

Matthaean Beatitudes and Traditional Promises

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I. INTRODUCTION: THE OLD TESTAMENT AND PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

For many years scholars have understood that the Matthaean Beatitudes were closely related to the Old Testament, especially Isaiah 57, 61, 67, and Psalms 24, 37, and 73. This Old Testament information, however, has not led scholars to realize fully the unity of the message and structure of these Beatitudes. This may be true because New Testament scholars have not approached the Beatitudes from a midrashic point of view, realizing the influence that an Old Testament text can have upon the meaning of the midrash. They may not have understood some of the thought forms that were basic to the Old Testament texts which the author of the Beatitudes took for granted. Therefore, this essay will begin with an introduction to some of these presuppositions: first, concerning the influence of the whole text to the message of a midrash.

II. PRESUPPOSITIONS: OLD TESTAMENT INFLUENCES

One of the ways early Jews and Christians proved their arguments was to quote Scripture that was generally accepted as authoritatively the Word of God. Arguments built around Old Testament passages are called midrashim. One example of the way Jews and Christians argued, using texts, is the following passage from Acts 13:33-38:

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It is written in the second Psalm, “*My son are you; today I bore you*” [Psa. 2:7]. Because He raised him from the dead, no longer about to return to corruption, He spoke as follows: “*I will give you the holy and faithful things of David*” [Isa. 55:3]. Wherefore, it also says in another Psalm, “*You will not let Your holy one see corruption*” [Psa. 16:10]. Now, on the one hand, *David*, after he had served the counsel of God [as king of Israel], in his own generation, *fell asleep*, was laid *with his fathers* [1 Kings 2:10], and saw *corruption* [Psa. 16:10]. But, on the other hand, the one whom God raised up saw *no corruption*. Therefore, let it be known to you, men, brothers, that because of this man, to you is announced the forgiveness of sins.

What does all this reasoning about seeing corruption or being God’s Son have to do with obtaining forgiveness of sins? Since the author quoted from Isaiah 55, he presumed that the reader would know the rest of the chapter and take into account Isaiah 55:7, which the author of Acts did not quote:

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord that He may have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Therefore, the argument ran from the proof that Jesus was God’s Son and also the son of David to identifying him with the holy and faithful things of David. Because the Lord’s holy one would not see corruption, either David or his son would not see corruption. David died and saw corruption, so the Scripture did not apply to him. Therefore, it refers to Jesus as the holy one or the holy and faithful things of David mentioned in Isaiah 55:3, so that the same Scripture promises that those who forsake their wicked ways and return to the Lord can receive the forgiveness of sins (Isa. 55:7). Twentieth-century Americans may not accept this kind of logic, but it was accepted in New Testament times as valid, so those who want to understand the meaning of New Testament Scripture must understand what the authors meant when they used Old Testament Scripture. In dealing with the Beatitudes, therefore, it is not enough to recognize the quotations of Scripture included in them. These texts must be understood against their entire background. This is especially true of Psalm 37 and Second Isaiah. Another presupposition that is important for the Beatitudes is early Jewish understanding of passive ethics. This has an important Old Testament background.

III. CONQUEST THEOLOGY

Scriptural Support

Farmer¹ observed that there were only two examples in the Old Testament of the qualities the Lord reckoned as righteousness. One of these pictured Abraham, who believed against heavy odds, and his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:1-7). The other was Phineas who, in opposition to the mingling that was going on between the Midianites and the Hebrews, took the law in his own hands and killed Zimri and the Midianite wife he had brought into his own tent (Num. 25:1-18). The religious interpretation of this event was that Phineas' action saved the day. The plague that had been killing Hebrews was stopped, and the Lord made with Phineas a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, a covenant of peace, because he had made atonement for Israel. The poetic report of this event said that this act was reckoned to Phineas as righteousness from generation to generation (Psa. 106:30, 31). This means Jews in New Testament times had both of these proof texts on which to base their ethics. They could either, like Phineas, take up the sword and resist all mingling, and the Lord would give them credit for this militaristic virtue, or they might suffer patiently against all odds and count on the Lord to bring about the desired blessing. The zeal of Phineas was exemplified in the conquest of Joshua, Gideon, the Hasmoneans, and the zealots who fought the war against Rome in A.D. 66-70. Paul was evidently this kind of zealous Pharisee before his conversion. On the basis of these ethics, the land was successfully obtained from the Canaanites during the period of Joshua and the Judges and again from the Greeks in the time of the Hasmoneans, so they had been tested and proved valid. Passive ethics had been tested in Babylon, where Jews lived without rebellion until Cyrus of Persia came and liberated them, giving them back the land. So this was also a valid guide to the acquisition of the land.² Since the Beatitudes depend upon passive ethics for their interpretation, passive ethics will be spelled out in more detail.

¹ W. R. Farmer, "The Patriarch Phineas," *ATR* 34, 1952, 26-30.

² An analysis of these two kinds of conquest theologies in the Old Testament and New Testament is presented in George Wesley Buchanan, *The Consequences of the Covenant*, Leiden, 1970, 1-42; GWB, *Revelation and Redemption*, Dillsboro NC, 1978, 1-24; and "The Merit of the Fathers," *Explor* 4, 1978, 33-44.

Passive Ethics

Passive ethics, in addition to the scriptural counsel as an activity which God reckons as righteousness, is based on imagery taken from: (1) the courts of law, and (2) business and banking practices.

From the standpoint of law, it was assumed that God conducted His judgments on the basis of the kind of justice operative in Israelite society. If a Hebrew borrowed money from a fellow Hebrew, he had to pay no interest, but if he failed to repay in the prescribed time, he was obligated to become a debtor captive to his creditor, working off his debt at half wages. This meant he had to pay double the amount he owed, unless the sabbath year arrived before it was all paid back, in which case he was allowed to go debt-free from his creditor's house.³ Another way of securing money was to sell property. If this was done, however, it was considered only a lease, because whenever the jubilee year arrived, this land was restored to the original owners, so as to keep family property in the family. On sabbath years, captive debtors were set free; on jubilee years, captives were set free, and the land was restored to the original owners. If a person was a captive, and the sabbath year had not arrived, he might still be set free if: (1) some other person acted as his redeemer and paid off his debt, (2) he acquired wealth and could pay off the remainder of his debt himself, or (3) he worked at half wages and thus removed the debt before the sabbath year.

