



Biblical Heritage Center's

DISCOVERING THE BIBLE

*Seeing the words of our Bible through the eyes of their ancient authors
and learning lessons about life, relationships, death and the afterlife.*

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Did Jesus Promote Violence or Shalom?

By Jim Myers

*From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven
suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.¹*

This verse has raised many questions since the first modern English translations of the Bible were published in the 17th century.

1. *Why had the Kingdom of Heaven suffered violence since John the Baptist?*
2. *Did John the Baptist cause the violence?*
3. *What kind of violence did the Kingdom of Heaven suffer?*
4. *Who are the ones called "the violent"?*
5. *What kind of force was being used to take the Kingdom of Heaven?*
6. *What does "take" the Kingdom of Heaven mean?*

The English translation of the verse above has influenced Christian theologies and Western cultures for centuries. Some Christians have used it to promote violence as part of their mission. You can even find graphics of Jesus in military gear with an AK-47 urging people to use violence and force in Google searches. But for most Christians, the thought of Jesus promoting violence simply feels wrong. However, some of them also believe the English words of their Bible are the *inerrant* and *infallible* word of God -- *God said it so that means it is true!* It's a crazy religious matrix that we live in.

If you have been studying with us for very long, you know we use the **BHC Linguistic Model**. The first thing it requires is to view the words we are studying in their *immediate context*, which in this case is Matthew 11:2-5; 9-15. The numbers are the paragraph markers.

¹ *And when John (the Baptist) had heard in prison about the works of the Anointed One, he sent two of his disciples and said to him (Yeshua), "Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?"*

² *Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are*

raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of me.”

³ *As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: “But what did you go out in the wilderness to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’ Amen!”*

⁴ *“I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*

Now let’s take a closer look at the content in each paragraph.

Paragraph 1 ó In prison John the Baptist heard reports about things that were happening at places where Jesus was preaching and teaching. John sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus this question -- “*Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?*”

Why did John the Baptist ask that question? The chances are pretty good that his disciples had been asking him the same question because of what he had been preaching before going to prison:

And he preached, saying, “There comes one after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed immersed you in water, but he will immerse you in the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:7-8)

For John the Baptist, the *“Coming One”* is the one that will immerse people in the Holy Spirit. That message meant something to his Jewish audience that modern Christian readers do not understand. Hillel was one of the most famous Jewish teachers in Judaism. Jesus probably heard Hillel teach at the Temple when his parents took him to the Temple to participate in festivals. In the story of Hillel’s eulogy, recorded in the *Talmud (Sanhedrin 11a)*, we find the following statement:

Our rabbis taught: Since the death of the last prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi—the Holy Spirit was removed from Israel but they would still hear a heavenly voice.

According to this, the presence of the Holy Spirit had not been in Israel for centuries, but God spoke to people as the *“voice from heaven.”* This throws new light on how we understand the baptism of Jesus:

And immediately, coming up from the water, he saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:10-11)

Here we see the Holy Spirit and the voice from heaven involved in the *“anointing of Jesus.”* This was the moment he became the *“Anointed One”* ó *the Christ*. It was also the moment he became *“the Son of God”* ó *the King*. For many, this signaled the beginning of the fulfillment of another well-known prophesy found in Joel 2:27-32. Keep the underlined words in mind as we continue because they will be important clues for accurately understanding the words of Jesus.

Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am Yahweh your God and there is no other . . . My people shall never be put to shame. And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth . . . before the coming of the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of Yahweh shall be saved, for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance.

Before the *Great Day of Judgment*, the presence of the *Holy Spirit* will return to Israel -- *God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh*. People will recognize that the *Holy Spirit* is present when they see *ōwondersö ó special displays of God power*. Now, let's move on to the second paragraph.

Paragraph 2 -- *Tell John the things which you hear and see -- the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*

The things Jesus told John's disciples are unmistakable signs of the power of God -- *the era of Joel prophesied had begun*. Jesus made the source of his miraculous power clear in Luke 11:20.

