



The Sermon on the Mount Study
Bible Study Session 29
Matthew 7:24-27 : Topic 28.0

Study By
Lorin L Cranford
cranfordville.com

Greek NT

7.24 Πᾶς οὖν ὅστις ἀκούει μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ ποιεῖ αὐτοὺς, ὁμοιωθήσεται ἀνδρὶ φρονίμῳ, ὅστις ᾠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν· 7.25 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. 7.26 καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀκούων μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ μὴ ποιῶν αὐτοὺς ὁμοιωθήσεται ἀνδρὶ μωρῷ, ὅστις ᾠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν ἄμμον· 7.27 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.

Gute Nachricht Bibel

24 Wer diese meine Worte hört und sich nach ihnen richtet, wird am Ende dastehen wie ein kluger Mann, der sein Haus auf felsigen Grund baute. 25 Als dann die Regenflut kam, die Flüsse über die Ufer traten und der Sturm tobte und an dem Haus rüttelte, stürzte es nicht ein, weil es auf Fels gebaut war.

26 Wer dagegen diese meine Worte hört und sich nicht nach ihnen richtet, wird am Ende wie ein Dummkopf dastehen, der sein Haus auf Sand baute. 27 Als dann die Regenflut kam, die Flüsse über die Ufer traten, der Sturm tobte und an dem Haus rüttelte, fiel es in sich zusammen und alles lag in Trümmern.

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.

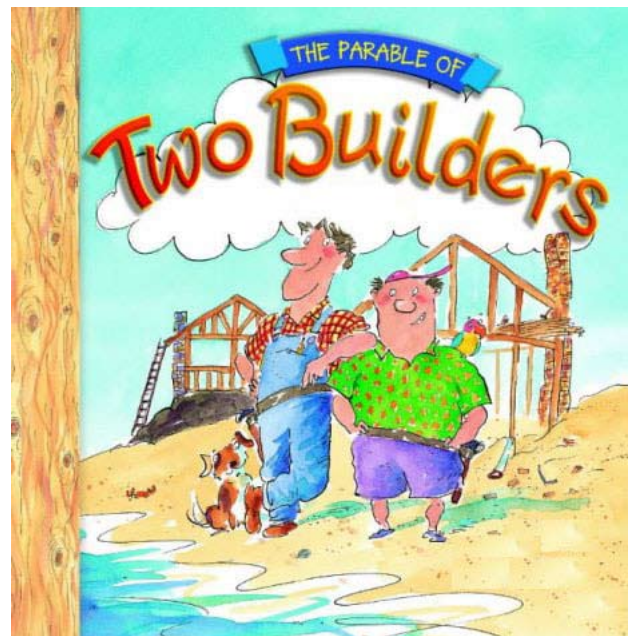
The Study of the Text:¹

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

This final pericope of the discourse text in the Sermon brings Jesus' words to a dramatic conclusion. Only the response of the listeners (7:28-29) remains in Matthew's presentation of the teaching of Jesus. Matthew 7:24-27 stands also as the fourth appeal in the Conclusion of the Sermon, 7:13-27, as the logical climax of the appeal to the listeners to choose Jesus and His claims about the Kingdom of Heaven. Discipleship in the Kingdom is house building work that takes a life time to complete. And as true of the construction industry, it is also true in discipleship: the foundation chosen is critical to the durability of the house.

Historical Context:

The historical reference point in these verses relates to patterns and methods of building houses and buildings in the ancient world. Modern construction methods and materials



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.

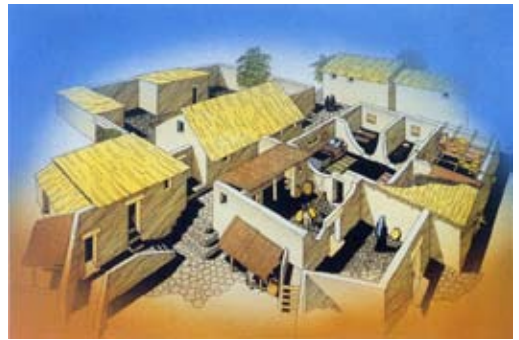
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are substantially different than in the ancient world. Thus some awareness of how people went about building a home in Jesus' day is helpful to the understanding of Jesus' words.