From this basis of justice, Israelites reasoned that God also demanded that debts be paid to Him, and that every infraction of a law was a charge against the account. Sins were considered debts. As early as Genesis 15, the same chapter where he learned what was reckoned as righteousness (15:6), Abraham was also told that after the Israelites left Egypt they would have to wait before they entered the promised land because the iniquity of the Amorites would not yet be complete (15:16). This seems to mean that the Amorites still had some credit in their merit account. In the eighth century B.C. Isaiah believed that the North Israelites would be restored to the land, being signaled by a great jubilee trumpet, calling them from Egypt and Assyria (Isa. 27:13). This is some of the earliest

³ Because of this, many Jews were unwilling to loan money shortly before the sabbath year. This worked a hardship on the poor. It was this realization, together with the likelihood of non-repayment, that prompted the admonition: "The one who asks you [for a loan], give; the one who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away [empty-handed]" (Matt. 5:42).

eschatology on biblical record, based on sabbath and jubilee justice. When Jeremiah foresaw the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, he interpreted this political situation as being caused by Israel's sin, and that the justice imposed would be like that of a debtor slave in Israel. Therefore, the Jews who were conquered were called captives and told that their land would be taken from them until they paid "double for all their sins," which meant working off their debt at half wages. These were the ethics understood by Second Isaiah, whose texts were considered authoritative by the author of the Beatitudes.

Second Isaiah and the Doctrine of Redemption

Second Isaiah, like Handel's *Messiah*, begins with an assurance of comfort to Jerusalem. Jews in Babylon had fulfilled the requirements laid down by Jeremiah; they had paid double for all their sins (Isa. 40:1, 2). The good news that was sent to Zion was one of comfort (Isa. 52:7-9); the Lord was going to return to Jerusalem. As a midrash on Leviticus 25:9, 10, interpreting the present return to the promised land as the result of jubilee justice, Isaiah 61:1-4 offered comfort, liberty, and good news. The Jews in Babylon were the "captives" who had paid double for all their sins, and now that the jubilee arrived, the land would be restored to the "original owners." Although Jews in Babylon soon found themselves in positions of wealth and influence, because of their relationship to Palestine and their belief in sabbatical eschatology, they continued to describe themselves in terms applicable to debtor captives: in Second Isaiah they were called servants (42:19; 43:10; 44:21; 45:4; 49:5, 6, 11; 63:17); deaf (42:18; 43:8); blind (42:19; 43:8); poor and needy (41:17); prisoners (49:9); exiles (45:13); captives (49:25; 52:2); prey (49:24); worms (41:14); despised ones (53:3); rejected ones (53:3); those afflicted (53:4; 54:11; 61:1); humble ones (66:2); contrite in spirit (66:2); oppressed ones (53:7); and those who were mourning (61:2; 66:10, 20). Reflecting this judicial, financial, jubilee system, Second Isaiah over and over again used such terms as comfort (40:1; 49:13; 51:12, 20; 52:9; 54:11; 61:2; 66:13); justice or righteousness (42:3, 4, 6; 51:4; 53:11; 56:1; 58:2, 8, 9, 14, 16, 17; 61:8, 10, 11); judgment (41:1, 21; 43:26; 45:21; 49:25; 50:8, 9; 53:8; 58:2; 66:16); and redemption or ransom (35:9, 10; 41:14; 43:13, 14; 44:6, 22, 23; 47:4; 48:17, 20; 49:7, 26; 50:2; 51:10, 11; 52:9; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 62:12; 63:4, 9, 16). The Lord who redeemed His people also comforted them (51:10-12); when He comforted His

people, He redeemed Jerusalem (52:9); when He proclaimed good news to the afflicted, He also announced liberty to the captives and comfort to all who mourned (61:1-3).

The Lord was pictured in different roles from different perspectives, but they all resulted in the same end—Jews were freed to return to Palestine. In judgment scenes, the Lord, like a defense attorney, was pleading the cause for the Jews (41:1, 21-24; 43:26; 45:20, 21; 49:25, 26; 50:8, 9; 53:8; 66:16). Because God, as a wealthy financier, was a redeemer, the ransomed of the Lord could return to Palestine (35:9, 10). God would redeem this worm, Jacob (41:14), when the Lord came to Zion as a redeemer for those Jews who turned from transgression (59:20). As a warrior, God would vindicate Zion, and she would gain international stature (62:1, 2). The day of vengeance, speaking militarily, or legally, would be the same as the day of redemption for the Jews, speaking in financial terms (63:4). That would be the time when the Lord would avenge the enemies of Israel (66:6).

According to sabbatical justice, any one of these activities would provide release: (1) if the debtor captive were redeemed, he would go free; (2) if the sabbath year or the jubilee year arrived, he would go free, and, in the latter case, his land would be restored; or (3) if he paid double for all his sins before the sabbath, he would go free. According to Second Isaiah all of these had happened. Jews had paid double for their sins; the jubilee had been announced; and the Lord was going to redeem the people. In addition, the Lord would become the defense attorney for the Jews in court, justifying them for release from prison. He would also become their military defender, avenging them against their national enemies. The author of this prophecy was convinced that the land was going to be returned. He knew about the negotiations with Cyrus, so he interpreted these political events in terms of this system which was already understood among Jews. It was this background to which the author of the Beatitudes appealed, assuming that his readers were in the same situation as the captive Jews in Babylon. If they only behaved as those Babylonian pacifists had done they would sooner or later receive the same kinds of rewards. That was the assumption the New Testament author tried to communicate in these eight promises.

