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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE TRANSITIONAL NATURE OF THE SERMON ON THE
MOUNT

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Sermon on the Mount is a difficult portion of Scripture to interpret because it is situated in the transition between the dispensation of Law and the dispensation of the earthly millennial kingdom. It is made even more difficult to interpret because of the Jews' rejection of the kingdom offer and the resultant transition into the previously unforeseen economy of grace. Sorting out the attendant issues, including the Sermon's relationship to the three dispensations surrounding it, has provided plenty of work for theologians over the centuries.

Dispensational Debate on the Sermon

The interpretive difficulty of the Sermon is demonstrated by a survey of dispensational commentators who, though of the same basic literal interpretive bent, disagree in at least six areas: the basic *hermeneutic* of the Sermon, the *time* of the Sermon's applicability, the relation of the Sermon to the *Mosaic Law*, the portrayal of *righteousness* in the Sermon, the application of the Sermon to the *Church*, and the condition of the *audience* of the Sermon.

For instance, Martin says that, to handle such difficult statements as cutting off of body parts, "hermeneutical considerations are still necessary to interpret various aspects of the Sermon"¹ suggesting that other than literal interpretation should be used. Rand's whole burden,

¹ John A. Martin, "Dispensational Approaches to the Sermon on the Mount," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, ed. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), p. 47.

however, is to show that such problems can be handled properly in a literal interpretation.²

Regarding the *time* aspect, Rand says the Sermon "sets forth the character of life to be found in those who will enter the millennial kingdom and then their manner of life during the earthly reign of the Messiah."³ Pentecost says, "We thus conclude that the Sermon on the Mount cannot be made to apply to conditions on the earth after the establishment of the kingdom."⁴

Concerning the relation of the Sermon to the *Mosaic Law*, Congdon writes, "Jesus abrogated some unscriptural traditions...corrected some wrong interpretations...confirmed [Old Testament legal injunctions] for the Jewish people living before Calvary."⁵ A much different emphasis is recorded by Chafer, who says, "It is evident from Deuteronomy 30:8...that the kingdom rule is the Mosaic system which...has now been extended to realms vastly more demanding."⁶ In Chafer's view, the Law is not then simply confirmed, but extended.

There is also a disparity regarding dispensational interpreters' views of *righteousness* in the Sermon. Regarding the comparison of Kingdom righteousness to Pharisaic righteousness, Rand writes, "No one can deny that the Pharisees and the scribes lived on the highest plane which is possible for a human being unaided by God's grace to attain."⁷ Blaising and Bock write "The eschatological righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the old dispensation. Consequently, it surpasses that exhibited by the scribes and Pharisees, teachers and practitioners of the Mosaic Law (5:20)."⁸ Pentecost says that the Pharisees were *not* righteous: "The Lord's purpose in this whole section from 5:21 – 7:6 was to present the true requirements of the Law as over

² James Rand, "Problems in Literal Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount," *Bib Sac* (Jan, Apr, 1955).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁴ Dwight J. Pentecost, "The Purpose of the Sermon on the Mount," *Bib Sac* (April, July, Oct., 1958): 135.

⁵ Roger D. Congdon, "Did Jesus Sustain the Law in Matthew 5?" *Bib Sac* (April-June., 1978): 125.

⁶ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 5:106.

⁷ Rand, "Problems in Literal Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount," p. 33.

⁸ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Victor Books/Bridgepoint, 1993, pg. 246.

against the Pharisaic misrepresentation of the Law."⁹ Congdon also supports the view that the Law is confirmed in the Sermon.¹⁰ Martin: "Matthew's gospel does not picture the scribes and Pharisees as being the most righteous people of their day."¹¹ So, some say that the a higher standard of righteousness prevails in the Sermon; others say the old standard is being reviewed.

Further, Chafer says regarding the application of the Sermon to the *Church* in light of Matthew 28:20, "It is hardly probable that He intends all the Mosaic Law, the governing principles of the kingdom, and the teachings of grace to be combined and applied to those who receive the message of the great commission."¹² Sturz disagrees with this statement, saying, "the ethical teachings of Jesus are for the present age...[The apostles] are to baptize these disciples and they are to teach them to observe all the things which Jesus had commanded them..." with "no 'selection' of things to be taught and observed."¹³

Finally, we note that the *audience* is seen differently by dispensational interpreters. Pentecost again says, "those who followed Christ now were the very ones who had experienced John's baptism and repentance."¹⁴ Ryrie, on the other hand, suggests the entire purpose of the Sermon "is a detailed explanation of what the Lord meant by repentance. It called the Jewish people to an inner heart change..."¹⁵ seemingly indicating that the message of repentance had not yet been made clear to the audience.

Approach of This Paper

In light of the results of this brief survey of intramural differences between dispensatio-

⁹ Pentecost, "The Purpose of the Sermon on the Mount," p. 316.

¹⁰ Congdon, "Did Jesus Sustain the Law in Matthew 5?"

¹¹ Martin, "Dispensational Approaches to the Sermon on the Mount," p. 44.

¹² Chafer, 4:177.

¹³ Harry Sturz, "The Sermon on the Mount and Application to the Present Age," *Grace Journal*, (Fall, 1963): 5, 11-12.

¹⁴ Pentecost, "The Purpose of the Sermon on the Mount", p. 216.

¹⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 100.

nalists on the Sermon, this paper will investigate the transitional nature of the Sermon which contributes to these disagreements. Several existing dispensational interpretations of the Sermon will be reviewed and briefly critiqued. An examination will then be made into the nature of transitional periods between dispensations. The insight gleaned from this study will then guide the development of our approach to the Sermon on the Mount.

Note several assumptions regarding the Sermon on the Mount that are made in this paper. First, a dispensational approach to the Scriptures is assumed, by which the Church and Israel are carefully distinguished. Second, the literary integrity of the Sermon is assumed. It was a single discourse given at one time by the Lord to a single audience, as indicated in Matt 5:1-2 and 7:28-29. In addition, we assume that its contents can be harmonized with those of the other gospels.¹⁶ Third, we assume that the Sermon is connected with the announcement of the Kingdom of God as predicted in the Old Testament. This is evident from the Sermon itself and the surrounding context, and has been very ably proven by other authors.¹⁷

Fourth, it is also our presupposition that the *primary* application of the Sermon was meant for the Jews in Jesus' audience who were offered the kingdom.¹⁸ However, we strongly affirm that a *secondary* application "to the Church means that lessons and principles may be drawn from it..."¹⁹ because of the unchanging holiness of God. The Law always serves to convict of sin, as taught in Romans 3:20: The Sermon as an expression of the Law will serve that purpose also.

