



The Sermon on the Mount Study
Bible Study Session 26
Matthew 7:13-14: Topic 25.0

Study By
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Greek NT

7.13 Εἰσέλθατε διὰ τῆς στενῆς πύλης· ὅτι πλατεία ἡ πύλη καὶ εὐρύχωρος ἡ ὁδὸς ἡ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ἀπώλειαν καὶ πολλοὶ εἰσιν οἱ εἰσερχόμενοι δι' αὐτῆς· 7.14 τί στενὴ ἡ πύλη καὶ τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδὸς ἡ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ζωὴν καὶ ὀλίγοι εἰσὶν οἱ εὐρίσκοντες αὐτήν.

Gute Nachricht Bibel

13 Geht hinein durch die enge Pforte. Denn die Pforte ist weit und der Weg ist breit, der zur Verdammnis führt, und viele sind's, die auf ihm hineingehen. 14 Wie eng ist die Pforte und wie schmal der Weg, der zum Leben führt, und wenige sind's, die ihn finden!

NRSV

13 Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. 14 For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

NLT

13 You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose the easy way. 14 But the gateway to life is small, and the road is narrow, and only a few ever find it.

The Study of the Text:¹

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

With this pericope we enter into the 'conclusion' of the Sermon on the Mount. Grammar markers signaling this are not present. But the content of the ideas presented in 7:13-27 makes it abundantly clear that a major shift takes place beginning with verse thirteen. The dominant orientation of these section is a call for decision. Up to this point Jesus has presented the concepts of participation in the Kingdom of Heaven by disciples; now He admonishes acceptance of those concepts in serious discipleship commitment. The framework of these admonitions will revolve around gates, roads, fruit-bearing trees, and house construction on foundations. Tucked in the midst of this is a graphic insight into the eschatological Day of Judgment in 7:21-23.

At the heart of the matter in this final section of the Sermon is the nature of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon. The presentation of the Kingdom of Heaven in Jesus' interpretation of it, over against the false ideas of the Jewish scribes and Pharisees, demands decision about Jesus as the Teacher of the Kingdom. He called for a response from his audience in the day of the presentation of the Sermon. Matthew in his version of the Sermon heightens this demand for response through his narration of the materials of Jesus.² In so doing Matthew reminds his readers of this aspect of Jesus' public ministry throughout His time from His baptism until His ascension. The mission of Jesus was confrontation to its core. The Lord came to confront sinners with the demand of the Heavenly Father for them to repent and turn to God in decisive decision. Thus the reaction to Jesus was seldom neutral; it virtually always was either acceptance or rejection. This was by design from Jesus, much as the resurrected Lord would say to the church at Laodicea in Rev. 3:15-16, "*I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, I will spit you out of my mouth!*" Neutrality and indifference to Jesus in reality constitutes rejection and brings rejection from the Lord.

Historical Context:

The historical background to this passage revolves around a clear understanding of roads and gates in ancient Palestine, along with their symbolical meaning. Additionally, the nature of demand for decision among teachers in the ancient world is important. Modern teaching methods, especially in the so-called 'liberal arts' category of western culture, frequently presents ideas in a neutral manner and leaves the reaction by students to choose between acceptance, rejection, or ignoring the ideas. "Scientific objectivity" in which the individual remains indifferent to the assumed 'facts' derived from research has been one of the major aspects of modern western culture for several centuries. The spill-over effect of this upon religion is to leave the false impression of this third alternative of indifference to the demands of religious claims. Consequently modern

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.

²This can be easily seen by comparison of Matt. 7:13-27 with Luke's much abbreviated version in Luke 6:43-49.

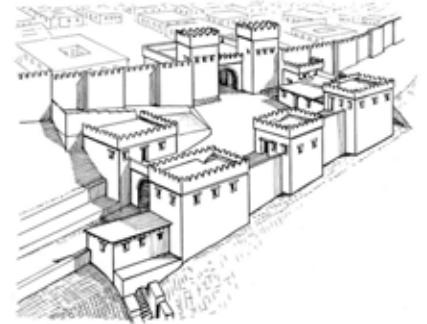
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western individuals dominantly are indifferent to Jesus Christ, feeling that they must neither accept or reject His claims upon their lives. This mentality runs head on into conflict with the nature of the gospel presentation of Jesus in the Bible.

Gates in the ancient world.



What did gates look like in the ancient world? Is there a particular kind of gate that Jesus had in mind here? These and other questions come to mind when seeking to understand His words in our text. In ancient Greek three words are primarily used to refer to the entrance to a building or a city: *πυλών*, *πύλη*, and *θύρα*.³ In Matthew 7:13-14 the word *πύλη* is used, but in the Lukan parallel of Lk. 13:24, *θύρα* is used.⁴ In English translation



³7.38 *πυλών*^b, *ωνος m*: the area associated with the entrance into a house or building—‘gateway, entrance, vestibule.’ κρούσαντος δὲ αὐτοῦ τὴν θύραν τοῦ πυλώνος ‘when he was knocking at the door of the vestibule’ Ac 12.13; ἐξελθόντα δὲ εἰς τὸν πυλῶνα εἶδεν αὐτὸν ἄλλη ‘he went out to the vestibule where another (servant girl) saw him’ Mt 26.71.

