
JESUS AND THE OT

QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why were the psalms sometimes classified under the term *“prophets”*?
- 2) If Jesus had perpetuated the *“law and the prophets,”* what would He have actually done?
- 3) What is the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet?
- 4) What did Jesus mean in Mt 5:18 when he said, *“Till heaven and earth pass away”*?
- 5) When Jesus said in Mt 5:18, *“till all be fulfilled,”* what did He mean by the word *“all”*?
- 6) Why did Jesus constantly say in this chapter, *“You have heard”*? Why didn't He say, *“It is written”*?
- 7) What contrast is being made when Jesus says, *“You have heard that it was said,”* was He referring to what the OT actually said or was He referring to oral traditions of the Pharisees?
- 8) Was Jesus teaching NT doctrine in Mt 5 or was He merely clarifying what the OT actually taught?
- 9) Was it possible for Jesus to teach *“new things”* while the OT was still in force? Would this have been a violation of the OT scriptures?

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 5:17-20

17 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

18 “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

19 “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20 “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Many religious bodies have misconceptions regarding the Old Testament and its place in religion today. Even many in the church are confused and so the need for this study is great.

Jesus is getting ready to teach some things that are new and different – things that would “*astonish*” these people (Mt 7:28).

Some might interpret these new teachings as an attempt by Jesus to **overthrow** the Old Testament Law. Jesus, then, takes this opportunity to reassure the people that He has come not to destroy, but to **fulfill** the Law.

TEXT (1)

Matthew 5:17

17 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

Whatever Jesus was going to do to the Law, He also was going to do to the prophets. What does “*Law*” and “*prophets*” refer to?

Law – refers to the first five books of OT

Prophets – has reference to the remainder of OT. Psalms is sometimes listed separately (e.g. Lk 24:44). However since prophets wrote the Psalms, it is often included in the term “*prophets*.”

“Law and the prophets” – refers to entire OT Scriptures.

Matthew 7:12

12 “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for **this is the Law and the Prophets**.

In other words, this is what the entire OT was trying to accomplish.

Once Jesus quoted the two greatest commandments of the Old Testament (i.e. to love God and to love thy neighbor), He said:

Matthew 22:40

40 “On these two commandments hang all **the Law and the Prophets.**”

Mt 5:17-20 states Jesus’ relation with reference to the entire OT.

FULFILL, NOT PERPETUATE

Notice carefully what Jesus did not say. He did not say He came to perpetuate the OT Law. He did not say it would stand as long as heaven and earth stood. The contrast is between:

Destroy vs. Fulfill

not

Destroy vs. Perpetuate

Many misunderstand Jesus here. They think since He is not destroying the Law, then He must be perpetuating it.

NOTE: If Jesus perpetuated the Law and prophets, He would have destroyed them! Why?

The OT was full of promises (called prophecies). If one perpetuates a promise (prophecy) he destroys them.

ILL: When a man makes a promise he must eventually fulfill the promise. If he keeps prolonging the promise, but never fulfills what he said he would do, he has broken his promise – destroyed it.

When one fulfills promises, prophecies, and types, he passes from the stage of the ***unfulfilled*** to the ***fulfilled***.

EXAMPLES

- 1) **Gen 22:17-18** – promises Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his seed. If Jesus had not brought a blessing to all nations, this promise would have been destroyed.

- 2) **Jer 31:31-34** – prophecies of a new covenant being made with God’s people. If Jesus had not established a new covenant, He would have destroyed Jeremiah’s prophecy.

- 3) **Dan 2:44** – prophecies the kingdom would be established. If Jesus had not established His kingdom, this prophecy would have been destroyed.

destroy (καταλύω) – “destroy, demolish, **overthrow**, throw down” (Greenfield)

fulfill (πληρώω) – “to fill, make full, fill up, **complete**” (Greenfield)

NOTE: Either of these methods will render the OT inactive. Jesus is emphasizing which method He will use.

Destroy	Fulfill
The law – prevent it from fulfilling its purpose.	Fulfill the purpose (goal) of the law (Rom 10:4).
The prophets – prevent what they predicted from coming to pass.	Complete the prophecy.

Instead of destroying the purpose of the law and the predictions of the prophets, Jesus came to fulfill them. The Law was “*taken out of the way,*” but not by **destruction**; rather by **fulfillment**.

