



The Sermon on the Mount Study
Bible Study Session 25
Matthew 7:13-14

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Greek NT

13 Εἰσελθατε διὰ τῆς στενῆς πύλης· ὅτι πλατεῖα ἡ πύλη καὶ εὐρύχωρος ἡ ὁδὸς ἡ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ἀπώλειαν, καὶ πολλοὶ εἰσὶν οἱ εἰσερχόμενοι δι' αὐτῆς· 14 ὅτι στενὴ ἡ πύλη καὶ τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδὸς ἡ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ζωὴν, καὶ ὀλίγοι εἰσὶν οἱ εὐρίσκοντες αὐτήν.

**La Biblia
de las Américas**

13 Entrad por la puerta estrecha, porque ancha es la puerta y amplia es la senda que lleva a la perdición, y muchos son los que entran por ella. 14 Porque estrecha es la puerta y angosta la senda que lleva a la vida, y pocos son los que la hallan.

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 Outline of the Text:¹

With this passage, the text of the Sermon shifts gears from laying down principles of discipleship to making an appeal for acceptance of these principles from the Teacher of this wisdom. Mt. 7:13-27 comprise this 'invitation' to discipleship. This section begins with the imagery of the narrow / broad gates (vv. 13-14) and ends with house building on either rock or sand (vv. 24-27). Between are two stern warnings about false prophets (vv. 15-20) and entrance in the Kingdom (vv. 21-23).² How the first listeners responded to this appeal is set forth in vv. 28-29.

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 on 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.³ 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.⁴ The Lord came to confront sinners with the demand of the Heavenly Father for

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 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.

³This can be easily seen by comparison of Matt. 7:13-27 with Luke's much abbreviated version in Luke 6:43-49.

Luke 6:43-49 NRSV: "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."

While Matthew takes the images of gates and roads into the very Jewish 'two ways' tradition of ancient Judaism, Luke in writing mainly to a non-Jewish audience goes a different direction with the single image of one 'door.' The option here is whether or not to enter through this door, not to choose which door to enter. Luke presses the response to Jesus' teaching issue, as does Matthew, but in a different manner and without quite the heightened intensity of Matthew's account.

⁴One would want to make note of the manner of teaching in the ancient world, in contrast to modern western styles of teaching. In both Greco-Roman educational approaches and Jewish approaches, education was not focused on accumulating 'facts' and information. Rather, it was centered on the development of moral standards of behavior, and the ability to communicate these to others. Greco-Roman school boys learned self-discipline and self-control as well as disciplined commitment to ideals, while Jewish boys achieved much of the same through focused study on the Law of God. Principles of disciplined moral living have long since faded into the background of modern western education to be replaced by learning information and development of job skills in order to 'make a living.'

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.⁵ 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.

The **literary form** (genre) of these two verses is that of an ‘Entrance Saying.’ 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. The imagery used here of gates and roads stresses two important aspects about entering the Kingdom: 1) it is a deliberate commitment (portrayed as a gate entered) and 2) it is a life-long journey (portrayed as a road traveled). This is the probable reason for the sequence being reversed, rather than the more logical ‘road leading to a gate’ sequence. Out of deliberate commitment to God comes a life-long pattern of obedience to God.

I. **Wide Gate and Easy Road: 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.

Εἰσελάθατε διὰ τῆς στενῆς πύλης· ὅτι πλατεῖα ἡ πύλη⁶ καὶ εὐρύχωρος ἡ ὁδὸς ἢ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ἀπώλειαν, καὶ πολλοὶ εἰσὶν οἱ εἰσερχόμενοι δι’ αὐτῆς·

The admonition to enter the ‘narrow’ gate is re-enforced by the causal warning about its opposite, the broad gate and road. One should note the Aorist imperative verb form Εἰσελάθατε, because it stresses deliberate decision to take action. One doesn’t ‘enter’ accidentally or casually. Rather, it must be by deliberate choice that produces action. The necessity of such a choice is motivated by the two options of gates and roads before the individual. Both the nature of each set, and especially the destination of each, make the choice of the ‘narrow gate’ clear. Jesus first elaborates on the negative choice.



