

I Came not to Destroy, but to Fulfill

Introduction:

The passage itself is quite simple. But as in all controversial and difficult passages it is the error and twisting of other Scriptures that have created the difficulties. The root of this problem all began with the false teachers in the early days of the church after Paul and Barnabas returned from establishing several primarily Gentile churches. They demanded every Gentile must be circumcised and commanded to keep the Law of Moses. Although this issue was definitively answered by the Holy Spirit in that same chapter, there have been people putting forth the same arguments ever since.

But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." Acts 15:5

Rather than getting bogged down in the minute details of the errors that are raging among the denominations and even among our brethren, who use this passage to justify unscriptural marriage or continuing to keep the Sabbath day, we want to simply look at the passage in the setting that it was first heard.

The Prophet who is to Come into the World

The audience to whom Jesus spoke heard only one thought and so should we. They had no idea of a relationship between the Law of Moses and the gospel of Christ. It had not even entered their minds. They were hearing for the first time that Jesus had a relationship with and a purpose for the Law of Moses. Remember many were already getting ideas about who Jesus was and what He was here to do. The rulers had already sent a delegation to John to ask him if he was the Prophet.

Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." Jn. 1:19-21

Others became convinced that Jesus himself was the Prophet based on His signs and teaching.

Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jn. 6:14

Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet." 41 Others said, "This is the Christ." Jn. 7:40-41

It appears that even at this time Jesus was suspected of being the prophet Moses had promised. As time passed more and more people began to believe it. These words were spoken to keep all misunderstandings of what He was to do at a minimum.

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, 16 according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.' 17 "And the Lord said to me: 'What they have spoken is good. 18 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. Deut. 18:15-19 see also Acts 3:22-24; 7:37;

There were many ideas about how this prophet who would be "like you" (Moses the Lawgiver) would carry out his mission. Jesus settled the matter right here. He had not come to destroy the Law of Moses. They may not have fully understood all that He was saying as these things were not revealed until the apostles and prophets were inspired by the Spirit and given all truth. But one thing was clear. Jesus had no plans to destroy or remove one jot or tittle from the Law until all had been accomplished.

Born under the Law to Redeem those Under the Law

From later writings we can see exactly what Jesus was telling them. During His lifetime that Law would remain intact and absolute. Nothing would be added or removed until it was all fulfilled. This is exactly what the Holy Spirit revealed through Paul.

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Gal 4:4-5

Jesus was born "under the Law." He lived his life "under the Law" and died "under the Law." At His death, all were redeemed from that Law and given the right to receive the adoption as sons. It was His death that brought the fulfillment, and at that time the Law of Moses was nailed to the cross.

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, 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. 15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. 16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17

which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Col. 2:13-18

When Jesus died on the cross, He wiped out the handwriting of requirements (the Law of Moses). He took that Law out of the way and nailed it to the cross. From that moment on all was fulfilled and it was no longer binding. Its commands regarding food and drink, festivals, new moons and even Sabbaths (one of the Ten Commandments) were no longer binding. The authority of Moses' Law remained absolute until Jesus' death. But after the resurrection, all of the authority contained in the Law of Moses was taken from Moses and given to Jesus. Jesus now has all authority in heaven and earth. This means that any authority given to the Law of Moses must be taken away from Jesus.

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."
Mt. 28:18-19*

Do Not Think I came Destroy

"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." Mt. 5:17-20

When Jesus was born, the Law of Moses was still God's Law for Israel. As long as Jesus lived, He and they were under the Law. Jesus wanted it clearly understood that he had not come to "destroy" either "the Law or the Prophets." This word is critical to our understanding of what Jesus did **NOT** come to do. Take a few minutes to see the fullness of this word.

kataluo, kata, "down," intensive, and luo 4, "to destroy utterly, to overthrow completely," is rendered "destroy," in Mt. 5:17, twice, of the Law; Mt. 24:2; 26:61; 27:40; Mark 13:2; 14:58; 15:29; Luke 21:6, of the Temple; in Acts 6:14, of Jerusalem; in Gal. 2:18, (Vine's Expository Dictionary 2647)

kataluo- to dissolve, to disunite a. what has been joined together, equivalent to: to destroy, to demolish .. throw down... b. metaphorically, to overthrow, that is, to render vain, to deprive of success, to bring to naught, to subvert, to overthrow; used of institutions, forms of government, laws, etc. to deprive of force, to annul, to abrogate, to discard ... (Thayer 2647)

God did not send Jesus to "completely overthrow" the Law. Jesus did not come into the world to "destroy, demolish, overthrow, render vain, bring to naught, subvert or overthrow" the Law. It was not part of God's plan to "to deprive it of force, annul it, abrogate it or discard it." Even today many believe this is why Jesus came, or at least what He accomplished with His death on the cross. They want a complete break between the "harsh" Law of Moses and the "gentle" Law of Christ. Some actually teach that God treated people differently under that Law being more harsh and expecting greater obedience than He does under the gospel.

