



The Sermon on the Mount Study
Bible Study Session 28
Matthew 7:24-27

Study By
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Greek NT

24 Πᾶς οὖν ὅστις ἀκούει μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ ποιεῖ αὐτούς, ὁμοιωθήσεται ἀνδρὶ φρονίμῳ, ὅστις ὠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν. 25 καὶ κατέβη ἡ βροχὴ καὶ ἦλθον οἱ ποταμοὶ καὶ ἔπνευσαν οἱ ἄνεμοι καὶ προσέπεσαν τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἐκείνῃ, καὶ οὐκ ἔπεσεν, τεθεμελίωτο γὰρ ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν. 26 καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀκούων μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ μὴ ποιῶν αὐτούς ὁμοιωθήσεται ἀνδρὶ μωρῷ, ὅστις ὠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν ἄμμον. 27 καὶ κατέβη ἡ βροχὴ καὶ ἦλθον οἱ ποταμοὶ καὶ ἔπνευσαν οἱ ἄνεμοι καὶ προσέκοψαν τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἐκείνῃ, καὶ ἔπεσεν, καὶ ἦν ἡ πτώσις αὐτῆς μεγάλη.

La Biblia de las Américas

24 Por tanto, cualquiera que oye estas palabras mías y las pone en práctica, será semejante a un hombre sabio que edificó su casa sobre la roca; 25 y cayó la lluvia, vinieron los torrentes, soplaron los vientos y azotaron aquella casa; pero no se cayó, porque había sido fundada sobre la roca. 26 Y todo el que oye estas palabras mías y no las pone en práctica, será semejante a un hombre insensato que edificó su casa sobre la arena; 27 y cayó la lluvia, vinieron los torrentes, soplaron los vientos y azotaron aquella casa; y cayó, y grande fue su destrucción.

NRSV

24 Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. 25 The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell — and great was its fall!

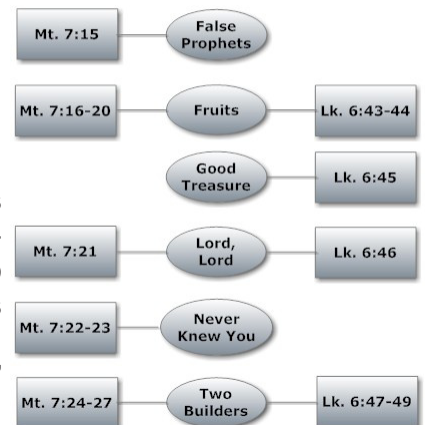
NLT

24 Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. 25 Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse, because it is built on rock. 26 But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. 27 When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will fall with a mighty crash.

The Outline of the Text:¹

With this study we come to the final saying of Jesus in the Sermon, which represents the end of the discourse section² of the scripture text. Luke's version of the Sermon comes to an end by a different means in Luke 6:43-49.³ Compare a listing of the elements in both conclusions in the chart to the right. He incorporated only Matthew's text of 7:16-21 and 7:24-27 in his version, and even these two elements are highly modified for Luke's targeted audience. Matthew's much longer conclusion stresses Jewish aspects of Jesus' teaching, while Luke's shorter conclusion focuses on a more Gentile oriented

Comparison of the Conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount Matthew 7:15-27 and Luke 6:43-49



¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

²The discourse section represents the 'talking' of Jesus found in 5:3 through 7:27. This direct discourse material is bounded by two narrative sections, 5:1-2 and 7:28-29, which introduce and conclude the discourse material.

³NRSV: "43 No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; 44 for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. 45 The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. 46 Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you? 47 I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. 48 That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house."

