

The Torah in the Sermon on the Mount

34-43 minutes

These days it should no longer necessary to reiterate that Jesus lived as a Jew—the apostle Paul himself acknowledged as much. Nevertheless, there are still those who either are ignorant of the fact of Jesus’ Jewishness, or who, because of their theological convictions, chose to ignore it. For instance, there are some scholars and theologians who insist that Jesus’ phrase, “But I say to you...,” proves that Jesus placed himself above the Law of Moses, and that he acted independently of the commandments. But does this picture of Jesus really make sense? And did Jesus actually mean that anger was a more serious sin than murder, or that for a man to look at a woman with desire is equivalent the sin of adultery? It is necessary, therefore, to take a different approach to Jesus’ relationship to the Torah in order to properly understand the Sermon on the Mount. In this essay we will examine specific points of Jesus’ Jewishness without engaging in fruitless arguments with those who remain in denial.

Our discussion will not focus on the entire Sermon on the Mount, but only on its first major section, Matt. 5:17-48, since I presume that this section forms a single coherent literary unit. To be sure, this original unit was expanded by the author of Matthew with additional materials. For instance, it is almost certain that the pericope on divorce (Matt. 5:31-32) did not belong to the original homily; [\[1\]](#) the author of Matthew incorporated it into the unit and adapted it to the sermon’s style. Such interpolations notwithstanding, the underlying exegetical sermon is not a compilation of originally independent sayings. The original parts of the sermon have always belonged together.

Jesus’ original homily opened with an introduction (Matt. 5:17-20) that justified the exegetical method he was about to pursue. This was followed by the exegetical sermon itself (Matt. 5:21-48). First, Jesus discussed the sixth and seventh commandments of the Decalogue: “You must not kill” (Matt. 5:21 ff.) and “You must not commit adultery” (Matt. 5:27 ff.). Setting aside the interpolation on divorce, we find that Jesus next addressed the issue of false swearing (Matt. 5:33 ff.). This, too, corresponds to one of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:7; Deut. 5:11). Then Jesus addressed the interpretation of the phrase: “An eye for an eye” (Matt. 5:38 ff.). Finally, Jesus gave his interpretation of the verse “And you must love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 5:43 ff.).

The *Lex Talionis*: “An Eye for an Eye and a Tooth for a Tooth”

To fully understand the meaning of Jesus’ exposition of Exod. 21:24 in the penultimate section

of the exegetical sermon, it is necessary to read it in its wider context:

If there is an injury, you must give a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot, a burn for a burn, a wound for a wound, a blow for a blow.

(Exod. 21:23-25)

On the basis of this passage, Jesus taught that one should not oppose a wicked attacker. According to his understanding, a person must give *of his own accord* an eye in addition to an eye, and to willingly receive a blow in addition to a blow: “To whomever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other also.” With this interpretation, Jesus rejected a cruel interpretation of the verse that was never accepted in actual practice, but which was nevertheless championed among the Sadducees. According to rabbinic sources the Boethuseans, who apparently were a subset of the Sadducees, explained the verse “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” as follows: “If someone knocks out his fellow’s tooth, he may knock out his tooth, and if someone blinds his fellow’s eye, he may blind his eye, and so they will be even.” The Pharisees, like Jesus, sharply rejected such a brutal interpretation.^[2] Through his daring exegesis of the verses, Jesus not only refuted his Sadducean opponents, he drew the exact opposite conclusion: the Torah does not guarantee a right to avenge, but issues a prohibition to retaliate!

