

# ISRAEL'S ANCIENT PSALMS: CORNERSTONE OF THE BEATITUDES

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One of the most significant influences on the Beatitudes found in the Sermon on the Mount, both on their form and content, was Israel's ancient Psalms—those that are found in the Old Testament as well as some circulating outside of the canon. The Psalms greatly influenced both the author of the sermon, Jesus Christ, and the sermon's chief New Testament chronicler, Matthew. My purpose is to demonstrate and discuss this influence.

Sometimes references to the Psalms in the Beatitudes are explicit, at other times more subtle. Nonetheless, one is able to discern a rich undercurrent of psalmic tradition and content in the Beatitudes—an undercurrent that parallels the Savior's reliance, in other contexts, on several verses from Israel's ancient hymnbook in order to teach and testify that he was the fulfillment of ancient messianic expectation. It should not surprise anyone that Jesus relied upon Israel's sacred lyric poems or hymns more than a little when presenting the Beatitudes (as well as the sermon as a whole) precisely because that was the pattern of his entire teaching

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ministry; he used the Psalms more than any other single Old Testament source during the three years he was among the people. Among other things, the Psalms prophesied of the Messiah and described certain specific events of his mortal life. The Psalms spoke exulting and exalting truths. And like the sermon itself, the Psalms reflected a celestial mindset. That, ultimately, seems to have been a major purpose of the Sermon on the Mount—to teach the disciples the characteristics they needed to possess in order to enjoy the environment of the celestial kingdom, to describe how they should act and think as committed disciples while living in a fallen world, and to demonstrate how they should teach others to bring them to salvation (see especially JST Matthew 7 in this regard).

#### PSALMS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Our English word *Psalms* derives from the Greek *psalmoi*, meaning “sacred songs sung to musical accompaniment,”<sup>1</sup> and is a translation of the general Hebrew term *tehillim*, usually rendered “songs of praise.”<sup>2</sup> However, more specific Hebrew designations of various individual Psalms found in their opening ascriptions further suggest ways they were to be used in Israelite worship. Some bear the designation *shir* (vocally performed song or ode), while others (fifty-seven in the Masoretic text, to be exact) are called *mizmor* (melody), or a sacred song accompanied with an instrument. Still others are left simply as *tehillah* (singular of *tehillim* mentioned above).<sup>3</sup> According to Jewish tradition, the Psalms were sung in front of the Tabernacle, or, later on, upon the steps of the Jerusalem temple. All the singers (chanters is also accurate) were Levites, while the priests or Kohanim (from the Levitical family of Aaron) accompanied the songs with instruments.

That the Psalms were regarded by early Christian disciples as containing powerful and profound doctrine, as presenting prophesy as well as praise, is attested by the more than one hundred quotations from the Psalter found in the New Testament. A significant number are located in the four Gospels. The use of Psalms in the gospel narratives depicting events of the last week of Jesus’ life, especially the period of the atoning sacrifice, is particularly striking. Of special note is Psalm 22, one of the most moving foreshadowings ever penned of the physical sufferings associated with the Messiah’s redemptive actions. Consider how the

following verses, reproduced in their numeric order, tell the story of the Crucifixion:

- “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?” (Psalm 22:1; compare Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).
- “All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying” (Psalm 22:7; compare Matthew 27:39; Mark 15:29; Luke 23:35).
- “He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him” (Psalm 22:8; compare Matthew 27:43).
- “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death” (Psalm 22:14–15; compare John 19:28–29).
- “For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me” (Psalm 22:16–17; compare Matthew 27:38–41; Mark 15:29).
- “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture” (Psalm 22:18; compare John 19:24, also Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34).

Little wonder, then, that the early Church disciples and New Testament authors knew and revered the Psalms. But in this regard they merely mirrored the lead of their Master, who, as the premortal Jehovah, was the inspiration behind the psalmists’ craft—and to whose mountaintop discourse we now turn.

