

Matthew 5:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

Analysis

This verse stands as a pivotal declaration in the Sermon on the Mount, addressing concerns that Jesus' ministry contradicts the Old Testament. The Greek word 'kataluo' (καταλύω) means to destroy, dismantle, or abolish. Jesus emphatically denies this intention. Instead, He came to 'fulfill' (πληρόω/plerosai) the Law and Prophets—to complete, accomplish, and bring to full expression. This fulfillment operates on multiple levels:

1. Jesus perfectly obeyed the Law's demands
2. He accomplished the prophetic promises pointing to Messiah,
3. He revealed the Law's deepest meaning and intent.

Far from abolishing Scripture, Jesus establishes it on firmer ground by embodying its righteousness and explaining its true spiritual significance.

Historical Context

First-century Judaism held Scripture (Torah and Prophets) in highest reverence. Pharisees and scribes meticulously preserved and interpreted the Law. When Jesus challenged their traditions (Mark 7:1-13) and reinterpreted Sabbath law (Matthew 12:1-8), religious leaders accused Him of undermining Scripture. This context makes Jesus' clarification crucial—He honors Scripture's authority while exposing how traditions had obscured its true meaning. Early Christians, many from Jewish backgrounds, needed this teaching to understand continuity between Old and New Covenants.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus fulfill the Law in ways that go beyond mere obedience to its commands?
2. In what ways might we 'destroy' Scripture by misinterpretation or selective application?
3. How should this verse shape our reading of the Old Testament in light of Christ?

Interlinear Text

Μὴ νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον καταλῦσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς
not Think that I am to destroy G3588 the law or G3588
G3361 G3543 G3754 G2064 G2647 G3551 G2228

προφήτας· οὐκ ἦλθον καταλῦσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι
the prophets not I am to destroy but to fulfil
G4396 G3756 G2064 G2647 G235 G4137

Additional Cross-References

Romans 10:4 (Word): For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Luke 16:17 (Word): And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

Romans 8:4 (Word): That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Romans 3:31 (Word): Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

Isaiah 42:21 (Word): The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable.

Matthew 7:12 (Word): Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Matthew 3:15 (Parallel theme): And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

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