What is a house? Houses come in all sizes, shapes and patterns.² This has been true throughout the history of building houses since the beginning of humankind. Huge differences in sizes, styles, methods of construction, materials used in construction etc. can be traced when one does a historical analysis of the efforts of individuals to build a home for themselves. A formal definition of the word 'house' is helpful:³

A house is generally a home, shelter, building or structure that is a dwelling or place for habitation by human beings. The term includes many kinds of dwellings ranging from rudimentary huts of nomadic tribes to free standing individual structures. In some contexts, "house" may mean the same as dwelling, residence, home, abode, lodging, accommodation, or housing, among other meanings.

The biblical terminology for 'house' is varied in both Hebrew and Greek.⁴ Four Greek words in the New Testament relate to the general designation of a 'house': οἶκος, οἰκία, ἔπαυλις, and βασιλείον.⁵ 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



²For a helpful survey of the general topic 'house' see "House," Wikipedia online.

³Taken from "House," Wikipedia online., which draws heavily on the standard reference work on this topic, Norbert Schoenauer, *6,000 Years of Housing*.

Interesting to compare is the Merriam-Webster online Dictionary definition of 'house':

"Etymology: Middle English *hous*, from Old English *hūs*; akin to Old High German *hūs* house. Date: before 12th century. **1** : a building that serves as living quarters for one or a few families : home. **2 a (1)** : a shelter or refuge (as a nest or den) of a wild animal **(2)** : a natural covering (as a test or shell) that encloses and protects an animal or a colony of zooids. **b** : a building in which something is housed <a carriage house>. **3 a** : one of the 12 equal sectors in which the celestial sphere is divided in astrology **b** : a zodiacal sign that is the seat of a planet's greatest influence. **4 a** : household **b** : a family including ancestors, descendants, and kindred <the house of Tudor>. **5 a** : a residence for a religious community or for students **b** : the community or students in residence. **6 a** : a legislative, deliberative, or consultative assembly; especially : one constituting a division of a bicameral body **b** : the building or chamber where such an assembly meets **c** : a quorum of such an assembly. **7 a** : a place of business or entertainment <a movie house> **b (1)** : a business organization <a publishing house> **(2)** : a gambling establishment **c** : the audience in a theater or concert hall <a full house on opening night>. **8** : the circular area 12 feet in diameter surrounding the tee and within which a curling stone must rest in order to count. **9** [from The Warehouse, Chicago dance club that pioneered the style] : a type of dance music mixed by a disc jockey that features overdubbing with a heavy repetitive drumbeat and repeated electronic melody lines"

⁴One Hebrew word, *biyath* (בֵּית), serves as the primary designation of a family dwelling in the Old Testament era. One must remember 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."

⁵The Louw-Nida *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* provides the following definitions:

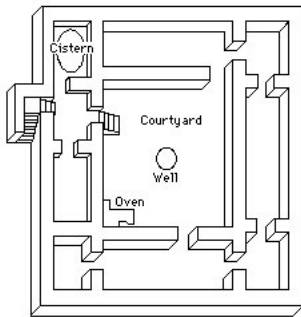
7.2 οἶκος^a, ου **m** : a building consisting of one or more rooms and normally serving as a dwelling place (οἶκος^a also includes certain public buildings, for example, a temple)...

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 βασιλείον, ου **n** : the dwelling of a king or ruler

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)



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 on 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.⁶ The reconstruction seeks to recreate the furniture etc. as it existed in Jesus' day.