#### SETTING OF THE SERMON

The setting for the Sermon on the Mount is a function of the great multitudes Jesus attracted from all areas of his mortal ministry, according to Matthew’s list—Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond Jordan. Thus, “seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain” (Matthew 5:1). While it has been argued persuasively that Jesus’ going up to the Mount paralleled Moses’ going up to Mount Sinai and receiving

the law,<sup>4</sup> the mountain setting of the Sermon also evokes a sense of going up to the temple, and hearing various Psalms sung by priests and Levites in the sacred temple precinct as part of Israel's worship services. The mountain-temple connection in ancient Israel is well established. A common Hebrew name for the Jerusalem temple was *har ha-bayit*, "mountain of the house." A good example comes from a well-known passage to Latter-day Saints in Isaiah 2:2, wherein the temple is called *har bêt Yahweh*, "the *mountain* of the Lord's house."

Also well established in the minds of the first century AD Israelites, according to several scholars, was the connection between the Psalms and the temple. "Many of the Psalms, . . . though also sung at home or in the synagogue, . . . were originally designed or later adapted for use in (or in connection with) the Temple."<sup>5</sup> Another scholar states flatly that "the Psalms were the hymns of the Temple."<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel has emphasized that the Psalms were centered in and an important part of Israelite and later Jewish temple worship.<sup>7</sup>

Thus it seems fair to say that one of the reasons the words and phrases of the Psalms were so powerful to the people of Israel (particularly the Jews) was because of their association with the temple. This is critical for truly understanding the Sermon on the Mount in general and the Beatitudes in particular. Because several passages in the Beatitudes echo words and phrases from the Psalms "that were particularly at home in the Temple,"<sup>8</sup> the Beatitudes, as well as the entire Sermon, surely took on an added layer or level of temple-oriented meaning to their hearers. Jesus made the threefold link between the setting of the sermon, the temple, and the Psalms more explicit when he spoke, near the beginning of the sermon, of the promise to the "pure in heart" that "they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). That Jesus had in mind the Psalms as the foundation upon which this promise rests is seen in the direct parallel to Psalm 24, one of the Psalms of ascent or procession sung by the Levites and priests as devotees went up to the temple to worship and participate in the sacrifices.<sup>9</sup> Part of this psalm reads:

Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?

He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

This is the generation of them . . . that seek thy face, O Jacob. . . .

Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. (Psalm 24:3–6, 10)

Though the King James Version of Psalm 24:3 uses the words “hill of the Lord,” the Hebrew is more directly related to the temple: “who shall go up to the mountain of Yahweh,” which is a reference to the Lord’s mountain house as we saw in Isaiah 2:2. And the phrase “who shall stand in his holy place” directly refers to the temple because a section of the Jerusalem temple was explicitly called “the Holy Place.”<sup>10</sup> The implication of the King James Version (KJV) of Psalm 24 seems to be that one could encounter God in the temple. However, the Septuagint (LXX) is much more explicit (especially verse 6) in pointing out that the ultimate intent of going up to the temple was to “seek the face of the God of Jacob.”

Who shall go up to the mountain of the Lord, and who shall stand in his holy place?

He that is innocent in his hands and pure in his heart; who has not lifted up his soul to vanity, nor sworn deceitfully to his neighbor.

He shall receive a blessing from the Lord, and mercy from God his Saviour.

This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek the face of the God of Jacob. . . .

Who is this king of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is this king of glory. (Psalm 23: 3–6, 10)<sup>11</sup>

Here the object of the pure in heart is to see God in the temple. In parallel fashion, Jesus promises the pure in heart that they shall see God. It may be further seen that Jesus was directing his listeners to Psalm 24 (Psalm 23 in the LXX) by comparing the wording of the Psalm in the Septuagint with the Sermon: the Septuagint phrase “pure in his heart” (*katharos te kardía*) used in the singular in verse 4 is the exact equivalent of the phrase “pure in heart” (*katharoi te kardía*) used in the plural by Jesus (see Matthew 5:8).

It is also important to point out that Jesus is not contradicting Jewish beliefs of his day but rather fleshing out, elevating, and emphasizing one of the most sacred and ennobling of them. In the literature of rabbinic Judaism—the Judaism of Jesus' day—"one speaks of 'seeing God' in a dominant and literal sense; . . . one encounters the Shekhinah, when one arrives there [in the temple], where God dwells in his mercy-presence in the Temple."<sup>12</sup> And, in a way, Jesus is broadening the blessings and promises given to the righteous by declaring that the purity required of those who may see God in the temple is required of all disciples, who then may see God, without necessarily being in the Jerusalem temple. Disciples thus live constantly in a virtual temple, where their holiness puts them ever before the Holy One. This may have echoes of the theology of the covenanters living at Qumran during Jesus' day, whose objective was also to live their lives as if in the temple continually.<sup>13</sup>

