

February 13-19, 2023

Matthew 6–7

“HE TAUGHT THEM AS ONE HAVING AUTHORITY”

Summary: *Matthew 6. Jesus continues the Sermon on the Mount—He teaches the disciples the Lord’s Prayer—They are commanded to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.*

Matthew 7. Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount—He commands, Judge not; ask of God; beware of false prophets—He promises salvation to those who do the will of the Father.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

traditions in giving charity, alms, and making offerings to assist the less fortunate. Philanthropy is a basic part of Biblical life, and hence, a religious life. To devout Jews, Biblical life means a Jewish life. “The obligation to help the poor and the needy and to give them gifts is stated many times in the Bible and was considered by the rabbis of all ages to be one of the leading *mitzvot* (commandments and blessings) of Judaism.” “In the Bible there are several laws which are in effect a sort of tax for the benefit of the poor. Among these are *leket*, (gleaning or gathering), *shikhhah* (presence), and *pe’ah*, (order of Seeds) according to which the farmer could not pick up the ears of corn that had fallen during the harvest or go back for forgotten sheaves or reap into the corners of the field. All these he was required to leave for the poor. Every third year the farmer was also required to put aside a special tithe for the needy. The institution of the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee was in order “that the poor of your people may eat” as well as to cancel debts. The Torah also insists that the needy be remembered when the festivals are celebrated, e.g., “You shall rejoice before the Lord your God, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite in your

How biblical is “giving?”

Judaism reflects a great history of instructions and

communities, and the stranger, the fatherless and the widow in your midst.” **(Deuteronomy 14:29)** The Bible expects Israel to be aware of the needs of the poor and the stranger because Israel itself had experienced this situation in Egypt.” **(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)**

How do other Hebrew words give me more understanding for charity?

“Although the idea of charity and almsgiving is spread throughout the whole of the Bible, there is no special term for it. The rabbis of the Talmud, however, adopted the word (*zedakah*) for charity and it is used (but not exclusively so) throughout rabbinic literature in the sense of helping the needy by gifts. The word has since passed into popular usage and is almost exclusively used for charity. The term *hesed* (“loving-kindness”), which is used widely in the Bible, has taken on the meaning of physical aid, or lending money without interest.” “Everybody is obliged to give charity; even one who himself is dependent on charity should give to those less fortunate than himself. The court can compel one who refuses to give charity --- or donates less than his means allow -- to give according to the court's assessment.” “To give a tenth of one's wealth to charity is considered to be a “middling” virtue, to give a 20th or less is to be “mean”; but the rabbis decided that one should not give more than a fifth lest he become impoverished himself and dependent on charity.” **(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)**

In what manner do I dispense alms?

“The rabbis were especially concerned about the manner in which alms are to be dispensed. The prime consideration is that nothing be done that might shame the recipient. About one pious man it was related that if he met a man of good family who had become impoverished he would say, “I have heard that a legacy has been left to you in such a place; take this money in advance and pay me back later.” “When the man accepted it he then said to him, “It is a gift.” “Maimonides (1138-1204) lists eight ways of giving zedakah which are progressively more virtuous: to give: (1) but sadly; (2) less than is fitting, but in good humor; (3) only after having been asked to; (4) before being asked; (5) in such a manner that the donor does not know who the recipient is, (6) in such a manner that the recipient does not know who the donor is; and (7) in such a way that neither the donor nor the recipient knows the identity of the other.” “The highest form of charity is not to give alms but to help the poor to rehabilitate themselves by lending them money, taking them into partnership, employing them, or giving them work, for in this way the purpose is achieved without any loss of self-respect at all.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How is charity like giving out kindness?