The Wisdom of Psalm 37 (LXX 36)

Psalm 37 is an acrostic wisdom Psalm, contrasting throughout the Psalm the actions of the wicked and the righteous, promising that in the long run the wicked would perish and the righteous would prosper. Therefore, the advice to the righteous was to keep on doing good, without worrying about the apparent success and prosperity of the wicked. Being “good,” he defined more sharply by offering the following counsel: do not fret (1); trust in the Lord (3); take delight in the Lord and commit your ways to Him (4, 5); be still before the Lord (7); avoid anger (8); give liberally (26); speak wisdom (30); wait for the Lord (34); and be blameless (37). The ethics advocated here is very much like the passive ethics that proved fruitful for the Babylonian Jews. For the Jews in Babylon, this nonresistant ethics restored the land to the chosen people. The refrain given throughout Psalm 37 is that those who take the author’s advice will get back the land and dwell in it securely (3, 9, 11, 22, 29, 34), and there be blessed (22) and have children who become a blessing (26).⁴ The inheritance of the land will surely be given, but selectively. It will not go to the wicked but to those who trust in the Lord and do good (3), those who wait for the Lord (9, 34), the meek (11), those blessed by the Lord (22), and the righteous ones (29). These are not several classes of people any more than the exiles, prisoners, captives, and others in Second Isaiah are different classes of people. The exiles are at once the prisoners and the captives as well as the poor and needy, and so forth. Those who wait for the Lord are those who trust in Him; they are the blessed, the meek, and the righteous. The ethics of Psalm 37 is so similar to that of Second Isaiah that it is not surprising that an author who approved of one should also like the other and weave the two as supporting texts into one newly created pericope. He also used several supporting texts, like Psalm 73 and Psalm

⁴Since the word “blessing” occurs twice in Psalm 37, it is tempting to conclude that this was the word that started the composition of the entire Beatitude unit, but even though both *’esher*, and *barak*, *be’rakah* are translated “blessing” or “blessed” in English, there was evidently a difference between the two meanings in New Testament times and earlier. In the LXX μακαρίος almost always (53 times) renders the Hebrew root *’esher*—only twice *barak* (Gen. 30:13: *be’ashry ky ishruny* is rendered μακαρία ἐγὼ ὅτι μακαριοῦσί με). On the other hand, some form of εὐλογίσει always (377 times) renders some form of the Hebrew *barak*, *be’rakah*; εὐλογημένος in Luke 1:42, however, seems to have the same meaning as μακάριος in Luke 11:27. These few examples seem only enough to tantalize—not to convince. For the significance of an Oriental blessing, see J. Pederson, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, London, 1959, 1-2, 182, 199, 201-202. Also A. Murtonen, “The Use and Meaning of the Words *Lebarek* and *Berakah* in the Old Testament,” *VT* 9, 1959, 158-77.

24, but the main theme of the Beatitudes in Matthew is based on Second Isaiah and Psalm 37. This will become evident in the following charts that point out the most obvious verbal identities between the Beatitudes and the Old Testament passages indicated.

IV. THE LITERARY UNIT

The unit under consideration is Matthew 5:3-10. This includes eight Beatitudes, but it omits Matthew 5:11, 12, that some have considered part of the original unit. The first and eighth Beatitudes have the same reward—“The Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.” This has the effect of an *inclusion*, which sets off a literary unit from that which precedes and that which follows. Matthew 5:11, 12 does not belong to the same unit; the two units are not of the same style; instead the latter unit constitutes a commentary on Matthew 5:10. The commentator, in good midrashic fashion, picked up the words “blessed,” “persecuted,” “for the sake of,” “righteousness,” and “Heaven” from 5:10, elaborating on them further, as midrashic commentators did. Furthermore, this commentator took the Beatitudes from their abstract, general application and directed them to his readers: “Blessed are *you* . . .” (emphasis added). This is a normal homiletical device. The similarities and differences between Matthew 5:10 and 5:11, 12, show clearly that 5:11, 12 is a commentary on the Beatitudes, especially the last one, but these verses are not a part of the original unit.

The Blessed

The fact that the first four Beatitudes are tied together by quotations from Second Isaiah and alliterative substantives in Greek, and five of the eight Beatitudes are united by Psalm 37, suggests that the Beatitudes were composed together under the influence of these texts. The poor in spirit are the same ones as those who mourn. They are the humble captives, like those in Babylon, who mourned for Zion with broken hearts all the time they were away from the promised land. Because of their patient suffering, God rewarded them with good news and comfort—they were permitted to return to Zion! Later, there were meek sectarians, described by the Scrolls, who mourned and fasted with broken spirits. After the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, there arose a new group of “mourners for Zion.”

These gathered at Jerusalem, fasting, weeping, wearing sackcloth, praying, and trying to gain enough merits for Israel to persuade God to return their land to them.⁵ These meek Jews who followed the Psalter's advice and did not retaliate against the wrongdoers, but humbly, righteously continued to do good, also observed the ethical advice of Second Isaiah. The author of Didache 3:7, 8 realized the unity of the message in the Beatitudes, Psalm 37, and Second Isaiah, because he offered advice that came from all three: "But be meek . . . be long-suffering, merciful, guileless, quiet, and good, and everfearing the words which you have heard." From Psalm 37, he got the words "meek," "long-suffering," "merciful," "guileless," and "good," but "quiet" and "everfearing the words which you have heard" come from LXX Isaiah 66:2. Both messages are united in the Matthaean Beatitudes. One of the Dead Sea Scroll authors also identified the meek with the poor who observed the season of fasting (4QPsa. 37, 2:9, 10). Because of its background both in Psalm 37 and Second Isaiah, those who hungered and thirsted for δικαιοσύνην must have been those who longed for vindication rather than righteousness. The situation is that of a person tried in court and proved right or vindicated. The poor, needy, and humble Jews in Babylon were vindicated when Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon and allowed Babylonian Jews to return to Palestine. The Psalmist assured the reader that the Lord would vindicate their cause against the wrongdoer. Those who longed for vindication were the same people as those who mourned for Zion; they were also the ones who qualified as being merciful and having pure hearts. Also nonresistant were the peacemakers. In fact, Psalm 37:11 said the meek would enjoy abundant peace. The seventh Beatitude does not directly reflect either Psalm 37 or Second Isaiah, but the wisdom Psalm 73, which, like Psalm 37, assures the reader that the wicked will perish and the righteous will be vindicated, supports the theme of those texts. Psalm 73 concentrates on the importance of the temple for the pure in heart. This is also related to Psalm 24, which reminds the reader that only those with clean hands and pure hearts are prepared to enter the temple of the Lord. These are the priests who are properly designated and ritually prepared to lead worship there. Such priests would receive vindication and blessing from the Lord. The words *tsaddyq*, *tsedeq*, *tsedaqah* = δικαίος, δικαιοσύνη, ἐλεημοσύνη are very closely related terms. A righteous person is one who has been