The righteous seeking after and seeing God is not an insignificant theme in the Old Testament and is found in other Psalms of Israel. From the Septuagint, "But I shall appear in righteousness before thy face: I shall be satisfied when thy glory appears" (Psalm 16:15 [17:15 KJV]). And, again in the context of the temple, "Thus have I appeared before thee in the sanctuary, that I might see thy power and thy glory" (Psalm 62:2 [63:2 in KJV]). Thus Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:8 is supported by a rich trove of psalmic material, especially the Septuagint version, which is likely the form of the scriptures with which Jesus' disciples were most familiar. It provided "the thought world and vocabulary for the N[ew] T[estament] writers."<sup>14</sup>

Besides the phrase "pure heart" found in Psalm 24:4, Jesus may also have had in mind other Psalms that speak of the "upright in heart" (Psalms 11:2; 32:11), which some scholars have connected to the Beatitude in Matthew 5:8.<sup>15</sup> It seems undeniable that the Psalms served as the foundation for Jesus' early instruction in the Sermon on the Mount, establishing a link between the mountain setting of the sermon and the "mountain house of the Lord," or the temple.

Not only did Jesus use the Psalms to establish an immediate connection between his mountain sermon and his holy temple, the writer Matthew may also have used the Psalms to form the beginning of his report of his Master's sermon: "And he opened his mouth and taught them"

(Matthew 5:2). The phrase “he opened his mouth” is a Semitic idiom—a characteristic phrase Hebrew or Aramaic used to mean “he spoke,” and not that he sat there with his mouth open. This idiom, according to the late professor Samuel Lachs, derives its sense from the contrasting condition of those who cannot or will not speak described in Psalm 38:14, “But I am like a deaf man, I do not hear; I am like a dumb man who does not open his mouth.”<sup>16</sup> In one way or another, the Psalms profoundly influenced the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount and its reporting.

#### LITERARY FORM OF THE BEATITUDES

After Jesus sat down on the Mount and was ready to teach, he began to lay out a series of formulaic pronouncements called in English the Beatitudes because of the first words of each statement, “Blessed are . . .” In Latin the opening word is *beatus*, from which “beatitude” derives. It means “to be fortunate, to be blessed, to be happy.” The literary form of each of the Beatitudes is based on an ancient Hebrew form of speech, *’ashre*, which is rendered in the underlying Greek text of the New Testament as *makarioi*. The Hebrew *’ashre* is a well-known literary construction in the Hebrew Bible as well as in intertestamental literature. In the Masoretic Text (MT) alone, “the term *ashre* occurs 44 times, . . . and 30 verses begin with it.”<sup>17</sup> Significantly, the majority of uses of *’ashre* is found in Psalms (26 times). The very first psalm begins with: *’Ashre ha’ish ’asher lo’ halakh*, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly” (Psalm 1:1). The Septuagint consistently translates *’ashre* as *makarios/makarioi*, as in Psalm 1:1: “Blessed (*makarios*) is the man,”<sup>18</sup> and repeatedly so throughout the Psalms where the Hebrew reads *’ashere*. To list a few examples, “Blessed are all who take refuge in [the Lord]” (Psalm 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 not deceit” (Psalm 32:1–2); “Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not turn to the proud” (Psalm 40:4); “Blessed is he who considers the poor” (Psalm 41:2); “Blessed are those who dwell in thy house” (Psalm 84:4); “Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times” (Psalm 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” (Psalm

119:1–2); “blessed is every one who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways” (Psalm 128:1).<sup>19</sup>

Thus we see that the Beatitudes are based on an original form of Hebrew speech found more often than not in the Psalms. This might be expected given that some of the Psalms are closely related to the holy environment of the temple and express the ultimate in praise, worship, blessing, happiness, and holiness, while the Beatitudes are a list of characteristics, attributes, and blessings possessed by those who are themselves praiseworthy, holy, or striving for holiness and who are or shall be citizens of the kingdom of heaven. In the Beatitudes “Jesus is actually describing the qualities of an exalted person.”<sup>20</sup> President Harold B. Lee said: “These declarations of the Master are known in the literature of the Christian world as the Beatitudes and have been referred to by Bible commentators as the preparation necessary for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. For the purposes of this discussion may I speak of them as something more than that as they are applied to you and me. They embody in fact the constitution for a perfect life.”<sup>21</sup>