“The phrase τὰ πρὸς τὴν θύραν (see 7.39) is essentially equivalent to *πυλών*^b: συνήχθησαν πολλοὶ ὥστε μηκέτι χωρεῖν μηδὲ τὰ πρὸς τὴν θύραν ‘so many people came together that there was no room left, not even out in the entrance’ Mk 2.2.

“7.39 *θύρα*^b, *ας f*: the entranceway into a building or structure—‘entrance, entranceway, portal.’ τίς ἀποκυλίσει ἡμῖν τὸν λίθον ἐκ τῆς θύρας τοῦ μνημείου; ‘who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the grave for us?’ Mk 16.3.

“In Jn 10.9 *θύρα*^b is used figuratively to refer to Jesus as the means of access to salvation: ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ θύρα· δι’ ἐμοῦ ἐάν τις εἰσέλθῃ σωθήσεται ‘I am the door; whoever comes in by me will be saved.’ In Jn 10.9 the emphasis is upon the door as a passageway and not as an object closing off an entrance. Literal translations of ‘I am the door’ may often lead to misinterpretation, since the term used for ‘door’ is likely to refer to a literal door rather than to the entranceway, thus suggesting that Jesus Christ functions primarily to prevent passage rather than making entrance possible.

“7.48 *πύλη*, *ης f*; *πυλών*^a, *ωνος m*: doors or gates used to close off entranceways—‘door, gate.’ *πύλη* and *πυλών*^a may refer to house doors and gates or to large doors and gates such as were used in a palace, temple, or in a city wall.

πύλη: ἦλθαν ἐπὶ τὴν πύλην τὴν σιδηρᾶν τὴν φέρουσαν εἰς τὴν πόλιν ‘they came to the iron gate that opens into the city’ Ac 12.10.

πυλών^a: ὁ τε ἱερεὺς τοῦ Διὸς ... ταύρους καὶ στέμματα ἐπὶ τοὺς πυλῶνας ἐνέγκας ‘the priest of the god Zeus ... brought bulls and garlands to the gate’ Ac 14.13. Note, however, that in Ac 14.13 the reference may not be specifically to the gates as objects, but to the entranceway into the city.

[from Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989), 1:86.]

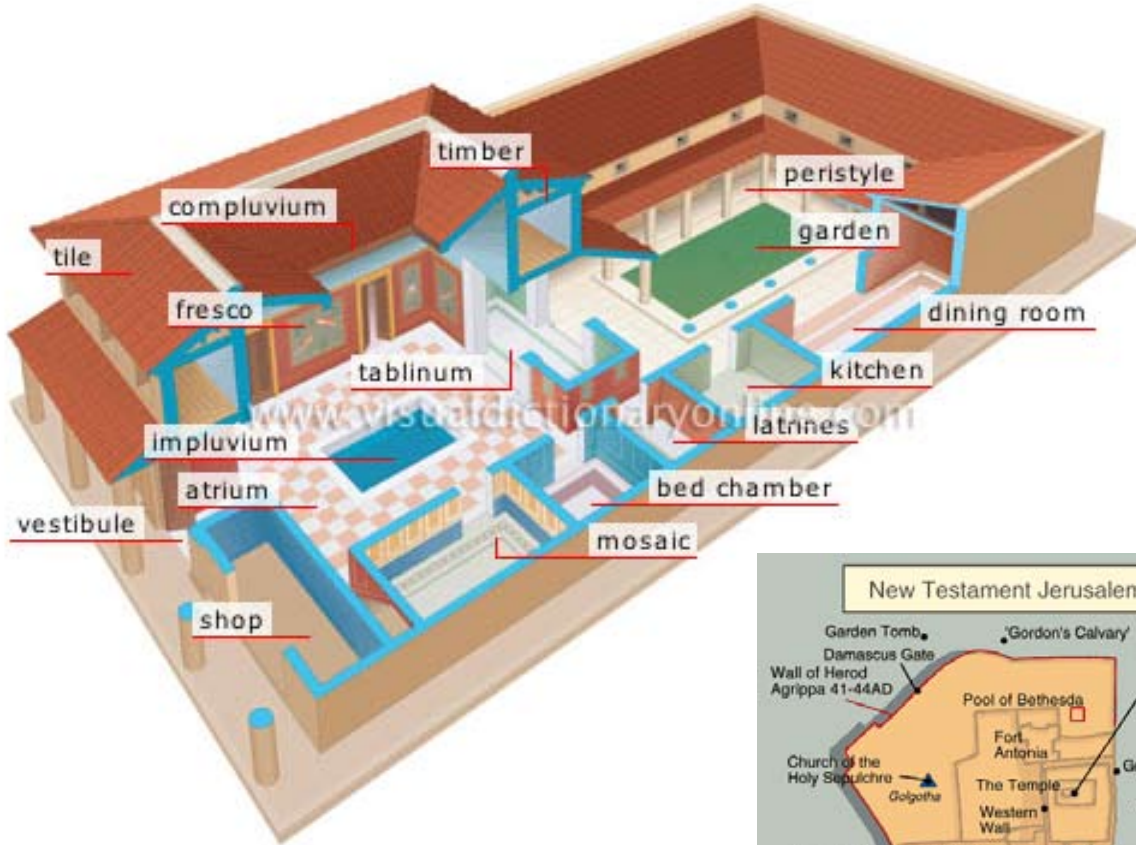
⁴Cf. Luke 13:22-30 (NRSV): 22 Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he went, always pressing on toward Jerusalem. 23 Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few be saved?” He replied, 24 **“The door to heaven is narrow. Work hard to get in, because many will try to enter, 25 but when the head of the house has locked the door, it will be too late.** Then you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Lord, open the door for us!’ But he will reply, ‘I do not know you.’ 26 You will say, ‘But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ 27 And he will reply, ‘I tell you, I don’t know you. Go away, all you who do evil.’ 28 “And there will be great weeping and gnashing of teeth, for you will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets within the Kingdom of God, but you will be thrown out. 29 Then people will come from all over the world to take their places in the Kingdom of God. 30 And note this: Some who are despised now will be greatly honored then; and some who are greatly honored now will be despised then.”