⁵ *Pesikta Rabbati* 34. See *GWB, Revelation*, 64-67, for an English translation.

vindicated in judgment and proved innocent. These terms are related to vindication, justice, charity, and righteous action that will be upheld in court. Charity is considered in terms of court terminology because of its relationship to sin and debts. A person who gives charity or does righteous deeds cancels debts and sins in the heavenly record. Therefore he or she promotes innocence, guiltlessness, or righteousness that leads to vindication or enables one to be successful in court. Although the fourth Beatitude may have a slightly different meaning for "righteousness," both qualities have the same goal. Those who innocently receive persecution cancel debts so that vindication is possible on the day of judgment. This kind of justice or righteousness comes without retaliation, and so it requires the same ethical point of view as do the other Beatitudes. All of these eight Beatitudes describe as blessed those same people who were not zealots. Like the ones singled out for deliverance by Ezekiel (9:3-5), all of those that are labeled by these eight Beatitudes can be identified with the ones who helped pay double for all the sins piled up against Israel when Jews were exiled in Babylon and those approved by the authors of Psalms 24, 37, and 73.

Not only are these Beatitudes unified by their background texts and their parallel nature which promises blessings for the same group of people who meet all of the qualifications that are synonymously listed in these texts, but the rewards are also synonymously listed. This means that those who receive one of these blessings will receive them all. The third Beatitude sets the tone clearly for the entire group. Based on Psalm 37, it provides the blessing of the land being restored to the Jews. They will "inherit it." Inheriting the land is listed as the desired blessing in Psalm 37 six times in addition to other allusions to the same goal. This is also the goal of Second Isaiah. Those who would inherit the land would be the meek, the mourners, those who wait upon the Lord, the innocent, the righteous. Early Christians made no mistake about this. The Latin text of the Didache said the meek would inherit the "holy land." The Apocalypse of Paul referred to Palestine as "the land of the meek." Those who mourned were like those who mourned in Zion for the restoration of the land. Second Isaiah promised comfort. For Second Isaiah comfort meant the warfare was accomplished; the sins were forgiven; Israel was free and would be restored to the promised land. This means that when the mourners are comforted the meek will inherit the land. When the wicked are punished and the righteous are vindicated, then those who suffer hunger and thirst for vindication will be satisfied as the Psalmist promised

(37:19). Being satisfied or filled and being vindicated, against its Old Testament background, has the same meaning as being comforted by inheriting the land. The way God shows mercy to His captives, the poor and needy exiles in Babylon, is to comfort them by restoring the land for which they have been mourning. When the land is restored, the temple will be cleansed, and the true priesthood reestablished. Then a legitimate priest can enter the holy of holies and stand in God's presence. This is what it means to stand in the presence of God and see His face. When the land is under Jewish control, then all Jews will be called God's sons (Ps. of Sol. 17:30; Jub. 1:24, 25). This is the reward they receive for being peaceful and meek. The Psalmist (37:11, 37) said the meek would not only inherit the land, but they would also have peace, and the peaceful person would have posterity. This means his children would survive to see the land restored. "He will see his offspring; he will prolong his days; and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand" (Isa. 53:10).

Summary

The texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls that have been shown here identify the poor in spirit with the mourners, the poor, the weak, those with broken spirits and knocking knees, the righteous, and the meek who will inherit the land. The association, as well as the *inclusion*, also indicates that the poor in spirit in the first Beatitude should be identified with those who are persecuted for the sake of justice in the eighth Beatitude. Furthermore the consistency and unity of these Beatitudes argue for the same meaning to be given for the "Kingdom of Heaven" as for "the land," which here clearly means the "promised land." In typical Semitic style, the author of the Beatitudes has created a midrash on some Old Testament texts that are very similar in meaning to argue or promise repeatedly that it is only for a certain kind of people that God's promises will be given. It is also a very special kind of reward that these people will be given when they are blessed. The ones who receive these blessings are not the zealot followers of Phineas, but the nonresistant, pacifistic ones who, like Abraham of old, or his New Testament advocate, the Apostle Paul, wait for God to provide what He has promised without active military assistance. This group was synonymously labeled poor in spirit, mourners, meek, those who hunger and thirst for vindication, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. The reward that they were to receive was the Kingdom of Heaven, comfort, inheriting the

land, having their hunger for vindication satisfied, receiving mercy, seeing God, being called God's sons. All of these would be granted at the same time when the conditions would all be met at once. In this way the eight Beatitudes are unified by meaning, repetition, scriptural background, and stylistic composition.

Supporters

Although no scholar has previously seen the full significance and unity of these Beatitudes in relationship to the Old Testament texts involved, many of the points given above have been made earlier by individual authors. Plummer, for instance, said of the Matthaean Beatitudes:

They do not describe eight different classes of people, but eight different elements of excellence which may all be combined in one individual, who may acquire them in any order, or simultaneously. The poor in spirit are certain to be meek; those who are merciful are likely to be peacemakers; those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are likely to be pure in heart; and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake will mourn with the mourning that is sure to be comforted. In other words, the Beatitudes are an analysis of perfect spiritual well-being . . .⁶

Likewise, Meyer said, "vv. 3-10 form an *ingenious and harmonious whole*."⁷ He further held that Matthew 5:3, 5, and 10 all referred to the Messiah's Kingdom and that receiving mercy meant salvation in the Messiah's Kingdom.⁸ Less certain was M'Neile, who thought there should probably be eight Beatitudes, rather than seven or nine.⁹ Windisch argued that those who were considered bringers of peace or peacemakers in antiquity were tyrants, like Solomon, Caesar, Alexander, and other kings who were called sons of God. They brought peace by conquering a country and policing it well.¹⁰ Even though this is true, this was not the kind of peacemaking the Beatitudes advocated. Hiers ventured to suggest rather weakly that the Matthaean version of the Beatitudes "may also reflect authentic traditions."¹¹ Schniewind thought the "poor" and the

⁶Plummer, *ICC Matthew*, 61.

