except a good morning or the like. Then one morning (again, assuming it's that time) Jesus comes by and says with the same casualness he had shown while out for a walk that they come after him. What's astonishing is that he claimed to make them fishers of men. It was so outlandish yet so attractive that they simply abandoned their work and hired help. At first walking away from a lucrative source of income sounds incredibly noble and given the context of the Gospel, worthy of imitation for living the Christian life. However, fishing was boring and tedious work as well as unpredictable. So the two brothers saw in Jesus an opportunity to break away from this and figured that if being with him didn't pan out, they could return to their former livelihood.

This readiness to follow Jesus is recounted in vs. 20. It begins with the important adverb *eutheos* which seems to be a variation of *euthus* noted earlier on several occasions. Also it's with the verb *akoloutheo* which has a fuller sense than to just go after. It implies going in the same direction, having the same goals and following a person who has taken the lead. Thus *eutheos* and *akoloutheo*, while noble in and by

themselves, are conditioned by that just mentioned desire to make sure the brothers' fishing business wasn't put in jeopardy.

Jesus has taken his first big step by picking Simon and Andrew to follow him. The three continued walking (a joint *peripateo para*, if you will) along the lake. Surely the brothers were filled with all sorts of questions as to Jesus' identity, why he called them and what they'd do next. Indeed, it sounded very exciting. As they moved along, Simon and Andrew would cast a furtive glance back at their hired help whom they left pretty much in a state of shock. Nevertheless, as the two moved on, they hoped their bosses would return shortly. Given the close, intimate relationships of that time and culture, these men were more than hired help; they were part of an extended family.

The problem with Jesus is that he wasn't from the Capernaum region but had come from Nazareth some thirty miles away. That made him an outsider of sorts and by no means familiar with the fishing industry on the lake. That aside, his experience with John the Baptist must have formed part of the common discussion as the three walked along. Shortly they came across two other brothers, James and John. Instead of fishing from the shoreline, the two were in a boat along with their father who was on land mending nets. Unlike Simon and Andrew, Jesus didn't summon these brothers nor did they bother engaging in a conversation however small. The text simply says that they left the boat immediately, *eutheos* and *akoloutheo* (both +).

Why so? They could see Jesus, Simon and Andrew having an intense, animated discussion which was evident even at a distance. Obviously this sparked their interest even though they hadn't a clue as to what it was about. While both brothers flanked Jesus, they were struck by the unusual expression on their faces. It was a combination of joy, peace and above all, simply glad and to be at ease in the company of this perfect stranger. As they found out shortly, both not only followed Jesus but left their father. It'd come as no surprise that like Simon and Andrew, they saw in Jesus an opportunity to escape their dreary existence. Besides, they had their father who would mind the business just in case. So at this point the group totals five men. We can assume that both pairs of brothers knew each other, perhaps even were rival fishermen, which implies that Jesus wasn't in the habit of collecting random strangers.

As for the other disciples, they aren't mentioned by name until Chapter Ten nor do we hear anything about Jesus calling them either now or later. We only know that somewhere along the line they hooked up with him. It'd come as no surprise that

they were attracted to Jesus because of the effect he was having on those already in his company. Also it seems likely that these two pairs of brothers accompanied Jesus while he was going all over Galilee. They had the benefit of knowing the area and thus making the tour...arduous in and by itself...easier to bear. In vs. 23 the verb *periago* is not unlike the sense of *peripateo* when Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee. The root *pateo* means to walk whereas *ago* implies leading or carrying and thus fits in better with a more extended area to cover.

The just noted *periago* is intimately bound up with both teaching and preaching in the various synagogues. Jesus is always on the move, never settling down. We don't have any record of how long he stayed in a given place which is incidental to his teaching and proclaiming, *didasko* and *kerusso* + (S *yalaph* and *karaz*: to teach, inform, train and to proclaim, to teach publicly). We can imagine he did this in a rabbinic style which involves a lively give-and-take instead of standing in front of an audience while imparting his message. Although the people may have been unsophisticated, they were thoroughly imbued with their religion which would make them more responsive than we might assume.

As for *periago* → *didasko* → *kerusso*, they are focused upon two things, “gospel (S *savrata*: from *savar*, to announce, declare) of the kingdom” and healing or *therapeuo* (S *'asa*, to restore). As for the phrase in quotation marks (*euaggelion* and *basileia* +), it occurs two other times in this Gospel and *euaggelion* once: 10.35, 24.14 and 26.13. As for *euaggelion*, fundamentally it means good news and comes from the same verbal root as *aggelos*, messenger or angel. Note the adverbial form *eu-* prefaced to it is important because it describes the mode in which is done, that is, well having a less static connotation. As for the healing, *pas* or “every” occurs twice. It conveys the image of Jesus constantly at work in his *therapeuo* or more precisely being in a given place while people brought the ill and afflicted to him. The phrase literally “in the people” along with the adjective *pas* suggests that Jesus was fully involved. While the teaching and preaching are important, by far the healing outstrips both by reason of its immediacy. Perhaps because they had been healed they were more responsive to what Jesus had to say.

The conjunctive *kai* begins vs. 24 to show the close connection of Jesus' *periago* → *didasko* → *kerusso* leading to *euaggelion* and *therapeuo* (walking → teaching → proclaiming). Obviously this is bound to attract attention which it does throughout parts of Syria, the area north of Galilee and towards Damascus. It prompted even more people to seek out Jesus for healing which he does gladly though there's no mention of teaching and preaching. Jesus is giving the people what they so

desperately need but at the same time knows it isn't enough. Healing doesn't translated over into a lasting impression. Vs. 24 enumerates five general categories of such afflictions which are all within the reach of Jesus' healing touch. Also he seems to be doing this on his own though as noted earlier, having the two sets of brothers familiar with the area would be a great help. As for their expectations in following Jesus, what they've experienced so far exceeds their expectations. It certainly beats fishing.