¹⁶ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), pp. 123-125.

¹⁷ Alva McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1974), pp. 274-303, for example.

¹⁸ Some interpreters extend the applicability of the Sermon into the tribulation era as well as we will see later.

¹⁹ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 5:97.

CHAPTER II

DISPENSATIONAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SERMON

There are three major classes of interpretive approaches to the Sermon on the Mount. The first is a liberal view which teaches that the Sermon is a "means of salvation for the world."²⁰ This amounts to a meritorious works-based salvation and has no place in Christian thinking. Lowery indicates perhaps one source of this idea: a spiritualized meaning of the term "kingdom." He writes, "The phrase 'the kingdom of God' is thus a designation with some flexibility, whose features compare in some respects with what later literature in the New Testament relates to the experience of salvation."²¹

The second major class of interpretations of the Sermon is that it is primarily for the Church. This view argues that the Sermon *must* be directly applicable to the Christian, in fact, for believers at any time in history. Sturz provides a litany of reasons to support this view,²² and today it is supported by both dispensational and non-dispensational interpreters.²³ This approach will be considered in more detail later in this work.

The third category of interpretation teaches that the Sermon is primarily Jewish and related to the Kingdom, though there is secondary application to the Church. The variants of this view will be elaborated in the following sections.

²⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), p. 77.

²¹ Lowery, "A Theology of Matthew," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck and Darrell L. Bock (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 41

²² Sturz, "The Sermon on the Mount and Application to the Present Age," pp. 5ff.

²³ R. Bruce Compton, "Gospels," class notes, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, p. 66.

The Kingdom View

In the Kingdom interpretation, the Sermon is the "divine constitution for the righteousness government of the earth."²⁴ Stam calls it the "charter of the Messianic kingdom."²⁵ It is the rule of conduct for those living in the millennial kingdom under the righteous rule of the Lord Jesus Christ. As such, the Sermon is legal in nature.

The kingdom constitution is indeed seen in the Sermon: the blessings of kingdom citizens in the Beatitudes (5:3-12); the place of the Mosaic Law (5:17-19; 7:12); and the ranking of citizens in the kingdom based on obedience to the Law (5:19).

This view has a number of drawbacks. The Sermon speaks of the kingdom as future (5:3, 10); of entrance into the kingdom (5:20; 7:13-14, 21-23); of prayer for the kingdom to come (6:10), of persecution, false prophets, and other conditions which will not prevail during the rule of Christ on the earth (5:10-12; 6:13; 7:15-20; cf. Ps 45:6-7; Isa 11:4); of judgment against false prophets and professors (7:19, 23); and of the priority of the kingdom (6:33). These texts are problematic for the Kingdom view.

However, even those who support the Kingdom view take note of these passages and do make some allowance for them. Note Chafer:

"[The Sermon] was addressed to the people before Him and concerned the requisite preparation on their part for admission into the kingdom of heaven...It likewise declared the manner of life that would be demanded within the kingdom when once it is entered...5:20 which proclaims the terms of admission in the kingdom for the Jew...it is the direct and official pronouncement of the King Himself of that manner of life which will be the ground for admission into the kingdom of heaven and the manner of life to be lived in the kingdom."²⁶

This serves to illustrate that the kingdom view is not held strictly in isolation from the

²⁴ C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 999-1000.

²⁵ Cornelius R. Stam, *The Sermon on the Mount and The Gospel of the Grace of God*, (Berean Bible Society, Germantown, WI 1983, second printing), p. 13.

²⁶ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*: 5:99, 108, 111.

other dispensational interpretations to be mentioned in the next sections.

The Interim Ethic View

A second dispensational view on the Sermon is called the interim ethic view. It teaches that the Sermon gives the code of conduct for those future citizens of the kingdom during the times when the kingdom is approaching. This would allow the Sermon to apply both to the Lord's original audience, as well as those in the Tribulation period preceding the coming of the King to establish the millennial reign at Jerusalem.²⁷ Toussaint writes, "The best interpretation says the Sermon was preached by the Lord to instruct the disciples as to how they should live in the interim preceding the kingdom."²⁸

This view has support in the Sermon. Conditions preceding the kingdom and the way to deal with such conditions in the interim are described: persecution for righteousness' sake (5:11); agreement with your opponent at law (5:25); the work of enemies (5:39-44); prayer for the inauguration of the kingdom (6:11); and the warning about false prophets (7:15-20). Further indications of pre-kingdom conditions are seen throughout chapter 6 where the contemporary practices involved in almsgiving, prayer, and fasting are reprovved and a correct approach is commanded. Rand adds other conditions which all indicate that the righteousness and peace of the kingdom have not taken effect: a hunger and thirst for righteousness (5:6), the exhortation to be peacemakers (5:9), and the exhortation to seek the kingdom first (6:33).²⁹

Problematic for this view are those texts in the Sermon which speak of the kingdom economy proper, as noted in the previous section, and those verses which speak of the righteous

²⁷ James F. Rand, "Studies in the Sermon on the Mount," Voice of the IFCA, September 1956, p. 4.

²⁸ Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Sermon on the Mount: Introduction and the Beatitudes," Study No. 1, (unpublished notes delivered in 13 studies on the *Heritage* radio program, undated), p. 1.

²⁹ Rand, "Studies in the Sermon on the Mount," p. 4.

entrance requirements for the kingdom.

The Entrance Requirement View

A third dispensational approach is the Entrance Requirement view, which says that the Sermon gives that standard of character which is required for entrance into the kingdom. This is also called the penitential or repentance view. When the multitudes gathered around Christ, Pentecost says, "One question was paramount in their minds: "How can we enter Your Kingdom? How righteous must we be to be saved? Will our righteousness be sufficient to admit us to Your Kingdom?"³⁰ Bowles adds,

"The emphasis of this position is not that the sermon is a law imposed upon a people who are waiting to enter the kingdom or who are living in the kingdom; rather, the emphasis of the Entrance Requirements position is upon the standard of righteousness a person must exhibit if he is to enter the kingdom at its conception."³¹

The Sermon does indeed give the conditions of entering into the prophesied kingdom. For example, 5:20 flatly states that "except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Chapter 7 speaks of entrance at the narrow gate (7:13-14) and of those false professors who will be denied entrance to the kingdom (7:21-23).

However, the entrance requirement view is not without its problems. For example, not all of the Sermon is concerned with the requirements for entrance, as has been shown in the other views. Neither does the Lord discuss how one might obtain such righteousness. Chafer answers that "'The straight and narrow way' is an outworking of personal merit and righteousness and is

³⁰ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Design for Living*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), p. 15.

