

The Meaning of Matthew 11:12

(An appendix for my self-study course on Matthew.
See my more complete study of Luke 16:16.)

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Theology affects translation. Notice how their theology affected NIV translators in Matthew 11:12. Convinced that the kingdom began and could be entered in Jesus' day, they took unusual or mistaken meanings for certain words in Matthew 11:12.

Matthew 11:12 in Two Translations			
Greek for Bolded Words	NIV (has unusual meanings)	NASB (has normal meanings)	Comments
<i>biadzetai</i>	From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing,	And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence,	This verb means rape in Deut. 22:25, 28. In Matt. 11:12, Louw & Nida translate, "suffers violent attacks"; NET, "has suffered violence."
<i>biastai</i>	and forceful men	and violent men	Never used elsewhere of good men.
<i>harpadzousin</i>	lay hold of it.	take it by force	Elsewhere NIV always translates this verb as take quickly or forcibly: see Matt. 12:29; 13:19; etc.

We can conclude that Matthew 11:12 does not speak of men entering the kingdom but plundering it.¹ The same argument applies to the parallel passage in Luke 16:16. There both NIV and NASB say that "everyone is forcing his way into" the kingdom. But the nearly identical form of *biadzetai* should be translated "uses violence." That raises the question of how "everyone" (people in general) or "violent men" could use violence against the kingdom or plunder it? By their selfish treatment of its representatives: John the Baptist, Jesus, and Jesus' own representatives. Instead of submitting to it humbly, they tried to use it for their own purposes. What is your attitude toward the kingdom?

¹ For the same theological reason, the NIV misinterprets Matthew 21:31. I will now summarize the argument I make there. The NIV states that to chief priests and elders Jesus says that wicked people "**are entering** the kingdom of God **ahead of** you." However, the Greek expression represented by bold letters (*proagousin eis*) says nothing about arriving or entering, as seen in NIV's translation of the same expression in 14:22 and 26:32. Matthew 21:31 means that wicked people were ahead of the leaders on the way to the kingdom.