Chapter Four concludes with mention of great crowds which follow Jesus, *akoloutheo* being used here as with Simon and Andrew as well as James and John. As for the noun *ochlos* or crowd, it suggests a bunch of unruly people loosely gathered together. Actually they were well-behaved simply because they were so desperate and in need of healing. Again, Jesus' teaching and preaching were incidental. Five places are mentioned from which this *ochlos* was composed suggesting it was a force to be reckoned with. We have no mention of the Roman authorities being aware of this. Perhaps it was a bit early for word to get out but get out it did in short order. Just the mere mention of an *ochlos* is foreboding enough for the future.

## Chapter Five

This new chapter begins quite abruptly or after Jesus had done a whirlwind tour throughout Galilee as recounted in 4.23. While the last verse of that chapter ends with "great crowds," here we have Jesus again present among them. It's quite difficult to imagine how he managed to maintain his own space in such a circumstance. That's where help from Simon and Andrew along with James and John would come in handy. Since healing was the priority of most people following Jesus, we can assume that the crowds (*ochlos* in the plural as it is in vs. 25) consisted of such people. Obviously word spread like wildfire, but there's only so much one man could do.

After having engaged in non-stop healing with some preaching and teaching thrown in almost as a kind of supplement, Jesus decides to assess the situation. That's part of the reason why this chapter begins with him seeing the crowds, *horaō*. Obviously much more than seeing is involved, for this verb suggests that he's about to take a different plan of action. Jesus knew that above all else the people needed healing and rightly so. However important that is, he couldn't continue doing it 7/24 but needed to shift his ministry, give it more drama, if we could put it that way.

Since Jesus is in the mold of Israel's prophets, why not start off with a certain flair? A mountain has special association with Moses, so he'd be the best figure to copy. With this in mind Jesus looks around for the nearest high point and decides to go ahead with this plan. While ascending the mountain, the disciples must have asked Jesus where he got his healing powers, thinking that a mountaintop was the last place to continue his ministry. It's a really good question, for once there, there's nowhere to go. It was an unsuitable place, so they figured he had lost it or had something else in mind. Perhaps even at this early stage some of the brothers may have started to entertain second doubts about whether or not to follow such a man.

Jesus didn't take long to shift his focus. After having ascended the mountain, he sat down. This can be taken as a way of showing that he's in charge despite the chaos all around him. As for the crowds mostly comprised of the ill and distraught that followed, Jesus didn't seem to have much sympathy for their condition. Only those determined enough would make the ascent. Surely that was no mean task. As to what happened next, we have no record. Perhaps Jesus was asking at random advice from locals as to how handle the crowds which despite their ailments, continued to stream up the mountain. Many already were in tough condition. As for the disciples drawing near, the preposition *pros-* of the verb *proserchomai* + is indicative of direction towards which. Apparently by now Jesus had increased his closest disciples though the number twelve and their names is missing and not presented until 10.1. At least a quick mention of their presence is a relief to know that he had support in this stressful situation.

Now that Jesus had a kind of protective ring about him in the form of his disciples, the next move is to address the crowds. Despite the pressing need people had for healing, Jesus knows this is a temporary fix. He's thinking of the long haul, that they need to be taught, but making the shift won't be easy. Such were his thoughts when here on the mountaintop he first opens his mouth and then teaches, *didasko* +. Jesus is fully aware that opening his mouth is a sign of authority having scriptural precedents. Nevertheless, he's taking somewhat of a chance while at the same time admittedly delighting in a bit of fanfare. Jesus' focus is on the long run. By this gesture he hopes to produce a modicum of silence and order so he can be heard above the din.

Actually having arrived on the mountaintop signals a very important moment. It is precisely here that Jesus first engaged in some serious teaching. As for him teaching throughout Galilee we have no information as to the content but can infer its general theme from his initial words in 4.17, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

And so the preaching that follows—the well known beatitudes—signifies a shift away from this crucial though initial stance. Again, it’s a gamble since those who had ascended the mountain came with the expectation of being healed. Once that was done, time to go back home.

Vs. 3 begins under the somewhat commonly used but bland title “beatitudes” and runs for nine consecutive verses. One way of viewing them is that they’re a summary...an outline...of what Jesus said in greater detail. They are easy to remember and reflect upon later. After all, Jesus didn’t stop here. He continued for a while, to the end of Chapter Seven. Throughout it all he was fully aware of the crowds’ (again, in the plural) expectations and knew they were there for healing. In truth, Jesus was taking a chance, for to continue preaching without healing was a gamble. However, it seemed to be working out okay...more than okay...concluding with the crowds being astonished at his teaching.

As for the word “beatitude,” the text has the familiar adjective *makarios*, also as fortunate or happy. The Syriac is *tuv* and is rather bland or generic like the Hebrew *tov* or good. On the other hand, the Hebrew adjective ‘*asher* fits the occasion better since it’s more dynamic, being derived from the verbal root ‘*ashar*, to go straight on, to advance. Similarly the relative pronoun comes from that root. So if we slam all three together we get an insight into something that’s more than happiness as commonly understood. It intimates transition as by the relative pronoun in the opening words of the first psalm: “Happy (‘*ashrey*) the man (*haysh*) who (‘*asher*) does not walk in the way of the wicked.” In other words, we have here a man or ‘*ysh*<sup>10</sup> (by reason of the sound of the word) who is happy.

We could stop with this verse right here, incomplete, of course, because it’s certainly loaded. Keeping in line with the Hebrew word, we can say that happiness is found in that which is transitional (as opposed to being transitory or passing) as it passes through a person or ‘*ysh* who (‘*asher*)...Again, an intentional incompleteness, the blanks being left as such but suggestive. Admittedly this is reading into *makarios*, but it would come as no surprise it concurred with what Jesus meant and who explained to it his disciples on a later occasion. Being with Jesus and familiar with Hebrew, they could grasp the connection. One way to see if it resonates is to substitute ‘*ashrey* for *makarios* when reading each of the nine verses in which it’s found. Most likely Jesus had in mind scriptural references with regard to each of the nine beatitudes he’s about to lay out. With this in mind, one such notable example is included.