Wide Gate. 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: *πυλῶν*, *πύλη*, and *θύρα*.⁷ In Matthew 7:13-14 the word *πύλη* is used,

Consequently, confrontation by teachers of students was an integral aspect of ancient education. Making decisions correctly and consistently were essential aspects of gaining an education. Jesus’ Sermon reflects this ancient pattern, especially here in the conclusion of 7:13-27, much more than modern commentaries on the Sermon that largely reflect modern western educational patterns.

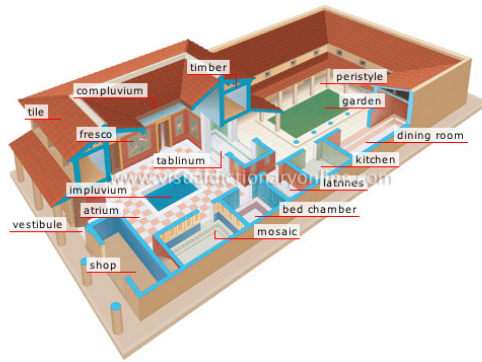
⁵The choice presented here is similar to the ‘two ways’ teaching in ancient Judaism. “Cf. “the way of life and the way of death” in Jer 21:8; cf. Ps 1:6; also Deut 11:26–29 etc. This traditional Jewish teaching on the two ways is developed at length in Did. 1–6.” [R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 287.]

⁶“The words ἡ πύλη, ‘the gate,’ are lacking in κ^* 1646 ita,b,c,h,k and many patristic citations of this verse, perhaps because of the unusual use of *πλατεῖα*, ‘wide,’ which usually applies to roads, as a modifier of *πύλη*, ‘gate.’ The MS evidence supporting the reading is very great.” [Donald A. Hagner, vol. 33A, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 178.]

The impact of this alternative reading is to change the imagery to only the way to life having a gate connected to it. Evidently some scribes in copying this text in later centuries sought to underscore that one doesn’t have to make a choice (i.e., enter a gate) in order to be on the ‘broad’ road, but intentional choice is essential for finding the path leading to life. The unnaturalness in ancient Greek of linking *πλατεῖα* with *πύλη* provided a basis for such modification of the text. But by far the bulk of the manuscript evidence favors including ἡ πύλη as the original reading of the text.

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

but, in the Lukan parallel of Lk. 13:24, *θύρα* is used.⁸ In English translation 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.⁹ The precise location of these gates, and whether they continued into the Christian

“The phrase *τὰ πρὸς τὴν θύραν* (see 7.39) is essentially equivalent to *πυλών*: *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, ας*: 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* 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; πυλών, ὄνος*: doors or gates used to close off entranceways—‘door, gate.’ *πύλη* and *πυλών* 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: *ὁ τε ἱερεὺς τοῦ Διὸς ... ταύρους καὶ στέμματα ἐπὶ τοὺς πυλώνας 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.]

⁸Cf. 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 αὐτοῦς, **13.24 Ἀγωνίζεσθε εἰσελθεῖν διὰ τῆς στενῆς θύρας, ὅτι πολλοὶ, λέγω ὑμῖν, ζητήσουσιν εἰσελθεῖν καὶ οὐκ ἰσχύσουσιν. 13.25 ἀφ’ οὗ ἂν ἐγερθῇ ὁ οἰκοδεσπότης καὶ ἀποκλείσῃ τὴν θύραν καὶ** ἄρξῃσθε ἕξω ἐστάναι καὶ κρούειν τὴν θύραν λέγοντες, Κύριε, ἀνοιξον ἡμῖν, καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ἐρεῖ ὑμῖν, Οὐκ οἶδα ὑμᾶς πόθεν ἐστέ. 13.26 τότε ἄρξῃσθε 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 ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων, ὅταν ὄψῃσθε Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ καὶ πάντας τοὺς προφῆτας ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὑμᾶς δὲ ἐκβαλλομένους ἕξω. 13.29 καὶ ἦξουσιν 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 οἱ ἔσονται ἔσχατοι.