“This last way of helping the poor is known as *gemilut hasadim*, “dispensing kindness.” This term also includes aiding people who need help and encouragement and includes such matters as visiting the sick and looking after them and inviting needy guests to eat at your home. One of the greatest acts of charity is to provide for orphans.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.) Collecting offerings in a Jewish community is similar to an older custom of collecting fast offerings in the Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints. “In every town where there are Jews they must appoint ‘charity wardens,’ men who are well-known and honest that they should collect money from the people every Sabbath eve and distribute it to the poor . . . We have never seen or heard of a Jewish community which does not have a charity fund” (Maimonides (1138-1204). Because the charity warden was involved in the collection and distribution of public funds, special care was taken to ensure that there should not be even the slightest suspicion of dishonesty. The actual collection had to be made by at least two wardens who were not permitted to leave each other during the course of it. The distribution of the money was to be made by at least three wardens in whose hands lay the decision as to whom to give and how much. Besides money, food and clothing were also distributed. Apart from maintaining the poor, the fund was also used for redeeming captives and dowering poor brides, both of which were considered to be among the most virtuous of acts. In addition to the fund there were also communal soup kitchens at which any person with less than enough for two meals was entitled to eat.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

What Jewish institutions have been established on the principle of “giving?”

“Throughout History the Jewish community has always been sensitive to the needs of the poor and established institutions to provide them with relief. This was a form of taxation which nobody could refuse if he wanted to be considered a member of the community. During the Middle Ages in some towns “meal tickets” were distributed to the needy entitling them to eat at various homes, and there is hardly a synagogue even today without a charity box. Before festivals, charity is distributed so that the poor will also be able to enjoy the Holy

Day; this is especially true of Passover when the charity is given a special name, *ma'ot hittim*, "money for wheat" to make *mazzot*." "Many associations were formed for charitable purposes, particularly to look after the sick and provide proper burial. Some communities set up hospitals; this has its result in modern times in institutions like the Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York which was established by Jews. Often the charitable society would own and maintain a hostel where needy wayfarers could spend the night." "Nowadays many communities integrate all their charitable endeavors into one central agency. In the State of Israel, the needs of the poor are looked after by the Ministry of Welfare, which is a government agency. However, a great deal of private, non-governmental charity work still goes on." ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

How much is tithing?

In modern times, the principle of tithing has been modified to reflect the charity and alms given. It is a general Jewish understanding that three percent of one's income should be used for charitable purposes. I have found a few who prefer the tithing amount to be biblical ten percent. In the Islam religion, charity is one of the basic five pillars or tenants of faith. The charitable contribution is generally considered to be two percent. The five pillars of Islamic beliefs are generally understood as: (1) Allah (singular) is God and does not have a son; (2) prayer to Allah – five times daily; (3) Donations or alms; (4) Fasting – "Ramadan" (complete fasting during the daytimes of a lunar month); (5) Pilgrimage to Mecca and getting a 'new-name.' "Islam, the name given by Muslims to their religion, means "submission" (to the will of God). Muhammad, a (twelfth) century C.E. merchant of Mecca, and founder of Islam, is considered by believers to have been the last of a line of prophets starting

with Adam, and the one who revealed to the world the divine doctrine of the Koran, said to have been given him from God by the angel Gabriel. Acceptance of Muhammad's teaching implies belief in Allah as the only god; in the angels; in the divine inspiration of the holy books (including the Bible); in the prophets (including such Jewish and Christian figures as Abraham, "the merciful friend" and the first to profess monotheism, Moses, and Jesus); in the day of judgment; and in Allah's predetermination of good and evil. Muslims are obliged to recite their creed and to pray five times daily; to fast from dawn to sunset in the month of Ramadan; to pay legal alms (charity); and to go on at least one pilgrimage to Mecca, site of the holy Black Stone, the *Ka'aba*." ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

How has prayer evolved into mannerisms?

To Moslems and Jews as well as to many Christians, the acts of prayer are accompanied by gestures and motions that show the person is in the act of prayer. Various forms of singing (chanting), bobbing (moving), washing, covering heads, and women wearing aprons have been passed down through the ages. "Prayer(s) (Hebrew: *Tefillah*), (are) expressions of praise, thanksgiving, petition and confession made by individuals or groups and directed toward God." "The Bible assumes that God exists, that He cares about individual human beings, and that He hears and is moved by their prayers. It also assumes that man has an inborn, spontaneous yearning to communicate with God and that he turns to Him "instinctively," without being commanded to do so. Sometimes man's turning to God comes from his feeling of helplessness, his fear of the future, and his need to petition God for help. Sometimes he wishes to communicate his thankfulness to God

because he feels that God does care about him, or because he feels that God has saved him from danger. Often in the Bible, someone expresses his own sense of failure and his desire to be forgiven. Several times a biblical personality finds it necessary to communicate his disapproval of God's planned action, and to urge Him to change His mind.'
([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

What do I think of motions and set wording for prayers?