GNT: 13.22 Καὶ διεπορεύετο κατὰ πόλεις καὶ κώμας διδάσκων καὶ πορείαν ποιούμενος εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα. 13.23 εἶπεν δὲ τις αὐτῷ, Κύριε, εἰ ὀλίγοι οἱ σωζόμενοι; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς, **13.24 Ἀγωνίζεσθε εἰσελθεῖν διὰ τῆς στενῆς θύρας, ὅτι πολλοί, λέγω ὑμῖν, ζητήσουσιν εἰσελθεῖν καὶ οὐκ ἰσχύσουσιν. 13.25 ἀφ’ οὗ ἂν ἐγερθῇ ὁ οἰκοδεσπότης καὶ ἀποκλείσῃ τὴν θύραν καὶ** ἄρξησθε ἕξω ἐστάναι καὶ κρούειν τὴν θύραν λέγοντες, Κύριε, ἄνοιξον ἡμῖν, καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ἐρεῖ ὑμῖν, Οὐκ οἶδα ὑμᾶς πόθεν ἐστέ. 13.26 τότε ἄρξεσθε λέγειν, Ἐφάγομεν ἐνώπιόν σου καὶ ἐπίομεν, καὶ ἐν ταῖς πλατείαις ἡμῶν ἐδίδαξας· 13.27 καὶ ἐρεῖ λέγων ὑμῖν, Οὐκ οἶδα [ὑμᾶς] πόθεν ἐστέ· ἀπόστητε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ, πάντες ἐργάται ἀδικίας. 13.28 ἐκεῖ ἐστί ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων, ὅταν ὄψῃσθε Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ καὶ πάντας τοὺς προφήτας ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὑμᾶς δὲ ἐκβαλλομένους ἕξω. 13.29 καὶ ἤξουσιν ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ δυσμῶν καὶ ἀπὸ βορρᾶ καὶ νότου καὶ ἀνακλιθήσονται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ. 13.30 καὶ ἰδοὺ εἰσὶν ἔσχατοι οἱ ἔσονται πρῶτοι καὶ εἰσὶν πρῶτοι



the pattern is normally to translate *πύλη* as 'gate' and *θύρα* as 'door.' Both terms can designate a variety of items related to the idea of 'entrance,' e.g., doorway, gate, door, entrance etc.

Physical gates in the ancient world came in all sizes and shapes. Most of the wider gates were arched for greater support. When around cities, they served as the entrance points into a walled city and thus gave the inhabitants greater control over who was permitted to enter the city. When a *πύλη* designated a 'gate' to a house, it usually closed



off a courtyard to the outside streets. In the above diagram it would have been the outside door of the vestibule on the left side. However, more common for this entrance way was the word *πυλών*. Also the word *θύρα* could be used for any of the entrance points from the outside and throughout the inside of the house.