Note the following description of the details of ancient Palestinian homes:⁷

The large majority of houses in ancient Palestine were built in fortified cities, though there were also many dependent villages. Even the farmer often lived in the city, although he might camp out at harvest-time, and threshing-floors were always near the city. Large cities might cover an area of 20 acres, though most towns or villages probably did not average more than about 6 acres. Houses were usually packed closely together, particularly if the city was built on a hill, so that space was used economically. Town planning is known as early as the mid-3rd millennium BC, AND DURING THE ISRAELITE PERIOD TOWNS WERE OFTEN ARRANGED WITH A CENTRAL COMPLEX OF HOUSES ENCIRCLED BY A STREET AND A WALL WITH HOUSES ATTACHED (e.g. Tell beit Mirsim, Tell en-Nasbeh). Larger houses were often on the W side of a city, to escape from smoke and dirt carried by the prevailing W winds.

Foundations varied according to the size and importance of the house, though they were important both because of the severe effects of heavy rain (cf. Mt. 7:24-27) and because Palestine is an earthquake area. The foundations sometimes went down into virgin soil, or even to the bedrock in the case of large houses, though in many instances remains of earlier walls and foundations were used in the building of new houses. If the ground was sloping, foundation layers were set on level terraces. The foundation layer often provided a ground plan for the house. The laying of foundations might be accompanied by human sacrifice (Jos. 6:26; 1 Ki. 16:34), but there is no widespread evidence of this horrific practice.

The walls of private houses were usually built of rough stone and mud-brick; where stone was scarce, the entire house was of mud-brick on stone foundations. The mud-bricks were coated with waterproof plaster on the inner faces of the wall, sometimes up to only half the height of the wall, while floors were made of marly clay, which can withstand hard use from bare feet. In the case of richer houses, the floor was sometimes paved, even in the courtyard. Strengthening of walls was sometimes achieved by placing hewn-stone pilasters at the corners and at regular intervals along the walls, or during the Divided Monarchy by stone pilasters laid horizontally, particularly in the upper parts of the wall. Walls could be up to 1 m thick, though interior walls were often thinner.

Doors were fixed in a frame of two doorposts, lintel, and sill or threshold. The doorway was usually lower than a man's height, and the door usually opened inwards, being prevented from swinging outwards by ridges on the lintel and threshold. The latter also served to keep out water and dirt. Doorposts were of wood (Ex. 21:6; Dt. 15:17) or stone (Is. 6:4), and the door could be locked or bolted (cf. 2 Sa. 13:17-18).

Windows are known from the 4th millennium BC onwards in Palestine. They were rarely on the ground floor, as the open door furnished plenty of light during most of the year, and were usually placed in the wall opposite the entrance. Window-space was kept to a minimum to keep the temperature down in summer and up in winter. Assyrian wall-reliefs of the Israelite city Lachish show windows high in the towers of the outer wall, and such windows in city walls provided a means of escape more than once (Jos. 2:15; 1 Sa. 19:12). Ivory carvings from various sites portraying a woman's face at a balustraded window may be related to the lattice windows of the OT which were located in outside walls (Jdg. 5:28; 2 Ki. 1:2; Pr. 7:6; Ct. 2:9).

Many houses had two storeys, though, since no building in ancient Israel has yet been preserved with a complete roofed ground floor or ceiling, the original height of a building is not always certain. Upper rooms were reached by

⁶For a helpful discussion see the website Follow the Rabbi.

