
CHAPTER 9

THE SERMON AT THE TEMPLE AND THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

The discussion of translation in the preceding chapter leads directly into a further area of textual study, namely, the examination of the early Greek manuscripts of Matthew. What may these precious manuscripts add to our understanding of the Sermon at the Temple?

The New Testament is one of the best documented books to come down to us from the classical world. Many manuscripts of the gospel of Matthew have survived from the second through the seventh centuries and beyond. Not all of these manuscripts are exactly the same, although in an overwhelming majority of cases they agree on the words, spellings, and conjugations in the Greek text of the Sermon on the Mount. They differ noticeably from the *Textus Receptus* (the Greek text from which the King James Version was translated) only in a few places. This high degree of confirmation of the received Greek speaks generally in favor of the Sermon at the Temple, for one could not have wisely gambled on such confirmation a century and a half ago, before the earliest Greek New Testament manuscripts had

been discovered. In the rush of manuscript discoveries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many people expected that the earliest texts of the New Testament would prove radically different from the traditional manuscripts handed down through the ages, but the need to revise our texts significantly did not materialize. A few interesting textual variants, however, deserve brief discussion.

Transmitted Correctly: The Omission of “Without a Cause”

In one important passage, manuscript evidence favors the Sermon at the Temple, and it deserves recognition. The KJV of Matthew 5:22 reads, “Whosoever is angry with his brother *without a cause* [*eikēi*] shall be in danger of the judgment” (italics added). The Sermon at the Temple drops the phrase *without a cause* (3 Nephi 12:22).¹ So do many of the better early manuscripts.²

This favorable evidence for the Sermon at the Temple has the support of reliable sources. While lacking unanimous consensus in the early manuscripts of the Sermon on the Mount (which is not unusual), the absence of the phrase “without a cause” is evidenced by the following manuscripts: *p64*, *p67*, Sinaiticus (original hand), Vaticanus, some minuscules, the Latin Vulgate (Jerome mentions that it was not found in the oldest manuscripts known to him), the Ethiopic texts, the Gospel of the Nazarenes, Justin, Tertullian, Origen, and others. One may count as compelling all readings that are supported by “the best Greek MSS—by the A.D. 200 *p64* (where it is extant) and by at least the two oldest uncials, as well as some minuscules, [especially if] it also has some Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and early patristic support.”³ A survey of the list of manuscripts supporting the Sermon at the

Temple and the original absence of the phrase *without a cause* in Matthew 5:22 shows that this shorter reading meets these criteria.

Moreover, this textual difference in the Greek manuscripts of the Sermon on the Mount is the only variant that has a significant impact on meaning. It is much more severe to say, “Whoever is angry is in danger of the judgment,” than to say, “Whoever is angry *without a cause* is in danger of the judgment.” The first discourages all anger against a brother; the second permits brotherly anger as long as it is justifiable. The former is more like the demanding sayings of Jesus regarding committing adultery in one’s heart (see Matthew 5:28) and loving one’s enemies (see Matthew 5:44), neither of which offers the disciple a convenient loophole of self-justification or rationalization. Indeed, as Wernberg-Møller points out, the word *eikēi* in Matthew 5:22 may reflect a Semitic idiom that does not invite allowance for “‘just’ anger in certain circumstances” at all, but “is original and echoes some Aramaic phrase, condemning anger as sinful in any case” and “as alluding to . . . the harbouring of angry feelings for any length of time.”⁴ In light of Wernberg-Møller’s interpretation of the underlying idiom, the original sense of Matthew 5:22 is accurately reflected in the Sermon at the Temple whether *eikēi* is included in the Greek saying or not.

In my estimation, this textual variant in favor of the Sermon at the Temple is very meaningful. The removal of *without a cause* has important moral, behavioral, psychological, and religious ramifications, as it is the main place where a significant textual change from the KJV was in fact needed and delivered.

Translated Clearly

In a few places in the Greek manuscripts of the Sermon on the Mount, the Greek itself has come down over the years in a slightly different form from that which was apparently written in the original Gospel of Matthew.⁵ In each of these cases, however, the later alternative Greek variants essentially say the same thing as the probable earlier readings. Thus, while the later variants may involve slightly different Greek constructions or vocabulary words, these differences are insignificant from the standpoint of translation. Accordingly, even though the Book of Mormon text does not differ in these spots from the King James Version of the Bible, the Sermon at the Temple still presents readers with a clear and appropriate translation of the essential meaning of these passages. Because the textual issues surrounding these passages have been examined elsewhere,⁶ these few points can be covered here in shorter compass.

