

we learn of the presence of others. The solution seems to be that the crowd was there and heard Jesus as he taught, but that the discourse itself was directed primarily to the circle of disciples. Occasional utterances, such as the 'woes' of Lk. 6:24-26, unless rhetorical devices, seem to be 'asides' to some who might be listening in and who needed such admonition.

IV. Analysis

Regardless of whether one sees the Sermon as the summary of an actual discourse or as a mosaic of ethical sayings arranged by Matthew, there is little doubt that Mt. 5-7 has a real unity marked by the logical development of a basic theme. This theme is presented in the Beatitudes and can be expressed as 'the quality and conduct of life in the kingdom'. The following is a descriptive analysis of the content of the Sermon.

a. The blessedness of those in the kingdom, 5:3-16

- (i) The Beatitudes (5:3-10).
- (ii) An expansion of the final Beatitude and a digression to show the role of the disciple in an unbelieving world (5:11-16).

b. The relationship of the message of Jesus to the old order, 5:17-48

- (i) The thesis stated (5:17). Jesus' message 'fulfils' the law by penetrating behind the letter and clarifying its underlying principle, thus bringing it to its ideal completion.
- (ii) The thesis enlarged (5:18-20).
- (iii) The thesis illustrated (5:21-48).

1. In the command not to kill, anger is the culpable element (5:21-26).
2. Adultery is the fruit of an evil heart nourished on impure desire (5:27-32).
3. Kingdom righteousness demands an honesty so transparent that oaths are unnecessary (5:33-37).
4. *Lex talionis* must give way to a spirit of non-retaliation (5:38-42).
5. Love is universal in application (5:43-48).

c. Practical instructions for kingdom conduct, 6:1-7:12

- (i) Guard against false piety (6:1-18).
 1. In almsgiving (6:1-4).
 2. In prayer (6:5-15).
 3. In fasting (6:16-18).
- (ii) Dispel anxiety with simple trust (6:19-34).

- (iii) Live in love (7:1-12).

d. Challenge to dedicated living, 7:13-29

- (i) The way is narrow (7:13-14).
- (ii) A good tree bears good fruit (7:15-20).
- (iii) The kingdom is for those who hear and *do* (7:21-27).

V. Interpretation

The Sermon on the Mount has had a long and varied history of interpretation. For Augustine, who wrote a treatise on the Sermon while still a bishop at Hippo (AD 393-396), it was the 'perfect rule or pattern of Christian life'—a new law in contrast with the old. Monastic orders interpreted it as a 'counsel of perfection' designed not for the populace but for the chosen few. The Reformers held it to be the 'uncompromising expression of divine righteousness directed towards all'. Tolstoy, the Russian novelist and (in later life) social reformer, resolved it into five commandments (suppression of all anger, chastity, no oaths, non-resistance, unreserved love of enemies), which if literally obeyed would do away with the existing evils and usher in a Utopian kingdom. Weiss and Schweitzer held that the demands were too radical for all times, and thus declared them 'interim ethics' for the early Christians, who believed that the end of all things was at hand. Still others, making great allowance for figurative language, understood the Sermon as the expression of a noble way of thinking—teaching which dealt with what man should *be* rather than with what he should *do*.

Thus the 20th-century interpreter is presented with a bewildering number of 'keys' with which to unlock the essential meaning of the Sermon on the Mount. With Kittel he can take the demands as purposely exaggerated so as to drive man to a sense of failure (and hence to repent and believe), or with Windisch he can differentiate between historical and theological exegesis and defend the practicability of the demands. With Dibelius he can interpret the great moral imperatives as the absolute ethic of the inbreaking kingdom, or with the Dispensationalists he can relegate the entire sermon to a future millennial reign of Christ.

How, then, shall we interpret the Sermon? The following will at least give us our guide-lines: *a.* Although

couched in poetry and symbol, the Sermon still demands a quality of ethical conduct which is breathtaking in its dimensions. *b.* Jesus is not laying down a new code of legal regulations but stating great ethical principles and how they affect the lives of those within the kingdom. 'It would be a great point gained if people would only consider that it was a Sermon, and was *preached*, not an *act* which was passed' (J. Denney). *c.* The Sermon is not a programme for the direct improvement of the world, but is directed to those who have denied the world in order to enter the kingdom. *d.* It is neither an impractical ideal nor a fully attainable possibility. In the words of S. M. Gilmour, it is 'the ethic of that transcendental order which broke into history in Jesus Christ, has built itself into history in the church, but whose full realization lies beyond history when God will be "all in all"' (*Journal of Religion* 21, 1941, p. 263).

