

A Comparative Analysis of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12

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Abstract

This journal article undertakes a comparative analysis of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12. One incentive for doing so is to advance the field of scholarship concerning the intertextuality between the Old and New Testaments by examining two seminal passages in the Judeo-Christian canon. A second motivation is that this topic has received only a cursory consideration in the academic literature. The major claim affirmed by the study is that there are discernible connections between these two passages at the linguistic and conceptual levels. In turn, recognising the latter helps to clarify the meaning and significance of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 for ministers of the Gospel.

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

The concept of ‘blessing’ dominates both Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12.² With respect to Psalm 1, the Hebrew noun אֲשֶׁרִי (*’āšrê*)³ only appears at the beginning of verse 1. Even so, it establishes the theological foundation for the entire sacred song. For instance, it is not only the prevalent theme in verses 1–3, but also stands in sharp contrast to the wretched state of the ungodly described in verses 4–6. Concerning the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12, the Greek adjective μακάριος (*markarios*)⁴ appears in every verse but the final one in the series. This datum indicates that the term is a central leitmotif of the passage.

An immediate query concerns whether there are discernible connections between the above two passages at the linguistic and conceptual levels. The comparative analysis undertaken in the upcoming sections of this journal article affirms the existence of such linkages. In particular, section 2 explores the linguistic aspects of this issue. Next, section 3 is an excursus dealing with the kingdom of God in biblical perspective. This important background information serves as a conceptual bridge to the descriptive analyses of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12, which are undertaken in sections 3 and 4, respectively. The conceptual

² Even though the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 are the principal focus of this journal article (along with Ps 1), attention is also given to the parallel passage in Luke 6:20–26, which includes both a series of blessings pronounced on the impoverished righteous and corresponding woes decreed to the wicked rich.

³ The Hebrew noun, which in Psalm 1:1 is an abstract nominative, intensive masculine plural construct, is commonly translated as ‘blessed’ (cf. NIV, NASB, ESV, NRSV, KJV, Lexham).

⁴ The Greek adjective, which is a nominative, plural, masculine construct in Matthew 5:3–11, is commonly translated ‘blessed’ (cf. NIV, NASB, ESV, NRSV, KJV, Lexham). Technically, the Beatitudes belong to a literary subgenre called ‘religious macarism’; cf. Collins (1992:629).

connections between these passages are taken up in section 6, followed by a concise wrap-up of the study in section 7.

One benefit arising from the proposed inquiry is that it helps to clarify the meaning and significance of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 for ministers of the Gospel. Moreover, the investigation advances the field of scholarship concerning the intertextuality between the Old and New Testaments by examining a lacuna, namely, the under-explored and underappreciated interrelationship between two seminal texts in the Judeo-Christian canon. For instance, Zimmerli (1978:13) in his deliberation of the relationship between the Matthean Beatitudes and the Old Testament, reserves just two sentences to Psalm 1. Likewise, Blomberg (2007:20) briefly notes that the ‘Beatitudes’ include ‘several key allusions’ to the Old Testament. In a similar vein, the analysis Howell provides concerning the Jewish origins of the Matthean Beatitudes includes just four incidental references to Psalm 1 (2011:117, 122, 197, 198).

Along the same lines, Plummer (1982:59–60) only devotes a single paragraph to the general premise that Jesus possibly was thinking about the beginning of the Psalter ‘when He placed’ the ‘Beatitudes’ in the opening verses of his oration. In a corresponding manner, Craigie (2004:61) observes that the contrasting destinies of the righteous and the wicked (Ps 1:6) are ‘illuminated further’ by the Saviour’s remarks in the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ (Matt 7:13–14). Moreover, a representative survey of other scholars indicates that each offers just a single sentence concerning the intertextual connection between Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12.⁵ In light of the preceding assessment, this

⁵ Cf. Anderson (1983:58); Boice (1994:14); Brown (2012:99); Davies and Allison (1988:432); Delitzsch (1982:82–3); Grogan (2001:146); Hagner (2000:88); Holladay

journal article seeks to address a topic that has received at most a cursory consideration in the academic literature.⁶

2. The Linguistic Connections Between Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12

As put forward in section 1, an analysis of the relevant biblical and extra-biblical data indicates there are strong linguistic linkages between Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12. The preceding assertion is based on a candid appraisal undertaken in the present section of the corresponding terms rendered ‘blessed’⁷ in each passage. In both texts, the horizon of redemptive history encompasses the past, present, and future. Also, it involves the divergent fates of the righteous and the wicked.

Concededly, the Hebrew noun אֲשֶׁרֶה (*’ăšrê*) only appears in Psalm 1:1; nonetheless, it sets the thematic tone and theological direction for the entire sacred song.⁸ Several standard lexical resources define the term as meaning either ‘blessed / blessedness’ or ‘happy / happiness’.⁹ Cazelles (1977:446) affirms the view that *’ăšrê* is predominately secularised in its emphasis, whereas *bārûk* (‘blessed’) places a greater accent on what is

(2012:144); Keener (1999:165); Kidner (1973:47); Lenski (1964:183); Liefeld (1984:891); Osborne (2010:162).

⁶ Admittedly, there is a vast amount of academic literature dealing separately with Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–11. Furthermore, this journal article makes no pretence of trying to engage all of it in a thoroughgoing manner. Be that as it may, the issue broached here remains underexplored and consequently worthwhile to comprehensively investigate.

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from the 2011 version of the NIV.

⁸ Cf. the usage of *’ăšrê* in Deut 33:29; Pss 40:4; 84:4–5; Prov 3:13.

⁹ Cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Cazelles (1977:445); Hamilton (1980); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Swanson (2001b).

sacred and solemn. Routledge (2012:61) clarifies that while *'ăšrê* and *bārûk* ('blessed') are not necessarily 'synonymous', they have some 'overlap in meaning'. Specifically, the basis for experiencing happiness (i.e. *'ăšrê*) is 'closely' tied to the 'bestowal of divine favour' (i.e. *bārûk*).

In Psalm 1:1, *'ăšrê* is an intensive plural form¹⁰ that can be 'interpreted as a type of interjection' (Cazelles 1977:445), especially a 'liturgical cry' (446). The term denotes a 'heightened state' (Swanson 2001b) of 'joy', which points to an exceptionally 'favourable circumstance', whether in the present or future (or both).¹¹ In keeping with what was noted above, the basis for such a propitious outcome is a 'life in right relationship with God' (Brown 1997). For all that, the author of Psalm 1 most likely did not make a sharp distinction between the so-called sacred and secular realms of existence. Put another way, the righteous remnant experience genuine happiness, regardless of whether the context is temporal and physical or eternal and metaphysical. After all, in every area of life the godly should be characterised by piety and rectitude (vv. 1–2),¹² along with an unwavering trust in and unmitigated devotion to the Creator as their 'refuge' (2:12).¹³

As with *'ăšrê*, numerous standard lexicons indicate that *markarios* can mean either 'blessed / blessedness' or 'happy / happiness', along with such interrelated connotations as 'fortunate', 'privileged', and 'highly favoured'.¹⁴ Accordingly, Danker (2000) posits the core nuance as

¹⁰ Cf. Waltke and O'Connor (1990).

