

# JESUS' TEACHING OF MATTHEW 5:17-19 EXAMINED: -

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**NOTE: -** All Bible texts are taken from the King James Version; and the compiler has supplied all emphasis throughout this Study Document.

Matthew 5:17 - 19: - "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach [them], the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Christ stated these words publicly in his Sermon on the Mount, which all professed Christians, of whatever denominational affiliation accept as being binding upon Christians for all time. Jesus' words are **plain** and **unambiguous**. Let us simply examine his statement, verse by verse.

**VS. 17:** - Christ taught concerning his coming into this world that he came **not** to destroy the "law" or "the prophets". He repeats this thought twice, and then stated that he came to fulfil them.

- It should be noted that "destroy" and "fulfil" are in contrast or are in opposition to each other in this verse.
- The term "the law and the prophets" is referring to the written Scriptures in Jesus' day, which we today erroneously call the Old Testament writings. The following New Testament passages establish this point: -

John 1:45: - "Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, **We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write**, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Acts 13:15: - "And after **the reading of the law and the prophets** the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, [Ye] men [and] brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."

Acts 28:23: - "And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into [his] lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, **both out of the law of Moses, and [out of] the prophets**, from morning till evening."

**See also:** - Matthew 7:12; 11:13; 22:35 - 40; Luke 24:27, 44 & 45; Acts 24:14; Romans 3:21.

- Concerning Christ's purpose in coming into this world to fulfil the law and the prophets - The word "**fulfil**" in the New Testament Scriptures has a number of different shades of meaning, two of which would apply to Jesus' mission in coming into this world.
  - i.) The word "**fulfil**" is often applied by the New Testament writers in the sense of: - **to carry out, to perform an obligation, to obey**. Here are some examples.

Acts 13:22: - "And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them **David** to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the [son] of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, **which shall fulfil all my will.**"

Romans 2:27: - "And shall not **uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law**, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?"

Romans 8:4: - **“That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”**

Galatians 6:2: - **“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”**

James 2:8: - **“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.”**

ii.) The word **“fulfil”** would also refer to Jesus’ fulfilling the many Scripture prophecies concerning the promised Messiah. Here are some examples.

Matthew 2:13 - 15: - **“And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: **that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.**”**

**NOTE**: - The prophecy that Matthew is referring to is Hosea 11:1.

Matthew 26:54 - 56: - **“But how then shall **the scriptures be fulfilled**, that thus it must be? In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done, **that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.** Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.”**

Luke 24:44: - **“And he said unto them, These [are] the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, **that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and [in] the prophets, and [in] the psalms, concerning me.**”**



Christ came to fulfil – that is to obey the teachings and commandments found within the “Law and the prophets”; and he also came to fulfil the prophecies of the “Law and the prophets” concerning his first coming.

**VS. 18**: - Jesus stated that until heaven and earth passed away, **NOT** one iota or tittle of the Law should pass away, until all things have been fulfilled. In the context of Jesus’ statement, this Law **must** be found in “the law and the prophets” – the Scriptures of Jesus’ day.

▪ The Bible has predicted that heaven and earth shall eventually pass away.

Psalms 102:24 - 26: - **“I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years [are] throughout all generations. **Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens [are] the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed.**”**

Matthew 24:35: - **“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”**

When does this event occur? At the Day of the Lord.

2 Peter 3:10: - **“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”**

▪ The Greek word for “jot” is the word “iota” – See Strong’s Concordance; Greek, No. 2503. It is defined as “the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic yod which in the original form of the saying, represented the smallest letter of the alphabet.” – A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, by Walter Bauer, page 386.

- The Greek word for “tittle” is the word “keraia” – See Strong’s Concordance; Greek No. 2762. It is defined as “literally ‘horn’; projection, hook as part of a letter, a serif.” – Bauer, page 428.

“SERIF” – “One of the fine cross-strokes at the top and bottom of a letter.” – The Oxford Universal Dictionary Illustrated, Volume 2, page 1848.

- In reality what Jesus is simply saying is that **NOT** even the smallest letter of the Law or even the crossing of a “T” of a letter of the Law is to pass away. And Luke echoes Matthew’s account of Jesus’ statement. Luke 16:17: - “**And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.**”

☞ This verse from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount answers the common objection that under the New Covenant, Christians have been freed from the “letter of the law”. Jesus taught that the smallest letter even down to the crossing of a “T” of a letter of the Law would remain as long as heaven and earth remain.