The Love Command: Friends, Neighbors, and Enemies

In his interpretation of “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18), it must be understood that the noun עֵרֵךְ (*rē’ā*) which is correctly translated here (and likewise in many other scriptural passages) as “neighbor,” can also be understood in the narrower sense of “friend.” Beginning with the narrower sense of עֵרֵךְ and by employing exegetical methods that were current in the first century, it was possible to conclude that כָּמוֹךָ (*kāmōchā*, “like yourself”) meant that one should treat each person the way that person treats oneself. The sublime commandment “love your neighbor as yourself” could thus be understood in accordance with the vulgar teaching of retribution, as if it were written: “Love your friend and hate your enemy” (Matt. 5:43). This (mis)interpretation of Lev. 19:18 corresponds to a primitive morality that was prevalent in the ancient world, and which Socrates had long since criticized. We have already encountered such a crude ethic in the Sadducee’s literal interpretation of “an eye for an eye.” So it is possible that the crude interpretation of Lev. 19:18 which Jesus opposed also belonged to the Sadducees.^[3]

The suspicion that Matt. 5:43 reflects Sadducean opinion is bolstered by the fact that the Pharisaic school of Hillel considered the verse concerning love for one’s neighbor to be the “great principle” of the Torah.^[4] So it is extremely difficult to believe that the almost barbaric interpretation of Lev. 19:18 preserved in Matt. 5:43, was quoted as the opinion of a school of the Pharisees.^[5] At any rate, it is clear that in Jesus’ time the impulse to apply the standard of “an eye for an eye” literally and the motto to love one’s friend and hate one’s enemy were both of the same origin. Moreover, Jesus responded to the pseudo-scriptural legitimization of hatred for one’s enemies with the commandment to love one’s enemies, just as he replied to the distortion of the scriptural phrase “an eye for an eye” with the reverse slogan: “Do not reciprocate evil!” It

should go without saying that Jesus did not thereby nullify the scriptural verses, he rather struggled to find their true meaning. In this struggle it appears he contended with the Sadducees—in the case of Matt. 5:38-42 this is practically certain—but generally not with the Pharisees. For though his opinions did not always agree with theirs, but the similarities between Jesus and the Pharisees were far greater than their differences.

The interpretation of the love command appears at the end of Jesus' sermon because at the time, in Hillel's school and in related circles, this verse was considered to be a concise summary of the entire Torah. Perhaps Jesus dealt with "eye for an eye" prior to this verse because in both cases he argued against the same coarsening of Judaism's message. That would explain how Matt. 5:38-42 fits with the rest of the sermon, since this section is distinguished from the other pericopae by its different mode of exegesis. In his treatments of all the other verses we observe Jesus giving a more rigorous ethical interpretation of Torah—this also applies to the saying on adultery, which was probably adapted by the evangelist—but in the case of Matt. 5:38-42, while Jesus does propose daring new interpretations, they do not exactly have a more rigorous ethical tone. A moralizing tone may be somewhat present in Jesus' interpretation of the command to love one's neighbor. According to Jesus, love for one's neighbor also includes love for one's enemy. But even if we say that this more rigorous understanding of the command to love one's neighbor agrees with the Sermon on the Mount's interpretive spirit, the midrashic argument is not quite the same as in the other pericopae. Here the word "neighbor" is given a broadened definition, whereas in the other pericopae Jesus presents a type of *qal vahomer* argument: "It is written: *You shall not murder*, but I tell you...everyone who is angry at his brother without cause is liable to the court" (Matt. 5:21-22); "It is said: *You shall not commit adultery*, but I say to you...everyone who looks at a woman to covet her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28);^[6] "It was said to the ancients: *You should not swear falsely*, but I tell you: *You should not swear oaths at all, not by heaven....*" (Matt. 5:33-34). The exegetical method in these verses is clear: The scriptural commands must not merely be understood according to what they say on the surface, the commandments must be examined for their deepest intentions and full implications. To the weighty commandments of the Torah of Moses, and especially those of the Decalogue, also belong the lighter commandments. This is the tendency of the introduction to the didactic section (Matt. 5:17-20) in which Jesus justified his exegetical method.