⁹Neh. 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**

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.¹⁰ But when Jesus mentioned entering a gate, the image most likely in the minds of His 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.

The ‘wide gate’ (πλατεία ή πύλη) highlights the option of religious commitment that is easy to make and that makes few, if any demands, on the individual. In popular expression, it is a religion of convenience. I make up my own rules to suit my individual tastes in this kind of religion.

Easy Road. 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 εύρύχωρος, ‘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.¹¹ 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 road metaphor. The ‘path’ of serving Jesus will be full of tribulations and hardships -- this is the point being made by the unusual term used here.



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.”

¹⁰Rabbi 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:

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 לאבנור 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, the Upper Gate; the East Gate הרומה רעש; the Middle Gate רעה רעה and the Old Gate רעש 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 אזה).
10. The Fish Gate (at the southeast), of 2 Chronicles 33:14, is explained in the Chaldean translation of Rab Joseph with ירוכ יבזמ “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.”

¹¹The sense of ‘being made narrow’ with the Greek perfect passive participle τεθλιμμένη is derived from the road or gate being over crowded by too many people, not by its size. Here with ‘few,’ ὀλίγοι, people being on it, over crowding is not in the picture. Thus affliction and tribulation are the intended meanings of the participle.

Travelers. Those who go through the wide gate and travel on the easy road (εύρυχωρος) are πολλοί, i.e., ‘many.’ The way of convenient religion is popular and gathers up large numbers of followers. This stands in stark contrast to the ‘tribulation filled’ road and the ‘narrow’ gate option of Jesus. Davies and Allison make an important point here:

καὶ πολλοὶ εἰσὶν οἱ εἰσερχόμενοι δι’ αὐτῆς. Compare Lk 13:24b (‘Because many ... will seek to enter and will be unable’). The ‘many’ are not identified—which leaves open the frightening possibility that the reader may end up among them. From the days of Noah (Gen 6) to the days of Moses (Exod 23:2; 32) and on to the days of the prophets (1 Kgs 19:10; Ezek 9:8–10; etc.), it is always the multitude, the many, who follow evil. Those that do good are, according to the Scriptures, a minority.¹²

As a matter of context, one should observe that πολλοί will include those claiming to have served Christ: “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?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’” (Mt. 7:22-23).¹³

Destination. The problem with the broad gate and easy road is where they lead: ἡ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν πώλειαν. Destruction, τὴν ἀπώλειαν, is clearly eternal damnation.¹⁴ The consequence of using the wide gate and the broad road is to end up in Hell!¹⁵

Also important to note is that these travelers ‘enter into destruction’ (οἱ εἰσερχόμενοι δι’ αὐτῆς). Little effort or energy is put forth to get to this destination. This will stand in strong contrast to the other travelers on the hard road having to ‘find’ (οἱ εὐρίσκοντες αὐτήν) it, clearly implying intentionality and deliberate effort to discover the correct path.

Salvation is here presented as a gate and a road.¹⁶ 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



¹²W. 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), 698-99.

¹³22 πολλοὶ ἐροῦσίν μοι ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ· Κύριε κύριε, οὐ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι ἐπροφητεύσαμεν, καὶ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι δαιμόνια ἐξεβάλομεν, καὶ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι δυνάμεις πολλὰς ἐποιήσαμεν; 23 καὶ τότε ὁμολογήσω αὐτοῖς ὅτι Οὐδέποτε ἔγνω ὑμᾶς· ἀποχωρεῖτε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν.

¹⁴“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.]

