

# **Jesus and the Law from *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*** *by Douglas Moo*

What impact did the coming of Jesus the Messiah (*see* Christ) and the establishment through him of the kingdom of God (*see* Kingdom of God) have on the authority and applicability of the Mosaic Law? The question is at the heart of the Gospels. It played a critical role not only in Jesus' disputes with various Jewish groups but also in the development of the early church's self-understanding as followers of Jesus sought to define the relationship between the church and Israel.

Jesus, living in the overlap between the old covenant and the new, is generally obedient to the Mosaic Law, but at the same time he makes clear that he has sovereign rights both to interpret and to set aside that Law. On this basis he criticizes the developing oral Law for its focus on a casuistic literalness that denied the very heart and purpose of the Law. It is in the dual command (*see* Commandment) to love God and neighbor that Jesus found the heart of the Law, and he used these basic demands to interpret and apply the Law in accordance with its author's intention. But Jesus was not simply a great expositor of the Law. What is most characteristic of the Gospels is Jesus' claim to be the Lord of the Law itself. Jesus manifests this claim in his implicit abrogation of several commandments within the Law and in his independent yet authoritative proclamation of God's will for his followers. As Messiah and Son of God (*see* Son of God), Jesus stands superior to the Law. Nevertheless, Jesus never attacks the Law and, indeed, asserts its enduring validity. But it is only as taken up into Jesus' teaching, and thus fulfilled, that the Law retains its validity. The Law comes to those living on this side of the cross only through the filter of its fulfillment in Christ the Lord.

The general sketch drawn in the last paragraph is reproduced in each of the Gospels, though with considerable differences in clarity and emphasis. Mark highlights Jesus' abrogation of ritual aspects of the Law, though he shows little interest in Jesus' ethical teachings. Matthew writes his Gospel for a community deeply concerned about the relation of Israel and church and, consequently, about the relation of the Law to Jesus' teaching. He therefore includes more of the teaching of Jesus on this issue than the other Evangelists, showing how Jesus both endorses the Law and surpasses it. Luke in his own way strikes a similar balance, commending the piety of those who follow the Law while showing that the continuing validity of the Law lies mainly in its prophetic aspects. John's stance is polemical, as he puts Jesus and his claims on a collision course with the Law and its institutions. Even here, however, the point is not so much that Jesus abrogates the Law as to show that as Son of God he replaces it.

1. Introduction
2. Jesus
3. The Gospel Writers
4. Conclusion

## **1. Introduction.**

“Law” is the standard translation of the Greek word *nomos*. This word occurs thirty-one times in the Gospels, always in the singular, and with two possible exceptions—both in John 19:7—the word denotes the body of commandments given by God to the people of Israel through Moses. Thus the Law can be called both “the Law of the Lord” (Lk 2:23–24, 39) as well as “the Law of

Moses” (Lk 2:22; Jn 7:23; cf. Jn 1:17, “the Law came through Moses,” and John 1:45, “Moses wrote in the Law”). On five occasions the Law is linked with “the prophets” (Mt. 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Lk 16:16; Jn 1:45—there is Jewish precedent for such a combination: cf. 4 Macc 18:10) and once with both the prophets and “the psalms” (Lk 24:44). In most of these texts *nomos* refers to the Pentateuch, and the whole phrase simply denotes “the Scriptures.” The Gospel writers also refer to the Law with the words “commandment” (*entolē*) (singular: Mt 15:3 par. Mk 7:9; Mt 22:36 par. Mk 12:28; Mt 22:38 par. Mk 12:31; Mk 7:8; 10:5; Lk 23:56; plural: Mt 5:19; 19:17 par. Mk 10:19 and Lk 18:20; Mt 22:40; Lk 1:6) and “decree” (*dikaiōma*) (Lk 1:6); or with a reference simply to “Moses” (Mt 8:4 par. Mk 1:44 and Lk 5:14; Mt 19:7 par. Mk 10:3; Mt 19:8 par. Mk 10:4; Mt 22:24 par. Mk 12:19 and Lk 20:28; Mk 7:10; Jn 7:22 [*bis*]: cf. “Moses and the prophets” in Lk 16:29, 31). On the other hand, *graphē* (“Scripture”) is never used to refer to the Mosaic Law alone, while the verb *graphō* (“write”: e.g., “it is written”) is only rarely so used (Mk 10:5; 12:19; Lk 2:23; 10:26; 20:28; Jn 1:45; 8:17; 10:34).

The virtual identification of “Law” with “Law of Moses” in the Gospels reflects OT usage and the Jewish milieu, in both of which the Law of Moses, the Torah (*tôrâ*), plays a central role. Obedience to the Law was not the means by which the people of Israel attained their covenant relationship with God. It was their response to the gracious initiative of God, a response both appropriate as a means of thanking and glorifying the God who had chosen them and necessary as the means by which the promises attached to the covenant would be actualized (see e.g., Deut 28:1–2, 9; 30:1–10, 15–16). In a development predicted in the Pentateuch (Deut 30:15–22) and identified by the prophets, Israel failed to obey the Law and so broke the terms of God’s covenant. Nevertheless, God affirmed his continuing faithfulness to his people and promises, announcing that he would establish a new covenant with his people, a covenant through which God’s Law would be “written on the heart” (Jer 31:31–34) and through which those very hearts would be transformed so as to make them obedient to the Lord (Ezek 36:24–28).

This pessimism about the Law did not take root in early Judaism. While generalizations about the Jewish people as a whole are dangerous and usually misleading, it is clear that the most important Jewish groups in Jesus’ day gave to the Mosaic Law a place of central importance in the life of the people and in their relationship to the Lord. Some of these groups, most notably the Pharisees, sought to aid the Jews in their obedience to God’s Law by adding to the written Law an oral tradition which would apply the written Law to the new situations faced by Jews. This development cannot be traced in detail, but it was certainly well underway in Jesus’ day, as is clear from his reference to the “traditions of the elders” (Mt 15:2 par. Mk 7:3). Fueling this development were two central postulates: that the Jew must obey God, and that the complete guide for that obedience is to be found in the Torah. The growth of an authoritative tradition such as this, which could, at a latter date, be called *tôrâ* (e.g., *b. Šabb.* 31a), complicates the discussion of “Jesus and the Law.” It is necessary, for instance, to determine whether Jesus’ critical attitude toward certain commandments and customs embodies criticism of the written Law of Moses or of the oral traditions of the Pharisees.

