

MATTHEW 7:14 - WHY ACCURACY IN BIBLE INTERPRETATION IS NOT NEGOTIABLE

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The following were quoted in a newsletter of Kenneth Gentry¹ in which he dealt with a question of a reader on the implications of Matthew 7:14 (my accentuations).

Dispensationalist Louis Barbieri writing Dallas Seminary's Bible Knowledge Commentary (BKC, 2:34) writes: "Even the Lord Jesus acknowledged that few would find the true way, the way that leads to life (i.e., to heaven, in contrast with ruin in hell)."

A. B. Bruce writing in the class Expositor's Greek Testament (1:132) comments on our passage: "The passage itself contains no clue to the right way except that it is the way of the few."

In his controversial The Gospel According to Jesus, well-respected dispensationalist pastor John MacArthur (191) stated that there cannot be a billion Christians in the world because "such figures certainly do not square with what Jesus said about many on the broad road and few on the narrow."

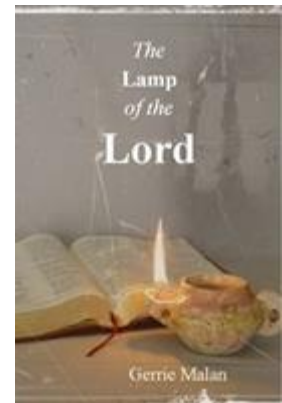
Reformed amillennialist scholar Herman Hanko agrees: "There are several passages in the scriptures which refer to the fact that the number of the saved, though a great multitude, is nevertheless, relatively speaking small. Texts such as Matthew 7:14 and 22:14 are referred to in this connection. . . . It is like a narrow way, and there are only a few who enter this way." (Hanko, "An Exegetical Refutation of Postmillennialism," 15.)

In his highly-regarded Systematic Theology (1124) premillennialist scholar Wayne Grudem writes of this passage: "Jesus seems here to be saying that those who are saved will be 'few' in contrast to the 'many' who travel toward eternal destruction."

What we have here are a number of well-known names in the world of theology, coming from both the Reformed (Hanko) and Evangelical environments (the rest). Bruce was a Scottish theologian, while the others are from the United States of America. As one can see, they have written extensive works which have been/are widely read and studied.

The essence of these gentlemen's views is that only a relatively few people will be saved in contrast to the many who have been, are and will be travelling toward eternal damnation. Whichever way one wishes to look at their statements, it is difficult to deny that they unavoidably take the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination to a new level. No longer did God pre-ordain some to eternal salvation and some to eternal damnation before the foundation of the earth (a doctrine I do not agree with in its general understanding), but only a relative few have so been pre-ordained to salvation. No, they did not state so directly, but that is the unavoidable implication of their views.

In my book, *The Lamp Of The Lord*, in which I try to present the biblical perspective of the human soul, I made the point that less than accurate Scripture interpretation may provide easy answers in one instance, but it will unavoidably create problems in another. These observations on the biblical narrow way concept again illustrate the truth of my conclusion. With this said, let us look at Matthew 7:14 qas well as its parallels in the Gospels.



In His sermon on the mount, Jesus of Nazareth was talking to the multitudes in their present tense. He was teaching them about their time, including a warning against false prophets. Bear in mind that Jesus continuously spoke against Jerusalem and the religious leadership in His parables. This context for His words on the narrow way can again be clearly seen in the Luke 13:22-29 parallel. Also, bear in mind that the Lord Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). There is no other way to the Father. As such He is the Narrow Way and history records His rejection by the vast majority of the people and religious leaders of Judah and Jerusalem of that time.

Gentry quite rightly points out that the Bible speaks of great numbers of the redeemed elsewhere. For example, and soon after His statement of Matthew 7:14, the Lord Jesus is found to say that **many** will come from the east and west to recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 8:11). Revelation 7:9 also refers to a great number of the redeemed.

We often hear John 3:16 quoted, especially around Christmas – that God loved the world (the *kosmos* or humanity) so much that He gave His only begotten Son for their salvation. But what about the next two verses?

“For God did not send His own Son into the world [the kosmos or humanity] that He might condemn the world [the kosmos or humanity], but that the world [kosmos or humanity] might be saved through Him. Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God.”²

Because some might understandably want to apply the common theological argumentation to justify the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, i.e. that those who (will want to) believe will be the predestined ones, let us look at one other passage of Scripture in winding up.

“For the grace of God has appeared, with salvation for all people.” (Tit 2:11)³

With these few notes I think I have been able to illustrate once more why it is so important to rightly divide the word of truth. And the wise words of A.W. Tozer resound in my mind once more:

*"It would be impossible to overemphasize the importance of sound doctrine in the life of a Christian. Right thinking about all spiritual matters is imperative if we would have right living. As men do not gather grapes of thorns nor figs of thistles, sound character does not grow out of unsound teaching...All a man, a church or a denomination needs to guarantee deterioration of doctrine is to take everything for granted and do nothing. The unattended garden will soon be overrun with weeds; the heart that fails to cultivate truth and root out error will shortly be a theological wilderness."*⁴

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¹ GENTRY, KENNETH. 2013. *The Narrow Gate And The Post Millennial Hope*. 4 June.

² Holman Illustrated Study Bible. 2006. Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers.

³ Holman Illustrated Study Bible.

⁴ TOZER, A.W. Chapter 37. The Importance of Sound Doctrine. *Man – Dwelling Place of God*. www.worldinvisible.com/library/tozer/5j00.0010.37.htm