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Hearing a Temple Register in the Beatitudes

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Chapter 3

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So far, the mountain clue is still merely a hypothesis waiting to be tested. In the next four chapters, the words of the Sermon on the Mount will be examined to test and explore the idea that the Jewish audience hearing these words would have recognized temple-related language scattered throughout this text from beginning to end. The Sermon on the Mount draws masterfully on many traditional Jewish images, especially those related to the Temple. Following a few introductory observations, this chapter will focus on temple themes and elements in the Beatitudes.

From the outset, it is important to recognize that a strong consensus has emerged that Jesus in general and the Sermon on the Mount in particular were not separatist. Hans Dieter Betz firmly states that the origins of this text should be dated to “a time when the addressees were a group of Jesus’ disciples within Judaism. They regarded themselves as something of an avant-garde within the Jewish religion, intended to fulfill its highest aspirations.”¹ Brad H. Young argues that, rather than withdrawing immediately from the Jewish sphere, Jesus “offers heart-felt criticism of a movement with which he identifies;” those leaders who were responsible especially for the Temple were challenged by Jesus, not as a hostile opponent, but as “an insider” trying to make needed reforms and restorations.² After a careful examination of the evidence, John Nolland concludes that the Gospel of Matthew is not anti-Judaic: “Anti-Semitism as classically understood is something that, while the church has been far from free of it, the Gospel of Matthew does not, so far as I can see, fall into.”³ This all being the case, it follows that Jesus was not opposed to the Temple as such, for the Temple, Torah observance, and Sabbath keeping were the “three central pillars” of Judaism in the first-century.⁴ Indeed, Matthew gives a “remarkably consistent and positive portrayal of the Temple. No negative word is uttered by either the evangelist or his Jesus about the Temple *itself*.”⁵ Since the city

¹ Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Minneapolis, 1995), p. 156.

² Brad H. Young, *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus* (Peabody, Massachusetts, 2007), pp. 35–6.

³ John Nolland, “The Gospel of Matthew and Anti-Semitism,” in Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland (eds), *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007), pp. 154–69, quote on 169.

⁴ Daniel M. Gurtner, “Matthew’s Theology of the Temple and the ‘Parting of the Ways,’” in Gurtner and Nolland, *Built upon the Rock*, pp. 128–9.

⁵ Gurtner, “Matthew’s Theology of the Temple,” p. 130.

of Jerusalem, and above all the Temple, “had been the focus of [Jewish] national and religious experience and aspirations for a millennium,”⁶ Jesus’ ambitions were not to destroy but to fulfill (Matthew 5:17), and this intention would apply not only to the Law and to the Sabbath but also to the Temple.

Once hearers had begun listening to the Sermon on the Mount through a register of temple-related signals and meanings, they would have caught on to the idea that something more than a plain ethical discourse was being presented. Indeed, Matthew’s statement about the response of these hearers indicates that they received this experience as something quite extraordinary. Just as Matthew introduces this text in Matthew 5:1 in a meaning-suggestive mountain context, he concludes the Sermon with an equally provocative comment about the response of the amazed listeners. They were astonished, amazed, or overwhelmed at his teaching (*exēplēssanto . . . epi tēi didachēi autou*) (Matthew 7:28), and in addition they were impressed that “he taught them as one having authority (*exousian echōn*), and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:29). Something more was involved in this presentation than ordinary, descriptive words alone. How Jesus taught and communicated was different from how others taught. He typically spoke in parables or in aphorisms with multiple, symbolic meanings (Matthew 13:11), out of which grew “an *oral* esoteric tradition, deriving from the apostles and having Jesus as the center of its secret teaching.”⁷ There may well have been many levels and types of intended meaning in each of his sayings, and thus there is every reason to assume that the sayings presented in the Sermon on the Mount also followed this characteristic.

At one level, of course, the Sermon on the Mount can be read as an ordinary ethical discourse or simple summary of the main teachings of Jesus, but to read it that way may be akin to reading the parable of the sower as if it is all about agriculture. At another level, however, the Sermon on the Mount can also be read as a symbolic, analogical, or coded text that has much to do with the rituals of transformation and initiation, the making of covenants with God, the formation of community, and obtaining all the promised blessings traditionally afforded by temples as places of contact between God and man. In order to lay the groundwork for such a reading, my endeavor in the following chapters is to go through the Sermon on the Mount, verse by verse, to identify all of its elements that may relate to the Temple in general and to ritual in particular. Because the Temple was the most powerful, authoritative religious institution in Judaism at the time of Jesus, it is incumbent on modern readers to consider the possibility that the Sermon on the Mount struck its original listeners and readers as authoritative precisely because it drew heavily on words, phrases, quotations, imagery, and rituals related to the Temple.

⁶ R.T. France, “Matthew and Jerusalem,” in Gurtner and Nolland, *Built upon the Rock*, p. 108.

⁷ Guy G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden 1996), p. 34 (emphasis in original).

Indeed, a surprising number of words in the Sermon on the Mount make good sense in a temple context. Its vocabulary is consistently at home in the Temple. There are about 383 Greek words in the total vocabulary of the Sermon on the Mount. Most of these words are everyday words, and thus the translation of these words is generally straightforward. What person does not understand such basic words as *mercy, the poor, peacemakers, salt, light, sun, secret, treasure, heart, bread, serpent, tree, fruit, blossom, rock, sand, brother, love, hate, enemy, marriage, divorce, pearls, pigs, dogs, grass, power, glory, rejoice, ask, seek, knock, clothing, evil, debts, forgive, obey, swear, kill, prophet, wide, narrow, father, children, holy, judge, fast, pray, law*, and so forth? Their overt meanings can hardly be mistaken, whether they are expressed in English, Latin, Greek, Aramaic, or any other language. Behind these words, however, may stand much deeper meanings. Simple words, such as *bread, garment, wash, or ask*, may have reference to religious objects, temple vestments, or ritual functions.

In addition, a significant number of phrases in the Sermon on the Mount quote from or allude to passages in the Old Testament, and many of them, especially those that come from the Psalms, evoke strong memories of the Temple in Jerusalem. Undoubtedly, Jesus' listeners would have recognized the Old Testament sources behind these words and phrases much more readily than modern readers do. In response to hearing these temple-related words and phrases, listeners would easily have thought to themselves, "I am listening to a holy man of God. He is speaking about holy things. He is drawing heavily on temple imagery. He is making the Temple come to life in an invigorating new way."

More than is usually noted, the Sermon on the Mount is steeped in phraseology of early biblical literature. Although modern Christian readers might well assume that Jesus' words were completely original, in fact many of the words and phrases in the Sermon on the Mount were taken directly or proximately from Old Testament scriptures. These expressions would have had a familiar ring to his audiences in Galilee and Judaea. Some are direct quotes; others are paraphrases or closely related expressions. Some have direct connections with the Temple, explicitly mentioning the Temple, an event or practice that occurred in the Temple, or some object or person directly associated with the Temple. Others have indirect connections. Many of the Psalms, for example, though also sung at home or in the synagogue or used as a "book of life" at any time and in any place during the Second Temple period,⁸ were originally designed or later adapted for use in (or in connection with) the Temple, and the words of the Psalms derived much of their power in local use or private meditation because they were deeply associated in the first instance with public worship.⁹ Thus it is noteworthy that several phrases in the Sermon on the Mount echo phrases from the Psalms that were particularly at home in the Temple. As Sigmund Mowinckel explains, "The title of the book of Psalms

⁸ Georg Braulik, "Psalms and Liturgy: Their Reception and Contextualization," *VE* 2 (2003): 309–32, quote on 325; Amos Hakham, *Psalms* (Jerusalem, 2003), pp. xvii–xviii.