## 2. Jesus.

From what the Gospels tell us of Jesus' behavior, he was generally obedient to the Law of Moses. He attends the major feasts in Jerusalem, pays the half-shekel temple tax (Mt 17:24–27), wears the prescribed tassel on his robe (Mt 9:20; cf. Num 15:38–41) and, whatever may be said about his disciples' behavior or his teaching, never clearly violates the Sabbath. It is only in the case of Jesus' contact with unclean people (*see* Clean and Unclean) in his healing ministry (e.g., touching a leper [Mt 8:3 par. Mk 1:41 and Lk 5:13]) that he could be considered in violation of the Law of Moses. Even in this case, however, the unusual nature of Jesus' healing activities makes it difficult to identify a clear-cut violation of the Law.

The situation is certainly different with respect to the oral traditions of the Jews. Jesus deliberately associates with people considered by strict Jews to be unclean (the tax collectors and sinners; cf. Mt 9:10–13 par. Mk 2:15–17 and Lk 5:29–32) and “works” on the Sabbath by healing people who are in no danger of losing their lives (Mk 3:1–6 par. Mt. 12:9–14 and Lk 6:6–11; Lk 13:10–17; 14:1–6; Jn 5:2–47; 9:1–41). It is not, however, that Jesus consistently flaunts the traditions, for he attends the synagogue on the Sabbath, and displays habits at mealtime and at prayer that are consistent with the traditions. What we have, then, is a Jesus who does not go out of his way to break the traditions of his day but at the same time makes clear that he considers himself free to ignore them if need demands.

While we can conclude from Jesus' behavior that he did not endorse the “traditions of the elders” as authoritative, his general conformity to the written Law allows no clear conclusions. Did Jesus obey the Law because he considered it to be eternally valid? Or did he obey it as “old covenant” Law, valid only until his death and resurrection should inaugurate a new covenant? Or was there a principle that Jesus applied to determine the validity of different commandments within the Law?

**2.1. Love and the Law.** The principle most often cited in this regard is the love command. Jesus singled out love for God and love for neighbor as the two great commandments (Mt 22:34–40 par. Mk 12:28–34; Lk 10:25–28; cf. Jn 13:31–35), going so far as to assert that “all the Law and the prophets depend” on them (Mt 22:40). Taken with Jesus' pronouncement of the “golden rule” (Mt 7:12), his insistence that “mercy” is more important than “sacrifice” (Mt 9:13; 12:7) and his humanitarian approach to the Sabbath (Mk 2:27; cf. Mt 12:3–4 par. Mk 2:25–26 and Lk 6:3–4; Mt 12:12 par. Mk 3:4 and Lk 6:9; Lk 13:15–16), his highlighting of the love command suggests that it plays a significant role in his understanding of the Law. But what is its role? Does love function to determine when the Law is to be obeyed? What laws are to be obeyed? And what is the meaning and intent of the Law?

Only this last role of the demand of love, that of determining the meaning and intent of the Law, has any clear basis in Jesus' teaching. Never does he suggest that he or his followers are free on the basis of love to disobey an authoritative commandment of Scripture. Nor does he dismiss the validity of commandments according to whether or not they are loving. But Jesus does appeal to love in elucidating the meaning and application of the Law. In contrast to the scribes, who insisted on literal and scrupulous observance of the commandments, Jesus sought out the intention behind the commandments and understood their meaning and the way they were to be obeyed in light of this intention (*see* Westerholm). And it is to love for God and love for others that Jesus appeals in clarifying God's intention in the Law. This is what he means by claiming that “all the Law and the prophets” (i.e., the OT in its commanding aspect; cf. Mt 5:17 and 7:12) “depend” (*krematai*) on the commands of love for God (Deut 6:5) and love for

neighbor (Lev 19:18). Jesus is not here teaching that love replaces the Law or that love shows how we are to obey the Law. Rather, as the greatest commandments within the Law, they are the touchstone by which the intention and meaning of all the other commandments must be understood. Several incidents reveal this role of the love commands in Jesus' interpretation of the Law.

When Jesus defends his befriending of tax collectors and sinners by appealing to Hosea 6:6 (Mt 9:13), his point is not that the moral Law ("mercy") takes precedence over the ceremonial Law ("sacrifice"), nor that being merciful to people is more important than obeying the Law, but that one has failed to understand God's intention in the Law if rigid adherence to oral tradition (i.e., prohibition of association with the "unclean") is retained at the expense of showing God's compassion on sinners.

The situation is similar in Matthew 12:7, where Jesus cites Hosea 6:6 to defend his disciples from the charge of Sabbath-breaking: they are "guiltless" (*anaitios*) because their plucking of grain is not contrary to God's intention in giving the Sabbath command. In the same incident Jesus also defends the disciples by citing the action of David and his followers in 1 Samuel 21:1–6. As they were fleeing from the wrath of Saul, David and his confederates ate the bread of the presence, "which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat" (Mt 12:3–4 par. Mk 2:25–26 and Lk 6:3–4). Jesus, it is sometimes alleged, cites this incident to show that human need takes precedence over obedience to the Law. But only Matthew even mentions the fact that the disciples were hungry. And, in any case, their need could not have been great—surely Jesus does not encourage disobedience to the Law to meet casual wants and desires! Rather, Jesus' purpose is quite different: by comparing his disciples with David's followers, he also compares himself to David, suggesting that if, in serving David, his followers were justified in doing what was "illegal," so much the more were Jesus' own disciples justified in breaking the Sabbath halakah (*see* Rabbinic Traditions and Writings) in their service of the greater Son of David (*see* Son of David). The focus is on christology, not on the interpretation of the Sabbath command. This christological interpretation is reinforced in Matthew by the comparison that immediately follows between Jesus and the Temple (Mt 12:5–6).

In Mark's Gospel, however, Jesus' reference to 1 Samuel 21:1–6 is followed by the strongly humanitarian statement "the Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath" (2:27). Some have found christology here also, arguing that "human kind" (*anthropos*) is a mistranslation of an Aramaic expression by which Jesus referred to himself as the Son of man (*see* Son of Man). There is no basis for this, however, and the saying fits well with similar pronouncements of Jesus such as: "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Mt 12:12; cf. Mk 3:4; Lk 6:9). Again, however, Jesus is not claiming that one can break the Sabbath command when human needs dictate, but that the Sabbath command itself must be so understood as to include this basic purpose in its promulgation. The Sabbath is truly obeyed only when its intention to aid human beings is recognized and factored into one's behavior. That is why, rather than being a violation of the Law, Jesus' Sabbath-Day healing of a woman was a true fulfillment of that Law ("it was necessary" [*edei*] that she be healed on the Sabbath: Lk 13:16).

For Jesus, then, love for God and for others, being basic to God's intention in giving the Law, must always be considered in interpreting the meaning of that Law.