"In general, biblical prayer was spontaneous and personal; the more formal aspect of worship probably consisted of bringing sacrifices at set times and with a fixed ritual. It seems, however, that even during the period of the First Temple there were already some prayers whose wording was set, and which were always recited on certain specific occasions. Some scholars, basing themselves on [Psalms 55:18](#) and [Daniel 6:11](#), believe that the practice of worshiping at least three times a day may be traced back to the biblical period."

How did the "formalities" of prayer originate?

"Even though there is no specific biblical verse which commands daily prayer services . . . the rabbis of the *Mishnah* (c. 200 C.E.) and the *Talmud* assumed that Jews pray at least three times a day, once in the morning (*Shaharit*), once in the afternoon (*Minhah*) and once in the evening (*Ma'ariv*, sometimes called *Arvit*). They also speak about an additional (*Musaf*) service which is to be recited on Sabbaths and holidays after *Shaharit*, and about a fifth service (*Ne'ilah*) which is recited on the Day of Atonement shortly before darkness falls." ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#)) The Hebrew word *Kavanah* is the direction, intention or concentration of prayer. So that we can better understand the customs of others in their form of prayer and worship, the following

quotation has been included. "Because the times of the services and even the words which were to be recited, were fixed, there was a danger that prayer would lose its vitality and become mere routine. In order to overcome this danger, the rabbis urged the worshiper to meditate before he began to worship, to think of "before Whom he was standing" in prayer, and to create a new prayer every time he worshiped. They placed great emphasis on the emotional aspect of prayer, calling it "service of the heart" and stressing that God appreciates most the pure intentions of the worshiper. Later authorities sought to embellish the fixed prayers with original poems . . . or with short introductions (*kavanot*) whose purpose was to direct the heart and mind of the worshiper. Melodic chanting was used as a means of increasing *kavvanah* and worshipers were taught to sway as they prayed, thus throwing their entire body into the worship." ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#)) When the Jews pray in a synagogue, they form a prayer circle (*Minyan*). It usually consists of at least ten participants. There is a tradition that if there are only nine persons, the prayer circle can be completed with an agreement that the presence of the Lord or the Spirit of the Lord is with them. In addition to group prayer and the prayer circle, it is still essential to have individual prayer.

Prayers, written or individually expressed?

Most prayers in Judaism are pre-written. Many are created from the Psalms. It is common that the prayers were and still are said in the Hebrew language. In fact, the Hebrew language was largely preserved because of prayers and, of course, the scriptures. There is also a recent trend of thought that questions the pre-written structure of prayers. "The rabbis assumed that God understands all languages; therefore, they said that prayers may be recited in any language

which the worshiper understands. Hebrew, however, was given a special status --- it may be used even though the worshiper does not understand it. Over the centuries some widely accepted prayers (*Kaddish*, *Kol Nidrei* for example) have been written in other languages. The Reform movement and, to a lesser extent, the Conservative movement, have encouraged prayer in the language understood by the worshiper. Recently, however, all movements have stressed the significance of Hebrew, not only as the language of prayer which ties the Jew to his past, but also as a means of uniting him with fellow Jews throughout the world.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

How are echoes of a “prayer circle” still reflected by the Jews?

“The rabbis placed great emphasis on the relationship of the individual to the community during prayer. Almost all prayer, for example, was written in the first-person plural --- “Forgive us,” “Teach us,” “Bring us to our Land.” Although private prayer was certainly permitted, the individual was urged to join a congregation (*minyan*) when he prays and to incorporate the needs of the *minyan* in his prayers.” “A minyan was said to consist of at least ten adult Jewish males. Without the presence of a minyan many important prayers --- *Kedushah*, *Kaddish*, the Priestly Benediction, the reading of the *Torah* and the *Haftarah* and the *hazzan* 's (singer/cantor) repetition of the *Amidah* -- cannot be recited. Recently, the Conservative movement in Judaism has granted its congregations permission to include women in the *minyan*. Reform congregations generally have not insisted on the presence of a *minyan*. When they have, women have usually been counted.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

What do I think of prayer and its effects?