¹⁵ἀπώλεια, 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 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 opp τήρησις; PTeb^t 276, 34) εἰς τὴ ἡ. 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; TestDa^a 4:5; Ar 13, 8; Jus^t., P. 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.; AcPI H^a 4, 16. (w. ὄλεθρον) βυθίζειν 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 Cⁱ 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. (Opp. περιποίησις ψυχῆς) Hb 10:39. (Opp. 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 Cⁱ 57:4 (Pr 1:26). Those destined to destruction are υἱοὶ τῆς ἄ. J 17:12; ApcPⁱ 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. ApcPⁱ 1:1.—DEL^g 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.]

¹⁶“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.]

to obedience at the same time.¹⁷

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.

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.¹⁸ 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, as well as free from persecution and opposition. Consequently, most people move along this option, rather than along the way Jesus’ sets forth.

II. Narrow Gate and Hard Road: 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.

ὅτι στενὴ ἡ πύλη καὶ τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδὸς ἡ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ζωὴν, καὶ ὀλίγοι εἰσὶν οἱ εὐρίσκοντες αὐτήν.

The alternative that Jesus set forth is the opposite of the wide gate and easy road. It is described as a ‘narrow’ gate and a ‘hard’ road, but its destination is life, rather than destruction.

Narrow Gate. The gate is στενή in contrast to πλατεῖα. The picture is of a gate so narrow that a single individual has difficulty getting through it. The religious point is similar to the entrance saying in Matthew 19:24, “Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” Entering the Kingdom of Heaven is not an easy matter. Serious, determined commitment is required, which typically means going against prevailing trends. Here Jesus plays off a relatively common idea in the ancient Jewish world that the way of wickedness is easy while the way of righteousness is very difficult. But He took the imagery a new direction in the usage here, as 5:20 dramatically highlights.

Hard Road. The hard road is literally the ‘affliction filled’ road and stresses the spiritual application of the metaphor more than the literal reference to a road. To be sure, some roads in the ancient world were ‘hard’ to travel on, as the photo to the right illustrates. But the primary stress of the adjective is on what believers will experience while traveling this path of discipleship.



¹⁷“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]

¹⁸To be sure the Pharisees who sought to follow the rigid requirements of Torah obedience comprised less than five per cent of the Jewish population (not more than 2,000 Pharisees total in Jesus’ day). But in popular opinion the teaching of these religious leaders was considered the defining way to religion among Jews, even if many Jews did not personally commit themselves to such rules and regulations. The alternative views on religious duty, e.g., Sadducees, Qumran etc., represented much smaller portions of the population of Jews both in Palestine and in the Diaspora, and subsequently exerted much less influence upon Jewish thinking about religion.

Davies and Allison, regarding the ‘hard road,’ observe:

If the way of the believer is in fact the ‘narrow way of tribulation’, then its opposite, the ‘broad way’, is such because it is relatively free of affliction and persecution. This is consistent with Matthew’s insistence upon the believer as the one who particularly suffers great difficulties (cf. 5:10–12, 44; 10:16–33; 13:21; 23:34; 24:9–10). And εὐρύχωρος, which basically means ‘spacious’, can refer to a place of comfort, a place free of molestation (so BAGD; , s.v.; cf. Herm. m. 5:1:2), while στενός (and related words) can describe a situation of oppression (as in 2 Cor 4:8; 6:12).¹⁹

Travelers. While ‘many,’ πολλοί, were traveling the ‘easy’ road, only ‘a few,’ ὀλίγοι, will discover where the hard road is and be able to travel on it. In the background here is the Jewish tradition of a ‘remnant’ of people coming to God in authentic commitment. This concept reaches back to the Old Testament prophets’ declaration that God would bring only a ‘remnant’ of Israelites out of Babylonian captivity. The concept was carried over into Christianity by Jesus and the apostles.²⁰ Elsewhere Matthew predicts a bountiful harvest of disciples, e.g., 13:31–33 and 9:37–38, but this does not contradict the reality that authentic discipleship in the Kingdom of Heaven has always been -- and always will be -- a remnant of people, never the majority of people. In the modern world this is much easier to understand when one lives where even professing Christianity is a minority religion. Luke 13:23–28 stresses this point dramatically.²¹ Here Jesus made the point that speculation about how many were going to make it to Heaven -- common among Jewish scribes at that time -- was beside the point. The thing everyone needs to concentrate on is whether or not they are going to make it!