**2.2. Jesus' Use of the Law in His Ethical Teaching.** The relatively few occasions on which Jesus cites the OT Law in formulating his own demands is revealing of the independent authority with which Jesus speaks. True, Jesus believes that his teaching stands in continuity with the OT demand (see, e.g., Mt 5:17 and 7:12). And he occasionally cites the OT in his own teaching (see Old Testament in the Gospels). But most of these citations come in conversation with Jewish opponents or inquirers in which the OT is appealed to because of its relevance to their situation. Jesus' teaching about the dual command of love is a case in point. He highlights these commandments in response to a question about which is the greatest commandment (Mt 22:36 par. Mk 12:28). Without minimizing the importance of these commandments, it is significant that in John's Gospel the commandment to love one another is a new commandment, authorized by Jesus without reference to the OT (13:31–35). Jesus also appeals to the prophets to establish priorities within the Law (Hos 6:6 in Mt 9:13 and 12:7; Mic 6:8 in Mt 23:23 [cf. Lk 11:42]).

Similarly, when questioned about the legitimacy of divorce (see Marriage and Divorce), Jesus cites Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 to correct the common over-interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1–4 (Mt 19:3–12 par. Mk 10:2–10). Some have thought that Jesus is following a rabbinic procedure by which two apparently contradictory statements within the Law could be harmonized. But rather than harmonizing the two, Jesus appeals to one over against the other. The original intention of God expressed in the Genesis texts is elevated over the Mosaic command which was given, Jesus says, because of “hardness of heart” (see Hardness of Heart). Here Jesus appeals to the OT teaching about the origin of marriage as authoritative for his followers. It is not clear, however, that this should be considered as an appeal to the Law. For Jesus' careful distinction between what God had said (in Genesis) and what Moses had said (in Deuteronomy) suggests that he cites Genesis not as part of “the Law,” in the sense of the Mosaic command, but as a scriptural and hence authoritative statement of God's intention for marriage. Here Jesus makes an important distinction, one that runs counter to the tendency of Judaism in his day: the distinction between the books of Moses as Scripture, and the Law of Moses that takes up a large portion of those books.

Another polemical use of the Law appears in Jesus' debate with the Pharisees over ritual defilement. Jesus defends his disciples' behavior in this matter by calling into question the “traditions of the elders” generally (Mt 15:3–6 par. Mk 7:8–13). Jesus brands these traditions as contrary to the Law they purport to expound and apply. From this we can conclude that Jesus expected the Jews of his day to observe the commandments under which they lived—beyond that we cannot go.

Slightly different is Jesus' rehearsal of decalog commandments when a young man asks him how he may attain eternal life (Mt 19:16–22 par. Mk 10:17–22 and Lk 18:18–23). Here, it could be argued, Jesus makes OT commandments basic to his own ethical demands. But such a conclusion would be too hasty. For Jesus imposes these commands not on a follower but on a seeker after eternal life. Does Jesus then view obedience to the Law as a means of salvation? This is possible, although we would then want to question whether Jesus considered it possible for any human being to render an obedience adequate to that end. For the young man, after claiming to have observed all the commandments cited by Jesus, is still seen to be short of entrance into the kingdom. But it is also possible that Jesus cites the commandments simply to initiate a discussion and to draw out this young man, and that he is not teaching that eternal life can be gained by obedience to the Law. In any case, it is significant that the climax of the narrative is Jesus' demand that the young man “follow me.” This has been viewed as Jesus'

further exposition of the real meaning of the commandments, but we question whether following Jesus in discipleship can be considered an exposition of any Mosaic command. Rather, whatever the role played by the commandments of the Law, it is Jesus' own demand that is crucial here. Jesus goes beyond the OT demand: it is following him, not obedience to the Law, that is the door into the kingdom of God.

It is clear, then, that Jesus' direct use of the OT in his ethical teaching is minimal (*see* Ethics of Jesus). Most of the references occur in polemical contexts where Jesus may be doing no more than assuming the reference point of his opponent. This does not necessarily mean that Jesus did not consider the OT Law to be relevant for the new age that was dawning through his ministry and work. He may simply have assumed its continuing validity. Still, what is impressive in Jesus' teaching is the way in which he taught directly, and without reference to any other authority, what it was that God was demanding of his people. The Mosaic Law, if not discarded, is generally ignored—and this signals an important shift from both the OT and the Judaism of Jesus' day.

**2.3. Abrogation of the Law?** We have seen that Jesus does not generally use the Law to formulate his ethics. But does he ever go so far as to pronounce invalid the Law or commandments within the Law?

**2.3.1. Clean and Unclean.** When Jesus' disciples violated the scribal tradition about hand-washing, he defended them in two ways (Mt 15:1–20 par. Mk 7:1–23). First, he criticized the scribal tradition generally, branding it a “human tradition” (Mk 7:8) that interferes with true worship of and obedience to God. He cites as an example the situation in which the scribes would insist that a person perform a vow, even if that vow were taken selfishly to avoid giving due honor to one's parents (*see* Family). Some have seen here a conflict between two parts of the written Law—the command to honor oaths and the command to honor parents—but the text makes clear that the conflict is rather between the “commandment of God” and “human tradition.” This text suggests, then, that Jesus did not endorse the developing oral Law of the Pharisees. But Jesus' second line of defense goes further. In enunciating the principle that “there is nothing outside a person which by going into a person can defile them” (Mk 7:15; cf. Mt 15:11), Jesus casts doubt on the continuing validity of the entire ritual body of laws in the OT. Certainly, this is how Mark understands him: “Thus he declared all foods to be clean” (7:19). Doubt has been cast on the authenticity of this saying of Jesus, it being argued that the debates in the early church over this matter are hard to understand if Jesus had spoken so clearly on the issue. But Jesus' almost parabolic saying would hardly have been sufficient to settle the matter, and Mark's parenthetical interpretation reflects a later, clearer perspective. The contrast in this pericope between Jesus' upholding of one commandment—to honor parents—and his effective abrogation of others—concerning unclean foods—raises the possibility that Jesus distinguished between the so-called moral and the ceremonial Law. There are hints of such a distinction in the Gospels, in Jesus' stress on the “weightier matters of the Law” (Mt 23:23) and in his picking up the prophetic focus on inner obedience. Nevertheless, the distinction was unknown in the Judaism of Jesus' day, and we would have expected him to make the distinction much clearer had it been fundamental to his assessment of the OT Law. Moreover, as we will see, Jesus' varying pronouncements about the Law cannot be fit into a neat distinction between the moral and the ceremonial.

