



Peninsula City Church

The Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5-7

Matthew 5:17-48 An Introduction

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The Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5:17-48 - An Overview

An Introduction

Q. What was Jesus' purpose for teaching here, and how can it be applied?

As we study this section of Matthew in context, hopefully, we will be able to understand what Jesus was saying in some of the challenging sections. Although it has been called the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was teaching rather than preaching, see Matt 5:2; 7:28-29. One part of this teaching in Matt 5:17-48 has been misunderstood and mistreated over the last two thousand years. Here, Jesus was teaching His disciples (or apprentices) the part they would play in partnership with Him in the Kingdom of Heaven. While doing so, the crowd that followed Jesus also had the opportunity to listen to His teaching, Matt 4:25-5:2; 7:28-8:1.

Jesus presented them with His perspective of the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) in a way that they would not have heard it taught before. Remember that the Torah was originally given on Mount Sinai, Ex 19-20. In contrast, Jesus here presented His interpretation of some aspects of the Torah on a Mountain in Galilee, Matt 5:1. The teaching we will look at here was given using a comparative method that was straightforward and challenging. Matthew was the only one to present this material since Luke in Lk 6:20-49 did not go that far. In this message, we will begin by exploring two matters. We will go into more detail at a later date.

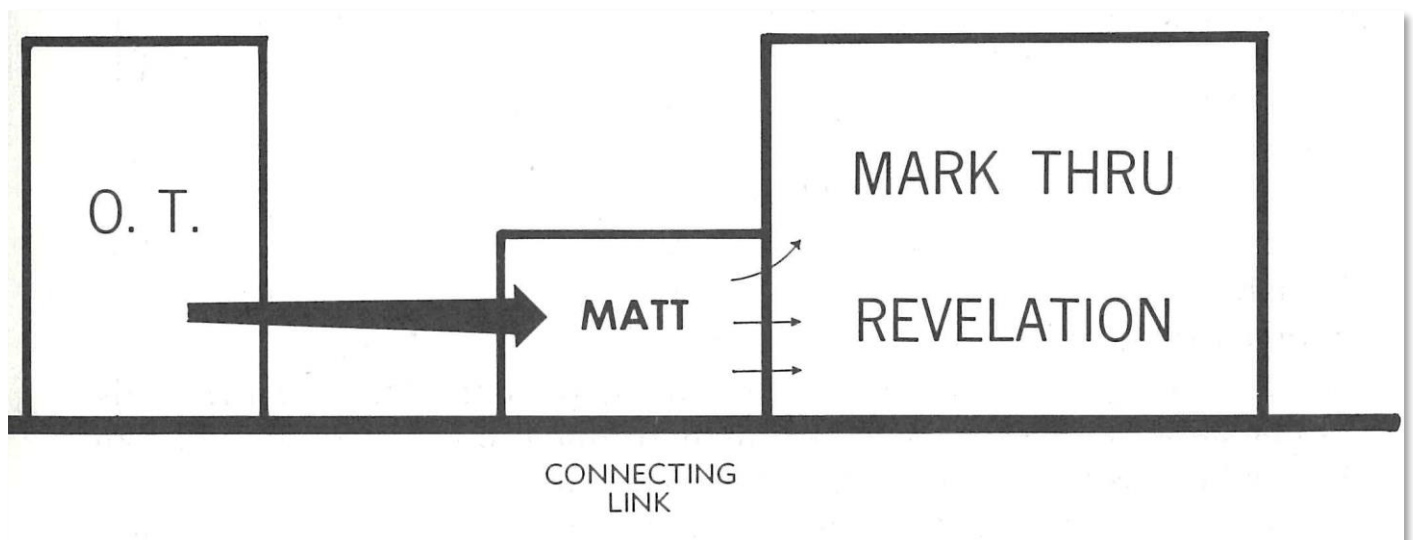
- One Jesus' teaching of His disciples: Matthew 5:17-48: An Introduction
- Two: The context of Matthew 5:17-48

1. The Teaching on the Mount: Matthew 5:17-48: An Introduction

Q. How can we understand the teaching presented by Jesus in this chapter?

a. A Link

As stated previously (May 5th, 2024), the book of Matthew is the first Gospel listed within the New Testament under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Although the Gospels of Mark and Luke may have been written first, Matthew appears straight after the close of the Hebrew Bible. Its position in the New Testament links the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament, focusing on what has been said and done in the Hebrew Bible.¹



¹ Jensen, Irving L. *Jensen's Survey of the New Testament*, (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1981), 113.