Destination. The ‘narrow gate’ and ‘hard’ road lead to life: ἡ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ζωὴν. Life here is synonymous with the eschatological ‘Kingdom of Heaven.’²² At the end of the journey on the ‘hard’ road lies ‘eternal life.’ By making the effort to discover this road, disciples find that all the difficulties connected to the journey are more than compensated for by what lies at the end of the journey.

The essence of the images here can be charted as follows:

Aspects:	Gates: ἡ πύλη		Roads: ἡ ὁδὸς	
Character:	Broad: πλατεῖα	Narrow: στενῆς	Easy: εὐρύχωρος	Hard: τεθλιμμένη
Travelers:	Many: πολλοί	Few: ὀλίγοι	Many: πολλοί	Few: ὀλίγοι
Destination:	Destruction: εἰς τὴν ἀπώλειαν	Life: εἰς τὴν ζωὴν	Destruction: εἰς τὴν ἀπώλειαν	Life: εἰς τὴν ζωὴν

Thus consistent with Matthew’s presentation of heavy discipleship demands by Jesus throughout his gospel, and especially inside the Sermon, the entrance saying here highlights the anticipation of opposition and hardships along the way of following Jesus in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus, as the new Moses, utters a challenge somewhat like that of Moses centuries before:²³

26 See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the

¹⁹W. 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), 700.

²⁰“ὀλίγοι εἰσὶν οἱ εὐρίσκοντες αὐτήν, ‘there are few who find it,’ is primarily descriptive of the situation confronted by Jesus and his disciples during his ministry (so too, 22:14). Although the ‘few’ is clearly hyperbolic, it remains true that the majority of the people (πολλοί, v 13) do not receive Jesus’ message (cf. 11:20–24; 12:41–42); they go down the broad path to destruction. Those who do follow Jesus and his summons to the righteousness of the kingdom are comparatively few (ὀλίγοι). That those who follow Jesus are a minority and that their path is a demanding one should come as no surprise, nor should it be discouraging. For from another perspective it may be said that “the harvest is plentiful” so that many more laborers are needed (9:37–38). The kingdom’s beginnings may be small, but the promise for the future is great (cf. 13:31–33).” [Donald A. Hagner, vol. 33A, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 179.]

²¹Luke 13:22-28 NRSV: 22 Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. 23 Someone asked him, “**Lord, will only a few be saved?**” He said to them, 24 “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. 25 When once the owner of the house has got up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, “Lord, open to us,” then in reply he will say to you, “I do not know where you come from.” 26 Then you will begin to say, “We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.” 27 But he will say, “I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!” 28 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out.

²²“εἰς τὴν ζωὴν, ‘to life,’ refers here to eternal life (cf. 19:16–17; elsewhere in Matthew only in 18:8–9; 19:29; and 25:46), language that is equivalent to entering the eschatological kingdom of God and is the exact opposite of the ultimate ruin referred to in the preceding verse.” [Donald A. Hagner, vol. 33A, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 179.]

²³Deut. 11:26-28 (NRSV).