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SERPENT.

I. General.

Serpents or snakes (*ANIMALS) are reptiles that have head, body and tail but no limbs, and move over the ground on their belly, so that with their flickering tongue they are often described as licking or eating the dust (Gn. 3:14; cf. Is. 65:25; Mi. 7:17; and implicitly, Pr. 30:19). In simile, compare the nations creeping like snakes, to acknowledge



Egyptian kings were protected by a goddess whose emblem, the cobra, they wore on their crowns. Shown here are Akhenaton and Nefertiti engraved on a piece of limestone. El-Amarna. Height 15.7 cm. 1380–1362 BC. (BrM)

Israel's God (Mi. 7:17) and Egypt's flight from battle like a hissing snake down its bolt-hole (Je. 46:22, in contrast to the Egyptian concept of the sacred uraeus-snake on a pharaoh's brow leading him to victory). The ability of various snakes to inject deadly poison into a wound when they bite or strike (Gn. 49:17; Ec. 10:8, 11; implicitly, Mt. 7:10; Lk. 11:11) enters into many biblical similes. Subjects of such similes include the harmfulness of the wicked (Dt. 32:33 (rebellious Hebrews); Pss. 58:4; 140:3) or of overmuch wine (Pr. 23:32), the Day of the Lord (Am. 5:19), and in metaphor foreign oppressors (Is. 14:29). Like war, famine, etc., snake-bite could feature among divine judgments and punishments (Nu. 21:4–6; Je. 8:17; Am. 9:3), and deliverance from this harm could be granted to God's servants (Mk. 16:18; Lk. 10:19; cf. Acts 28:3–6). Some snakes could be charmed (Ec. 10:11), others were considered 'deaf' to the charmer's techniques (Ps. 58:4–5; Je. 8:17). Snake-charmers may possibly be represented on Egyptian scarab-amulets (P. Montet, *L'Égypte et la Bible*, 1959, pp. 90–94, fig. 17). On snake-charming in Egypt, ancient and modern, cf. L. Keimer, *Histoires de Serpents dans l'Égypte Ancienne et Moderne*, 1947, and for Mesopotamia, see N. L. Corkill,

'Snake Specialists in Iraq', *Iraq* 6, 1939, pp. 45–52.

Besides the general word *nāḥāš*, 'snake, serpent', and *sārāp*, 'burning' (see II, below), Heb. possesses several other words for serpents. The old word *peten* (Dt. 32:33; Jb. 20:14, 16; Pss. 58:4; 91:13; Is. 11:8; AV 'adder, asp') occurs as *btṇ* in the Ugaritic texts of the 14th century BC. This is often considered to be the Egyptian cobra (Arab. *naja haje*; and the related *naja nigricollis*, M. A. Murray, *JEA* 34, 1948, pp. 117–118), and is the 'asp' of classical writers. The cobra gave rise to two Egyptian hieroglyphs. This venomous beast gave point to passages like Dt. 32:33 and Jb. 20:14, 16. The word '*ep'eh*' (Jb. 20:16; Is. 30:6; 59:5; AV 'viper') is identical with Arab. *afa'a*, and like that word appears to be a further general term for serpents and sometimes more specifically for vipers (cf. L. Keimer, *Études d'Égyptologie*, 7, 1945, pp. 38–39, 48–49). In Gn. 49:17 (AV 'adder'), Heb. *šep'ōn* is often thought to represent the *cerastes* vipers: either or both the 'horned viper', *Cerastes cornutus*, and the hornless *Vipera cerastes*. In Egypt and Palestine these have been familiar from ancient times, and in Egypt became the hieroglyph for 'f', from the onomatopoeic words *fy, fyt*, 'cerastes-viper' (Keimer, *Études d'Égyptologie* 7, 1945; P. E.

Newberry, *JEA* 34, 1948, p. 118). The identification of '*akšūb*' in Ps. 140:3 is uncertain; in Rom. 3:13 it is rendered by Gk. *aspis*, 'asp'. The word *šip'ōnī* is rendered by AV as 'adder' in Pr. 23:32, and, like *šep'a'* in Is. 14:29, as 'cockatrice' in Is. 11:8; 59:5; Je. 8:17; these words certainly denote snakes of some kind. The animal that fastened on Paul's hand in Acts 28:3 is often considered to be the common viper of the Mediterranean region; the same Greek word (*echidna*) is used in the powerful metaphors of Mt. 3:7; 12:34; 23:33; Lk. 3:7.