Matthew highlighted Jesus starting this section with His statement regarding the context of this section, which began with the following,

“From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand’” (Matt 4:17 NASB).

The section comes to a close with Matthew chapter sixteen when the author says,

“Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ” (Matt 16:20 NASB).

The author then began the next section with,

“From that time, Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day” (Matt 16:21 NASB).

Up to now, we have heard some light on the Beatitudes, what Jesus had to say about His disciples being salt and light and not worrying about the needs of life. Here, we will begin to review what Jesus had to say regarding the Torah (meaning instruction) and the Prophets. It will be dealt with over two sessions since there is too much for one. Firstly, here we will review the methodology that Jesus used, then what He had to say to His disciples and how to apply it.

Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand

b. Torah and the Prophets: Matthew 5:17-20

The author of the Gospel of Matthew referred to the Hebrew Bible quite a bit in their account. They recorded Jesus as being the fulfilment of the Torah and the Prophets. Jesus said twice that He did not come to abolish or destroy the Torah or the Prophets. He was forbidding the action of abolishing it. Jesus’ purpose is to fulfil them as the coming Messiah. That is,

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law (*Torah*, i.e. Lit. Heb. *journey* and Greek *instruction*) or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfil” (Matt 5:17 NASB).

In doing this, Jesus used a couple of phrases within this section of the account: Jot and Tittle. What do they mean?

¹⁷ “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law (*Torah*) or the Prophets (Former and Later); I did not come to abolish (*teardown*) but to fulfil.¹⁸ For truly (*amen*) I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter (Heb *the letter Yod*) or stroke (i.e., *the small part of a letter*) shall pass from the Law (*Torah*) until all is accomplished.¹⁹ Whoever then annuls (or *loses, dissolves*) one of the least of these commandments and

teaches others to do the same shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever keeps (Lit *does*) and teaches them, they shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.²⁰ For I say to you that unless your righteousness Lit. Heb. *righteous to be on the path or way*, so

Jot & Tittle

“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter (Jot/iota, Yod) or stroke (Tittle) shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” (Matt 5:18)

Jot
Yod
“Y”
Aramaic Hebrew Paleo-Hebrew

Tittle
Beth Kaph
“B” “K”

A jot is the smallest letter only in the Aramaic alphabet proving Jesus wrote Hebrew using the Aramaic alphabet.

A tittle is a small mark that distinguishes between two letters the same way we know O from a Q in English.

www.bible.ca/manuscripts

righteousness means *to be walking on the right path or way*) surpasses (or exceeds) that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt 5:17-20 NASB).

See the illustration on the previous page for the Jot and Tittle. They are part of the Hebrew language and were what Jesus talked about.² Notice here that Jesus mentioned the Kingdom of Heaven three times within these four verses. He highlighted the context in which He said these things from the Kingdom of Heaven perspective. All of this language is expressed within the understanding of the righteousness of God and His Kingdom cf. Matt 5:20; see also Matt 5:6,10; 6:33. Observe that the issue of righteousness here is the lack of it, as with the scribes and Pharisees. So, someone who is righteous needs to be on the right path or way, since the scribes and Pharisees are not. Notice that our series is called the ‘Way of Jesus,’ i.e. the right way.