⁹ George S. Gunn, *Singers of Israel: The Book of Psalms* (New York, 1963), p. 18.

in Hebrew is *Tēhillîm*, which means ‘cultic songs of praise.’ This tallies with the indications we have that the songs and music of the levitical singers belonged to the solemn religious festivals as well as to daily sacrifices in the Temple.”¹⁰ Mowinckel rejected the idea that the Psalms were created for synagogue worship, since “the synagogue is on the whole later than the period of biblical psalmody,”¹¹ and argued that the Psalms were an important part of temple worship, composed for and in that holy place:

There can hardly be any doubt that [the Psalms] contain some features showing that most of them were composed at the Temple of Jerusalem. . . . As we have seen, the psalmists time and time again speak of their internal and external relations with the Temple and its orderings and the service there. They are living in the Temple, they are thinking and expressing themselves in the notions of Temple and cult. Very often we are told about the Temple of Zion and the temple mountain, about the temple courts and the holy city, about the altar and about sacrifices. . . . The authors, moreover, even have their daily home in the sacred place. . . . Through good and evil times the longing of the psalmists is for the Temple. Again and again they disclose their knowledge of the cultic life that went on at the Temple, and not infrequently they allude directly to the different ritual functions taking place there.¹²

Although disagreeing with Mowinckel about the dating of the Psalms, Raymond Jacques Tournay agrees that the Psalms can only be properly understood in the context of the “liturgical celebrations, sacrifices, fasts, vigils, pilgrimages, etc., in Jerusalem,” for the “whole liturgy of the Jerusalem Temple [was] the setting for cultic theophanies” that were reflected extensively in the Psalms during the Second Temple period.¹³ Although the precise cultic context originally associated with each psalm remains debatable, there can be little doubt that most of the Psalms had cultic, liturgical or festival connections of some sort, and that they were sung (or easily could have been sung) in the Temple precinct, while entering the Temple, or turning toward it. Thus, “the Psalms were the hymns of the temple.”¹⁴

Even after the destruction of the Temple of Herod, the rabbis remembered (and sometimes argued over) specifically which psalms were sung on certain occasions in the Temple. For example, the Levites would usually chant the daily psalms

¹⁰ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (New York, 1962), vol. 1, p. 2.

¹¹ Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 1, p. 4.

¹² Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 2, pp. 89–90 (citations omitted).

¹³ Raymond Jacques Tournay, *Seeing and Hearing God with the Psalms: The Prophetic Liturgy of the Second Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield, 1991), pp. 27, 85.

¹⁴ Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven* (London, 1991), p. 45.

“while the drink-offering accompanying the daily sacrifices was being offered.”¹⁵ These daily psalms were thought to consciously revisit each of the seven days of the Creation: on the first day they sang “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalms 81:2); on the second day, “Great is the Lord and highly to be praised” (Psalms 98:2); on the third day, “God standeth in the congregation of God” (Psalms 82); on day four, “O Lord, thou God, to whom vengeance belongeth” (Psalms 94); on day five, “Sing aloud to the God of our strength” (Psalms 81); day six, “The Lord reigneth, He is clothed in majesty” (Psalms 93); and on the seventh day, “A song for the Sabbath day” (Psalms 92).¹⁶ On Rosh Hashanah, the rabbis remembered, they normally sang from Psalm 81 at the time of the additional morning sacrifice unless that feast fell on Thursday, while Psalm 29 accompanied the afternoon sacrifice.¹⁷ On the six intermediate days of the Feast of Tabernacles, when additional sacrifices were also offered, other psalms were used: Psalm 29 on day one; Psalm 50 on day two; Psalm 94:16–23 on day three; Psalm 94:8–15 on day four; Psalm 91 on day five; and Psalm 82 on day six.¹⁸ The fifteen psalms in Psalms 120–34 have been identified as songs that were possibly sung by pilgrims as they went up to the Temple and perhaps were related to the fifteen steps between the Court of the Women and Court of the Priests.¹⁹

For these reasons connecting the Psalms to the Temple, particular emphasis is given to words and phrases from the Psalms in the analyses below, and as the following will show, much has been and yet can be said about the use of material from the Psalms in the Sermon on the Mount. By going step by step through the Sermon on the Mount, many of its features are seen to have strong connections with the Temple, its orderings, and its functions. Jesus thinks and expresses himself in terms of the Temple and its generative powers.

Stage 1. Blessings Are Promised (5:3–12)

At the outset of the Sermon on the Mount, a series of blessings are promised to the people—blessings well known as the Beatitudes. As candidates for entrance into the celestial kingdom, the people are typified as humble, compassionate, and long-suffering peacemakers, who love righteousness, who will see God’s face, and who will be his eternal children. This initial segment at the entrance to the Sermon on the Mount consists of ten pronouncements:

¹⁵ TB, Rosh Hashanah 30b (Soncino), p. 144, n. 3.

¹⁶ TB, Rosh Hashanah 31a.

¹⁷ TB, Rosh Hashanah 30b.

¹⁸ TB, Sukkah 55a.

¹⁹ Loren D. Crow, *The Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120–134): Their Place in Israelite History and Religion* (Atlanta, 1996), pp. 18–24. See, further, the lengthy list of Psalms summarized in T. Worden, *The Psalms Are Christian Prayer* (New York, 1961), pp. 37–8, n. 25.

- (1) Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- (2) Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
- (3) Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
- (4) Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they shall be satisfied.
- (5) Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
- (6) Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
- (7) Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.
- (8) Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- (9) Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
- (10) Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets which were before you. (Matthew 5:3–12)

The number of the Beatitudes, whether seven, eight, or ten, has long been a matter of speculation and fascination.²⁰ The number seven would echo the days of the week and the frequent use of that number in the priestly temple texts of Leviticus. The number ten would in turn echo the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5, and the “ten words” in Exodus 34:9, but also with several other lists of holy tens in Jewish numerology, including ten trials of Abraham; ten plagues of Egypt; ten rebellions in the wilderness (Numbers 14:22); ten elders at the gate in Ruth 4:2; ten generations from Pharez to David (Ruth 4:18–22); ten days of penitence between New Year and the Day of Atonement; ten utterances of the divine name on the Day of Atonement; ten sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; ten powers in Romans 8:38–9; ten heavens in the Enoch literature; and ten degrees of holiness or *sefirot* in Jewish mysticism radiating from the Holy of Holies.²¹ Many dimensions in the Temple were ten cubits in length or height (Exodus 26:1; 1 Kings 6:23–5; 7:23–4), including the Holy of Holies, which was ten cubits by ten cubits by ten cubits (1 Kings 6:20), thus, as Philo said, embracing “the whole of Wisdom.”²² In the Talmud, God was said to have taken his leave from the Temple in ten stages: (1) from the ark-cover, (2) to the cherubim, (3) to the door out of the Holy of Holies, (4) to the door out of the great hall, (5) to the altar in the court of the priests, (6) to a corner on the Temple roof, (7) to the wall of the Temple precinct, (8) to the city of Jerusalem, (9) to the Mount of Olives east of

²⁰ Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 105–9.

²¹ For references, see John W. Welch, “Counting to Ten,” *JBMS* 12/2 (2003): pp. 40–57, esp. 42.

²² Philo, *Preliminary Studies*, 116.

the city, and finally (10) into the wilderness where he abode in his own place.²³ Presumably, God would retrace these ten steps when he returned to the Temple. For this reason, suggestions such as Delitzsch's that an echo of the Decalogue might be heard in the ten Beatitudes should not be discounted.²⁴ Associating the Sermon on the Mount with the Temple and its frequent attraction for things that occur a perfect number of ten times would add strength to Delitzsch's insight and other such possibilities.

The initial blessings extended in the Beatitudes identify and promise the ultimate benefits that the faithful will receive if they obey in righteousness the principles that Jesus is about to deliver to them. These benedictions are usually translated in the present tense, "blessed *are* the . . .," and to some extent these assurances have immediate currency; but the verb *are* is unexpressed in the Greek.²⁵ These assurances may just as well be translated, "blessed *will be* the . . .," coinciding with the future tenses in each of the *hoti* clauses in Matthew 5:4–9.

All of the first nine lines begin with the word *makarioi*, a word that already places the hearer in a temple frame of reference. On numerous occasions, the Psalms declare that the righteous are *makarioi*, beginning with the very first word in the Septuagint version of the Psalms: "Blessed (*makarios*) is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked" (Psalms 1:1). This word appears repeatedly throughout the Psalms: "Blessed are all who take refuge in [the Lord]" (Psalms 2:12); "blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit" (Psalms 32:1–2); "blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not turn to the proud" (Psalms 40:4); "blessed is he who considers the poor" (Psalms 41:1); "blessed are those who dwell in thy house" (Psalms 84:4); "blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times" (Psalms 106:3); "blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart" (Psalms 119:1–2); "blessed is every one who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways" (Psalms 128:1), to list only a few. The most common place where one would have heard and with which one would have associated the word *makarioi* would have been in the Psalms of the Temple. In several of the Psalms, this is the opening word.

Jesus promises his followers blessings in eight different respects. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven (1 and 8); they will inherit the earth (3), receive comfort (2) and

²³ TB, Rosh Hashanah 31a.

