

How Did Jesus Christ Fulfill the Law and the Prophets?

*As Mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus emphasized
the spiritual intent and purpose of the Law and the Prophets.*

Throughout the Bible, there is a *contrast* between the physical and the spiritual. The apostle Paul wrote that the physical comes *first*, then the spiritual (I Cor. 15:45-47). The first man, Adam, came from the earth and was physical. The second Adam, Jesus Christ, came from heaven and is spiritual. Likewise, the Old Covenant was physical, and has been superseded by the New Covenant, which is spiritual. God established the Old Covenant with the children of Israel by proclaiming the Ten Commandments from the top of Mount Sinai. The event was so terrifying to the people that they pleaded with Moses to no longer have God speak *directly* to them (Ex. 20:18-19).

Because the children of Israel were fearful of God's voice and power, Moses stood as mediator between God and the people to bring them God's spoken words. Moses went to the top of Sinai to meet with God, where he received the statutes, judgments and other laws to deliver to the children of Israel. Moses was considered lawgiver and mediator of the Old Covenant (Ex. 20-24).

Moses' office as mediator and lawgiver was a physical *type* of the coming spiritual Lawgiver, Jesus Christ. When the children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land, God gave this prophecy of the coming Messiah: "And the LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well what they have spoken [that they wanted Moses to speak to them, instead of God]. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, *one* like you [Moses], and will put My words in His mouth. And He shall speak to them all that I shall command Him. And it shall come to pass, whatever man will not hearken to My words which He shall speak in My name, I will require *it* of him' " (Deut. 18:17-19).

This prophecy of the coming Messiah reveals that those who reject the words of Christ will be held accountable by God on the day of judgment. During His ministry, Jesus confirmed that He was that Prophet and that His words are the *standard* by which all will be judged: "But if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. **The one who rejects Me and does not receive My words has one who judges him; the word which I have spoken, that shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken from Myself; but the Father, Who sent Me, gave Me commandment Himself, what I should say and what I should speak**" (John 12:47-49).

Obviously, the spiritual office of Jesus far overshadows the physical office of Moses. Christ was God manifested in the flesh—the Lord God of the Old Testament Who had established the Old Covenant with the children of Israel. His death ended the Old Covenant with its "administration of death," and established the New Covenant which offers the gift of eternal life (II Cor. 3:6-11).

Unlike the Old Covenant, which required obedience only to the letter of the Law, the New Covenant is based on obedience to the spiritual intent of the Law. For this reason, Christ came as the spiritual Lawgiver to amplify and magnify the laws of God: "The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will magnify the Law and make *it* glorious" (Isa. 42:21). The Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry reveal that God requires obedience to His commandments not only in the letter of the Law, but in the spirit of the Law as well. Throughout His ministry, Jesus taught repentance from *sin*—which is clearly defined as the transgression of the laws of God (I John 3:4).

In spite of Jesus' clear teachings which magnify the laws and commandments of God, most professing Christians have been taught that Christ came to abolish the laws of God. Jesus, however, emphatically denounced this idea: **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the Law until everything has been fulfilled”** (Matt. 5:17-18).

How Did Jesus Fulfill the Law?

To comprehend how Jesus fulfilled the Law, we must first understand the meaning of the word *fulfill*, translated in Matthew 5:17 from the Greek verb *pleeroo*. Depending on the context, *pleeroo* is understood as either 1) *fulfill* (do, carry out); 2) *bring to full expression*, i.e., show forth the true spiritual meaning; or 3) *fill up*, as in “to complete” (Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

As our spiritual Lawgiver, **Christ fulfilled the Law of God by bringing it to its full expression, thus revealing its complete spiritual meaning and intent.** He “filled the Law to the full” by teaching obedience in the spirit of the Law. That is how He magnified the laws and commandments of God and made them honorable.

To fulfill the Law of God by amplifying its meaning and application is the exact *opposite* of abolishing the Law. If Jesus had come to abolish the laws of God, He would not have magnified and expanded their meaning, making them even more binding.

Jesus taught His disciples the spiritual meaning and application of every one of God's laws and commandments. For example, He magnified the Sixth Commandment by showing that murder begins in the heart and is rooted in hatred and anger (Matt. 5:21-22). The spiritual amplification of the Sixth Commandment extends far beyond the letter of the Law, which judges only physical acts of violence. Under the New Covenant, hatred in one's heart is judged as murder (1 John 3:15). This spiritual standard also applies to hatred for an enemy (verses 43-44).

Christ also taught the spiritual meaning and application of the Seventh Commandment. “You have heard that it was said to those *in ancient times*, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ **But I say to you** [as the spiritual Lawgiver], **everyone who looks upon a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart**” (Matt. 5:27-28). Jesus made the Seventh Commandment far more binding than did the letter of the Law. Thus, every individual is held accountable for his or her adulterous thoughts, even if no physical act is committed.

A thorough study of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in Matthew 5-7, will show that Jesus revealed the full spiritual meaning of all the commandments of God.