⁷Taken from D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 487. S.V., "House."

stairs or ladders. These rooms provided the main living and sleeping accommodation (cf. 2 Ki. 9:13, 17), and guests could also be looked after there (1 Ki. 17:19; 2 Ki. 4:10-11). Roofs were constructed from beams covered with branches and a thick layer of mud plaster, though the rafters were sometimes supported by a row of pillars along the middle of the room. Cylindrical stone rollers about 60 cm. long were used to keep the roofs flat and waterproof, though roofs needed to be replastered annually prior to the rainy season to seal cracks which had developed during the summer heat. The family would often sleep on the roof in summer or use it to dry raisins, figs, flax, etc., in the sun. A parapet was to be built as a safety precaution according to Dt. 22:8. Vaulted roofs were certainly in use in Palestine by the Persian period, while the tiled roof also appeared before NT times. The rooftop was also a place of worship, either for Baal and especially the host of heaven (Je. 19:13; Zp. 1:5), or for the true God (Acts 10:9).



Who built homes in Jesus' day? The process of building a home is expressed in the New Testament by the Greek verb οἰκοδομέω.⁸ The builder is a οἰκοδόμος.⁹ 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.

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.

Literary Aspects:

Consideration of the literary aspects of these verses has significance because of the special forms used by Jesus here.

Literary Form:

The broad genre designation here as with previous pericopes all through the Sermon is *Logion Jesu*, i.e., Saying of Jesus. This same saying is also found at the end of Luke's version of the Sermon in Lk. 6:47-49.¹⁰

46 "So why do you call me 'Lord,' when you won't obey me? 47 I will show you what it's like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then obeys me. 48 It is like a person who builds a house on a strong foundation laid upon the underlying rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against the house, it stands firm because it is well built. 49 But anyone who listens and doesn't obey

⁸This 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.

⁹This 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.'

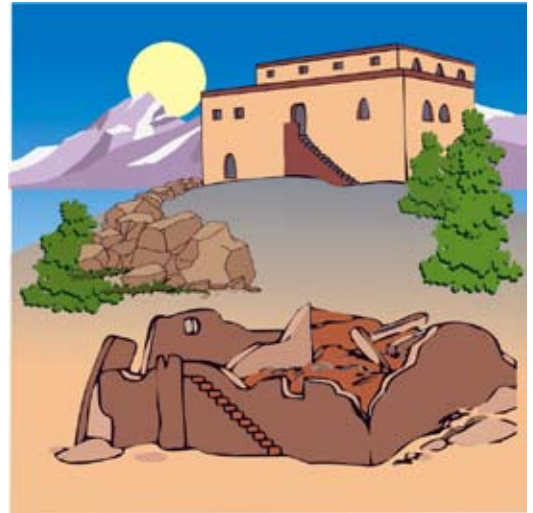
¹⁰GNT: 6.46 Τί δέ με καλεῖτε, Κύριε κύριε, καὶ οὐ ποιεῖτε ἃ λέγω; 6.47 πᾶς ὁ ἐρχόμενος πρὸς με καὶ ἀκούων μου τῶν λόγων καὶ ποιῶν αὐτοῦς, ὑποδείξω ὑμῖν τίνι ἐστὶν ὅμοιος· 6.48 ὅμοιος ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπῳ οἰκοδομοῦντι οἰκίαν ὅς ἔσκαψεν καὶ ἐβάθυνεν καὶ ἔθηκεν θεμέλιον ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν· πλημμύρης δὲ γενομένης προσέρηξεν ὁ ποταμὸς τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἐκείνῃ, καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσεν σαλεῦσαι αὐτὴν διὰ τὸ καλῶς οἰκοδομηθῆαι αὐτήν. 6.49 ὁ δὲ ἀκούσας καὶ μὴ ποιήσας ὅμοιος ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπῳ οἰκοδομήσαντι οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν χωρὶς θεμελίου, ἣ προσέρηξεν ὁ ποταμὸς, καὶ εὐθὺς συνέπεσεν καὶ ἐγένετο τὸ ρῆγμα τῆς οἰκίας ἐκείνης μέγα.

is like a person who builds a house without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will crumble into a heap of ruins.”

The language of Luke is slightly modified from that in Matthew but clearly the saying is essentially the same and as the last pericope of both versions of Jesus’ Sermon the saying functions in the same role of a climatic ending appeal to the sermon.