³¹ Ken Bowles, "How Does the Dispensationalist Interpret the Sermon on the Mount?" [<http://home.usmo.com/~kocu/SOM.html>], paragraph 26.

far removed from salvation."³² We stress instead that such righteousness is not obtainable but by the help of God Himself, since the ultimate standard our Lord is teaching is God-like perfection (5:48). Bowles proposes that, based on Matt 7:7-11, the audience should simply ask God for this righteousness.³³

Ryrie suggests a position that is similar to this one when he writes, "[The Sermon] is a detailed explanation of what the Lord meant by repentance. It called the Jewish people to an inner heart change that they had dissociated from the requirements for the establishing of the Messianic kingdom."³⁴ Even Pink agrees, "[Jesus] began His public ministry by insisting upon repentance (Matt. iv, 17), and here He enlarges upon this vitally important subject in a variety of ways, showing us what repentance really is and what are its fruits."³⁵

Comments on The Dispensational Views

What is to be done in light of these different dispensational interpretations of the Sermon? It is interesting to observe initially that the surveyed dispensational interpretations may be categorized under two main headings. First, note an emphasis on *time*. The Kingdom and Interim views stress that the Sermon is applied to a time either before or during the kingdom. In fact, when Ryrie outlines the major dispensational views of the Sermon, he outlines them using the concept of time: "1. *The Sermon relates only to the millennial kingdom...* 2. *It relates to any time the Messianic kingdom is offered...* 3. *It relates both to any time the kingdom is offered (that is, during our Lord's earthly ministry as well as during the coming tribulation period) and to the*

³² Chafer, 5:110.

³³ Bowles, "'How Does the Dispensationalist Interpret the Sermon on the Mount?'" [<http://home.usmo.com/~kocu/SOM.html>], paragraph 110.

³⁴ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 100. He adds three other conditions, two of which mention that the Sermon "relates to any time that the kingdom is offered" and "also relates to life in the millennial kingdom." How exactly it relates is not explained.

³⁵ Arthur Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (Swengel: PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1950, second printing 1953), p. 13.

time when the millennial kingdom is functioning on this earth."³⁶

Second, note the emphasis on the idea of a *test* or *human responsibility*. This is seen especially in the Entrance Requirements view: people are responsible to repent and somehow attain a certain standard of righteousness. The other views have a flavor of this idea well, in that they teach the Sermon as being a binding law on citizens or pre-citizens of the kingdom.

Notice that these categories correspond to the emphasis on the ideas of *time* and *test* in early definitions of a dispensation: "A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some *specific* revelation of the will of God."³⁷

Even though the concepts of time and test are legitimately related to the outworking of a dispensation, more recent dispensational thought has revised the definition to subordinate these ideas. Ryrie writes concerning this distinction: "*A dispensation is a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purpose.* If one were *describing* a dispensation, he would include other things, such as the ideas of distinctive revelation, responsibility, testing, failure, and judgment."³⁸ In addition, one would include the idea of time as well, since a dispensation is worked out over a corresponding period of history.

To elaborate on Ryrie's definition, notice several factors regarding the definition of a dispensation. There is one essential aspect of a dispensation, and that is the *governing relationship* or economy between God and man. Then there is the way that the governing relationship is *initiated*, and the *specifics* of the governing relationship. Both the initiation and specifics are subordinate to the main idea of the governing relationship.

The dispensation is *initiated* or made known by new revelation from God. Since revela-

³⁶ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 99-100.

³⁷ C.I. Scofield, *The Scofield Study Bible*, p. 5

³⁸ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 28.

tion is not required during the operation of the dispensation, it is not an integral part of the dispensation itself. For example, the Church age has operated for nineteen hundred years without new revelation from God. Revelation may be given (such as during the OT prophetic period), but does not make or break the dispensation. As such, revelation is very important during transitional periods between dispensations in order to define the distinct nature of the new economy.

The *specifics* of the governmental relationship include responsibilities for both God and man. For man, there are certain requirements such as belief of God and proper obedience to the governmental arrangement. God's "responsibilities" are those things which He imposes upon Himself in the operation of the dispensation. These include the judgment of man's failure during the dispensation and reward of man's obedience, in whatever way God specifies. These Self-impositions source in His constitutional nature, which punishes evil and rewards righteousness.

It is the contention of this paper that the interpretive approach to the Sermon on the Mount can benefit by an examination of it in light of this more precise definition of a dispensation. How? By looking at the Sermon in light of its transitional context, it is apparent that it is part and parcel of the revelatory activity at the transition between the distinguishable economies of Mosaic Law and Grace. In fact, to put a finer point on it, the Sermon is a component of the transitional program from the Mosaic economy to the Kingdom economy.³⁹ Rather than viewing the Sermon as to the time when the economy is applicable, or the tests of entrance into the economy (as above), we will view it from the perspective of how it fits into the transition period and in this way attempt to resolve some of the debate between dispensational interpretations.

Therefore, in the following two sections, we will investigate general transitional factors in dispensations in the and then seek to apply them to the Sermon.

³⁹ Leave the economy of Grace out of the picture since it was not revealed at the time of the Sermon.

CHAPTER III

THE NATURE OF DISPENSATIONAL TRANSITIONS

In this chapter we will sift out some general ideas from the Scriptures in regard to transitions between dispensations. Since there are seven dispensations, we will examine the six transitional periods between them as well as the periods before the first and after the last dispensation, for a total of eight periods.

This chapter roughly follows Ryrie's outline as to the Scriptural delineation of the dispensations,⁴⁰ but will have more detail about the Scripture dealing with the transitional periods. The effects of "strict carry-overs" between dispensations, those principles or practices that are true before, during, and after the transition will be largely ignored as these are not transitional but are instead "constants." For instance, civil government as a carry-over remains throughout all dispensations and transitional periods since it was initiated. There are other carry-overs or continuing principles which may involve times of judgment, practices carried into transition periods that are stopped by the end of the period, or practices that are started in view of the upcoming dispensation which may be mentioned in the discussion below.

Transition into Innocence

Ryrie indicates that the first dispensation ranges from Gen. 1:3-3:6. Because a dispensation deals with God's governing rule (noted previously), the start of the dispensation should be delayed until 1:27 where man is created; it is then that there are subjects present to be governed,

⁴⁰ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 54.

and shortly thereafter responsibilities are revealed (1:28). This responsibility revelation concludes by Gen 1:30 but more is given in 2:15-25 as the creation account is detailed again.