¹¹ Cf. Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014).

¹² Cf. Pss 112:1; 119:1–2; 128:1–2; Prov 8:32; 1 En 99:10; 4 Macc 7:22; Sir 34:15.

¹³ It may be that the occurrence of *'ăšrê* functions as a thematically introductory inclusio, since it appears at the beginning of Psalm 1 and the end of Psalm 2; cf. n 44 (below), along with Brown (1997); Cazelles (1977:445); Waltke and O'Connor (1990).

¹⁴ Cf. Danker (2000); Hauck (1999); Louw and Nida (1989); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Silva (2014); Spicq (1994); Strecker (1990); Swanson (2001a).

someone being the ‘privileged recipient of divine favour’. In the words of Spicq (1994), those who are blessed experience an ‘interior joy’ that becomes manifest in the ‘external’ world. Turner (2008:146) explains that the antithesis of divine blessedness is not feeling miserable or despondent; rather, it is the state of being ‘cursed’.¹⁵

The lexical connection between *markarios* and *’ăšrê* is strengthened due to the fact that the Septuagint often uses *markarios* to render *’ăšrê*, especially in the Psalms and Sirach.¹⁶ This holds true for the Septuagint version of Psalm 1:1, where *markarios* is used for *’ăšrê*. For the sake of comparison, the Vulgate translates *’ăšrê* by using the Latin verb *beatus*, which has a comparable range of meanings to its Hebrew and Greek counterparts, including ‘happy’, ‘blessed’, ‘fortunate’, and ‘prosperous’.¹⁷ Bertram (1999) notes that in Jewish literature, *markarios* ‘always refers to a person, never a thing or state’. Silva (2014) adds that the noun especially concerns individuals who exist in a ‘right relationship’ with God. Indeed, there is a strong ‘connection’ made between the ‘favour’ of the Lord and ‘earthly happiness’, as evidenced by his gracious bestowal of temporal ‘gifts’.

Moreover, Silva (2014) points out that in Jewish texts written during the Second Temple period, *markarios* is found in a ‘series’ of ‘elaborate pronouncements’.¹⁸ In turn, these declarations of ‘blessedness’ stand in contrast to a comparable ‘series of woes’.¹⁹ The ‘setting’ is the ‘consolation’ awaiting the upright at the ‘eschatological’ terminus of the age, as well as the consummation of the divine ‘kingdom’.²⁰ Similarly,

¹⁵ Cf. Matt 25:31–46; Luke 6:24–26.

¹⁶ Cf. Nolland (2013:87); Silva (2014).

¹⁷ Cf. Collins (1992:629); Crane (2016); Grounds (2009:530); Lewis (1980); Lewis and Short (1879).

¹⁸ Cf. 2 En 42:6–14; Sir 25:7–10; Tob 13:14–16.

¹⁹ Cf. Eccles 10:15–16; 1 En 103:5; 2 En 52:1–14.

²⁰ Cf. Isa 61:1–3; 1 En 58:2; Pss Sol 17:50.

according to Strecker (1990), the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 occur in a concatenation, reflect a ‘prophetic-apocalyptic’ backdrop, and are anchored to the ‘Christ-event’.

Nolland (2013:88) posits that the Beatitudes are an ‘expanded restatement’ of 4:17, which records Jesus’ summons for people to ‘repent’, especially since the ‘kingdom of heaven’ had drawn ‘near’. Even more consonant with the intertestamental Jewish literature is the parallel passage in Luke 6:20–25, which includes a succession of ‘blessings’, followed by corresponding ‘woes’. Indeed, as Silva (2014) observes, the future promise of an end-time ‘salvation’ provides the incentive in the present for the faith community to prize and cultivate such ‘virtues’ as humility, holiness, and rectitude, despite experiencing maltreatment from their foes.²¹

3. Excursus: The Kingdom of God in Biblical Perspective

As noted in section 1, background information concerning the kingdom of God serves as a conceptual bridge between the linguistic analysis put forward in section 2 and the descriptive analysis promulgated in sections 3 and 4, respectively. To begin, ‘kingdom’ in Matthew 5:3, translates the Greek noun *basileia*. The term refers to the rule of God over the entire universe, which according to Hauck (1999), involves a ‘sacred paradox’. After all, as Holladay (2012:155) notes, God’s reign is a ‘future reality’ operative in the present. Specialists refer to this dialectical tension as ‘inaugurated eschatology’.

Guelich (1982:77) highlights three ‘facets’ of the divine kingdom, especially within Matthew’s Gospel, as follows: (1) the ‘redemptive

²¹ Cf. the use of the Greek temporal adverb *nyn* (‘now’) two times in Luke 6:21.

historical element'; (2) the 'personal and ethical implications'; and, (3) the 'cosmological-universal focus'. The first component anchors the rule of God within the narrative of *past* human existence and activity. The second aspect situates the Lord's reign within the *present* moral circumstance. The third factor calls attention to the *future* implications of the Creator's sovereignty for every creature throughout the cosmos.

An examination of the Judeo-Christian canon depicts God's kingdom as being heavenly,²² unshakable,²³ and eternal.²⁴ Scripture describes the richness of God's kingdom in a variety of ways. It is inseparably linked to righteousness, peace, and joy.²⁵ The kingdom of God is associated with suffering and patient endurance,²⁶ supernatural power,²⁷ promise,²⁸ glory,²⁹ and the 'renewal of all things'.³⁰ God's kingdom is not the product of human striving or invention.³¹ It is given as a gift³² and humbly received.³³ The Lord brings his people into his kingdom,³⁴ makes them worthy of it,³⁵ and preserves them for it.³⁶

An assessment of the scholarly discourse³⁷ points to the divine kingdom including God's presence and rule over human hearts, regardless of

²² Cf. 2 Tim 4:18.

²³ Cf. Heb 12:28.

²⁴ Cf. 2 Pet 1:11.

²⁵ Cf. Rom 14:17.

²⁶ Cf. Rev 1:9.

²⁷ Cf. 1 Cor 4:20.

²⁸ Cf. Jas 2:5.

²⁹ Cf. 1 Thess 2:12.

³⁰ Cf. Matt 19:28.

³¹ Cf. John 18:36.

³² Cf. Luke 12:32.

³³ Cf. Mark 10:15.

³⁴ Cf. Col 1:13.

³⁵ Cf. 2 Thess 1:5.

³⁶ Cf. 2 Tim 4:18.

³⁷ The scholarly discourse on the divine kingdom is extensive. Concerning what the biblical and extra-biblical literature teaches about the kingdom of God, cf. Bivin and

where and when they live. This kingdom embraces all who walk in fellowship with the Lord and do his will. The kingdom is governed by God's laws, which are summed up in humankind's duty to love the Lord supremely and love others unreservedly. Moreover, this kingdom, which was foretold by the prophets and introduced by Jesus, would one day displace all the kingdoms of this world, following the return of the Redeemer. God's kingdom is the society in which believers ultimately find perfect congruity, but its realization awaits the end of the age.