What did Jesus mean by the Torah and the prophets? See below that the Torah is the first five books of the Bible. The word Pentateuch (mentioned below) comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible called the Septuagint (or the LXX meaning 70 as it is thought to have been 70 scholars involved in the translation from Hebrew to Greek). What is meant in the Hebrew Bible by the Prophets is either Former (our Bibles would call these the Historical Books) and the Later Prophets (it includes all but Daniel, which is in the Historical section of the Hebrew Bible), or all of the Hebrew Bible other than the Torah.³

The Hebrew Bible (Tanakh)		
The Law	The Prophets	The Writings
Torah (Pentateuch)	<u>Former Prophets</u>	Poetry
Genesis	Joshua	Psalms
Exodus	Judges	Proverbs
Leviticus	Samuel (1 & 2)	Job
Numbers	Kings (1 & 2)	
Deuteronomy		Five Rolls
	<u>Latter Prophets</u>	Song of Songs
	Isaiah	Ruth
	Jeremiah	Lamentations
	Ezekiel	Esther
	The Twelve	Ecclesiastes
	Hosea	
	Joel	History
	Amos	Daniel
	Obadiah	Ezra-Nehemiah
	Jonah	Chronicles (1 & 2)
	Micah	
	Nahum	
	Habakkuk	
	Zephaniah	
	Haggai	
	Zechariah	
	Malachi	

From here on, Jesus began to use two phrases to illustrate how He had come to fulfil the Torah and the Prophets. These phrases are “You have heard that it was said...” and “But I say to you...” But what did He mean by this, and why did He use them? Matthew 5:21-48 follows for us to read and review.

² *The Difference Between the Jot and Tittle.* <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-difference-between-a-jot-and-a-tittle> (28th May 2024).

³ *The Difference Between the Hebrew Bible and the English Bible.* <https://www.christianlearning.com/the-difference-between-hebrew-bible-and-the-english-bible/> (28th May 2024).

2. The Context of Matthew 5:17-48

Q. Is there a methodological structure highlighting the teaching that can aid understanding?

a. The Context

The author documented that Jesus chose six illustrations to examine with His disciples, i.e. living in righteousness as mentioned in the Torah and the Prophets. In this section, Jesus used the Midrashic phrases (Mishnah is the hermeneutic method of repetition or the act of learning oral tradition by repeating it constantly to gain the meaning of and behind the text), “You have heard that it was said...” and “But I say to you...” which we need to see in context. The section is in light of the Torah and the Prophets (can mean the Hebrew Bible) 5:17-48, of which Jesus is the fulfilment.

You have heard that
it was said... But I
say to you...

Jesus used the method of comparison here to teach His disciples. In doing so, He highlighted six crucial features of the Torah that the disciples needed to know and understand. In preparing to arrange the teaching found in their Gospel, the author introduced it in the following way.

Methodology	Passage	Topic	Summary
Comparison	5:17-48	Part of the largest method that Jesus used in this section	
	5:17-20	The Eternal Torah	Jesus Fulfilled the Torah
	5:21-26	Murder & Words	It all begins within the heart of a person
	5:27-32	Adultery & The Heart	It all begins within the heart of a person
	5:33-37	Oaths & Yes/No	Oaths are not acceptable
	5:38-42	Love Your Enemies	Go the second mile (So to speak)
	5:43-48	Enemies Hate or Love	Love everyone regardless

The following is a brief overview of Jesus’ methodological structure of His teaching in Matt 5:21-48. The use of comparisons was between the earthly perspective and the Heavenly. For example, Jesus used phrases like “You have heard that it was said...” in a public reading of the Torah and the Prophets, “But I say to you...” revealing the Heavenly. In doing so, He introduced certain new actions showing how things would be done. So, we could ask, “Was Jesus using contrast to add to what had already been said in the Torah or not?” The answer may be ‘Yes,’ i.e. He may have been dealing with both perspectives.

Topic	You have heard it said...	But I say to you... Correct Interpretation
Murder	Matt 5:21	Matt 5:22
Sexual Purity	Matt 5:27	Matt 5:28
Divorce	Matt 5:31	Matt 5:32
Oaths	Matt 5:33	Matt 5:34
2 nd Kilometer	Matt 5:38	Matt 5:39
Love	Matt 5:43	Matt 5:44

What was Jesus doing by using these phrases? Some of what has been mentioned in these verses has been lost in translation in the West for over two thousand years. However, one suggestion is that He was building a fence around the Torah, especially with the illustrations mentioned here. But why would He need to build a fence around the Torah? If we read the sections that Jesus mentioned, “You have heard it said,” we will see that each matter links back to a truth mentioned within the Torah. If this is the case, did He use a gentler command to bring the matter from an external command to an internal heart issue? For example,

