

## From Start To Finish (Part Two)

by Charles Whitaker (1944-2021)  
*Forerunner, "Ready Answer,"*

*“A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.” ( Luke 6:40)*

As we saw in Part One, the Hebrew verb *yacad* means “to begin” or “to found.” In Matthew 21:16, the apostle Matthew quotes Christ as He, in turn, quotes Psalm 8:2: “From the mouths of little children and infants, You have built a fortress against Your opponents . . .” (Psalm 8:2; *GOD’S WORD Translation*).

The Greek verb Matthew uses in Matthew 21:16 is *katartizo*.<sup>1</sup> The *English Standard Version*<sup>2</sup> renders it as the verb “prepared”: “Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise . . .”

At this point, the reader may be inclined to ask this question, as I did: What connection did Matthew see between Hebrew *yacad* and Greek *katartizo*?

As we will see, *katartizo* means many things, but neither “to found” nor “to begin” is among its many connotations. Not at all. Yes, the translators of the Septuagint indeed rendered *yacad* as *katartizo* in Psalm 8:2. But to say that Matthew<sup>3</sup> blindly cribbed the Septuagint, copying down the word *katartizo* without thought when he penned his gospel, is to miss one vital point. Although Matthew probably did not know it when he wrote his gospel, God certainly knew that he was writing a book that would ultimately become part of the canon, inspired Scripture. God, therefore, took an active role in the selection and treatment of source material, as well as in the choice of words. This fact suggests that *katartizo* is not a wrong word but one approved by God. The fact that *katartizo* appears fourteen other times in the New Testament bespeaks God’s approval, as well.

Yet, the fact remains: The meaning of *katartizo* does not map well against *yacad*. It would be unfair to say that the two verbs are “nuanced” differently, for, in actuality, not only their connotations but their denotations too are quite dissimilar, as we will presently see. God oversaw the selection of words, permitting the use of *katartizo* to make a point—or several.

One of those points is that the two verbs, dissimilar as they are in meaning, *when taken together*, carry the notion of first and last, beginning and ending, start and finish. As such, the *yacad-katartizo* dichotomy becomes a striking figure—the merism mentioned in Part One—encompassing God’s working with His creation and with humanity.

A discussion of *katartizo* is in order.

### ***Mending Nets and Restoring Attitudes***

Matthew 4:21 contains the first occurrence of *katartizo*: “And going on from there [Jesus] saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and He called them.” The Greek verb translated “mending” is *katartizo*, appearing a total of fifteen times in the New Testament. Notably, John and James were not observed in the act of making or building their nets—not creating them, not founding them, not beginning them. This passage does not carry the idea of “beginning” at all, a notion we saw repeatedly associated with *yacad* in Part One.

Instead, the fishermen were *re-creating* their nets. That is, they were *restoring* them. Under the weight of water and fidgety, frightened fish, the strands making up a net naturally give way over time. Hoisting the net from the water, sometimes heavily loaded, full of fish, only increases the stress on the strands—and the net rips. As time wears on, this disintegration process renders even the most substantial net worthless. If Zebedee and his two sons were to remain in business, they needed to mend nets constantly. It was a cost of doing business. By analogy, it was their way of tending the garden. <sup>4</sup>

Pure and simple: The idea behind *katartizo* is ongoing maintenance and restoration. This first use of the verb presents a concrete, easy-to-grasp picture of the meaning of *katartizo*.

While most of us do not mend nets today, we all understand the principle of entropy: Things wear out. Women mend their children's damaged clothing. Men maintain their cars, which may mean crawling under the hood at times to perform major maintenance, repairing fatigued parts, putting the vehicle in operating order as part of preparing for a trip. Many of us do this in preparation for the Feast of Tabernacles. Doing so, we are not creating or building the car—the manufacturer has already done that. Rather, we are, in essence, making the car “fit” for the trip. This distinction is the heart of the meaning of *katartizo*.

When a person mends a net, he joins loose ends together. That action of joining forms another basic idea behind the verb *katartizo*. It deserves comment here. The apostle Paul writes the members of the church at Corinth: “I beg you . . . by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you agree with each other and not be split into groups. I beg that you be completely joined together by having the same kind of thinking and the same purpose” (I Corinthians 1:10; *New Century Version*). Here, it takes three English words to carry the idea of the one Greek verb, *katartizo*: “completely joined together.” Perfectly fit together or perfectly united. If strands of God's net become disjoined—separated for any reason—He, like a good fisherman, can take remedial, restorative action, mending the net.

So, *katartizo* means “to maintain,” with the implication of restoring what has broken or degenerated. Notice Paul's admonition to us all, recorded near the end of the epistle in II Corinthians 13:11: “And that's about it, friends. Be cheerful. Keep things in good repair. Keep your spirits up” (*The Message*). The paraphrasers rendered *katartizo* as, “Keep things in good repair.”