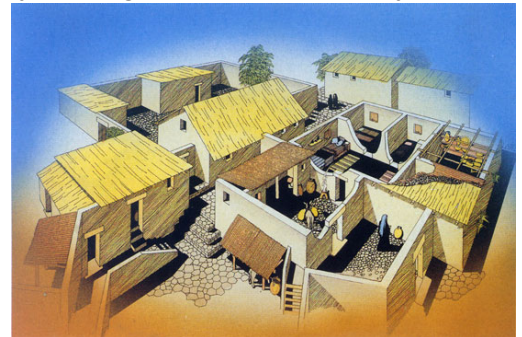
readership.⁴

The **literary form** of this saying, i.e., the genre, is that of a Parabolic Saying.⁵ The significance of this classification is to remind the Bible student that he / she is looking at figurative language, not literal language. The word picture painted here makes a central point, known in scholarly circles as the *tertium comparationis*. Thus the narrative details in the miniature story all contribute to making the central foundational point, and understanding this point is the goal of the analysis of the text. Here the point to obey Jesus' teachings set forth in the Sermon as the essential preparation for facing the 'storm' of Judgment Day. The introductory declaration in both Matt. 7:24⁶ and Luke 6:47⁷ make this point very clearly. Listening to and obeying Jesus are key elements in preparing to face God in final judgment. By this one builds a discipleship 'life' here called a 'house' that can withstand the intensive scrutiny of Almighty God in judgment.

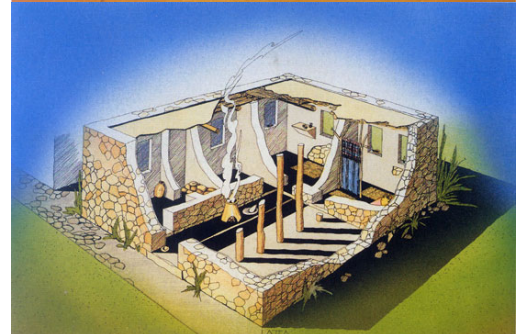


The **literary context** for 7:24-27 is clear and significant, as illustrated in the chart on the last page of this study. At the larger level, this pericope is the final discourse text of the Sermon. Thus it becomes Jesus' last word to His audience before ending His teaching. Consequently it became the last thing to linger in the minds of the hearers. As such it was important to paint a dramatic picture that would be easy to remember and that would make a lasting memory for them. Most scholars will agree that Jesus succeeded wonderfully well in communicating His ideas forcefully. His listeners carried away a lasting image about discipleship as house building, and about the critical importance of this in anticipation of the Day of Judgment for all humanity.

At the smaller level, this pericope stands as the fourth and climatic appeal to decision in the Conclusion to the Sermon in 7:12-27.⁸ Jesus moved from appealing to the listeners to take up the difficult task of discipleship in 7:12-14 to this broad appeal to committing themselves to life long discipleship in 7:24-27. Between these comes the warnings about false teachers (7:15-20) and false discipleship (7:21-23). Both paths are spiritual disasters and will doom the individual on the Day of Judgment. The straight gate and difficult road in verses 12-14 call for decisive commitment to enter the Kingdom; the two houses in 24-27 call for life-long commitment. The previous sections in the Conclusion contain admonitions, but this final appeal is cast as a parabolic saying that leaves a graphic image in the minds of the listeners.



The **literary structure** of the text is likewise very clear, as explained in detail in the Block Diagram section below. The extensive parallelism in the saying is cast as antithetical parallelism with parallel opposites consistently through both sides of the parallelism. The opposite perspectives reinforce the same essential point to build wisely.



House building in ancient Palestine. The biblical terminology for 'house' is varied in both Hebrew and Greek.⁹ Four Greek words in the

⁴How -- possibly why -- these variations were created leads one to probe the more technical aspects of **Source Criticism**, a technical methodology that examines how ancient writers utilized their written and oral sources for writing their documents. This methodology is also closely related to a derivative approach, labeled **Redaction Criticism**, which examines the literary and theological impact of how the biblical writers put their writings together from their sources. The difference between these two approaches is illustrated by the central questions asked by each: The source critic asks, What were the sources used by the writer? And the redaction critic asks, How did the writer put his sources together in order to make his individual point? By using both methods, the Bible student can gain a better understanding of the text.