Topic	You have heard it said, but I say...
Murder	Matt 5:21; cf. Ex 20:13; Lev 24:21; Cf. Lev 19:17; Deut 5:17; 19:11; Prov 14:17
Sexual Purity	Matt 5:27; cf. Ex 20:14,17; Deut 5:18; Cf. Job 31:1; Prov 6:24-25
Divorce	Matt 5:31; cf. Deut 24:1-4; Cf. Job 31:1; Prov 6:24-25
Oaths	Matt 5:33; cf. Ex 20:7; Lev 19:12; Deut 23:21,23; Cf. Deut 23:22; Eccl 5:5
2 nd Kilometer	Matt 5:38; cf. Ex 21:24-27; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21; Cf. Prov 20:22; 24:29
Love	Matt 5:43; cf. Lev 19:18; Deut 7:1-6; 23:3-7; Cf. Ex 23:4-5; Prov 25:21

b. A Fence around the Torah

What does it mean to build a fence around the Torah? Torah means instruction rather than law; it was a poor translation from Hebrew to Greek. So, building a fence around the Torah was supposed to keep it safe from being violated. We all know a fence’s purpose is to keep things in or out for protection. In the days of Jesus, there were stone and wooden fences like those in the images.⁴ As suggested above, a fence around the Torah would have been used in Jesus’ day for its protection. The idea appears to have been part of rabbinic tradition and was then expanded in the Mishna written about 200 AD. The word Mishnah means ‘repetition’ or the act of learning oral



tradition by repeating it constantly. It has been said that,

“The word Midrash is derived from the verb דָּרַשׁ *darash*, which means to demand, seek out, or investigate.”⁵

The purpose of building a fence around the Torah was so people would not break the Kingdom principle that the Torah was teaching. How did this work? The Jewish religious leaders used a well-known hermeneutic principle of repetition of the Oral Torah of the Second Temple period (586

BC - AD 70).⁶ However, what was said by the rabbinic scholars concerning building a fence around the Torah?

⁴ <https://ferrelljenkins.blog/2014/06/23/the-shepherd-and-the-sheepfold/> (4th June 2024).

<https://jeffgravens.com/2016/04/27/hearing-the-shepherds-voice/> (12th June 2024).

⁵ Introduction to Midrash. <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/475308?lang=bi> (21st June 2024).

The following are some examples of statements made regarding this hermeneutic principle. It is recorded in the Mishna that,

“Moshe (*Moses*) received the Torah from Sinai and handed it down to Yehoshua [Joshua], and Yehoshua handed it down to the Elders and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets handed it down to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be cautious in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Torah” (*Pirkei Avot* 1:1).⁷

It is also recorded later on in the Mishna,

“Then Rabbi Akiva said: ‘Merriment and frivolity accustom one to sexual licentiousness; Tradition is a fence to the Torah; tithes a fence to wealth, vows a fence to abstinence; A fence to wisdom is silence.’” (*Mishna, Pirkei Avot* 3:13).

Then again, it is stated,

“Consider how wondrous are the words of this Midrash (*a Hebrew commentary*). For it likens this prohibition with that of the Nazir (*a separated one through their oath*), which, even though the primary prohibition of Nazir is only on wine, nevertheless, the Torah forbids him all that is connected to wine. This was a lesson the Torah taught to the Sages how they should ‘make a fence around the Torah’ so that they may use the authority granted to them to enact protections to the Torah. For they could learn from the Nazir to prohibit all that is connected to the primary prohibition...” (*Mesilat Yesharim* 11:33-34).

The image here⁸



These sections within the Pirkei Avot (meaning Chapters of the Fathers) are possibly based on the following passage/s from the Torah,

“Thus, you are to keep (Lit. *guard, keep safe, safeguard, or fence off*) My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the LORD your God” (Lev 18:30 NASB).

Alternatively, the idea of protecting the Torah may have come from the following house building instruction,

“When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet (i.e., *a low wall*) for your roof, so that you may not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone falls from it” (Deut 22:8 NASB).

Then again, the principle of fence building could have even been built on both passages.

Another example of the hermeneutic principle of building fences to protect the Torah may have come from a prohibition in Exodus 23:19b, i.e.,

“You are not to boil a kid in the milk of its mother” (Ex 23:19b NASB).