What principles may be gleaned from this transition into the first dispensation? We notice that it was the sixth day before man was created. During this time the scene was being set for God's dispensational program. Further, there was revelation given as God communicated to Adam his role in world dominion and care of the garden and so on. Revelation is included as to the penalties for disobedience as well. We glean from this account first that time is required to transition from one dispensation to the next, even when supernatural means are being used to establish the dispensation. Second, revelation is required. Time and revelation are necessary components of the transitional period, and we will see them again and again throughout the remainder of this chapter.

From Innocence to Conscience

Since the fall occurs in Gen. 3:6, this is the formal end of the dispensation of innocence because "the eyes of them both were opened" immediately. Adam and Eve took whatever measures they could to address their newly discovered problem, but had to resort to hiding in the garden when God came to commune with them. The transition into the fullness of the dispensation of conscience does not occur until Gen. 3:24 where God has finished giving his judgmental revelations; these judgment revelations do double-duty as the revelation of the conditions of the new dispensation.

From this account, it is evident that there is a definite act or "final straw" that initiates the transition. Second, we gather that some features of the earlier dispensation carry over into the transitional period. In this case, Adam and Eve remained in the garden for some time after the fall. Third, features of the new dispensation are introduced during the transition period, since

Adam and Eve were changed the instant they sinned. Fourth, a statement of failure is made (Gen 3:11). Fifth, revelation of judgment and new governing conditions is included to complete the transition into the new dispensation. Finally, the new governing conditions are, in this case, themselves a form of judgment.

From Conscience to Civil Government

Conscience lasts until the flood judgment and exit of Noah from the ark. The transitional period surrounding the end of the Conscience period may be said to include the flood judgment itself and the post-flood revelation from God concerning the limited uniformity of seasons, the ability of mankind to eat meat, the regulations concerning capital punishment, and the covenant of the rainbow. God at this point has delegated further responsibilities to man to implement His governmental rule over mankind through capital punishment, laying the groundwork for the eventual development of other preventive and punitive governmental measures to curb sin. By these means the dispensational rule is extended over the earth. This means that the proper administrative activities of God's dispensation are, because God delegated it to men, themselves susceptible to human disobedience. The governing relationship established by God therefore dovetails with human responsibility and itself becomes a test of mankind.⁴¹

These events are covered in the Scriptures between Gen 7:11 and 9:17. The flood is included in the transitional period because by that means the Lord was ending the period of His rule in mankind through His Spirit (Gen 6:3). The new revelation from God is included because the transition into the new dispensation is incomplete without it.

In addition to the revelatory activity of God during the transition, His judgment activity for the earlier failure (Gen 6:5) is involved in the transition period. The transition is a year long.

⁴¹ Incidentally, today such failure is evident in many countries where capital punishment is not practiced.

From Civil Government to Promise

The dispensation of Civil Government lasts until the Tower of Babel incident and the call of Abram in Gen. 11:8 to 12:1. This transition supplies insights similar to those of the earlier transitions because there is judgment upon the failure of the people to fill the earth (Gen 11:2); and there is new revelation as God calls Abram and makes the great Abrahamic covenant with him. This revelation is repeated and detailed in several more instances in Abraham's life, but the transition is essentially finished by Gen 12:7. One additional insight is afforded, namely that the dispensational transition deals with the selection of an individual (and family) out of the families of the earth. The other families are left in the previous dispensational conditions. Thus, there is a "narrowing" or "focusing" of God's dispensational program during this transition period. Such narrowing is important to note as a feature of a dispensational transition.

From Promise to Mosaic Law

The dispensation of promise continues from Abram's call to the Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Law to the infant nation of Israel. The departure started in Exodus 12:1 with the Passover observance. The giving of the Law extended from Exodus 19 through the entire book of Leviticus until the Israelites left the Sinai. Chronologically, this transitional period was 13 months and 20 days (Ex 12:1, 40:17, Num. 10:11). The dispensation of the Mosaic Law continues through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

First, note again that the transition period is quite lengthy – over a year in this case. Second, the Passover, a feast kept during the Law period, was kept before the official giving of the Law. Nevin notes that this constitutes an antecedent continuing principle, one that anticipated

the time when it would be officially instituted.⁴² For purposes of this paper, this may be considered a transitional feature of the new dispensation introduced ahead of time. Third, through the judgment of God on the Egyptians, He effects a major shift in the political landscape of the middle east. The Israelites are established under a new form of government and the Egyptians are badly defeated.

From Law to Grace

The transition period between the Mosaic Law and the Church age is at least from the time of the crucifixion until Pentecost. Clarence Larkin suggests that this transition period lasts much longer: from the Cross in 30 A.D. until Jerusalem is destroyed in 70 A.D.⁴³ The transition period may be tightened up since most Church revelation was given through Paul by 68 A.D. The book of Jude and John's letters are perhaps the only ones that come after this date, no later than 100 A.D. On the other end, the transitional period should also include the Upper Room discourse and other post-rejection teachings of the Lord. Whatever position one takes on the placement of the Kingdom rejection and length of the transition into Grace, the completion of revelation sufficient to put the new dispensation on "solid footing" took a significant amount of time.

Transitional events are noted especially in the book of Acts. For example, the problem over Jewish practices at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Or, Paul's encounter with disciples of John the Baptist in Acts 19. These events took place around 49 and 55 A.D. respectively. In both instances, the transitional nature of practices remaining from the previous dispensation and new practices from the age of grace are seen. These are resolved through new revelation and the propagated through the teaching of the apostles.

⁴² Paul D. Nevin, "Some Major Problems in Dispensational Interpretation." (Unpublished Th.D. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary), pp. 120ff.

⁴³ Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth*, (1918, Enlarged and Revised Edition 1920, 16th Printing), p. 127.

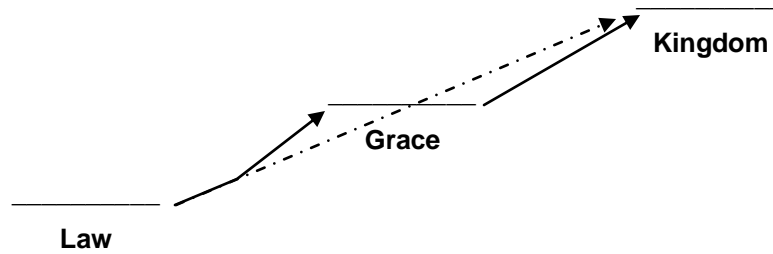


Figure 1: The Dispensational view of the Kingdom offer and rejection in Matthew's Gospel.