⁷Meyer, *Matthew*, 116.

⁸*Ibid.*, 114-16.

⁹M'Neile, *Matthew*, 51.

¹⁰H. Windisch, "Friedensbringer-Gottessöhne," *ZNT* 24, 1925, 240-60.

“poor in spirit” were the same. He did not think Matthew made any additions to the original and thought the eight Beatitudes in Matthew formed an integral unit.¹² Losada said that the meek were the same people as the poor, afflicted, peacemakers, and others described by other Beatitudes. The most likely interpretation of the reward for the meek is that they would be heirs of the promised land, since the Church is the true Israel.¹³ Soiron¹⁴ correctly argued that the reward for the meek was not the earth, as Billerbeck thought, but the heavenly Kingdom on earth. The land was to become a possession in the future age. He also argued against those who thought Luke’s fresh, direct form of the Beatitudes the most original. He said Luke’s was revised to meet the needs of Hellenistic Christians, whereas Matthew’s form is more traditionally Jewish.¹⁵ Dupont, like Allen,¹⁶ thought being poor and meek were the same, but Allen said this was so only if the poor referred to the poor in spirit. The interpretation “in spirit” was a necessary Greek addition to the Hebrew meaning of poor in Second Isaiah. Lamentation, he said, was for the sins of Israel that prevented the Kingdom from coming.¹⁷ He also disagreed with Wellhausen in thinking that the Beatitude of the meek was originally a part of the Beatitudes.¹⁸ Strecker said the reward for being meek was possession of the land, which, for Matthew generally, meant nothing less than the Kingdom of God.¹⁹ He further believed that the original unit ended with Matthew 5:10, Matthew 5:11, 12 being a later addition.²⁰ Soiron correctly said that “seeing God” meant worshiping in the temple, where the worshiper could be in God’s presence. When the temple no longer stood, God accepted studying the Torah in the land of Israel as a substitute. This assured Jews of the presence of the Shekinah, which meant seeing God.²¹

¹¹ R. H. Hiers, *The Historical Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, Gainesville, 1973, 15.

¹² Schniewind, *Matthäus*, 40-51.

¹³ D. Losada, “*Bienaventurados los mansos porque ellos heredaran la tierra*,” *Revist-Bib* 41, 1979, 239-43.

¹⁴ T. Soiron, *Die Bergpredigt Jesu: Formgeschichtliche Exegetische and Theologische Erklärung*, Freiburg, 1941, 160-61.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁶ J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, Paris, 1973, 3,386; Allen, *Matthew*, 39-40.

¹⁷ Allen, *ibid.*, 40.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ G. Strecker, “*Die Makarismen der Bergpredigt*,” *NTS* 17, 1971, 264.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 256.

Dausch held that the original form of the Beatitudes was in Matthew.²² Luke reduced the eight Beatitudes to four and changed them to suit Gentile situations.²³ He said inheriting the land was the same as receiving the Kingdom of Heaven, but he thought this took place in heaven.²⁴ Dupont said the Beatitudes provided the conditions necessary for entering the Kingdom of Heaven.²⁵ Zahn insisted that all eight Beatitudes were original, the first and eighth forming an *inclusion* for the six in between, which are all joined together as a chain.²⁶ “There are,” he asserted, “neither seven, nine, nor ten Beatitudes, but . . . eight.”²⁷ Michaelis reached a similar conclusion but on a different basis and to a different extent. She held that the Beatitudes were composed into groups of four, the first four Matthaean Beatitudes being formed alliteratively in Greek. Those who were to be blessed were all described with adjectives beginning with the Greek “p” sound.²⁸

Opponents

The supporters listed above reached conclusions similar to the ones indicated by a midrashic analysis, but not all of them agreed on every point. Some, who agreed that two of the Beatitudes were synonymous, for example, also insisted that there were only seven Beatitudes originally and argued that Luke preserved the earliest form. Others who thought the Kingdom of Heaven would take place on the promised land thought Matthew was dependent upon Q for the source of his Beatitudes. Those who showed most agreement with the conclusions reached from midrash analysis were those who best understood Hebrew thought-form and were the least dependent upon the hypothetical Q. Those most in disagreement with this position were the ones most convinced of Q and the ones least interested in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Jewish backgrounds to the New

²¹ Soiron, *Bergpredigt*, 182-84. See also *GenR* 56.10.

²² Dausch, *Drei*, 93.

²³ *Ibid.*, 464.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁵ Dupont, *Béatitudes* 3,555.

²⁶ T. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus*, Leipzig, 1910, 181, 195.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

²⁸ C. Michaelis, “*Die Alliteration der Subjectsworte der Ersten 4 Seligpreisungen in Mt. v. 3-6 und ihre Bedeutung für den Aufbau der Seligpreisungen die Matthew, Luke, und in Q*,” *Nov* 10, 1958, 148-161.

Testament. These are the ones to be considered now.