In Jesus' day, the concept of 'kingdom' was rooted in the Old Testament. The term most often referred to the reign or royal authority of a king. Jewish people prayed daily for the coming of God's reign. When they prayed for his kingdom, they did not doubt that God presently reigned over his creation; yet, they longed for the day when God would rule unchallenged and all peoples would acknowledge Him. Most Jews, therefore, associated this kingdom with the coming of a Jewish ruler who would lead his people to victory over their enemies.³⁸ During Jesus' first advent, he inaugurated the kingdom of God.³⁹ Also, through Jesus' words and works, he clarified the foremost ethical priorities of the divine kingdom.⁴⁰

Tilton (2015); Duling (1992), Marshall (2009); McClain (2001). In terms of what the four Gospels reveal about the divine kingdom, cf. Green (2013a). With respect to Paul's letters and the kingdom of God, cf. Kreitzer (1987). The theme of God's kingdom, as developed in the later New Testament, is examined in Kim (1997). For a treatment of how the theme of God's kingdom fits within the biblical narrative of the history of redemption, cf. Schreiner (2013). Concerning how the divine kingdom theologically relates to the atoning sacrifice of the Son at Calvary, cf. Treat (2014). A comparison of the three leading millennial views of the kingdom can be found in Walvoord (1983). For two views regarding the connection between the kingdom promises and the testaments, cf. Kaiser (1991); Waltke (1991).

³⁸ Cf. John 6:15; Acts 1:6.

³⁹ Cf. Matt 4:17.

⁴⁰ Cf. Matt 4:12–16, 23–25.

In Jesus' nighttime conversation with Nicodemus, the latter initially operated under the assumption that those who wanted to be right with God had to strive to perfectly obey the Mosaic law. With profound insight, Jesus told Nicodemus that, in order to see God's kingdom, a person must be 'born again' (John 3:3). In this decisive intervention, God miraculously raises the repentant from spiritual death to new life. The desires, goals, and actions of the regenerate are so radically changed that they want to live for God and serve others.

Against this theological backdrop, to see God's kingdom (as a result of the new birth) means to experience fully the redemptive blessings associated with the rule of the Lord in one's life, both in the present and throughout eternity. Even such a respected individual as the rich young ruler needed to be spiritually reborn. Also, God's power alone, not human effort, could transform his sinful heart (as well as that of all people). Ultimately, the kingdom of God can be received only by those with childlike faith. Just as children are dependent on their parents, so believers are dependent on their heavenly Father for eternal life.⁴¹

4. A Descriptive Analysis of Psalm 1

Before exploring the conceptual connections between Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 (in section 6 below), it is necessary to undertake a descriptive analysis of each passage, beginning here with Psalm 1. Perhaps more than any other part of scripture, the Psalms tell readers what it feels like to walk in the way of the Lord. Old Testament specialists, having noted the similarity of forms and themes among many of the Psalms, have tried to classify them according to type. For instance, Psalm 1 is identified with wisdom literature, for it provides instruction about living as the people of God. In this didactic sapiential poem,

⁴¹ Cf. Mark 10:15.

readers are admonished to abandon the ephemeral trail of evil and follow the enduring path of rectitude.⁴²

A further analysis of Psalm 1 indicates that it is a sacred song with sagacity as its predominant theological characteristic. Expressed differently, this psalm shows Proverbs-like thinking and language. The theological outlook is either ‘yes’ or ‘no’, with no middling ethical equivocation. Furthermore, life is portrayed as offering only two moral choices, namely, right or wrong. The implication is that a truly wise person would always choose the upright path. The human author⁴³ realized that not everything turns out well for believers. Still, he understood that saying ‘no’ to some situations and ‘yes’ to others was crucial to enjoy the blessings God wants for his people.

Dahood (1965:1) refers to the Psalm 1 as a ‘*précis*’ to the rest of the Psalter.⁴⁴ This designation is appropriate, for the ode is similar to a map

⁴² The following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the discourse in this section dealing with Psalm 1: Anderson (1983); Boice (1994); Botha (2012); Brown (2012); Bullock (1988); Cohen (1992); Cole (2013); Craigie (2004); Creah (1999); Dahood (1965); deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner (2014); Delitzsch (1982); Gillingham (2013); Goldingay (2006); Grogan (2001); Hilber (2009); Høgenhaven (2001); Kidner (1973); Kraus (1988); Leupold (1984); Mays (1994); McCann (1996); Perowne (1989); Raymond (2012); Smith (1996); Terrien (2003); VanGemeren (1991); Whiting (2013).

⁴³ There is no scholarly consensus concerning the unidentified human author of Psalm 1, due in part to the absence of a superscription or title (hence, it is called an ‘orphan’ psalm). This journal article surmises that the writer was a godly Hebrew male scholar of the Torah who may have lived in postexilic Judah.

⁴⁴ As Cohen (1992:1) observes, it is possible that due to the linguistic and thematic connections between Psalms 1 and 2, they together serve as gateway sacred songs to the Psalter. For an historical survey and critical appraisal of the scholarship dealing with this topic, cf. Cole (2013). For an assessment of how Psalms 1 and 2 have been received in divergent ways within Jewish and Christian traditions, cf. Gillingham (2013). For an examination of the thematic relationship between these two texts, cf. Høgenhaven (2001). For a consideration of Psalms 1 and 2 as a point of entry to the Psalter, cf. Whiting (2013).

showing two divergent roads at the headwaters of human existence—the way of righteousness and the path of wickedness. The writer did not use the Hebrew noun, *šāddīq* (which is translated as ‘righteous’ in v. 6) to describe godly behaviour, though it is clear this is what he had in mind; rather, the writer used the noun, *’āšrê*, which is translated ‘blessed’, and which could more literally be rendered ‘blessedness[es]’.⁴⁵ Perhaps the noun is not found in the singular in the Hebrew text due to the fact that there is no such thing as a single blessing; instead, wherever there is one blessing from God there is another from him, too.⁴⁶

The Psalms arose from a long tradition of Hebrew poetry. This is a valid observation, since most books of the Old Testament, beginning with Genesis, contain at least some fragments of poetry. Hebrew poetry is flexible in form and rhythm; however, most Hebrew poetry exhibits a distinguishing characteristic called parallelism. This term simply means that two (or sometimes three) lines of poetry are, in one way or another, parallel in meaning. Psalm 1:1 is a prime example. The writer used a dramatic threefold parallelism to note what divinely blessed people avoid doing. Specifically, they shun the thinking, practices, and fellowship of those who are ungodly.

Noteworthy is the literary progression to ‘walk’, ‘stand’, and ‘sit’, which possibly denotes successive downward steps in evil activities. On the one hand, there is merit in affirming, as Craigie (2004:60) observes, that the ‘three parallel lines’ in Psalm 1:1 are ‘poetically synonymous’; on the other hand, he seems unnecessarily dismissive of the view that these ‘three lines’ describe ‘three distinct phases in the deterioration of a person’s conduct and character’. The same critique can be made of VanGemeran (1991:54), who espouses that the psalmist’s ‘three descriptions’ are not emblematic of either ‘three kinds of activities of the

⁴⁵ Cf. n 3.