The Law-Grace transition is arguably the most complex transition between two dispensations. Since the kingdom is offered in the early ministry of our Lord, but rejected by the Jews, there is what may be called a "false start" of a dispensational transition. Another transition is instituted instead. This is shown pictorially in Figure 1. The initial (announced) change from Law to the Kingdom is shown by the dashed line. (This is obviously a hypothetical transition since God allowed his offer to be rejected.) The crook in the solid line between Law and Grace indicates the rejection of the kingdom offer, the postponing of the kingdom program, and the movement toward the Church age.

As for principles to glean about transitional periods, note first the usual elements of time and new revelation during this transition period. Second, notice the overlapping of Jewish and Christian features from the old and new dispensations. This admixture of practices makes it necessary to use great care in taking the book of Acts as normative for today.

Third, it is seen that God involved the apostles in announcing the dispensational change from the Law of Moses to the age of grace. This places a limitation on the "immediacy" of the dispensational change – there were a limited number of apostles with limited time to teach in limited regions – so that God's dealings with man may be formally changed over a short period of time (say, at the cross) but it takes a while to implement these changes (until the 40s and 50s, up to 20 years after the cross). Obviously much time was required for the gospel to be proclaimed

"in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8) using the means of preaching and teaching that God ordained.⁴⁴ In previous dispensational transitions, God did not use such means. The fall and flood dealt with the whole world directly; the call of Abraham was only for him and his family and so was accomplished directly; and at the giving of the Law, the entire nation was present at Sinai to receive the revelation of God directly and through Moses. During the change to the sixth dispensation, God did not make an announcement or judgment directly on all those involved in the new dispensation (the whole world).

This brings us to the fourth transitional principle that we learn from the Law-Grace transition, and that is that there is a broadening aspect of the transition to the age of grace. God moves back to a world-wide level from Abraham, where he narrowed, so to speak, his focus in the dispensational plan to the Abrahamic line. Now, the command is to go to all the nations (Matt 28:19); previously, Abraham was called out specifically and the nation of Israel was called God's own "peculiar treasure...above all people" (Ex 19:5). God in His sovereign good pleasure turned from a single family/nation to a world-wide governance in this transition period. The transition period evidences a movement toward this "broadening" purpose.

Finally, note the "false start" criteria, that a dispensational program may be announced but set aside, as when the kingdom was rejected and the age of grace was ushered in.

⁴⁴ The reader may ask, "If the dispensational change is tied to the proclamation of the dispensation, when does the transitional period actually end?" The job of proclaiming the gospel is never finished, for it is to go on until the end of the age. So, the end of the transition period should not be tied to the completion of proclamation but to the completion of the distinct revelation defining the dispensation. In other words, people who do not hear about the dispensational change do not have an excuse nor do they personally "hold up" the changeover from one dispensation to the next. It is still true that the dispensation has changed and that they are responsible to God under its terms (e.g. Acts 4:12).

From Grace to the Millennial Kingdom

The next dispensational transition is that from Grace to the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. The transitional time frame involves the judgment during the tribulation until 75 days after the tribulation period as marked out by Daniel (12:12), a time just over seven years in length. Obviously the only revelation we have at this point is the predictive revelation in the Apocalypse of John and the OT prophets. It seems clear that God will deliver further revelation during the Tribulation, through the 144,000 witnesses (Rev 7:1-8, Isa 66:19) and angelic pronouncements of the gospel and judgment. The tribulation may be seen as the closing judgment of the dispensation of Grace on the world for its rebellion against God, but it nonetheless brings Israel to the center stage again. Thus, the nation becomes a focal point even before its Millennial glory begins. Carry-overs from the age of grace are evident as the work of Christ will be a conscious basis of faith for the Israelite nation. The transition will start imminently and it ends dramatically with the return of the Lord.

Here of course we do not have the advantage of looking through the eyes of history at the transition to the Kingdom age since it has not yet occurred. The revelation we do have is consistent with those principles already laid out, namely that there is a time element and a new revelation element to the dispensational transition. There is an admixture of the previous and the following dispensations in this period. God's designs are, in one sense, again narrowed from a world-wide scene to a national scene. The world is still in view as far as receiving judgments and relating to the nation of Israel.

Transition out of the Kingdom into the Eternal State

The final two and a half chapters in the Bible deal with the transition from the kingdom into the eternal state (Rev 20:8-22:21). Here again is a scene of judgment, this time at the great

white throne. The new heaven and new earth are formed during this transitional period. As in the first few dispensations, the revelatory material here is sparse so not much more on the transitional nature can be drawn out. The transition out of the historical program accompanies a supernatural creation event, just as the transition into the first dispensation was accomplished after God's initial creative activity.

Conclusions

We have seen several aspects of a dispensational transition. Since a dispensation can be described by time and revelatory activity, we expect the transition periods to be full of these. That is exactly what we have found in the above analysis of the eight transitional periods. In addition to these two basic elements, there are several other aspects that may or may not characterize a dispensational transition. To summarize, dispensational transitions are characterized by one or more of the following features:

1. Time is required for judgment and revelation. The time for these periods can be quite lengthy.
2. Revelation is given by God to delineate the failure in the old dispensation, judgments for those failures, new responsibilities, and new penalties and rewards. The completion of new revelation regarding the economic program marks the end of the transitional period.
3. Features of the earlier dispensation often spill over into the transitional period; likewise features of the next dispensation are often "started early" during the transitional period.
4. Judgments for failure in the completed dispensation are often a prominent feature of the transitional period.
5. The "narrowing" of God's focus from a world-wide dispensational arrangement to a specific people may occur; or the opposite may occur, where God's focus "broadens" from a par-