²⁴ Franz Julius Delitzsch, *Neue Untersuchungen über die Entstehung und Anlage der kanonischen Evangelien* (Leipzig, 1853), vol. 1, p. 76, cited in Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 109, where he points out that, though Delitzsch's idea may seem fanciful to some, "one must still explain why there are ten."

²⁵ Except in Matthew 5:11, "blessed are you when . . ." But even here, the sense of the promised blessing is in the future, "for your reward is [will be] great in heaven."

mercy (5); they will also be filled with the spirit (4),²⁶ see God (6), be called the sons of God (7), and have a great reward reserved for them in heaven (10). As will be discussed below, each of these blessings pertains to the realm of the Temple, which represented heaven on earth, and housed the mercy-seat, and was filled with the spirit of God. The Temple was where priests and prophets saw God,²⁷ surrounded by the heavenly train of the sons of God. The Temple, “a tabernacle for the sun” (Psalms 19:4), was the conveyer of God’s great rewards, for “in keeping [all of God’s laws, ordinances, statutes and judgments] there is great reward” (Psalms 19:11). These blessings have the effect of separating the sacred from the secular; they separate the followers of Jesus from the rest of the world and free them from the fear of death.²⁸ Such blessings—overcoming the shadow of death, fearing no evil, and finding comfort in the rod and staff of the Lord—were emphatically associated with the Temple, with one’s dwelling “in the house of the Lord for ever” (Psalms 23:6). These defining blessings, as Jonathan Draper points out, are also “linked to the blessings and curses of the Covenant,”²⁹ all of which were maintained and sustained by the ordinances and observances of the Temple.

The attitudes extolled in these beatifications are also related to the Temple. It was at the Temple that these expressions of piety and spirituality were most strongly pronounced, and thus many of the Psalms praise and exalt those who

²⁶ For the use of *chortasthēsontai* in describing the full spiritual satisfaction of awakening with the likeness of God, see Ps 17:15 (LXX).

²⁷ Discussed in connection with Matthew 5:8 below.

²⁸ Andrej Kodjak observes: “Those who are poor, who mourn, who are meek, who seek righteousness above all, who are merciful, pure in heart, and seek peace, as well as those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake—all have one thing in common: not conforming out of fear, they preserve their fearless attitude towards the dangers and threats of the temporal world. This common denominator separates such persons from the mass of humanity on a deeper level as well. . . . It is the fearlessness of death that all the blessed ones share that constitutes their bliss, their ability to realize the kingdom of heaven.” Andrej Kodjak, *A Structural Analysis of the Sermon on the Mount* (Berlin 1986), p. 52.

²⁹ Jonathan A. Draper, “The Genesis and Narrative Thrust of the Paraenesis in the Sermon on the Mount,” *JSNT* 75 (1999): 35. Draper addresses the Beatitudes as part of his analysis of the Sermon on the Mount’s literary structure. See pp. 25–48, 35–8. His discussion of the Beatitudes emphasizes the Sermon on the Mount’s theme of more perfect compliance with the principles of the Torah. Each blessing helps to demonstrate the attitude of a true follower. On page 35, he writes:

Jesus begins his teaching with a characterization of the leadership of his new community couched in terms of blessings. They serve the same rhetorical function as the traditional lists of virtues and vices, [fn omitted] although only a list of virtues is given here, unlike Luke’s parallel account which includes matching woes (probably because Matthew’s list is directed towards the four disciples and not everyone). That is, they serve to define the ethic of the community and to differentiate it from its opponents. In a Jewish community, the device is linked to the blessings and curses of the Covenant, though it is not identical.

come to the Temple with these spiritual feelings and thoughts in their hearts and minds. The devout are to cultivate these spiritual attributes throughout their lives, but especially when they enter the temple precinct and its holy courts. Each of the Beatitudes is most strongly understood in a temple context.

(1) “Blessed will be the poor (*ptōchoi*) in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven [or of the heavens] (*tōn ouranōn*)” (5:3). Who are “the poor” mentioned in the first beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount? More than just beatifying those who are involuntarily poor materially, as the Latin *pauperes* implies, the Greek *ptōchoi* evokes those who have willingly diminished themselves. This word is directly related to the noun *ptōsis*, meaning a fall or calamity, and to the verb *ptōssein*, which means to fall down, or to bow down timidly, and also to cringe or beseech like a beggar. Those who are poor in respect to the Spirit of God begin by recognizing their empty and fallen state, sometimes falling down prostrate before God, pleading for his gifts and blessings.

To be a destitute *ptōchos* is to be even poorer than a peasant or *penēs*. While both the totally impoverished pauper and the ordinary member of the peasant class typically have no significant property, at least they can work for their livelihood, whereas “*ptōchos* denotes the complete destitution which forces the poor to seek the help of others by begging.”³⁰ This condition vividly calls to mind the pleading of those entering the Temple begging for God’s blessings especially in times of dire calamities. Being empty, their greatest hope is to be filled.

The first and second beatitudes can thus be related to the tabernacle in Exodus 33. The reference to the “poor in spirit” and “those that mourn (*penthountes*)” in Matthew 5:3–4 is reminiscent of the Israelites entering the tent of the tabernacle humbly and in a mournful state (*katēpenthēsen*), voluntarily stripped of their ornaments and glorious apparel in Exodus 33:4–6. This practice dramatically symbolized repentance and mourning.³¹ The first beatitude, therefore, implicitly promises redemption from the fall and an ascent “from the earthly and lowly thoughts to the spiritual mountain of higher contemplation.”³²

This beatitude may also be related to Psalms 69:32–3, the Septuagint version of which clearly connects these “poor” with those who seek God in the Temple: “Let the impoverished (*ptōchoi*) see and rejoice; seek God, and find. For the Lord listens to the poor (*penētōn*) and sets not at naught those who are shackled.”³³ As Mowinckel states, “It is ‘the zeal of Yahweh’s house’ that has roused the worshipper of Ps. 69.”³⁴ More than referring to people who are economically poor, the Psalms in general and this Psalm in particular have in mind those who

³⁰ Ernst Bammel, “*ptōchos*,” in *TDNT*, vol. 6, p. 886.

³¹ R.E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford, 1965), p. 36.

³² Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 106, discussing a conception of the Beatitudes offered first by Gregory of Nyssa.

³³ The link between Psalm 69 and Matthew 5:3–4 is noted by Herman Hendrickx, *The Sermon on the Mount* (London, 1984), pp. 19–20.

³⁴ Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 2, p. 20.

approach God with a “broken and contrite heart” (Psalms 51:17). Accordingly, Robert Guelich, in discussing the religious meaning of “the poor,” observes that the “humble posture of *the poor* devoid of pretension before God reflects the religious dimension and comes out frequently in the Psalms.” In his discussion of Matthew 5:3, Guelich cites several verses from the Psalms which he argues reflect the type of “poverty” that is intended here in Matthew 5:3. Those texts include Psalms 10:8 (“his eyes look upon the poor [*ton penēta*]”); Psalms 14:6 (“ye have shamed the counsel of the poor [*ptōchou*]”); Psalms 22:24 (“he has not been angry at the supplication of the poor [*ptōchou*]”); Psalms 25:16 (“for I am an only child and poor [*ptōchos*]”), and so on in Psalms 34:6; 35:10; 37:14–15; 40:17; 69:29; 72:2, 4, 12; 86:1; 88:15.³⁵ In these psalms of humble piety, it is in the house of the Lord that one finds the strongest antecedent to the relatively odd concept in Matthew 5:2 of being “poor in spirit,” or in other words “beggars with respect to the spirit” (*hoi ptōchoi tōi pneumati*).³⁶ In the context of the Temple, the beggar comes into the house of God. There, the Lord blesses these prostrated, beseeching, poor through the ordinances, sacrifices, prayers, and instructions of the Temple. At this place, the kingdom of the heavens is theirs. There, they praise God and “speak of the glory of thy kingdom” and reveal “the glorious splendor of thy kingdom,” a kingdom “of all eternal beings (*pantōn tōn aiōnōn*)” whose “dominion endures throughout all generations” (Psalms 145:11–13).