Jesus Brought the Physical Rituals of the Law to Completion: A second meaning of *pleeroo*—translated “to fulfill” in Matthew 5:17—is “to complete,” or “bring to completion.” Christ came to bring the entire system of animal sacrifices, temple rituals and laws for the Aaronic priesthood to completion. Through His death, Jesus *ended* the Old Covenant, which had imposed a system of ritual laws on the children of Israel. In its place, He established the New Covenant, replacing the old requirements of the Law with a higher spiritual application.

The sacrificial laws were brought to completion through the superior sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The sacrifice of Jesus as the “Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world” superseded and replaced all the animal sacrifices and other physical rituals and ceremonies that were performed at the Temple of God in Jerusalem. The apostle Paul confirms the consummation of the sacrificial and ritual system through the one perfect sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 10:5-12).

With the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, the priesthood of Aaron and the Levites came to an end as well. Thus, a physical priesthood was no longer required because Christ was serving as High Priest in heaven, making intercession for the saints before God the Father.

In the same way, the spiritual Temple in heaven has superseded the physical Temple that was on earth. Under the New Covenant, true believers have direct access through prayer to the heavenly throne of God the Father. Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, where He carries out His spiritual work as High Priest (Heb. 10:16-22).

Physical Circumcision Brought to Completion: With the end of the Old Covenant, the requirement for circumcision of the flesh was superseded by spiritual circumcision of the heart. The apostle Paul makes this clear: “For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, neither *is* that circumcision which *is* external in *the* flesh; rather, he *is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly, and **circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit** and not in *the* letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God” (Rom. 2:28-29).

Spiritual circumcision brings conversion of the mind and heart, which physical circumcision in the flesh cannot accomplish. To be circumcised in the heart, a person must repent of his or her sins and be baptized by *full immersion* in water. The act of baptism is a **type of circumcision** because the sins of the flesh are removed. Then, through the laying on of hands, the believer receives the Holy Spirit, converting the heart and mind. The apostle Paul describes the spiritual circumcision that takes place at baptism: “For in Him [Jesus Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, Who is the Head of all principality and power in Whom **you have also been circumcised with the circumcision not made by hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism**, by which you have also been raised with *Him* through the inner working of God, Who raised Him from the dead. For you, who were *once* dead in *your* sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has *now* made alive with Him, having forgiven all your trespasses” (Col. 2:9-13).

Tithing Transferred Under the New Covenant: Under the Old Covenant, God gave authority to the priests and Levites to collect tithes and offerings from the children of Israel. Under the New Covenant, there is no priesthood of men—only the *one* High Priest, Jesus Christ, Who is “a High Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 6:20). The apostle Paul explains that Melchisedec was Priest of God at Jerusalem in the days of Abraham. In describing how Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedec, Paul reveals that He was the one Who later came to earth as Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:5-13).

As Paul reiterates, the entire Levitical priesthood has been superseded by Jesus. However, there is still a need to teach the true worship of God and to preach and publish the Word of God. Through His Church, Christ has provided a ministry that is able to teach the Word of God and to preach the gospel to the world. Christ has also provided a way to support the ministry. Under the New Covenant, the authority to receive tithes and offerings has been transferred from the Levitical priesthood *to* the ministry of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul makes this very clear: “Don’t you know that those who are laboring *in* the sacred things of the temple live *of the things* of the temple, *and* those who are ministering at the altar are partakers with the altar? **In the same way also, the Lord did command that those who preach the gospel are to live of the gospel**” (I Cor. 9:13-14).

How Did Christ Fulfill the Prophets?

During Jesus’ life in the flesh, all the Old Testament prophecies concerning His first coming were fulfilled. These prophecies included His miraculous conception and birth from the virgin Mary, the flight to Egypt to escape Herod, the return to Galilee and dwelling in Nazareth, the announcing of His ministry by John the Baptist, the healings and mighty works during His ministry, the preaching of the Gospel throughout the land of Judea and Galilee, the persecution and suffering that followed, His death by crucifixion, the place of His burial, and the time of the

resurrection. Many of the prophecies that were fulfilled concern His suffering and death on the Passover day.

Although nearly two thousand years have passed since these prophecies were completed, the many prophecies in both the Old and New Testaments about Christ's second coming have yet to be fulfilled. To be sure, every prophecy in the Word of God will be fulfilled in its set time as determined by God the Father (Acts 1:7). Jesus did not abolish a single prophecy or even a single word of the Old Testament. Again, Jesus said concerning the Scriptures: "For truly I say to you, **until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the Law until everything has been fulfilled**" (Matt. 5:18).

The Spirit and Intent of the Law and the Prophets

The purpose of the Law and the Prophets and all the writings of the Old Testament is to teach people to love, worship and obey God, and Him alone. Christ revealed the spirit and intent of the Law and the Prophets when He was asked by a scribe to name the "greatest" commandment. Jesus replied, " 'You shall love *the* Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is *the* first and greatest commandment; and *the* second *one is* like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' **On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets**" (Matt. 22:35-40). And again, "Therefore, everything that you would have men do to you, so also do to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

Under the New Covenant, true worship and love toward God is made possible through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which enables the believer to reverence God and obey Him from the heart. Through deep faith in Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the believer learns to obey every command of God in the full spirit and intent of the Law, as magnified by Jesus Christ. This is the manner in which every true believer will keep the laws and commandments of God, because he or she loves God the Father and Jesus Christ with all the heart, mind, soul and strength.