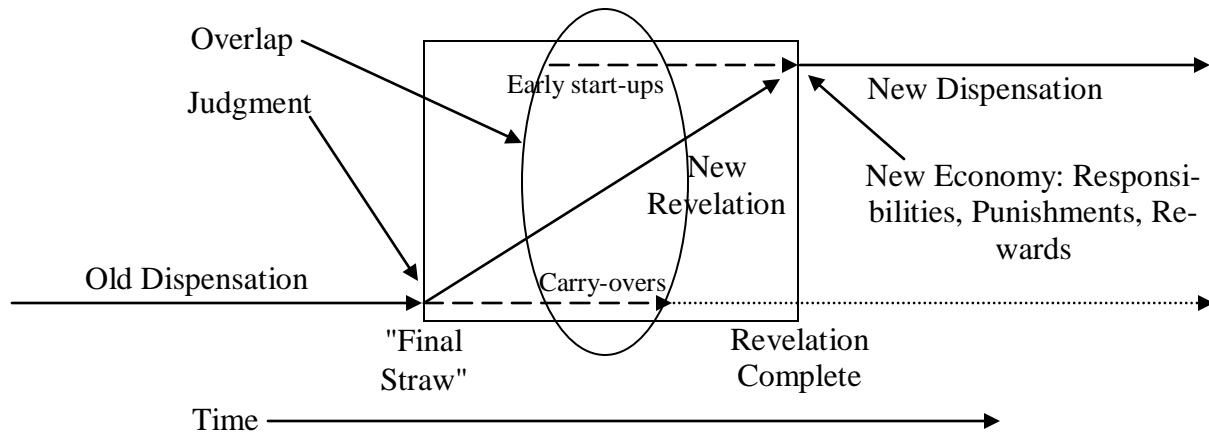


Figure 2: Diagram of the transitional period between two dispensations. Notice the staircase feature of the diagram, indicating progress from one dispensation to the next. The heavy dashed arrow at the bottom of the diagram indicates transitional features out of the old dispensation; some of those may be carried out into the new dispensation. Other features may be "started early" as indicated by the heavy dashed arrow at the top of the diagram and thus overlap the carry-overs from the earlier dispensation.

ticular group of people to a larger group.

6. A major shift in geo-political affairs may take place, as it did with the formation of the nation of Israel at the expense of the Egyptian power, or as was proposed during the Lord's ministry.

7. The announcement of the dispensational change may be made directly to the entire community affected; or, it may not be made immediately and directly to the entire group. God may instead use temporal means, such as the preaching of the apostles, to establish and proclaim the change of economies.

8. The revelation for a new dispensation may begin in a transition period before the transition is aborted in favor of another, as with the revelation of the kingdom of God which was rejected by the nation of Israel.

Some of these features are shown pictorially in Figure 2.

CHAPTER IV

THE SERMON IN LIGHT OF DISPENSATIONAL TRANSITIONS

After the long silence of revelation in the inter-testamental period, the kingdom forerunner comes on the scene followed by the king himself. Both are proclaiming a message of repentance, faith, and kingdom nearness. We may say then that the Law-Kingdom transition period is initiated and underway. Based on our survey in the previous chapter, we expect a number of features to be present in the Sermon, since it is part of a transitional period. This chapter describes the Sermon and attempts to resolve some interpretive problems in light of these features.

1. There is time required for the transition into the kingdom economy. There is no need to detail this aspect, as it is present in every dispensational transition.

2. As the Lord itinerates throughout Israel, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, he is giving copious new revelation to fill in the details of the transition. In the general case, transitional revelation contains judgments and new responsibilities. For this transition, it appears the revelation has to do primarily with new responsibilities and spiritual emphases for the kingdom dispensation. The Sermon revelation clearly delineates both the failure of the Jews to obey the Law and also gives the correct (non-Pharisaic) interpretation of the Law.

3. Features from the previous dispensation are clearly seen in the attachment to the Mosaic Law. This will be examined in more detail in the following pages. Features of the kingdom are already present, particularly the King Himself.

4. Post-Law judgments do not seem to be a prominent feature in the Lord's ministry.

Woes and denouncements of the religious leaders of the day do surface from time to time.

5. Notice also that there is no narrowing or broadening of the dispensational focus during the Lord's early kingdom announcement ministry. Gentiles are specifically mentioned as not in view (1:21, 10:5-6, 15:24). The Sermon was delivered in this portion of the Lord's ministry.

6. A shift in political affairs is indicated by the pronouncement of the kingdom, though not ever realized because of the switch into the age of grace.

7. The Lord used an itinerant method of evangelism, similar to what we see in the apostles' work in the transition to Grace. Thus, the transition was to be accomplished using temporal means. In fact, the means were not only dependent on the king and kingdom heralds, but also on the recipients of the message. The offer of the Kingdom was so bona fide that we say the transition was already under way but that it could be rejected. The Lord's desire was that the people would accept his offer to be their king (Matt 23:37), He did not force the kingdom on them.

8. As indicated earlier, the transition period of the Kingdom of God was under way. Unfortunately, the rejection of the nation caused the "end" of this "beginning." Matt 21:43 says "the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Judgment was prophesied on Jerusalem in Matt 24. The new dispensation of grace was shortly inaugurated. These factors may make it seem like the "mini kingdom period" during the Lord's earthly ministry was a small dispensation in itself, including a *failure* on the part of the Jews to meet the *test* of the Lord's revelation, and a corresponding *judgment* on the nation. This idea cannot be taken too far, however, because the kingdom was not brought into full operation. The distinguishable economy part of the definition of a dispensation cannot be seen for this "mini kingdom" because the transition was never completed. We prefer to see the Sermon as part of the aborted transition.

A Transitional Approach to the Sermon on the Mount

This section describes a modified approach to the Sermon which refines the earlier dispensational views in light of what has been learned above.

The Lord began his ministry by proclaiming a message of repentance (Matt 4:17), belief in the gospel of the kingdom (Mark 1:15), and the "at hand" nature of the kingdom (Matt 4:17). The kingdom is immediately near or "available" in the person of the king. He is looking for "a few good men," that is, subjects over which to rule. *In the Sermon the Lord Jesus Christ unmasks the failure of the Jews to meet the requirements of the Law and defines the righteous intent of the Law in order to delineate the proper reaction to His call for repentance and belief in light of the kingdom announcement. Thus the Lord's revelation in the Sermon is integral in effecting the transition from the Mosaic economy to the Kingdom economy.* The themes of failure and call for responsible obedience mark the Sermon as transitional, even as other dispensational transitions are marked by these features. The Sermon answers the questions of the Jewish hearer, "What should I do in light of this message of repentance and the kingdom's nearness? How shall I react to this transition that is being introduced to me?" The Sermon addresses Matthew's church audience by showing that the Kingdom transition was underway, but (according to the remainder of Matthew's gospel) it was aborted by the rejection of the Jewish nation. It answers the question of a Jewish Christian, "What happened to the Kingdom?"

The Sermon does not include all the revelation that one would need in order to know how to qualify as "a good man" fit to be a subject in the kingdom; nor does it fully detail the Kingdom constitution; nor does it make a sharp distinction between the proper reaction in the face of the announcement (the interim) and the behavior in the kingdom (the constitution). These elements are not expected due to the transitional nature of the Sermon. The Sermon does not stop at a

statement of repentance: the Lord indeed calls for a turning away from sin like the prophets of old, and He adds a positive statement of belief and righteousness as well.

Benefits of the Kingdom Transition View of the Sermon

What is the value of viewing the Sermon through a dispensational transition grid? This can be determined by reviewing the points of dispensational debate on the Sermon which were introduced in Chapter I. This will be done in two parts: first, four of those issues can be easily resolved by looking at the Sermon's transitional nature; two issues are not solved by the transitional approach.