The Least of These Commandments: Great and Small, Difficult and Easy, Heavy and Light

First of all, it should be noted that what Matt. 5:19 refers to as μία τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων ("one of the least of these commandments") in Greek would have been called an "easy" or "light" commandment (i.e., "insignificant") in Hebrew, as opposed to the "difficult" or "heavy" commandments (cf. "but they neglect the weightier matters of the Law" in Matt. 23:23). The Greek translator allowed himself to be misled into adopting this translation (i.e., "least commandment") because immediately afterwards he read about him who is called great (μέγας, "big") in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 5:19); in this way he obscured the meaning of the verse,

which should read as follows: “Therefore whoever violates one of these ‘light’ commandments and teaches people to do the same will be called ‘insignificant’ in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever does and teaches them will be called ‘great’ in the Kingdom of Heaven.” By means of back translation (i.e., retroversion to Hebrew) it is possible to discover Jesus’ true intention. Jesus could not have meant that someone who cancels even a light commandment will be less esteemed, but nevertheless remain a participant in the Kingdom of Heaven, since this is a complete contradiction of what he said in the opening of the sermon (Matt. 5:17-18). Jesus could only have meant that anyone who cancels even a “light” commandment will be lightly esteemed or be considered insignificant in the eyes of the Kingdom of Heaven,^[7] which is to say, he will not have any portion in the Kingdom of Heaven at all. It is no accident that, in the introduction to the sermon, Jesus spoke of the importance of the seemingly light commandments, since it is precisely this concept that he emphasizes in the body of the sermon (Matt. 5:31-37)^[8] We must understand that the introduction to Jesus’ interpretation of the scriptural verses (Matt. 5:17-20) is all about establishing his exegetical method.

Interpreting the Torah: Abolish or Fulfill, Undergird or Undermine

When it is understood that this is the function of the introduction to the sermon, and if one is also familiar with the Jewish exegetical vocabulary of Jesus’ time, then it is possible to avoid a common misunderstanding of the first verse of this introduction: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17). “The law and the prophets” is an ancient name for the holy books that make up the Hebrew Scriptures. But presumably it was the evangelist, or perhaps already his source, who inserted this misleading appellation which was so familiar in his time.^[9] Jesus himself almost certainly spoke exclusively of the Torah in this verse, since in the homily that follows he confines himself to the interpretation of verses from the Torah of Moses, or the Pentateuch.^[9a]

That Jesus did not originally refer to the Prophets is also clear from the following verse, in which the Torah is conceived of as a cosmic force (if we may borrow a phrase from Martin Buber): “Until heaven and earth pass away, not one *yod* nor one *qotz* will pass away from the Torah” (Matt. 5:18).^[10] Here Jesus claims that the Torah and the cosmos are united. Nevertheless it is of a written text that Jesus spoke since he refers to letters and pen strokes. The Torah as it is written is mysteriously bound up with the existence of the world. In a similar vein, Rabbi Eleazar said: “But for the Torah heaven and earth would not exist” (b. Pes. 68b). There are also rabbinic sages who took the position that one may not erase a penstroke or a *yod*, the smallest of the Hebrew letters, from the Torah without undermining the world’s morality. With these words Jesus underscored the importance of the “small” commandments that are mentioned in the verse that follows (Matt. 5:19). The word “commandments” here refers concretely to the written Torah, the five books of Moses, and not to the entire system of Jewish commandments in the abstract.

But what did Jesus mean by “fulfilling” the commandments and by “abolishing” them (Matt. 5:17)? Since ancient times in Jewish and in Jewish-Christian circles alike it has been supposed