(2) Who, then, is contemplated in the second beatitude? “Blessed will be those who mourn (*hoi penthountes*): for they shall be comforted (*paraklēthēsontai*)” (5:4). In the early parts of the Old Testament, mournful sorrow is often accompanied with “tears, lamentations, and rites, especially mourning for the dead,” but it also plays a role “in prophecies of disaster.”³⁷ Although *pentheō* can mean to be sad, to grieve, or to mourn in general, it clearly includes a more specific weeping and sorrow for sin. Bultmann comments, “One cannot fail to include penitent sorrow for sin in this *penthein*.”³⁸ The Hebrew counterpart, *’abhal*, likewise denotes outward lamentation for the dead but also, especially in the Second Temple period, mourning for sinners: “The latter idea is particularly prominent in later texts in connection with the concept of repentance and returning to God.”³⁹

Mourning and repentance for sin, especially for the breaking of the covenant by the nation, was strongly associated with the Temple. Most notably, Ezra “mourned (*epentheī*) because of the covenant-breaking (*epi tēi asunthesiai*) of the exile” (Ezra 10:6); he observed a three-day fast, after which he convened an assembly of

³⁵ Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount—A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, Texas, 1982), p. 68.

³⁶ The preposition “in,” being unexpressed in Greek, may be rendered in other ways.

³⁷ R. Bultmann, “*Penthos, pentheō*,” in *TDNT* vol. 6, p. 41–2; A. Baumann, “*’abhal*,” in *TDOT*, vol. 1, pp. 45–6.

³⁸ Bultmann, “*Penthos, pentheō*,” vol. 6, p. 43.

³⁹ Baumann, “*’abhal*,” vol. 1, p. 47.

all the men of Judah at the Temple where he took their confession, recommitment, and averted the wrath of God (Ezra 10:6–14). In general, those who came to the Temple sought, above all, forgiveness for sin. In remorse, they brought their sacrifices and went away with a feeling of expiation and reconciliation with God, not only for their own sins (Testament of Reuben 1:10) but also the sins of others (1 Esdras 8:69; 9:2; 2 Esdras 10:6). On the Day of Atonement, in particular, rituals at the Temple emphasized sorrowful penitence, afflicting one's soul, confession, sincere repentance, and divine forgiveness (see Leviticus 16:7–10, 29–31; 23:27–32; Numbers 15:27–31; Jubilees 34:17–18).

In Matthew 5:4, those who mourn are promised comfort. The word “comfort” (*paraklēsis*) includes the meanings of encouragement, exhortation, assurance, acceptance, and consolation; one who gives such comfort is a comforter (*paraklētos*), a helper, mediator, intercessor, advocate, or adviser. Those who “mourn” spiritually in a temple setting are promised that they shall be helped, encouraged, advised, and accepted; they shall have a mediator or intercessor covering their sins. They shall also enjoy unspeakable relief and joy in the House of the Lord: “When the cares of my heart are many, thy consolations (*hai paraklēseis sou*) cheer [love or comfort (*ēgapēsan*)] my soul” (Psalms 94:19). Above all, the Day of Atonement rituals performed by the High Priest brought about an exceptional time of “true joy.”⁴⁰ Joyous offerings now supplant the tears of sorrow: “May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy! He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves” (Psalms 126:5–6).⁴¹ The archetypal intercessor is, of course, the High Priest, which role anticipates the identification of Jesus as the Great High Priest in Hebrews 10; and the idea of being comforted that is present in Matthew 5:4 is a prelude to the comforter or advocate (*paraklētos*) in John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7 and 1 John 2:1. Whether this intercession occurs in the Temple or in heaven, it is conceptually the same, for the one is simply a counterpart of the other. Thus Bultmann was on the right track when he said that “the blessing of the *penthountes* in Mt. 5:4 is to be taken eschatologically.”⁴² The blessing of those who mourn will indeed take its full effect eschatologically in the heavenly kingdom, but it also is found in the blessings of the Temple, which represents and anticipates that celestial realm.

(3) Is there a connection between the Temple and the “meek” mentioned in the third beatitude? “Blessed will be the meek (*praeis*): for they shall inherit the earth (*klēronomēsousin tēn gēn*)” (5:5). In classical Greek, the word “meek”

⁴⁰ Moshe D. Herr, “Day of Atonement,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (2nd edn, Detroit 2007), vol. 5, p. 491, citing Philo.

⁴¹ Guelich draws this parallel but sees Psalm 126:5–6 as related more closely to the Lucan Beatitude (Luke 6:21—“blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh” than to the Matthean Beatitude. Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 80, 100, 116.

⁴² Bultmann, “*Penthos, pentheō*,” vol. 6, p. 43.

(*praüs*) means mild, soft, gentle, friendly, pleasant, quiet, or (of a horse) tame.⁴³ In Hellenistic Jewish thought and in the Septuagint, it takes on the meanings of being in the position of a servant, accepting hardships without objection, and (perhaps ironically) it becomes one of the ideal qualities of the righteous leader, especially having reference to Moses (Numbers 12:3).⁴⁴ As one of the key virtues that characterizes greatness of the soul, “meekness” is deeply rooted in patiently waiting on the Lord:

Triumphant waiting on God rather than the superior aloofness of the sage is the correlate of mild acceptance, Is. 26:6. OT *praütēs* is based on the eschatological hope (Ps. 76:9) that God will judge (147:6; 149:4) and give the land to the lowly, i.e., to those who wait (37:9). Ps. 37:9–11 connects with this the promises of the land which were originally given to Abraham and his descendants.⁴⁵

Thus, the blessing of the meek was a frequent theme of the psalms sung in the Temple: The direct source of the blessing in the third beatitude is Psalms 37:9, 11, 18, “They who keep waiting for the Lord, they shall inherit the land (*klēronomēsousin tēn gēn*). . . . The meek shall inherit the earth (*praieis klēronomēsousin gēn*) and shall delight in the fullness of peace, . . . and their inheritance shall be eternal.” Other hymns promise that when God stands “in his dwelling-place” on the “everlasting mountains” to judge the world, he will “save all the meek (*praieis*) in heart” (Psalms 76:2, 4, 9; see also 25:9; 34:2; 45:4; 90:10; 132:1). Their response will be to give thank-offerings, to hold a sacred feast in God’s honor, to make vows and pay for them in the Temple, and for all those in a circle around him (or his altar) to bring gifts to God (Psalms 76:10–11). Likewise, the words of Psalms 147 and 149, and others identified by Mowinckel as hymns of praise that were probably used in the Temple,⁴⁶ sing forth: “The Lord lifts up (i.e. to heaven, or takes back, or adopts, *analambanōn*) the meek (*praieis*), while he humbles the sinners to the earth (*heōs tēs gēs*)” (Psalms 147:6 LXX); “for the Lord is well pleased in his people, and he will exalt the meek (*praieis*) in salvation” (Psalms 149:4). The first of these temple-psalms recalls the names and numbers of the stars; it praises God for the clouds of heaven that bring rain to the grass of the earth and to the young ravens that call upon him (Psalms 147:4, 8–9), and the latter hymn appears to have been sung in the Temple while the sons of Zion shouted alleluia (compare Matthew 5:12), danced in chorus, and made music (Psalms 149:2). The meek and the poor, according to David Flusser, are the ones who will be “endowed with the supreme gift of divine bliss, with the Holy

⁴³ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Stuart Jones, *Greek English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1968).

⁴⁴ F. Hauck and S. Schulz, “*Praüs, praütēs*,” in *TDNT*, vol. 6, pp. 645–7.

⁴⁵ Hauck and Schulz, “*Praüs, praütēs*,” vol. 6, p. 648.

⁴⁶ Mowinckel, *Psalms*, pp. 81, 83.

Spirit.”⁴⁷ Through the Temple, these blessings are both present and future, and such realizations call for jubilation.