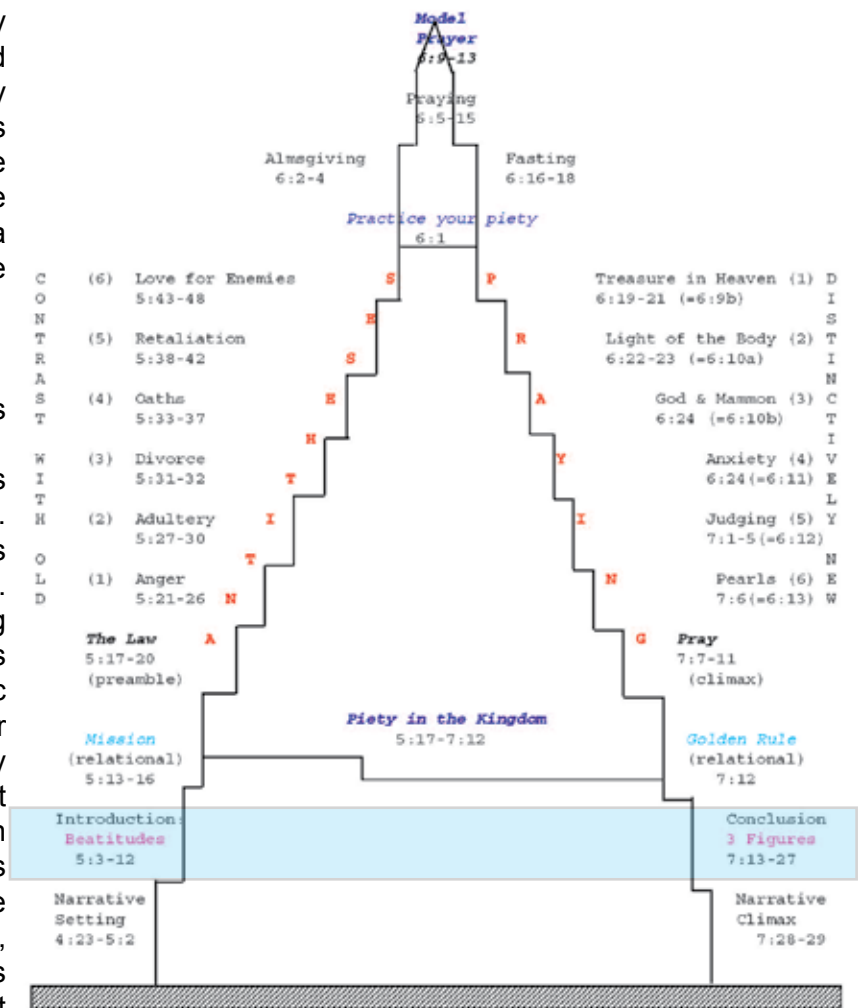
The precise nature of this Saying of Jesus is that of a Parabolic Saying.¹¹ The significance of this classification is to remind the Bible student that he / she is looking at figurative language, not literal language. The word picture painted here makes a central point, known in scholarly circles as 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. 7:24¹² and Luke 6:47¹³ 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 Structure of the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 4:23-7:29



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

Literary Setting:

The literary context for 7:24-27 is clear and significant.

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

¹¹In 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.”

¹²Mt. 7:24 (NRSV): “*Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me* is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock.”

¹³Lk. 6:47 (NRSV): “I will show you what it’s like *when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then obeys me.*”

stands as the fourth and climatic appeal to decision in the Conclusion to the Sermon in 7:12-27.¹⁴ 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.

Literary Structure:

The block diagram of the Greek text highlights the internal thought structure of this passage. The following is an English translation based on the Greek.