“Modern Jewish thinkers, even those with a deep faith in God, have raised many questions about prayer, its effect upon God, and the person who is worshiping. Can the individual pray with real *kavanah* (concentration, intention) when he is reciting words written by other people who lived in another era and when he is asked to recite these same words at set times every day? Do prayers, written so long ago, reflect the moral and religious ideas of modern Jews? Does God really “hear” prayer; does He, or can He, change the processes of nature (for example, heal a dying person) in response to prayer?” “In light of these and other problems, many thinkers who have associated themselves with the Reform and Reconstructionist movements have suggested changes which should be made in the wording of traditional prayers. They have chosen to eliminate or to reinterpret prayers for the Resurrection of the Dead, the coming of a personal Messiah, the restoration of animal sacrifices and the benediction in which a man blesses God for not having made him a woman. Some thinkers, who do not believe that God changes the course of nature or favors the prayers of one person more than another have tried to reinterpret those prayers which call upon God to intervene in human affairs. These authors generally stress the belief that the Hebrew word for prayer, *tefillah*, is derived from a root *pil* which (in reflexive form) means to “judge oneself”; prayer, therefore, is mainly an act of self-judgment in which the individual examines his life in the light of what God expects of him and of what he, himself, is able to achieve.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

Prayer – kneeling, standing, sitting, anywhere?

The *hasidic* movement in Judaism places great emphasis on the necessity for *kavvanah* in prayer. According to *hasidic* teaching, man may easily be overcome by "evil thoughts" which deprive him of *kavvanah* and which, eventually, may destroy his moral and spiritual life. Prayer, in part, involves the "annihilation" of evil thoughts; it helps the good, already present in man's soul, to come forth; it enables man to achieve an intense closeness (*deveikut*) to God. Many scholars believe that *Hasidism* stresses the *deveikut* aspect of prayer even more than the literal meaning of the words recited. "In prayer, mention of God's holiness should stimulate the worshiper to seek holiness in his own religious and moral life. Holiness is acquired by separation from evil, by the performance of mitzvot and by one's willingness to do even more than the law requires, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God, am holy" (**Leviticus 19:2**).” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) Kneeling, a common form of prayer among Christians, is shunned by Jews, although scriptural references to kneeling do exist. "And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven." (**1 Kings 8:54**) "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker." (**Psalms 95:6**). (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

How has clothing affected prayer habits?

"Related to the prohibitions regarding idolatry, is the Torah law of *hukkat ha-goi* (laws and customs of the gentiles). In this law the Torah explicitly states that it is forbidden to adopt any heathen superstitious or idolatrous practice of the gentiles. This encompasses any gentile

dress associated with religious practice, on which the *Talmud* comments that one should accept martyrdom rather than "change even the style of a shoelace." Accordingly, in modern times, this law has raised a serious question about rabbis wearing the canonical garb which resembles the clothing of the priest in gentile religious ritual. In the same way, it has been questioned whether the organ which is used in Christian ceremonies should be permitted in Jewish prayer. The question has also been raised as to whether Christianity is considered an idolatrous religion, because of its belief in the Trinity and its use of images and icons. However, it is generally accepted that Islam is a monotheistic religion and is not idolatrous." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

How is fasting determined and when can I fast?

