Violence in Heaven
Scripture: Matthew 11
Code: BQ032612

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. (11:12)

Even if a man has outstanding character and an outstanding calling, he must also have opportunity in order to reach the potential of his greatness. **John the Baptist** entered the scene of history at precisely the right time-according to God's own plan, prediction, and provision. After 400 years with no word from the Lord, Israel was expectant; and until Jesus began His own ministry, John was the focal point of redemptive history. He was the culmination of Old Testament history and prophecy.

But John generated conflict wherever he went, because his message upset the status quo. With his call for repentance, he stirred up a hornet's nest among the religious leaders and even with the king. Everywhere he moved there was reaction, and often even violence, which eventuated in his being arrested, imprisoned, and finally executed.

From the days of John the Baptist until now (which had been a relatively brief period of time, perhaps eighteen months), **the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force**. Everywhere he went, John evoked strong reaction.

The kingdom of heaven refers to God's general rule, His will for and His work with mankind, especially His chosen people, the Jews. It represents His purpose, message, principles, laws, and activities relating to mankind-all of which had been associated with some form of **violence** since John began preaching.

The form of *biaz* (from which **suffers violence** comes) can be read as either a Greek passive or middle voice. As a passive, it would carry the idea of being oppressed or treated violently, which would indicate that **violence** is brought on **the kingdom of heaven** by those outside of it. The Pharisees and scribes had attacked John verbally, and Herod had attacked him physically. The **kingdom** was being violently denied and rejected; and because it was being rejected in its spiritual dimension, the kingdom would not come in its earthly, millennial dimension. Soon the enemies of the

kingdom would kill not only **John** but even the Messiah Himself. They would destroy both the herald and the King.

In the middle voice the verb carries the active idea of applying force or of entering forcibly-in which case the translation would be, “The kingdom of heaven is vigorously pressing itself forward, and people are forcefully entering it.” With its focus in John the Baptist, the kingdom moved relentlessly through the godless, sin-darkened human system that opposed it.

The first of those two interpretations is negative and the second is positive; but both are true. As already seen, the negative is illustrated by the persecution of John. The positive is illustrated by the many people that John’s preaching led to the Lord, just as the angel predicted: “He will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:16–17).

Although both interpretations are possible and true, the second seems preferable in the context. Jesus had already taught that the few who enter the kingdom do so by first finding and then entering the narrow gate and walking the narrow way (Matt. 7:13–14). He also said that citizenship in His kingdom requires denying self, taking up one’s cross, and following Him (Matt. 16:24; cf. 10:38). Following the Lord demands earnest endeavor, untiring energy, and the utmost exertion. To be a Christian is to swim against the flow of the world, to go against its grain, because the adversary-Satan, his demons, and the world system-are extremely powerful. Those who enter the kingdom of grace through faith in Christ do so with great effort through the sovereign power of the convicting and converting Holy Spirit.

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