The Beatitudes also reflect the personalities—the makeup and qualities—of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, President Lee has noted that in the Sermon on the Mount, particularly the Beatitudes, “the Master has given us somewhat of a revelation of his own character, which was perfect, or what might be said to be ‘an autobiography, every syllable of which he had written down in deeds,’ and in so doing has given us a blueprint for our own lives.”<sup>22</sup> And so at the end of the section in the sermon containing the Beatitudes, disciples are commanded to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect, or as Nephi reports, “be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect” (3 Nephi 12:48). This, arguably, is the capstone exhortation of the sermon as well as the Beatitudes. Put bluntly, the Beatitudes collectively are saying, “Blessed for eternity will be the person who possesses the characteristics that I and my Father possess.”

#### CONTENT OF THE BEATITUDES

Not only the form of the Beatitudes, but also the content of specific Beatitudes were grounded in the Psalms of first-century Israel.



“*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:3). This first beatitude promises that which Jesus’ mission and message were all about—securing for worthy disciples a place where the Father and the Son reside. The impoverishment spoken of here is not economic, but rather the “humble posture of the poor devoid of pretension before God.”<sup>23</sup> This beatitude speaks of and to those who are stripped of pride and is underpinned by Psalm 69:32–33: “The humble shall see this, and be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God. For the Lord heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners.” Proverbs 29:23 is a companion verse: “A man’s pride shall bring him low, but a man of lowly spirit shall obtain honor” (author’s translation).

Several other verses from Psalms reflect the kind of poor people that Jesus was referring to in this Beatitude (Psalms 10:8; 14:6; 22:24; 25:16; as well as others). The problem is that the exact phrase “poor in Spirit” (Hebrew, *aniye ru’ah*) does not appear in the Masoretic Text or rabbinic literature. It is found, though, in a psalm from the War Scroll, one of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered at Qumran in the Judean wilderness. “Blessed be the God of Israel. . . . He has . . . steadied the trembling knee; he has braced the back of the smitten. Among *the poor in spirit* [there is power] over the hard of heart” (War Scroll XIV 8).<sup>24</sup>

A passage from the Psalms of Solomon, a group of eighteen psalms composed during the intertestamental period and not part of any canon, seems to indicate that the word “poor” in the foregoing context had, by the second or first century BC, become “a synonym for *hasid*, ‘pious’ or ‘saintly’ in the best senses. So, for example, Pss. Sol. 10:7 [reads:] ‘The saints also shall give thanks in the assembly of the people and God will have mercy on the poor in the (days of) gladness of Israel.’ Here ‘the saints’ and the ‘poor’ stand in synonomous parallelism. Again in the Talmud they are treated as synonyms (Ber[akhot] 6b).”<sup>25</sup> It appears that Jesus also viewed the truly “poor in spirit” as saints, “holy ones” striving for an eternal, exalted place in the kingdom of heaven. It is also apparent that the concepts expressed in the first beatitude were part of a general fund of knowledge grounded in ancient Israelite psalmic tradition, well known to various religious Jews in first-century Palestine. It also signals that there may have been several noncanonical psalms or psalmlike aphorisms current in Jesus’ day.

*“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted”* (Matthew 5:4). Though this beatitude has no verbatim parallel in Psalms, it reflects the sentiment of Psalm 147:3: “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.” By his own declaration, Jesus is the one who heals and binds up wounds, just as he is the one who comforts, in the ultimate sense, those who mourn. Early in his ministry, Jesus had publically announced his messianic calling to those attending synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth by reading Isaiah 61:1–2, which clearly foreshadows the promises reiterated in the second beatitude: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn” (compare Luke 4:18–19). The Greek wording of Matthew 5:4 implies that those who mourn (*hoi penthountes*) do so for their sins, their behavior; in the classic sense, the verb *pentheō* means not only “to mourn, to lament” but also “to deplore” an action.<sup>26</sup>

Thus this beatitude is another declaration of Jesus’ power as the Messiah to heal and redeem. It is particularly applicable to those who mourn for their sins, whose hearts are broken (see Psalm 147:3; Isaiah 61:1) and whose spirits are contrite because of their misdeeds. For as the patriarch Lehi taught, the Messiah “offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered” (2 Nephi 2:7). The intent of this beatitude seems to be to encourage disciples to cultivate a broken heart because of their sins and to feel that “godly sorrow [that] worketh repentance to salvation” (2 Corinthians 7:10), spoken of by a later disciple.