TEXT (2)

Matthew 5:18

18 “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

jot (ἰῶτα) – smallest letter of Greek alphabet

tittle (κεφαλαία) – “*little horn*”; a stroke of the pen which distinguishes some letters from others.

ILL: E – F; G – C

Not the smallest letter or smallest part of the letter will pass away by destruction.

FIRST: Jesus is going to keep the most minute “*letter of the law*” – to the smallest fragment of the letter – and it would not make Him a “legalist.”

SECOND: The OT Law was not going to fade out bit by bit. It is either completely in force or completely abolished. Jesus is saying as long as any of it remains in force, all of it does – every jot and tittle including:

- animal sacrifices
- stoning blasphemers
- circumcision
- assembling in Jerusalem three times a year
- forbidden food regulations, etc.

We cannot decide to just keep the 10 commandments, but not of the rest.

Galatians 5:3

3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to **keep the whole law.**

DURATION OF OT

“till heaven and earth pass” – Does this mean every jot and tittle remains in full force as long as heaven and earth stand? NO! Luke helps us understand what Jesus meant:

Luke 16:17

17 “... **it is easier** for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.

Jesus is using a proverb. He is speaking of the certainty of fulfillment, not the duration of the Law. It is so certain that the OT will be fulfilled that it would be easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of the Law to be destroyed.

Jesus gives the duration of the Law in the second half of verse 18 – “till all be fulfilled.”

Q: What did Jesus mean by all?

At first it would appear that *all* would include every single prophecy in the OT. If so, then the entire Law of Moses remains in full force till the end of time. Why?

There are still unfulfilled prophecies in OT:

EXAMPLE: Isa 25:8 – death will be eliminated forever – God will wipe away every tear. This will happen when Jesus returns and destroys the earth (1 Cor 15:54). Must this be fulfilled for the Law of Moses to pass?

Luke’s gospel gives us a clue about what Jesus meant by all things being fulfilled:

Luke 24:44

44 Then [Jesus] said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that **all things must be fulfilled** which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.”

[This is the Bible interpreting itself.]

Again:

Acts 13:29

29 “Now when they had **fulfilled all that was written concerning Him**, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb.

The Law would last until ***all*** things concerning the Messiah had been fulfilled. Notice also our text:

Matthew 5:17

17 “Do not think that **I came** to destroy the Law or the Prophets. **I did not come** to destroy but to fulfill.

Jesus is speaking of His coming to the earth and the purpose for which He came. He was speaking of things concerning His ***earthly ministry***.

SUMMARY: Jesus taught every jot and tittle of Moses’ Law would remain in force until all things concerning His earthly ministry were accomplished.

Q: Did Jesus really fulfill all things concerning His earthly ministry? YES.

John 19

28 After this, Jesus, knowing that **all things were now accomplished**, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, “I thirst!”

30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “**It is finished!**” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

After Jesus died, He ascended into heaven to reign as our King and High Priest. All things were fulfilled concerning His earthly ministry.

Things passed from the stage of the ***unfulfilled*** to the ***fulfilled***.

The OT was completed now. It had served its purpose (Rom 10:4). It was now fulfilled and so it came to an end. Not because it was destroyed, but rather fulfilled.

Colossians 2:14

14 having **wiped out** the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

If the Law of Moses was fulfilled, has served its purpose and is abolished, how can we be under it?

A NEW COVENANT

Now we live under a new and better covenant:

Hebrews 9:16-17

16 For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.

17 For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.

While Jesus was on earth He made His new will – He taught the gospel of the kingdom – but it did not come into power until after His death.

TEXT (3)

We move on now to the next point Jesus made in His sermon:

Matthew 5:19

19 “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Break (λύω) akin to **destroy** (καταλύω) in verse 17. Usually translated “to loose” and carries the idea of freeing from restraints.

Whoever **loosens** the requirements of even the least commandment, while the Law is in force, he is the real destroyer of the Law.

NOTE: It is important to notice what Jesus did **not** say. He did not say, “*Whoever teaches new things or different things will be least in the kingdom.*”

Jesus taught many new and different things that went into effect after He died. But He never broke or taught anyone to break Moses’ Law while it was in force.

(He never “loosened” the requirements of Moses’ Law while it was in force.)

CONTRASTIVE TEACHING **ILLUSTRATED**

Now let me try to illustrate what is taking place in Mt 5. If I take these principles that Jesus taught, and I place them in this box called NT there will be some people who object.

