

# The Sermon on the Mount

## Jesus and the Law and Prophets (Matthew 5:17-20)

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. One of the most remarkable events to occur in the life of Jesus was what students of the Bible simply call "the transfiguration."
  - A. When this wonderful, soul-stirring event occurred the Savior was only A YEAR away from the Cross.
    1. Time was running short, and the faith of His disciples was still shaky to say the least.
      - a. While they confessed, at Caesarea Philippi, that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God (**Matthew 16:16**), they were still confused about His role and His pending death in Jerusalem.
    2. Therefore, the disciples needed to know for CERTAIN that Jesus was not only the Christ, but that He was CLEARLY on the right course – that He WAS doing the will of God.
      - a. To do this, Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him to spend the night on a high mountain – believed by most to be Mount Tabor, located about 6 miles from Nazareth.



II. While the disciples gazed in amazement, the voice of almighty God must have still been ringing in their ears – *"Hear Him!"*

A. What does this mean? What's the significance of this statement? Why would Jehovah God COMMAND the disciples of Jesus to hear Him, and not ALSO hear Moses the lawgiver and Elijah the greatest of the Old Testament prophets?

1. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, in their commentary, write that the disciples were to, *"Hear Him reverentially, hear Him implicitly, hear Him alone!"*

2. Adam Clarke writes in his commentary: *"The disciples wished to detain Moses and Elijah that they might hear them: but God shows that the law, which had been in force, and the prophets which had prophesied, until now, must all give place to Jesus; and he alone must now be attended to, as the way, the truth, and the life; for no man could now come unto the Father but through him. This voice seems also to refer to that prediction in Deut 18:15. 'The Lord shall raise up a Prophet like unto me: him shall ye hear.' Go no more to the law, nor to the prophets, to seek for a coming Messiah; for behold he is come! Hear and obey him, and him only."*

3. Albert Barnes writes in his commentary, *"This was spoken to confirm the disciples; to make known to them that it was their duty*

*to hear Christ rather than any other, and to honor him more than Moses and Elijah..."*

4. J.W. McGarvey writes in his commentary, the Four-Fold Gospel, *"This command contains the chief significance of the entire scene. Spoken in the presence of Moses and Elijah, it gave Jesus that pre-eminence which a son has over servants. He is to be heard. His words have pre-eminence over those of the lawgiver and the prophet."*

## **BODY:**

- I. It seems fairly simple, doesn't it? God was giving Jesus Christ the pre-eminence. He was turning the disciples AWAY from Moses and the prophets, and turning them TO Jesus Christ – *"Hear Him!"*
  - A. But, there's a problem here. The problem is that the Law of Moses was still in force!
    1. In fact, just a year earlier, Jesus stood on another hill in **Matthew chapters 5 through 7**, preaching to a large crowd of followers, and proclaimed that He had NOT come to destroy the Law NOR the prophets.
    2. In **Matthew 5:17-20**, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 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. 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. 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."*

3. How can we understand God's command to hear Jesus, and Jesus alone, while at the same time Jesus emphatically said, *"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."?*

II. To understand the relationship between Jesus and the Old Testament Law of Moses, let's examine these verses a little closer.

A. It's often been said the best DEFENSE is a good OFFENSE, and that's certainly true with regard to the statement of Jesus concerning the Law and the Prophets.

1. **Matthew 5:17-18** – Jesus said: *"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."*

2. Opposition to Jesus and His teaching had not yet reached its zenith.
  - a. The scribes and Pharisees were only REMOTELY aware of this Jesus of Nazareth, but were beginning to hear of His increasing popularity.
  - b. Although the focus of Jesus' ministry was throughout the northern region of Galilee – miles from Jerusalem – word was filtering back to the religious leaders in Jerusalem about this man who performs miracles.
3. Just PRIOR to Jesus preaching the Sermon on the Mount, we're told: **Matthew 4:23-25** – *And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. 24 Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. 25 Great multitudes followed Him — from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.*

4. Shortly AFTER He preached the Sermon on the Mount opposition began to rise against Jesus from among the ranks of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law (scribes).
  5. That opposition would eventually grow to a feverish pitch.
    - a. Jesus would not only be branded as a false Messiah, but a man who had no regard for the Law of Moses.
    - b. He would be charged over and over with being a Lawbreaker.
- B. Therefore, at the outset, Jesus wanted His disciples to know the TRUTH in advance. He had NOT come to destroy the LAW or the PROPHETS – which was a Jewish way of saying Jesus had not come to destroy what we call the Old Testament.
1. He had not come to DESTROY – a word that literally means "to destroy utterly, to overthrow completely" (VINE).
  2. Rather, Jesus had come to FULFILL!
- III. There's a very good reason WHY Jesus had not come to destroy but to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.
- A. The Law and the Prophets foretold the COMING of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God Who would take away the sins of the world, and the MESSIAH – the One Who would rule and reign as KING of kings, and LORD of lords!

