

“KEEP MOSES’ LAW”, Jesus Urged!

Do you keep the Law of Moses? No? Early in his ministry Jesus warned the crowd on the mountain, “*Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt. 5:19). Thereafter, the stature of men in the kingdom of heaven would be affected by their keeping, or failure to keep, the law!

Why don’t we hear that declared from our pulpits and classrooms? That’s because the law was abolished at the cross -- right? Wrong! Jesus said he did not come to abolish the law. How dare we contradict him, for he declared emphatically, “*Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them*” (v. 17). Well, he fulfilled the law on the cross -- right? Not really!

How long would the law be in effect? We will let Jesus answer that: “*For truly, I say to you, till HEAVEN AND EARTH PASS AWAY, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until it is accomplished*” (v. 18). Have heaven and earth passed away?

Is that not a bit puzzling? Have you really explained these passages without being contradictory? Through most of my career as a sort of kindergarten “teacher in Israel”, I have to admit that I was at a loss to give a logical explanation. Having accepted the popular concept that the Law of Moses was nailed to the cross thereby being abolished / destroyed, my explanations obviously were not in harmony with Jesus’ plain declarations. My plan is to deal with that concept more in the next mailout.

In this essay, we will question how long the law was to last. That was answered by Jesus. It would not pass away or be accomplished / fulfilled until heaven and earth pass away. Have heaven and earth passed away? Yes! If that be true, when did it happen?

In his Olivet Discourse, Jesus gave his hearers the best indication as to the what was to transpire and when it would happen. Veiled in symbolic language common in Hebrew literature, Jesus pointed to the destruction of their religious and political capital, Jerusalem (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). In those “last days” of the nation of Israel, their temple would be destroyed and their people and priesthood would be dispersed making it impossible to keep the rituals of the law as prescribed.

After predicting the great tribulation that would come upon their city and people, Jesus continued, “*Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*” (24:29-31). To better understand this apocalyptic language, please read again FR 168, “Coming On The Clouds,” and FR 169, “The Sun, Moon, and Stars,” by Wallace Bradberry.

The concept of the stars falling from heaven could not be literal for the earth is tiny in comparison to them. Celestial bodies are used to represent the rulers and dignitaries of both religion and state. The collapse of both their political and religious structures were pictured as a collapse of the material universe. It was these of whom Jesus was speaking when he said *“the power of the heavens will be shaken.”*

What is the time frame for all this? Jesus declared, *“Truly, I say to you, THIS GENERATION will not pass away till ALL these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”* (v. 34-35). Jesus assured his listeners, *“when you see these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates”* (v. 33). Notice that he said YOU, not THEY who might be living millenniums later. With similar clarity, Jesus told Caiaphas the high priest most emphatically, *“Hereafter YOU will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven”* (Matt. 26:64). At the end of the age in their lifetime, THEY (not us) would see his coming, the “parousia,” his presence in power. The tribes of Israel would mourn the devastation but the elect would be gathered to him. John declared that “they that pierced him” would soon see these things come to pass (Rev. 1:1-7).

Surely, some of “the law and the prophets” was fulfilled on the cross when atonement was made for sin, but there was still something lacking. We have read about this all along, especially in *Hebrews*, but we did not grasp its full meaning. In Chapter 9, the old covenant system is pictured as a type of what was being fulfilled even as the epistle was being written more than thirty years after the cross. The record states, *“The priests go continually into the outer tent, performing their ritual duties; but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the WAY INTO THE SANCTUARY IS NOT YET OPENED as long as the outer tent is standing (which is symbolic for the present age)”* (9:6-9). The “present age” was then, not 2003.

Jesus, as High Priest, *“entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption”* (v. 12). That’s where Jesus was at the time of the writing. *“For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ... But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him”* (v. 24-28). When the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies with the blood for their atonement, the people of Israel watched expectantly for him to emerge again giving them assurance that their sins were forgiven. So, Israel and the first believers in Christ were waiting eagerly for the appearance of their High Priest. His appearance (parousia) would not be to deal with their sins, which he had done on the cross, but to save them, the way into heaven having been opened. If he did not return to receive and save them, heaven is unoccupied! Until his return, the dead waited in the unseen world, but since the way into heaven is opened, there has been no waiting. Leaving her earthly body behind, my Lea entered through heaven’s opened door May 25. The “hope of Israel” was for resurrection (Acts 23:6; 24:14; 26:6; 28:20). We believers need no resurrection for we will never die (John 11:26).

It would not be until this return of the conquering Jesus that all was fulfilled! During the approximate forty years of the “last days” the law and the prophets had not been fulfilled completely, even after the gospel was being preached and the firstfruits were being gathered. This was a time of overlapping of Moses and Christ, giving time for the gospel to be preached into all the world. Jesus had said, *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come”* (Matt. 24:14).

The old covenant with its law had not been destroyed or nailed to the cross, for as the time of the “parousia” approached, it was written, *“In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away”* (Heb. 8:13). It was at this time that the new covenant was established, for *“He abolishes the first in order to establish the second”* (10:9). It would be very beneficial to read again these full texts in Hebrews with these thoughts in mind. The kingdom of Israel and the spiritual kingdom co-existed from Pentecost until the “parousia.” It was like the sun rising while the moon, still in view, soon fades from sight in the bright sunlight.

For brevity, we will skip to Hebrews 12:18-29. Toward the end of the last days, they had come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, etc. They were receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken replacing the earthly, shaken one.

John envisioned the judgment of Israel and the early converts as earth and sky fled away (Rev. 20:11-15) Then the dramatic culmination and fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan is brought to view: *“Then I saw a NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH; for the FIRST HEAVEN AND THE FIRST EARTH HAD PASSED AWAY, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people. And God himself will be with them; ..’”* (Rev. 21:1-5).

Heaven and earth passed away to be replaced by a new heaven and earth. The old system involving the law and prophets was fulfilled. In the “parousia” Christ confirmed a new relationship with God as he dwells with us, and in us, who are the holy city, the bride, the new Jerusalem.

If the Lord wills, we will deal more in our next issue with the idea of the law being nailed to the cross and disciples keeping rituals of the law.

(Cecil Hook; June 2003) []