that Jesus meant that he had not come to abolish the commandments, but that he regarded himself as a faithful Torah-observant Jew.^[10a] On one side this interpretation of Matt. 5:17 is based on the assumption that Jesus defended himself against the accusations of his opponents. On the other side it is based on the assumption that the statement was not spoken by Jesus himself, but is of Jewish-Christian origin: the Jewish Christians allegedly fabricated this statement long after the fact in order to legitimize their fidelity to the Jewish law with a dominical saying. This latter pseudo-solution is fashionable in scholarly circles today. But it is only when Jesus' statement is taken out of context that it is possible to adopt either of these two solutions. The original meaning of Matt. 5:17 can be understood only if 1) we consider this statement to be the first sentence of the introduction to Jesus' interpretation of the verses that follow, and 2) we are aided by the exegetical terminology of contemporaneous sages. It is true that "to fulfill" and "to abolish" mean, first and foremost, to live according to the commandments or to transgress them. But when this lexical pair is used with reference to the interpretation of Scripture, the meaning is that if one interprets a verse in a manner not in accordance with halakhah he "abolishes" or "nullifies" a word of the Torah, and if one interprets correctly he "fulfills" it, or to be more precise, he "establishes" the Torah.^[11] Instead of citing one of the numerous rabbinic texts that demonstrates this exegetical terminology, let us be content with a verse from Paul:

Do we therefore abolish the law by faith? By no means! Rather we establish the law.^[12]
(Rom 3:31)

If one recognizes that this Jewish exegetical terminology is what stands behind Matt. 5:17, Jesus' statement loses the decisive weight that has been attributed to it, but its original meaning is brought clearly into focus. In other words, Jesus did not express his loyalty to the commandments as such, rather he defended himself against the possible claim that the daring interpretations of the Torah he was about to offer nullified the original meaning of the scriptural verses: that was not his intention; he wished to set forth the words of Scripture according to their truest and deepest meaning. It is also possible that Jesus did not begin his statement with "I have come," (i.e., in the sense of "It is my calling," or "my destiny" or "my mission to...") but simply with "I come" (in the sense of "Now, in this sermon I want to..."). In other words, it appears Jesus said: "Do not think that in this sermon I wish to nullify the commandments; I do not wish to nullify, but to establish," thereby allaying all concern that his following exposition does away with the Torah's original intention.

As we shall see, Jesus' exposition is not strictly literal, but neither is it overly daring. This is because exegesis aimed at ethical sharpening was also common in certain Jewish circles at the time. Nevertheless, the his interpretation of the two verses "an eye for an eye" and love for others are rather exceptional. In both cases, Jesus does not seek an ethical sharpening, as with the previous interpretations, he rather contests a distorted method of interpretation. The interpretations he contested were not Pharisaic, as we saw, but apparently belonged to the Sadducean school of exegesis. At the same time, however, these final two interpretations are more typical of the spirit of Jesus' gospel than are his interpretations of the former verses, for

which parallels can easily be found in ancient Judaism. There is no doubt that Jesus' treatment of "and you shall love your neighbor" (Lev. 19:18) belongs to the sermon, since, as we said, this was considered to be the "great principle of the Torah"—the Torah in a nutshell, or, to use the ancient Jewish expression, the Torah as taught while standing on one foot—and it serves as a beautiful conclusion to the sermon as a whole. Because he polemicized against a primitive distortion of the meaning of this verse, Jesus attached it to his interpretation of "an eye for an eye," since there too he strove against an inhumane morality and a distorted interpretation that attempted to find a basis on a verse from the Torah.

We find Jesus' explanation of the method by which he proceeded in the other cases in the preamble to his exegetical homily. First he refutes the claim that he is nullifying the original meaning of the commandments through his exegesis. On the contrary, he wishes to reveal their true meaning. How dare he, since even the apparently most unimportant pen stroke of the Torah is mysteriously bound up with the existence of the world? Therefore it is forbidden to nullify even the "insignificant" or "easy" commandments in the Torah and to teach people to do the same for whoever does so will be found to be "insignificant" in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever fulfills the Torah and teaches it will be found to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven. Then Jesus turned to his disciples. "For I tell you, if your righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, [\[13\]](#) you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