2.3.2. *The Sabbath.* The centrality of the Sabbath for Jewish piety is reflected in the numerous conflicts between Jesus and the Jews over its observance: the Gospels record six separate incidents. Did Jesus abrogate the Sabbath command, as some claim? Answering this question is complicated by the need to distinguish between the Mosaic Sabbath requirements and the extensive traditional regulations developed by the scribes in an effort to regulate Sabbath observance. The OT prohibits work on the Sabbath, but gives few details about what constitutes work. It is this ambiguity that the scribal tradition seeks to clarify. Certainly Jesus and his disciples violated the scribal Sabbath regulations: by plucking grain (Mt 12:1–8 par. Mk 2:23–28 and Lk 6:1–5) and by healing people whose lives were not in danger (Mt 12:9–14 par. Mk 3:1–6 and Lk 6:6–11; Lk 13:10–17; 14:1–6; Jn 5:2–47; 9:1–41). Neither of these activities is a clear violation of the Mosaic Sabbath rules, although Jesus’ healing ministry is difficult to categorize. The most that can be said is that his initiative in healing on the Sabbath, rooted in theological conviction—“it was necessary” for Jesus to heal on the Sabbath (Lk 13:16)—stretches the Sabbath commandment. But we have no evidence that Jesus ever himself violated, or approved of his disciples violating, the written Sabbath commandment.

Jesus’ teaching, however, is another matter. We have already discussed (see 2.1. above) Jesus’ focus on humanitarian concerns in defending his Sabbath behavior. Some think that Jesus here abrogates, or at least relativizes, the Sabbath by putting human need over observance of the command. As we have argued, this is not the case: Jesus’ humanitarian emphasis is not intended to abrogate but to define the Sabbath command. More telling is Jesus’ christological defense for his Sabbath activity. He justifies the disciples’ grain plucking through a comparison of himself with David (Mt 12:3–4 par. Mk 2:25–26 and Lk 6:3–4) and the Temple (Mt 12:5–6). He claims the Father’s own right to continue “working” on the Sabbath (Jn 5:17–18). And in a succinct and clear statement of his position vis-a-vis the Sabbath, he claims “the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Mt 12:8 par. Mk 2:28 and Lk 6:5). Here Jesus claims superiority over the Sabbath, including the right to interpret, transform or even abrogate this central Mosaic institution. Nevertheless, Jesus never actually uses this authority to abrogate the Sabbath, and whether the early church did so on the basis of Jesus’ authority is another question.

2.3.3. *Divorce.* We have noted that Jesus responds to a question about the grounds for divorce by citing Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 (Mt 19:3–12 par. Mk 10:2–12; cf. Lk 16:18). He thereby bypasses the then-current debate about the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1–4 by using God’s intention in creation to call into question the entire matter of an allowance for divorce. It is true that according to Matthew (19:9; cf. 5:31–32) Jesus’ position is not far from that of his near-contemporary Shammai, and from Deuteronomy 24:1–4 as well. But what is important for our purposes is the logic with which Jesus arrives at his position. The Mosaic provision for divorce is simply swept aside as a concession to “hardness of heart.” What is unclear is whether Jesus thinks that the inauguration of the kingdom through his redemptive work will take away that hardness of heart or whether he considers this condition to be one that will only disappear in the next life. The contrast between the creation intention of God and the Mosaic provision (“but from the beginning it was not so”) favors the former. If this is so, Jesus questions the tacit approval of divorce within the Mosaic legislation.

2.3.4. *The Antitheses.* Matthew 5:17–48 is the most significant passage in the Gospels for determining the relationship between Jesus and the Mosaic Law (see Sermon on the Mount). Verses 17–20 will be considered below (see 2.4.); here we focus on verses 21–48 in which Jesus

six times compares his teaching with what had been told to “the ancients.” Many scholars are convinced that Jesus abrogates Mosaic commands in at least some of these comparisons.

The introductory formulae vary, but appear to be variations of a single basic formula, seen fully in verses 21 and 33: “you have heard that it was said to the ancients (*tois archaiois*) . . . but I say to you.” The dative *tois archaiois* has occasionally been understood in an ablative sense (“by the ancients”), but is probably a pure dative (as we have translated it). Jesus’ reference is probably to the generation that received the Law at Sinai, although this does not exclude the possibility that oral traditions are included in the reference: for it was taught that the “oral Law” had also been given at Sinai (cf. *m. Ḥabot.* 1:1–2). Similarly, the “you have heard” refers to the hearing of the Law read in the synagogue, a reading that often incorporated traditional interpretations (*see* Targum). The formula in itself, then, does not enable us to decide whether Jesus is citing the Mosaic Law per se or the Mosaic Law as interpreted and expanded by the scribes. Nor, while the nomenclature has become standard, is “antitheses” necessarily the best way to describe these six comparisons. The grammar allows at least three different nuances: (1) “you have heard, but I (in contrast to that) say to you”; (2) “you have heard, but I (in addition to that) say to you” or (3) “you have heard, and I (in agreement with that) say to you.”

No abrogation of the Law occurs in the first two comparisons (Mt 5:21–26 and 27–30), but it is harder to know whether Jesus is expounding the true meaning of the commandments, deepening the commandments by extending them from the level of action to the level of attitude, or simply juxtaposing his own teaching with that of the Law. Against the first alternative, however, is the lack of clear evidence that the Decalog prohibitions of murder and adultery included prohibitions of, respectively, anger and lust as well. Jesus, while not necessarily going beyond the Mosaic Law and the scribal teaching (both of which prohibit anger and lust), goes beyond the actual commandments he cites.

Jesus’ teaching about divorce in verses 31–32 is sometimes taken as part of the second comparison, but the abbreviated introductory formula in verse 31 suggests rather that it be considered a separate, third comparison. In our earlier discussion of Jesus’ teaching on divorce (*see* 2.3.3. above), we noted that Matthew’s exceptive clause (v. 32: “except on the ground of unchastity”) has the effect of bringing Jesus’ teaching fairly closely into line with the Mosaic allowance. What effect this has on the actual commandment Jesus cites—(*viz.*) that a person who divorces his wife give her a “bill of divorcement”—is not clear, but it is probably stretching the matter to speak of an abrogation of the commandment here. Nevertheless, Jesus’ teaching that an improper remarriage constitutes adultery goes beyond the OT. Clearly, Jesus is not simply expounding the Mosaic legislation regarding divorce; nor does the idea of deepening fit the circumstances very well. He goes beyond the Law in the seriousness with which he considers improper remarriages, and his basic agreement with Deuteronomy 24:1–4 over the appropriate grounds for divorce and remarriage is, as it were, incidental to the central point.