Wellhausen is the one normally credited with the suggestion that there were only seven Beatitudes, originally, but all that he said in defense of this suggestion is the following paragraph:

[Matthew] 5:10 would be the eighth Beatitude. Matthew, to be sure, added to the three Beatitudes of Luke, not so as to bring them up to eight, but to bring them up to seven, just as he composed the [seven] petitions of the Lord's Prayer. He had also composed seven parables in chapter 13 and seven woes in chapter 23. The one interpolated is not verse 10, which certainly might easily be considered from the standpoint of content, because it provides the transfer to the two following verses, but rather verse 5, because it is taken over, lock, stock, and barrel (τινῶν) from Psalm 37:11, and it holds a weakened position among the manuscripts — which is often a sign of an interpolation.²⁹

This seems to be an inadequate defense for an entirely new thesis, and it is mistakenly thought to be original. More than forty years earlier Holtzmann followed a still earlier work of Ewald in offering the suggestion that Matthew had only seven Beatitudes, originally.³⁰ Holtzmann, who also followed Ewald in thinking Mark was the earliest gospel, thought Matthew used the source "A," which scholars later called *Urmarkus*. Holtzmann said Matthew added "for the sake of righteousness" and "in spirit" to the Beatitudes he found in this source which was reflected more accurately in Luke.³¹ Lagrange and Dupont observed, however, that more than fourteen hundred years earlier, St. Augustine thought there were only seven Beatitudes, considering Matthew 5:10 to be a summary of the others.³² St. Thomas agreed with Augustine on this. Later Dabek compared these seven blessings and the seven woes in Matthew 23 to the seven blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28. This view has been supported by still more scholars,³³ but it does not escape without objection. (1) Kilpatrick disagreed with Wellhausen's analysis of the textual strength of Matthew 5:5. He said, "The disturbance of the

²⁹ J. Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Matthaei*, Berlin, 1914, 14.

³⁰ H. J. Holtzmann, *Die Synoptischen Evangelien*, Leipzig, 1863, 175 (Ewald, *Evangelien*, 210).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

³² Dupont, *Beatitude*, 254.

³³ *Ibid.*: also see C. H. Dodd, "The Beatitudes," *Melanges Bibliques*, Paris, 1957, 404-10.

order of verses 4, 5 in some manuscripts tells us nothing about the history of verse 5 before it appeared in the Gospel and is not in itself sufficient evidence for omission."³⁴ (2) In order to compare Matthew with Deuteronomy on this score, it is necessary, not only to remove one of the existent Beatitudes, but to put together blessings and woes that are eighteen chapters apart in Matthew. (3) Matthew 13 contains seven parables *about the Kingdom*, but there is also another parable in Matthew 13, making a total of eight. (4) Just because an author includes one unit of seven in his work does not mean this was the only number he knew and was compulsively fixed to that unit. If his document contains both units of seven and eight, it is normal to assume that he collected materials in units at least as different as seven and eight.

Black conjectured that the Beatitudes were once in Aramaic and rhymed and were organized differently from their current structure. He thought Matthew 5:3 and 5:5 belonged together and Matthew 5:7 and 5:9 belonged together. He further held that Luke preserved the more primitive form of Q, but he believed "in spirit" to be original, based on the Hebrew understanding of "poor," and that the word usually translated "righteousness" should instead be "vindication," because of its dependence on Isaiah 61.³⁵ Conjecturing emendations to a Greek text on the basis of a hypothetical language, like New Testament Aramaic, is not very convincing. Braumann was persuaded that the difference between Matthew and Luke is too great to be explained by Matthew's editing Luke. Instead, both Matthew and 1 Peter were dependent upon the same baptismal liturgy. All Dead Sea Scroll parallels and the later New Testament allusions to the Beatitudes are closer to Matthew's form than Luke's.³⁶ Barth followed many predecessors in claiming that Matthew added 5:10 and also 5:5. In Matthew 5:3 he added "in spirit" to his Q text as well as "thirsting for righteousness" to Matthew 5:6.³⁷ Strecker also agreed that the use of second person plural in Luke was a mark of originality and that Matthew used Q, adding such things as "thirsting for righteousness."³⁸ He thought

³⁴ G. D. Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Oxford, 1946, 16.

³⁵ M. Black, "The Beatitudes," *ET* 129, 1953, 125-26.

³⁶ G. Braumann, "Zum Traditionsgeschichtlichen der Seligpreisungen Matthew V 3-12," *Nov* 4, 1960, 253-60.

³⁷ G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, H. J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, Philadelphia, 1963, 123.

³⁸ Strecker, "Makarismen," 256-59, 264.

the original collection of seven Beatitudes was pre-Matthaeian, and it might even go back to Jesus.³⁹ This pre-Matthaeian source was a form of Q. Strecker supported his arguments with the opinions of such scholars as Wellhausen, Harnack, and Klostermann.⁴⁰ Schwartz presumed that originally the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3, 4 and 6 belonged together without the Matthaeian additions of “in spirit” to 5:3 and “and thirst for righteousness” in 5:6.⁴¹ There are many other scholars, like Enslin⁴² and Kilpatrick⁴³ who agreed that (1) Matthew used Q, (2) Luke reflects the earliest form of Q, and (3) Matthew “spiritualized” the Beatitudes by adding such words as “in spirit” and “thirsting for righteousness.” Of those who think there were originally seven Beatitudes, some would omit Matthew 5:5 from the list, and others, 5:10. Those who would omit Matthew 5:5, like Wellhausen, say it was simply copied from Psalm 37. These scholars are not aware of the midrashic method of composition and have not noticed how extensively Psalm 37 has influenced other Beatitudes besides Matthew 5:5. Those who think Matthew 5:10 was a later, unnecessary addition say that most of its content is repeated in 5:11, 12. They have missed the midrashic relationship between Matthew 5:10 and 5:11, 12, which makes 5:10 necessary for the composition of 5:11, 12. They have also overlooked the inclusive relationship between 5:3 and 5:10 which holds the rest of the Beatitudes into a unit.

The change from third person singular, in Matthew 5:3-10, to second person plural, in 5:11, 12, shows not the freshness and originality that most scholars have affirmed, but the homiletical nature of the second person plural. This, therefore, attests to its dependence on the earlier text, which is in the third person singular.⁴⁴ If “freshness” were a certain sign of earliness, then J. B. Phillips’s translation of the Bible would have to

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ G. Schwartz, “*Ihnen Gehört das Himmelreich? (Matthäus v. 3)*,” *NTS* 23, 1977J, 341-43.

⁴² M. S. Enslin, *The Prophet from Nazareth*, New York, 1961, 99.

⁴³ Kilpatrick, *Origins*, 14-16.

