

Jesus the Interpreter of Jewish Scriptures

*"Do not think that I have come
to **destroy** the Torah or the Prophets;
I have not come to **destroy** them
but to **fulfill** them."
(Matthew 5:17-18)*

The Torah and the Prophets are the first two sections of the *Jewish Scriptures*. Today, a third section is called "**the Writings**." Some translations have "**abolish**" instead of "**destroy**." However, a widely held Christian doctrine interprets the verse above as, "**Jesus fulfilled the Law, therefore Christians are not under the Law.**" "*The law*" is interpreted as "**Jewish laws in the Old Testament.**" Thus we have this very famous Christian doctrine, "**Christians are under grace not the law.**" The primary purpose of the Old Testament for many Christians is to quote verses they interpreted as "*predicting the coming of Jesus*" from prophecies.

The Talmud contains a story that will help us link the Hebrew words that Jesus actually said to a similar story in the Jewish culture. This allows us to reattach the Hebrew cultural meanings to the words of Jesus.

Imma Shalom, Rabbi Eliezer's wife, was Rabbi Gamaliel's sister. Now, a certain philosopher lived in his vicinity, and **he bore a reputation that he did not accept bribes**. They wished to expose him, so she brought him a golden lamp, went before him, and said to him, "***I desire that a share be given men in my deceased father's estate.***"

"Divide," ordered the philosopher.

Rabbi Gamaliel said to him, "It is decreed for us, where there is a son, **a daughter does not inherit.**"

The philosopher replied, "Since the day that you were exiled from your land **the Law of Moses has been superseded and another book** given, wherein it is written, '**A son and a daughter inherit equally.**'"

The next day, Rabbi Gamaliel brought him a Libyan ass and said to them, "Look at the end of the book, wherein it is written, '**I came not to destroy the Law of Moses nor to add to the Law of Moses,**' and it is written therein, '**A daughter does not inherit where there is a son.**'"

When Rabbi Gamaliel said, "It is decreed for us, where there is a son, **a daughter does not inherit,**" he was quoting **Numbers 27:8** -- "*And*

BHC Exploration #4

you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying, `If a man die, and have no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter.'"

Rabbi Gamaliel then says, "Look at the end of the book, wherein it is written, **I came not to destroy the Law of Moses nor to add to the Law of Moses,**" (Deuteronomy 12:32) -- "**What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: you shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.**" (Talmud - Shabbat 116a-b)

Rabbi Gamaliel was using a wordplay on Deuteronomy 12:32 when he said "**I came not to destroy the Law of Moses nor add to it the Law of Moses.**" Below is the verse from Deuteronomy.

*"See that you do all I command you; **do not add** to it **or take away** from it."*

In this context the phrase "destroy" means "**take away from.**" One way a person can "**take away from the Law**" is to "**literally remove letters from words.**" Another way to "**take away from the Law**" is to "**misinterpret the Law.**" Now I will use this information to reconstruct the meanings of the words of Jesus so you can hear what his Jewish audience heard.

*"Do not think that I have come to
misinterpret the Torah or the Prophets;
I have not come to misinterpret them
but to interpret them correctly!"*

It is important to see Jesus as a very skilled interpreter and teacher of the Torah and the Prophets. In almost all of his discussions with Sadducees, Pharisees, Herodians, scribes, and lawyers, he is defending his interpretations or challenging their interpretations.

This brings me back to the *Alliance* and the stories in Genesis. Jesus will interpret them and use them to support his interpretations. It is clear that Jesus views himself as "**The Creator's Representative to all life on Earth.**" And, the people in his "**Kingdom of the Creator Movement**" view themselves as "**Representatives of the Creator,**" too!

Jesus is teaching his generation about the Creator's Alliance. At birth they became part of the *Alliance with its obligations*. On the **Great Day of Judgment**, or **death**, they will be judged by whether they fulfilled those obligations – *acted as the Creator's shepherds by caring for their fellow humans.*

BHC Exploration #4

Shalom,
Jim Myers