⁵In my treatment of the Parables of Jesus, this is parable #15 of the 83 such sayings in the Synoptic Gospels. For details on analyzing the parables of Jesus, see my "Exegeting Parables" at cranfordville.com. The simple definition of a parable is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

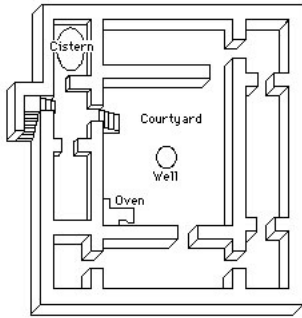
⁶Mt. 7:24 (NRSV): "Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock."

⁷Lk. 6:47 (NRSV): "I will show you what it's like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then obeys me."

⁸Luke tailors his conclusion to Jesus' Sermon (6:43-49) considerably different from Matthew. His contains only two pericopes: 6:43-45, the good tree, and 6:46-49, the house built on a rock. Both of these are found in Matthew but Luke omits the false teachers and the false discipleship pericopes found in Matthew.

⁹One Hebrew word, *biyath* (בֵּית), serves as the primary designation of a family dwelling in the Old Testament era. One must re-

Ground plan of a villa of the early 2nd millennium BC in Palestine. Stairs lead to the upper floor and main living-rooms from the central courtyard. (NBD p. 498)



New Testament relate to the general designation of a 'house': οἶκος, οἰκία, ἔπαυλις, and βασιλειον.¹⁰ The one used in Matt. 7:24-27 is οἰκία, which more properly designates a private residence of an individual or a family. In Palestine, as well as in the rest of the ancient world, the style and composition of family homes evolved over time as they became more elaborate and ornate. The graphic on the top right on page 2 depicts a Jewish peasant home in the first Christian century, while the one below it depicts an 8th century BCE Israelite peasant home. Careful examination will reveal substantial

differences in the way the homes were constructed and how they were furnished. The difficulty in modern studies with such a theme is that few detailed descriptions of houses in ancient Palestine exist. We depend largely on archaeological discovery for our understanding. And most of the surviving homes are at the upper income levels; hardly any Jewish peasant home has been discovered. Probably this is because they were not built as well as the more expensive homes, and less permanent construction materials were mainly used. The photos to the right are taken from the excavation of a first century Jewish home in the village of Gatzrin in Galilee.¹¹ The reconstruction seeks to recreate the furniture etc. as it existed in Jesus' day.



The process of building a home is expressed in the New Testament by the Greek verb οἰκοδομέω.¹² The builder is a οἰκοδόμος.¹³ The individuals responsible for constructing homes depended upon the economic status of the individual. Jewish peasants were pretty much 'on their own' to construct their own homes, often with the help of neighbors and relatives. Aristocrats in Jewish and Greco-Roman spheres contracted with an οἰκοδόμος to design and supervise the construction of their homes. At the beginning of the Christian era Roman architecture was in the midst of a blossoming era and contained numerous new innovations. The building of private homes was caught up in this only at the aristocratic levels. Homes for peasants, including multi-story apartment homes, struggled with shoddy design and the use of inferior construction materials. In Palestine where stone was plentiful, homes were made either of stones and/or mud bricks. Wood materials would be used sparingly, especially in Judea in the south, because of the scarcity of trees. Only in Galilee in northern Palestine were trees of various species, suitable for construction purposes, relatively plentiful.

member that prior to the Exodus, the Israelites were nomadic and lived in tents, not in permanent residences. Housing in Palestine never achieved the sophistication that it enjoyed elsewhere in the Mediterranean world, particularly among the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. Thus by the time of Jesus the people in Palestine lived in substandard housing in comparison to elsewhere in the Roman empire. The exceptions to this were the aristocratic Jews who adopted Greek and Roman architectural styles and brought in experts to build their homes according to these designs. Note the observation in the *Eerdman's Bible Dictionary*, "House":