⁴⁴ One of my former students, O. Lamar Cope, read a paper at a regional Society of Biblical Literature meeting at Notre Dame, Indiana, U.S.A., several years ago which has not yet been published. He argued that Matthew 5:11, 12 was secondary to Matthew 5:3-10 and also that Luke’s Beatitudes were secondary to Matthew 5:11, 12 for their form and style. Professor Cope still plans to publish this. L. Schottroff and W. Seligmann, *Jesus von Nazareth—Hoffnungen der Armen* (Stuttgart, 1978) 30-31, overlooked this relationship when they judged Luke 6:20-26 to be a part of “the oldest Jesus tradition.”

precede the stately King James Version. If Matthew had used Luke’s Beatitudes, it would not have been necessary for him to have changed them, but if Luke used Matthew, and persisted in providing corresponding woes, he would have to have changed Matthew’s text by omitting such words as “poor in spirit,” because there is no satisfactory verbal opposite. It would not be satisfactory to say “rich in flesh,” for instance.

Ramifications

As Dupont has shown, in his extensive survey of scholarship on the Beatitudes, the point that has received the most attention over the years is the identification of the “poor in spirit.” The church fathers have almost consistently defined the poor in spirit as the “voluntary poor.” This opinion has also been widely accepted by later scholars.⁴⁵ These would be the members of monastic orders who have voluntarily surrendered their possessions to a community to which they belong and to which they have taken vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience. The poor in Second Isaiah were not limited to these. All of the Zionistic Jews in Babylon were called “poor,” whether they were materially poor or not. Some of them may have belonged to monastic orders, but that would not have been a requirement. The motivation for monasticism in early Judaism was perfection of legalistic observances necessary to regain favor with God so that the land could be restored. Therefore there would have been some of the spiritual descendants of “the poor” Jews in Babylon.⁴⁶

Another suggestion that has been frequently given is to identify the “poor in spirit” with the *’amme ha’arets*, because these would lack the religious wealth known and observed by strict sects, like the Pharisees or the Essenes. Unlike the Pharisees, the *’amme ha’arets* would have been spiritually poor or “poor in spirit.” This identification has been made without any familiarity with the historical origins of this group of people. In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the most Zionistic Jews in Babylon returned to the promised land and tried to rebuild the walls and the temple. They found there the descendants of the Jews that had not been taken into Babylon. Their parents had not been the wealthy, talented leaders of the country before 586 B.C. They were the lower classes who provided no

⁴⁵ Dupont, *Béatitudes* 3,400-27.

⁴⁶ See GWB, *Consequences*, 238-50; GWB, “The Role of Purity in the Structure of the Essene Sect,” *RQ* 4,397-406; GWB, “Essenes,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2.

threat to Babylon. When the Babylonian Jews returned, they called the Jews already there, the “people of the land,” thereby typologically identifying them with the heathen Canaanites who occupied the land before Joshua’s conquest. Although the Jews from Babylon who returned were not nearly so poor, economically, as the “people of the land,” they called themselves “the poor,” just as they called themselves captives. Typologically, they identified themselves with the Hebrews who escaped from Egypt in the Exodus. Therefore it is a mistake to consider the “people of the land” to have been “the poor in spirit.” The “poor in spirit” were not necessarily peasants, tax collectors, or any other economic class. They were first of all pacifistic Zionists, who had been deprived of their country.⁴⁷

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, several scholars, like Flusser,⁴⁸ have seen the close relationship in wording and meaning among the Dead Sea Psalms, the War Scroll, and the Beatitudes. Flusser, however, even though he clearly observed the nationalistic background of these Dead Sea Scrolls, strangely enough, thought the Beatitudes held a non-nationalistic meaning for the Kingdom of Heaven.⁴⁹ When seen in a midrashic relationship to the Old Testament passages considered by their author, as well as the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Kingdom of Heaven in the Matthaean Beatitudes demands a nationalistic interpretation.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The midrashic analysis of the Matthaean Beatitudes calls attention to their unity of content, theology, and structure. It also argues against the assumption that Matthaean Beatitudes are secondary to Lukan Beatitudes or that they were composed in any jigsaw fashion, based on biblical, hypothetical sources. The close identification of the Matthaean beatitudes with Second Isaiah and Psalms 24, 37, and 73 shows that Matthew 5:5 should be translated, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land,” meaning the promised land. Matthew 5:6 should be rendered, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for vindication, for they will be

⁴⁷Contra Schottroff and Seligmann, *Jesus*, 26-31, who understood “poor” to mean only economically deprived.

⁴⁸D. Flusser, “Blessed are the Poor in Spirit . . .” *IEJ* 10, 1960, 1-13.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 8-9.

satisfied.” Matthew 5:11, 12 should be considered a later midrashic interpretation of the earlier Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-10, applying the teachings of the Beatitudes to current situations. Familiarity with early Jewish and Christian methods of interpretation prompts a careful consideration, not only of the Old Testament passages quoted, but also their surrounding contexts which the New Testament authors had in mind when they prepared their messages.

BEATITUDES	QUALIFICATION	REWARD
Blessed are	<i>the poor in spirit</i> (πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι)	because the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
	Old Testament <i>Isa 57:15: I dwell . . . with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit</i> (ὀλιγοψύχοις) <i>to revive the spirit of the humble</i> (συνετριμμένοις). <i>Isa 61:2: . . . to proclaim good news to the poor</i> (πτωχοίς). <i>Isa 66:2: . . . to this man I will look: to the [one with a] poor and broken spirit</i> (τὸν ταπεινὸν καὶ ἠσύχτιον) who trembles at my word.	
	DSS and Others <i>IQH 18:14-15: To announce good news to the poor</i> with respect to the abundance of your mercies [. . .] from the source [. . .] <i>to those of a broken spirit</i> and <i>to those who mourn</i> with respect to <i>the joy of the age</i> (based on <i>Isa 35:10; 57:15; 61:1, 2</i>). <i>10QM 14:5-7: He will call . . . for the opening of the mouth of the dumb</i> [<i>Isa 35:6</i>] <i>to praise the mighty deeds of God, and the hands of the weak</i> [<i>Isa 35:3</i>] [he will call] <i>to learn war. He will give to the knocking knees</i> [<i>Isa 35:3</i>] <i>firm standing and gird the loins for [those with] weak backs, and with the poor in spirit</i> [he will destroy] <i>the hard heart, and with the perfect of way all the wicked nations will be finished off.</i>	
Blessed are	<i>those who mourn</i> (οἱ πενθοῦντες)	because they will be comforted (παρακληθήσονται).
	Old Testament <i>Isa 61:2-3: . . . to comfort all who mourn</i> (παρακαλέσαι πάντα τοὺς πενθοῦντας) <i>to grant to those who mourn in Zion</i> (δοθῆναι τοῖς πενθοῦσιν Σίῳν). <i>Isa 66:14: As with a man whose mother comforts him, thus will I comfort you</i> (παρακαλέσω ὑμᾶς). <i>You will be comforted</i> (παρακληθήσεσθε) in Jerusalem.	