When we catch the drift of this introduction, we see that Jesus demands the observance of the "easy" ethical commandments, and precisely in a manner of increased moral rigor. His approach is clearest in the first two verses he treats, the sixth and seventh commandments of the Decalogue: It is forbidden to kill, but anyone who is angry with his brother is already guilty; and as for not committing adultery, anyone who looks upon a woman and covets her in his heart is regarded as an adulterer. [\[14\]](#) In the case of swearing, a "light" commandment is not juxtaposed to a "heavy" one, but the argument is similar. It is of course forbidden to swear a false oath, but it is better not to swear at all. "But let your word be 'Yes, yes,' 'No, no.' Anything more is from the evil [impulse]" (Matt. 5:37). There are many examples of this kind of precaution in the literature of the sages. [\[15\]](#) To this day, a religious Jew is permitted to answer "Yes" instead of swearing in court. According to Josephus the Essenes regarded their every word as having more force than an oath (*Bel.* 2:135). They avoid swearing, for to them taking an oath was worse than swearing falsely is for others. In their opinion, anyone who does not believe another because he does not swear in God's name is already condemned. The Essenes' argument against swearing is similar to Jesus' argument.

The Sermon on the Mount and the Jewish *Two Ways*

There is an important parallel to Jesus' teaching about murder and adultery in an ancient Jewish composition called the *Two Ways*, [\[16\]](#) which is preserved in the early Christian writing known as the *Didache*. There we read:

My child, flee from every evil and from everything that resembles it. Do not be angry, for anger leads to murder.... My child, do not be full of lust, for lust leads to fornication...for all these

things cause adultery.

(*Did.* 3:1-3)

The instruction to flee not only from what is actually evil, but also from anything that resembles evil, also occurs in rabbinic literature and it serves as a model for Jesus' exegetical method of ethical sharpening of the Torah in the Sermon on the Mount. The continuation in the Two Ways corresponds to Jesus' teaching on murder and adultery, so there may even be a literary connection between the Sermon on the Mount and the Jewish *Two Ways*.

As others have shown, the brief Jewish *Two Ways* treatise is related to the Essene Scrolls from the Dead Sea, but at the same time it shows points of contact with certain currents of rabbinic thought. We may therefore suppose that the Jewish *Two Ways*, like the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, arose on the periphery of the Essene movement, where the right wing of Essenism met with left wing of Pharisaism. Both the *Two Ways* and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* contain moral teaching that is very close to the ethics of Jesus. It seems, therefore, that the starting point of Jesus' ethical approach is to be sought in the circles in which these two semi-Essene and semi-Pharisaic compositions came into being. It is interesting to note that the Essene motifs we find in the teaching of Jesus appear there in the same humane reinterpretation as in these two semi-Essene writings.

The *Two Ways* treatise describes the good and the evil paths between which a person must choose; the evil path is only described in summary form (chapter 5), but the good path in which a person should walk is explained in detail (chapters 1-4). The writing begins (according to the Latin translation) thus: "There are two ways in the world, the way of life and the way of death, the way of light and they way of darkness..." The unusual Hebrew expression דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ (*derech 'eretz*, "the way of the earth") has meant "practical ethical behavior" in Judaism since the second half of the first century C.E.,^[17] but earlier—and also later in certain circles—the expression referred to the way of right behavior on earth, the way a person should choose,^[18] and it was related to the doctrine of the Two Ways. In these circles a whole literature of treatises arose, the Tractates *Derech Eretz*, a literary corpus that was passed down orally and in some cases was not written down and edited until the late Talmudic period. The ancient portions of this ethical literature are easily recognizable by their special peculiarity, and it is closely related, even in its style, both to the *Two Ways* in the *Didache* and to the ethical preaching of Jesus. These Hebrew treatises, like the message of Jesus, emphasize humility and deliberate humiliation, among other things; they speak of the fact that a person should endure insults and should never offend his neighbor.^[18b] In the *Derech Eretz* tractates a great deal is said about the "light" or "easy" commandments being as important as the "heavy" or "difficult" commandments, not according to legal definitions or halakhah, but according to a strict ethical conception presented by Jesus and also by certain Jewish pietistic circles. The concepts of a "light commandment" and a "heavy commandment" became technical terms of the pietistic mentality in the land of Israel, and from there these terms were adopted with this specific meaning by the rest of rabbinic literature. In these circles, from which the *Derech Eretz* tractates originate, the sentence about keeping distance from evil and from what resembles it

occurs—it is also known to the rest of rabbinic literature—in precisely the same sense of ethical sharpening as in the *Two Ways*. This tightening of the Torah is summed up very nicely in one of these tractates:

Keep away from that which leads to transgression! Keep away from what is ugly and from what resembles ugliness! Be aloof from a “light” sin, lest it lead to a “heavy” sin! Be quick to do an “light” commandment, which will lead you to perform a “heavy” commandment!^[19]

(*Masechet Yirat Het [Tractate Fear of Sin]*, ed. Higger, *Massektot Ze’irot*, p. 75, 20-23)

This deep saying is close to what Jesus demanded of his disciples. Perhaps it is possible to argue that, in contrast to the Jewish circles to which he was close, Jesus was even more extreme in that he regarded everyone who has transgressed a “light” commandment as having already transgressed a “heavy” commandment; the sages—and not only in the Tractates mentioned above and in the *Two Ways*—speak only of one transgression leading to another, and of one commandment paving the way to another. However, such a distinction is not entirely correct in and of itself. For how can we understand Jesus’ words about swearing (Matt. 5:33-37) other than that every oath is liable to cause false swearing? Jesus’ teaching on murder (Matt. 5:21-26) is less clear in this regard. It appears that Jesus did not want to say exactly what is written in the *Two Ways*: “Do not be angry, for anger leads to murder.” But neither did Jesus say that anyone who is angry with his brother has already committed murder; such a supposition would be too harsh in relation to Jesus’ stance. But Jesus’ saying on murder is not so far removed from such a conception; when we consider Jesus’ saying on adultery (Matt. 5:27-30), we see that Jesus went so far as to equate the “light” sin with the “heavy” transgression: “Everyone who looks upon a woman to covet her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” But is such a view really foreign to the rest of Judaism because it is so extreme? We find the equating of the “light” with the “heavy” more than once in the sayings of the rabbinic sages, but we shall consider only two examples. The first, as with Jesus, pertains to murder: “Anyone who causes his neighbor to blanch in public (by humiliating him) is as if he sheds blood” (b. Bab. Metz. 58b). And to Jesus’ saying on adultery there is a very close parallel, which says that the word “adultery” is written in Hebrew with four letters in order to deliver a specific warning:

Do not commit adultery is fourfold, so that one will not commit adultery with the hand or the foot or the eye or the heart. And whence do we learn that the hand commits sexual transgression? From the verse, *your hands are full of blood* [Isa. 1:15]. And whence do we learn that the foot commits sexual transgression? From the verse, *and hastening with his feet he sins* [Prov. 19:2]. And whence do we learn that the eyes and the heart commit sexual transgression? From the verse, *and you will not follow after your eyes or after your heart after which you stray into sexual transgression* [Num. 15:39].

(*Midrash HaGadol, Exod. 20:13*)

Conclusion

We have examined Matt. 5:17-48, albeit in a somewhat cursory manner, in order to show how this part of the Sermon on the Mount relates to the Judaism of Jesus’ time. The homily cannot

be deconstructed into isolated sayings of Jesus. Even though the author of Matthew inserted some additional sayings that Jesus had spoken on other occasions into the original sermon, the sermon we have must be treated as a single didactic unit. There is no reason to assume that this exposition of the Torah did not originate with Jesus himself, since it is anchored in a pietistic mindset which Jesus shared. In the introduction (Matt. 5:17-20) Jesus explained the method with which he would deal with each verse. It is a method of ethical sharpening of the Torah's commandments. Jesus used this method with each of the following verses, with the exception of "an eye for an eye": in the case of murder, adultery, and swearing Jesus equated the "light" with the "heavy," since an "light" transgression can lead to a serious one. As we discussed, this type of argument has roots in circles that were close both to the *Two Ways* and to the teaching of Jesus.