Regarding the question of whether the Sermon applies only to the conditions on the earth during the millennial kingdom or only during the interim, the answer is technically neither. Instead the Sermon applies to the transitional period from the Mosaic economy to the Kingdom economy. This may seem like a hair-splitting distinction, but the Sermon is situated in a transitional period of change from one dispensation to the next and has transitional features from both the earlier and later dispensations. To make it apply to one or the other (interim or Kingdom) is to miss the point that it applied to the hearer of the Sermon in the transitional period as soon as it was given, because it was part of the revelational means God was using to effect the transition into the Kingdom. There is no "interim" dispensation where the Law is outmoded and a new governing relationship is established in anticipation of the coming Kingdom dispensation. The dispensational debate comes about because of the overlap of features of the earlier and later dispensation.

As for the related view that says the Sermon applies to any time the kingdom is offered,⁴⁵ this is doubtful when examined in light of the transitional nature of the Sermon. The Sermon is in

⁴⁵ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 100.

the Law-Kingdom transition which ended up being aborted; the future tribulation is in the Grace-Kingdom transition period. Different transitional features will prevail in that future transitional period. For instance, the conditions prevalent in first century Israel under the Pharisees, which form a major basis of the Sermon's teaching in the antitheses of chapter 5 and the corrections of chapter 6 will probably not be replicated in the tribulation period. Only by indirect application will these principles be relevant at the future time. As another example, the Kingdom will not be "offered" at that future time; it will come whether particular people want it to or not. Further, transitional features in the Grace-Kingdom period must be modified to include the accomplished death of Christ, an element not present in the transitional period which the Sermon covers, but most definitely will be present as a carry-over from Grace to the Kingdom.

Regarding the application to the Church, it is a common misconception that the Sermon's teachings should be considered directly relevant to the church because of Matt 28:18-20, which says "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (20a).⁴⁶ It is said therefore that "The sermon must be germane to the purpose of Matthew...in ethical value to the believers within this age to whom he is writing."⁴⁷ Martin writes in the same vein:

"In Matthew 28:20 the disciples are instructed to teach new converts to observe all that He had commanded them. Given Matthew's theology, what teachings could Jesus have been referring to other than the discourse sections that highlight the book?...The Sermon sets forth the life that is to be the mark of the believer. It is unattainable, but nevertheless it is to be attempted by disciples in dependence on God."⁴⁸

The transitional view of the Sermon demands that such a blanket connection must not be made between the Great Commission and the rest of Matthew's gospel, because much of Mat-

⁴⁶ Harry Sturz, "The Sermon on the Mount and Its Application to the Present Age," *Grace Journal* 4 (Fall, 1963), p. 13.

⁴⁷ David M. Doran, "A Dispensational Approach to the Sermon on the Mount" (Unpublished Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary Seminar paper, October 6, 1987), pp. 6-7.

⁴⁸ Martin, "Dispensational Approaches to the Sermon on the Mount," pp. 47, 48.

thew's gospel belongs to the Law-Kingdom transition, not the transition into the Church age (much less the fully-revealed glory of the Church economy). Otherwise *all* the commands of Christ in the gospel would have some kind of binding force on the Christian. But this is obviously not the case. For example, the Lord says in Matt 23:1b-2a, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do..." But this is addressed to the multitude and to the disciples and obviously promotes obedience to the Mosaic Law, which is obviously *not* still binding on the Christian in the present age. See Rom 6:14, 7:4, and 7:6 for texts which teach clearly that the Christian is not "under law" but is instead "dead to the Law" and "delivered from the Law." Other texts in Matthew's gospel also demonstrate the point that "all" of what Jesus said is not directly applicable to the Church. The commission to the disciples in Matt 10:5-6 to avoid preaching to Gentiles and Samaritans, and the Lord's statement in 15:24 that he was sent "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" are obviously out-moded by the later command given in the Great Commission to evangelize the whole world and the progressive revelation given in the last supper that the Lord was to die for "many for the remission of sins" (Matt 26:28), not just for Jews. Further, text in the Sermon itself, such as 5:23-24, which mentions the altar, is obviously not directly applicable to the Christian today, there being no altar in this age. Transitionally speaking, the broadening aspect of the Law-Grace transition occurs late in the Lord's ministry; the Sermon remains in the more narrowly focused Israelite setting where the Church is not in view. Note that our argument does not suggest that no part of the Sermon is *applicable* to the Christian, just that it is not *necessarily* the case that all of it *must* be applicable. Chafer agrees with this conclusion, saying:

"There is, therefore, a possible limitation to be placed on the extent of the responsibility imposed by Christ in His great commission wherein He said: 'teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you' (Matt. 28:20). It is hardly probable that He intends all the Mosaic Law, the governing principles of the kingdom, and the teachings of

grace to be combined and applied to those who receive the message of the great commission."⁴⁹

Similar arguments for the Sermon's applicability to the Church are made based on 1 Pet 2:21 and 1 John 2:6. These can be handled as above. The conclusion is that the Sermon, viewed in its proper transitional light, has nothing to say directly to the Church economy.⁵⁰

Regarding the view of righteousness in the Sermon, recall that the question is this: is the righteousness described in the Sermon a new, intensified standard of righteousness? Are the Pharisees righteous and the people need to super-exceed this righteousness in order to get into the kingdom? Transitional thought helps to answer this question because a new standard of righteousness does not seem to be revealed in any of the other dispensational transitions. Though this may be styled an argument from silence, God's righteousness is the standard all the time: it is an undercurrent that "carries over," unchanged, into every dispensation. For example, regarding Noah: "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations" (Gen 6:9). Regarding Abraham: "the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen 17:1). Regarding Job: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1). Regarding the nation of Israel: "Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God" (Deut. 18:13). Regarding God Himself: "As for God, His way is perfect" (Ps 18:30). And now in the Sermon, the Lord Jesus Christ calls to Israel: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt 5:48). The Lord in the Sermon is calling Israel back to the perfect standard that God demands in all ages, not some brand new standard previously unknown.

⁴⁹ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:177.

⁵⁰ We remind the reader of our presupposition that the Sermon is profitable to the believer. As all transitional periods between dispensations, it must be treated with extreme care by the believer, who has nothing to do with either the Law or Kingdom dispensations, the transitional periods with which the Sermon deals. For a dispensational application of the Sermon to the Church, see Pentecost, *Design for Living*.

Regarding the condition of the audience, we should expect that the audience would be in somewhat of a transitional existence. Not all of the Lord's audience were repentant and baptized disciples, though some undoubtedly were (Matt 7:28).