"The homes and palaces of the nobility were more elaborate, featuring hinged doors and latticed windows and decorated with wood carvings, paintings, mosaics, and inlaid ivory (cf. Amos 3:15; 6:4). Such structures have been discovered at Tirzah, capital of the northern kingdom, and among remains of the Persian period at Lachish. In the New Testament period Hellenistic and Roman influence is particularly apparent in the adoption of a large outer court or atrium, surrounded by rooms accessible to the public, and a private, inner court or peristyle with the family quarters."

¹⁰The Louw-Nida *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* provides the following definitions:

7.2 οἶκος^a, ου ἴ : a building consisting of one or more rooms and normally serving as a dwelling place (οἶκος^a also includes certain public buildings, for example, a temple)...

7.3 οἰκία^a, ας f : a building or place where one dwells

7.4 ἔπαυλις, εως f : property in which a person was expected to reside, either as the result of ownership or legal contract

7.5 βασιλειον, ου ἴ : the dwelling of a king or ruler

¹¹For a helpful discussion see the website Follow the Rabbi.

¹²This verb specifies the process of constructing a 'building' that may include private homes among other facilities. Related verbs used rarely in the New Testament include ἐποικοδομέω ['to build onto something such as a foundation'] and ἐποικοδομέω ['to build together']. The umbrella term for 'building' of any kind, including a house, is οἰκοδομή.

¹³This word stresses the person who designs the building and supervises its construction. As such, in the secular literature it is often translated as 'architect.' The individuals doing the actual work of construction are designated by generic terms such as ἐργητής, 'worker.'

Thus, when Jesus alludes to building a house in this parabolic saying, he draws off an image clearly defined in the minds of His listeners. The extensive use of the construction process as a metaphor for 'building a life' made His words very clear to His audience. Clearly the 'house' represents a life of 'discipleship,' either good or bad, that is constructed for testing by the storms that signal the Day of Final Judgment already put on the table by Jesus in 7:22, with the phrase "on that day."¹⁴

I. **Be wise by building a house that lasts, vv. 24-25.**¹⁵

24 Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. 25 The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.

24 Πᾶς οὖν ὅστις ἀκούει μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ ποιεῖ αὐτούς, ὁμοιωθήσεται ἀνδρὶ φρονίμῳ, ὅστις ὠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν. 25 καὶ **κατέβη ἡ βροχὴ** καὶ ἦλθον οἱ ποταμοὶ **καὶ ἔπνευσαν οἱ ἄνεμοι καὶ προσέπεσαν τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἐκείνῃ**, καὶ οὐκ ἔπεσεν, τεθεμελίωτο γὰρ ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν.

Lukan parallel (6:46-48):

46 Why do you call me "Lord, Lord," and do not do what I tell you? 47 I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. 48 That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built.

46 **Τί δέ με καλεῖτε· Κύριε κύριε, καὶ οὐ ποιεῖτε ἃ λέγω;** 47 πᾶς **ὁ ἐρχόμενος πρὸς με** καὶ ἀκούων μου τῶν λόγων καὶ ποιῶν αὐτούς, ὑποδείξω ὑμῖν τίνι ἐστὶν ὅμοιος· 48 ὅμοιός ἐστιν ἀνθρώπῳ οἰκοδομοῦντι οἰκίαν **ὃς ἔσκαψεν καὶ ἐβάθυνεν καὶ ἔθηκεν θεμέλιον** ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν· πλημμύρης δὲ γενομένης προσέρηξεν ὁ ποταμὸς τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἐκείνῃ, καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσεν σαλεῦσαι αὐτὴν διὰ τὸ καλῶς οἰκοδομηθῆσθαι αὐτήν.