*But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons,
then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.*

People believed that diseases were caused by evil spiritual forces. The phrase *ōby the finger of Godö* is an idiom that means *ōby the power of Godö*. The message Jesus sent John was that God was confirming he is the *ōComing Oneö* by the miraculous events that took place when he preached.

Paragraph 3A -- As John's disciples departed, Jesus asked the crowd a question about John -- *What were you expecting to see when you saw John? Were you expecting to see a prophet?*

Apparently, the discussion between John's disciples and Jesus took place in a public meeting. After answering John's question, Jesus immediately turned to the people in the audience and asked them the above questions about John. However, before anyone can answer, Jesus answers the question himself.

Paragraph 3B -- *Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you." Amen!*

Jewish teachers commonly used a method called *remez* or *ōhintingö* to make key points as they taught. They would quote a few words or lines from portions of Scriptures members of their Jewish audiences knew very well. There was no need to quote the entire passage. When Jesus said, *'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you;'* everyone in the audience knew the Scriptures he was *ōhinting atö ó it was the first of two parallel texts found in Malachi (3:1-2 and 4:5-6)*. Both verses are references to the same person.

*Behold, I send **My messenger**, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts.²*

*Behold, I will send you **Elijah the prophet** before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”³*

Imagine the audience’s reaction to Jesus identifying John the Baptist as “My messenger” in the first quote from Malachi. Jesus didn’t immediately link John the Baptist to “Elijah the prophet” from Malachi, but he would at the end paragraph four.

End of Paragraph 4 -- *John is Elijah who is to come.*

By saying that John the Baptist was Elijah the Prophet, Jesus was also declaring that he is “Coming One”! How many people going to the wilderness to see John the Baptist made that connection? And, if John the Baptist is *Elijah the Prophet*, then the *Great Day of Judgment* is near too! Now let’s go back to the beginning of paragraph 4 and learn what “violence”, “violent” and “force” mean.

Beginning of Paragraph 4 -- “*I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.*”

Yeshua was a master teacher and storyteller. His words are loaded with wordplays, rhetorical questions and loaded statements designed to grab the audience’s attention. What do you think they thought when they heard -- *Of those born of women, there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist*. What about Moses or Jesus? Was John the Baptist greater than them?

Before the audience has time to consider that statement, Jesus throws this at them -- *He who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John the Baptist*. It wasn’t what Jesus said about John that grabbed their attention – *it was what he said about the Kingdom of Heaven*. Had it already appeared and people were already in it? *The Great Day of Judgment hadn’t taken place!*

According to popular messianic expectations of that period, the neither the “Coming One” nor the *Great Day of Judgment* or the “Kingdom of Heaven” could appear until the yoke of foreign domination had been permanently removed from Israel. *The land had not been purified by removing all of sinners by the Great Day of Judgment*. Sinners and the Kingdom of Heaven were not supposed to exist at the same time and place together! Buried in the mistranslated words in the middle of paragraph four is an explanation of this confusing situation.

Middle of Paragraph 4 -- *From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.*

Dr. Robert Lindsey, pastor of a Baptist congregation in Jerusalem, and Dr. David Flusser, an orthodox Jew and professor at Hebrew University, discovered the prophesy that Jesus was hinting at. It is an amazing story and I want you hear it in Robert Lindsey’s own words below.

One thing that intrigued me several years ago was the possibility that the Greek word which is usually rendered “suffers violence” (*biazetai*) might not have a passive sense but an active sense. Perhaps, I guessed, it represents the Hebrew word *poretz*, but I concluded it was just a random thought of mine and doubtless a bad guess.

Imagine my surprise when one day as I came to see Flusser for a couple of hours of study he looked up to me from his desk, cluttered with books, and said, "Lindsey, I think I know what *biazetai* means! In fact, I know what it means!"