---

10 Not from the same verbal root, of course.

Vs. 3 opens with the first *'ashrey*<sup>11</sup> with regard to those who are poor in spirit, *ptochos* and *pneuma* +, the Syriac *meshken* connoting poverty as the adjective at hand. Certainly *ptochos* fits everyone in the crowds (again, plural) without exception, including the disciples. As for being this way in spirit, most likely it didn't register among most of those who were present. It simply went over their heads. Why bother, some may have asked, being poor in spirit because already we're poor resource-wise? As for this verse, Jesus uses the present tense in order to drill it home.

Jesus adds to *makarios* the kingdom of heaven, *basileia* and *ouranos* (both +). The association of being *ptochos* and a *basileia* is a real paradox, especially one not of this earth, the latter of far greater worth than riches, the very source of such riches. *Basileia* automatically brings to mind political associations with some listeners associating it with the occupying power of Rome. Perhaps that's why Jesus added *pneuma* or spirit. Without it he couldn't make the association between *ptochos* and *basileia*.

One biblical reference relative to the *ptochos* at hand is Zeph 2.3: "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land who do his commands." *Hanav* (cf. vs. 5) is the corresponding adjective which suggests affliction, even persecution. This can come either from one's own circumstances or imposed from without. Regardless, it frees one up for *baqash* or to search for the Lord, this verb connoting the sense of touch, almost of groping. While engaged in this *baqash*, the humble of the land or *'erets*—it involves more than physical territory, that is, a nation—are doing what the Lord commands, *mishpat* also as judgment. The verb *pahal* here also means to make in the sense of fabricate and is more poetic than the common *hasah* (to do, to make).

Vs. 4 has *makarios*/*'ashrey* with those who mourn or *pentheo* which also means to be sad, the Syriac *'aval* also to bewail. Because so many who have followed Jesus this early in the game are in search of healing from a variety of ailments, this statement hits home directly. In fact, there may have been quite a few already mourning on the mountaintop for those who had succumbed or feel just plain hopeless. So when Jesus uttered this sentence, the mourning stopped at once. Total silence except the sound of the wind. What really brings it home is the promise of being comforted. Who, what and when are left up the air. It was enough just to hear these words from someone who speaks with authority but quite another with someone who's endowed with healing powers. As for his identity, there must have been plenty of discussion

---

11 All nine such verses do the same. For the fun of it, let's substitute the notion of *'ashrey* for *makarios* as noted in the previous paragraph. That would put the beatitudes in a different perspective, actually one that's more attractive.

by those present. Jesus was keenly aware of this and above all else, wished to avoid being led off as some kind of king.

A biblical except relative to *pentheo* is Is 61.2 which is part of an extended sentence beginning in vs. 1: “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.” This is the second time *qara’* + or to proclaim is used, the first being in vs. 1 with respect to liberty. The sense of *qara’* is more to cry aloud. Note the piel form of *nacham* or to comfort; it also means to lament, to take vengeance. Here it applies to those mourning, ‘*aval* corresponding to *pentheo*, suggestive of walking with one’s head cast down.

*Parakaleo* is the verb which as in 2.18 is comprised of the root *kaleo* (to call, summon) prefaced with the preposition *para-*, beside...to call-beside in the sense of getting close or intimate. Unlike the previous verse related to being *ptochos*, this one is in the future<sup>12</sup>. Those mourning right now aren’t comforted but will be comforted. As to when, Jesus doesn’t specify. Nevertheless, he has created a safe space in which this will emerge on its own.

Vs. 5 has ‘*ashrey* or blessed concerning those who are meek or *praus*, that is, not preoccupied with a sense of self-importance. The Syriac is more direct, *makek* being derived from *mak*, to lay down, to be prostrate on the ground. Even though virtually everyone on the mountaintop is poor and afflicted with a battery of physical ailments, chances are not many are meek as just described. In other words, being poor doesn’t mean you’re automatically equated with it. And so when everyone heard Jesus speaking, it made them pause to consider their situation. Perhaps cultivating meekness would help put their state of affairs into perspective, especially with the prospect of inheriting the earth, *kleronomeo* also as to come into possession. Compare this with the first beatitude, the kingdom of heaven for those poor in spirit. So if you combine both, you have pretty much everything you could imagine.

One scriptural reference to *praus* is Ps 37.11: “But the meek shall possess the land and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.” The adjective is *hanav*, the same as used with respect to *ptochos* or poor in vs. 3. Actually the two verses have a lot in common. Here the meek will inherit the land or ‘*erets* + as well as take delight in (*hal*, literally ‘upon’) prosperity which is the noun *shalom* +or peace as well as wholeness. The verb is *hanag* which connotes a certain softness and delicacy.

---

12 Vss. 3, 9, 10 and 11 are in the present tense. All others are in the future.

Vs. 6 has *'ashrey* as being hungry and thirsty for righteousness, *dikaiousune* + (S *ke'nu*) also as judicial responsibility and fairness. Keeping in mind the quote below, such persons will find satisfaction, *choregeo* also as to supply in abundance. Both the **RSV** and **NIV** have Is 55.1-2 as a reference with regard to this verse: "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food." The waters aren't specified here but are associated with wine and milk. Of note is the double use of *shamah* +or to hear rendered as "listen diligently."

Vs. 7 has *'ashrey* as describing those who are merciful or *eleeo* and by reason of this, will receive *eleeo* in return. The Syriac is *rechmatha'* also as love, friendship and desire. Of all the nine beatitudes, this one, along with vss. 9 and 10 (peacemakers and those suffering persecution), lack biblical references most likely because they are obvious and straight forward.

In vs. 8 has *'ashrey* pertains to those who are not just pure or *katharos* (also as clean; S *daka'*) but pure with respect to the heart or *kardia*, the seat of physical, spiritual and mental life...in essence, one's very being. Such purity enables one to see God, *horao* + being the common verb also as to catch sight of, to notice. This gives a certain suddenness to the act. The image here is not unlike a mirror reflecting God.