It is repeated in the following sections of the Torah,

⁶ “When we can't simply agree to disagree... Or claiming my rabbinic authority as community gate keeper.”

<https://www.kolaminw.org/post/when-we-can-t-simply-agree-to-disagree-or-claiming-my-rabbinic-authority-as-community-gate-keeper> (29th May 2024).

⁷ *Pirkei Avot* 1:1. https://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei_Avot.1.2?lang=bi (29th May 2024).

⁸ *Make a fence for the Torah*. <https://www.pirchei.com/pictoral/avos/perek1/m01dx.htm> (17th June 2024).

“You shall bring the very first of the first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk” (Ex 34:26 NASB).

“You shall not eat anything which dies of itself. You may give it to the alien who is in your town so that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner, for you are a holy people to the LORD your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk” (Deut 14:21 NASB).

So, rightly or wrongly, it is from this idea that the Jews have gotten the tradition that prohibits meals being made from both meat and dairy.

Another example that was given was,

“And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire” (Ex 12:10 NASB).

“You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), in order that you may remember all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt” (Deut 16:3 NASB).

It prevented anyone from accidentally eating anything as part of the natural fermentation process.

So, if using these passages was the basis for the principle, the Torah scholar’s task was ‘to make a fence around the Torah’ to protect people from breaking the commandments. Remember that a fence protects by limiting entrance to an area. So, building a fence was seen as protecting people so they did not violate the Torah. It appears to have been part of the rabbinic tradition in Jesus’ day that He would have been acquainted. Finally, in another Jewish collection of writings called the Talmud (*meaning study or learning; it is a collection of writings on the Torah*), it is pointed out that,

“To ‘make a fence around the Torah’ was corollary (a result) of the desire to live by its precepts.”⁹

Consequently, within this context, to break one of the commandments, one would need to climb over the established fence, either intentionally or accidentally. As a result, the fence was in place to strengthen the original commandments; it was not to change them. It has been said that,

“We must also keep in mind another key principle. There is a difference between making a ‘fence around Torah’ and clearly defining a commandment of Torah. ‘Fences’ do not define or interpret the commandments of Torah.”¹⁰

The use of this principle was commonplace. However, what did Jesus think about it? Did He use this hermeneutic principle or shun it?

b. Jesus, a Rabbinic fence, and the Torah

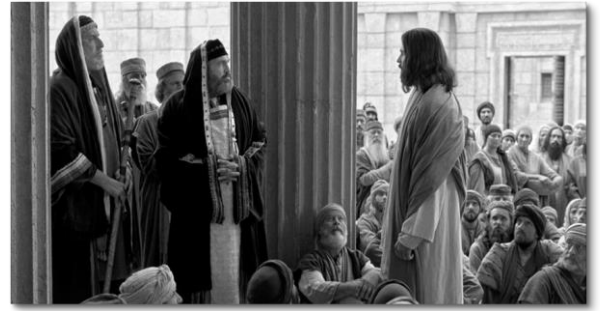
However, what about Jesus? Like the rabbis, was He making fences around the Torah?¹¹ As stated earlier, Jesus, as a rabbi, would have been aware of the concept. But did He build a fence to protect and strengthen the Torah but not reform, change, or cancel it? He was an expert Torah teacher, but He also obeyed it. We must remember that Torah means instruction or teaching, not law, so that He would have instructed His disciples in Matt 5-7. It has been suggested that,

⁹ Cohen, A. *Everyman’s Talmud*. (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1932), xx.

¹⁰ “Building Fences.” <https://www.emethatorah.com/blog/2014/april-18/building-fences> (29th May 2024).

¹¹ <http://www.answersfromscriptureonline.com/jesus-and-saducees/> (4th June 2024).