The following prophecy from the book of Psalms concerning the coming of the Messiah has a direct bearing upon Christ’s statement in Matthew 5:18.

Psalms 40:6 - 10: - “Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. **Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book [it is] written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law [is] within my heart.** I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. **I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart;** I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.”

**NOTE:** - (That this is indeed a prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah, see Hebrews 10:5 - 9, where the apostle Paul applies this to Christ.) A few comments may be helpful: -

- In VS. 8 Christ stated, “I delight to do thy will, O my God”; “**thy law is within my heart**”. God’s will therefore is having his Law in our hearts. Jesus himself said that he had kept his Father’s Commandments, when he was upon this earth.  
John 15:10: - “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; **even as I have kept my Father’s commandments,** and abide in his love.”
- In VS. 9 it was predicted of the Messiah that he would preach righteousness in the great congregation. Jesus’ whole Sermon on the Mount was a fulfilment of this prophecy, where he did indeed preach more fully and clearly God’s standard of righteousness to his disciples and to the multitudes that heard him.
- In VS. 10 it is stated concerning the Messiah, “I have not hid **thy righteousness within my heart**”.

☞ Putting VS. 8 together with VS. 10, we find that **God’s righteousness = having God’s law within the heart.**

This truth is further reinforced when we consider what the psalmist and the prophet Isaiah have also written on the vital point of God’s righteousness.

Psalms 119:172: - “My tongue shall speak of thy word: **for all thy commandments [are] righteousness.**”

**NOTE:** - All ten of God’s holy and just Commandments **ARE** God’s standard of righteousness.

Isaiah 51:6 - 8: - “Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: **for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment,** and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, **and my righteousness shall not be abolished.** Harken unto me, **ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart [is] my law;** fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: **but my righteousness shall be for ever,** and my salvation from generation to generation.”

**NOTE:** - Although the heavens and the earth shall pass away (which Jesus referred to in Matthew 5:18), God's Righteousness **shall not be abolished - it shall stand for ever.** (This echoes exactly Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:18.) The people, who know righteousness, are those who have God's Law within their hearts. (This is because God's Law **IS** righteousness.) Complete harmony exists between these passages in the book of Isaiah and Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:18!

**VS. 19:** - The second word of this verse – “**Therefore**” indicates that what Jesus is about to say is based upon what he has just stated in VS. 18. Because every letter of the Law even down to the crossing of a “T” of a letter of the Law still remains, whosoever should break one of **these** least Commandments, and should also teach others to break them, they shall be called the least **by**<sup>#</sup> the kingdom of heaven. While those who keep the least of **these** Commandments, and should teach others to do the same, will be called great **by** the kingdom of heaven.

- Jesus' use of the word “**these**” referring to the Commandments of the Law of VS. 18 is specific. Jesus is **specifically** referring to the least of these righteous Commandments of the unalterable Law that is **not** to be broken, but are to be obeyed and taught.

At the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Jesus summed up two types of hearers concerning his teachings: - A wise person hears and keeps Jesus' sayings; an unwise person hears but does not obey Jesus' sayings. (Note that Jesus has again used the specific word “**these**” concerning his sayings – he is specifically referring to sayings recorded in the Sermon on the Mount.)

Matthew 7:24 - 27: - “**Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.**”

☞ **These sayings of Jesus must also include his statements found in Matthew 5:17 - 19.**

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# The Greek word that is translated in the KJV twice in VS. 19 as “in” is the preposition “en” - See Strong's Concordance: Greek, No. 1722. It has a range of meanings which includes “among, in, by, with, within”. It is better translated as “**by** the kingdom of heaven” in this verse. Why? Because commandment-keepers will be allowed to enter into the Heavenly City, the New Jerusalem – Revelation 22:14: - “**Blessed [are] they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.**” Therefore, those who break the least of these commandments and teach others to do the same will **not** be in the Kingdom of Heaven. They will be called the least **by** the Kingdom of Heaven – that is **by** those who are in the Kingdom of Heaven.