The positive side of the comparison is presented first. In this, a shift takes place from the two previous pericopes of vv. 15-20 and 21-23 where two warnings were presented as the dominate emphasis. This positive emphasis is even more prominent in Luke's account. The Sermon ends therefore will a strong appeal to respond to Jesus in the affirmative. This is consistent with the summarizing declaration of the essence of Jesus' public ministry set forth in Matthew 4:17 (NRSV): "From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'"

The spiritual side of the story. The designation of the religious value of the saying is given at the outset in the subject of the comparative verb 'is like': "Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys them..." (Πᾶς οὖν ὅστις ἀκούει μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ ποιεῖ αὐτούς...). Clearly the principle of hearing God's Word and then obeying it stands central to the teaching of Jesus. And here the focus is clearly on Jesus' words in the Sermon as God's Word to be heard and obeyed; note the emphatic "these words of mine" (μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους). It is from this concept that James 2:1-27 and vv. 14-27 especially are derived.¹⁶ James chapter two stands as an important commentary on this principle in the Sermon. One should note that nature of the spiritual principle here. It is works added to faith. Rather, it is a working faith that saves. Obedience comes naturally from hearing with commitment to obey. In contrast to the Jewish writings with the 'two ways' emphasis, it not obedience to the Torah that counts.¹⁷ Rather, it is obedience to the principles of the Kingdom set forth by Jesus that matter. Mere

¹⁴The uniform use of Aorist tense verbs throughout to depict the 'storm' also make it clear that Jesus is talking about Judgment Day, and not about 'the storms of life' as popular modern interpretation mistakenly assumes.

¹⁵The **bold/italic red type** signals a phrase found in one of the accounts but not in the other. Alternatively, different concepts at the same place in the text may surface and are so marked. The use of different Greek words to say essentially the same thing are not marked, but quite a number of such instances are present in the two sets of texts. Such an analysis illustrates the significantly different writing styles of both Matthew and Luke.

¹⁶Jas 2:14-26 (NRSV): "14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. 20 Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. 23 Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead."

¹⁷Note also: "It is perhaps noteworthy that, in 7:24-7, Matthew says nothing at all about studying the words of Jesus. For the evangelist, presumably, it is not studying that is greater but doing. Compare *m* 'Abot 1:17, which no doubt addresses a tendency in rabbinic Judaism to exalt study at the expense of other action." [W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the*

hearing and knowing the teachings of Jesus are not enough. One must act upon those words in obedience, if the house is to be built properly.

The earthly side of the story. The ‘earthly story’ references the wise man who builds his house on a solid rock. Understanding the image here against the historical backdrop is important. What kind of house was envisioned here? Here Matthew and Luke adapt the Jesus tradition, most likely from their Q source, to their distinctive audiences. Luke simply specifies a man (ἄνθρωπος), while Matthew depicts a wise man (ἀνδρὶ φρονίμῳ). Luke’s Gentile oriented audience didn’t need the qualifying adjective φρονίμῳ in order to realize the wise choice of this builder. But Matthew’s Jewish Christian audience heard in this adjective an illusion to ancient Jewish wisdom teachings which added persuasiveness to Jesus’ words.

Also, Luke depicts the construction of the house “on a strong foundation laid upon the underlying rock” (ὅς ἔσκαψεν καὶ ἐβάθυνεν καὶ ἔθηκεν θεμέλιον ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν). The image relates more naturally to the building of a house in a city or urban area somewhere in the Roman Empire. The builders had to dig down deep into the soil to lay the foundation on solid rock. On the other hand, Matthew’s depiction of the house is that it is built “on solid rock” (ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν). The language here is more naturally Semitic and understandable of a peasant house built in a Jewish village somewhere in Galilee. Here the solid rock was virtually at the surface of the ground.