Quite clearly the use of *τῆς στενῆς πύλης* in our text highlights a different gate that is spiritual in nature. But most likely it plays off the familiar concept of one of the city gates to ancient Jerusalem as a walled city. Details about the city gates of ancient Jerusalem are sketchy; Nehemiah 2:13-15 contains more information than any other single ancient source.⁵ The precise location of these gates, and whether they continued into the Christian era with the same name or a different name -- or were closed off -- is not certain. Rabbi Joseph Schwarz has provided a helpful examination of this material in the Jewish History web site.⁶ But when Jesus mentioned entering a gate, the image most likely in the minds of His

οἱ ἔσονται ἔσχατοι.

⁵Neh. 2:13-15 (NRSV): "13 I went out by night by *the Valley Gate* past the Dragon's Spring and to *the Dung Gate*, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. 14 Then I went on to *the Fountain Gate* and to the King's Pool; but there was no place for the animal I was riding to continue. 15 So I went up by way of the valley by night and inspected the wall. Then I turned back and entered by *the Valley Gate*, and so returned."

⁶Rabbi Joseph Schwarz, "The Gates of Jerusalem," Descriptive Geography and Brief Historical Sketch of Palestine: "I will next describe the supposed situation of all the gates mentioned by Nehemiah:



hearers was one of the city gates to Jerusalem. The adjective στενός translated as 'narrow,' literally means a passageway so small that a man would have difficulty getting through it. In this text two gates are described with one being στενός, 'narrow,' and the other being πλατύς, 'broad,' 'wide.' Thus the contrast is clearly between a gate that is wide and one that is narrow. That is one that



an individual has difficulty getting through, and the other so wide that many people can pass through at the same time.

The function of a gate, either in a city wall or at the entrance to a house, was to exercise control over entrance. A locked gate prevented entrance. The width of the passage way of the gate determined ease of passage. An open gate meant passage. This significance of the gate metaphor stands behind the image of the entrance into the Kingdom being described as a gate.

Roads in the ancient world. In addition to two gates there are two roads in this passage. Roads



in the ancient world ranged from dirt paths to hardened surface highways. The Roman Empire built a system of 'super highways' crisscrossing the empire for military transport. A few of these still exist today and continue to be used almost two thousand years after initial construction.



The two roads are also described as τεθλιμμένη, 'hard,' and as

εὐρύχωρος, 'easy.' These two opposites are not natural opposites in ancient Greek. The Greek word τεθλιμμένη can mean 'made narrow,' but that is not its meaning here. This participle adjective comes from the verb θλίβω, meaning 'to afflict,' or 'to punish.' Suffering tribulations because of faith commitment to Jesus is a major theme in Matthew's gospel, and most likely the term jumps from the literal road to the spiritual meaning of the metaphor of the road. The 'path' of serving Jesus will be full of tribulations and hardships.

Demandive teaching in the ancient world. When teachers taught students in the ancient world a tendency of most was toward pushing the students to make decisions. In general education in the ancient world placed secondary important on conveying new information. Instead, it focused on moral development of the student. The development of self-discipline, self-control etc. played a major role in

At the south there were,

1. The Dung Gate, also called the Gate between the two Walls; east of the same was
2. The Gate of the Fountain.

At the west,

3. The Valley Gate;
4. The Corner Gate, properly northwest from the first, at a distance of four hundred cubits.

At the north,

5. The Gate of Ephraim, also called the Gate of Benjamin, in Jeremiah 37:13, since it led into the territory of both Ephraim and Benjamin.

6. The Prison Gate (Neh. 12:39), the site of which can be accurately determined even at present by means of a tradition which defines the position of the prison, the grotto of Jeremiah, or otherwise called the Archer's Court הרטמה רצה: it was situated near the Bab al Amud (which see). To the east of this gate were the towers Meah and Chananel לאגחו האמ of Nehemiah 12:39.

At the east were,

7. The Sheep Gate (properly at the northeast).
8. The Old Gate, also called the Middle Gate (Jer. 39:3), since, according to the assertion of Yerushalmi Erubin, 5., it bore different names, to wit, רעש ויילעה the Upper Gate; the East Gate הרזמה רעש; the Middle Gate רעה ויהת and the Old Gate ותיא רעש.
9. The Water Gate (Neh. 8:1, "Upon the broad street, before the Water Gate," is explained by the Talmud to mean "the Temple Mount" תיבה רה אוה).
10. The Fish Gate (at the southeast), of 2 Chronicles 33:14, is explained in the Chaldean translation of Rab Joseph with נבזמ ירוכ "where fish are sold, or the fish market," and was probably near the pool of Shiloach; and
11. The Horse Gate, of Jer. 31:40, and 2 Kings 11:16, and 21:11."

the education of young boys in ancient Rome. Closely linked to this in the Roman system was the ability to communicate one's ideas effectively through skillfully used rhetoric. Much memorization of content was stressed, and the ancient world was much better at memorizing things than modern western man. The Jewish system of education reflected many similar traits, although it was focused almost entirely on religion and the passing down of the religious heritage of the Jewish people.