1. There are well over 300 PROPHECIES concerning Jesus Christ that are found in the Law and the Prophets.
  - a. **Genesis 3:14-15** – After Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden: *So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. 15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."*
  - b. **Deuteronomy 18:15** – Moses told the people of Israel: *"The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear..."*
  - c. **Deuteronomy 18:19-20** – A few verses later, God told Moses: *"I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. 19 And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him. "*
  - d. The entire **53<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Isaiah** speaks of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, and the redemption of our sins that will come through His sacrifice: **Isaiah 53:4-6** – *Surely He has*

*borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

- B. But the Law and the Prophets didn't just foretell the coming of the promised Messiah and Redeemer of the world, they also foretold the coming of a very special and unique kingdom.
1. One example is a prophecy of Daniel as he interpreted a dream of the Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar.
    - a. Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed about a giant statue that had a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, stomach and thighs of brass, and legs and feet of iron mixed with clay.
    - b. Nebuchadnezzar then dreamed that this great image was stuck on the feet by a large stone that caused the image to crumble, while the stone became a great mountain.
  2. Daniel gave this interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream:

**Daniel 2:36-44** – *"This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. 37 You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power,*

*strength, and glory; 38 and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all — you are this head of gold. 39 But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. 40 And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. 41 Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. 42 And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. 43 As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. 44 And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."*

- a. In this prophecy, the head of the image represented Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire – the head of gold.
  - b. The chest and arms of silver represented the next kingdom to rule over the civilized world – the Assyrian Empire.
  - c. The stomach and thighs of brass would represent the next kingdom to rule the world – the Grecian Empire of Alexander the Great and his generals.
  - d. That means the legs of iron and feet of iron mixed with clay would then represent the next kingdom to rule the ancient world – the Roman Empire.
  - e. But Daniel said it would be in the days of these kings – those represented by the fourth empire (the Roman Empire) – that the God of heaven would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed.
3. And it was during the days of the Roman Empire that Jesus came preaching about this kingdom.
    - a. **Mark 1:14-15** – ...*Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."*

C. But the Law and the Prophets didn't just prophecy of the coming Messiah and His spiritual kingdom, the Law and the Prophets also foretold the establishment of a NEW COVENANT (a new Law) for the people of God.

1. For example, Jeremiah gave this prophecy from God.

a. **Jeremiah 31:31-34** – *"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."*

2. The writer of the Hebrew letter speaks of how Jesus functioned as our High Priest when He offered His own blood on the cross to redeem us from our sins.

- a. And because of this, the Hebrew writer tells us that Jesus therefore became the Mediator (the arbitrator or go-between) of a NEW COVENANT – the same covenant Jeremiah prophesied about.
  - b. **Hebrews 9:11-15** – *But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant , that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.*
- D. Therefore, Jesus did not come to DESTROY the Law and the Prophets, He came to FULFILL them.
1. He came to be the Messiah and Savior of the world.

2. He came to establish the spiritual kingdom over which He would reign as King.
  3. And He came to become the Mediator of a new covenant between God and mankind that is ratified and confirmed or authenticated by the blood of Jesus Christ.
- IV. Not only did Jesus say He had not come to DESTROY the Law and the Prophets, He ALSO said He was NOT going to CHANGE the Law.
- A. Jesus was VERY emphatic on this point.
1. **Matthew 5:18** – Jesus said, *"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."*
  2. **Luke 16:17** – Jesus said, *"It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail."*
    - a. In other words, the Law would be as permanent as the heavens and the earth – a very subtle way of saying the Law WOULD eventually come to an end, just as the heavens and the earth will come to an end.
  3. When Jesus said not even a *"jot"* or a *"tittle"* would pass from the Law until all is fulfilled, He was speaking of Hebrew grammatical markings, similar to the dotting of an *"i"* or the crossing of a *"t"*.

