

Violence and the Kingdom of the heavens

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(Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the NASB.)

“Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matt. 11:11).

“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven **suffers violence** and *violent men take it by force*” (Matt. 11:12).

“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven **suffereth violence**, and *the violent take it by force*” (Matt. 11:12, KJV).

“Ever since the coming of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of heaven has been **subjected to violence** and *violent men [a] are seizing it*” (Matt. 11:12, New English Bible [NEB]).

[a]: *Or*, has been **forcing its way forward**, and *men of force*...

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been **forcefully advancing** and *forceful men lay hold of it*” (Matt. 11:12, New International Version [NIV]).

“The law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and *everyone is forcing his way into it*” (Luc. 16:16).

“The law and the Prophets are until John; since that time the Kingdom of God is proclaimed, and *everyone exercises force on it*” (Luc. 16:16, according to the Dutch State translation).

(The expression, “the kingdom of heaven,” in the preceding verses should literally be translated, “the kingdom of the heavens.” In each of the thirty-two times in which this expression appears in Matthew’s gospel, in the Greek text, “heavens” is always plural and preceded by the definite article. Thus, in this article, reference will be made to “the kingdom of the heavens” rather than “the kingdom of heaven.”)

In Matt. 11:11, the Lord spoke about John and certain others in connection with John’s ministry and positions which individuals would hold in the kingdom being offered to Israel, *the kingdom of the heavens*. “The kingdom of the heavens” is simply *the rule of the heavens over the earth* (Dan. 4:26b) — a rule presently under the control of Satan and his angels, as they exercise regal power and authority over the earth, from a heavenly sphere, through the Gentile nations.

Satan and his angels will continue to exercise power and authority in this manner until that coming day when they are forced to relinquish their place in the heavens and are cast out onto the earth (Rev. 12:8). Then, this same heavenly sphere of the kingdom, during the following Messianic Era, will become the place from which Christ and His co-heirs will rule the earth — a rule as it exists today, *a rule from the heavens over the earth*.

In this respect, the expression, “the kingdom of the heavens,” can refer to the same kingdom under one of two individuals — *Satan present*, or *Christ future*. Thus, since the kingdom under Christ is future, there is no present kingdom of the heavens into which man can enter and have a part, for this sphere of the kingdom is presently occupied and controlled by Satan and his angels. The only time in which man can occupy a place in this sphere of the kingdom is *future*, after Satan and his angels have been forced to relinquish the sceptre

and have been cast out of their place in the heavens.

And Christ's statement in Matt. 11:11 must be understood accordingly. The Lord could only have been drawing a contrast between positions held by certain individuals during *two different times*— John during *present time* (when the kingdom of the heavens remained under the control of Satan and his angels) and others during *future time* (after the kingdom of the heavens has come under the control of Christ and His co-heirs). The Lord called attention to *the greatness* of the position held by John in his day. Then He, through a contrast, stated that the person who would be *the least* in the future Messianic Kingdom would be *greater* than John was in his day.

It is evident that Christ could not have been dealing with things completely future in His statement in Matt. 11:11, for it could not be correct to say that John would be the least in the future kingdom of the heavens; nor, on the other hand, could it be said that John would not be present in the future kingdom (Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28,29). And, as has been shown, a person could not enter the kingdom of the heavens during John's day, for this sphere of the kingdom was (and remains today) the realm from which Satan and his angels exercised power and authority.

The Lord conquered Satan at Calvary, but removing Satan from his present position in the heavens is still future. In John's day one didn't enter the kingdom; rather, during John's day the kingdom was *offered*, not *entered*. And it is exactly the same for Christians today. Entrance into the kingdom, as Satan's removal from office, was *future* during John's day and remains *future* today.

(Many Christians erroneously believe that they enter the kingdom of the heavens at the time of the birth from above, on the basis of Col. 1:13, 14: "*For he has rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*".

However, as previously shown, it is simply not possible for Christians to enter into the present kingdom of the heavens, for Satan and his angels rule in this kingdom, with Christ and His co-heir's to occupy and rule in this kingdom *only* at a time yet future. And this is the consistent teaching of any Scripture bearing on the subject.

The Greek verb, “to transfer,” in Col. 1:13 is *methistemi*. The verb means “to move” [to move a mountain (1 Cor. 13:2)]; [to move into the kingdom (Col. 1:13)], or “to remove” [to remove from an office (Luke 16:4)].