Jesus vehemently and clearly denied it. Any understanding we have of the Law and all that the NT teaches on the relationship of the Law to the gospel cannot violate the clear teaching of this verse. This is one extreme we must avoid at all costs.

Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. 22 But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23 But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Gal. 3:21-24

Consider the difference between the law given to Adam and Eve and what Jesus is saying here. They were allowed to remain in the garden of Eden, and they were commanded only to refrain from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When they violated that law all was destroyed. They were cast from the garden, and that law was destroyed, never to be given or even spoken of again.

I Came to Fulfill

Although it was never Jesus' intent to "destroy" Moses' Law, things were definitely not going to stay the same. Jesus did not give much information at this point in His ministry. He only told them He would "fulfill" all its requirements. He left completely silent what would occur after the Law was fulfilled. As a matter of fact it was entirely up to God what would happen to that Law at that time, and only God can tell us what the Law is now to be used for. But nothing could happen until all was fulfilled.

"pleroo, ...1. to make full, to fill, to fill up... to fill to the full... to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally...2. to render full, i. e. to complete; a. prop. to fill up to the top...so that nothing shall be wanting to full measure, fill to the brim,... b. to perfect, consummate... bb. to make complete in every particular; to render perfect... c. to carry into effect, bring to realization, realize; ..." (Thayer, p. 517-518; 4137).

Jesus explained that he came to "to make full, fill, fill up... complete, perfect, and consummate" the Law. The Law of Moses was a mixture of law and prophecy and spiritual explanations. Until all the prophecies were fulfilled and until all the things God explained in the Law were also fulfilled that Law

could not be changed. The blood of bulls and goats had to be replaced. The articles in the temple had to be built in heaven. The High Priest had to become eternal and after the order of Melchizedek. Multitudes of things had to be accomplished before the Law could be fulfilled.

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." Luke 24:44-45

Was Done that it Might be Fulfilled

The virgin shall be with child.	<u>Mt. 1:22-23</u>	Warned not to make known.	<u>Mt 12:15-18</u>
Taking Jesus to Egypt.	<u>Mt. 2:14-15</u>	All spoken in parables.	<u>Mt. 13:34-35</u>
Death of infants in Bethlehem.	<u>Mt. 2:17-18</u>	Riding on a donkey.	<u>Mt. 21:4-5</u>
Living in Nazareth.	<u>Mt. 2:23</u>	Jesus betrayed in Gethsemane.	<u>Mt. 26:52-56</u>
Dwelling in Capernaum.	<u>Mt. 4:13-14</u>	Judas given 30 pieces of silver.	<u>Mt 27:9-10</u>
Healing the sick.	<u>Mt. 8:16-17</u>	Crucified/divided his garments.	<u>Mt. 27:35</u>

Yet they were not without guidance. Jeremiah had already revealed that God would remove the old covenant and replace it with the new. This was Jesus' intent when he came into the world.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. 8 Because finding fault with them, He says: "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 — 9 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. 13 In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. Heb 8:7-10, 13

Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), 9 then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. 10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Heb 10:8-10

Jesus fulfilled God's holy and good law so He could add grace, mercy and forgiveness to it. Just as nothing in the Law could be changed until it was all fulfilled, once fulfilled it could not be modified or changed. It had to be completely removed for the necessary changes to occur.

For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. 13 For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. ... 18 For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, 19 for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. Heb 7:12-13; 18-19

So the Law had to be completed and fulfilled first. Then it could be "done away in Christ" and would soon be "nigh unto vanishing away."

Not One Jot or Tittle

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. Mt. 5:18

And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail. Lk 16:17

The conjunction "for" at the beginning of this verse reveals a logical progression important to see.

"gar... by the use of this particle, either the reason and cause of a foregoing statement is added, whence arises the causal or argumentative force of the particle, for... or some previous declaration is explained, whence gar takes on an explicative force for, the fact is, namely... Thus the force of the particle is either conclusive, or demonstrative, or explicative and declaratory;..." (Thayer, p. 109-110; 1063)

Whenever this conjunction is used, "the reason and cause of what was just stated is explained." Jesus wanted them to understand that the Law had been set in place by God and could not be arbitrarily modified. It would be easier for God to remove heaven and earth than it would be to modify even the tiniest portion of the Law. God's righteousness and integrity were the foundations of the Law of Moses. God had made promises and commitments in that Law that could not simply be set aside, even by Jesus until "all was accomplished." Jesus remained on the cross until He could say "it is finished" and at that point as Paul later revealed, the Law of Moses was nailed to that cross.