Accordingly, this promise extended to the disciples of Jesus is again related to the Temple. The realization of God’s promise is based on holy conduct, tamed submission to the will of the Lord, leading others with mildness and gentleness, accepting difficult tasks or eventualities, and patiently anticipating God’s fulfillment of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

(4) The fourth beatitude reads, “Blessed will be they who hunger and thirst for righteousness (*tēn dikaiosunēn*): for they shall be filled (*chortasthēsontai*)” (Matthew 5:6). Here again one finds a similar confluence of vocabulary in the Psalms: “But I shall appear in righteousness (*en dikaiosunēi ophthēsomai*) before thy face: I shall be filled (*chortasthēsomai*) in beholding thy glory” (Psalms 17:15 LXX). According to Mowinckel, this verse indicates that Psalm 17 was an oracle received at night in the Temple or some sanctuary.⁴⁸ Other parallels to the fourth beatitude can also be found in the Psalms: “The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live for ever!” (Psalms 22:26); “the Lord knows the ways of the perfect, and their inheritance shall be forever; they shall not be ashamed in an evil time, and in days of famine they shall be satisfied (*chortasthēsontai*)” (Psalms 37:18–19 LXX); “he satisfies (*echortase*) him who is thirsty [the empty soul, LXX], and the hungry he fills with good things” (Psalms 107:9). In Psalms 42:2, the worshipper “is looking back on all the times he used to lead the pageant up to the Temple of Yahweh”⁴⁹ and cries out: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” Likewise in Psalms 63:1, the singer whose “soul has thirsted for” God, seeks the Lord at the Temple.⁵⁰ In this connection, Guelich notes other expressions of being hungry in Psalms 107:36⁵¹ and of being filled or to “abundantly bless her provisions” in Psalms 132:15 and 146:7.⁵² In all of these cases, being filled or satiated epitomizes the overflowing fullness of joy and ecstasy of beholding the Lord in his holy Temple, together with which the Lord promises, “Her priests I will clothe (*endusō*) with salvation, and her saints will shout for joy” (Psalms 132:16).

(5) “Blessed will be the merciful (*hoi eleēmones*): for they shall obtain mercy (*eleēthēsontai*)” (5:7). Receiving mercy is one of the most common yearnings of the Psalmist as he contemplates and sings about the Temple. With little comment, Guelich readily offers several references to mercy in the Psalms in his discussion

⁴⁷ D. Flusser, “Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit,” *IEJ* 10/1 (1960): 6.

⁴⁸ Mowinckel, *Psalms*, p. 254.

⁴⁹ Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 2, p. 42.

⁵⁰ Mowinckel, *Psalms*, pp. 6, 226, vol. 2, p. 101. The connection between Psalms 63:1 and Matthew 5:6 has been pointed out by Hendrickx, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 6.

⁵¹ Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 83.

⁵² Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 88. Psalms 132:15 continues, “I will satisfy (*chortasō*) the poor (*ptōchous*) with bread.”

of this beatitude, including Psalms 86:15–16; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; 145:8.⁵³ It bears clearer articulation that one of the dominant qualities of the Temple was its role as the primary source of mercy: “But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy (*eleous*)” (Psalms 5:7). People came to the Temple hoping and praying for mercy. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever” (Psalms 23:6). The Temple has everything to do with obtaining mercy.

More precisely, the Temple was the spring of God’s waters of mercy because it was the enshrinement of the covenant between God and his people. Robert H. Mounce states: “Behind the Greek word is the rich Hebrew term *hesed*, ‘loving kindness’ . . . or ‘steadfast love.’ To be merciful means to maintain the fidelity of the covenant relationship. It is not a surge of emotion but intentional kindness.”⁵⁴ Thus he rightly characterizes the fifth beatitude of mercy in terms of a “covenant relationship,”⁵⁵ which relationship draws this promised blessing into the ambit of the beneficence normally associated with the Temple.

(6) One of the clearest connections between the Beatitudes and the Temple is found in the sixth beatitude: “Blessed will be the pure in heart (*hoi katharoi tēi kardiai*): for they shall see God (*autoi ton theon opsontai*)” (5:8). The most obvious and direct parallel to this beatitude is found in Psalm 24, which sets for the requirements for entry into the Temple. It reads, “Who shall ascend into the hill [the Temple] of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands, and a pure heart (*kathoros tēi kardiai*)” (Psalms 24:3–4). The words *clean* and *pure* have obvious temple connections. Although the word *katharos* populates the vocabulary of most Old Testament books, it appears saliently over one hundred times in the concluding chapters of Exodus and throughout Leviticus in connection with the Tabernacle and temple sacrifices or rituals. Guelich also connects the “pure in heart” of this beatitude to Psalms 11:2 and 32:11 (see also 73:1), both of which refer to the “upright in heart,”⁵⁶ a similar although not identical expression. Those who are pure in heart are more than upstanding and morally correct; they are cleansed from all uncleanness in the sense of ritual purification. The word *katharos* is a leading theme in both the law and the prophets and in the New Testament,⁵⁷ for without being purged of all uncleanness access to or association with that which is holy is precluded.

The promise that “they shall see God” also has unmistakable temple bearings.⁵⁸ Margaret Barker describes these words of Jesus as “his comment on the purity of the priesthood, those who claimed the right to enter the holy of holies and look

⁵³ Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 88.

⁵⁴ Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 88.

⁵⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew* (Peabody, Massachusetts, 1991), p. 40.

⁵⁶ Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 72.

⁵⁷ F. Hauck and Rudolf Meyer, “*Katharos*,” in *TDNT*, vol. 3, pp. 413–31.

⁵⁸ See, generally, Raymond Jacques Tournay, *Seeing and Hearing God with the Psalms: The Prophetic Liturgy of the Second Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield, 1991).

upon God.”⁵⁹ Psalm 24 continues, “Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob” (Psalms 24:6), and the words in Psalms 24:7–10 about “the king of glory coming in should probably be understood as referring to God’s arrival in the temple.”⁶⁰ Seeking and seeing the face of God was an experience connected with the tabernacle or Temple on several occasions. For example, Psalms 63:2 makes a cultic reference to seeing God: “So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary, beholding thy power and glory.”⁶¹ Yet again, “As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness” (Psalms 17:15). Of this verse in the Psalms and citing Matthew 5:8, James Luther Mays writes, “Communion occurs in the experience of the presence. . . . The vision will convey justification; it will be a sign of the acceptance that makes the relation to God right.”⁶² The famous Priestly Blessing extended to the righteous the prospect that the Lord would “lift up his countenance upon” them (Numbers 6:26), that they would see his face. Strack and Billerbeck state that in the rabbinic literature, “one speaks of ‘seeing God’ in a dominant and literal sense; . . . one encounters the Shekhinah, when one arrives there, where God dwells in his mercy-presence in the Temple, in the synagogue, or in the house of instruction.”⁶³

These parallels with Psalm 24 and these other factors have rightly led some commentators to see all of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 as the “entrance requirements” for the Kingdom⁶⁴ and as what Georg Strecker calls “the conditions that must be fulfilled in order to gain entrance to the holy of holies.”⁶⁵ If Jesus is alluding here to those who are worthy to enter the Temple and there may see God, then, as Betz states, “In terms of the history of religions, the concept implies critical reflection about purity and related rituals.”⁶⁶ Strecker hastens to qualify his point, however, with the assertion that Jesus “teaches not cultic but eschatological virtues. They refer to entrance not into the earthly temple but into the kingdom of

⁵⁹ Margaret Barker, *Temple Themes in Christian Worship* (London, 2007), p. 56, see also pp. 147, 154–60.

⁶⁰ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2005), p. 204.

⁶¹ Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 91, 105.

⁶² James Luther Mays, *Psalms* (Louisville, 1994), p. 89.

⁶³ Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich, 1922), vol. 1, p. 206.

⁶⁴ Hans Windisch, *The Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount*, trans. S. MacLean Gilmour (Philadelphia, 1951), pp. 26–7, 87–8. Robert A. Guelich, “The Matthean Beatitudes: ‘Entrance Requirements’ or Eschatological Blessings?” *JBL* 95 (1976): 415–34, argues that both factors are present in the Beatitudes, which presuppose the creation of a new relationship between man and God, implicit to which is an eschatological dimension, especially in connection with Isaiah 61. See also Mays, *Psalms*, pp. 19–20, 119–24.

⁶⁵ Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary*, trans. O.C. Dean Jr (Nashville, 1988), p. 33.

⁶⁶ Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 134.

God,”⁶⁷ but even Strecker’s qualified assessment should not be read too narrowly. The cultic and the eschatological go hand in hand: To discard the efficacy and the present significance of the Temple in earliest Christianity ignores the fact that all aspects of the old were not destroyed, but they simply were fulfilled and became new in Christ.

Entering into temples was connected quite ubiquitously with looking forward to entering God’s presence in the hereafter, having been prepared to see God by the ordinances and accouterments of the Temple. In this regard, the evidence of several Greek Orphic gold leaves is instructive. As Betz points out, following Zuntz,

The inscriptions on the gold leaves contain quotations of brief sentences, among them a beatitude . . . : “Happy and blessed are you, you will be god instead of human.”