The storm depicted here by the threefold rain, flooding and wind alludes to the Day of Judgment at the end of the world, not to difficulties faced in this life.¹⁸ The reference is the same as in 7:22, ‘on that day’ (ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ). This experience of final judgment comes at us like a hurricane that tests the durability of the discipleship ‘house’ that we have built. One should note a word play in the Greek text that is impossible to preserve in translation. The severe winds blew (προσέπνευσαν) against the house, but the house didn’t collapse (ἔπεσεν). Severe storms churning up in Galilee were common and would readily communicate a dramatic image to the listeners of Jesus’ words. This was ‘the storm,’ not one of many coming over a life time.

The spiritual point of this side of the ‘double parable’ is that this disciple withstood the divine scrutiny of final judgment successfully. He had build a solid home on the right foundation, Jesus’ teachings, and thus found divine approval on the day of judgment. Thus, his decision to hear and obey qualified him as indeed a smart builder. Consistent with 7:21b, he will be the one “doing the will of my Heavenly Father” (ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρός μου τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς).

II. Don’t be foolish by building a house that brings disaster, vv. 26-27.

26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell — and great was its fall!

26 καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀκούων μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ μὴ ποιῶν αὐτοὺς ὁμοιωθήσεται ἀνδρὶ **μωρῷ**, ὅστις ὠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπὶ **τὴν ἄμμον**. 27 καὶ **κατέβη ἡ βροχὴ** καὶ ἦλθον οἱ ποταμοὶ καὶ **ἔπνευσαν οἱ ἄνεμοι καὶ προσέκοψαν τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἐκείνῃ**, καὶ ἔπεσεν, καὶ ἦν **ἡ πτώσις** αὐτῆς μεγάλη.

Lukan parallel (6:49):

49 But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.

49 ὁ δὲ ἀκούσας καὶ μὴ ποιήσας ὁμοίος ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπῳ οἰκοδομήσαντι οἰκίαν ἐπὶ **τὴν γῆν χωρὶς θεμελίου**, ἣ προσέρηξεν ὁ ποταμός, καὶ εὐθύς συνέπεσεν, καὶ ἐγένετο **τὸ ῥῆγμα** τῆς οἰκίας ἐκείνης μέγα.

The spiritual side of the story. Here the contrast to the positive side is “hearing and not obeying” in both Matthew

Gospel According to Saint Matthew (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 719]

¹⁸The history of interpretation is marred with false and bizarre interpretations. One example is from the fourth century church father Augustine, as Davies and Allison note:

According to Augustine (*De serm. mont.* 2:24:87), the storm that strikes the house built upon the rock stands for the calamities and afflictions of everyday life. Indeed, carried away by allegorical fancy, he equates rain with ‘gloomy superstition’, rivers with ‘carnal lusts’, and winds with ‘rumours’. But we may well doubt whether 7:25 was intended by Jesus or understood by Matthew to depict the harsh vicissitudes of normal human existence. In the OT the storm often represents God’s judgement (Gen 6–7; Isa 28:2; 29:6; 30:30; Ezek 13:10–16; 38:22), and in later Jewish literature the difficulties and trials of the latter days are, despite Gen 9:11, sometimes pictured as terrible tempests (e.g. 1QH 3:14; Sib. Or 3:689–92; 5:377–80; 2 Bar 53:7–12). In the synoptic tradition itself the story of Noah’s flood is taken up in an attempt to portray the eschatological affliction (Mt 24:39 = Lk 17:27). It seems a good guess, then, that Mt 7:24–7 = Lk 6:47–9 should conjure up in the mind the storms of the end times. The troubles facing those who have heard Jesus’ words are the eschatological ordeals, from which people are saved by virtue of their obedience to the sermon on the mount (cf. Cadoux, p. 245; Jeremias, *Parable*^s, pp. 169, 194).

[W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 721.]

(καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀκούων μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ μὴ ποιῶν αὐτούς) and in Luke (ὁ ἀκούσας καὶ μὴ ποιήσας). Matthew is very clear about what is heard: “these words of mine” (μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους). From the positive image in 7:47, one clearly understands in 7:49 that it is “my teaching” (μου τῶν λόγων) that is heard but not obeyed. Luke is more inclusive of Jesus’ body of teaching in the gospel, but, given the summary nature of Matthew’s Sermon, one comes to the same point in Matthew as well. Given the context of 7:22-23¹⁹, one should note that what is required is authentic obedience to Jesus’ words as set forth in the Sermon, not religious actions in general even though done in Jesus’ name.

The earthly side of the story. The earthly story aspect characterizes the builder,²⁰ how he built his house, and what happened to it in the coming storm. First in Matthew he is characterized as a ἀνδρὶ μωρῷ, ‘moronic man.’²¹ Luke adds no negative adjective to the reference to the individual (ἀνθρώπῳ). His failure to build properly becomes evident in the destruction of his house in the storm.

This builder opted for the cheap, easy to build house. That is, he chose to build it “on sand” (ἐπὶ τὴν ἄμμον) Matthew, or “without a foundation” (ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν χωρὶς θεμελίου) Luke. Both depictions allude to a building process obviously doomed to failure. Thus understanding the spiritual point from this dramatic picture would be easy and forceful. No builder constructing his own house to live in would dare put up a house with no foundation or else build it on unstable sand.²² Thus to hear Jesus’ words and not obey them is just as senseless.

The coming storm here is described exactly the same way in Matthew as in the other image in verse 25. Only one word is different: whereas with the house built on the rock foundation it “didn’t fall” (οὐκ ἔπεσεν), here it “falls” (ἔπεσεν). Luke, on the other hand, uses different words to describe the essentially same point. The house built on a solid foundation with the coming storm “stands firm because it is well built” (οὐκ ἴσχυσεν σαλευθῆαι αὐτὴν διὰ τὸ καλῶς οἰκοδομηθῆαι αὐτὴν). But the house without a foundation “when the river burst against it, immediately it fell,” (ἢ προσέρηξεν ὁ ποταμός, καὶ εὐθὺς συνέπεσεν) in the coming storm. In both instances Luke depicts only flood waters as the source of testing of the two houses, rather than the fully described storm of rain, wind and flooding, as does Matthew. The point is the same between Matthew and Luke. The testing (storm in Matthew; flooding in Luke) on the Day of Judgment will expose the inadequacy of false discipleship and will doom it to banishment into eternal condemnation. Both gospel writers stress the dramatic collapse of this falsely built house: Matthew, “and great was its fall!” (καὶ ἦν ἡ πτώσις αὐτῆς μεγάλη); Luke, “and great was the ruin of that house” (καὶ ἐγένετο τὸ ῥήγμα τῆς οἰκίας ἐκείνης μέγα). Both accounts highlight the awful spiritual reality of eternal damnation in their wording.

The failure of much of interpretive history to correctly understand this parable has led to the ‘watering down’ of the bluntness of Jesus’ words.²³ If we are going to understand Jesus correctly, we must let the full

¹⁹Mt. 7:22-23 (NRSV): “22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ 23 Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’”

²⁰“The foolish man is introduced as the counterpart of the wise man. As so often in the parables of Jesus, correct behaviour may be observed in one character, incorrect behaviour in another. Compare the two servants of 18:23–34, the two sons of 21:28–31, the two servants of 24:45–51 = Lk 12:35–46, and the two debtors of Lk 7:41–2; also the rich man and beggar in Lk 16:19–31 and the Pharisee and the publican in Lk 18:9–14.” [W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 723]

²¹“In the First Gospel μωρός refers to the folly of not understanding religious truths that should be obvious (23:17, 19) or to the folly of not acting upon what one knows (25:2, 3, 8). Both meanings are appropriate in 7:26. (Unlike Paul, who transforms the word into something ironically positive (1 Cor 1:25; 3:18; 4:10), Matthew maintains a wholly pejorative sense.)” [Davies, *Ibid.* 724]

²²This ancient pattern stands in contrast to modern American tendencies to build ‘slab’ foundations floating on sand in residential construction in many parts of the U.S. The value of this technique is to avoid the stresses put on the building by the shifts in hardened clay loam soil. Readers of Matthew coming out of this situation have a more difficult time grasping the full impact of Matthew’s terminology.