*“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth”* (Matthew 5:5). There is no mistaking the direct influence of the foundation laid by Psalm 37:11 for this beatitude: “But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” While the meek (Greek, *praîs*) are literally defined as the “mild, gentle,”<sup>27</sup> perhaps even as those who exhibit calm and poise in the face of provocation, tribulation, or suffering, the Lord himself revealed in latter-day scripture that the meek are

those who shall obtain the celestial kingdom—those who have kept their covenants and been resurrected with celestial bodies.

And the redemption of the soul is through him that quickeneth all things, in whose bosom it is decreed that the poor and the meek of the earth shall inherit it.

Therefore, it [the earth] must needs be sanctified from all unrighteousness, that it may be prepared for the celestial glory;

For after it hath filled the measure of its creation, it shall be crowned with glory, even with the presence of God the Father;

That bodies who are of the celestial kingdom may possess it forever and ever; for, for this intent was it made and created, and for this intent are they sanctified. (D&C 88:17–20)

This declaration gives invaluable commentary on the beatitude. It creates a seamless fabric between Jesus' Old World, meridian dispensation teachings and his New World, modern-day restoration teachings. The ancient beatitude speaks about and to those who are baptized, keep gospel covenants, and perform righteous works. It can also be linked to a modern-day beatitude, given through the Prophet Joseph Smith, wherein the Lord said: "Behold, blessed, saith the Lord, are they who have come up unto this land with an eye single to my glory, according to my commandments. For those that live shall inherit the earth, and those that die shall rest from all their labors, and their works shall follow them; and they shall receive a crown in the mansions of my Father, which I have prepared for them" (D&C 59:1–2).

*"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled"* (Matthew 5:6). This beatitude is founded upon several Psalms that reassured ancient devotees that God was able to satisfy every righteous need and desire. However, like the Psalms, Jesus' new-covenant promise had little to do with being filled with temporal food and drink (though God possesses that power as well), but rather being filled with God's Spirit, as at least two Psalms aver: "For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness" (Psalm 107:9). "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:2). Significantly, this is the meaning articulated in the New World version of the beatitude: "And blessed are all they who do hunger and

thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 12:6). The Greek word *chortasthēsontai*, translated in the King James Version of Matthew 5:6 as “filled” is perhaps better translated “satisfied,” as in LXX Psalm 16:15 (17:15 in MT), “But I shall appear in righteousness before thy face: I shall be satisfied (*chortasthēsomai*) when thy glory appears.” Note that this verse in Septuagint Psalms again has direct reference to seeing God and being satisfied in the presence of his glory. Perhaps this is the ultimate meaning behind Jesus’ promise. Disciples who press forward, hungering and thirsting after every word of God, will finally be satisfied, and only truly so when they behold the face of God in his kingdom.

One other psalm centers on this theme: “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary” (Psalm 63:1–2). Here the temple is explicitly mentioned, with the overall message confirmed that those who seek God in his holy house and desire to see his power and glory in their lives will be filled with those things they seek.

“*Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy*” (Matthew 5:7). Many are the psalms that describe God’s mercy, but a few have a special connection to this beatitude, for the issue is not that God is full of mercy but that his followers can obtain his mercy and the tangible results of his mercy because of the mercy they demonstrate toward others. As the Psalmist said, “The righteous *sheweth mercy*. . . . For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth” (Psalm 37:21–22; emphasis added). Thus, according to Psalm 37, both the meek (Psalm 37:11) and the merciful inherit the earth. Mercy seems to be a defining characteristic of true followers of him who is the source of eternal mercy through the Atonement. The merciful are drawn inextricably to the Merciful One: “For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light; *mercy hath compassion on mercy and claimeth her own*; justice continueth its course and claimeth its own; judgment goeth before the face of him who sitteth upon the throne and governeth and executeth all things” (D&C 88:40; emphasis added). The rabbis of Jesus’ day believed in that concept: “He who shows mercy to his fellow creature obtains mercy from Heaven.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the Psalmist indicates that the

merciful are drawn to the house of the Merciful One, the temple: “But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple” (Psalm 5:7).