7:24 Therefore
 everyone who hears these words of mine
 and
 does them,
 170 **will be like the wise man,**
 who built his house
 on the rock;

7:25 and
 171 **the rain came down**
 and
 172 **the streams came**
 and
 173 **the winds blew**
 and
 174 **--- ----- beat against that house,**
 and
 175 **it did not fall,**
 for
 176 **it had been built**
 on the rock.

7:26 And
 everyone hearing these words of mine
 and
 not doing them
 177 **will be like the foolish man,**
 who built his house
 on the sand;

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

¹⁴Luke 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.

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: 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.

Exegesis of the Text:

The calling for decision at the end of a long discourse is not uncommon in biblical materials. One need only to look at Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 30:15-20, which conclude the Holiness Code in the Old Testament. Additionally, see the final chapter in 1 Enoch, chapter 108 and the Assumption of Moses 12:10-13 for further examples in non-canonical Jewish writings of this ancient period.¹⁵ Also, inside Matthew’s gospel one should look at 18:1-35 and 24:45-25:46, both of which are concluded by an eschatological parable of two choices that demand response to Jesus’ teaching. Matthew’s summary of Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon is then expanded elsewhere in his gospel.

The connection of vv. 24-27 to the preceding material is explicitly stated by the inferential conjunction οὖν, ‘therefore.’ What follows in vv. 24-27 is a logical deduction from at least 7:14-23, if not from the entire Sermon text. The principle of obedient listening is assumed throughout the Sermon; the final pericope of 7:24-27 makes this explicit.

Building a durable home, vv. 24-25: “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.” (7.24 Πᾶς οὖν ὅστις ἀκούει μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ ποιεῖ αὐτούς, ὁμοιωθήσεται ἀνδρὶ φρονίμῳ, ὅστις ᾠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν· 7.25 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 “So why do you call me ‘Lord,’ when you won’t obey me? 47 I will show you what

¹⁵Of particular interest is the similar parable by Rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah (ca. 120 AD) from ‘Abot R Nat (A) 24: Elisha ben Abuyah says: One in whom there are good works, who has studied much Torah, to what may he be likened? To a person who builds first with stones and afterward with brick; even when much water comes and collects by their side, it does not dislodge them. But one in whom there are no good works, though he studied Torah, to what may he be likened? To a person who builds first with bricks and afterward with stones: even when a little water gathers, it overthrows them immediately. He used to say: One in whom there are good works, who has studied much Torah, to what may he be likened? To lime poured over stones: even when any number of rains fall on it, it cannot push it out of place. One in whom there are no good works, though he studied much Torah, is like lime poured over bricks: even when a little rain falls on it, it softens immediately and is washed away.

For more details see Hans Dieter Betz and Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, Hermeneia -- a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 557–569.

it's like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then obeys me. 48 It is like a person who builds a house on a strong foundation laid upon the underlying rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against the house, it stands firm because it is well built." (6.46 Τί δέ με καλεῖτε, Κύριε κύριε, καὶ οὐ ποιεῖτε ἃ λέγω; 6.47 πᾶς ὁ ἐρχόμενος πρὸς με καὶ ἀκούων μου τῶν λόγων καὶ ποιῶν αὐτούς, ὑποδείξω ὑμῖν τίτι ἐστὶν ὁμοίος· 6.48 ὁμοίος ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπῳ οἰκοδομοῦντι οἰκίαν ὅς ἔσκαψεν καὶ ἐβάθυνεν καὶ ἔθηκεν θεμέλιον ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν· πλημμύρης δὲ γενομένης προσέρηξεν ὁ ποταμὸς τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἐκείνῃ, καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσεν σαλευθῆσαι αὐτὴν διὰ τὸ καλῶς οἰκοδομηθῆσαι 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 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 (ἀνθρώπῳ), 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 anywhere 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



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

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.

What was the storm? The 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:¹⁸

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.¹⁹ 3:689–92; 5:377–80; 2 Bar.²⁰ 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,²¹ *Parable*^{22s}, pp. 169, 194).



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. 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 testing 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 πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς).