⁴⁶ Cf. Pss 2:12; 34:9; 41:1; 65:4; 84:12; 89:15; 106:3; 112:1; 127:5; 128:1; 144:15.

wicked’, or a ‘climactic development from walking to sitting’, or an ‘intensification in the depraved activities of the wicked’.⁴⁷

In agreement with the view that a literary progression is operative in verse 1, what begins as a seemingly innocuous association morphs into brazen participation. There is also a threefold collection of wicked contemplations: ‘counsel’,⁴⁸ ‘way’, and ‘seat’.⁴⁹ Finally, three words describe the character of the ungodly: ‘wicked’, ‘sinners’, and ‘mockers’. The three clauses with their respective cluster of interrelated terms emphasize that people characterised by rectitude and piety shun all association with evildoers and their wicked ways. Also, the upright do not adopt the mores of reprobates as a rule of life. Furthermore, those who are prudent do not persist in the practices of notorious offenders. In short, God’s people refuse to associate with those who openly scoff at the Creator, his Word, and his children.⁵⁰

deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner (2014:60) draw attention to the sharp numerical disparity in verse 1 between a sole upright person versus the collective mob of the ‘wicked’, ‘sinners’, and ‘mockers’. From a literary standpoint, it is a ‘mismatched equation’ in which the ‘righteous’ individual makes an ongoing, courageous effort to go ‘against the traffic’ of innumerable evildoers. In fact, it is a lifelong ‘struggle’ that necessitates ‘buffeting against the currents of peer pressure and group-think’. Despite the personal sacrifices that are made, the people of God experience a life filled with temporal joy and eternal fecundity.

⁴⁷ For a detailed affirmation of the ‘synonymous parallelism’ view and critique of the ‘climactic progression’ view, cf. Anderson (1974).

⁴⁸ Or ‘advice’; cf. KJV, NASB, NRSV, ESV, NET, Lexham.

⁴⁹ Or ‘assembly’; cf. NET, Lexham; Ps 107:32.

⁵⁰ Cf. Prov 1:22; 9:7–8; 13:1; 14:6; 15:12; 19:29.

The psalmist next focused attention on the ‘law of the Lord’ (v. 2),⁵¹ and said it is to be the believer’s rule of conduct. The Hebrew noun, *tôrâ*, is often rendered as ‘law’. While in some contexts this legal nuance is present, it is too narrow and rigid to insist on it in all places where *tôrâ* occurs. The more basic meaning of the noun is ‘instruction’ or ‘teaching’ and denotes a way of life, that is, one characterised by piety and virtue.⁵² The purpose of the Torah, then, is not merely to present a fixed number of ordinances, edicts, and decrees embedded within it; instead, as divinely revealed instruction, the Torah presents God’s will for his children on how to live in an upright manner. Accordingly, God’s law is not an irksome restriction, but rather the object of the upright’s love and constant study. Virtuous people find true happiness in the revealed will of God, as recorded in his Word.

The implication, then, is that the Hebrew phrase translated the ‘law of the Lord’ can refer to either teaching or instruction (or both). It is also used of a body of laws, especially the laws of Moses recorded in the first five books of the Old Testament. In verse 2, the writer made the phrase synonymous with the Word of God and stressed that it served as the believers’ guide for life. The upright engage scripture in two specific ways. First, they ‘delight’ in it. The underlying Hebrew noun does not refer to a mere external formalism, but rather to an obedient heart.⁵³ Second, believers constantly immerse themselves in scripture. The

⁵¹ Cf. the use of the strong adversative particle אך כִּי in Ps 1:2 (translated as ‘but’, ‘rather’, or ‘instead’); Putnam (2002).

⁵² In the Septuagint, *tôrâ* is frequently translated using the Greek noun, *nomos*; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Enns (1997); Hartley (1980b); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Liedke and Petersen (1997); López (2006:611); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Swanson (2001b).

⁵³ *hē’pēs*; cf. Ps 37:31; Botterweck (1986a:92–3); Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Gerleman (1997); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Swanson (2001b); Wood (1980); Talley (1997).

psalmist was referring to thoughtful reflection and study in an attitude of prayer and worship.⁵⁴

Verse 3 contains a vivid simile that is reminiscent of the Edenic garden to describe godly people. They are comparable to flourishing, fruitful trees deliberately placed near and nourished by constant supplies of water.⁵⁵ The writer possibly had in mind the desert date-palm tree, due to its craving for water, its stately growth, its evergreen foliage, and its valuable fruit. The Hebrew phrase rendered ‘streams of water’ could denote either natural streams or irrigation channels. Regardless, without this constant and reliable supply of life-sustaining hydration, a desert tree would quickly wither and die under the sun’s scorching heat. The biblical truth being communicated is that the upright are sustained by bountiful supplies of God’s grace. Such is drawn from their vital union with him through worship, prayer, and fellowship.⁵⁶

Not only are the righteous filled with joy and able to stand up under hardship, but also their multitudinous endeavours flourish. The Hebrew verb translated ‘prosper’ (v. 3) denotes outcomes that are successful and thriving.⁵⁷ In a manner of speaking, believers regularly produce ‘fruit’, like a well-watered tree. The psalmist may have been thinking about such material benefits as a large family, influence in the community, and a robust income. The ancient Israelites, living centuries before the time of the Messiah, did not have a complete understanding of eternal life. So,

⁵⁴ The Hebrew verb, *hgh*, which is translated ‘meditates’ (Ps 1:2), denotes reading Scripture attentively, including the reciting of verses in a low or barely audible voice; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Negoitā (1978); Swanson (2001b); Van Pelt and Kaiser (1997); Wolf (1980).

⁵⁵ Cf. Ps 92:12–14; Jer 11:19; 17:7–8; Ezek 17:5–10; 19:10; 47:12.

⁵⁶ Cf. Pss 52:8; 92:12.

⁵⁷ *slh*; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Hartley (1980a); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Luc (1997); Sæbo (1997); Swanson (2001b).

they tended to think that rewards and punishments were always given in this life.⁵⁸ From a New Testament perspective, the faithful discern that sometimes justice has to wait until the next life; nevertheless, it remains true that the righteous would prosper—if not now, then eventually in the eternal state.⁵⁹

In verses 4 through 6, the psalmist sets forth an acute disparity between the righteous and the ‘wicked’. The latter translates a Hebrew noun that refers to those guilty of criminal, impious activity. Additionally, the term points to an unrelenting, brazen way of life.⁶⁰ As noted above, the godly are like firmly rooted, verdant, and bounteous trees. In contrast,⁶¹ evildoers—who shamelessly scorn the Lord, the Tanakh, and the upright⁶²—are like the lifeless and rootless ‘chaff’ (v. 4) on a threshing floor and which is swept away by the slightest breeze. Worthless, insubstantial husks of grain scattered by an afternoon ‘wind’ provide a common Old Testament figure for the sudden destruction of reprobates.⁶³ Moreover, chaff describes both their disposition and demise.