“*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God*” (Matthew 5:8). Given the temple connection of the previous beatitude, this one—already shown to be linked to the temple and to Psalm 24—follows naturally. According to Psalm 24, only the pure in heart, the worthy and righteous of God’s professed followers, may enter the temple, where they may see the God of mercy. But the Savior’s later disciples also understood that this promise extended beyond the earthly temple to the heavenly temple—the kingdom of heaven or celestial glory—made possible through Christ’s atoning sacrifice. “For Christ is not entered [only] into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24).

“*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God*” (Matthew 5:9). In this beatitude Jesus ties together the doctrine of adoption and the concept of peacemaking, both of which have roots in the Psalms, though the term “peacemakers,” *eirēnopoioi*, does not appear in the Septuagint. To be called God’s children in the fullest sense, disciples must first do what Jesus does, act as he acts. Jesus is the Prince of Peace (see Isaiah 9:6). Psalm 147:14 states that God is he who “maketh peace in thy borders”; therefore disciples also must be peacemakers. As disciples imitate Jesus and obey him, they are spiritually adopted into his family and become his children (see Mosiah 5:7). Adoption as Jesus Christ’s children leads to full inheritance of all that God the Father has and all that he is. The Apostle Paul illuminates our understanding of the full meaning of adoption: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:16–17).

Christ is the only natural Son of God and heir to kingship, the Only Begotten Son and natural heir of the Father, just as the Psalmist attested: “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (Psalm 2:6–7). However, through adoption made possible by the Atonement, disciples also become the children of God and heirs

of all that the Father has to give: “Those who are sons [and daughters] of God in this sense are the ones who become gods in the world to come (D&C 76:54–60). They have exaltation and godhood because the family unit continues in eternity (D&C 132:19–24). . . . Through Christ and his atoning sacrifice they are ‘begotten sons and daughters unto God’ (D&C 76:24), meaning the Father.”<sup>29</sup> Later first-century Christians after Jesus understood the true peacemaker to be Jesus himself. Paul affirmed this belief, using the same word root for “peacemaker” found in Matthew 5:9: “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace (*eirēnopoíasas*) through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself” (Colossians 1:19–20). Because of the peacemaking work of the Prince of Peace, other declarations recorded by the Psalmist referring to the doctrine of adoption could be fulfilled: “Ye are gods . . . children of the most High” (Psalm 82:6).

What Jesus says in Matthew 5:9 is different, ultimately, from the teachings of the great rabbis of his day. Many leaders encouraged fostering peace. One of the most famous of all, Rabbi Hillel, links the idea of peacemaking to the biblical figure of Aaron. Hillel said, “Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace, and pursuing peace, loving your fellow creatures and bringing them near to the Torah” (*Pirque Avot* 1:12). But nowhere in rabbinic literature are the concepts of cultivating or promoting peace specifically linked to becoming “the children of God.”<sup>30</sup> Another incomplete parallel to Jesus’ teaching is found in a series of beatitudelike statements in the book of Slavonic Enoch: “Blessed is he who established peace and love” (52:11). “Blessed is he who goes and brings together in peace” (52:13).<sup>31</sup> However, these statements present only half of Jesus’ teaching, for the ultimate blessing associated with peacemaking is the promise of inheriting all God possesses because, as his children, we become his heirs. The instruction of the Master is unique.

*“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake”* (Matthew 5:10–11). This last beatitude is influenced by the Psalms, but it takes a different tack than the Psalmist’s consistent plea for deliverance from persecution. As he said: “O Lord, . . . save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me” (LXX Psalm 7:1); “Deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from

them that persecute me” (LXX Psalm 31:15–16); “Bring forth a sword, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say to my soul, I am thy salvation (LXX Psalm 34:3; KJV 35:3). In both this beatitude and the Psalms, the words “persecute/persecution” are from the same Greek root, which carries a sense of driving, chasing, hunting, and the like.<sup>32</sup> And the Psalms contain a sense of immediacy to the request for deliverance. But Jesus does not promise deliverance; rather he speaks of a reward for enduring persecution. He infers that persecution will continue and perhaps intensify. Persecution was the path the Master himself trod; “If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). This persecution culminated on the cross. Ironically, it was a verse from the Psalms that formed Jesus’ final response in mortality to all his persecution and suffering: “Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me” (Psalm 31:5).