As mentioned above, the practice of fasting is found in Islam. It is also a part of Jewish life, although fasting is never done on a Sabbath day because Sabbath is a day of joy and fasting (to many) is less than joyful! *Yom Kippur* (a High Day - hence, treated as a Sabbath) is the only exception. On that day, fasting begins an hour before the Sabbath and continues until an hour afterwards. "Fasting is an act of repentance or of supplication seeking divine forgiveness or the prevention of disaster. Public fasts also commemorate catastrophic events in Jewish history. On fast days one neither eats nor drinks. On major fasts, other prohibitions are washing, wearing leather shoes, using ointments or perfumes, and other physical pleasures. There are special prayers, and the *Torah* is read in the synagogue. *Yom Kippur* and *Tishah be-Av* are observed from sunset to sunset (nightfall to nightfall). All other fasts are from sunrise to sunset." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) "When a natural or human disaster threatens or strikes a whole community, a public fast is proclaimed. In biblical times,

fasting served to beseech the Almighty to end a famine or to lighten the oppression of foreign rulers." "Only one fast day is decreed in the Bible, that of the tenth of *Tishrei*, *Yom Kippur*. This holiest day is the climax of an annual period of soul-searching and resolution to improve one's life. So important is *Yom Kippur* that it is observed even if it occurs on the Sabbath." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*) In spite of the statement in the Bible that fasting is only required once, Jews have many traditional fasting days and fasting reasons. It is the custom among the very religious to fast at the beginning of every month. The *Talmudic* teachings caution against excessive fasting. Young children are not required to fast nor are individuals whose health is precarious.

Who chose the chosen?

A few other comments may be of interest to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who consider themselves chosen if they keep the commandments, both ritually and morally. "How odd of God, to choose the Jews." W.N. Ewer, who wrote this jingle, could not understand why Israel is God's Chosen People. Moses, in *Deuteronomy 7:7--8*, explains it thus: "The Lord did not set His love upon you because you were more in number than any people . . . but because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath (covenant) which He had sworn to your fathers." The rabbis insist that Israel was elected because it voluntarily accepted the *Torah* whereas other nations would not. Mercy and forgiveness, says the *Talmud*, are distinguishing characteristics of Abraham and his seed, and these characteristics motivated God to choose Israel as His people." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

How related are Justice and Mercy?

"The exercise of mercy is an obligation for all Jews. By this it is meant that they must

act with compassion and forgiveness towards all mankind and perform deeds of charity and kindness. This quality is an essential characteristic of God who is known as *Rahum* ("Merciful") and, in accordance with the tradition which sets as man's goal the imitation of God: "As He is merciful, so be you merciful." Just as God is bound by His covenant of mercy with His people, so is the Jew bound by specific commandments to act mercifully to the oppressed, the alien, the orphan, the widow, and indeed, every living creature." "The stress placed upon this quality is evident both in the many charitable institutions existing in Jewish communal life, and in the daily prayers which implore God to deal compassionately even with the undeserving man. Human beings are frail, imperfect creatures constantly open to error, and so they are totally dependent on God's mercy." "But God, as depicted by the rabbis, embodies a combination of justice and mercy, of strict judgment and lenient compassion. This combination of justice and mercy in God is represented by the two names of God --- *Elohim* and *YHWH*. The former stands for justice and the latter for mercy. Though they may seem contradictory, one actually complements the other and, when there is a conflict between the two, God usually favors mercy." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*) The two *cherubim* (*winged beings*) that sit on the ark of the covenant, forming the "mercy seat" between them, are often explained as two statues represent the two attributes of God, mercy, and justice. (<https://www.sefaria.org/topics/chaim-paltiel?tab=sources>) "Judaism demands of its judges this same balance, and the principle of mercy thus assumes extreme importance in the administration of Jewish law. The prophet Zechariah (*Zechariah 7:9*) put it: ". . . execute the judgment and show mercy and compassion every man to his brother." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

What is it like belonging to a community where “everything belongs to the Lord?”

As a closing comment on this lesson, let me add a personal perspective. In the days of the Savior, all believing members committed their time, talent, and even their lives to “the kingdom.” I participated in an archaeological survey close to Jericho where we were discussing the odd nature of a beautiful synagogue floor of the first century. What was odd about it

was the signature. Almost every ancient mosaic floor found in Israel has the signature of the donor with his family name and title. This one simply had an inscription that indicated that the “entire community” had done this work. I had the distinct feeling we were standing on the remains of a worship center used by early saints, “Former-day Saints,” people who committed themselves to first building of the Kingdom of God – as a community rather than individually.