

The Violent Are Taking the Kingdom of Heaven by Force?

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Think of a Sheepfold brimming with fat sheep, full of feed and of pride. They have all they need and more. They have become so satisfied, in fact, that they nomuch prefer to speak of their food in their own terms than even to actually eat the food any longer. Don't try to tell them who The Shepherd (God) favors, for He has been providing them with the food (His Word) for generation upon generation. These are the sheep inside the fold. And the fold has become their fortress. A fortress that now they cannot escape, for the leaders among them (The Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees) over the eons, have been piling the stones and twigs, dirt and branches of their own tangled ideas at the entrance of the fold so that the gate is now inoperable and their fortress is impenetrable. And they like it that way! Outside of the fold, there are other sheep, bedraggled, gaunt, and starving. Their plaintive cries as they yearn for the food stashed inside the fold, ever increasing in intensity as their numbers and their need grow. The sheep inside the fold say to those outside, "*You're baaad!*" "*Go! Get away from here!*" "*You can't have any of this food!*" "*It's only for us!*"

Here comes the Breaker. The Breaker tears down the gate and all of the mounded debris. The Breaker is the Messiah. Now there is a breach where there was a barricade. The hungry, determined sheep rush in. They feast! Oh, how they have longed for this! And so, they eat! As they eat, The Breaker informs the sheep that the very food (word) from the Shepherd, that the satiated sheep have had in abundance over the centuries, and which the emaciated sheep have had to do without, in fact, reveals Him to be the very son of their Shepherd, and He has come to deliver any and all of them who will follow Him to freedom. As they depart, the fat sheep that choose to remain begin immediately to reconstruct the wall.

Read **Matthew 11:1-19**. Is there a particular verse in that text that seems to be out of place or strange in the way it comes across? Look at the title of this article. Reflect upon my little story of the sheep. Focus on the second part of **Matthew 11:12**. "*Violence*" in this New Testament text is the Greek term, "*biazeti*", which basically means, "*A force exerted*": the intense passion required to live kingdom of Christ values in a world whose values war against such. "*The violent*" in this text is from the Greek, "*biaste*", meaning "*someone who is forceful or resolute*". These are not evil people attacking God's Kingdom; these are people who are so desperate to enter God's Kingdom that they are pressing through every barrier, every obstacle, every wall of resistance to lay hold of it (**Luke 16:16**). They are not criminals or rebels, but spiritually hungry people, very intent on accessing what they need.

Micah 2:13 is the verse that Jesus was referencing in **Matthew 11:12**. It was an oblique sort of reference from the Septuagint Greek translation of the text. **Micah 2:13** is talking about a spiritual breakthrough in the context of the coming of the Messiah. The breaker, the Messiah, opens the way, and the people rush in. From the old covenant Hebrew perspective, it is a picture of a sheep pen, a fold, and "*The Breaker*", "*Haparetz*," comes forward, smashing the gate open. There is a rushing in and a rushing out to follow their leader, Christ the Lord, to freedom. "*Since the days of John*," (the cousin of Jesus, the immerser), indicates when the break occurred. A breaking out of the imprisonment to Judaism and a breaking in to the Kingdom of Christ that occur simultaneously in connection with John's announcement of the Messiah. Among the Jews, not everyone was happy to see tax collectors and sinners, and especially the Gentiles, breaking in.

Jesus was not then, or now, directing His followers to acts of political violence or rebellion; He was painting a vivid picture to show that something had changed. The gates of heaven have been opened. The hungry, who have nothing to lose, the desperate, are storming the kingdom, not with swords, but with faith, with sheer determination; breaking through shame, guilt, tradition, legalism, fear, and all of the barriers which had formerly been in their way. They are rushing after their Shepherd. Jesus was not advocating chaos or political upheaval, but spiritual breakthrough, a holy surge of humanity reaching through for what had been locked away for centuries.

John was already imprisoned by the time Jesus uttered these words. John was about to be beheaded. But God's kingdom can never be subdued or opposed by human violence. The Kingdom presses ahead relentlessly. And only the relentless press their way into it! Other expressions are found in Matthew 7:13, 14. It isn't going to be easy! There is only ONE gate, and we must look for the opening that the opener Jesus makes for us. This gate is constrictive! It is precise! It is salvation through Christ alone! It is God's way! The only way that leads to salvation, **Acts 4:12**.

The breach has been made. The Good Shepherd stands waiting to show us the way. The Kingdom is open, but only the determined will lay hold of it. Are you willing to break through and follow Jesus?