A proper understanding of what is involved in a person being transferred or moved in Col. 1:13 can be derived through comparing this verse with Acts 13:22, where *methistemi* is also used. In Acts 13:22 [drawing from 1 Samuel], Saul had been rejected [he had been “removed”], and God then raised up David to be king in Israel: “*After He removed him, He raised David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, I have found David the son of Jesse...*”

Saul remained in power as king until his death, and his rejection [“removal,” though still seated on the throne] was God’s announcement that his days as king were numbered. Saul would, at a future time, be put down; and another — David — would then ascend the throne. God would remove Saul from power and place David in power, in complete keeping with Dan. 4:17-32.

After Saul had been rejected, though still occupying the throne, God singled out David and instructed Samuel to anoint him king in Saul’s stead. However, David, though anointed king in Saul’s stead, didn’t immediately ascend the throne. Saul, though rejected, continued to reign; and David during this time found himself rejected in a different sense [by man, not God], exiled, and passing through a time of trials and sufferings.

Also during this time a number of individuals, dissatisfied with existing conditions in the kingdom under Saul, left Saul’s kingdom and associated themselves with David; and, in so doing, they found themselves occupying exactly the same position in which David found himself during this time — rejected, exiled, and passing through a time of trials and sufferings.

The band of men who had left the kingdom under Saul and had associated themselves with David simply changed positions, as in Col. 1:13. There was no existing kingdom under David in which these men found themselves, as there is no existing kingdom under Christ in which Christians presently find themselves. In David’s day, Saul still occupied the throne, as Satan continues to occupy the throne today; David was waiting to ascend the throne, as Christ is presently waiting to ascend the throne; and those who had joined themselves to David

had been moved into a new position [from the kingdom under Saul, anticipating the kingdom under David] in order to share David's glory in a coming day, and those who have joined themselves to Christ have been moved into a new position [from the kingdom under Satan, anticipating the kingdom under Christ] in order to share Christ's glory in that coming day.

[Note the purpose for this interim in the type during David's day — a time during which David could acquire the necessary rulers to hold positions of power with him when he took the kingdom. And, in the antitype, the purpose for the interim is exactly the same — a time during which Christ can acquire the necessary rulers to hold positions of power with Him when He takes the kingdom.]

Thus, relative to the preceding, Acts 13:22 forms the type, and Col. 1:13 the antitype. And types with their corresponding antitypes *always* have to be understood and interpreted exactly the same way.

The move in Col. 1:13 can only be a move *from* an association with the power and authority which Satan presently exercises in his kingdom *into* an association with the rejected position presently held by the King Who will one day replace Satan. It has nothing to do with a move into a position where the King already exercises power and authority, as many erroneously believe. The type doesn't allow understanding the verse in this manner. Though the move in the type had to do with *regality*, such could not be brought to pass until a future day. And matters in the antitype must be understood after exactly the same fashion as seen in the type.)

Matt. 11:12 requires special attention, because the various translations show substantial differences.

The New International Version (NIV) reads, "*the kingdom has been forcefully advancing*".

The New American Standard Bible (NASB) reads, "*the kingdom of heaven suffers violence*", similar to the New English Bible (NEB): "*the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence*".

There is considerable difference between the kingdom forcefully advancing and the kingdom being subjected to violence, which necessitates going to and studying the Greek text to derive the proper

translation and understanding of this verse.

The Greek verb in view is “biazoo” and appears in the New Testament in Matt. 11:12 and in Luke 16:16, the parallel verse to Matt. 11:12.

The verb always carries the thought of “violence”. The related Greek noun “bia” simply means “violence” (*cp.* Acts 24:7; 27:41).

The problem in Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16 has to do with grammatical voices. Voices refer to the relationship between the subject and the verb.

In the active voice (the subject does the acting), “biazoo” means “to treat violently, to overpower”. In the passive voice (the subject receives the action), “biazoo” means “to be treated violently”.

However, along with the active and passive voices, Greek also has a middle voice for verbs.

Basically the middle voice stands between the active and passive voice. In the middle voice the subject is less active, but not completely passive.

An example of the active voice is, “the priest offers” (on behalf of others). An example of the passive voice is, “the bull has been offered”.

Examples of the middle voice are, “the king offers [on behalf of himself (reflective meaning)]” or “Christ offered Himself”(reflective meaning).

(In Matt. 11:12 the conjugation of the verb “biazoo” could be understood as either middle or passive, for the form of the middle and passive voices in the present indicative of this verb are the same.)

To make it more complex, in the New Testament almost seventy-five percent of the middle voices have an active meaning. This is also the case with the verb “biazoo”.

In the middle voice “biazoo” means “to treat violently”. One has to study Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16 to see whether these verses have to be translated as “to be treated violently” (passive) and/or “to treat violently” (middle voice [with active meaning]).

