

Violent Seize the Kingdom of God

I am having difficulty approaching the word that “the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.” Does this mean that the Kingdom of Heaven is supposed to be a violent force? Has this not been abused in past history by the Church?

There should be little denying how the word about the Kingdom of Heaven “suffering violence,” among other statements appearing in the Gospels, has been misunderstood or misapplied throughout religious history. This statement of Yeshua’s appears twice in the Gospels:

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

“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” (Luke 16:16, NASU).

In Matthew 11:12, the verb commonly rendered as “suffers violence” (NASU), “has been subjected to violence” (TNIV/2011 NIV), or “is treated with violence” (TLV), is *biazetai* (βιάζεται), a third person present passive indicative. The 1984 NIV rendered it inappropriately as “has been forcefully advancing,” with an active sense. Lexically speaking, three different definitions could be considered for Matthew 11:12 and the verb *biazō* (βιάζω): “to inflict violence on, dominate, constrain,” “to gain an objective by force, use force,” or “go after someth. w. enthusiasm, seek fervently, try hard” (BDAG).¹ The Brown and Comfort interlinear has notably rendered *hē basileia tōn ouranōn biazetai* (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν βιάζεται) with the alternative, “the kingdom of the heavens is forcibly entered,”² and the alternative translation “is forcibly entered” also appears in a note in the *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* (NASB).³

One of the most significant perspectives to be recognized here, albeit one which can be rather uncomfortable for various contemporary Believers, is the fact that the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven **is not something that is “safe.”** The Kingdom of Heaven is a supreme power from God the Creator which does manifest itself in force (“the Kingdom of Heaven has been forced” [Matthew 11:12, *Lattimore*]), to change and overthrow the corruption and wickedness of the Kingdom of Darkness. The Kingdom of Heaven is a great prize that those seeking God and His ways do have to reach out for.

Matthew 11:12 is preceded by a word in Matthew 11:11 about John the Immerser/Baptist, who was a prophetic figure whose ministry service was not only marked with controversy, but who was later beheaded (Mark 6:25; Matthew 14:8). The statement about the Kingdom of Heaven either experiencing violence, or being entered into violently, is representative of how when God’s Kingdom begins to manifest itself on the platform of history—controversy and violence will erupt. The Wuest New Testament offers an appropriate expansion of Matthew 11:12: “Indeed, from the days of John the Baptizer until this moment, the kingdom of heaven is being taken by storm, and the strong and forceful ones claim it for themselves eagerly.”⁴

While there might be some unjustifiable acts of violence in Christian history, particularly in Catholicism’s influence on European politics of the Middle Ages, which might have used Matthew 11:11 or Luke 16:16 as

¹ BDAG, 175.

² Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort, trans., *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1990), pp 38-39.

³ Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, NASB (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1994), 1277.

⁴ Kenneth S. Wuest, trans., *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 27.

support—the main emphasis from “the violent grasp hold of it” (Matthew 11:11b, TLV) or “the violent seize it” (my translation; *biastai haparzousin autēn*, βιασταὶ ἀρπάζουσιν αὐτήν), would be in the striving necessary to demonstrate one as worthy of such a Kingdom. **The Kingdom of God is something that God’s people have to fight for!** As Yeshua emphasized,

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14, NASU).

“Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:24, NASU).