Ps 24.3-4 is a reference to this seeing God: "Who shall ascent the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully." Probable reference is to ascending Mt. Zion and the Jerusalem temple. The first ascent (*halah*) reads "in (b-) the hill." Similarly, with regard to the second act of standing (*qum*), it is "in his holy place." Note use of *qum* whose basic meaning is to rise as though there were a second ascent within the holy place or *meqom*. The two rhetorical questions can refer to any person who has emerged from the chaos symbolized by the seas and rivers of vs. 2.

The verbal root for clean (*naqah*) in vs. 4 of Psalm Twenty-Four implies being free or to pardon. Perhaps this word as applied to hands suggests that a person had been manacled and now is free. As for hands, they represent external activity whereas heart is the inner person which is pure, *bar*; alternate meanings are son, beloved, field. The harmony between outer and inner cleanliness is carried over to the second half of vs. 4, the lifting of one's soul or *nephesh* or *nasa'* (which is a silent gesture) and

refraining from a false oath. False or *shawe'* fundamentally means to lay waste whereas vanity is a noun. The verbal gesture of not swearing deceitfully (*mirmah*) is the external gesture.

Vs. 9 has '*ashrey* describing the beatitude of those who are peacemakers (*eirenopoios*) and will be called sons of God. Given the composition of the crowd, this has practical application when it comes to domestic squabbles and local misunderstandings. Perhaps when hearing this some had in mind the larger, more explosive issue of Israel's relationship with Rome which could turn sour at any moment.

Vs. 10 has '*ashrey* relative to those experiencing persecution, that is, in the present as opposed to the future. *Dioko* (S *radaph*: also to follow after) is the verb which also means to set in quick motion as well as to chase, an apt way to describe the nature of persecution. As for what's involved, most likely Jesus hadn't in mind religious persecution but the political variety which, of course, ties in with Rome. For the most part it didn't affect the local population directly though people living in populated areas such as Jerusalem were more keenly aware of what was involved. Nevertheless, both they and in rural areas were subjected to paying taxes. As for this beatitude, it lacks a biblical reference as noted with regard to vs. 7.

Vs. 11 has a different twist on '*ashrey* insofar as it pertains to one's relationship with Jesus himself (*heneken emou*, 'on my account'). It's aimed directly at those listening (i.e., 'you') to him instead of a more general approach. Because this comes as a surprise as well as a challenge, we can be pretty certain not many responded from the crowds strewn over the mountaintop. In other words, they hear Jesus but aren't listening to him. While those who had been healed certainly were filled with gratitude, chances are they were intent on getting home and resuming their own lives. To them this talk about people slandering Jesus didn't make much sense. He was too new on the scene, essentially coming from nowhere. Some may have thought that Jesus had been speaking of an earlier experience but was reluctant to spell it out publicly.

As for the '*ashrey* at hand, it applies to three types of abuse which people would undergo because of Jesus: *oneidizo*, *dioko* + and *poneros*. The first involves mocking or heaping up of insults, the second is with regard to persecution which is expanded from righteousness of vs. 10 to Jesus and putting up with evil, this adjective also inferring degeneracy. The Syriac verbs are *chasad*, *radaph* + and *byesh*. The first connotes defying, the second to follow after and the third, the general adjective for

evil or wicked. Surely this beatitude didn't impress most of Jesus' listeners but must have turned quite a few off.

One biblical reference to the sentiment of this beatitude is Is 51.7: "Listen to me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear not the reproach of men and be not dismayed at their revilings." The Lord commands his people to listen to him (*shamah* +) because they know righteousness, *yadah* + and *tsedeq*. This can be compared with *dikaiosune* of vs. 6, those who hunger and thirst after it. Such intimate knowledge is possible because the people have the Lord's law or *Torah* in their hearts (*lev*). It will enable them to do the following two things: not to fear reproach and be dismayed at their revilings, the verbs being *yare'* + and *chatat* which fundamentally means to break.

Vs. 12 is a continuation of the '*ashrey* of the previous verse where Jesus adds some encouragement...enticement?...to inspire people to consider what he had just said and perhaps be part of his following. However, apart from the disciples we don't hear of him doing any active recruitment. At this point it consisted just of the two sets of brothers and possibly several others, hangers-on, if you will, at least for the moment. Now he exhorts his listeners on the mountaintop to rejoice and be glad. *Chairo* is the verb for the former and suggests more or less constant state whereas the latter (*agalliao*) connotes intense joy. Combine the two and you have something that's over the top even though both tie in with suffering for Jesus' sake.

The reason for *chairo* and *agalliao*? Jesus says it's because a reward is laid up and destined to be great not on earth but in heaven, *misthos* also as remuneration for work that has been done. That consists of being reviled, persecuted and evil spoken against oneself. Wisely Jesus concludes with a historical perspective. Israel's prophets suffered from this threefold abuse and had received their reward. This can't help but bring to mind 2Chron 36.15-16: "The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets till the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, till there was no remedy." The last words are scary. The Lord had tried his best to extend his mercy to the people, but even he has a limit. To say there's no remedy or *marpe'* is by any standards extreme. The verbal root *rapha'* fundamentally means to sew together or mend and more commonly to heal. In other words, there's no more binding up left.

Jesus continues with what may be taken as a summation...abbreviation...of his teaching on the mountaintop, the beatitudes having had some success in consoling the crowds. At least momentarily it took their minds off their one track desire for healing. Surely any one person—and again we're talking about peasants whose lives centered around the Lake of Galilee—didn't embody one, let alone all the beatitudes. In fact the same holds true across the board for everyone. While Jesus addressed these people he knew that his disciples were recording his words for the ages. They weren't taking physical notes but stuffing his words away in their memories which compared with today, were far keener in the ability to retain information. Perhaps as Jesus continued with his teaching they could see a real parallel between him and Moses who had received the *Torah* on the holy mountain and delivered it to the people.