“If you have Jesus teaching NT principles like these while He’s alive, He would actually have been teaching people to violate the Law of Moses” (they say). After all Jesus said:

Matthew 5:19

19 “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven ...

So what they do is they reach their hand into this box and they pull out these very same principles – the ones they said would have violated the Law of Moses had Jesus taught them while He was alive – and they place them into this OT box. Now, all of a sudden, these principles don’t violate Moses’ Law – instead, **they are the law!!**

- Now I maintain that if these principles violate Moses' Law when they're in the NT box, they will also violate Moses' Law when you put them in the OT box.
- Conversely, if you can place these teachings in the OT box and they don't violate Moses' Law, then you can also place them over here in the NT box, and none of these teachings will cause anyone to "**break**" one of the least commandments.

It is inconsistent to say the teachings of Mt 5 would violate Moses' Law if placed in the NT box, but would harmonize with Moses' Law if placed in the OT box. **(RE-LABELING)**

TEXT (3)
(Continued)

Jesus is teaching that if a man breaks what he considers a least commandment under the OT, he will do the same when you give him a NT. Habits are hard to break.

APPLY: Is there not a lesson here for us? Jesus is teaching us that if we want to have devout, dedicated converts we are going to have to look for someone who is devout and dedicated to begin with.

- A devout heathen or Moslem will make a better convert than a lukewarm, liberal "church of Christ" member!
- Look at how dedicated someone is in their present church and that's how dedicated they will be if they are converted to the truth.

Obedience under OT Law was an indicator of what a man would do under NT Law.

Luke 16:10

10 "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.

How many people label commandments as "*big*" or "*little*" and then discard with the "*small*" ones? God never approved of that!

Men must respect even those commandments considered "*little*."

Psalms 119:6

6 Then I would not be ashamed, When I look into **all** Your commandments.

“does and teaches them” – Jesus put *doing* before *teaching*. We must practice the Law before teaching it.

TEXT (4)

Matthew 5:20

20 “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Because of this verse many people have drawn the wrong conclusion regarding the rest of this chapter. In the remainder of Mt 5, Jesus begins to do some contrastive teaching. There are two major views:

a) Jesus is contrasting the teachings of the Pharisees with what Moses actually meant.

(The popular view)

b) Jesus is contrasting Moses’ Law with His own NT principles.

Our outlook on a great many things is going to be greatly affected by how we view these teachings of Jesus.

- If Jesus was merely explaining what Moses’ Law taught, then these principles no longer apply (cf. Col 2:14), but
- If Jesus was contrasting Moses’ Law with His own NT principles, then these teachings do apply today and we dare not ignore them.

So the study before us is very critical.

“YOU HAVE HEARD”

Matthew 5:21

21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’

Jesus does not begin His contrastive teaching as we might expect. We expect Him to say, *“It is written,”* or *“You have read.”*

John 10:34

34 Jesus answered them, “**Is it not written** in your law, ‘I said, “You are gods”’?”

Matthew 21:16

16 ... And Jesus said to them, “Yes. **Have you never read**, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise’?”

Here it is obvious that Jesus is referring to the written Law.

Are we to suppose, then, that when Jesus said, *“You have heard that it was said ...”* that He was referring to the oral traditions of the Pharisees? Or, some perversion of Moses’ Law? – NO!!

Any apparent reference to the Pharisees’ perversions, it is only a *by-product*, a *side effect* or a *secondary purpose*. The primary focus of these contrastive teachings is a contrast between OT and NT.

Let me give you some reasons for this conclusion:

REASON #1

(Why Jesus was NOT explaining OT law)
(4 reasons)

REASON #1: The people assembled before Jesus were common uneducated people – most were probably illiterate.

Matthew 7:28-29

28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that **the people** were astonished at His teaching,
29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as **the scribes**.

These people were the common people, not the scribes, doctors and lawyers.

Mark 12:37

37 ... And the **common people** heard Him gladly.

When Jesus spoke to the educated scribes, doctors and lawyers He said, *“It is written,”* or *“Have ye not read.”*

When Jesus spoke to common, uneducated people He said, *“You have heard that it was said.”*

John 12:34

34 The people answered Him, “We have **heard from the law** that the Christ remains forever; ...”

The multitudes **heard** from the law, but they had not read it themselves.

- Most were probably illiterate.
- Few would have owned copies of the Scriptures, unless they were wealthy – then they probably wouldn’t have been illiterate.