The fourth thesis cited by Jesus as a point of departure for his own teaching is an accurate summary of the Mosaic requirements regarding oaths and vows (v. 33; *see* Oaths and Swearing). Oaths and vows were not carefully distinguished in the OT, both involving a pledge of truthfulness in connection with God. The rabbis reluctantly accepted the need for oaths and regulated their use, but the Essenes, who often had stricter requirements than the Pharisees (or the rabbis), apparently did prohibit most oaths (*see* Josephus *J.W.* 2.135). Jesus’ requirement seems absolute: “do not swear at all” (v. 34). But there is considerable debate about this, for the

following delineation of examples appears to reflect the casuistic debates about oaths in the scribal tradition (see *m. Šeb.*; *m. Sanh.* 3:2; *t. Ned.* 1). This background, taken with the undoubted presence of hyperbole in Matthew 5, may suggest that Jesus simply intends to encourage absolute truthfulness (see v. 37). Another possibility is that Jesus prohibits voluntary oaths. If Jesus is indeed prohibiting all oaths, then a technical abrogation of the Mosaic command requiring an oath in the court (Ex 22:10–13) occurs (Meier). But the uncertainty about Jesus' intention should make us cautious about claiming an abrogation of the Law here. In any case, we see again that Jesus is neither expounding nor deepening the Law but juxtaposing his own (perhaps more radical) demand with that of the Law.

Of the six antitheses there is most agreement among scholars that the fifth, relating to the *lex talionis*, abrogates the Mosaic Law. But this is not at all clear. The law of equivalent compensation is stated in three places in the Mosaic Law (Ex 21:23–25; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21), and in each case it has the purpose not of justifying but of restraining private retribution by establishing an equitable judicial guideline to which all could be held. Jesus does not question, nor does he uphold, this policy. He simply demands that his followers not use it as an excuse for retaliation. Jesus certainly goes beyond the demands of the Law, but he does not contradict it.

The final quotation in Matthew 5 differs from the others in including a clause not found in the OT—that one is to “hate one’s enemy” (v. 43). It has sometimes been argued that this requirement is a fair extrapolation from the fact that the scope of the love command (Lev 19:18) is restricted to the fellow-Israelite (*rēc*) and from the frequent OT expressions of hostility to Israel’s enemies. But this conclusion is not warranted, and we must consider the command to “hate your enemy” not as an OT requirement, but as a reflection of current Jewish teaching in some circles (perhaps associated with the Essenes of Qumran). Jesus does not, therefore, abrogate Mosaic Law by requiring love for one’s enemy, but he does ask his followers to do something that the Mosaic Law had not asked the people of Israel to do: love one’s enemy. Once more, then, Jesus’ teaching transcends without clearly revoking the OT Law.

We find, then, that only one possible abrogation of the Law—that having to do with divorce and remarriage—occurs in the antitheses. In the others Jesus’ teaching is juxtaposed with the Mosaic commands in a way that does not fit either of the popular categories: exposition or deepening. The dominant note, hinted at in the emphatic “I say to you” and recognized by the crowds at the end of the Sermon (7:28–29), is the independent authority of Jesus, who presumes to announce God’s will for life in the kingdom without support from any other source (*see Amen*).

Jesus, then, abrogated some Mosaic Laws—the food Laws and possibly the divorce provisions—but this is not the dominant motif in his teaching. Jesus does not so much oppose the Law as claim to transcend it. He is the “Lord of the Sabbath” and claims the right to determine God’s will without reference to the Law.

**2.4. Fulfillment of the Law.** The best-known statement of Jesus with respect to the Law comes in Matthew 5:17: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets: I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill them.” To understand this claim, we must consider its following context (Mt 5:18–19) and the partial Lukan parallel to this context (Lk 16:16–17).

In Luke 16:16 Jesus announces a fundamental shift in salvation history: “The Law and the prophets were until John: since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and

every one enters it violently.” Especially in light of Luke 16:17 Jesus cannot mean that the significance of the OT is terminated; he must mean that John’s coming has signaled a fundamental shift in the role and importance of “the Law and the prophets.” Matthew’s parallel (11:13) adds an important nuance: “the Law and the prophets prophesied until John.” Here Jesus claims that the entire OT has a prophetic aspect, that the Law itself has some kind of forward-looking element. This reference furnishes an important clue to the Matthean viewpoint on the Law and helps us unravel the meaning of Matthew 5:17.

Study of Matthew 5:17–19 is complicated by the complex and debated tradition-history of the verses. According to one viewpoint, for instance, each verse is to be assigned to a different stratum of the early Christian community, with none of them embodying the teaching of Jesus himself. However, while the verses may indeed come from different sources (e.g., v. 18 may be from Q; cf. Lk 16:17) and while Matthew was undoubtedly responsible for their final arrangement in his Gospel, there is no compelling reason to deny their authenticity.

The key word in this paragraph is the word “fulfill” (*pleroō*, 5:17). Its interpretation becomes the basis for, or expression of, divergent general interpretations of Jesus and the Law. We speak of *law* because in Matthean usage the expression “Law and the prophets” (cf. Mt 7:12 and 22:40) and the parallels “Law” (v. 18) and “commandments” (v. 19) refer to the commanding aspect of the OT. The clear connection with the comparisons of 5:21–48 also indicates that Jesus is focusing on the relationship between his teaching and the Law. With these qualifications in view, the following are the most important interpretations of “fulfill”: (1) Jesus fulfills the Law by *confirming its validity* (presupposing that the Aramaic word *qûm* lies behind *pleroō*; Branscomb); (2) Jesus fulfills the Law by *adding to it* (based on the alleged parallel to Mt 5:17 in *b. Šabb.* 116b; Jeremias); (3) Jesus fulfills the Law by bringing out its *full, originally intended meaning* (Bahnsen); (4) Jesus fulfills the Law by *extending its demands* (Davies); (5) Jesus fulfills the Law by teaching the *eschatological will of God* which the Law anticipated (Banks, Meier).

Methodologically, we should look for the meaning of *pleroō* by referring to Matthew’s usage rather than to an alleged Hebrew or Aramaic original (*see* Languages of Palestine). For there is no way of confirming what that Semitic original may have been, and there is ample evidence that Matthew himself, while reproducing Jesus’ own intention, is responsible for the wording of the saying. The closest syntactical parallel to Matthew 5:17 is 3:15, where *pleroō* is also used in the active voice and is followed by a direct object. Focusing on this parallel, Ljungman argues that “fulfilling” the Law must refer to Jesus’ fulfillment of the Scripture as the means of bringing in eschatological righteousness (*see* Justice and Righteousness). But the most distinctive use of *pleroō* in Matthew comes in the introductions to his eleven so-called formula quotations, most of which are unique to his Gospel. In these texts Matthew announces the fulfillment of a text, event or prophecy in the life of Jesus. The importance of this word in these contexts, combined with Matthew’s striking reference to the Law as “prophesying” (11:13), makes this prophetic use of *pleroō* the most likely source for our interpretation of Matthew 5:17. In a way analogous to his fulfilling Israel’s history in his own departure from Egypt (cf. Mt 2:15) and his fulfilling the prophets’ predictions in his life, Jesus also fulfills Israel’s Law in his teaching. The entire OT, in

all its parts, is viewed as the promise component in a promise-fulfillment scheme of salvation history, and the Law cannot be excluded from this scheme.

