

### When Heaven and Earth Passes Away the Law Is Fulfilled

Matthew 5:17-18

These two verses are used by many Christians to tell people that everything in the Old Testament (Old Covenant) is as binding on believers in Jesus Christ as it was binding on the Jews. From the Sabbath, to “storehouse tithing,” to the discipline of children, to even dietary and civil laws, all of it is part of the Christian’s education in how to live—under the law. Yet, this passage presents just the opposite conclusion. Jesus is showing how He fulfills the Law, then it’s abolished, and He becomes the New Lawgiver. This understanding of our text brings true freedom to hear Him!

Matthew presents Jesus as the New Lawgiver as opposed to the Old Covenant Lawgiver Moses.

- (1). The early Christians believed Matthew to be five books, similar to the Pentateuch of Moses.
  - (a). The first book (Matthew 1-4) has remarkable parallels to the narratives of Mosaic times.
  - (b). The second book (Matthew 5-7) parallels with the teaching of Moses on Mt. Sinai, etc.
- (2). *The Sermon on the Mount* is preceded by baptism in water and *forty* days in the wilderness. The whole narrative of Jesus (childhood, exodus, baptism, wilderness, mountain, law) is precisely the narrative of Israel and Moses (childhood, exodus, Red Sea, wilderness, etc).
- (3). Matthew calls Jesus “greater than Solomon” (12:42), “greater than the Temple” (12:6), “greater than Jonah” (12:41), “Lord of the Sabbath” (12:8), and greater than Moses (17:5).
- (4). It is disobedience to the Words of Christ that defines “lawlessness” (*anomia* 7:23).
- (5). In the Great Commission, Jesus instructs to teach all that “I have commanded” (28:18-20).

#### I. “The Law and the Prophets” is an abbreviation for the Old Testament Scriptures ...

We saw this last week in our study regarding reading the Scriptures with Jesus glasses. All of the Old Testament points to the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Law is Moses, the Prophets included all the prophetic books, and of course, you have Psalms and Proverbs. “The Law” is an abbreviation like “Justified by faith” is “justified by grace through faith.”

#### II. Jesus came to fulfill “The Law” and not to abolish it.

Because Jesus *fulfills* the Law, and does not “abolish” it, how do we relate to it as believers?

**(A). Jesus built on and advanced the Law ...** “*He added what was wanting*” (Tertullian).

It’s like Moses’ Law was the seed and Jesus is the tree. It was completed (Augustine).

**(B). Jesus interpreted the true meaning of Moses ...** “*He tells what Moses meant*” (Calvin).

Jesus is merely articulating and clarifying what Moses intended—the old law remains.

**(C). Jesus set aside the Old Covenant Law ...** this was the position of the Ana-Baptists.

**(D). Jesus binds all of the Old Covenant Law on believers ...** This is called *theonomy*.

**(E). Jesus sets aside the Old Covenant Law for a season ...** this is *dispensationalism*. The

above views are what many Christians teach regarding Moses’ law and our relation to it.

But I believe that Jesus simply made a statement that He “fulfills” the Law and the

Prophets. The Old Testament is about Him. It predicted Him, foreshadowed Him,

prophesied Him. “It is Jesus who pronounces with supreme authority what is the will of

God, and it is His teaching which forms the ultimate standard of righteousness” (see esp.

Colossians 2:17). For this reason, you study the Old Testament to learn about Jesus Christ. It

reveals Him. He accomplished for you what you cannot do for yourself. You reap what He has

sown.

### III. When “heaven and earth pass away” the “Law” passes with it.

The Jews believed their Law eternal. But Jesus said that the Old Covenant Law would pass.

The term “heaven and earth” is apocalyptic wording. That’s not to say the term heaven and earth never refers to material creation; it is just used figuratively among the Jewish people. Remember, Jesus was a Jew. As such he was raised hearing the Old Testament prophets taught in the synagogues. These prophets utilized spiritual language. As the prophet of and to Israel (Matthew 15), Jesus wasn’t only familiar with the language of the prophets, he used the same language. **How did the prophets use the term heaven and earth?**

See Isaiah 24. The prophet Isaiah predicted the passing of heaven and earth in chapter 24. He said the earth would be utterly *broken down, clean dissolved, and completely removed*, vs. 19. Now this sounds like the destruction of material creation but closer examination reveals it to be speaking of the destruction of Israel's Covenant World under the imagery of "heaven and earth". Note verse 5 gives the reason for the destruction – **“they have broken the everlasting covenant.”** What covenant was that? It was the Mosaic Covenant! God was going to destroy "heaven and earth" because Israel had broken her covenant with Jehovah!

See Isaiah 51:16. Another example of "heaven and earth" referring to the Old Covenant with Israel and not literal creation is Isaiah 51:16. *"I have put my word in your mouth and have covered you with the shadow of my hand, to establish the heavens, to found the earth, and to say to Zion, 'You are my people'".* [NASV] [Unfortunately, the New International Version incorrectly translates this verse. Check several translations.] What is the point? Notice that God is speaking to Israel. He says he gave them his law, the Mosaic Covenant, the same law Jesus is speaking about in Matthew 5:17-18, to establish heaven and lay the foundation of the earth! Clearly Jehovah is not saying he gave the Mosaic Covenant to Israel to create literal heaven and earth! This is language to represent Israel’s covenant.

God created Israel's "heaven and earth" by giving them his Covenant. Now if he destroyed THAT Old Covenant heaven and earth and gave a NEW covenant, would he not thereby be creating a new heavens and a new earth? This is precisely the thought in the New Covenant Scriptures! Old Israel's covenant was about to pass away – (see **II Corinthians 3:10; Hebrews 8:13; 12:25**). The New Covenant of Christ was being given (**Ephesians 3:3; Hebrews 2:1**). Since the giving of the Old Covenant created "heaven and earth," the giving of a NEW Covenant would mean a new heaven and earth (II Peter 3) was revealed.

The fall of Jerusalem was far more than the passing of the capital of Judaism—it was the dawning of a new age! Matthew 24:29-34 refers to the judgment upon the Jewish people for violations of the Old Covenant. In AD 70 the salvation that comes through simple faith in Christ was fully revealed, Colossians 3:1. It is because of what happened then, as the consummation of the work started on the Cross, Hebrews 9:26-28, that you and I can have confidence in the Word of God and the God of the Word. Christ did come in judgment of the Old World in AD 70 and fully established the unending New Covenant Heaven and Earth. This is when all things foretold by the prophets was fulfilled and that is how heaven and earth passed away! The Old Covenant Law is gone—forever. Jesus is our Lawgiver. Hear Him! Listen to His Spirit. He commands us to *love one another* (Jn 13:34).