Jesus graphically illustrated the meticulous nature of what He said with the words "jot" and "tittle." These were two small portions of letters that were a part of the Hebrew and Greek Languages. The word "jot" is literally, "iota" which were the smallest Greek and Hebrew letters.

iota, (ι) from the Heb. yohd, (ך) The smallest of them all; hence equivalent to the minutest part: Mt. 5:18. (Thayer 2503)

The word "tittle" is another word they were familiar with. It was a small point on one of their letters.

keraiā- 1) a little horn 2); used by Greek grammarians of the accents and diacritical points. Jesus used it of the little lines or projections, by which the Hebrew letters in other respects similar differ from one another. NT:2762, The meaning is, "not even the minutest part of the law shall perish." (Thayer 2762)

[cheth ח and he ה]; [daleth ד and resh ר]; [beth ב and kaph כ]

This was very likely one of their idioms to explain tiny distinctions. Even today we sometimes say "not one iota," to emphasize how closely we want something followed. Jesus simply affirmed that not only could none of the ceremonial laws or laws of conduct be removed. Not even a single letter could be changed. We speak of this today as crossing our "f's" and dotting our "i's." This helps us understand what happened to Saul and Nadab and Abihu. If not even a letter could be removed, any modification of any Law made one worthy of death. God cannot lie, when He gives His word, He cannot change. The Law of Moses was in place until Jesus removed it all. Until that day not even the tiniest thing could be modified, changed or removed.

Jesus warned His disciples not to be impatient. He would become greater than Moses and His law of liberty would replace Moses Law, but not until all was accomplished.

Least and Greatest in the Kingdom

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. Mt. 5:19

Jesus now makes another important application, this time using a "therefore" which again forces us to see that his logical progression of thought.

"oun... indicating that something follows from another necessarily;... it is used in drawing a conclusion and in connecting sentences together logically, then, therefore, accordingly, consequently, these things being so..." (Thayer, p. 463-464; 3767)

This is not a new thought. Jesus is not changing subjects. These words "follow" the previous thoughts "necessarily." He is not now affirming the opposite of what He just taught, but continuing what he just finished teaching. As long as Jesus is on earth, and as long as all authority is vested in Moses, no one can break even the least of the commands Moses gave or teach anyone else they could violate them. He may already be referring to the scribes and Pharisees. Only after "all authority was given to me in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18) could these Laws be set aside. Until the Law was fulfilled and removed, any modifications were sinful and wrong.

Righteousness Exceed the Scribes and Pharisees

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. Mt. 5:20

These final words clearly stamp it with a time element, making it certain he only spoke of the time period while He was still on this earth. He again uses "gar" to reveal this is "the reason and cause of what was just stated is explained." By speaking of the righteousness of His own disciples exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees of that day, He dates it to that time period while the Law of Moses was still in force. Unless they sought to exceed that righteousness when all those sermons were preached in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), they would not have responded or entered the kingdom

The leaders in that day could not be looked up to in their personal lives. Though they were the teachers of the Law, there was a great deal of hypocrisy that Jesus warned against.

In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. 2 For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Lk. 12:1

Just before His crucifixion he again warned Israel of this problem. The sad reality was that though they taught the truth they refused to do it themselves. They could bind heavy burdens on others and teach it clearly to others, but when it came to doing it themselves they were terrible examples.

Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying: "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. 4 For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. Mt 23:1-4

Hence Jesus warned His disciples that their own responsibility is directly to God's law. Not to those who are preaching it. What follows in the rest of this chapter are some of the things concerning righteousness that Jesus wants his disciples to pay special attention.

- 1 What prophesy did Moses give about Jesus that is dealt with in this section?
- 2 Would Jesus set aside Moses Law while he lived on earth?
- 3 Did the controversy between the authority of Jesus and that of Moses end after the cross?
- 4 What are the extremes we must avoid if we are to be right with God?
- 5 Could these words of Jesus contradict what the Spirit later told Paul?
- 6 Since Jesus did not “destroy” the law, do we have to keep the Sabbath today?
- 7 Does Jesus fulfilling the Law allow it to vanish away and be done way in Christ?
- 8 What is a jot and a tittle?
- 9 What does the jot and tittle have to do with Moses Law?
- 10 Before Jesus death on the cross, how much of Moses Law could be set aside?
- 11 As long as Jesus was on earth what would happen if his disciples taught anyone not to keep the Law?
- 12 Is Paul least in the kingdom because he taught we do not have to observe the Sabbath?
- 13 Why does Jesus warn his disciples about the righteousness of the Pharisees?
- 14 Does his use of the scribes and Pharisees help us with the time frame of this verse?