Vs. 13 continues with Jesus on the mountaintop. Perhaps by now some of the people had drifted away, knowing he wasn't going to do any healing but instead, teach. As for Jesus' teaching, at this stage it's pretty much straight-forward and admittedly bland. Knowing this to be true but essential, Jesus decides to shift gears having two images of a positive nature meant for encouragement. That is, he speaks directly to the crowds as demonstrated by the second person plural, "you." The first such of images coming in rapid-fire succession is salt which was considered valuable because it was a preservative. If salt is present in the earth it acts as a kind of fertilizer. However, the primary image that comes to mind are fields liberally sown with salt as a way of rendering them useless. Such was a common practice done to fertile land of a recently defeated enemy. Jesus, of course, has the positive image in mind. Should salt become insipid or *moraino*, he asks rhetorically how can it be restored.

*Moraino* also means to be foolish or to show oneself to be such and *halizo* as to salt or make salty once more. If the earth can't be re-salted, the salt which had been in it is useless. Jesus makes this clear by using the vivid example of trampling it under foot. So for the earth to be salted—an image of oneself using the sense of taste—Jesus is pointing to the way a person comports himself through life. This isn't to be done in bits and pieces but in an overall or comprehensive manner. As for the trampling, the preposition *kata-* as down prefaced to *katapateo* and is along the lines of a stomping which is more graphic.

The second image of a positive note is not just light or *phos* + in and by itself but of the world. Jesus' listeners could identify with salt, but light on a worldwide scope was well beyond their reach. At the same time being present now as on a mountaintop is ideal for this image for a light which can be projected at great

distances. That's why Jesus shifts from this light to a city on a hill unable to be hidden. In fact, if you were at some distance from this mountaintop, you'd see it swarming with people not unlike a vast array of ants on a mound. That assembly in a sense formed a kind of collective light.

Returning to the image of light, Jesus gives the almost absurd but graphic example of lighting a lamp and putting it under a bushel. Instead, it's placed on a stand to shed light throughout the entire house. He's speaking of a single lamp...essentially a candle...which to give off maximum light needs to be situated as close to the center of a room or house as possible. So with this in mind he says in vs. 16 that one's light must shine before others but to do so gathered around this stand with a single lamp on it. In this way it will be the center of their lives and around which they will order everything. As for the light which others see, Jesus identifies it with good works or *ergon* (also as deed) which are *kalos* + or beautiful. As for *kalos*, it doesn't refer to something done which is simply good and acceptable but is more comprehensive. The idea of adornment is suggested which makes the image quite attractive. And so *kalos* has a way of making the person who sees it become equally *kalos*.

Such *kalos*-as-elegance just presented is, of course, meant to be seen but is much more. Jesus says that it's intended to make people glorify the Father of those who've become radiant, he being present in heaven. Seeing (*eido*, also as to perceive) good works leads automatically to *doxazo* or to attribute glory and praise to God. Thus it moves to what is right before one's face to what is completely invisible. As for God being in heaven, there's a shift which takes place in the blink of an eye. That is to say, it's from *eido* (in a person) to *doxazo* (God), the two being distinct but in a manner which is interchangeable. Another way of understanding this is that the *phos* of which Jesus speaks is a reflection of the *doxa* of *doxazo*.

After having presented two images that involve his listeners on the mountaintop along with God as Father, in vs. 17 Jesus takes what many would consider an unexpected stance. He speaks of himself with respect to the law and the prophets. Again we have to keep in mind that the people present with him essentially were peasants. Nevertheless, they had a rudimentary grasp of their religious tradition to which they clung with dear life. While everyone present on the mountaintop concurred that the beatitudes sounded beautiful, this sudden introduction of Jesus' relationship with two important tenets of faith came across as not quite in line with how they had been raised.

First of all, in a way Jesus reads the minds of those whom he's addressing by using the verb *nomizo* or to think, suppose. More fundamentally it means to form an idea about something or to hold as tentative until further evidence comes in. Also *nomizo* is related to the noun *nomos* which means custom or usage...in essence, something which is familiar and a guiding principle. Having that straight in his mind, Jesus now can come out with the controversial two verbs *kataluo* and *pleroo* to both *Torah* and the prophet. Jesus mentions the fact of loosening with regard to *Torah* but doesn't, of course, carry through with it. That'd mean a loosening or *luo* which, if you will, is *kata-* inferring that which is down...a thorough loosening of that which is most central to Israel's religion.

Essentially the same applies to the prophets, those men who were prominent in Israel's history but can include all holy men and women who helped shape that nation's religion. Applying the verb *kataluo* to them would be bordering upon the idolatrous or to undo their collective witness which in turn was based upon *Torah*.

Jesus is quick to point out that instead of being identified with a loosening of both the *Torah* and prophets, he has come to fulfill them, *pleroo* +. This could be interpreted wrongly in terms of political action. However, if one has in mind what's implied by both *Torah* and prophets, it suggests that being present among the people is what counts. However, those in power both in the political and religious arenas won't sit by idly nor listen to Jesus as the crowds are doing right now. They will be instrumental in taking this *pleroo* to a place that will involve considerable suffering and pain. In other words, Jesus won't have to do a thing; all he has to do is await what for what is prepared for him.

In vs. 18 Jesus speaks somewhat cryptically, even vaguely. He's using passive language, "all is accomplished" or literally as "all may be occurring," the verb being *ginomai*, to come into being, to take place. What, then, is this "all?" Obviously it's connected with the *Torah* as something not so much written but with the fuller sense of being inscribed conveyed by the Hebrew verb *saphar*. That, in turn, implies a close association with *Torah* where Jesus mentions the smallest letter in it, an *iota* or the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew *yod*. It seems that *Torah* will abide as long as heaven (*ouranos* + or the sky above) and earth, that they won't pass away or *parerchomai* or go by the side, *para-*. In other words the two will run concomitantly until *ginomai* or "all may be occurring." So Jesus is pointing to *Torah* as equivalent if not greater than the physical realm which is true from the mythic point of view. Reading it (and this implies doing it as *lectio divina*) is the equivalent of accessing God's presence, the one who created heaven and earth.