"Fine, what is it?" I could only ask.

"Look," he said seriously, "I was looking up something Radak mentioned. Radak is the name by which a famous medieval rabbi and commentator is known.

"I am all ears," I said.

"*Biazetai* is a translation of *poretz*!" he almost shouted, waving a Hebrew Bible at me. Radak mentions an old interpretation of Micah 2:13. Look at Micah 2:12 and 13."

I read it:

I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob . . . like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men. The breaker (*poretz*) will go up before them; they will break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king will pass on before them, the Lord at their head.

It was clear what the prophet was saying. God was comparing Israel to a flock kept up at night behind a temporary rock wall. In the morning the shepherd "breaks open" a gap in the wall and the sheep run pellmell through the opening. But since he is really talking about people, the shepherd or "breaker" is both "their king before them" and "the Lord at their head."

"Radak retains this old midrash on the Messiah," said Flusser. "He says that 'the Breaker' is *Elijah* who precedes the coming of the Messiah, the 'king' is *melech hamashiach* and 'the Lord' is of course the God of Israel."

"All the people of course know this text of Micah 2:13 refers to the Messiah," continued Flusser. Jesus hints at it as he so often does in other passages. We have to read it as follows:

"From the days of John until now the Kingdom of Heaven is breaking out" (*poretzet* - feminine form of *poretz*)

My earlier guess was right after all! Jesus is not talking about the *Kingdom of Heaven* "suffering violence" . . . but (*about a kingdom that is*) *breaking forth or breaking out, expanding, and growing as many more come into the movement.*⁴

Let's take a look at the words of Micah 2:12-13 before we continue:

*I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel.
I will put them together like sheep of the fold, like a flock in the midst of their pasture.
They shall make a loud noise because of so many people.
The one who breaks open will come up before them.*

*They will break out, pass through the gate and go out by it.
Their king will pass before them, with Yahweh at their head.*



In a world in which shepherds and sheep were part of the daily life for many people, the meanings of the references about caring for sheep were easily understood. In Israel, when shepherds tend their sheep, they often erect makeshift fences to create a sheepfold by gathering stones and building a temporary holding pen at night. They might design a full circular enclosure, or connect their fences to an already existing natural barrier like a cave in the side of a rocky hillside.

After being confined all night in the limited space of the makeshift sheepfold, the animals are anxious to break out.⁵ In the morning a shepherd knocks down a section of the piled-up stones and opens a space that creates a way out. The anxious sheep immediately rush to it and push to get out as quickly as possible. As they push and shove each other they knock down more stones and make the opening wider.

In Micah's prophesy, the way for redemption begins with the gathering of the remnant of Israel together like sheep in a pasture behind a rock fence. It will be a large flock that makes a great deal of noise. At some point a shepherd, acting as the breaker will make an opening for sheep to go through. As they pour through the opening, their King will pass by and they will follow him. In front of him at the head of this movement is Yahweh leading the King. *This group is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

- *The people were the ones that repented and were baptized by John for the remission of sins.*
- *Yeshua is the Anointed One and King.*
- *Yahweh is their god.*

This all began when John went to the wilderness and preached. That is why Jesus said *among men born of women there is none greater than John.* But, John did not follow the sheep through the opening into the Kingdom of Heaven *that's why the least in the Kingdom is greater than John.*

Dr. Brad Young studied under Lindsey and Flusser and below is his reconstruction of the Hebrew words Jesus spoke. Compare what Jesus actually said to the words of the King James translation.

*From the days of John the Baptist until now,
the Kingdom of Heaven breaks forth and those breaking forth are pursuing it.*

*From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven
suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.*

What ideas do the accurate meanings share with the KJV translations?

ōKingdom breaking forthö & òKingdom suffers violenceö

ōthose breaking forthö & òthe violent.ö

ōare pursuing itö & òtake it by force.ö

The essence of Yeshua's words dynamically portray people breaking through the opening made by John, streaming into the *Kingdom of Heaven*, with each person actively seeking and pursuing the divine purposes revealed by their King.