These people depended on the scribes and Pharisees to hear the Scriptures read and explained to them. Thus, Jesus is indeed quoting from the written Law, but He rightly says, *“You have heard.”*

REASON #2

(Why Jesus was NOT explaining OT law)

REASON #2: When Jesus says, “You have heard” you can turn right over to the written Law and read what they had been hearing!

BUT, when Jesus says, *“I say to you”* you cannot read in the written Law the new teaching He gives.

“You have heard”	“But I say”
“Thou shalt not kill” (v21) Ex 20:13	Anger = murder (Not taught in OT)

ARGUMENT: The OT teaches in Ps 37:8 that anger is sin.

R: Yes, we admit anger was condemned in OT. BUT, OT never taught anger = murder. This is new truth! Moses Law against murder forbade only the actual act.

When Jews were angry, they were sinning, but not guilty of murder! (Otherwise, they would have been stoned.)

“You have heard”	“But I say”
“Thou shalt not commit adultery” (v27) Ex 20:14	Lust = adultery (Not taught in OT)

(Had lust been equivalent to adultery, people would have been stoned for lusting.)

“You have heard”	“But I say”
“Give her a writing of divorcement” (v31) Dt 24:1	Only for fornication (Not taught in OT)
“Thou shalt not swear falsely” (v33) Lev 19:12	“Swear not at all” (Not taught in OT)
“An eye for an eye” (v38) Ex 21:24	“Resist not evil” (Not taught in OT)
“Love your neighbor” (v43) Lev 19:18 “Hate your enemy” implicit – Ex 21:24; Dt 23:6	“Love your enemies” (Not taught in OT)

NOTE: Jesus was revealing new truth! This new truth astonished the people (Mt 7:28-29).

REASON #3

(Why Jesus was NOT explaining OT law)

REASON #3: To say the focal point of Jesus’ preaching was to correct perversions of the Law would be to completely ignore the mission of John.

John’s mission was to reform the people in accord with Moses’ Law. John was a prophet and the mission of all prophets was to bring men back to Moses’ Law.

If Jesus was merely bringing men back to Moses’ Law, and that was the sum total of His work, then we must conclude:

- That John failed in his mission to bring men back to the Mosaic Law.
- That Jesus’ mission on earth was no different than that of an ordinary prophet.

However, Jesus praised Peter who confessed that Jesus was the Son of God rather than a mere prophet (Mt 16:13-17).

REASON #4

(Why Jesus was NOT explaining OT law)

REASON #4: "It has been said" is a formula used by the Lord Himself to refer to Moses' law.

Luke 4:12

12 And Jesus answered and said to [Satan], "**It has been said**, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'"

This is Jesus, being tempted by the Devil, referring to **Dt 6:16**.

Hebrews 4:7

7 again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as **it has been said**:

"Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts."

Here "it has been said" refers directly to **Ps 95:7**. (See also Heb 3:15).

This should end all quibbling.

"BUT I SAY"

Matthew 5:22

22 "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. ...

“But I say” (6 times) – The OT prophets would preface their remarks, *“Thus saith the Lord ...”* (**415 times**) but Jesus doesn’t – because He is the Lord!

Moses and the prophets were merely human messengers delivering God’s word. Jesus **was** God and He spoke on His own authority! He shows no shame or embarrassment – *“I say to you.”*

I want you to notice two important points:

FIRST: Jesus does **not** say, *“Folks, I know what you’ve been hearing, but this is what Moses really meant ...”*

Had Jesus simply been interpreting the Law we would have expected something like that.

SECOND: Jesus does **not** say, *“Folks, I know what you’ve been hearing, but here’s some more scriptures those Pharisees haven’t told you about ...”*

When Jesus says, *“But I say to you,”* He does not quote from OT. He asserts His own authority. People must do what Jesus said, not because OT taught it, but because Jesus **Himself** taught it. *“Because He said so.”*

To put it another way, when Jesus said, *“I say unto you,”* He was **making Scriptures rather than quoting them!**

This authoritative teaching astonished people:

Matthew 7:28-29

28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching,

29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

It would not have been astonishing if Jesus said:

- **“Moses really meant ...”** or
- **“Here’s what other Scriptures say ...”**

Jesus was delivering new truth which had never been revealed in OT! He's setting a new standard of living.

The people were shocked at:

- **His doctrine (not Moses' doctrine)**
- **His authority**

In fact, Jesus identifies these teachings so there will be no question as to where they belong:

Matthew 7

24 "Therefore whoever hears **these sayings of Mine**, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:

26 "But everyone who hears **these sayings of Mine**, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand:

Clearly Jesus is teaching "*kingdom law*," not explaining OT Law.

