

## 38. Restoring the Law

Matthew 23:1-3a

*Luke A had taken Mark's Jesus further in the renunciation direction: believers must sacrifice every worldly advantage for their Heavenly reward. Matthew, coming shortly after, takes a contrary approach. Jesus, following the later prophets, had reduced the Law to six clauses: our relations with others. Returning instead to the older Scriptures, Matthew reinstates the whole Law!<sup>1</sup> He even affirms the authority of Jesus' opponents, the scribes and Pharisees, as being the correct interpreters of the Law. Or so it seems at first:*

Then spake Jesus to the multitudes and to his disciples, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, do and observe . . .



<sup>1</sup>Matthew 5:17-18, "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets; I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass away from the law till all things be accomplished." The contradiction with Jesus does not matter; Matthew has his strategy.

### *Reflections*

Having reinstated the Scriptures, Matthew then takes possession of them, by asserting that they are fulfilled in Jesus. The fulfilment of Scripture in Jesus had previously been asserted just once, in Mark. That was at the Arrest:

Mk 14:49. I was daily with you in the Temple teaching, and ye took me not; but let the Scriptures be fulfilled.

Matthew preserves this passage more or less intact, and adds ten fulfillments of his own, each marked by a recurring final formula. The ten formulas are:

- Mt 1:22-23 [Birth of Jesus] . . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying [Isaiah 7:15]
- Mt 2:15 [Departure for Egypt] . . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying [Hosea 11:1]
- Mt 2:17-18 [Slaying of the Infants]. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying [Jer 31:15]
- Mt 2:23 [Dwelling in Nazareth] . . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, that he should be called a Nazarene [very contorted echo of Judges 13:7, “for the child shall be a Nazirite”]
- Mt 4:14-16 [Dwelling in Capernaum] . . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying [Isaiah 8:23–9:1]
- Mt 8:17 [Healing in Capernaum] . . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying [Isaiah 53:4].
- Mt 12:17-21 [Healings following the Sabbath healing of the Man with the Withered Hand] . . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying [Isaiah 42:1-4]
- Mt 13:35 [end of the Kingdom parables] . . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying [Psalm 29:30]
- Mt 21:4-5 [Jesus riding into Jerusalem] . . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying [Zechariah 9:9]
- Mt 27:9-10 [Returning the pieces of silver] . . . [Zechariah 11:13b]

Matthew was the first to include a Birth Narrative, and four of his fulfillments support that new material. Most of the others support other Matthean novelties (where Jesus lived, what he rode into Jerusalem). What is the point of this? Part of it is to back up Matthew’s innovations against the earlier Mark and Luke. But the main idea is to show that, in all details, Jesus is foretold by Scripture. If even here, how much more in claims like that made by the heavenly voice at the baptism (Mt 3:17, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”)? Scripture is the final authority. The right to interpret Scripture is accordingly the highest power in Judaism.

Who has that power? *Who owns Judaism?*

Matthew answers that question in part by his denunciation of the Pharisees.