Lord your God that I am commanding you today; 28 and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn from the way that I am commanding you today, to follow other gods that you have not known. But the new Moses has a new set of commandments from God, and He has just laid them down in the Sermon. Now it is up to would-be disciples to take them up and to obey them through their commitment to Him as the anchor of their entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Diagram of the Sermon on the Mount Matthew 7:13-14

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

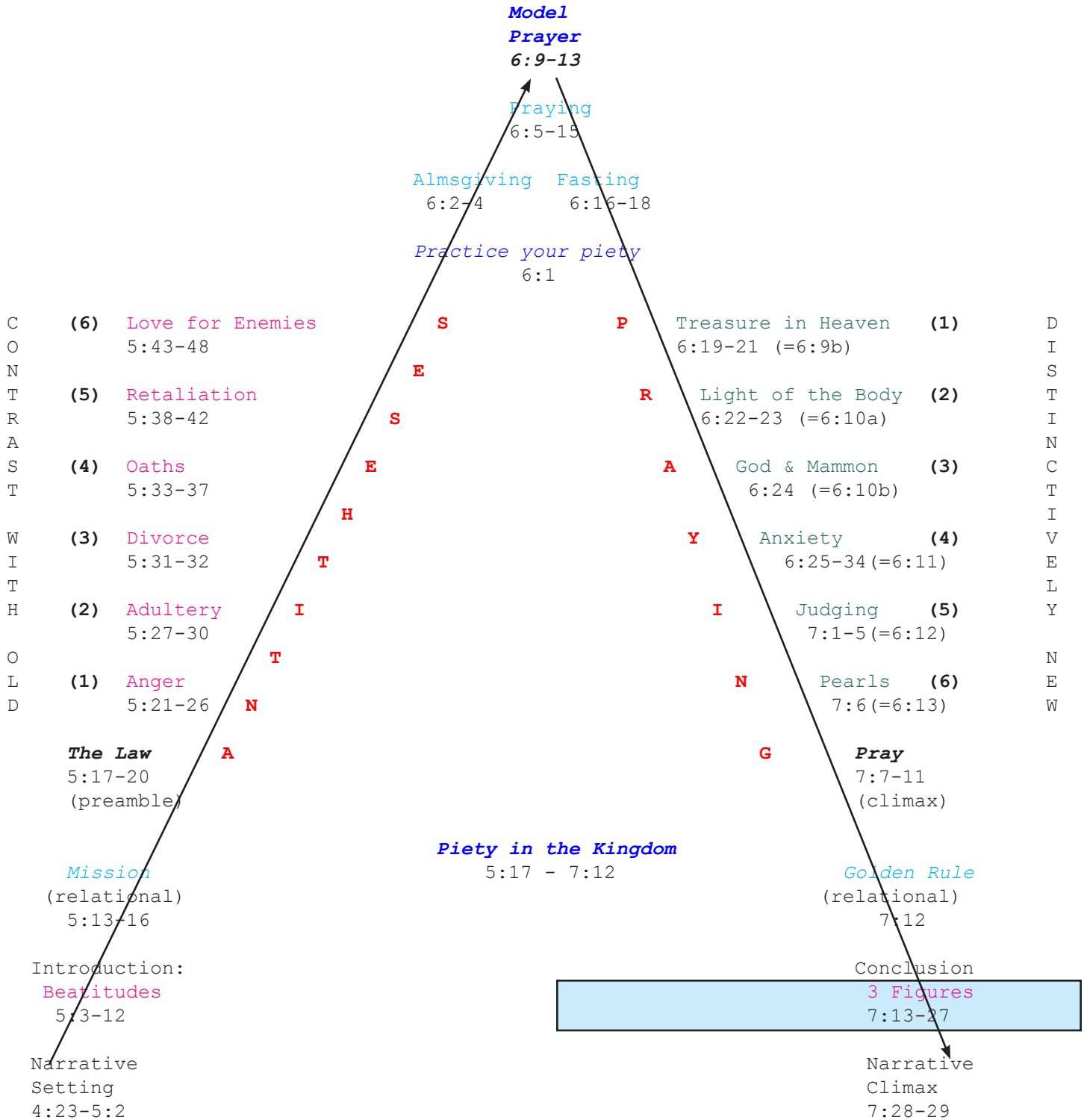
151 ^{7:13} **Enter**
through the narrow gate;
because the gate is wide
and
the path is spacious
which leads
into destruction
and
many are those entering
through it;

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.

The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 4:23-7:29



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