Against this backdrop stands in our passage a reflection of the 'two ways' teaching very widespread in the ancient world. Ulrich Luz provides a helpful summation of this tradition.⁷

The contrast between two ways is widespread in Greek and Jewish sources. Its Greek roots are in the fable of Heracles at the crossroads (told by Prodicus in Xenophon *Mem.* 2.1.21–34) and in Hesiod *Op.* 287–92. Under Hesiod's influence the usual interpretation was that the easier way led to κακία and the more difficult to ἀρετή. In the OT the motif is rooted in the contrast between the way of the righteous and the way of the godless, esp. in Psalms and Proverbs; cf., e.g., Jer 21:8⁸; Pss 1:6⁹; 139:24^{10*}; Prov 28:6^{11*}, 18^{12*}. Early Jewish and rabbinic sources: Str-^{13B} 1.460–63, also Wis 5:6–7^{14*}; 1 Enoch 91.18–19; 2 Bar. 85.13; 2 Enoch 30.15; 1Q^{15S} 3.13–4.26; Philo *Agric.* 102–4. One can speak of a parenthetic didactic form in *T. Ash.* 1.3–6.6 and *Did.* 1.2–5.2, and its parallel *Barn.* 18.1–20.2; however, the two texts are different. Thus one should not speak of a fixed didactic form and certainly not of a Jewish baptismal instruction (Alfred Seeberg, *Die beiden Wege und das Aposteldekret* [Leipzig: Deichert, 1906] 1–38). The material is presented clearly in Michaelis, “ὁδός,” 43–46, 53–56, 56–60, 93–96. On the status of research see Jürgen Becker, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Testamente der zwölf Patriarchen* (AGJ^{16U} 8; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 365–69; Willy Rordorf, “Un chapitre d'éthique judéo-chrétienne: Les deux voies,” *RS^{17R}* 60 (1972) 109–28; M. Jack Suggs, “The Christian Two Ways Tradition: Its Antiquity, Form and Function,” in David E. Aune, ed., *Studies in the New Testament and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honor of Alle¹⁸ⁿ P. Wikgren* (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 60–74.

In this tradition, demand for response was nearly universal. The listener / reader was pushed to decide which way he would choose. And always the choice was between a good and a bad way.

The teaching of Jesus in the Sermon comes to this choice being pressed upon the listeners and readers. We must choose to accept the demands of Jesus for entrance into the Kingdom, or to reject them. If Jesus is the true Teacher of God, then the choice is indeed between entering the Kingdom of Heaven or being locked out of it. This first pericope in the conclusion of 7:13–27 presses this issue hard.

Literary Aspects:

The literary aspects also play an important role in understanding the passage.

Literary Form:

As is true with much of the material in the Sermon, this pericope falls under the Sayings of Jesus category, i.e., the Logia Jesu. This leads to the Source Critical issue of the origin of the saying in its form in Matthew. The uncertainty of a Q source is heightened because the Lukan parallel in Luke 13:24 is different.¹⁹ The differences are in wording and setting for the saying, although the essential idea is the same. Different opinions will be found among New Testament scholars at this point, ranging from independent

⁷Ulrich 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).

⁸And to this people you shall say: Thus says the Lord: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. Bible:Je 21:8 (NRSV)

⁹for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Bible:Ps 1:6 (NRSV)

¹⁰See if there is any wicked^c way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.^d Bible:Ps 139:24 (NRSV)

¹¹Better to be poor and walk in integrity than to be crooked in one's ways even though rich. Bible:Pr 28:6 (NRSV)

¹²One who walks in integrity will be safe, but whoever follows crooked ways will fall into the Pit.^c Bible:Pr 28:18 (NRSV)

¹³Str-B Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (2d ed.; 4 vols.; Munich: Beck, 1956)

¹⁴6 So it was we who strayed from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness did not shine on us, and the sun did not rise upon us. ⁷ We took our fill of the paths of lawlessness and destruction, and we journeyed through trackless deserts, but the way of the Lord we have not known. Bible:Wis 5:6–7 (NRSV)

¹⁵1QS *Rule of the Community (Manual of Discipline)* from Qumran Cave 1

¹⁶AGJU Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums

¹⁷RSR Recherches de science religieuse

¹⁸Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (ICC; 3d ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912).

¹⁹Luke 13:24 (NRSV): ““Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.”

sources for both Matthew and Luke to Matthean reworking of his Q source, and perhaps Luke also.

The Matthean form of the saying is additionally an “Entrance Saying” of Jesus. That is, a teaching of Jesus about entering the Kingdom of Heaven. The previous Entrance Saying surfaced in 5:20 (NRSV), “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you **will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**” The next one in the Sermon will surface in 7:21-23 (NRSV), “21 Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ **will enter the kingdom of heaven,** but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. 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.’” These three logia of Jesus directly address the issue of entering the Kingdom of Heaven, and do so in the form of a warning about the dangers of not being able to enter. They call for serious commitment to God and to the principles of the Kingdom as set forth by Jesus in the Sermon.

