

---

# LIFE BIBLE STUDY

---

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: MATTHEW 5:17-48**

To determine the true meaning of the law, and why it is still important to Christians today.

## The Real Story

As a child, I'll never forget the real story of the three little pigs. Not the regular version, the *real* story. It was narrated by the so-called big bad wolf, who as it turns out, wasn't so bad at all. In his account of the story, he had a head cold, which made him sneeze a lot. He was baking a cake and simply needed sugar, and so he



went ask his neighbors for some. His neighbors? The pigs. They were, of course, very rude to him, and each time when he got worked up, his cold would cause him to sneeze, which in turn, destroyed the pig's house.

**“Jesus unpacks the true meaning of the Law as it was intended to be understood from the beginning.”**

---

It was a favorite of mine because it took a story that we had all heard a dozen times and seemingly redefined it, except, it wasn't redefined. It was the *actual* story. In this next part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus does a similar thing. The Law, handed down by Moses and practiced through the centuries by Jews, was very familiar to all of Jesus' audience, and then Jesus seemingly redefines it, except, He doesn't. He

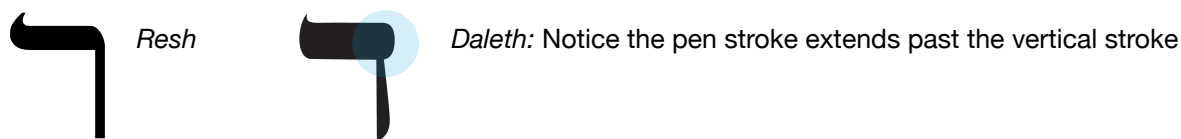
unpacks the *true meaning* of the Law as it was intended to be understood from the beginning.

## Abolished or Fulfilled?

It isn't uncommon for churches to avoid study of the Old Testament. It's difficult, a part of a non-western and ancient culture, seemingly barbaric, and depicts God in a way that seems different from the New Testament. Overwhelmingly, however, it is because there is a deep belief (and misunderstanding) that, "all of that Old Testament stuff is done away with under the New Covenant. However, upon further inspection, Jesus seems to tell us quite the contrary: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." Jesus does indicate a time in which the law will eventually pass away, however: "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished." Since the law is recorded in Hebrew, Jesus likely means the smallest letter or stroke (sometimes translated, "jot or tittle") from Hebrew. The smallest letter in Hebrew is the *yod*.

י *Yod*

The *yod* is similar to an apostrophe in English orthography. While the smallest letter is small, the smallest stroke is even smaller. In Hebrew, there is an almost ornamental pen stroke that can be seen in the difference between the two letters, *resh* and *daleth*.



In the figure above, the *resh* is one single pen stroke, where the *daleth* appears to be two. The extension of the horizontal pen stroke past the vertical pen stroke is what Jesus was referring to. This would be considered the smallest stroke, or a *tittle*.

What is the point Jesus is making? That not even the almost unnoticeably small marks of the law will pass away until the second coming, much less whole chunks of it. Jesus doesn't just obey the law; He fulfills it. He, "fills it fully," to be more true to the original language. This means two things are true for Christians today. First, when approaching the Old Testament then, it must never be discounted as useless, but it also must always be interpreted through the person and ministry of Jesus. Since the law is binding over us, and Jesus fulfills that binding law, the only way to satisfy its demands in our lives is by the exchange of righteousness that happens when we are born again. A Christian's unrighteousness is placed onto Jesus, and His perfect righteousness through the fulfillment of the law is placed over the believer (2 Corinthians 5:21). Second, that Jesus fulfills the law also implies that He understands the correct interpretation of it. This means that when Jesus says, "You have heard it said... but I say to you," He is not giving *new definition* to the law, but rather explaining how it was intended to be understood from the beginning.

The Pharisees' interpretation of the Law was so off base and riddled with illogical conclusions. For example, the way they interpreted the Law led them to teach that it was ok to love your friend but hate your enemy (43-46), but Jesus establishes how illogical this is by way of asking the question: "Do not even the Gentiles do that?" (47). How far had the religious leaders come that their interpretation of God's perfect Law would lead them to do something that even pagans do?