In vs. 19 Jesus comes off with a kind of veiled threat or warning not to meddle with the *Torah*. He brings this home by mentioning the smallest letter in it (i.e., *yod*) which no one has the authority to change. As for the *luo* or loosening in vs. 17 (i.e., *kataluo*: a loosening down or *kata-*), Jesus uses it in vs. 19 with respect to anyone who applies it to one of the least commandments or *entole* (also a mandate) within *Torah*. If that weren't bad enough, even worse would be teaching (*didasko* +) others to do the same. However, there is hope because such loosening, while not advisable, has to do with observance and observance can never be complete but lacking in one way or another. The person so engaged will be considered least compared with one who observes these small commandments, that is, one considered as great. Thus within the universe of *Torah* is a reality broader than one can imagine which Jesus certainly acknowledges and tries to impart to his listeners on the mountaintop.

In vs. 19 Jesus turns attention to the scribes and Pharisees or religious authorities who are educated and belong to a class wholly other than those gathered on the mountain. Without bringing it out in the open, Jesus presents a critical view of the two groups while at the same time respecting them. Actually his listeners love this, their ears suddenly being perked more than when he had been in a preaching and teaching mode. Some would have wanted Jesus to go further in his criticism, but that isn't what he's about. If there were anything between the first words out of his mouth and through Chapter Seven that stuck in the minds of his listeners, we have them right here.

As for the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus speaks of righteousness or *dikaiosune* +, perhaps wishing to tie them in with his earlier words in vs. 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Here he renders *dikaiosune* in more concrete terms or as applicable to daily life. That means we can render *dikaiosune* as fairness or a desire to act uprightly. Chances are Jesus' listeners practiced that fairly well in their humble day-to-day interactions. Certainly it didn't reach the more subtle and more sophisticated realm in which the scribes and Pharisees operated who most likely would look down on their humbler counterparts. Thus the practice of *dikaiosune* as properly understood is the most important criterion for entering the kingdom of heaven. The verb is *eiserchomai* (literally, to enter into) with the preposition *eis*. I.e., we have a double *eis* or into. As for mentioning the kingdom of heaven, Jesus is being faithful to the very first words he uttered publicly, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

In vs. 21 Jesus gets down to practical, nitty-gritty details about relationships. He refreshes the memory of his listeners, that is, by appealing both to the *Torah* ('it is was said'<sup>13</sup>) and those to whom it had been addressed. Jesus shows reverence by calling them *archaios*, an adjective referring to what was from the beginning or a long time ago (S *qadeym*: first, former). Also by this term Jesus wants to make what was uttered then is just as valid now. The reference? One of the Ten Commandments, "You shall not kill" or *phoneuo* which is more along the lines of murder and therefore an intentional act.

The full sentence from Ex 20.13 is very short and the same as in the text at hand. As for the Hebrew *ratsach* (S *qatal*: also as to murder), it's pretty much equivalent to the Greek *phoneuo*. Virtually everyone present on the mountaintop was familiar with what Jesus is speaking about, namely, references from the Ten Commandments, the heart of Jewish religious life. In both instances—then and the present—murder makes one liable for judgment, the adjective *enochos* (S *chov*: to be guilty, to be unequally matched, powerless) with respect to *krisis*, judgment. Chances are that it will result in capital punishment. What made this statement even more frightful was that in some instances the Roman overloads might get involved and mete out punishment in the form of crucifixion, a horror to everyone.

After grounding his initial remarks in a key element from the Jewish code of moral behavior, Jesus adds his own interpretation, thereby elevating the original sense of the commandment at hand. That's where the participle *de* comes in—barely noticed but important—which the **RSV** translates as "but." Note that Jesus prefaces his words with "But I say to you," the active *lego* compared with the passive "it was said" relative to the *Torah*. This he does with the remaining scriptural citations. So in the verse at hand *lego* represents a distinction between two types of murder: the physical one and the mental one, the latter which Jesus puts as being angry, *orgizo* (S *ragaz*: prone to anger or to have enmity). Not only that, he increases the severity with the term *adelphos* or brother meaning that all people are equal and related with each other.

The person committing murder, so to speak, by expressing anger deserves hearing the condemnatory Aramaic word *rhaka* (S *raqa'*: contemptible), a term of abuse or contempt related to a lack of intelligence. Furthermore, such a person is liable (*enochos* +) or held accountable before the council, *sunedrion* being the highest court of the Jews. That, of course, is something anyone would want to avoid, again because of

---

13 This is the first of six references to the phrase.

the Roman overlords who could intervene at any moment. However, usually they let things be while at the same time keeping a close eye on what's going on.

Even worse than the example Jesus just presented is when someone uses the adjective *moros* (S *leal*: brutish) which means foolish or stupid. It makes him automatically liable (*enochos* +) for the fires of hell, *Gehenna* being the word which is the city dump for Jerusalem. The preposition *eis* or “into *Gehenna*” gives a sense that one will be there for good. As for the fires associated with it, they are slow-burning and therefore more persistent, not the kind that flare up and die down.

In vs. 23 Jesus gives an example related to what he had just expounded, not as intense, but still comes across as a stiff warning. Of concern is the offering a gift at the altar which presumably is a rare occurrence for those whom Jesus is addressing. Most likely he's referring to Jerusalem, and people of the Galilee area didn't get there very often. Passover might be the prime example which combines making a sacrifice with going on a pilgrimage. Good as all this may be, more important is to be reconciled where again Jesus uses the noun *adelphos* + to make it more personal.

*Diallassomai* is the verb to reconcile which implies the restoration of normal relations as well as to make an exchange, the *dia-* or through indicative of thoroughness. The Syriac *raha'* is pastoral and pertains to sheep; also it means to keep. Jesus employs this association of offering and reconciliation to show how religious practices which have become so ingrained in a culture can be taken as an excuse for less than exemplary behavior. It's far easier to focus on such observances than to engage in real life situations which have an effect over the long haul. While people would tend to agree, still it's hard to put into practice.