One can reach some conclusions about the purpose of these gold leaves and their inscriptions. They were apparently placed into the tombs of deceased mystery-cult initiates, put in the initiates’ hand or near their ears. The inscriptions provide the deceased with the decisive formulae that as initiates they have to know as passwords on their way to the Elysian Fields. These formulae were, one may suppose, revealed to the initiate during an initiation ceremony, and they contain the essential message of salvation that the cult conveys. . . . For the initiate these statements contain indispensable knowledge. . . . They identify their bearer as a beneficiary of the mysteries.⁶⁸

This inscription points to deification (“you will be god instead of human”), and in a similar fashion, all of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 point out attributes of divinity. In this context, David Daube sees an affinity between the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount and those in the following rabbinic hymn from the Gaonic era (sixth to tenth centuries CE) with its ten makarisms:

Blessed be he who spake and the world existed, blessed be he.
 Blessed be he who was the maker of the world in the beginning.
 Blessed be he who speaketh and doeth.
 Blessed be he who decreeth and performeth.
 Blessed be he who hath mercy upon the earth.
 Blessed be he who hath mercy upon his creatures.
 Blessed be he who payeth a good reward to them that fear him.
 Blessed be he who liveth for ever and endureth to eternity.
 Blessed be he who redeemeth and delivereth, blessed be his name.
 Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe. . . .⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Strecker, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 33.

⁶⁸ Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 95–6.

⁶⁹ David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London, 1956), p. 198.

Through the inculcation of the heavenly virtues set forth in these beatitudes, traits of divinity are established. Adherents must first approach the throne of God, passing the tests of the Beatitudes, after which they may see and become like God (compare 1 John 3:2).

(7) In an important temple sense, the Beatitudes culminate in the seventh: “Blessed will be the peacemakers (*eirēnopoioi*), for they shall be called the sons of God (*huioi theou*)” (5:9). No word is richer in the biblical vocabulary than peace, both *shālom* and *shālēm* in the Old Testament and *eirēnē* in the New. In its basic sense, the biblical concept of peace includes making peace between two warring parties (Joshua 10:1, 4), but the word has a “broad range of meanings,”⁷⁰ and as von Rad concisely summarizes, “seldom do we find in the OT a word which to the same degree as *shālēm* can bear a common use and yet can also be filled with a concentrated religious content far above the level of the average conception,” and the “religious use must not be regarded as a deduction or a later development. . . . It is more likely that an original religious significance was to some extent lost in the course of time than the reverse.”⁷¹ Among the religious meanings of the words *shālom*, *shālēm* or *eirēnē* are friendliness, submission, safety, well-being, “the right order of the world,” “wholeness,” settlement or “restitution,” payment of a vow, the gift of God, the eschatological “eternal peace,” “the portion of the righteous,” “love,” the “salvation of the whole man,” “peace with God,” and “peace with all men.”⁷² In the Psalms, above all, “*shālom*” is “the quintessence of blessing (Psalms 147:14)” and constitutes “in the most comprehensive sense the epitome of the successful, undisturbed, and salvific effectiveness.”⁷³ More than anything else, the petitions of the Psalms offered in the Temple and reinforced especially in the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah seek to acquire all that comes from this dynamic, divinely interrelational condition of peace.

The question then becomes, in what sense (or senses) does Jesus promise a blessing to those who are peacemakers (*eirēnopoioi*)? What meanings and associations might the word *peacemaker* have brought to mind? Betz is certainly correct: “It is evident that the SM deals with acts of peacemaking at several levels,” including “in the context of family and friendship ethics,” perhaps drawing upon “the language of ruler-cult notions” (where the term *eirēnopoios* appears as an honorific title) or also “in imitation of God,” he being “the principal peacemaker.”⁷⁴ But it is also possible that the term encompasses those who make peace, not only in imitation of God, but also between God and his wayward people, especially in a temple context. In addition, the idea of peacemaking in Matthew

⁷⁰ F.J. Stendebach, “*shālom*,” in *TDOT*, vol. 15, p. 15.

⁷¹ Gerhard von Rad, “*eirēnē*,” in *TDNT*, vol. 2, pp. 402–3.

⁷² Stendebach, “*shālom*,” vol. 15, p. 40; Illman, “*shālēm*,” in *TDOT*, vol. 15, pp. 97, 99, 101, and Gerhard von Rad and Werner Foerster, “*eirēnē*,” in *TDNT*, vol. 2, pp. 403, 405, 409, 412, 415, 416.

⁷³ Stendebach, “*shālom*,” vol. 15, pp. 40–1.

⁷⁴ Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 138.

5:9 may also be grounded in the rabbinic expression of “making or accomplishing peace” (*‘āsha shālēm*), referring to “those who disinterestedly come between two contending parties and try to make peace,” as Werner Foerster concludes.⁷⁵ The peacemakers of Matthew 5:9 may just as well be those who proclaim peace by serving as intercessors of reconciliation between God and man, as between man and man. Thus several meanings of peacemaking can be understood in the seventh beatitude.

Strength is added to this temple-connected interpretation by the wording of the promised blessing: “They will be called sons of God.” This language employs a powerful term that has a rich history in Jewish literature and also is used to describe the relationship between the Father in Heaven and his children that is affirmed throughout the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:9, 45; 6:9; 7:9–11). This sonship language adopts the language of the divine council of heavenly beings whose train filled the Holy of Holies in the Temple; it also echoes the language of kingship, adoption, deification, or apotheosis of the Psalms; and it reinstates the language of covenant-making that looks back to the covenant-making in Sinai, as the following instances demonstrate.

The phrase “sons of God” immediately casts the mind back to the time when “the sons of God sang together as they witnessed the creation.”⁷⁶ On that day, “the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord” (Job 1:6; 2:1), and “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). According to an old biblical account of the creation, at this time the Most High divided up all the nations and set their boundaries “according to the number of the sons of God” (Deuteronomy 32:8).⁷⁷ Enveloping this early tradition, the liturgy of the Temple apparently had certain people stand in the “hidden place, or ‘in the beginning,’ both descriptions of the holy of holies/Day One. [There] they learn[ed] about the angels, known as the sons of God.”⁷⁸ Wisdom, the Four-fold Living One, “was the Mother of the sons of God, the angelic powers.”⁷⁹

Sonship language was also employed in the psalms of kingship. Best known is the declaration of royal adoption: “I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill. . . . You are my son, today I have begotten you” (Psalms 2:6–7). Enoch too was transformed into the great angel Metatron, with this same affirmation from Psalm 2, a tradition which Barker, following Idel, says “may even be as old as it claims

⁷⁵ Foerster, “*eirēnē*,” vol. 2, p. 419.

⁷⁶ Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest* (London, 2003), p. 264.

⁷⁷ Barker, *Great High Priest*, pp. 278, 302. The textual evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls in 4QDeut^l = Deut 32:8 LXX confirms that this text should be read “according to the number of the sons of God,” not as the “angels of God” as in the MT; see “sons” also in 4QDeut^a = Deut 32:43 LXX, unlike “servants” MT. See Immanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, 1992), p. 269 on Deut. 32:8, and p. 365 on Ps. 29:1 and 89:7.

⁷⁸ Barker, *Great High Priest*, p. 164.

⁷⁹ Barker, *Great High Priest*, p. 267.

to be, and have its roots in the temple.”⁸⁰ Likewise, the Psalms celebrate the time when the Lord declared, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your descendants for ever,” asking if anyone can doubt or challenge this promise, for the Lord is “a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and terrible above all that are round about him” (Psalms 89:3–4, 7).

Just as it was the case that a covenant created the relationship of sonship between God and his king, God’s covenant with Israel resulted in them all becoming his sons and daughters as well. The term “son” (*ben* or *bar*) is often used in the Old Testament and in the intertestamental literature “far more often” to describe the relationship between God and his people than to denote his relation to the king.⁸¹ As Betz observes, the promise of becoming sons of God “was first made by God to Israel,”⁸² as is evident from Deuteronomy 14:1, “You are the sons of the Lord your God (*huioi este kuriou tou theou*)”; from Deuteronomy 32:19, “The Lord saw it, and spurned them, because of the provocation of his sons and his daughters”; Isaiah 43:6, “bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth”; and Isaiah 45:11, “Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: Will you question me about my children?” This covenant relationship is clearly reflected in the book of Jubilees: “And they will not obey until they acknowledge their sin and the sins of their fathers. But after this they will return to me in all uprightness and with all of (their) heart and soul. And I shall cut off the foreskin of their heart and the foreskin of the heart of their descendants. And I shall create for them a holy spirit, and I shall purify them so that they will not turn away from following me from that day and forever. And they will do my commandments. And I will be a father to them, and they will be sons to me. And they will all be called ‘sons of the living God.’ And every angel and spirit will know and acknowledge them” (Jubilees 1:22–5).⁸³

That divine sonship relationship depended for its existence on the covenant of peace, the “everlasting covenant (*berit*),” maintained in the ancient Temple of Jerusalem. In Isaiah 54:10, “Yahweh declares that his steadfast love (*hesed*) will not depart from Israel and that the *berit* of his *shālom* will not be removed.”⁸⁴ As Margaret Barker explains, this covenant of peace will not be removed because of its sustenance in the Holy of Holies:

⁸⁰ Barker, *Great High Priest*, p. 112.