If there is anything in this section of the Sermon on the Mount that is especially typical of Jesus' personal stance, it is his command that one should not oppose evil (but we also find parallels to this among the Essenes) and his teaching that merely not hating one's enemy is not enough, one must even learn to love him. We have seen that in these most typical of his teachings Jesus did not polemicize against the Pharisees—for he was quite close to certain groups within the Pharisaic movement—but it appears he did polemicize against the Sadducees. Moreover, neither in his personal conduct nor in the Sermon on the Mount, did Jesus consider himself to be superior to the Torah's commandments. The recognition and profession of these facts neither minimizes nor negates the greatness of Jesus or the meaning of Christianity. Perhaps it even enhances them.



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Notes

[*] This article originally appeared as David Flusser, "Die Tora in der Bergpredigt," in *Juden und Christen lesen die selbe Bibel* (ed. Heinz Kremers; Duisburg: Braun, 1973), 102-113; repr. in idem, *Entdeckungen im Neuen Testament* (2 vols.; Neukirchener, 1987-1999), 1:21-31. This translation is primarily based on the Hebrew version published in Flusser's יהדות ומקורות הנצרות; 234-226 עמ' "תורה" בדרשה על-ההר: מהקרים ומסות (תל אביב: ספרית פועלים, תשל"ט) where it is entitled: ה"תורה" בדרשה על-ההר. However, a few paragraphs—beginning after the first sentence under the subheading "The Sermon on the Mount and the Jewish *Two Ways*"—were somehow omitted from the Hebrew version of Flusser's article. These were translated perforce from the German version with the aid of Google Translate.

In this translation I have supplemented the article with a few additional footnotes. These are

marked with the letters “a,” “b,” “c,” etc., appended to the number of the preceding footnote, e.g., [11a].

Flusser’s “The Torah in the Sermon on the Mount” is intimately related to his essay, [“It Is Said to the Elders’: On the Interpretation of the So-called Antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount”](#) (*Jerusalem Perspective*), which I also edited—JNT.

[1] The original context of the saying is in Matt. 19:3-12. Nevertheless, Matt. 5:32 retains the original form, but note the differences in the version in Matt 19:9.

[2] *Megillat Ta’anit* for the fourth of Tammuz. See the edition by Hans Lichtenstein, *Hebrew Union College Annual* vol. 8/9 (1931/32): 257-351, esp. 331. Josephus testifies that in meting out punishment the Sadducees were harsh while the Pharisees were lenient. From what we know of the Essenes, it is possible that they would have interpreted “an eye for an eye” in a manner similar to that of the Sadducees.

[3] The quotation in Matt. 5:43, however, is not a corruption of a scriptural verse, but the product of a false, vulgar exegesis, an un-Pharisaic or even an anti-Pharisaic midrash, though not a quotation from Essene ethical dualism. I assume that the midrash is of Sadducean origin, but I do not thereby wish to deny that the Essenes thought along similar lines (see the previous note).

[4] See most recently David Flusser, “A New Sensitivity in Judaism and the Christian Message,” in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 469-489. On the meaning of love for one’s neighbor in ancient Judaism and on the exegesis of Lev. 19:18 see especially 474-480.

[5] The interpretation of Lev. 19:18 against which Jesus polemicized, disagrees with the Aramaic Targum, although it follows the same exegetical method. In Matt. 5:43 Lev. 19:18 is interpreted as “Love your friend and hate your enemy,” and even Targum Yonatan paraphrases the verse as “Love your friend, who is like you, and do not do to him what you hate.” The Targum interprets the phrase כַּמֶּנֶּכְחָ (kāmōchā, “as yourself”) with the so-called Golden Rule, while the same phrase in Matt. 5:43 is interpreted as “hate your enemy,” which is to say, “Love only the person who is like you—your friend” (in Hebrew it is possible to understand רֵעָךְ [rē^achā] as “your friend”) or, “Treat others as they treat you: your friend with love, your enemy with hate.” It is possible that the Jewish formulation of the Golden Rule—according to which one should not do to one’s neighbor what is hateful to himself, which is already expressed by Hillel (see W. Bacher, *Die Agada der Tannaiten* [Strasbourg, 1903], 1:4)—is a polemical response to the interpretation that one should love one’s friend and hate one’s enemy.