We conclude, then, that the fifth alternative listed above—the eschatological will of God—is the best interpretation of Matthew 5:17. In response to rumors about his Law-negating stance, Jesus assures his listeners that his teaching stands in continuity with the OT Law. His teaching does not abolish the Law, but brings it to its intended eschatological climax. This view of Matthew 5:17 fits well with the antitheses that follow and which furnish specific examples of Jesus’ fulfillment of the Law (5:21–48). For, as we have seen (2.3.4 above), what Jesus does with the Law in these six comparisons cannot all be explained by recourse to any single concept, such as exposition or deepening. What is common to each is a juxtaposition of OT teaching with Jesus’ own, a teaching that transcends the OT teaching. Understanding “fulfillment” in the broad, salvation-historical sense that we have defended enables 5:17 to function as a heading to these comparisons, as indeed it was apparently intended to do.

Can this interpretation be reconciled with the context of Matthew 5:18–19? At first sight no stronger endorsement of the eternal applicability of every commandment of the Mosaic Law could be envisaged than what we have here. Agreeing with this assessment are those scholars who think that Matthew 5:19, or 5:18–19 together, is a creation of a conservative Jewish group within the early church. Matthew, they argue, has inserted this material into the present context in order to correct it. While it may well be that Matthew has been responsible for juxtaposing verses 18–19 with verse 17, we are not so sure that we must deny these sayings to Jesus. Can these verses be read in a way compatible with Jesus’ teaching about the Law elsewhere in Matthew’s Gospel? Attempts to avoid the conclusion that Jesus here endorses the continuing applicability of every “jot and tittle” of the Law, and so to reconcile 5:18–19 with 5:17 and 21–48, focus on three issues: the scope of the two *heōs* (“until”) clauses in 5:18, the meaning of *nomos* (“Law”) in 5:18 and the antecedent of *toutōn* (“these [commandments]”) in 5:19.

The first *heōs* clause in 5:18, “until heaven and earth pass away,” must be compared to its counterpart in Luke 16:17: “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.” Luke apparently uses this verse to guard against an antinomian interpretation of 16:16. Probably we are to understand the clause in Matthew in the same way; every detail of the Law remains valid until the present world order passes away. Nevertheless, this conclusion in itself does not stand in contradiction to Matthew 5:17, for the nature of this validity must be probed further.

The second *heōs* clause, which many take to be Matthew’s insertion, is more difficult to interpret, for there is no clear antecedent to *panta*, “all things,” and the precise force of *genētai* is not evident. One possibility is that Jesus is teaching that the Law will remain valid only until all the demands of the Law are “done” or “obeyed.” We may then infer that these demands were fully met by Jesus in his obedient life and sacrificial death, and that the Law is therefore no longer valid. But *genētai* is more likely to mean “happen” in this context, while *panta* probably refers to predicted events (cf. Mt 24:34–35). These events have been identified with Jesus’ death and resurrection, with those things prophesied about Jesus generally or with all the components of God’s plan for history. The lack of any restriction in this context favors the last of these

alternatives. This being so, the second *heōs* clause is roughly parallel to the first, both maintaining that the Law will remain valid until the end of history as we know it.

An assumption quite popular in some circles is that *nomos* in 5:18 refers only to the moral Law. But no such restriction can be entertained. Not only is there no support for such a limitation in first-century Judaism, and little in the teaching of Jesus, but the reference to “jot and tittle” in 5:18 shows that no part of the Law can be omitted from Jesus’ purview.

Jesus, then, asserts in Matthew 5:18 (and in its parallel, Lk 16:17), that the whole Mosaic Law will remain valid throughout this age. But “valid” in what way? Here it is appropriate to suggest that this must be understood in light of Matthew 5:17—the continuing validity of the Law must be seen in terms of Jesus’ fulfillment of it. In all its details the Law remains valid, but the manner in which people are to relate to it has now been determined by the one who brought its fulfillment. We are probably to understand Matthew 5:19 in a similar way. Indeed, some have taken *toutōn* to refer to what follows, in which case “these commandments” are the commands Jesus himself issues in 5:21–48. But there is little grammatical basis for this. “These commandments” are the detailed parts of the Law of 5:18; the teaching of these commandments must take place in conjunction with the nature of Jesus’ fulfillment of the Law.

There is an undeniable tension between the stress on continuity with the Law in these two verses and the stress on discontinuity that pervades Jesus’ teaching about the Law. Those who find the tension intolerable will declare these verses inauthentic. But we would argue that while some tension remains, the interpretation we have given makes credible Jesus’ uttering all the statements in Matthew 5:17–19. Indeed, if tension is to be found, it is more likely to be an authentic reflection of the historical Jesus than the creation of the church or the Evangelist. Seen in this light, Matthew 5:18–19 reinforces the “I have not come to abolish” of verse 17. As Jesus proclaimed the beginning of the new era with its “new wineskins,” he was aware of the danger that the newness could be pressed to the point of rupture with the OT. This he guards against by stressing, perhaps with some hyperbole, the continuing validity of the OT and its Law for the life of the kingdom.

### **3. The Gospel Writers.**

Jesus’ stance on the Law and his disputes with his Jewish contemporaries about this stance, are so integral to his mission and message that none of the Evangelists can avoid the topic. Nor is there any indication that they wanted to. However, they do differ in the degree to which they are interested in this issue and the emphases they bring to it.

**3.1. Matthew.** As our previous discussion would indicate, Matthew shows more interest in Jesus and the Law than do the other Evangelists. He alone records Jesus’ claim to fulfill the Law (5:17). In passages paralleled in Luke’s Gospel, Matthew adds references to the Law, most notably in the formulation of the so-called golden rule (Mt 7:12 par. Lk 6:31) and in the antitheses (Mt 5:21–48; cf. Lk 6:27–36; 12:57–59; 16:18). It is evident that Matthew writes to a community that is deeply concerned about the relationship between Jesus and the Law, but there is scholarly debate about the exact nature of that community and the overall force of Matthew’s teaching on this matter. This is partly because Matthew presents two different—potentially conflictive—emphases: endorsement of the Law and transcendence of the Law.