Verse 5 declares that the real character of the godless would be revealed in a future time of ‘judgment’. In point of fact, since they were unstable and ephemeral, the ‘wicked’ would be powerless to hold their ground when the Creator separated them from the upright in the eschatological day of reckoning.⁶⁴ It is important to note that the psalmist was not just referring to the Lord’s end-time decree of condemnation, but also to all

⁵⁸ Cf. Gen 24:35; Josh 1:8; 1 Kings 3:11–13.

⁵⁹ Cf. Hab 2:2–3; 3:16; Matt 6:33.

⁶⁰ *rāšāʿ*; cf. Carpenter and Grisanti (1997); Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Livingston (1980); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Ringgren (2004:1); Swanson (2001b); van Leeuwen (1997).

⁶¹ Cf. the use of the strong adversative particle כִּי in Ps 1:4 (translated as ‘but’, ‘rather’, or ‘instead’); Putnam (2002).

⁶² Cf. Ps 1:1.

⁶³ Cf. Job 21:17–18; Pss 35:5; 83:13; Isa 17:13; 29:5; Hos 13:3; Zeph 2:2; Matt 3:12.

⁶⁴ Cf. Prov 2:22; Eccl 12:14; Nah 1:6.

temporal acts of divine justice against earth's miscreants. Included in this determination of guilt were their unrelenting efforts to exploit and maltreat God's people.

The wicked would have no weight, or influence, in the proceedings of the community of the faithful, which the psalmist referred to as the 'assembly of the righteous' (v. 5). In keeping with an ancient Near Eastern cultural context, evildoers would be unable to gather at the city gate with the community leaders to decide issues of justice. Neither could the profane worship in the temple with the people of God. Those guilty of committing vile acts would become known, making them perennial outsiders.

Verse 6 is literally translated, 'for the Lord knows the way of the righteous', in which the focus is on an established pattern of behaviour.⁶⁵ 'Righteous' translates the Hebrew noun, *šāddîq*, which refers to individuals whose conduct is characterised by rectitude and virtue, as well as integrity and blamelessness. Because their behaviour conforms to God's ethical standard, as revealed in the Torah, they enjoy an upright status in his presence.⁶⁶ The Septuagint translation uses the Greek adjective, *dikaïos*, which approximately reflects the general semantic range of meanings assigned to *šāddîq*.⁶⁷ *Dikaïos* is derived from the

⁶⁵ Instead of recognizing the Hebrew particle, *kî*, as being explanatory in force (i.e. translated as 'for'; cf. KJV, NASB, NRSV, ESV, Lexham), it is grammatically possible to treat it as asseverative (i.e. a solemn affirmation or declaration rendered as 'surely', 'indeed', or 'certainly'; cf. NET; van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze 1999).

⁶⁶ Cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Johnson (2003); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Reimer (1997); Stigers (1980); Swanson (2001b).

⁶⁷ Cf. Danker (2000); Hoogendyk (2014); Liddell and Scott (2010); Louw and Nida (1989); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Schneider (1990); Schrenk (1964); Silva (2014); Spicq (1994); Swanson (2001a).

noun *dikaïosynē*, which is commonly translated ‘righteousness’ and refers to what is in accordance with established moral norms.⁶⁸

In a legal sense, righteousness means to be vindicated or treated as just. From a biblical perspective, God’s character is the definition and source of righteousness. As a result, the righteousness of human beings is defined in terms of God’s holiness. Because the Lord solely provides righteousness, it cannot be produced or obtained by human efforts. God makes his righteousness available to all people without distinction. Just as there is no discrimination with the Creator in universally condemning all people as sinners, so he does not show partiality by offering righteousness to one particular ethnic group. The Lord freely gives it to people—regardless of race or gender—when they trust in the Messiah.⁶⁹

In the New Testament, the Greek verb, *dikaioō*, which is commonly rendered ‘justified’, signifies a court setting, with a judge declaring an individual ‘not guilty’. The idea of justification comes from a judge pronouncing someone to be righteous or innocent of a crime. The word has a technical forensic application of a one-time rendering of a positive judicial verdict. In Paul’s letters, he used the term to refer to God’s declaration that the believing sinner is righteous because of the atoning work of the Messiah on the cross.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Cf. Danker (2000); Hoogendyk (2014); Kertelge (1990); Liddell and Scott (2010); Louw and Nida (1989); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Schrenk (1964); Silva (2014); Spicq (1994); Swanson (2001a).

⁶⁹ The literature dealing with the concept of ‘righteousness’ from a biblical and theological perspective is extensive. In addition to the pertinent lexical sources cited throughout this section, the following are representative, summary treatments from various ecclesial and doctrinal perspectives: Diehl (2001:1033–4); Erickson (2013:883–90); Horton (2011:637–43); Mueller 1934:367–83); Seifrid (2000:740–5); Toon (1996:687–9).

⁷⁰ Cf. Danker (2000); Liddell and Scott (2010); Louw and Nida (1989); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Schrenk (1964); Silva (2014); Spicq (1994); Swanson (2001a).

On one level, God's knowledge of the 'righteous' (Ps 1:6) concerns his perceiving and taking note of their demeanour, priorities, and actions and recompensing them accordingly;⁷¹ yet, on another level, it is possible to extend the lexical nuance of the Hebrew verb, *yd'*, to include such concepts as 'watch over', 'guard', and 'protect'.⁷² In this case, greater interpretive weight is given to the trajectory of their temporal existence, along with the felicitous outcome of their eternal future.

The above option corresponds well with the second half of verse 6, particularly its declaration that the fate of the 'wicked' terminates in desolation. deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner (2014:64) aptly surmise that the 'road' of one's 'own choosing leads only' to one's 'own destruction'. Concededly, malcontents eventually die and because of their villainy are permanently cut off from the upright;⁷³ even so, the destiny of evildoers goes beyond just the idea of perishing to include that of eternal ruin.⁷⁴

5. A Descriptive Analysis of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12

The preceding section undertook a descriptive analysis of Psalm 1. The investigation continues in the present section with a descriptive analysis of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12. At the outset of Jesus' public ministry, He announced that God's kingdom was drawing near (Matt 4:17). What attitudes and actions were appropriate for a citizen of God's

⁷¹ Cf. KJV, NASB, ESV, Lexham; Josh 3:4; Job 21:14; Ps 67:2; Isa 42:16; Jer 5:4–5.

⁷² Cf. NRSV, NIV, NET; Job 23:10; Botterweck (1986b:468–9); Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Fretheim (1997); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Lewis (1980); Magnum, Brown, Klippenstein, and Hurst (2014); Schottroff (1997); Swanson (2001b).

⁷³ Cf. KJV, NRSV, NASB, Lexham; Prov 12:26; 15:9.