## The Law Rightly Interpreted

Jesus gives six examples of the law with His correct interpretation of them, and they would have come as a shock to the readers or disciples of that time because of how radically misunderstood they were to begin with. Murder, adultery, divorce, false vows, eye for an eye, and loving your neighbor but hating your enemy are all covered in His teaching, and in each category Jesus deliberately attacks the heart. Murder is merely hating your brother. Adultery is simply lust. Love your neighbor, yes, but *also* your enemy. This is a radical shift from action to intent. From behavior to the spiritual condition of a person. This was God's intention from the beginning. This is why God said through the prophet Isaiah that the people, "draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote" (Isaiah 29:13). As you study this week, ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and identify whether you understand God's law through the lens of rote obedience, or the lens of love in Christ.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Matthew 5:17-20. According to this passage, what is Jesus' relationship to the Law? What are the consequences of leading others away from the Law? Summarize verse 19 in your own words. Consider verse 20, and write down what you think Jesus means by this statement? How is this truth tied Him fulfilling the Law?
2. Read Matthew 5:21-26. In your own words, summarize what Jesus is saying. What is the core problem He is attacking? How does this passage tie into your understanding of spiritual maturity?

### Day Two

1. Read Matthew 5:27-30. In Jewish culture, "adultery" meant strictly the act of sexual relations with another woman who was already married to a different man. The stress of this sin was more or less theft, not sexual immorality. Jesus heightens this to any sexual immorality. What are the consequences of unchecked sexual sin according to this passage? What lengths should someone go to in order to quell this type of sin?
2. Read Matthew 5:31-32. What is the one reason Jesus gives for divorce? In your own opinion, is divorce ever something God desires? Why or why not? Use Scripture to support your answers.

### Day Three

1. Read Matthew 5:33-37. Now read Leviticus 19:12 and Numbers 30:2. What is Jesus saying in this passage? Is He saying that oaths are never acceptable, or that frivolous oaths are never acceptable? Support your answer with Scripture (Hint: Read 2 Corinthians 1:18 and Galatians 1:20).
2. Read Matthew 5:38-42. This seems insubstantial at first, but this is actually a correction of another ancient law code. The Laws of Eshnunna (LE), written around 1800 BC in Akkadian, dictate that if someone slaps your cheek they are to pay you 10 shekels. However, Jesus radically alters this. What is the core principle being taught by Jesus here?

### Day Four

1. Read Matthew 5:43-48. "Love your neighbor," very clearly comes from 19:18, but "hate your enemy" is nowhere found in the Old Testament, indicating the teaching of the Pharisees of that day had drifted quite dramatically from the Scriptures. Why would, "hate your enemy," be a legitimate teaching that people

would buy into? Think of the exiles throughout Jewish history. Put yourself in the shoes of an Israelite; how would you feel, as a Jew, regarding your enemies?

2. What does Jesus' correction of the Law demonstrate about our need for reading, knowing, digesting, and meditating on God's Word?

## Week 8 Discussion: The Heart of the Matter

In Matthew 5:17-48, Jesus brings His readers to the heart of the issues that the Law was originally meant to address. It is within the desire of humanity to know where the black and white lines are within morality, and yet Jesus attacks the heart in six of these examples. Discuss together how important the heart is to growing in spiritual maturity.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever taken a Freedom Group or a recovery group of some sort that addressed heart issues? If so, what did you discover about yourself? If not, why not?
2. Matthew 5:23-24 address the sequence of events that should happen when you are making an offering at the altar (worship) and you remember a brother (or sister) has something against you. How hard is this to practice and why? Note: this passage indicates nothing of innocence or guilt, but only that a brother has something against you.
3. Why is the issue of making frivolous vows a heart issue? Have you ever met someone that made frivolous vows and couldn't keep them?
4. How have you sabotaged yourself as a result of unchecked heart issues? How have other people harmed you as a result of heart issues?
5. In essence, Jesus is saying to us, "Do not be conformed to this world (the worldly interpretation of the Law) but be transformed by the renewing of the mind (the Spirit's work in our lives)" (Romans 12:2). What will you do this year to be transformed in your mind and your heart? Make a plan and hold one another accountable.

## Takeaways:

1. Jesus rightly corrects the misinterpretation of the Law in a way that sheds light on the sinfulness of our hearts.
2. The Law is not done away with, but rather perfectly fulfilled in the Son of God, and all who are born again in Him are given His perfect righteousness that upholds the Law (2 Corinthians 5:21).

### *PRAYER REQUESTS:*