Because this example of reconciliation is difficult to carry out both then as well as now, Jesus saw the value of befriending the person who's making accusations, the *anti-* or against-ness of *antidkos* making it necessary. Note two indications of the urgency involved, Jesus being fully aware that to continue in an adversarial relationship is damaging all around. That is, *tachu* and *en te odo*, immediately and “in the way” or at the same time one is off to court with him who is *anti-*. Also the suddenness with which Jesus recommends doing this can resolve the situation more quickly by not allowing it to fester indefinitely. After all, who wants to appear before a judge and end up in prison? Jesus means business, for the person who doesn't allow reconciliation will remain in prison until he pays the very last penny. *Kodrantes* is the smallest Roman coin and once again intimates the ever present Roman rule hovering quietly yet persistently in the background.

In two paragraphs above we have the verb *diassomai* or to reconcile. Jesus brings this a step further with the verb *eunoō*, to make friends. More accurately, it means to think well, *noō* (to perceive, to observe) prefaced with the adverbial form of *agathos* or good, *eu-* +. A more sober approach is implied, of having good thoughts with regard to someone who had been or still might be a threat.

Vs. 27 has the second instance of “it was said” where Jesus appeals to the *Torah*’s authority to back up his words. All such examples convey a clear impression that his authority is the one that counts, that of the *Torah* being derived from it. Now Jesus quotes a second time from the Ten Commandments, “You shall not commit adultery” [Ex 20.14], *moicheuo* for the Hebrew *na’aph*. Jesus ramps this up considerably by saying that just looking at a woman with lustful intent is the equivalent of adultery. The two verbs here are *blepo* and *epithumeo* (S *chaza’* + & *rega’*: desire, longing, appetite), the former being the common verb to see or to look at and the latter, to have intense desire (*thumos* +) upon or *epi-*. This looking → desire-upon is intensified by the preposition *pros*, indicative of direction towards-which. The suddenness and intensity effects adultery not in the physical sense but in one’s heart or *kardia* +.

In vs. 29 Jesus follows through on this *blepo/epithumeo* which deals with visual lust, if you will, by removing the source which is not so much the physical eye but the inner one. This vision is the one responsible for committing sin, *skandalizo* or to cause a downfall from which is derived the noun *skandalon*, a device for catching something such as a trap or snare. The verbs *exaireo* and *ballo* along with *apo* (‘from you’) are intended to show the immediate and drastic need to take such action as it pertains to keeping one’s heart or *kardia* pure. Jesus says this is more profitable or *sumphero*—to bear or to carry with—oneself than to have one’s entire body cast into Gehenna. That is the same place mentioned in vs. 22 with regard to being angry with one’s brother. Jesus counsels the same in vs. 30 concerning the cutting off one’s right hand when it comes to sin, the hand applicable to doing sin compared with seeing it. And so he covers both the inner and outer person, eye and hand.

In vs. 31 we have “it was also said” instead of “You have heard” though it’s of the same order, if you will, and counts as the third instance of this expression. This time Jesus is referring to divorce or *apoluo* + which means literally a loosening from. It borrows from Dt 21.1 which is part of an extended sentence running through vs. 4. “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and

puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house.” The text revolves around indecency which reads literally as “word (as expression) of nakedness” comprising of *davar* + and *hervah*. Implies is being uncovered in the sense of being discovered as well as laying naked in bed with a man other than one’s husband.

While Jesus subscribes to the Deuteronomy verse just cited, he amplifies it as indicated by the participle *de* + which the **RSV** renders as “but.” Furthermore, the words “I say to you” have a definite air of speaking authoritatively. Here *apoluo* + or loosening-from is with regard unlawful sexual activity by one’s wife. Should the husband do this, he’s making her an adulteress, and should a woman marry this man, he’s committing adultery, *moicheuo* +. Such talk is quite strong for those on the mountaintop, making them look within themselves as well as their more immediate family members and neighbors. Throughout it all we have no person asking Jesus for any clarification or the like, his words hitting too hard to evoke a response.

Vs. 33 has the fourth installment, if you will, of “you have heard” but this time prefaced with *palin* or again. Such is one way Jesus continues his use of scripture to enhance his own teaching. He presumes with pretty good certainty that his audience, humble though it may be, has a fundamental understanding of its religious heritage. Here he brings in “men of old” or *archaios* + which gives his interpretation on swearing an oath greater credence. In this instance Jesus’ words are given preceded by the original verse, Lev 19.12: “And you shall not swear by my name falsely and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.” This verse stands out by reason of three similar sounding words or more accurately, beginning with the same letter, *shin*: *shavah* +, *shem* and *sheqer* or to swear, name and lie or fraud. Making a false oath profanes not just God but “your God,” that is, making it personal, the verb being *chalal* fundamentally as to lay open, to dissolve. To top it off, he says simply but majestically that he’s the Lord.

“You shall not swear falsely but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.” *Epiorkeo* (S *dagal*: to lie, cheat) is the verb where the preposition *epi-* or upon is indicative of an underhanded frame of mind. The Lord’s name isn’t mentioned but inferred by reason of Jesus making an association with the Leviticus verse above. In place of this swearing-upon a person is to perform what he or she already has sworn. That is to say, *apodidomai* (S *shalam*: to complete, make whole) literally as to give away but more as to fulfill relative to one’s *horkos* or oath, that is, minus the deceptive-ness inferred by the preposition *epi* of *epiorkeo*.

In vs. 34 Jesus shifts the tone of the Leviticus verse by again using *de* + or “but” and the authoritative “I say to you.” Such words wouldn’t be used if Jesus were simply engaged in a conversation. Instead, he’s imparting a teaching in a formal way which hopefully his listeners will apply to themselves. Instead of swearing an oath (*omnumi* is the verb) he counsels that it not be done in accord with heaven, earth, Jerusalem or one’s head. The details of these are spread out over the next two verses, that is, 34-35.