⁷⁴ Cf. NIV, NET; Ps 146:9; Prov 4:19; Jer 12:1.

kingdom? The Messiah answered this question in what is known as the Sermon on the Mount (or SOM; chaps. 5–7).⁷⁵ Although Jesus' primary audience would have been his disciples, there was a larger crowd of people who listened to him teach (7:28). The ethics Jesus taught in his address contrasted sharply with the sterile, inert legalism of his religious critics. Because the Pharisees and scribes coveted external forms of righteousness, Jesus launched his oration by decrying such an approach to life.⁷⁶

There are two views regarding when and where the SOM was preached. One group asserts that it is a compendium of various teachings that were given on different occasions in several places. A second group maintains the address was delivered at one time early in Jesus' ministry and in one location (e.g. on the slope of a mountain near Capernaum). Portions of the SOM are similar to Jesus' Sermon on the Plain (or SOP; Luke 6:20–49). Some conjecture these passages signify two different messages given on separate occasions, while others surmise the two passages represent the same message. According to the second view, Luke

⁷⁵ The following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the discourse in this section dealing with the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12: Davies and Allison (1988); Betz (1995); Blomberg (1992); Bock (1994); Boring (1995); Carson (1984); Culpepper (1995); Ellis (1983); France (2007); Geldenhuys (1983); Guelich (1982); Hagner (2000); Hendriksen (1973); Holladay (2012); Howell (2011); Keener (1999); Lenski (1964); Liefeld (1984); Luz (2007); Marshall (1983); McNeile (1980); Morris (1974); Nolland (2005); Osborne (2010); Plummer (1982); Powell (1996); Turner (2008); Witherington (2006); Zimmerli (1978).

⁷⁶ Guelich (1982:60, 66) draws attention to the scholarly debate concerning whether the SOM should be interpreted as either 'kerygma' or 'didache', 'law' or 'gospel', and 'ethical' or 'eschatological'. In this essay, such sharp, binary distinctions are not emphasized; instead, it is affirmed that a dynamic interplay between each of these elements is at work within the literary matrix of the SOM.

presented an abbreviated version of the longer oration recorded in Matthew.⁷⁷

Presumably, the ‘crowds’ of Matthew 5:1 who came to hear Jesus’ sermon are the same as the ‘large crowds’ of 4:25 who accompanied Jesus.⁷⁸ The throng journeyed from at least a 100-mile radius of the territory to listen to Jesus (5:2). As the Master Teacher, Jesus employed the normal sitting posture of a Jewish rabbi.⁷⁹ God’s supreme Old Testament revelation—the law—was given by Moses, accompanied by thunder and lightning, from Mount Sinai.⁸⁰ Jesus, who is infinitely greater than Moses,⁸¹ also delivered the SOM from a mountain region; yet, it remains unclear exactly where Jesus gave his oration.⁸² A traditional site, however, is on a hillside near Capernaum, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. If so, then, part of the ‘crowds’

⁷⁷ For a detailed synopsis and assessment of the scholarship concerning the relationship between the SOM and SOP, cf. Bock (1994:931–44).

⁷⁸ Osborne (2010:165) envisions the presence of an ‘inner circle’ of Jesus’ disciples (esp. the Twelve) functioning as ‘active’ listeners. In contrast, the throng comprised an ‘outer circle’ of ‘passive’ listeners.

⁷⁹ Cf. Matt 13:1–2; 23:2; 24:3; 26:55; Luke 2:46; 4:20–21. Also, compare Luke 6:17, which depicts Jesus as standing while He ministered to large numbers of people.

⁸⁰ Cf. Exod 19:9, 16–19; 20:18; Deut 5:4–5, 22, 23, 26; Heb 12:18–19.

⁸¹ Ellis (1983:111) draws attention to various ‘Jewish traditions’ that portrayed the ‘Messiah’ as an authoritative ‘interpreter of the Torah’ or Mosaic legal code. This individual was also depicted as the premier disseminator of a ‘new Torah’, in which the divine oracles were clarified. This is the same law that Jesus said he came to fulfill, not abolish (cf. Matt 5:17), and which finds its culmination in him (cf. Rom 10:4). Jesus perfectly obeyed the law and brought to pass its types and prophecies. Also, in Jesus, the law finds its significance and continuity. Jesus emphasises the true meaning and spirit of the law, which is a reflection of God’s righteous character. Through the Saviour’s ministry of teaching and his redemptive work on the cross, those who are united to him by faith are able to understand and apply the precepts of scripture, as expressed in the law.

⁸² As elsewhere in Matthew, the Evangelist literally referred to ‘the mountain’ (i.e. by using the definite article), yet without specifically identifying either its name or location; cf. 14:23; 15:29; 28:16.

(4:25; 5:1) Jesus drew came from the thousands of people who lived in the cities and smaller settlements that dotted the Sea of Galilee's coastline during the first century CE.

At various times in history, there have been common misconceptions made about the SOM. One view is that it is nothing more than a call to social action. A second option regards the oration simply as a list of expectations to fulfill to secure happiness. A third stance asserts Jesus' address is not applicable for the present era, but only for a future kingdom age. These contrasting perspectives notwithstanding, the lexical data analyzed in section 2 suggests that both a present and future focus are in view. Moreover, it was surmised that believers experience God-given joy, regardless of whether the realms of existence are sacred or secular, and whether the context is temporal and physical or eternal and metaphysical.

As observed in section 1, the recurrence of the term rendered 'blessed' in Matthew 5:3–12 indicates that it is a central leitmotif of the passage. Keener (1999:165) clarifies that Jesus' maxims fit well within a 'Palestinian Jewish milieu'.⁸³ To recap the analysis appearing in section 2, 'blessed' conveys the idea of being the privileged recipient of God's favour and enjoying a happier end than the wicked. Betz (1995:94) labels the marcarisms as anticipatory, 'eschatological verdicts'. On one level, the believers' experience of God's favour and approval is a potential, present reality; yet, on another level, the believers' state of blessedness serves as a prelude to the full and complete manifestation of 'divine justice' in the kingdom age.

⁸³ Cf. Ps 2:12; 32:1–2; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4; 84:4–5, 12; 94:12; 112:1; 119:1–2; 128:1; Prov 8:34; Isa 56:2; Jer 17:7; Dan 12:12; Bar 4:4; 1 En 99:10; 2 En 42:6–14; 44:5; Ps Sol 4:23; 5:16; 6:1; 10:1; Sir 25:8–9.

The Messiah pronounced his first blessing on the ‘poor in spirit’, in which the prepositional phrase is a dative of reference or sphere.⁸⁴ Accordingly, Jesus directed his attention to the realm of the human spirit as the place where a humble attitude is manifested.⁸⁵ These are believers who, having been stripped of their own securities, feel deeply their need for God.⁸⁶ The Saviour’s redemption, not their own presumed goodness, is the basis for their present and future citizenship in heaven. In Greek thought, humility tended to be a negative trait that suggested weakness and a lack of worth or dignity. Jesus, however, in concert with Second Temple Judaism,⁸⁷ made it a cornerstone of Christian character.⁸⁸

The attitude and lifestyle Jesus enjoined in the first Beatitude is foundational to all the other virtues he commended in the subsequent Beatitudes.⁸⁹ For instance, believers cannot mourn without recognising how unable they are to handle life in their own strength (v. 4). They cannot be meek unless they humbly acknowledge their need for gentleness (v. 5). Believers cannot long for righteousness if they proudly view themselves as already righteous (v. 6). They cannot be merciful without recognising their need for God’s mercy (v. 7). Believers cannot be pure in heart if their thoughts and emotions are filled with pride (v. 8). They cannot be peacemakers if they arrogantly assert that their way is always right (vs. 9). Finally, they cannot stand up under persecution without Christlike humility (vv. 10–12).