A COMPLETE CONTRAST?

In saying Jesus was contrasting OT Law with His Own NT Law, we hesitate to use the word "*contrast*." It sometimes leaves the impression Jesus repudiated all things which Moses taught; that He wanted absolutely nothing to do with anything Moses taught.

There are four basic things happening in this chapter:

(1) ACCEPTING

Sometimes Jesus will *accept* the OT teaching just as it is and "*bring it over*" into the NT:

Love your neighbor (v43) – "Yes, I accept that just the way it is written."

We “*love our neighbor*” not because the OT taught such, but because NT does.

(2) ADD TO

Sometimes Jesus will first add to the Law before making it one of His own:

Do not murder (v21) – “Yes, I accept that, but I’m also adding, Don’t even be angry.”

Do not commit adultery (v27) – “Yes, I accept that, but I’m adding, Don’t even lust in your heart.”

Do not forswear (v33) – “Yes, I accept that, but I’m adding, Let your yes be yes and your no, no!”

(3) SUBTRACT FROM

Sometimes Jesus will first subtract from the OT Law before He accepts it as one of His own:

Give a writing of divorcement (v31) – “Only for fornication.”

(4) REJECT

Sometimes Jesus completely rejects an OT Law because it completely contradicts His NT Law:

An eye for an eye (v38) – “Do not resist evil” (these are mutually exclusive)

Hate your enemy (v43) – “Love your enemy” (these are mutually exclusive)

TEXT (4)
(Continued)

Let us return to the original text and notice what Jesus is saying:

Matthew 5:20

20 “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

The scribes and Pharisees were considered by the common people as models of righteousness. When Jesus here told the multitude their righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees, it must have shocked them.

Some probably thought: *“These Pharisees are fanatics about religion.”* They:

- fast twice a week
- give tithes of all they earn
- pray long and often
- cleanse themselves often to prevent defilement
- compass land and sea to make converts

“How can we possibly exceed what they are doing? We can’t possibly do better than them!”

Jesus: *“Oh yes you can.”* – Then He proceeds to explain how they can do better.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF
THE PHARISEES

To understand what Jesus meant we must first understand what kind of righteousness the Pharisees had.

Jesus just got through saying if you want to be great you must: **(1) do**, and **(2) teach** the commandments of God. The Pharisees **taught** the commandments, but they did not **do** them.

Matthew 23:2-3

2 ... “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.

3 “Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.

Jesus is saying we are going to have to do better than that! We must not only teach, but **do** the will of God.

Now, Jesus says in Mt 5:20 we must have an **exceeding righteousness**. He then begins to describe that righteousness which is necessary for one **to enter and to remain in the kingdom**.

He is not describing the righteousness necessary to be a faithful Jew under Moses’ Law! He begins to describe the righteousness necessary to be a faithful disciple in the Kingdom!

Beginning in Mt 6 we see Jesus giving some examples of how to exceed them in righteousness.

Matthew 6

2 “Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites ...

5 “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. ...

16 “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, ...

Matthew 7:5

5 “Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Here is a basic outline of what Jesus is doing in Mt 5-7:

5:1-12	<i>Citizenship requirements</i>
5:13-16	<i>Function of citizens</i>
5:17-20	<i>Theme of the sermon</i>
5:21-48	<i>Fulfilling the law and prophets</i>
6:1 – 7:12	<i>Exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees</i>
7:13-27	<i>Warnings of not becoming a citizen</i>

CONCLUSION

My friends, what we are witnessing here in Mt 5-7 is the fulfillment of OT prophecy:

Isalah 52:15

15 So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For what had not been told them they shall see, And **what they had not heard they shall consider.**

In other words, when the Messiah comes He would bring new teachings with Him. That's exactly what we see happening in Mt 5-7.

Is there any wonder that the people listening to Jesus that day were "*astonished*" at what they heard (Mt 7:28)?

The very enemies of Jesus were forced to admit:

John 7:46

46 ... "No man ever spoke like this Man!"

Over and over again this phenomenon occurred.

Luke 4:22

22 So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. ...

My friends, can you *truly* examine the words of this “*sermon on the mount*” and be unconvinced of His deity?

John 6:68-69

68 But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? **You have the words of eternal life.**

69 “Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”