In Matthew 5:27 we read: “Ye have heard that it was said *by them of old time*, Thou shalt not commit adultery.” The best early manuscripts of this verse, however, do not contain the words *tois archaiois* (“by them of old time”). They only read, “Ye have heard that it was said. . . .” Textual purists are probably right that the phrase should be left out of our Greek texts of Matthew 5:27 today, but the meaning of this phrase is implicit in the Greek text, whether or not the words *tois archaiois* are written out. This is because the parallel sayings in Matthew 5:21 and 5:33 contain the phrase *tois archaiois*, so these words are understood in verse 27, just as they are understood in verses 38 and 43, where no Greek manuscript evinced a need to repeat the obvious either. In fact, this variant is insignificant enough that the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament does not even note it.

It is also interesting to note that the phrase *by them of old time* does *not* appear in 3 Nephi 12:33, whereas it *does* appear in the Greek and KJV of Matthew 5:33. Thus, just as the Greek manuscripts sometimes include and other times exclude the words *tois archaiois* in the five “ye have heard” verses, so does the Sermon at the Temple. Neither the Sermon on the Mount nor the Sermon at the Temple needs to spell this phrase out each time in order to convey this meaning.

In Matthew 5:30, the better Greek manuscripts read, “lest your whole body go off [*apelthēi*] into hell,” while other texts, including 3 Nephi 12:30, warn, “lest your whole body *be cast* [*blēthēi*] into hell.” These readings also present a distinction without a difference. There is no practical difference between these two idioms. The result is the same whether one’s whole body “is cast” into hell or “goes off” into hell. So this variant, too, is not significant enough to have been noted in the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament. Furthermore, it is evident that Jesus and his early apostles intended to convey no detectable difference in meaning between these two phrases, for they are used synonymously and concurrently in Mark 9:43, 45, and 47. Thus, they work as acceptable English equivalents in translation today.

Also, while the position of the prepositional phrase *into hell* shifts around in the various Greek manuscripts, in English this phrase can stand only at the end of the sentence. Thus, our English translations put this prepositional phrase in the only place where English syntax will allow.

Moreover, although the textual evidence is on the side of *go into hell* in Matthew 5:30, it may be a quirk of fate that the oldest surviving manuscripts happened to have the reading “cast into hell” (3 Nephi 12:30). This observation

receives some support from Matthew Black's argument that *cast into hell*, preferred by the KJV, fits more comfortably into the alliteration of the Aramaic of this Markan (and Matthean) passage than does *go to hell*.⁷ In any event, Jesus may well have said "cast into hell" originally here.

Similarly, in Matthew 7:2 the older texts read, "and with what measure ye mete, it shall be *measured* to you" (*metrēthēsetai*; italics added), while the later ones add, "and with what measure ye mete, it shall be *measured* to you *again*" (*antimetrēthēsetai*; italics added). Like the KJV, 3 Nephi 14:2 ends with the word *again*. Since Luke 6:38 also has the word *antimetrēthēsetai* (measured again), New Testament scholars have generally concluded that the text of Matthew 7:2 was changed at some point to harmonize with Luke.

Behind the English word *again*, however, stands only the Greek intensifying prefix *anti-*. With or without this prefix on the verb, the sentence means exactly the same thing. In either case, Jesus says that the standards a person uses to judge or to measure others will be used against the person who uses them. Again, this variant was not considered significant enough to be noted in the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament.

The texts of Matthew 5:44 present an interesting set of readings. Some texts say "love your enemies and pray for them which despitefully use you," while others add such words as "bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you." The injunction to love one's enemies is shorter in the earlier manuscripts; the later ones seem to have incorporated the additional words from Luke 6:27–28. Here the issue is a little different. Did Joseph Smith have the shorter text on the plates and expand it in the translation process, or did the longer text appear there similar to the

way Jesus had spoken in Luke 6:27–28? Either is possible. Jesus must have said something like “love your enemies” many times; he need not have said it exactly the same way every time. Moreover, as John Gee has pointed out, early Hebrew versions of Matthew 5:44 contain the longer form similar to the Sermon at the Temple.⁸ These points seem to me to allow adequate room for the translation given in the Sermon at the Temple.