In this case, we, God's people, are to do the ongoing mending, that is, to maintain things (for example, good attitudes). Other translations of this passage urge Christians to “mend your ways,” “put yourselves in order,” “aim for restoration,” “repair whatever is broken,” or “set things right.” The focus of *katartizo* is plainly not initial creation, not founding or beginning, as

is the case with *yacad*. Rather, *katartizo* carries the thrust of restoration and maintenance.

### Other Shades of Meaning

Galatians 6:1 provides another example but with a different emphasis. Here, we are to help restore other Christians who are in difficulty. Unlike Cain, we are to serve as our brother's keepers<sup>5</sup>: "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore [*katartizo*] him in a spirit of gentleness."

In I Thessalonians 3:10, Paul shades *katartizo* a bit differently. In this context, the apostle reminds the congregation of God at Thessalonica that he and Timothy "pray very hard night and day that we may see you again face to face." Why? "So that we may equip you with whatever is lacking in your faith" (*International Standard Version*). The verb "equip" is *katartizo*. *The Amplified Bible* actually employs the mending metaphor, which we saw in the first use of *katartizo*, by including the gloss, "mend and make good whatever may be lacking." Other versions use the verb "restore" or "supply" whatever may be needed. Paul points out that the ministry has a responsibility—and, by implication, the ability—to restore a congregation to spiritual health, as much as possible.

The King James Version (and about ten other versions, usually older ones<sup>6</sup>) translate *katartizo*, as it appears in I Thessalonians 3:10, with the verb "perfect." For instance, the *Modern English Version* renders it, "night and day praying earnestly that we might see your face and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith . . ."

The root word of *katartizo* informs these translations. That root is *artios*, an adjective that means "perfect."<sup>7</sup> It appears only once in the New Testament, in II Timothy 3:17: "That the man of God may be perfect [*artios*], thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (*Blue Red and Gold Letter Edition*). *The Amplified Bible, Classic Edition* handles II Timothy 3:17 this way,

glossing *artios* as “complete and proficient”: “So that the man of God may be complete and proficient, well fitted and thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Thayer’s *Greek Lexicon* comments that *artios* has reference “apparently to ‘special aptitude for given uses.’” *Artios* carries the idea of being especially “fitted out” for a purpose or being “complete to carry out a special purpose.” Other translations use the adjectives “competent” or “fully qualified.” In the context of II Timothy 3:17, Paul says that God’s Word can make us completely able to carry out His work, competent for the task. The Scriptures provide all we need to make us fit for the work He has assigned us. And, returning once more to I Thessalonians 3:10, Paul and Timothy, meeting again with the people, will be able to supply everything they need spiritually.

<sup>8</sup> Hence, *katartizo* implicitly speaks to the fact that God will provide, the meaning of one of His names, *YHWH-Jireh* (Genesis 22:14).

In most of these examples, God’s people or His ministers do the mending, restoration, and equipping. In Part Three, we will examine some uses of *katartizo* that clearly draw attention to the role *God* plays in providing ongoing maintenance, not only to His creation but to us, His New Creation.

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Katartizo* has the same usage in the parallel passage, Mark 1:19.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural citations are from the *English Standard Version*.

<sup>3</sup> There is good reason to believe that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew, not Greek. It follows, then, that another person, unknown to us, later translated Matthew’s Hebrew into Greek. If that is the case, then it was not Matthew himself, but his subsequent translator, who opted to use the Septuagint’s verb, *katartizo*. Without any doubt, Christ used neither *yacad* nor *katartizo*, as He almost certainly spoke in the vernacular of His day, Aramaic.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 2:5: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”

<sup>5</sup> Compare Genesis 4:9: “Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ He said, ‘I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?’”

<sup>6</sup> Versions that make use of the verb “perfect” include *21<sup>st</sup> Century King James Version*, the *American Standard Version*, the *Blue, Red and Gold Letter Edition*, the *Darby Translation*, the *New King James Version*, the *World English Bible*, and *Young's Literal Translation*. Versions approaching the Greek by using the adjective “imperfect” include *The Amplified Bible*, *The Amplified Bible, Classic Edition*, and *The New Testament in Modern English*.

<sup>7</sup> *Artios*, a *hapax legomenon*, is *Strong's* #737. Importantly, *artios* is not related to another Greek word carrying the idea of perfection, the adjective *teleios* (*Strong's* #5046), used 17 times in the New Testament. *Teleios* means “perfect,” “finished,” “wanting nothing.” Its first use is Matthew 5:48: “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

<sup>8</sup> Luke 6:40 is another example where the translators, especially the older ones, employed the verb “perfect” in rendering *katartizo*. An example of a newer translation doing so is the New King James Version: “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.” The verbal “perfectly trained” is *katartizo*.