“As a Jewish sage, Jesus would have been familiar with the pertinent arguments and styles of teaching from the period, therefore, we might also expect to find Him addressing the subject of fence-building by either supporting or reproving the practice... Jesus is not above using good advice as a fence... From the few examples we have reviewed in Matthew, one might agree that Jesus’ fence-building techniques are on par with other period rabbis, especially in regard to connecting lighter commands with heavier ones of the same theme.”¹²



However, did Jesus try to strengthen the Torah by building fences, as did the religious leaders of His day? Did Jesus, by saying, “But I say to you...” build fences around the commandments?¹³ If this is the case, it could be considered a protective measure. Yet was this the case, especially in light of what He said in the following passage,

¹⁷ “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law (*Torah*) or the Prophets (Former and Later); I did not come to abolish but to fulfil. ¹⁸ For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law (*Torah*) until all is accomplished” (Matt 5:17-18 NASB).

Jesus clarified that He had come to fulfil the Torah, not change, or cancel it. Does this mean that He, rather than build fences, was the fence? What would this mean if this were the case? To break a Torah commandment that Jesus Christ had fulfilled, they must first bypass what Jesus had come to do. That is, “You have heard it said...But I say to you...” Jesus did not come to carry on this Rabbinic tradition of building a fence around the Torah like the religious teachers of the day. Jesus had something else in mind here. Jesus used the Midrashic principle of ‘Light and Heavy’ or ‘Lenient and Strict’ (*Kal vaChomer*). That is,

“It is drawing a conclusion from a less stringent case to a more stringent one.”¹⁴

He had come to be the fence, which was not like the ones that the religious teacher of the day had built.¹⁵ He was teaching His disciples by refocusing on the principles of the Kingdom of Heaven. If we remember the whole context of what Jesus was doing in Matthew chapters 5-7, it was based on the present Kingdom of Heaven. Namely, “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (or near)” (Matt 4:17), cf. Matt 5:3,10,19,20; 6:10,33. So, what did this look like?

c. Jesus, a different type of fence and the Torah

Firstly, we will spend more time going into the six illustrations that Jesus used here in Matt 5:21-48 another time. Here, though, we will deal with the fence that Jesus used to deal with them. If we understand Jesus’ teaching here, we must grasp the structure He used here. Unfortunately, there have been a lot of inaccurate and bizarre teachings in this section of Matthew. So, like any solid teaching, it needs a good methodological foundation to grasp what is being said here.

¹² “The Sealed Garden of Torah: How We Protect the Word and Community of God.”

<https://www.jerusalemcornerstone.org/news/2013/06/11/the-sealed-garden-of-torah-how-we-protect-the-word-and-community-of-god> (4th June 2024).

¹⁴ Rose, Tov. A Midrash & A Wedding, What's the Connection? https://tovrose.substack.com/p/a-midrash-and-a-wedding-whats-the?utm_source=post-email-title&publication_id=789143&post_id=135597303&utm_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=1f6r3k&triedRedirect=true&utm_medium=email (21st June 2024).

¹⁵ Jesus Teaches the Old Testament, Part 4: Midrash in the Gospels. <https://sharperiron.org/article/jesus-teaches-old-testament-part-4-midrash-gospels> (21st June 2024).

Remember that the fences were meant to help people avoid breaking God's Torah more carefully. For Jesus, obeying the Torah through a relationship with God and others was more important than legalism. Remember, Jesus was the only One who could and did fulfil all of the requirements of the Torah. As a result of the rupture of creation, as recorded in Genesis chapter three, every person falls short and misses the mark of obeying God's Word due to sin. If anyone wanted to come to the Father, it was only through Jesus Christ that it could happen,

Jesus, the only One
who could fulfil the
requirements of the
Torah

"Jesus said to him (*Thomas*), 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me'" (Jn 14:6 NASB).

As a result, it is proposed here that Jesus was the fence around the Torah or Word of God. Yet, He was also the Gateway to the God of the Torah, the Word of God Jn 10:7-9. It is proposed here that Jesus was encouraging His disciples to step back and see the person they were angry with at the time. They were to do this out of a relationship and not just legalism. The objective here was not to hurt God by disobeying Him but by choosing to obey Him. It was also important not to murder the person by attacking them over what they saw as an issue. Here, we will look at the first illustration used by Jesus to understand this idea. So, it would work like this: Jesus said,

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court'" (Matt 5:21 NASB).

The word used by the writer of Matthew is the word (φονεύω *phoneuo* [pronounced fon-yoo'-o]), which means to kill, slaughter, or murder.