Issues Not Solved by the Kingdom Transition View

Two of the issues initially proposed in this paper are not directly solvable using dispensational transition concepts. For instance, the basic hermeneutic used in the Sermon cannot be determined by the concepts we learned regarding dispensational transitions. This must be resolved through other means. The consistent literal approach advocated by dispensationalism itself should be observed. A complementary or spiritual hermeneutic should not be used.

Regarding the question of the relation of the Sermon to the Mosaic Law, the Law is clearly upheld (5:17-19; 7:12). Since this is a transitional period, it could be changed but it need not be. Our position is that the Law is *not* changed in the Sermon, but rather the Sermon reminds the hearers of the true spiritual nature of the Law. Congdon shows the OT connections which demonstrate this.⁵¹ In fact, the Lord uses the proper view of the Law to demonstrate the Jews' failure under the old dispensation and calls them to a renewed obedience to the Law.

⁵¹ Congdon, "Did Jesus Sustain the Law in Matthew 5?"

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The intramural debate between dispensational interpreters of the Sermon was highlighted. The major dispensational interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount were then reviewed and found to have some support, but also clear problems from the text of the Sermon. The kingdom and interim views alone are not completely satisfactory, because elements of both are true. Neither is the entrance requirement view completely satisfactory, for there are elements of "living requirements" that are just as appropriate during the kingdom age as before.

Scriptural data were then examined to determine the characteristics of dispensational transitions, those periods of time when God's governing relationship to the world or some people group is in the process of being changed. In summary, eight such characteristics were found.

These observations were applied to the Sermon and a modified interpretation of the Sermon called the Kingdom Transition view was proposed. This view says that the Lord Jesus Christ preached the Sermon to demonstrate (negatively) the failure of the Jews to keep the Law and to declare (positively) the righteous intent of the Law, in order to elicit a reaction of repentance and belief on the part of the audience. As such, the Sermon is an integral portion of the Law-Kingdom transition period. Features of both the Law and Kingdom are present.

It was observed that several interpretive problems indicated in the first chapters of this paper are satisfactorily addressed by the Kingdom Transition interpretation of the Sermon. It was also noted that some of the issues are not solved by this approach.

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APPENDIX: OUTLINE OF THE SERMON

1. Setting.....	5:1-2
2. Beatitudes	5:3-12
3. Salt and Light.....	5:13-16
4. The Sermon and the Law	5:17-20
A. Not to be set aside.....	5:17-18
B. Righteousness in the Kingdom.....	5:19-20
5. Righteousness in Inter-Personal Relationships.....	5:21-48
A. Murder and Anger	5:21-26
B. Adultery and Lust	5:27-30
C. Divorce.....	5:31-32
D. Oaths and Reliable Speech.....	5:33-37
E. Retribution and Love.....	5:38-47
F. Summary Statement	5:48
6. Righteousness in Religious Motives	6:1-18
A. Almsgiving.....	6:1-4
B. Prayer	6:5-15
C. Fasting.....	6:16-18
7. Righteousness in Personal Matters.....	6:19-34
A. Heart and Treasures	6:19-21
B. Eye, Light and Darkness	6:22-23
C. Undivided Loyalty	6:24
D. Unfettered Priority.....	6:25-34
8. Miscellaneous Instructions	7:1-12
A. Judging.....	7:1-5
B. Pearls and Swine.....	7:6
C. Expectation of Good Gifts from God	7:7-11
D. Summary Statement: Golden Rule	7:12
9. Entrance into the Kingdom.....	7:13-23
A. Entrance by the Narrow Way	7:13-14
B. False Prophets Known by Their Fruit.....	7:15-20
C. Entrance to Those Who Do the Will of God.....	7:21-23
10. Conclusion: Call to Hear and Obey.....	7:24-27
11. Reaction of the People.....	7:28-29

I must deal with issue of kingdom constitution (rule of life) by Chafer because I don't see where he actually shows how it is a rule of life in the kingdom.

Mauro: pg. 179: My main purpose in the present chapter is to show more fully than has yet been done in the preceding pages that the Sermon on the Mount exhibits in every part thereof the character of grace.

Mauro: pg. 182: We do not find in it any explanation of the means by which those addressed would be made to children of God; but such explanation is not called for in the address in the form given to it as a part of the *written Word*. (italics his).

A common misconception regarding the Sermon has to do with the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. In Matt 5:20 this is made a benchmark of comparison for entrance into the kingdom: "except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Chafer says on this point, "The scribes and Pharisees attended upon the law in their age, but a greater or more perfect righteousness than theirs will be demanded of those who enter the kingdom."⁵² Another writer says that the "righteousness taught by the King surpasses the scribes and Pharisees' practice of righteousness to receive the acknowledgement of men."⁵³ Rand writes "It is patent that the law of the kingdom as revealed in Matthew 5-7 is a much higher standard than that which prevailed during the Mosaic dispensation...it is a greatly intensified Mosaic law which will be enforced in the kingdom."⁵⁴ These statements suggest that the scribes and Pharisees possessed some mid-grade kind of righteousness, but a higher level of righteousness had to be obtained by the disciples in order to enter the kingdom. The rest of the Sermon's text, however, does not bear this idea out—indeed the disciples needed more righteousness than the Pharisees, but the Pharisees were not really righteous at all. Rather, the scribes and Pharisees are shown to have a mere appearance of outward righteousness. Consider the Lord's use of the word "hypocrite" to describe these whose righteousness must be exceeded to enter the kingdom (6:20, 5, 16). Their "righteousness" was one of self-

⁵² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 5, pp. 106-7.

⁵³ Ken Bowles, "How Does the Dispensationalist Interpret the Sermon on the Mount," home.usmo.com/~kocu/SOM.html, pg. 11.

⁵⁴ Rand, "Studies in the Sermon on the Mount," 5.

aggrandizement through religious acts performed in public. It must have been no mystery to the first century Jew that this was sheer veneer with no substance. A Jew properly related to God would understand that this sort of pride is clearly a sin in the Lord's eyes (Prov 6:16-19). To correct this misconception, it is better to take the Lord's words in 5:20 to refer to a *commonly held view that the Pharisees seemed* very righteous, though in fact, upon observation, they were not at all so. They were not really "practitioners of the Mosaic law" though they did hold to some outer form of the Law. Further, to do as Blaising and Bock have done, to attach the righteousness to a dispensation, misses the point that the Sermon is talking about a kind of righteousness which is in accord with God himself (Matt 5:48, 6:33), not with a particular period of time.