Literary Setting:

The literary context of this passage is relatively easy to determine. As already discussed, 7:13-14 represents a shift from concepts about the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven to a series of admonitions encouraging the listeners / readers to make the serious commitment to enter the Kingdom, rather than miss out on it.

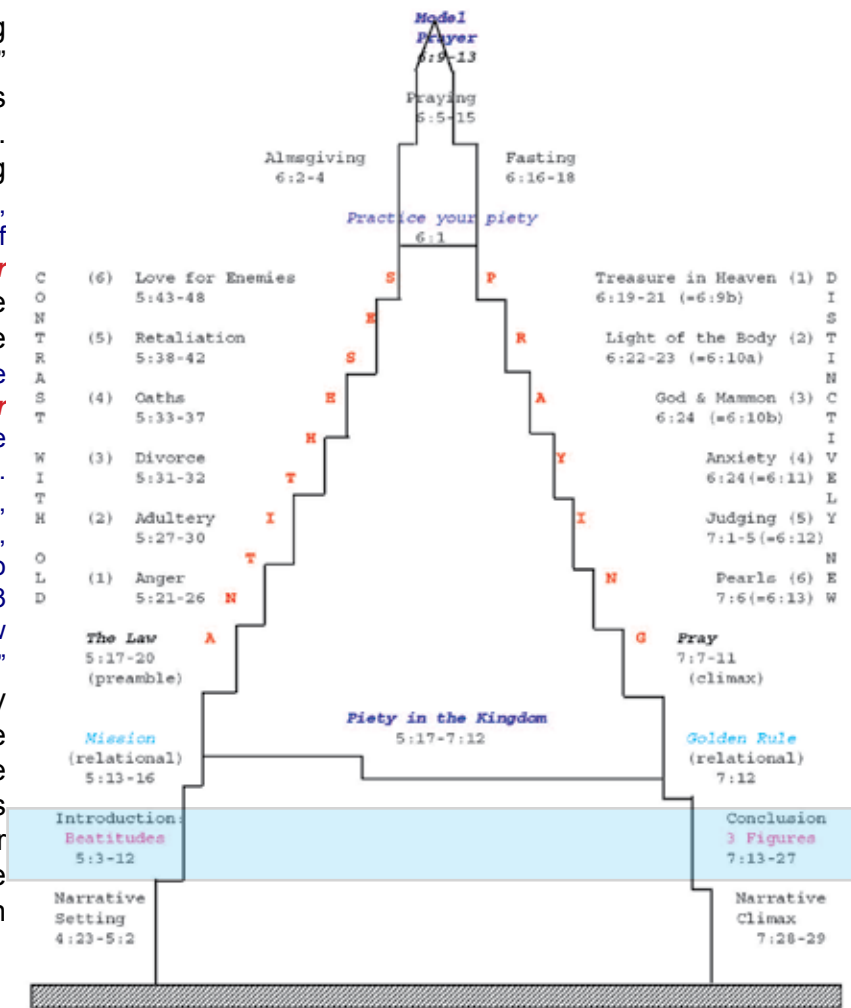
The one point of debate and unclarity here is whether this ‘conclusion’ of the Sermon in 7:13-27 is comprised of three units (vv. 13-14; 15-23; 24-27) or of four units (vv. 13-14; 15-20; 21-23; 24-27) of text material. Since this relates to a later study, we will postpone discussion of this issue until the appropriate subsequent study.

Literary Structure:

The literary flow of ideas inside the text is also easy to determine, as the Block Diagram of the original Greek text reveals, and is reflected in the literal English translation below.

151 ^{7:13} **Enter**
 through the narrow gate;
 because the gate is wide
 and
 the path is spacious
 which leads
 into destruction
 and
 many are those entering
 through it;

The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 4:23-7:29



Source: Leoin L. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988), 320. Adapted from Guntor Bornkamm, “Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt,” *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432.

152 ^{7:14} **How narrow is the gate**
 and
 153 **(how) compact is the path**
 which leads
 into life,
 and
 154 **few are the ones finding it.**

Clearly the nature of the two segments (#s 151 and 152-154) is of a literary parallelism that is antithetical in nature. The opposing nature of the two gates and the two roads is matched by the climatic declaration of many / few individuals taking advantage of them.