The quote used by Jesus is based on the following passages,

"You shall (*will*) not murder" (Ex 20:13 NASB).

"You shall (*will*) not murder" (Deut 5:17 NASB).

Although there are several words used in Hebrew for murder and kill, the most numerous are the two following ones. The word used in the above verses is (רָצַח *ratsach* [pronounced raw-tsakh']), and it means to murder or baseless homicide and can focus on the murderer. But having said that, it can sometimes simply mean to kill (so the context is important). In contrast, the Hebrew word for kill is (הָרַג *harag* [pronounced haw-rag']). It can also mean murder, but it is translated as kill in the following verse.

"And he said to them, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "Every person of you put their sword upon their thigh and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill (*harag*) everyone their brother, and every person their friend, and everyone their neighbour" (Ex 32:27 NASB).

In both cases here, the nuance of the word would appear to be murder rather than kill. So, regarding these two words, it has been said,

"Like all words in all languages, the words for 'killing' and 'murder' derive their meaning and nuance from the context in which they are found. This seems to be a concept that simply escapes the understanding of many skeptics (whether consciously or not is a question,

though)... In a nutshell, *ratsach* carries more of the nuance of ‘murder/manslaughter.’ In contrast, *harag* carries more of the nuance of ‘murder/kill in anger/kill in battle,’ and *ratsach* usually describes the person committing *harag*.¹⁶

However, having said this, Jesus aimed to get His disciples to step back and see a real, breathing person. In doing so, He was moving them a step further away from merely a stationary legalistically learned command to the relational response of intent of the heart. That is, He went on to say,

“But I say to you that everyone angry with their brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to their brother, ‘Raca (*pronounced rhaka*, meaning *empty or worthless*),’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, ‘You fool (*moron, or stupid*),’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell” (Matt 5:22 NASB).

Notice here that Jesus encouraged His disciples to take this step back and see that it was their brother. That is, every time they were angry and degraded someone with their words, they had murderous intent towards them. It was just like they were murdering the person.

“He is telling His disciples that if they entertain anger towards someone, that anger can grow until it becomes verbal abuse. Further unchecked, and allowed to fester one’s thoughts and words can lead to violence and even to murder.”¹⁷

We might think that “You shall not murder” is the tougher command, but when Jesus said, “Everyone angry with their brother,” it is the more rigorous. He challenged His disciples to move back from the brink. He told them to do the more challenging thing, i.e., move back from the edge of the murderous intent of the heart and see the person they had a relationship with at the time. They needed to know that the person they were angry with was created in the image of God. In other words, it could be said that they need to see Jesus as the fence or boundary. So, they needed to go through Him if they wanted to murder the person. It could be said that Jesus was encouraging His disciples to look Him in the eyes with their murderous intent for the person. They were to see the person as if they were looking at Jesus, not just a commandment to be obeyed out of legalism. That is to say, Jesus was teaching His disciples that if you want to murder your brother and sister, you will need to come through Me.

If this is the case, Jesus, in doing so, also wanted to move His disciples from using the Torah as a cold, brutal weapon to living out from the heart. In other words, if His disciples were angry with their brother or sister in the heart and spoke to them or of them in a degrading way, it was just like murder. Jesus said in another place in Matthew in response to some accusations by the religious leaders regarding His disciples,

¹⁵ “Peter said to Him (*Jesus*), ‘Explain the parable to us.’ ¹⁶ Jesus said, ‘Are you still lacking in understanding also? ¹⁷ Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated? ¹⁸ But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the person. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adultery, fornications (sexual immorality), thefts, false witness, slanders. ²⁰ These are the things which defile the person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the person” (Matt 15:15-20 NASB).

Everyone who
hates their brother
is a murderer

¹⁶ *The whole killing vs. murder ‘contradiction’...* <https://mennoknight.wordpress.com/2009/04/30/the-whole-killing-vs-murder-contradiction/> (12th June 2024).

¹⁷ *How Jesus Built Fences Around Torah.* <https://weekly.israelbiblecenter.com/jesus-built-fences-around-torah> (17th June 2024).

John, in his first letter, revealed his understanding of what Jesus meant here when he said in an uncomplicated way that,

“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 Jn 3:15 NASB).