As for heaven, it’s where God has his throne (cf. Jas 5.12 for similar words). Jesus is using part of Is 66.1 which runs in full as “Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house which you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?’” If heaven is the Lord’s throne and earth his footstool, that means he spans the full distance in between which, of course, is all creation. And so he asks rhetorically about the house and place of rest the people are building for him. As for the latter, *menuchah* can be taken as the temple of Jerusalem situated midway between the divine throne in heaven and the divine footstool on earth. In other words, it stand in between both. This doesn’t contradict the Lord telling David to build a house which was followed through by his son Solomon. Rather, it infers an insight reaching beyond a particular spot (the Jerusalem temple) vis-à-vis the entirety of creation.

As for the forth element which Jesus counsels against, it’s swearing an oath by one’s own head or very person. Note the adverb *holos* or “at all,” also as “wholly” for emphasis. Jesus adds somewhat humorously that we’re unable to change a single hair of our head white or black by any attempt at swearing as he describes it. In vs. 37 he spells out the gist of this as to when we have to swear an oath, that is, our word or *logos* + (*S melata’* or *melal*) is to be done simply and directly. Any more comes from the evil one, *poneros* +, the devil or the same one who had tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Such *poneros* (*S beysh*) ties in with swearing an oath in a false manner, *epiorkeo* of vs. 33.

Vs. 38 has the fifth example of “you have heard that it was said” in reference to Ex 21.23-24: “If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” The context is the judge deciding the proper punishment for any harm (*ason* also as mischief and seems to infer premeditated action) done to a pregnant woman. Again, in vs. 39 Jesus brings this verse to a whole new level as indicated by the conjunctive *de* + translated as “but.” What he proposes sounds downright ridiculous, obviously extreme. Our first instinct is to be defensive should someone evil try to do something to us. Instead, Jesus advises not resisting it, *antistemi* (*S qam*: to take a stand) literally to stand against a person who is evil or

*poneros* +. In sense, this is a bit ambiguous because it could refer to a person or the one who is *poneros* mentioned in vs. 37. Chances are it's a person influenced by the one who by nature is *poneros*.

Not engaging in *antistemi* takes on five forms which are extreme by any measure. What's striking is the way Jesus speaks of them as though they were perfectly normal to do. They are as follows:

- The famous exhortation of turning of one's cheek.
- Freely give one's cloak to a person who'd sue you.
- Go two miles with one who forces you to go one mile.
- Give to one who begs.
- Do not refuse a person who borrows.

Most likely 99.99% percent of those hearing this on the mountain would not agree, something Jesus had anticipated. Although their implementation is clearly out of reach, in reality Jesus expects going at it little by little, taking baby steps and perhaps focusing upon one of the five, not swallowing them all at once. After a while, one may advance. The big problem, of course, is holding on to the memory of personal offense and not being able to let go.

So with this in mind Jesus moves on (one would ask how can you move on after this?) to flesh them out. He starts in vs. 43 with the sixth example based upon Lev 19:18: "You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." This verse is couched within the context of one's own people, i.e., Israel. By any standard not taking vengeance nor bearing a grudge with closer members makes this more difficult to practice. The two verbs are *natar* and *naqam*; the former means to watch or to retain while the latter connotes satisfaction by taking vengeance. And so loving one's neighbor is the divine command, '*ahav* suggestive of breathing after. There's simply no way out of this. The verse concludes with the Lord saying that he is as he is. A person can rely upon such a statement as being constant and thus helpful to avoid despair or fear. To no surprise, the verb *agapao* (S *chuv*: also to show affection) is used in the verse at hand, the verbal root for *agape*.

Vs. 44 has another distinction between the scriptural passage Jesus quotes from and his own take on the matter, that is, through the conjunctive *de* + translated as "but." As we'd expect, Jesus does use the verb *agapao* + (root of *agape*) but not in and by itself. Along with it he throws in praying for one's enemies, *proseuchomai* (S *barek*: to

bow down) more as to make petition. Note the preposition *pros-* prefaced to the verb signifying direction towards-which. Such *pros-*ness is on behalf of those responsible for the persecution, *dioko* +. Jesus doesn't intend this next-to-impossible command of having *agape* towards these persons to be done in isolation. Rather, in vs. 45 he continues to say that by doing this one becomes a son of your Father who is in heaven.

By reason of this position (i.e., above, if you will), he both observes and participates in making not just the sun but his sun rise on both those who are evil and good alike as well as sending rain on the just and unjust. The two pairs are *poneros* and *agathos* (both +) *dikaioi* + and *adikos*. And so both sun and rain are not representative of a remote indifference but of not bothering to make distinctions. To do so at this level is virtually impossible to carry out. That's why Jesus couches it in terms of one's Father who is in heaven, not present on the earth. To the former it is possible whereas as to the latter it is not possible. Thus the introduction of space physically speaking helps to understand what's going on here.

Towards the end of this chapter Jesus comes off with four rapid three rhetorical questions followed by a concluding verse which gives an exhortation in light of them. They are enumerated as follows:

-No reward or *misthos* + for showing *agapao* in return for *agapao* +. A secondary type of rhetorical question is attached here, though not included among the four, where Jesus exclaims that tax collectors engage in the same *agapao*.

-Saluting your brothers is essentially no big deal, *aspazomai* meaning to recognize someone. Again Jesus throws in a secondary rhetorical question, that the Gentiles do the same.

Vs. 48 brings Chapter Five to a close with what seems like an ultimatum as far as religious and moral behavior is concerned, well beyond the reach of all who are on the mountaintop listening to Jesus. He tells...commands...them to be perfect in the same way their heavenly Father is perfect. *Teleios* is the adjective applicable to God the Father as well as people. It doesn't involve an unattainable goal but to live in a way where one is geared toward the end of things, the *telos* or end of life in the sense of completion. *Gamer* is the Syriac adjective derived from the verbal root which is similar and connotes completion as well as maturity. One can only speculate how this went over with the crowds who, it should be kept in mind, are designated as *ochlos*, essential a mob or not far from it. By now people must have been drifting away down the mountain saying they've had enough. After all, what happened to the

healing? They had forgotten the real healing Jesus had in mind as embodied by his words, the healing of mind and spirit.