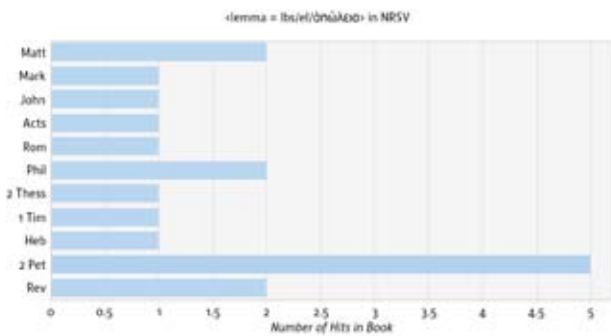
Exegesis of the Text:

The destiny of destruction, v. 13: “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it” (Εἰσεέλθατε διὰ τῆς στενῆς πύλης· ὅτι πλατεῖα ἡ πύλη καὶ εὐρύχωρος ἡ ὁδὸς ἡ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ἀπώλειαν καὶ πολλοὶ εἰσὶν οἱ εἰσερχόμενοι δι’ αὐτῆς).

Salvation is here presented as a gate and a road.²⁰ One should resist the logical temptation to see a road leading to a gate scenario here. The two metaphors are not supplementary. Instead, they are complementary, both designating the same reality from two different angles. Entrance to the Kingdom is both an intentional decision and an ongoing commitment to obedience at the same time.²¹

The gate entrance to the Kingdom is narrow, something emphasized twice in the pericope. The image of a passageway difficult to pass through underscores the necessarily serious commitment to God required for entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

The justifying statement for the admonition beginning with ‘for’ switches to the opposites of a wide gate and a spacious road. The reason for needing to put forth the extra effort to enter the narrow gate is because the wide gate and spacious road lead to destruction. And everyone is traveling on one of these two roads whether they realize it or not. This is a divinely determined presupposition. Only two choices are possible.

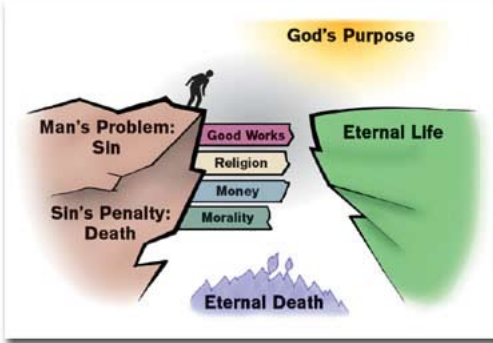


²⁰”Then throughout the conclusion, the basic choices are laid before us. We see contrasts between two choices: life or destruction. This passage is the New Testament equivalent of the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 11:26–29; 28. We also see a strong parallel to Moses’ parting challenge: “I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him” (Deut. 30:19–20a; cf. Matt 16:24–27).” [Stuart K. Weber, vol. 1, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 99.]

²¹”There has been some discussion over just what image should be conjured in the mind’s eye by Mt 7:13–14. Should one think of a traveller on a road who is approaching a city gate (cf. Tabula of Cebes 15; so Mattill (v), pp. 543–6)? Or just maybe of a passage on the way (so P. Joüon, according to Jeremias (v), p. 922)? Or, as the gate is mentioned before the way, is it not more natural to envision a gate at the beginning of a road—as in John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*?⁶ In our estimation, none of these questions can be answered affirmatively. If the tradition-history suggested on p. 696 be right, then the theme of the two ways has, along with the image of the gate leading to eternal perdition (cf. 16:18; 3 Macc 5:51; 2 Bar. 59:10; T. Abr. A 11:11; b. Erub. 19a)Z, been brought into secondary association with the original statement about the gate or entrance leading into eternal life (cf. 4 Ezra 7:6–8; Sib. Or. 2:150; Rev 22:14; T. Abr. A 10:15; Herm. s. 9:12:5; Apoc. Zeph. 3:9; T. Jacob 2:17; Pesiq. R. 179b). One cannot, therefore, expect a coherent image to crystallize readily if at all. And in fact, ‘gate’ and ‘way’ seem to function synonymously (cf. Bonnard, p. 102). They are, in a sense, set not one before the other but side by side.⁸ [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), 693]

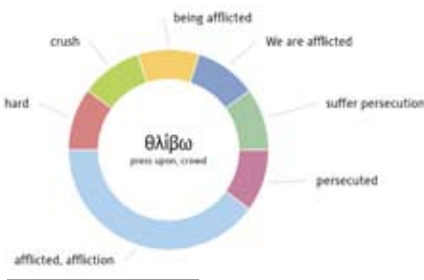
Destruction, τὴν ἀπώλειαν,²² is clearly eternal damnation.²³ The consequence of using the wide gate and the broad road is to end up in Hell!

What then do these two 'entrances' of wide gate and broad road suggest in their religious meaning? From the context one clearly sees that they are the opposites of the narrow gate and constricted road. These images unmistakably define Jesus' demands for discipleship commitment as set forth in the preceding section of the of Sermon. The opposite, that is the wide gate and broad road, then represent alternative approaches to entering the Kingdom of Heaven. In the context of the Sermon this would particularly allude to the 'works salvation' approach of the scribes and Pharisees (cf. Mt. 5:20). On this path in Jesus' day were most



of the Jewish people. The adjectives 'broad' (πλατεῖα ἢ πύλη) and 'spacious' (εὐρύχωρος ἢ ὁδός) are sometimes taken to mean easy alternatives to finding salvation. The approach of the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day was not an 'easy' way to finding justification before God; in fact, it was a very demanding way. By contextual implication, Jesus' alternative is hard and the others in comparison are easy. Easy in the sense of being popular and widely accepted. Consequently, most people move along this option, rather than along the way Jesus' sets forth.