So, with all of this in mind, Jesus illustrated to His disciples in Matthew 5:21-26 that the fence of the religious leaders was not what He was teaching them here. He was dealing with the intent of their heart. Subsequently, they were to step back each time and look at the person they had an issue with.¹⁸ If they want to murder their brother or sister, they will need to come through Jesus Christ. It would be the same for all of Jesus’s six illustrations here. Remember, it was not up to them to build these fences; it was entirely up to Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God as they have already done in the Word of God. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand the relational side of the matter. On earth, the context was that Jesus was a Jewish person who dealt with people, which will help us grasp why He said what He did. So, it has rightly been said that,

“We have lost sight of Jesus’ Jewish teaching methods over the centuries, as the church has moved from its Jewish beginnings to being almost entirely Gentile.”¹⁹

Therefore, Jesus built a fence, and that fence was Himself. It was not part of the rabbinic tradition but the Kingdom of Heaven. His disciples needed to repent, i.e., see things from Jesus Christ’s perspective, the Kingdom of Heaven. In teaching His disciples, the crowd following Jesus would have heard this teaching. So, it was like a stone being thrown into a pond, and the ripples would have gone out.



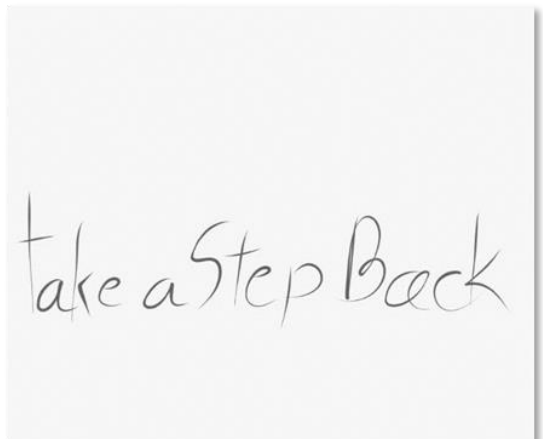
Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

Q. What was Jesus’ purpose for teaching here, and how can it be applied?

We have seen that the so-called Sermon on the Mount (since, as we have seen, Jesus was teaching, Matt 5:2; 7:28-29) is an incredible insight into the Kingdom of Heaven. Hopefully, the ideas within these pages will guide us in our continuing reading and study of these chapters. Remember that nothing laid out here is exhaustive but simply an overview of the teaching in Matt 5:17-48. Its primary aim is to help us understand the literary context. So, please remember that whatever section you are reading or studying has context.

Jesus had not come to destroy the Torah but had come to fulfil it. So, He needed to teach His disciples in line



¹⁸ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/power-stepping-back-how-taking-time-reflect-can-fuel-your-bhardwaj> (17th June 2024).

¹⁹ <https://engediresourcecenter.com/2019/09/09/jesus-rabbinic-teaching-style/> (4th June 2024).

with His Kingdom of Heaven mission. It is why He taught them this truth; we can learn from what He said here. Like them, we have a responsibility to the person towards the person that we have murderous intent in our hearts. He was teaching them that He was the fence they needed to go through to disobey the Torah and the Prophets. However, He did not set up fences as the religious leaders of the day did. We need to live by Jesus' righteousness and not our self-righteousness.

In the next session, we will review Jesus's six illustrations in Matt 5:17-48. We will see how Jesus wants His followers to live,

¹⁹ "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven... ⁴⁸ Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:19-20,48 NASB).

Jesus was teaching His disciples that, if you want to murder them you will need to come through Me.

So, from today onwards, we need to let the Holy Spirit guide our reading and studying these chapters to change our lives. We need to 'Stop and reflect.' We have seen what has been said on this matter. But what has the Holy Spirit been saying to you today? That is, what is the one thing that stands out to you? We all need to apply what we have learned; otherwise, it is merely all academic. Then, we need to respond to what the Holy Spirit has been saying to us.

In response, we need to ask through this process:

- What personal application can be found in the passages?
- What is God teaching me today?
- That is, "What is God saying to me?"

How should I respond to what is being said, or so what?

- What are you going to do about it?
- What do you need to do to respond?
- Pray and respond