Likewise, in Matthew 6:4, 6, and 18 textual evidence supports the idea that Matthew 6:4, 6, and 18 originally said, “Your Father will reward you,” not “Your Father will reward you *openly* [*en tōi phanerōi*].” The KJV and the Sermon at the Temple, however, read “openly.” Again, the only possible meaning of these verses is that God will openly reward the righteous with treasures in heaven on the judgment day. This understanding is sustained by the Greek verb for *reward*, namely, *apodidomi*. It has a wide variety of meanings, including “to give retribution, reward, or punishment.” Its prefix *apo* can mean, among other things, “out from.” For example, in the word *apocalypse*, the prefix *apo* means “out from” that which is hidden. In the verb *apodidomi*, it may convey the idea of being rewarded *apo*, that is “out from” the obscurity of the acts themselves, or openly. Thus, one does not need the phrase *en tōi phanerōi* (translation) in order to understand that “he who sees *in secret* will reward you *apo*, openly.”

God will reward the righteous openly when the books are opened at the final judgment. Contemplating an open reward of treasures in heaven is especially consistent with the increased eschatological orientation of the Sermon at the Temple.

The Long Ending of the Lord's Prayer

Finally, there is the famous textual problem at the end of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:13. Did the prayer originally include the doxology "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen"? Can one assume, with Jeremias and others, that Jesus originally appended some ending to the Lord's Prayer, although it is not recorded in the earliest survivors of the Sermon on the Mount? This issue is unsettled among biblical scholars.⁹

It is well-known that the earlier Greek manuscripts have no doxology at the end of the Lord's Prayer; they end abruptly with "deliver us from evil." In this respect they resemble (and may have been changed to conform with) Luke 11:4, which also simply ends "but deliver us from evil." The Sermon at the Temple along with later Greek manuscripts and the KJV conclude with a doxology. Whether the phrase was originally present in the text of Matthew cannot be known, although most textual critics find it easiest to believe that the phrase was introduced later into that text. For many circumstantial reasons, however, no one seems to doubt that Jesus probably pronounced a doxology of some kind at the end of his prayers. The only question is how early such a thing found its way into the text of the Gospel of Matthew.

The following evidence makes it likely that Jesus indeed ended his prayers in Jerusalem and Bountiful with a doxology. First, it would have been highly irregular at the time of Jesus to end a Jewish prayer without some words in praise of God. Jeremias states: "It would be a completely erroneous conclusion to suppose that the Lord's Prayer was ever prayed without some closing words of praise to God; in Palestinian practice it was completely unthinkable that a prayer would end with the word 'temptation.' Now,

in Judaism prayers were often concluded with a ‘seal,’ a sentence of praise freely formulated by the man who was praying.”¹⁰

Second, Jeremias’s point can be extended one step further into the temple. As pointed out above, a special acknowledgment of the glory and kingdom of God was spoken in the temple of the Jews as a benediction on the Day of Atonement. The people bowed their knees, fell on their faces, and said, “Praised be the name of his glorious kingdom forever and eternally!” In the sacred matters in the temple, one did not simply answer “Amen.”¹¹ It is all the more unlikely that a prayer at the temple would end without some form of doxology. This may be a factor in explaining why the prayer here at the temple in Bountiful includes the doxology, but the instruction given by Jesus on prayer out in the open in Luke 11 does not.

Third, the doxology in the KJV and Sermon at the Temple seems to have followed a traditional form, reflected in 1 Chronicles 29:10–13, as is widely observed.¹² The Nephites may have known such phraseology from their Israelite traditions, for it appears in an important blessing spoken by King David, and the Nephite records contained certain historical records of the Jews (see 1 Nephi 5:12). According to Chronicles, David’s blessing reads: “Wherefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our father, *for ever and ever*. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the *power*, and the *glory*, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the *kingdom*” (1 Chronicles 29:10–11; italics added).¹³

Fourth, although a minority, several early texts in Greek, Syriac, Coptic, and in the Didache (ca. A.D. 100) also exist that include doxologies at the end of the Lord’s Prayer

in Matthew 6:13. These indicate that the cultic or liturgical use and acceptance of some doxology was apparently widespread at a very early time in Christianity. The form of these doxologies, however, could easily vary, as is borne out by 2 Timothy 4:18.¹⁴

Fifth, it can also be noted that the Lord's Prayer in the Sermon at the Temple differs in several other respects from the version of the prayer in Matthew 6, as discussed above. Like the prayer in Luke 11, the prayer in the Book of Mormon is shorter than the version in Matthew, yet it agrees substantially with Matthew's wording, a felicitous result for the Sermon at the Temple in light of Jeremias's conclusion that "the Lucan version has preserved the oldest form with respect to *length*, but the Matthean text is more original with regard to *wording*."¹⁵