⁸¹ Eduard Schweizer, “*huioi*,” in *TDNT*, vol. 8, pp. 347, 351, 359. For the notion of Israel being sons of God, see Ben Sirach 36:11–12; Pseudo-Philo 32:10; Test. Judah 24:3; Test. Isaac 1:2; Test. Levi 4:2.

⁸² Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 141, citing Deuteronomy 14:1; 32:5, 19; Isaiah 43:6; 45:11; Hosea 2:1.

⁸³ James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols, New York, 1983–85), vol. 2, p. 54.

⁸⁴ Stendebach, “*shālom*,” vol. 15, p. 34. For “covenant of peace,” see also Numbers 25:12; Ezekiel 34:25; 37:26.

The Hebrew dictionary offers two meanings for the consonants translated “everlasting”; it can be either [1] ancient, perpetual, the remote future and eternity, or it can be [2] hidden, secret. In fact these should not be distinguished as two meanings, because in the world of the temple the hidden, secret place was the eternal state outside time, and so this everlasting covenant would have been connected to the holy of holies. This explains why the everlasting covenant was also described as the ‘covenant of peace,’ *šalom*, another word associated with the state beyond the veil.⁸⁵

Barker explains further that “the covenant of peace was therefore linked exclusively to the high priesthood, and entailed making atonement to repair any breach in the covenant which exposed the people to danger.”⁸⁶ In performing and announcing such covenant renewals, in establishing and proclaiming peace, the feet of God’s messengers become beautiful upon the holy mountains (Isaiah 52:7). It was these sons of God who were “to restore the original covenant, thus producing the paradisiacal state of the earth, which was represented by the holy of holies.”⁸⁷

Thus the seventh beatitude includes the promise that “peacemakers,” who can be understood as including those who make and maintain the covenant of peace with God, will truly be the sons of God. For Christians, that covenant of peace was effectuated through the sacrifice of the atoning blood of the new High Priest, Jesus Christ:

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; and having made peace (*eirēnopoīēsas*) through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself . . . things in earth or things in heaven, and you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled, in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight (*katenōpion autou*). (Colossians 1:19–22)

Christian disciples accepted that covenant by manifesting their faith: “for you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26). Brought along in this path, they become sons of God: “All who are led [guided, brought along] by [or to] the Spirit of God (*pneumati theou agontai*) are sons of God, . . . [and] have received the spirit of sonship (*pneuma huiōthesias*), in which we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Romans 8:14–15).

While this sonship may be fully “actualised only eschatologically,”⁸⁸ the conduct necessary to make that ultimate blessing possible begins in this life, with an eye toward the world to come. Thus, even in the here and now, the Psalmist can pronounce in temple environs, “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you” (Psalms 82:6). And while “the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of

⁸⁵ Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London, 2004), p. 34.

⁸⁶ Barker, *Temple Theology*, p. 35.

⁸⁷ Barker, *Temple Theology*, p. 48.

⁸⁸ Schweizer, “*huios*,” vol. 8, p. 390; Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 141.

God” (Romans 8:19), in the 40-day literature the resurrected Jesus as High Priest can already reveal to twelve men and seven women “the relationship between the Lord of the universe and the heavenly beings known as the sons of God.”⁸⁹ This sacred status of divine sonship, which was reserved in earlier temple eras for the king alone (Psalms 2:7), is now transcendently extended by Jesus to his faithful.

With the seventh beatitude, the Sermon on the Mount completes a full cycle of qualifications bringing the disciple into the presence of God and into divine status. Seeing the Beatitudes “as stages in the ascent of the soul,” Augustine explained, “Seven in number, then, are the things which bring perfection; and the eighth illuminates and points out what is perfect, so that through these steps others might also be made perfect, starting once more, so to speak, from the beginning.”⁹⁰ Friendly amendments to Augustine’s insightful commentary would point out, first, that the ascent of the soul in Isaiah 6 and in Jewish literature generally is closely associated with the ritual cycles of the Temple; and second, that the eighth beatitude can be easily combined with the ninth and tenth to accommodate both the priestly number seven and the wisdom number ten.

As the last three beatitudes are closely linked together, they are best considered as an ensemble. In these final three of the ten statements, the focus shifts from the previous emphasis on individual righteousness to the proper response of the initiate to the social problems and persecutions that are sure to follow in the wake of the transformation that the Sermon on the Mount will both require and make possible:

(8) “Blessed are those who are persecuted (*diōxōsin*) for righteousness’ sake (*heneken dikaiosunēs*), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (5:10).

(9) “Blessed are you when men shall revile you (*oneidisōsin*) and shall persecute you and shall utter all manner of evil (*pan ponēron*) against you [falsely], because of me (*heneken emou*)” (5:11).

(10) “Rejoice and be glad (*chairete kai agalliashte*), for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets which were before you” (5:12).

At this juncture in the Sermon on the Mount, after hearing these three pronouncements, the disciple would clearly understand that suffering persecution is an essential part of the life of righteousness.⁹¹ Are there connections between persecution and temple imagery?

At one level, the Psalms frequently express prayers of the righteous hoping to be rescued from those who pursue or persecute them. For example, “Save me from all them that persecute (*tōn diōkontōn*) me” (Psalms 7:1 LXX); “deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors!” (Psalms 31:15). “Stop the way against them that persecute me: say to my soul, ‘I am thy salvation’” (Psalms 35:3 LXX; see also 69:4). In the Temple, which also served as a place of refuge, the

⁸⁹ Barker, *Great High Priest*, p. 22, citing *Wisdom of Jesus Christ*, pp. 98–100.

⁹⁰ Augustine, *De serm. dom. in monte* 1.3.10, quoted in Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 107.

⁹¹ Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 142–6.

righteous sought to find deliverance from their persecutors and pursuers. Thus, when the Sermon on the Mount promises the blessings of heaven to the righteous who are persecuted, even if that blessing is to be deferred until the time of reward in the kingdom of heaven, it fills the vindicating role traditionally served by the Temple.

Furthermore, it would not have been uncommon for a Jewish person to expect to be persecuted if he had received some higher level of instruction or had attained a higher status than ordinary people. In the Wisdom of Solomon, the godless are said to lie in wait to test and torture the righteous man because “he professes to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a child of the Lord, . . . and boasts that God is his father” (Wisdom of Solomon 2:13, 16). First and foremost, the cause of persecution is the claim to have received some esoteric or special knowledge about God. Such knowledge and filial relationship would have come, at least to some significant degree, from the rituals and liturgies of the Temple. Thus, after hearing the language of the first seven beatitudes, all disciples would already have understood that the teachings revealed, the demands imposed, and the relationships created by the Sermon on the Mount would set them apart from the rest of society and would set them up for inevitable persecution.

At yet a deeper level, the disciples are told that this persecution will not be because of their own righteousness, but “because of me” (Matthew 5:11). The meaning of “for righteousness’ sake” must have less to do with the disciple’s righteousness than, in some way, “because of the Righteous One.”⁹² Indeed, the parallel beatitude in Luke explicitly traces the source of persecution to one’s connection with the Son of man: “Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you (*aphorisōsin*) and revile you, and cast out your name as evil (*ponēron*), on account of (*heneka*) the Son of man!” (Luke 6:22). Similarly, the Servant of the Lord is “described as the Righteous One, *sadiq*,” in Isaiah 53:11.⁹³ Thus the burdens to be borne must have something to do with the disciple’s identification with Jesus as the Lord. While “no attempt is made [in the Sermon on the Mount] to connect the theme [of persecution] with the life and death of Jesus,”⁹⁴ the connection between Jesus and his disciples will spawn hatred and extreme rejection. Accordingly, the relationship between Jesus and the disciple is not a casual one, not even one of master-teacher. The relationship entails complete ownership and identification, which is the kind of relationship created by the Covenant and maintained in the Temple.