[6] We pass over the exegesis on divorce (Matt. 5:31-32) because I assume that this passage was not originally part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Nevertheless, it fits fairly well into the sermon’s exegetical scheme. See above, note 1.

[7] Perhaps the translator adjusted the first κληθήσεται (klēthēsetai, “he will be called”) in Matt. 5:19 to match the second.

[8] We have already discussed Matt. 5:38-48.

[9] A literary indication for this assumption is that here we speak not of the “Law *and* the Prophets” but of the “Law *or* the Prophets.”

[9a] In Flusser’s article the following sentence appears here: The word “commandments” here refers concretely to the written Torah, the five books of Moses, and not to the entire system of Jewish commandments in the abstract. Since Flusser had not previously referred to commandments, the sentence, in its original position, is a non sequitur. However, I have relocated this sentence at the end of the paragraph, where it makes perfect sense—JNT.

[10] The words “until everything comes to pass” do not seem to be the words of Jesus. For the meaning of these words, see G. Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit* (Göttingen, 1966), 143-144.

[10a] See David Flusser, “An Early Jewish-Christian Document in the Tiburtine Sibyl,” in his *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 359-389, esp. 379-380.

[11] See W. Bacher, *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur* (repr. Darmstadt, 1965), 1:170-172, 2:186-189; Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (Uppsala, 1961), 287.

[12] Gerhardsson (see previous note) correctly recognized the rabbinic exegetical terminology in this Pauline verse, but he did not make bring this awareness to bear on Matt. 5:17.

[13] Matthew, in his usual manner, inserted the Pharisees, but this does not change the matter itself. It is interesting that in the sectarian commentary on the Psalms the Essenes condemn the Pharisees because “they choose the easy things” (4Q171 1-2 I, 19). See David Flusser, “Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes in Peshar Nahum,” in his *Judaism of the Second Temple Period* (2 vols.; trans. Azzan Yadin; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007, 2009). 1:214-257, esp. 256 (Note the shortcomings of the translation of this collection of Flusser’s essays, which I discuss in “[Corrections and Emendations to Flusser’s Judaism of the Second Temple Period](#) on *Jerusalem Perspective*—JNT). This is the oldest evidence for this Jewish term, which, as I said, also occurs in Jesus’ teachings. Note, too, that the Essene reproach against the Pharisees is close to what is written in Matt. 5:20.

[14] We will not deal with the section on divorce here, if only because it was not originally part of the Sermon on the Mount (see notes 1 and 6 above).

[15] The oldest evidence is in Sifra (ed. Weiss) 91a; James 5:12 refers to the words of Jesus.

[16] See Huub van de Sand and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (CRINT III.5; Assen: Royal Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); David Flusser, “Which Is the Straight Way That a Man Should Choose for Himself?” (m. Avot 2.1),” in his *Judaism of the Second Temple Period* (2 vols.; trans. Azzan Yadin; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007, 2009). 2:232-247 (on the shortcomings of the translation of this collection of Flusser’s essays, see n. 13 above—JNT). NB: Where n. 16 appears in the text is the point at which the omission from the Hebrew version of

Flusser's article begins—JNT.

[17] Cf., e.g., m. Avot 3:5.

[18] See m. Avot 2:1.

[18b] It is at this point that the omission from the Hebrew version of Flusser's article ends—JNT.

[19] Cf. *Massechot Derech Eretz* (ed. Higger; Jerusalem, 1960), 78. On the sentence “Flee from all evil” in the *Didache* and in rabbinic literature see G. Allon, *Studies in Jewish History in the Times of the Second Temple, the Mishna and the Talmud* (2 vols; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1958), 1:282-284 [Heb.].