Building a shoddy home, vv. 26-27: “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.” (7.26 καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀκούων μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ μὴ ποιῶν αὐτοὺς ὁμοιωθήσεται ἀνδρὶ μωρῷ, ὅστις ὠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν ἄμμον· 7.27 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 anyone who listens and doesn’t obey is like a person who builds a house without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will crumble into a heap of ruins.” (6.49 ὁ δὲ ἀκούσας καὶ μὴ ποιήσας ὁμοίος ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπῳ οἰκοδομήσαντι οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν χωρὶς θεμελίου, ἣ προσέρηξεν ὁ ποταμὸς, καὶ εὐθὺς 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 (πᾶς ὁ ἀκούων μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ μὴ ποιῶν αὐτοὺς) 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

¹⁸W. 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.

¹⁹Or. Sib. Or. Sibylline Oracles

²⁰2 Bar. 2 Baruch

²¹Jeremias, J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (trans. of *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 1970), 2nd rev. ed., London, 1972.

²²*Parables* J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (trans. of *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 1970), 2nd rev. ed., London, 1972.

context of 7:22-23²³, 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,²⁴ 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.'²⁵ 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. Hans Dieter Betz has an interesting observation on the Matthean depiction of this builder:²⁶

Hearing without doing amounts to failure of discipleship, but the SM has more in mind than a simple commonplace. Disciples who never get beyond listening to the words of Jesus may not intend to disobey their master. They are not like the would-be disciples portrayed elsewhere in the Gospels (see, e.g., Mark 10:22^{27*} par²⁸), who fully understand Jesus' words but remain in a state of indecision. Rather, the SM focuses on those who listen and listen and listen, while it never occurs to them that they should implement what they have heard in their daily lives. Those people may hear, but they do not understand. A person of this kind is compared with the foolish builder: "he will be like a foolish man" (ὁμοιωθήσεται ἀνδρὶ μωρῷ), the antitype of the faithful disciple of vs. 24–25^{29*}. One should note that the man is merely compared with a fool but not called such (cf. SM/Matt 5:22^{30*}). Instead, he should recognize himself as such. The character of the fool was another stock figure, known from literature and even the theater stage.

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.³¹ 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

²³Mt. 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.'"

²⁴"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]

²⁵"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]

²⁶Hans Dieter Betz and Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Sermon on the Mount : A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 557–569.

²⁷When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. Mark 10:22 (NRSV)

²⁸par. parallel

²⁹–²⁴Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵The 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. Matthew 7:24–25 (NRSV)

³⁰But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. Matthew 5:22 (NRSV)

³¹This 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.

built” (οὐκ ἴσχυσεν σαλευσαι αὐτήν διὰ τὸ καλῶς οἰκοδομηῆσθαι αὐτήν). But the house without a foundation “when the river burst against it, immediately it fell,” (ἡ 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 ρῆγμα 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.³² If we are going to understand Jesus correctly, we must let the full force of His words come across to us, even though they may make us uncomfortable. He ends His sermon with a blunt reminder that authentic discipleship in the Kingdom of Heaven requires serious commitment to follow Him carefully and consistently. It’s much more than a ‘conversion experience.’ This is the beginning point, the initial ‘entrance into the Kingdom now.’ But discipleship is a life long commitment to obey Jesus. Without this, no entrance into Heaven in final judgment will take place, the eschatological entrance into the Kingdom stressed in 7:14-27.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

- 1) What are the ‘two houses’ that supposed disciples build in this life?

- 2) Which ‘house’ are you building?

- 3) What will the ‘storm’ of eschatological judgment reveal?

- 4) How do you feel about the teaching of Jesus on being a disciple in the Kingdom?

³²Cf. 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 “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 laid and doing with building on the rock. Instead, both of them, hearing *and* doing, correspond to building on the rock. Conversely, only hearing, without doing, corresponds to building on sand.”