*3.1.1. Endorsement of the Law.* In our previous discussion (see 2.4. above) we noted the strength of Jesus' endorsement of the Law as recorded in Matthew 5:18–19. But this passage is not alone. In Matthew 8:4 (with parallels in Mk 1:44 and Lk 5:14) Jesus insists that the leper (*see* Leprosy) whom he cleansed report to the priests and “offer the gift which Moses commanded, as a witness to them.” In the story of the rich young man, Matthew accentuates more strongly the connection between obedience to the Law and salvation by adding the saying “If you want to enter life, keep the commandments” (19:17). In Matthew 23:23 Jesus, while scolding the religious leaders for neglecting the “weightier matters of the Law,” nevertheless insists that they should continue to obey the law of tithing. Jesus in Matthew expects his disciples to bring gifts to the altar (5:23–24), to give alms (6:1–4) and to fast (6:16–18). And, in perhaps the strongest statement of its kind, Matthew presents Jesus endorsing the authority and teaching of the scribes and Pharisees (23:2–3). Here Jesus appears to endorse not only the Mosaic Law but the oral Law as well.

*3.1.2. Transcendence of the Law.* Along with these apparently strong endorsements of the Law come equally strong indications of Jesus' transcendence of the Law. Only Matthew records Jesus' claim to fulfill the Law (5:17) and the antitheses, with their implicit criticism of the Law (5:21–48). He, along with Mark and Luke, portrays Jesus acting with sovereign free dom on the Sabbath and records his far-reaching claim to be “Lord of the Sabbath” (12:8). In a related development that many think to be central to Matthew's view of the Law, there is a strong emphasis on love or concern for others as the embodiment of the Law (7:12; 22:40).

*3.1.3. A Synthesis.* With these two strands of teaching in evidence, it is no wonder that some have seen Matthew as a conservative on the Law, while others have seen him as antinomian. Others seek to do justice to both strands in Matthew by suggesting that he is fighting on two fronts—combating both Jews and/or Jewish-Christian rigorists, and Gentile-Christian antinomians (e.g., Barth). That Matthew was seeking to present a balanced teaching on the Law against opposing tendencies is possible. But it is also possible to find a theological coherence in Matthew's teaching about the Law if his salvation-historical perspective is considered.

Matthew makes clear that Jesus' death and resurrection mark a significant shift in salvation history. Prior to these events, as Jesus makes clear, his business is with “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24). After Jesus' mission is accomplished, however, the disciples are sent to “all the nations” with the good news (28:19–20). Similarly, Matthew shows that John's ministry ends the prophetic office of the OT (11:13). To some extent, then, Jesus' endorsement of the Law in Matthew reflects only its continuing validity during the period before the new era is brought in. This is almost certainly the case in Matthew 8:4; 23:23 and 5:23–24; 6:1–4 and 6:16–18. Jesus' endorsement of the teachings of the scribes and the Pharisees in 23:2–3 may also fall into this category, although we are probably to see irony here also (Jeremias).

Jesus never doubted the authority of the Mosaic Law for the time preceding the entrance of the kingdom, and his instructions to followers living in that time will naturally include admonitions to obey those Laws. Only those who think Matthew has rewritten everything in his Gospel for the consumption of the church in his day would have any difficulty with this. On the other hand, statements about Jesus transcending the Law—and these represent the dominant thrust of the Gospel—reflect the fact that a new era of salvation history is indeed breaking in. This is an era in which Jesus' own teaching will be the central authority for the people of God, and the Law will play a role only as caught up in, and re-applied by, Jesus (Mt 5:17–19).

The relationship of the Law to Jesus in Matthew is, then, only one segment of his salvation-historical, promise-fulfillment scheme. Through it Matthew integrates his stress on the continuity of the Law—for the Law looks ahead to, and is incorporated into, the teaching of Jesus—and on its discontinuity—for Jesus, not the Law, is now the locus of God’s word to his people.

**3.2. Mark.** In comparison with Matthew, Mark seems to display little interest in the issue of the Law, as is revealed by the fact that the word never occurs in his Gospel. Nevertheless, many of those incidents that are fundamental in Matthew’s presentation of Jesus and the Law are taken from Mark: the controversies over the Sabbath (2:23–3:6) and ritual defilement (7:1–23), Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage (10:2–10), the story of the rich young ruler (10:17–22), and Jesus’ teaching about the “great commandment” (12:28–34). Indeed, in three of these incidents Mark has important material not found in Matthew or in any other Gospel: the saying that “the Sabbath was made for humankind” (2:27), the editorial application of Jesus’ teaching about defilement (“thus he made all foods clean,” 7:19), and the conversation between Jesus and a scribe after Jesus’ identification of the greatest commandment, in which the scribe, with Jesus’ approval, asserts that loving one’s neighbor is “more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices” (12:33). This material suggests that Mark may have had a particular interest in the supersession of the ritual Law.

**3.3. Luke.** While Luke’s perspective on the Law cannot be understood apart from Acts, the second part of his two-volume work, we will concentrate on the Gospel. Here there is evidence that Luke is conservative with respect to the Law (see Jervell), evidence that comes both from what Luke has added to and omitted from the tradition. In adding to the tradition he portrays the piety of those involved in Jesus’ infancy in legal terms (1:6; 2:22–24, 27, 37, 39, 42; *see* Birth of Jesus). On the other hand, Luke omits from his Markan source the episode concerning ritual defilement, the dispute about the Law in its relation to divorce and remarriage and the teaching on the great commandment. In comparison with Matthew, Luke includes Jesus’ teaching about the eternal validity of the Law (16:17), but does not have the antitheses, Jesus’ claim to have fulfilled the Law or any reference to “weightier matters of the Law.” But these data do not justify the conclusion that Luke, in contrast to Matthew, upholds the Mosaic Law.

First, comparisons with Matthew are difficult because we do not know whether Luke has omitted something in their common tradition or whether Matthew has himself added that which was not there. Second, Luke’s omission of some of the Markan episodes suggests that he was not as interested in the Law as were Mark and Matthew, but this is not necessarily indicative of a conservative attitude. Third, almost all of the positive evidence for a Lukan endorsement of the Law comes from the infancy narrative. But his purpose in portraying the people in this narrative as obedient to the Law is simply to stress their piety and righteousness in accordance with the standards under which they lived. To conclude that Luke presents these people as exemplars of Torah piety for Christians generally is to go far beyond the evidence. Fourth, Luke adds to the tradition two Sabbath healings by Jesus (13:10–17; 14:1–6) and, while they do not present Jesus annulling the Sabbath, they share with the other Sabbath incidents an emphasis on the sovereign freedom with which Jesus treated the Sabbath.