The reward promised to the disciples was the kingdom of heaven. The disciples could take heart in knowing that they were following the path that great ones before them had trod, “for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:12).

A modern revelation received by President Joseph F. Smith in 1918 confirms and expands the promise made by Jesus to all those who suffer persecution for righteousness’ sake—the promise of a place in the kingdom of heaven.

“As I pondered over these things which are written, the eyes of my understanding were opened, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me, and I saw the hosts of the dead, both small and great.

And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality;

And who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer’s name.” (D&C 138:11–13)

## CONCLUSION

Jesus went on to speak of other things in the Sermon on the Mount, which also contains references and allusions to the Psalms. But the

Beatitudes clearly evince the richest reservoir of psalmic material. Both the Beatitudes and the Psalms present to disciples attributes and attitudes of celestial beings and describe personal qualities and characteristics by which they can influence others to receive exaltation. Some non-LDS commentators have even called the Beatitudes the “entrance requirements” for the kingdom of God, which create or establish a new relationship between man and God.<sup>33</sup> However, the concepts are not new. Many of the concepts and principles taught in the Beatitudes were rooted in, if not directly quoted from, the much older Psalms. Even the ultimate command issuing from the sermon—to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect (see Matthew 5:48)—is reflected in one of the Psalmist’s exhortations: “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace” (Psalm 37:37). The more we examine the Psalms and compare them with the life and the teachings of our Lord, especially those found in the Beatitudes, the more we realize something the Master knew so well. Several of those songs and lyric poems are a true reflection of the Savior’s mortal ministry, his makeup and personality, and what he tried to communicate to his followers. One hopes modern disciples have listening ears like the ancients.

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## NOTES

1. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1954), 487.
2. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, study edition, 2 vols, trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 2:1692.
3. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 2:1481–82; 1:566.
4. Several authors point out the parallel. See, for example, Dale Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 174–75; John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), 17–23. However, W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 99, says the New Sinai typology “only acquires force from other elements in the Gospel which point to this.”
5. John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, 43.
6. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven* (London: SPCK, 1991), 45.
7. Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 2:89–90.
8. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, 43.



9. For this well-known idea, see Charles M. Laymon, ed., *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 269; George A. Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 4:131, 133.
10. Alec Garrard, *The Splendor of the Temple: A Pictorial Guide to Herod's Temple and Its Ceremonies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregal, 2000), 21, 73.
11. Translation from Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 711.
12. Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: Beck, 1922), 1:206; quoted in John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in Light of the Temple*, 55.
13. "The Essenes' basic ideal was to live as if they were priests dwelling in the temple itself. By this means, they sought to make their community a virtual temple, whether or not they were priests or Levites" (S. Kent Brown, "The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Mormon Perspective," *BYU Studies* 23, no. 1 [1983]: 57–58).
14. J. W. Wevers, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press), s.v. "Septuagint," 4:277.
15. Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1982), 72–73.
16. Samuel T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1987), 68.
17. Lachs, *Rabbinic Commentary*, 70.
18. Author's translation.
19. The versification for these examples follows the Hebrew text.
20. Church Educational System, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus and His Apostles* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978), 60.
21. Harold B. Lee, *Decisions for Successful Living* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 57.
22. Lee, *Decisions for Successful Living*, 56.
23. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 68.
24. Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 180; emphasis added.
25. Lachs, *Rabbinic Commentary*, 71.
26. Liddell and Scott, *A Lexicon Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 542.
27. Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 583.
28. Sifre Deuteronomy 36 (end), quoted in Lachs, *Rabbinic Commentary*, 75, 80, end-note 43.
29. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–71), 2:474–75.
30. Lachs, *Rabbinic Commentary*, 76.
31. Translation in Lachs, *Rabbinic Commentary*, 76; see also James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 1:180, where the opening word is translated, "Happy."
32. Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 176.
33. Robert A. Guelich, "The Matthean Beatitudes: 'Entrance Requirements' or Eschatological Blessings?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 415–34.