This choice is important because the passive voice and the middle voice call for different interpretations. So, we have two possibilities:

Matt. 11:12a	
middle voice (with active meaning)	< forces its way forward < forcefully advancing
passive voice	< suffers violence < subjected to violence

There are definite problems understanding this verb in Matt. 11:12 as being in the middle voice. *The kingdom of God doesn't advance forcefully*. Rather, *the kingdom was/is offered*: first to Israel, and presently to the "one new man in Christ" (Eph. 2:15). At Christ's first coming we occasionally see that the Lord overruled the power of Satan (Matt. 12:28), but that doesn't mean that the kingdom is presently advancing forcefully.

The passive voice fits very well in Matt. 11:12. In Matt. 23:13 we see that the Pharisees were violent people and a quick look at Luke 20:14 will only show how far this religious group went in their violence.

When the kingdom of the heavens has been "subjected to violence" (NEB), it means that *its messengers* were subjected to this violence. Note the Lord Himself, John the Baptist, Paul, etc. to see how true this was. The kingdom of the heavens itself wasn't subjected to violence, because the rule of Satan and his angels over this earth remained unchanged. But relative to *the offering of the kingdom* to Israel, and later to Christians, violence definitely comes in view.

And that's what Matt. 23:13 is about. The religious leaders in Israel — the Pharisees — had sought, in every way possible, to subvert the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to the Jewish people; and, through this means, they had subjected the people to violence in order to prevent them from accepting the offer to enter this future kingdom.

And exactly the same thing can be seen in Christian circles today when the proclamation of the Word of the Kingdom comes into view. It is invariably the religious leaders in Christendom who seek, in every way possible, to subvert this message, *subjecting Christians to violence in order to prevent them from accepting the offer to enter this future kingdom*.

Matt. 11:12b	
	< violent men take it by force < forceful men lay hold of it

The second part of Matt. 11:12 reads, “*violent men take it by force*”.

The Greek verb here is “harpazoo”, which means “to seize upon with force, to snatch away, to rob.” The verb appears three times in John 10, where the wolf robs the sheep (verse 12), and in verse 28 and 29 where we read that no one can “snatch away,” “rob,” the sheep out of the Lord’s hands. The same thought can be seen in Matt. 23:13, where the Pharisees sought to subvert the offer of the kingdom of the heavens, seeking to rob the Israelites in this respect.

Therefore, the thought in Matt. 11:12 centers around the offer of the kingdom of the heavens. The kingdom had been subjected to violence and violent people had attempted to snatch the offer away in order to prevent the people from accepting the offer.

Luke 16:16	
middle voice (with active meaning)	1. everyone is forcing his way <u>into</u> it 2. everyone exercises force <u>on</u> it
passive voice	< everyone is being pressed <u>into</u> it

In Luke 16:16, the parallel verse to Matt. 11:12, the same problem can be seen. Should “biazoo” be translated middle or passive? A comparison with Matt. 11:12 shows that the verb cannot be understood in the passive voice, in the sense that “everyone is being pressed into it.” There are no well-known (or current) versions which translate Luke 16:16 in the passive voice.

In the middle voice, two lines of translation can be seen. The first line is, “*everyone is forcing his way into it*” and the second line is, “*everyone exercises force on it*” (Dutch State translation).

There is a difference between “everyone is forcing his way into it” and “everyone exercises force on it.” The former is out of line with Matt. 11:12, where violence is not related to trying to enter the kingdom, but trying to prevent entrance into the kingdom.

“Exercising force on it”, as the Dutch State translation reads, fits quite well. Here we have an excellent example of the value of parallel verses. They serve to present the complete picture (e.g., compare Eph. 5:18 with Col. 3:16, where being filled with Spirit in one verse is

equated, in the other verse, with the Word dwelling richly in the individual).

A point of consideration is the translation, “into” and “on” in Luke 16:16. This is the translation of the Greek preposition “eis”. And, basically, “eis” means a move into a place or object. But movement upon that place or object is also possible.

In order to get a harmonious picture of Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16, the second meaning of “eis” seems to be the correct one and favors the Dutch State translation.

By way of conclusion, the one who is least in the kingdom of the heavens, will be greater than John was in his day; but, in order to enter the kingdom, one will have to qualify, will have to be shown worthy (2 Thess. 1:5). Consecration and suffering will be part of the person’s life as he seeks to qualify (refer again to the experiences of those joining themselves to David in the type and those joining themselves to Christ in the antitype, seen earlier in this article).

And as it was in the days of our Lord, so is it today:

Some Christians will attempt to prevent other Christians, through force, from entering the kingdom. And though Christ will take Satan’s crown by force at a future date, that has no relationship to and doesn’t mean that the entrance into the kingdom also takes place by force.

Rather, from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of the heavens has been subjected to violence and violent men lay hold of it, i.e., they exercise force on it to prevent people from accepting the *offer* of the kingdom of the heavens.