DSS <i>110 Psa Zion 32:9: How do they wait for your salvation?</i> Your perfect ones <i>mourn</i> over you. <i>1QH 18:14-15: for those of a broken spirit and those who mourn</i> for the joy of the age. . . .	
Blessed are	<i>the meek</i> (οἱ πραεῖς) because they will inherit the land (κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν).
	Old Testament <i>Isa 61:2-3, 7: [The mourners who have been comforted] will inherit the land</i> a second time (κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν). <i>Ps 37 (LXX 36):</i> <i>3: then you will dwell in the land</i> (τὴν γῆν) <i>and feed on its wealth.</i> <i>9: but those who wait on the Lord will inherit the land</i> (κληρονομήσουσιν γῆν). <i>11: the meek will inherit the land</i> (οἱ δὲ, πραεῖς κληρονομήσουσιν γῆν). <i>18: The Lord knows the ways of the innocent, and their inheritancé</i> [will extend] <i>into the age</i> (ἡ κληρονομία οὐτῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα εἰσται). <i>22: because those who bless him will inherit the land</i> (οἱ εὐλογούντες αὐτὸν κληρονομήσουσιν). <i>29: The righteous will inherit the land</i> (κληρονομήσουσι γῆν), <i>and they will dwell in it for the age of an age.</i> <i>34: Wait for the Lord and keep his ways, and he will</i>
	<i>exalt you to inherit the land</i> (κατακληρονομήσαι γῆν). DSS and Others <i>Targ. Ezek 17:22-23: And he [the child from the house of David=tall cedar] will become a strong king, and all the righteous will be supported by his “leaves” and all the meek will be “watered” by the “dew” of his kingdom.</i> <i>4QPs 37, 2:9, 10: The meek will inherit the land.</i> Its interpretation is for the community of the poor who have accepted the season of fasting, and they will be rescued from all the traps of Belial.

Didache 3:7-8: But be *mEEK* (πραῦς), since *the meek will inherit the land* (οἱ πραῦς κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν; variant Latin text: *sanctam terram*—the holy land).*

Apocalypse of Paul: I said, “Lord, what is this?” Then he said to me, “This is *the land of the meek* (ἡ γῆ τῶν πραΐων), or do you not know that it is written, *Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the land?*”

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for *vindication* (δικαιοσύνην) because *they will be satisfied* (χορτασθήσονται).

Old Testament

Isa 62:1-2: until her *vindication* (δικαιοσύνη) goes forth like a light, and her salvation, like a burning torch, and the Gentiles will see your *vindication* (δικαιοσύνην), and all kings, your glory.

Isa 63:1: I am speaking with *vindication* (δικαιοσύνην), mighty to save.

Ps 37 (LXX 36):

6: He will bring out your *vindication* (δικαιοσύνην) as light.

19: In the days of famine, *they will be satisfied* (χορτασθήσονται).

Blessed are *the merciful* (ἐλεήμονες) because they will receive mercy.

Old Testament

Ps 37 (LXX 36):

21: *The righteous man is merciful* (οἰκτίρει) and giving.

26: All day long he is *merciful* (ἐλεᾷ) and giving.

Blessed are *the pure in heart* (καθαροὶ τῆ καρδία) because they will see God.

Old Testament

Ps 73:1: But God is good to Israel, to *the pure in heart* (τοῖς εὐθέσι τῆ καρδία).

Ps 24:3-4: Who will ascend the hill of the Lord? Who will stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a *pure heart* (καθάρως τῆ καρδία).

Blessed are *the peacemakers* (εἰρηνοποιοί) because they will be called sons of God.

Old Testament

Ps 37 (LXX 36):

11: *The meek will inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace* (ειρήνης).

37: Observe the innocent man and watch the upright, because there is posterity for *the peaceful man* (ἄνθρώπῳ εἰρηνικῷ).

Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of *justice* (δικαιοσύνης) because the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Old Testament

Ps 37 (LXX 36):

16: *Better is the little of the just man* (τῷ δικαίῳ) than the wealth of sinners.

17: The Lord supports *the just men* (τοὺς δικαίους).

25: Never have I seen *the just* (δίκαιον) abandoned.

*J. P. Audet, “Affinités littéraires et doctrinales du Manuel de Discipline,” *RB* 59, 1952: 219-38; Audet, *La Didache*, Paris, 1958, 132-33.

(The following chart will summarize the background material in relationship to each Beatitude, so that the overall picture will be clear.)

BACKGROUND	QUALIFICATIONS	REWARDS
Isa 57:15; 61:2; 66:2 1QH 18:14-15; 1QM 14:5-7	poor in spirit	the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
Isa 61:2-3; 66:14 11QPsa Zion 32:9 1QH 18:14-15	those who mourn	they will be comforted.
Isa 61:2-3, 7 Ps 37:3, 9, 11, 18, 22, 29, 34 Targ Ezek 17:22-23 4QPs 37:2:9, 10 Didache 3:7-8 Apocalypse of Paul	the meek	they will inherit the land.
Isa 62:1-2; 63:1 Ps 37:6, 19	those who hunger and thirst for vindication	they will be satisfied.
Ps 37:21, 26	the merciful	they will receive mercy.
Ps 73:1; 24:3-4	the pure in heart	they will see God.
Ps 37:11, 37	the peacemakers	they will be called sons of God.
Ps 37:16, 17, 25	those who are persecuted for the sake of justice	the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.