In sum, it is hard to see that the Sermon at the Temple can be faulted. In each case where minor textual troubles prevent us from knowing exactly how the Greek text of Matthew originally read, the Book of Mormon offers an appropriately acceptable rendition of the meaning of that passage. And in the one case where the ancient manuscripts convey an important difference in meaning from the King James Version by omitting *without a cause* in Matthew 5:22, the Book of Mormon agrees with the stronger manuscript reading of that text. The Greek manuscripts of the Sermon on the Mount do not discredit the Book of Mormon, and may on balance sustain it.

Notes

1. This point was first published in John W. Welch, "A Book You Can Respect," *Ensign*, September 1977, 45–48.

2. For a discussion of this text by a scholar who challenges many normal assumptions, see David A. Black, "Jesus on Anger: The Text of Matthew 5:22a Revisited," *Novum Testamentum* 30/1

(1988): 1–8. While acknowledging that “the shorter text undoubtedly has impressive manuscript support,” Black presents reasons why the longer reading “should at least be reconsidered in scholarly discussions of this passage” (ibid., 5; compare p. 2). His points, however, have not shifted the balance of scholarly opinion to favor including the word *eikē*.

3. Stanley R. Larson, “The Sermon on the Mount: What Its Textual Transformation Discloses concerning the Historicity of the Book of Mormon,” *Trinity Journal* 7 (spring 1986): 43.

4. P. Wernberg-Møller, “A Semitic Idiom in Matt. V. 22,” *New Testament Studies* 3 (1956): 72–73; italics deleted.

5. Of course, it is impossible to know exactly what the original copy of Matthew’s Gospel was like. See J. K. Elliott, “Can We Recover the Original New Testament?” *Theology* 77/649 (1974): 343.

6. Larson originally explored the possibility of twelve such trouble spots for the Sermon at the Temple and then published his *Trinity Journal* article suggesting eleven. See his “The Sermon on the Mount: What Its Textual Transformation Discloses,” 23–45. After my examination of those points in chapter 8 of my 1990 edition of *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS), Larson reduced the number to eight in “The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi,” in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent L. Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 115–64. Those eight were dealt with again in my review of that material in “Approaching New Approaches,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 152–68. I have appreciated this stimulating and courteous exchange.

7. Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 171.

8. John Gee, “La Trahison des Clercs: On the Language and Translation of the Book of Mormon,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 68.

9. For a recent debate regarding the long ending of the Lord’s Prayer, see Andrew J. Bandstra, “The Original Form of the Lord’s

Prayer," *Calvin Theological Journal* 16/1 (April 1981): 15–37; Jacob van Bruggen, "The Lord's Prayer and Textual Criticism," *Calvin Theological Journal* 17/1 (1982): 78–87; and Andrew J. Bandstra, "The Lord's Prayer and Textual Criticism: A Response," *Calvin Theological Journal* 17/1 (1982): 88–97.

10. Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967), 106; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 385.

11. Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: Beck, 1922), 1:423, citing Mishnah, *Yoma* 6:2, and others. Discussed in chapter 4 concerning 3 Nephi 13:9–13. Samuel T. Lachs, "Why Was the 'Amen' Response Interdicted in the Temple?" *Journal for the Study of Judaism: In the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 19/2 (1988): 230–40, shows that the "amen" was dropped by the Pharisees, leaving only the doxology, during the Second Temple period when the High Priest was a Sadducee, whose words were not to be confirmed. In Lehi's day, and hence in Nephite culture, the "amen" was clearly added (see 1 Chronicles 16:36; Nehemiah 8:6; Psalm 106:48). *Ibid.*, nn. 7 and 10.

12. Jeremias discusses this, as Larson too observes ("The Sermon on the Mount: What Its Textual Transformation Discloses," 35). See John W. Welch, "The Lord's Prayers," *Ensign*, January 1976, 15–17; and Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 1:424.

13. Italics added. Note that "for ever and ever," which appears in the JST and which Larson claims is going "in a direction away from the original text" ("The Sermon on the Mount: What Its Textual Transformation Discloses," 39 n. 34), is close to this ancient blessing of David and is also the same as the typical ending of the Jewish temple benediction. See Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 1:423, "immer u. ewig."

14. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 385.

15. Jeremias, *Prayers of Jesus*, 93; italics in original.