- a. Therefore, He said not even the smallest, seemingly most insignificant, marking in the manuscript of the Law will pass away until all is fulfilled.
4. That simply means there would be ABSOLUTELY NO CHANGE in the Law AT ALL!
- B. Furthermore, Jesus added that a person's ATTITUDE toward the Law and their HANDLING of the Law would affect their standing before God.
  1. **Matthew 5:19** – *"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."*
    - a. No doubt, Jesus had the Pharisees in mind when He said this.
    - b. They were notorious for considering certain laws of God as being relatively unimportant, while they held others in the highest esteem.
    - c. The relatively unimportant laws were often set aside so the Pharisees could keep what they considered the MOST important laws.
    - d. A good example of this is when Jesus said the Pharisees set aside the law regarding taking care of their aging parents to keep their long-held tradition that tithing (or giving at the Temple) was FAR more important.

- e. This is the reason Jesus added: **Matthew 5:20** – *"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."*
  - 2. Keep in mind that Jesus and His disciples were still living under the Old Testament Law of Moses, and were bound to KEEP that Law.
    - a. Therefore, anyone who would have such disrespect for the laws of God contained in the Law of Moses would have the same disrespect for the laws of God contained in the New Covenant – the New Testament of Jesus Christ.
  - 3. Therefore, Jesus assured those who were hearing Him preach that He had not come to DESTROY, CHANGE, or even DISREGARD or DISRESPECT any part of the Law.
  - 4. But remember, Jesus said: **Matthew 5:18** – *"...till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law TILL ALL IS FULFILLED."*
- V. Therefore, the most important question for US is this: "Did Jesus fulfill the Law and the Prophets?"
- A. This is a vitally important question for us to answer.
    - 1. If Jesus did NOT fulfill the Law, then:

- a. He failed His purpose for coming to this earth: **Matthew 5:17b** – *"I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."*
  - b. We need to be observing the Law in its strictest sense, including sacrifices, holy days, the Sabbath, circumcision, and not eating unclean meats (no more ham sandwiches)!
2. But if Jesus DID fulfill the Law, then:
- a. He accomplished His purpose: **John 17:4-5** – *"I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."*
  - b. We shouldn't be surprised a NEW LAW or a NEW COVENANT governing the people of God today.
- B. Therefore, to answer the question "Did Jesus fulfill the Law," the answer is YES! In fact, Jesus fulfilled the Law in two ways.
1. First, Jesus fulfilled all that was written about Him in the Law and the Prophets concerning being the promised Messiah, the King of kings and Lord of lords.
  2. Second, Jesus fulfilled all that was written about Him in the Law and Prophets concerning being the Lamb of God, the Savior Who gave His life for us so that we could receive remission of sins through His blood.

C. After Jesus was resurrected from the dead He told His disciples that all those prophecies about Him that He said must be fulfilled WERE fulfilled – and He opened their minds to SEE the fulfillment of all these things IN the Law, the Prophets and even in the Psalms.

1. **Luke 24:44-45** – *Then He 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." 45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.*
2. Therefore, ALL those things that MUST be fulfilled in the Law and the Prophets (and the Psalms) concerning Jesus WERE fulfilled.

## **CONCLUSION:**

- I. So what does all this mean to us? What does it mean that Jesus actually DID fulfill all that was written about Him in the Old Testament prophecies.
  - A. The odds are truly ASTRONOMICAL of one person OTHER than Jesus fulfilling all the 300 plus Old Testament prophecies.
    1. This makes the fact that Jesus fulfilled them all a miracle in itself because many of the prophecies are not under human control.
      - a. In other words, if someone tried to fulfill all of them, how would they arrange to be (1) born in Bethlehem (2) with a virgin for a mother?

- b. Already they would have a problem—and these are only two prophecies.
  - c. Even a casual glance at all the Messianic prophecies shows that a person could not fulfill them by their own efforts.
- B. Therefore, the importance to US about Jesus fulfilling all these prophecies is this proves beyond any doubt whatsoever that Jesus is the ONE AND ONLY Messiah – the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and the ONLY Lord and Savior.
- 1. When the apostles Peter and John were arrested and stood before the Sanhedrin defending their faith in Jesus Christ, Peter said:  
**Acts 4:12** – *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*
  - 2. This simply means that Jesus Christ is the ONLY ONE through Whom we can be saved from our sins and gain a home in heaven when we die.
- C. Has Jesus become your Lord and Savior?
- 1. Have you received the complete remission of your sins by having come to Jesus Christ in faith and obedience – having been baptized into Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and having then been added by the Lord to His church?

2. And if you have received complete remission of your sins in the past, are you continuing to receive the forgiveness of your sins through the blood of Jesus Christ by confessing those sins to God and truly repenting of those sins?