Finally, Luke includes several sayings of Jesus that betray the same kind of salvation-historical perspective we have seen in Matthew. Luke 16:16 (with a parallel in Mt 11:12–13) is the most important: “The Law and the prophets were until John; since then the kingdom of God

is being proclaimed, and everyone is entering it violently.” The debate about whether John is here included in the time of the “Law and the prophets” or in the time of the kingdom is immaterial to our purposes. What is important is that Luke’s Jesus affirms the cessation of the authority of the OT, in some sense, in the age of the kingdom. The important promise-fulfillment emphasis of Luke 24 (see 24:25–27, 44), while not directly applied to the Mosaic commands, contributes to this Lukan salvation-history scheme. Rather than being a “conservative,” Luke in his Gospel gives many indications that he views the Law as belonging fundamentally to the past of the people of God (Blomberg).

**3.4. John.** True to its tendency, the Fourth Gospel follows its own course with regard to the Law. In fact there is no single teaching about the Law that is common to John and to any of the Synoptic Evangelists (*see* Synoptics and John). Like the Synoptic Evangelists, however, John records two healings of Jesus on the Sabbath (5:2–47; 9:1–41). In the first, Jesus’ healing of a lame man sparks a debate about Jesus’ authority to work on the Sabbath. John betrays no interest in the meaning and intent of the Sabbath command; he focuses exclusively on the christological claim: Jesus, as Son of God, has the same right to work on the Sabbath as does the Father himself. The same christological focus is evident in the second incident, the healing of the man born blind. The Pharisees deny that Jesus is from God, because he sinned in performing the miracle on the Sabbath (9:14–16). Once again, Jesus’ behavior, bound up as it is with his unique status, says nothing about his attitude toward the Sabbath or the Law generally.

Jesus’ references to “your Law” in disputes with the Jewish authorities (8:17; 10:34 [although note the alternative reading]) strike a much more polemical note. The use of the possessive pronoun creates some distance between Jesus and the Law, although it is not clear if this is because Jesus stands with God over against the people, because he stands with John’s Gentile readers against the Jews (as some interpret the circumstances of the Gospel) or simply because he wants to impress on the Jews their responsibility to hearken to their own Law. Probably the last of these alternatives is the best (see Jn 7:51), in which case we learn little from it about Jesus’ attitude to the Law in John.

John shares with the Synoptic Evangelists an emphasis on the fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus’ ministry and includes the Law as a witness to Jesus on one occasion (1:45). We should note in this regard the way John shows Jesus replacing the great feasts and institutions of Israel—Passover (1:29 [?]; 19:36 [probably]); the manna in the wilderness (chap. 6; *see* Mountain and Wilderness); Tabernacles (chaps. 7–8); Israel itself (chap. 15). Evidence that John included the Law in this replacement scheme comes from terms, commonly associated with the Law, that are applied to Jesus (“light,” 8:12; “bread of life,” 6:35; “living water,” 4:10), the designation of faith in Jesus as the one “work” that disciples are to do (6:29; in contrast to the “works of the Law”?) and the Mosaic role that Jesus often assumes. It is precariously easy to read anything into John’s symbolism that one wants, but there is enough evidence here to create the strong presumption that John wants to present Jesus as one who comes to fulfill for the church the role that Moses and the Law performed in Israel.

The discontinuity between the Law and Jesus seen in this replacement motif comes to clear expression in John 1:17: “the Law came through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” This discontinuity does not relate to the presence of grace in the OT as such, for 1:16 indicates that Christians receive grace “in place of” (*anti*) the grace found in the old covenant. The discontinuity lies rather in the suggestion that the grace available for God’s people in the OT

does not come through the Law, and that it is only now in Jesus Christ that such grace can be found. Moreover, in associating the Law so closely with Moses and putting Christ firmly on the other side of the salvation-historical dividing line, John implies that in Jesus the Law will no longer have the same position and significance that it had before.

#### 4. Conclusion.

In different ways and with different emphases, all four Gospels reflect a dominant theme in the teaching of Jesus: his divine authority with reference to the Law. Jesus was quick to clarify that his authority did not negate the role of the Law in salvation history. But he also made it clear that this authority involved the right not only to exposit, add to or deepen the Law, but to make demands of his people independent of that Law. This being the case, it is quite inadequate, and potentially misleading, to think of Jesus as “the last great expositor of the Law.” The Law, God’s great gift to Israel, anticipated and looked forward to the eschatological teaching of God’s will that Jesus brought. This teaching, not the Law, is the focus of the Gospels, and the Law remains authoritative for the disciple of Jesus only insofar as it is taken up into his own teaching.

*See also* CLEAN AND UNCLEAN; COMMANDMENT; MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE; OATHS AND SWEARING; RABBINIC TRADITIONS AND WRITINGS; SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. G. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Nutley, NJ: Craig, 1977); R. Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (SNTSMS 28; Cambridge: University Press, 1975); G. Barth, “Matthew’s Understanding of the Law,” in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963); K. Berger, *Die Gesetzesauslegung Jesu: Ihr historischer Hintergrund im Judentum und im Alten Testament* (WMANT 40.1: Neukirchen/Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1972); C. Blomberg, “The Law in Luke-Acts,” *JSNT* 22 (1984) 53–80; B. H. Branscomb, *Jesus and the Law of Moses* (New York: Richard A. Smith, 1930); D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); W. D. Davies, “Matthew 5.17, 18,” in *Christian Origins and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962); P. Fairbairn, *The Revelation of Law in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957 [1869]); V. P. Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972); W. Gutbrod, “νόμος,” *TDNT* IV.1036–85; H. Hübner, *Das Gesetz in der synoptischen Tradition* (2d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973); J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Scribner’s, 1971); J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972); H. Ljungman, *Das Gesetz Erfüllen: Matth. 5.17ff. und 3.15 untersucht* (LUA 50S; Lund: Gleerup, 1954); J. P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel* (AnBib 71; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1976); D. J. Moo, “Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law,” *JSNT* 20 (1984) 3–49; S. Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel* (NovTSup 42; Leiden: Brill, 1975); A. Sand, *Das Gesetz und die Propheten* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1974); E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); idem, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990); H. J. Schoeps, “Jesus und das jüdische Gesetz,” in *Aus frühchristlicher Zeit: Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1950); S. Westerholm, *Jesus and Scribal Authority* (ConBNT 10; Lund: Gleerup, 1978).

D. J. Moo<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 450.