II. Specific

a. The first serpent in Scripture is the subtle creature of Gn. 3, used by Satan to alienate man from God (Rom. 16:20; 2 Cor. 11:3), controlled by the devil like the demons in men and swine in NT days. For its part, the serpent was put under a curse that it would never rise above its (already customary) creeping posture (Gn. 3:14). The serpent thus remained a biblical symbol of deceit (Mt. 23:33), and the arch-deceiver himself is 'that old serpent' (Rev. 12:9, 14–15; 20:2); Christians should match the serpent in his fabled wisdom if in no other respect (Mt. 10:16).

b. A sign performed by Moses before Israel (Ex. 4:2–5, 28–30) and by Moses and Aaron before pharaoh (Ex. 7:8–12) was to cast down his rod so that it became a serpent and take it up again as a rod, having on the latter occasion swallowed up the serpent-rods of the



A snake, the Egyptian cobra, is the hieroglyph for Udjo, patron goddess of Lower Egypt. Relief from the kiosk of Sesostri I, Karnak. Height of snake c. 8 cm. c. 1950 BC. (PAC)

Egyptian magicians (*MAGIC AND SORCERY, 2. II. c).

c. In the wilderness rebellious Israel was once punished by the onset of 'fiery serpents' (*nāḥāš šārāp*), whose venom was fatal (Nu. 21:4-9; cf. Dt. 8:15). When Israel sought deliverance God commanded Moses to set up a bronze figure of a serpent on a pole, that those bitten might look to it, trusting in God's healing power, and live (*SERPENT, BRONZE). The term *šārāp*, 'burning', or 'fiery', may refer to the effect of the venom or poison of the snakes concerned; it recurs in Is. 14:29 and 30:6 (where

'flying' might refer to the speed with which such reptiles may strike, as though 'winged'—so, modern Arab usage; for this and other explanations, see Keimer, *Histoires de Serpents*, p. 10, n. 2; D. J. Wiseman, *TynB* 23, 1972, pp. 108-110.

d. Some Hebrew references to 'serpents' apply rather to other fearful creatures, or are metaphorical of certain great military powers in the biblical world. Thus, the 'serpent' of Am. 9:3 is probably some large denizen of the deep rather than a snake. In Is. 27:1 the sword to be raised against 'Leviathan the fleeing (or, swift) serpent, Levia-



than the twisting (or, winding) serpent, and . . . the dragon that is in the sea' (cf. RSV) most probably expressed coming judgment upon Assyria (land of the swift Tigris), Babylonia (of the winding Euphrates) and Egypt (*tannîn*, 'dragon, monster', as in Ezk. 29:3; 32:2) respectively. Isaiah may here be announcing God's judgment on these pagan lands in terms of the ancient Canaanite myth of Baal's destruction of Lôtan or Leviathan and the many Mesopotamian tales of slaying dragons and serpents

Serpents surround a female figure on this silver and bronze cult-standard from Hazor. 12.5 cm × 7 cm. Canaanite. c. 1400-120 BC. (IM)

Serpents decorate this pottery stand used in a Canaanite temple. Bethshean. 11th cent. BC. (UMUP)

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(Labbu, Zu, etc.), not to mention the Egyptian overthrowing of 'Apep, condemning them under their own popular imagery. In Jb. 26:13 the identity of the 'fleeing serpent' as associated with the sky is uncertain. Since the serpent can stand for Satan (cf. a, above, and Rev. 12:7-10, 14-15; 20:2) one may possibly compare here his alternative (?) designation of fallen Day Star (AV 'Lucifer'), to whom the king of Babylon is likened in Is. 14:12, 15; cf. Jude 6 and 2 Pet. 2:4.

In no case does any of these passages, biblical or non-biblical, refer to a creation-struggle of deity and monster, as all the serpent-slaying in them is done within an already created world. Furthermore, the Babylonian Ti'amat, whose death at Marduk's hands is associated with creation, was *not* a serpent or dragon, and therefore gives no support for assuming a struggle of deity and serpent/dragon at creation either (cf. A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 1951, pp. 83-88, 102-114). (* DRAGON; * LEVIATHAN; * RAHAB.)