⁸⁴ Greek: *tō pneumatic*.

⁸⁵ Cf. Luke 6:20, which narrows the focus to those who are materially impoverished.

⁸⁶ Cf. Isa 57:15; 61:1; 66:2.

⁸⁷ Cf. Prov 3:34; Isa 57:15; Zeph 2:3; Zech 9:9; Ant 3:212; Sir 3:17.

⁸⁸ Cf. Matt 18:4; 23:12; Luke 18:14.

⁸⁹ Despite numerous approaches to determine the genre, structure, and number of the Beatitudes, no consensus has emerged among specialists. It is beyond the scope of this essay to resolve these longstanding, debated issues.

Jesus pronounced his second blessing on the mournful, whom he promised would receive God's comfort both now and in the eschaton.⁹⁰ 'Those who mourn' (v. 4) weep, not only due to the presence of injustice throughout society, but also because they have transgressed against the Lord.⁹¹ Furthermore, they cry in confession and repentance, which are a reflection of their humble spirit. These believers do not look to unsaved humanity to right all wrongs and defend the downtrodden. Similarly, human rulers are not seen as the linchpin for establishing eternal satisfaction, joy, and comfort; rather, these verities are only found in baptismal union with the Saviour. For this reason, the mournful come to Jesus in humility and faith, confessing their sins. In turn, he enters their lives and abides there with the assurance of his forgiveness and the promise of his vindication.

Jesus gave his third blessing to the 'meek' (v. 5) and pledged to give them the renewed earth as an eschatological inheritance.⁹² Meekness has two aspects. On the one hand, the meek bear up under provocations, control their feelings, and refuse to get even; on the other hand, they are courageous, generous, and courteous. They put others first, not themselves. Here readers find Jesus explaining the values of the end-time kingdom he announced. Relationships, possessions, information, prayer, money, and power are a few of the categories he redefined from God's perspective. Jesus showed that following him involves radical change. For many believers this means undoing the way they have always acted and reconsidering traditional sources of wisdom from their family, friends, and culture. To become like Jesus requires believers to do a toughminded review of their moral values and lifelong goals and dreams.

⁹⁰ Cf. Isa 61:2; Rev 7:17; 21:4.

⁹¹ Cf. Luke 6:21, in which the reference to those who 'weep' at this moment in time parallels the mournful in Matthew 5:4.

⁹² Cf. Ps 37:9, 11, 29; Isa 61:7.

Jesus next blessed those who longed for ‘righteousness’ (v. 6) and promised to fulfill their desires at the end of the age.⁹³ Matthew’s Gospel does not use *dikaiosynē* (‘righteousness’) in the strictly forensic sense of being declared not guilty in the sight of God. Admittedly, the Matthean nuance does not contradict the notion of imputed righteousness found in Paul’s writings. Even so, consonant with the statements conveyed in section 4, the primary focus here is on attitudes and actions that align with God’s holy character. On one level, the emphasis is on desiring God above all things and seeking to be in a harmonious relationship with him and others; on another level, while greed, injustice, and violence consume the unsaved, believers yearn for God to bring about social justice and goodness both temporally and eternally.

In the preceding Beatitudes there seems to be a fourfold logical progression. First, believers admit their spiritual bankruptcy (v. 3). Second, recognising themselves as ‘poor in spirit’ causes them to ‘mourn’ (vs. 4) their condition. Third, because they grieve over their sorrowful state, they come to a correct notion of themselves, which is to be humble and meek (v. 5). Fourth, by accepting the appraisal arrived at in verses 3 through 5, they are ready to ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness’ (v. 6).

Given the above, it is appropriate that Jesus blessed the ‘merciful’ (v. 7) and declared they would one day be treated with ‘mercy’. This verse is referring to the presence of a gracious disposition toward others, even when mistreated.⁹⁴ Specifically, the merciful are kind, charitable, and ready to sympathise with the sufferings of the afflicted. They long for the vindication of the righteous, but are not harsh and cruel. Also, they seek to be generous to all by showing the love of God without partiality or

⁹³ Cf. Luke 6:21, which restricts Jesus’ declaration to those who experience hunger in the present.

⁹⁴ Cf. Matt 6:12; Luke 6:36; 11:4; Jas 2:13; 1 Clem 13:2.

preconditions. The merciful receive God's favour in the temporal and eternal realms, for they are the beneficiaries of his mercy.

Jesus focused the sixth Beatitude on the 'pure in heart' (v. 8)⁹⁵ and promised that eventually they would 'see God'.⁹⁶ The focus here is on being genuine and honest in all one's dealings. Such purity requires spiritual discipline, self-control, and a single-minded focus in renouncing self-love for the love of God. Sin is the enemy of moral purity, and popular ideas and activities conspire to undo it. Furthermore, the world ridicules and taunts the virtuous for not seeking pleasure; but rather than amusement, in the eternal state the pure receive the greatest gift of all, namely, a personal encounter with the living God. When the penitent come to know the Father through faith in the Son, they are truly fulfilled.

In the seventh Beatitude, Jesus pronounced God's approval on the 'peacemakers' (v. 9).⁹⁷ In referring to them as 'children of God', Jesus meant they already were beloved members of the Creator's everlasting family.⁹⁸ Peacemakers do not merely stay cool, calm, and collected, but

⁹⁵ Cf. Ps 51:10; 73:1; Prov 22:11; 2 Bar 9:1; 2 En 45:3; Test Ben 8:2; Test Jos 4:6.

⁹⁶ As Hendriksen (1973:277–8) clarifies, the experience of seeing God is technically known as the 'beatific vision' (in Latin, *visio beatifica*; cf. Exod 24:9–11; Job 19:26; Pss 11:7; 17:15; 24:3–6; 42:2; 63:2). Although the Mosaic law is holy (cf. Rom 7:12), it could only provide an incomplete understanding of God (cf. Heb 1:1–2). In addition, He who 'lives in unapproachable light' (1 Tim 6:16) has never been seen in the fullness of His glory by human eyes (John 1:18; cf. Exod 33:20; 1 John 4:12). The only exception is Jesus (John 6:46). All that the law anticipated and declared is embodied in the Messiah. He is both the 'one and only son' (1:18), but also 'God' made in his 'human likeness' (Phil. 2:7). John 1:18 uses the Greek noun, *kolpos* to declare that the Son abides in intimate relationship with the Father (as well as the Spirit). Accordingly, the Son has made the Father known to humankind. Only the Son, then, could reveal the essential being of the Godhead, for the Messiah alone is the 'image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15), the 'exact representation of [God's] being' (Heb 1:3), and the One in whom 'all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form' (Col 2:9). For this reason, Jesus said to Philip, 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9).

⁹⁷ Cf. Ps 34:14; 2 En 52:11.