1. The central ideas of this message are the highest values taught by Yeshua.
2. The focus of the account is on the energy of those breaking forth and pushing forward with all their might into God's Kingdom.
3. They are possessed by an intensity to actively participate in the work of the Kingdom.
4. They seek the rule of God in every part of their lives.
5. They view themselves as subjects who have accepted the yoke of the Kingdom.
6. They see themselves as subjects with important roles in expanding the Kingdom.
7. They long to see the redeeming power of the Kingdom expand around the whole world.⁶

This is the most powerful description of the *ōKingdom of Heavenö* in the *New Testament*. The two highest values of Yeshua's teachings are *tzedaqah* (righteousness) and *shalom* (peace). Isaiah explains the relationship of the two words in Isaiah 32:17-18.

*The work of tzedaqah shall be shalom,
and the pledge of tzedaqah shall be safety that continues forever.
My people will dwell in a pasture of shalom,
in dwelling places of safety and secure resting places.*

Yeshua taught that doing acts of *tzedaqah* (righteousness) is the basic requirement for entering the Kingdom. Some of the acts of *tzedaqah* listed in Isaiah 58 are *ōbreaking your bread with the hungry, bringing the wandering poor to your home, covering a naked one, and not hiding from your flesh.ö* The Hebrew word *shalom* has little in common with the English word *ōpeace.ö* It does not merely mean the absence of strife. *It is pregnant with positive, active and energetic meaning and association and connotes totality, health, wholesomeness, harmony, success, the completeness and richness of living in an integrated social milieu.*⁷

In the verse from Isaiah above, each *act of tzedaqah* is viewed as a pledge given to Yahweh to secure safety that continues forever -- *dwelling in a pasture of shalom, in places of safety and in secure resting places. Tzedaqah* is the work of the entire nation of Israel according to Isaiah. In the teachings of Yeshua, *tzedaqah is the work of everyone in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

BHC

January Memorials

In Loving Memory

**MURLIN
BENTLEY**

May 24, 1929
January 20, 1996

*May you dwell under His wings
in complete SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**JULIE FALLIN
KELSOE**

January 12, 1960
January 19, 1990

*May you dwell under His wings
in complete SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**HOMER
MELTON (DOC) PITNER**

October 7, 1914
January 10, 1971

*May you dwell under His wings
in complete SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**AMOS DANIEL
HAZELWOOD**

September 23, 1908
January 25, 1969

*May you dwell under His wings
in complete SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**GLADYS GERALDINE
MYERS**

October 1, 1916
January 29, 2009

*May you dwell under His wings
in complete SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**CLIFTON RAYMOND
TENNISON, SR.**

December 19, 1919
January 13, 2005

*May you dwell under His wings
in complete SHALOM forever!*

In Their Remembrance

*May their memories inspire us to seek those qualities of mind and heart,
which they shared when we walked life's journey together.
May we help to bring closer to fulfillment their highest ideals and noblest strivings.
May their memories deepen our loyalty to those things which we valued and shared -
faith, love, peace and devotion. As long as we live, they too will live;
for they are now a part of us, as we remember them.*

(Inspired from prayers found in Yitzhor Reflections - The New Mahzor - The Prayer Book Press)

¹ Matthew 11:12.

² Malachi 3:1-2

³ Malachi 4:5-6

⁴ *Jesus Rabbi & Lord* by Robert L. Lindsey © 1990 by Cornerstone Publishing, Oak Creek, WI; pp. 61-62.

⁵ *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* by Brad Young; pp. 52-53.

⁶ *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* by Brad Young; p. 55.

⁷ *Hebrew: The Eternal Language* by William Chomsky © 1957 by the Jewish Publications Society of America, Philadelphia, PA; p. 4.