In Canaanite, Mesopotamian, Anatolian and Egyptian mythology and cults, serpent deities are known, and serpents in various contexts are symbols of protection (Egyptian uraeus), of evil (e.g. Egyptian 'Apep or Apopis), of fecundity (Egypto-Canaanite goddesses of sex; ANEP, figs. 471-474), or of continuing life (symbolized by repeated shedding of its skin, cf. A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, 1949, p. 92, n. 212). For Canaanite altar-stands with serpents modelled on them, see ANEP, figs. 585, 590. In the texts from Ugarit note the prescribed sacrifice of 'a head of small cattle (for) 'Anat-Lôtan' (C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature*, 1949, pp. 114, 107, n. 1) and an incantation against snakes (C. Virolleaud, in *Ugaritica* 5, 1968, pp. 564ff., No. 7; M. Astour, *JNES* 27, 1968, pp. 13-36; A. F. Rainey, *JAOS* 94, 1974, pp. 189f., 194; M. Dietrich et al., *UF* 7, 1975, pp. 121-125. K.A.K.

SERPENT, BRONZE. On the borders of Edom, rebellious Israel suffered deadly snakebite as a punishment and begged Moses to intercede with God for them, to save them from the serpents. God then commanded Moses to make a bronze figure of a serpent and set it up on a pole, so that anyone bitten by a serpent need only look at the bronze serpent-figure and he would live (Nu. 21:4-9; 1 Cor. 10:9, 11). By this means God granted the people deliverance and enforced the lesson of dependence upon himself both for that deliverance and as a general principle. Centuries later, during his purge of idolatrous objects and customs, King Hezekiah of Judah destroyed the bronze serpent because the people had turned it into an idol, burning incense to it (2 Ki. 18:4). The following phrase *wayyiqra' lô nêhuštan* may mean either 'he (= Hezekiah) called it Nehushtan' (i.e. 'only a bit of bronze'), or 'it was called Nehushtan' (i.e. by the people from of old). In either case it is a pun on the phrase *nêhaš-nêhošet*, 'serpent of bronze', two very similar-sounding words in Heb. The significance of serpents in surrounding paganism made Hezekiah's action especially imperative (cf. *SERPENT, end of section II. d; see also H. H. Rowley, 'Zadok and Nehushtan', *JBL* 58, 1939, pp. 113ff.). A bronze serpent was found at Gezer (see R. A. S. Macalister, *The Excavation of Gezer*, 2, 1912, pp. 398-399 and fig.; or I. Benzinger, *Hebräische Archäologie*³, 1927, p. 327, fig. 418), a serpent standard at Hazor, and a gilded copper snake from a shrine at Timna (B. Rothenberg, *Timna, Valley of the Biblical Copper Mines*, 1972, pp. 152, 183-184, pls. XIX-XX).

When speaking of his coming crucifixion, Jesus Christ used the incident of the serpent, which was lifted up that man might look in faith and live, in order to illustrate the significance of that impending event. Those who put faith in him, uplifted on the cross for their sins,

would have life eternal (Jn. 3:14).

K.A.K.

SERPENT'S STONE ('Stone of Zohemoth', AV) (*'eben hazzōhelet*). A stone near En-rogel, to the SE of Jerusalem, the scene of the slaughtering of animals by Adonijah (1 Ki. 1:9). The meaning of *zōhelet* is uncertain, but it is usually connected with *zāhal*, 'to withdraw, crawl away'. From this, some would interpret the phrase as 'the stone of slipping' and connect it with a steep and slippery rock slope, called by the Arabs *zahweileh*, or some neighbouring surface, near Siloam. The translation 'serpent's stone' may be linked with a possible identification of *En-rogel with the Jackal's Well (Ne. 2:13).

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SERVANT OF THE LORD.

I. In the Old Testament

a. The 'Servant Songs'

B. Duhm's commentary on Isaiah (1892) distinguished four passages which have since been regarded as the 'Servant Songs': Is. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12. Some scholars (e.g. S. Mowinkel) have gone so far as to assign these passages to a separate author and period from the surrounding text. Modern scholarship is generally agreed, however, that they are an integral part of Isaiah 40ff., with many echoes in neighbouring passages. The term 'servant' (*'ebed*) occurs as frequently outside Duhm's selected passages as within them (e.g. Is. 41:8f.; 43:10; 44:1f., 21; 45:4; 48:20), with reference to the nation of Israel. It is also used in the OT for individuals in a close relationship with God, such as the Patriarchs, prophets and kings, and particularly Moses and David (e.g. Gn. 26:24; Ex. 14:31; Dt. 34:5; 2 Sa. 7:5; Is. 20:3; Am. 3:7). But in the 'Servant Songs' a distinctive conception of 'servanthood' comes