⁹⁸ Cf. John 1:12; Rom 8:14–17; Gal 4:4–7; Eph 1:5.

also proactively work for peace within their families, schools, churches, businesses, and communities. Jesus is the ultimate peacemaker,⁹⁹ for he destroyed the enmity between sinners and God.¹⁰⁰ Jesus not only brings believers peace with God, but also heals their broken relationships.¹⁰¹

In the final Beatitudes, Jesus declared that God's favour abided on the 'persecuted' (v. 10) and promised them the eschatological divine 'kingdom'.¹⁰² This outcome repeats the promise Jesus made in verse 1 to the 'poor in spirit'. Together, verses 1 and 10 function as an inclusio (or bracketing) for the intervening verses. Furthermore, verses 3 through 6 primarily concern the believers' relationship with God, whereas verses 7 through 10 deal with their interactions with other people. This thematic emphasis parallels the Decalogue, in which the first half of the Ten Commandments spotlight the proper way to relate to the Creator and the second half shifts the focus to one's fellow human beings.¹⁰³

Verses 11 and 12 elaborate further on what Jesus' broached in verse 10. Specifically, he taught that when believers upheld truth, rectitude, and goodness, they would be slandered and insulted (v. 11). Such persecution arises because of taking a stand for righteousness and being known as a follower of the Messiah. Jesus gave two reasons his harassed followers could accept their circumstances with an attitude of joy (v. 12). First, they ought to realise that their eternal reward would exceed their wildest

⁹⁹ Cf. Isa 9:6.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. 2 Cor 5:18–19; Eph 2:13–18.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Rom 5:1.

¹⁰² Cf. the parallel rendition of Jesus' statements in Luke 6:22–23, 26.

¹⁰³ For a comparative analysis of the Ten Commandments and the Matthean Beatitudes, cf. Chan (2012). The author utilizes virtue tradition as his mode of exposition. He also engages such luminaries as Aquinas and Calvin, along with the Confucian tradition, to round out his disquisition.

expectations. Second, they could recall that God's enemies also mistreated his 'prophets'.¹⁰⁴

6. The Conceptual Connections Between Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12

The preceding two sections embark on a descriptive analysis of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12, respectively. This pivotal information, in turn, provides the basis for discerning the conceptual connections between these two seminal passages in the Judeo-Christian canon. To begin, Psalm 1 describes what it is like to walk in the way of the Lord. Similarly, the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 relate what it means to live as a follower of the Saviour. In keeping with the observation made by Powell (1996:460), these two texts augur 'eschatological rewards for the virtuous', as well as 'reversals' for the impious.

Furthermore, common to both passages is an awareness that a flourishing life is deeply rooted in the soil of God's Word. Psalm 1 uses the intensive masculine plural construct of the Hebrew noun, *'ăšrê*, which can be rendered 'blessedness[es]' to indicate that wherever there is one blessing from God there is another from him. Correspondingly, in the Beatitudes, Jesus does not restrict his discourse to highlight only one form of blessing; rather, he accentuates a series of interconnected blessings graciously bestowed by the Creator on the righteous.

Psalm 1 draws a sharp contrast between the righteous and the wicked. The former enjoy God's favour, both temporally and eternally. In contrast, the impious experience the Creator's judgment, especially for

¹⁰⁴ Cf. 1 Kings 18:4, 13; 19:10, 14; 2 Chron 24:21; 36:15–16; Neh 9:26; Jer 2:30; 20:2; 26:20–24; Ant 10:38; Asc Isa 2:16; 5:1–14; 2 Bar 52:6; 4 Bar 9:21–32; Jub 1:12; 2 Macc 7:9; 14:38; 4 Macc 9:29; 18:3; Matt 23:32–37; Acts 7:52; 1 Thess 2:15.

their maltreatment of the upright. Even if this dire outcome is not evident in this life, it is inescapable in the eschaton. Similarly, the Beatitudes reveal that the destiny of the Messiah's followers is characterized by unspeakable delight, both in the present and at the end of the age. Not even evildoers can rob believers of the Saviour's abiding and sustaining presence. He graces them with fecundities that can neither be purchased with money nor wiped out by malevolent forces.

The above observations indicate that both Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 are concerned with the past, present, and future aspects of God's reign. This includes the way in which the Creator enables his spiritual children to flourish both temporally and eternally. For instance, they experience unfathomable joy and peace, even when their circumstance is dominated by loss and grief. Furthermore, they have the God-given assurance that in the eschaton the Lord would vindicate the upright and judge the wicked.

The time horizon, then, in these two portions of scripture is not limited to any specific period of human history. Indeed, each passage, respectively, takes into account the entire arc of God's redemptive plan and kingdom program. There is a sense in which both Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 signify apocalyptic manifestos, wherein the aspirations of the upright for a better world are affirmed. The scope and scale extend far beyond the confines of earth to encompass the entire cosmos. This awareness of salvation history incentivizes the believers' valuation and pursuit of such virtues as humility, holiness, and rectitude.

Given what has been conveyed, it is not surprising that both Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 articulate a complementary, cohesive, and coherent view of reality. With respect to Psalm 1, there is a stark, binary description of what the end would be for the righteous and the wicked. Specifically, the Creator bequeaths blessedness to the former and

decrees wretchedness to the latter. Likewise, Matthew 5:3–12 discloses that even when the upright encounter hardship and heartache in the present, the kingdom of heaven belongs to them, along with divine consolation, forgiveness, and joy. Concisely expressed, each of these passages envisions an eternal future in which God's people luxuriate in His sacred presence.

7. Conclusion

This journal article undertakes a comparative analysis of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12. One incentive for doing so is to advance the field of scholarship concerning the intertextuality between the Old and New Testaments by examining two seminal passages in the Judeo-Christian canon. A second motivation is that this topic has received only a cursory consideration in the academic literature.

The major claim affirmed by the study is that there are discernible connections between the above two passages at the linguistic and conceptual levels. In turn, recognising the latter helps to clarify the meaning and significance of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 for ministers of the Gospel. Admittedly, the overriding premise of this essay cannot be established with mathematical precision. Even so, the candid and objective assessment of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 undertaken in the preceding sections indicates that strong intertextual connections between these two passages are recognisable.

Moreover, there are several ministry-related implications arising from a comparative analysis of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12. To be specific, when believers put their faith in the Son, they begin a new life in baptismal union with him. Even after death, this existence centred in the Messiah continues, yet within the glorious heights of heaven. Such

an outcome is appropriate, for those who trust in the Redeemer for eternal life are destined to remain forever in the sacred presence of the triune Creator. In contrast, those who reject God's offer of love may travel down their own road of earthly life as long as believers do on theirs; yet, after that, the wicked receive a sentence of terrible finality leading to eternal doom in unending separation from the Lord.

Furthermore, as the comparative analysis of Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 discloses, Jesus' followers should not be shocked when they are slandered, physically harmed, or targeted for malicious rumours. Although believers feel the intense pain of such injustices, they can persevere by holding fast to the promise of God's richest blessings. After all, Jesus said that heaven belongs to the persecuted righteous. By this he meant they would have a place of distinction in the kingdom of God. Concededly, in this present world, many of the Lord's disciples are harassed and abused by others for the cause of the Son. Even though the world may regard them as nobodies, the Father considers them as people of honour to whom he gives nothing less than unending bliss within his glorious temple in heaven.

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