The destiny of life, v. 14: "For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (τί στενὴ ἡ πύλη καὶ τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδὸς ἡ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ζωὴν καὶ ὀλίγοι εἰσὶν οἱ εὕρισκοντες αὐτήν).



The alternative set forth by Jesus is defined as a narrow gate (τί στενὴ ἡ πύλη) and a hard road (τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδός). The narrow gate image stresses difficulty of passageway. Getting through it requires serious effort and



²² ἀπώλεια, ας, ἡ (s. ἀπόλλυμι; Demade^s [IV B.C.]: Or. Att. II 52 p. 313 in the sense 'loss'; later writers; in^s, pa^p, oft^s LX^x, pseudepigr, Phil^o, Jos, Ar, Jus^t; Mel, P).

* *the destruction that one causes, destruction, waste* trans: (Aristo^t, EN 4, 1, 1120a 2; Poly^b. 6, 11a, 10 oppr τήρησις; PTeb^t 276, 34) εἰς τί ἡ ἄ. αὐτῆ τ. μύρου; why this waste of ointment? Mk 14:4; cp: Mt 26:8.

* *the destruction that one experiences, annihilation both complete and in process, ruin* intr (so usu: LX^x; EpAris^t 167; Phil^o, Aet. M. 20; 74; Jos, Ant. 15, 62, Vi. 272; TestDaⁿ 4:5; Ar 13, 8; Jus^t,^d. 56, 5; Mel; but also in Aristo^t, Prob. 29, 14, 952b 26; Poly^b, Plu^t, Epic^t. et al [Nägeli 35]; Diod^s 15, 48, 1 with φθορά; Herm. Wr 12, 16; PG^M 4, 1247f παραδίδομι σε εἰς τὸ μέλαν χάος ἐν τ. ἀπωλείαις) Ac 25:16 v.l.; AcPl H^a 4, 16. (w. ὄλεθρον) βυθίζεις εἰς ὄ. καὶ ἄ. plunge into utter destruction 1 Ti 6:9; πρὸς τ. ἰδίαν αὐτῶν ἄ. to their own ruin 2 Pt 3:16; (w. πλάνη) 2 C¹ 1:7 (Ar 13:8). Esp. of eternal destruction as punishment for the wicked: Mt 7:13; εἰς ἄ. ὑπάγειν go to destr. Rv 17:8, 11. (Oppr. περιποίησις ψυχῆς) Hb 10:39. (Oppr. σωτηρία) Phil 1:28. ἡμέρα κρίσεως καὶ ἀπωλείας (Job 21:30) τ. ἀσεβῶν ἀνθρώπων day of judgment and (consequent) destruction of wicked men 2 Pt 3:7. Hence the end of the wicked is described as ἄ.: τὸ ἀργύριόν σου σὺν σοὶ εἶη εἰς ἀπώλειαν to hell with you and your money (Phillips) Ac 8:20 (for the phrasing cp: Da 2:5 and 3:96 Theod); ὧν τὸ τέλος ἄ. Phil 3:19. σκευὴ ὀργῆς, κατηρτισμένα εἰς ἄ. objects of (God's) anger, ready for destruction Ro 9:22 (Is 54:16). It will come quickly 2 Pt 2:1; is not sleeping vs. 3 (on the topic cp: O^d. 2, 281-84). Appears as a consequence of death (cp: Job 28, 22): ὁ θάνατος ἄ. ἔχει αἰώνιον H^s 6, 2, 4; God laughs at it 1 C¹ 57:4 (Pr 1:26). Those destined to destruction are υἱοὶ τῆς ἄ. J 17:12; ArcP^t 1:2. The Lawless One is also υἱὸς τῆς ἄ. 2 Th 2:3. αἰρέσεις ἀπωλείας heresies that lead to destr. 2 Pt 2:1; δόγματα τῆς ἄ. ArcP^t 1:1.—DEL^o s.v ὄλλυμι. M^{-M}. T^W [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 127.]

²³ The metaphor of a gate, whether as the entrance to eschatological blessing, as in the heavenly Jerusalem, or as the entrance to the place of judgment, as in hell, is not uncommon in Jewish literature (e.g., 4 Ezra 7:6-9; [Pesiq. R.](#) 179b; and b. [Sukk.](#) 32b; b. [Erub.](#) 19a)." [Donald A. Hagner, vol. 33A, *Word Biblical Commentary : Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 177.]