⁹² Samuel T. Lachs argues that the word *saddiq* (righteous one) was in the original form of Matthew 5:10 but that it was wrongly understood as *zedeq* (righteousness), in “Some Textual Observations on the Sermon on the Mount,” *JQR* 69/2 (1978): 101–2; Strecker, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 42.

⁹³ Margaret Barker, *The Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God* (London, 2007), p. 49.

⁹⁴ Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 145.

The nature of the persecution also indicates more than mere social rejection or economic ostracism. Luke 6:22 preserves the formula that these confederates of Jesus would be “excluded” (*aphorisōsin*). This term is predominantly associated with cultic separations: declaring something literally out of bounds, “dividing out of the unclean or unholy,” or being cast out from the community (Numbers 12:14–15; 2 Esdras 10:8).⁹⁵ Thus, the expectation is that the Christian will be excommunicated, not allowed to enter the assembly or Temple. Identifying with Jesus will have cultic ramifications. Such confederates or unrighteous ones are to be cast out (*katebales*, Psalms 72:18; 105:26; 139:10); their names will no longer be numbered in the book of life (Psalms 69:28; 109:13).

Beyond simple exclusion, curses will be inveighed against those who have bound themselves to Jesus. People will pronounce every kind of evil (*pan ponēron*) upon them (Matthew 5:11). To be certain, one must fight fire with fire. Evil enemy spirits must be defeated by ritually calling upon stronger powers, and so the Sermon on the Mount fully expects that Christians will be reviled (*oneidisōsin*), insulted, blasphemed, and cursed by some (compare Exodus 22:28). Only a greater spiritual power can withstand these assaults, and that power must be derived through channels that are connected to an even more potent source of strength.

If these curses and persecutions are falsely and unjustly based (Psalms 119:86, 161), the Lord will bestow a great reward in heaven, “for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.” Wisdom of Solomon continues that on the final judgment day,

the righteous man will stand with great confidence in the presence of those who have afflicted him, . . . When they see him, they will be shaken with dreadful fear, and they will be amazed at his unexpected salvation, . . . and in anguish of spirit they will groan, and say, ‘This is the man whom we once held in derision and made a byword of reproach—we fools! . . . Why has he been numbered among the sons of God? And why is his lot among the saints? (Wisdom of Solomon 5:1–7)

Anticipating that future day of total vindication, the present response of this band of righteous followers seems to bespeak the Temple. Rejoicing is doubly characteristic of the experience in the Temple: “Be glad (*euphanthēte*) in the Lord, and rejoice (*agalliasthe*), O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!” (Psalms 32:11). The “double call [rejoice, *chairete*, and be exceeding glad, *agalliasthe* (Matthew 5:12)] appeals to the hearers or readers for what amounts to a liturgical response, much like ‘hallelujah’ or similar exclamations.”⁹⁶ The verb *agalliaomai*, whose use in the Old Testament is obviously temple-related, appears almost exclusively in the Psalms (fifty-three times) and in Isaiah (eleven times). “Let all that trust on thee be glad in thee: they shall exult for ever (*agalliasontai*)” (Psalms 5:11 LXX); “I will be glad and exult in thee: I will sing to thy name, O

⁹⁵ K.L. Schmidt, “*aphorizō*,” in *TDNT*, vol. 5, p. 455.

⁹⁶ Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 151.

thou Most High” (Psalms 9:2). This has to do with “cultic joy which celebrates and extols the help and acts of God,” including ecstatic and festal expressions.⁹⁷ The appropriate response to the nine preceding makarisms is this jubilant antiphony of the hearers themselves.

One further temple connection in this ensemble of beatitudes is found at the conclusion of Matthew 5:12, which calls to mind a time when people had rejected and persecuted the prophets who had gone before. This could well refer to the time, shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, when the Chronicler reports the infamous disaster when the Temple was polluted by sins of the priests who refused to heed God’s warnings and “kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets” (2 Chronicles 36:16). If this allusion in Matthew 5:12 was consciously given and received, the hearer would clearly have understood that, just as the Temple of Solomon had been destroyed because its priests had rejected the warnings of the prophets, so the Temple of Herod would be destroyed because its operators would scorn, curse, and reject the prophetic warnings of Jesus (compare Matthew 24:2; Mark 13:2).

Thus, hearing the blessings of the Beatitudes in a ritual or temple context is more than natural. The trajectory of this reading is confirmed by other passages that are similar in form to the Beatitudes and found in several apocryphal, pseudepigraphic, and Greek religious texts,⁹⁸ in which this term had clear cultic usages, as well as eschatological and apocalyptic significance. For example, lines 480–87 in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* read: “Blessed (*olbios*) is the mortal on earth who has seen these rites, but the uninitiated who has no share in them never has the same lot once dead in the dreary darkness. . . . Highly blessed (*meg olbios*) is the mortal on earth whom they [Demeter and Zeus] graciously favor with love.”⁹⁹

In 2 *Enoch* 42, one reads of an ascent into “the paradise of Edem [*sic*],” where a divine figure appears before Adam and his righteous posterity and rewards them with eternal light and life. Among the nine beatitudes he speaks to them are these:

⁹⁷ R. Bultmann, “*agalliaomai*,” in *TDNT*, vol. 1, pp. 19–20.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Sophocles frg. 753, “How thrice blessed are they of men who, when they have seen these rites, go to Hades; for to these alone is it given to live, and only misery to the rest,” *Tradicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (ed. A. Nauck, 1889), in H. Preisker, “*misthos*,” in *TDNT*, vol. 4, pp. 704–5. See also 4 *Ezra* 8:46–54; Pindar, frg. 131a; Sophocles, frg. 837; Euripides, *Bacchae*, pp. 72–7; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985), p. 289; Gustav L. Dirichlet, *De veterum macarismis* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1914), pp. 62–4; these and other references offered by Todd Compton, review of John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount*, in *FARMS Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): p. 322, n. 2.

⁹⁹ Helen P. Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 26–7.

Happy is the person who reverences the name of the Lord; . . . Happy is he who carries out righteous judgment; . . . Happy is he who clothes the naked with his garment, and to the hungry gives his bread; . . . Happy is he in whom is the truth, so that he may speak the truth to his neighbor; . . . Happy is he who has compassion on his lips and gentleness in his heart; Happy is he who understands all the works of the Lord, performed by the Lord.¹⁰⁰

This connection with the Temple becomes explicit in *2 Enoch* 51–3, where one is further taught that “it is good to go to the Lord’s temple” three times a day to praise God by speaking a matched list of seven blessings and curses, including: “Happy is the person who opens his lips for praise of the God of Sabaoth; . . . cursed is every person who opens his heart for insulting, and insults the poor and slanders his neighbor, because that person slanders God; . . . Happy—who cultivates the love of peace; cursed—who disturbs those who are peaceful. . . . All these things [will be weighed] in the balances and exposed in the books on the great judgment day.”¹⁰¹

In the ancient sources of this genre, the word *makarios* “designates a state of being that pertains to the gods and can be awarded to humans *post mortem*. Thus in Hellenistic Egyptian religion, the term plays an important role in the cult of Osiris, in which it refers to a deceased person who has been before the court of the gods of the netherworld, who has declared there his innocence, and who has been approved to enter the paradise of Osiris, even to become an Osiris himself.”¹⁰²

Because these and other similar texts were regularly used in ancient cultic ceremonies, Betz sees an important parallel between the Beatitudes and the initiation rituals of ancient mystery religions, for both “impart to their adherents, in initiations of the most various kinds, the secrets of the world beyond and their own lot at present.”¹⁰³ In other words, through the blessings of the Beatitudes toward the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, the listeners would hear an overture of the heights to which they may rise—the kingdoms and qualities they might obtain—if they remain true and faithful.

¹⁰⁰ Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, p. 168.

¹⁰¹ Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, pp. 178–81.

¹⁰² Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 93.

¹⁰³ Hans Deiter Betz, *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount*, trans. Laurence Welborn (Philadelphia, 1985), p. 30; see pp. 26–33. Betz further relates that “the second line of the macarism in Matt. 5:3 is, therefore, to be regarded as an eschatological verdict reached on the basis of knowledge about the fate of humankind in the afterlife. There is thus a remarkable parallel within the phenomenology of religion between the ancient Greek mysteries of Demeter and other mysteries, and Jewish apocalyptic. . . . It is for this reason that the verdict awaited at the last judgment, both in the mysteries and in Jewish apocalyptic, can already be rendered in the earthly present” (p. 30). See further, Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 330–35.