²³Cf. Ulrich Luz and Helmut Koester, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary on Matthew 1-7*, Rev. ed., Hermeneia -- a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 387–388 : “In the church’s exegesis the parable’s reference to the last judgment was often minimized or even ignored. The storm was interpreted as referring to this-worldly experiences such as superstition, rumors, temptations of the flesh, flattery, the power of the devil, or demonic thoughts. It was also easier to interpret the text in terms of the present when the rock was interpreted as Christ (cf. 1 Cor 10:4). Then the text was a call to hold fast to “the rocky foundation of the eternal Word of God” (= Christ). The reformers in particular favored this interpretation. In the Reformation this text was also drawn into the tumult of the antithesis between faith and works: in contrast to building on one’s own piety and one’s own works, one can have certainty only by building solidly on the foundation, Christ. The important thing then is the *hearing* of the word—that is, the foundation that is provided—or trusting God. What the human being does is of secondary importance. The text is distorted in this way in Protestant exegesis down to the present day. Catholic exegesis objected to relating this text, of all texts, to faith without works where it clearly speaks of the “faith made firm by good works” (“*fides bonis operibus solidata*”). The objection is justified. “Hearing and doing” may not be separated in this parable. Indeed, right hearing leads to doing. It is not the case that hearing is compared with the foundation that is

7:27 and
 178 **the rain came down**
 and
 179 **the streams came**
 and
 180 **the winds blew**
 and
 181 **they beat against that house,**
 and
 182 **it fell**
 and
 183 **its collapse was great.**

Quite clearly the saying is set up in antithetical parallelism with statements 170 and 177 introducing the contrast between the doer of Jesus' words and the non-doer. The 'spiritual' side of the story is introduced first and followed by the 'earthly side of the story. The signaling of a parable is unmistakable with the introduction of each side of the contrast with the standard formula for introducing parables: ὁμοιωθήσεται, 'will be like, compared to.' The two subjects of this verb in statements 170 and 177 are similar but yet distinct in the underlying Greek text. In the first instance, the substantival use of a qualitative relative pronoun in a dependent clause sets up the comparison: Πᾶς οὖν ὅστις ἀκούει μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ ποιεῖ αὐτούς. But in the second instance, the verb subject is set up as a substantival participle phrase: καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀκούων μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ μὴ ποιῶν αὐτούς 'Hearing' (ἀκούει / ἀκούων) and 'doing' (ποιεῖ / μὴ ποιῶν) are contained in both constructions, although in the second case it is 'not doing,' the opposite of the first instance.

The distinction then is drawn between 'doing' and 'not doing,' rather than between 'hearing' and 'not hearing.' Both hear what Jesus said. The distinction is further identified in the adjective quality of the two men. The doer is an ἀνδρὶ φρονίμῳ, an exceedingly wise man. The non-doer is an ἀνδρὶ μωρῷ, a 'moronic man.' This contrast is dramatic in order to make the point with greater intensity. The final distinction in the saying is between the outcomes when the storm hits the two houses. The house built on the rock foundation οὐκ ἔπεσεν, τεθεμελίωτο γὰρ ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν, "did not fall, for it had been built upon the rock." But the house built on sand ἔπεσεν καὶ ἦν ἡ πτώσις αὐτῆς μεγάλη, "fell, and its collapse was great." The exact contrast between the two scenarios is drawn at each of the three points of comparison: the spiritual side of response to Jesus' words; the two house builders; and the durability of the houses they built. The builders and their houses stand on the 'earthly story' side of the comparison in the parabolic saying. The contrast here between the two approaches of constructing a house is extreme and makes use of hyperbole in order to drive home the point of wise building more forcefully.

