

Luke 16:16-17

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/luke/luke-16/luke-1616-17/>

Jesus affirms the durability of God's Law. He says that even though the Age of the Law and Prophets have passed, and the Age of the Gospel of the Kingdom has come, it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one part of the Law to fail. In the middle of saying these things, Jesus offers an enigmatic line that everyone is forcing his way into the kingdom of God.

This parallel gospel accounts for these teachings are Matthew 11:12 and Matthew 5:18, 24:34.

After calling out the Pharisees for loving money and the approval of men, and despising God and scoffing at His teachings (Luke 16:14-15, Luke 16:1-13), Jesus warns about the certainty of God's Law.

The point Jesus seems to be making is that *God's Law* is eternal and unbreaking. It never changes. And it does not shift or realign itself to the opinions of men. He was basically telling the Pharisees, "You are wrong if you think that you can go up against *God's* laws and win. You will lose. *God* is not mocked."

Jesus makes this point with three thoughts and a comparison.

The three thoughts are:

1. *The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John*
2. *since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached*
3. *and everyone is forcing his way into it*

The comparison is:

But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.

This commentary will address each thought in order and then Jesus's comparison. But first, it is worth noting that the three thoughts He offered the Pharisees are very similar to what Jesus taught the crowds as *John* the Baptist's disciples returned to their imprisoned rabbi.

"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force."

(Matthew 11:12)

The first thought expressed by Jesus: *The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John.*

The expression *the Law and the Prophets* was an allusion to the Jewish scriptures, what we now call the "Old Testament." The Old Testament begins with *the Law*: the five books of Moses

(Genesis—Deuteronomy). These books were called the Torah by the Jews (sometimes called the Pentateuch). The Torah/Books of Moses were considered by the Jews to be *the Law* because this was where the Ten Commandments were given (Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:1-21) as well as hundreds of other commandments and rules set down by God for the children of Israel to follow in order to fulfill the spirit of the Ten Commandments. The Old Testament concludes with *the Prophets* (Isaiah—Malachi).

John explicitly refers to *John the Baptist*, Jesus's cousin (Luke 1:36, 57-60) and the Messianic forerunner (Matthew 3:1-12; 11:7-19; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-22; 7:18-30; John 1:6-8, 19-34).

What did Jesus mean by *The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John*?

He could mean that the age of the Old Testament where God speaks primarily through *prophets* came to an end with *John the Baptist*. The end could have been when John first began his public ministry or when it ended with *John's* arrest/beheading (Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29). Jesus noted that *John* is said to fulfill the prophecy that Elijah would come prior to the advent of Messiah. This likely means the phrase, "*until John*," indicates that the Baptizer was the last of the Old Testament *prophets*.

Jesus was, in effect, announcing that one age has closed—*The Law and the Prophets*, and a new age was now being preached and offered—The Advent of *the Messianic kingdom*.

But even though the age of the *Law* had ended, we should not assume that its laws have no current meaning. Jesus famously said in His Sermon on the Mount:

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:17-19)

However from our present perspective, since Israel declined to follow Jesus their King (and usher in the Messianic *kingdom*), instead what is initiated is the "Age of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24; Romans 11:25).

Another meaning Jesus might have had when He said *The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John* is that the scriptures *prophesied* of *John* and foretold *John's* coming as the forerunner of the Christ.

Both meanings could be inferred together without eliminating the other.

The second thought expressed by Jesus: *since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached.*

The second thought is related to the first. The first thought indicated that the Age of *the Law and the Prophets* was [from *the time* of Moses] until *John* the Baptist. Now that *John* the Baptist had appeared preaching *the good news of the Messianic kingdom*, a new era had arrived. This is what Jesus meant when He said *since that time [of John the Baptist] the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached*. It was preached by *John* as well as by Jesus.

John's message was "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2), and he went about "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3) in preparation of the Messiah *The gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached* (and is continuing to be) *since John* first began his ministry. Jesus's ministry began after Jesus endured the temptation of Satan and settled in Capernaum, and is described with this statement:

"From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (Matthew 4:17)

As Jesus taught, He was presenting and inviting people to participate in His kingdom.

The third thought expressed by Jesus: *and everyone is forcing his way into it.*

The first two thoughts indicated that the Age of *the Law* had now come to a close, and the era of *the Gospel of the Kingdom of God* had now arrived. The third thought that Jesus states immediately after those observations is that *everyone is forcing his way into it*.

In Matthew's gospel, instead of saying *everyone is forcing his way into it*, Jesus says: "and violent men take it by force" (Matthew 11:12).

What can Jesus mean by this enigmatic thought?

What is clear is that *it* refers to *the kingdom of God*.

The phrase *everyone is forcing his way into the kingdom of God* could mean two things.

It could refer to the violence done to *John* the Baptist (and other faithful members of *the kingdom of God*). According to this interpretation *everyone* ("violent men" in Matthew 11) implied earthly authorities such as the Pharisees and Sadducees who took *John* into custody (Matthew 4:12), and Herod who currently held *John* imprisoned (Matthew 11:2).

By extension this interpretation also refers to *everyone* who persecutes the faithful. Jesus foretold being a faithful witness can be hazardous to the body (but not the "psuche") (Matthew 10). The Christian Church will encounter much *violence* and persecution throughout the Book of Acts and beyond. The *force* Jesus is speaking of here very well could refer to the *violence* of persecution against *the kingdom*.

If this is what Jesus meant, then we as Christ's followers can rest assured that *God's* "kingdom cannot be shaken" (Hebrews 12:28) and that "the gates of Hades will not overpower" His church (Matthew 16:18).

But Jesus could have been referring to a different kind of violence altogether.

A second interpretation of *everyone is forcing his way into the kingdom of God* is that it requires a kind of spiritual violence to overcome the temptations of the present age to enter the *kingdom*. If this is the case, Jesus is alluding to something very similar to what Paul describes in [Ephesians 6:10-17](#) as putting on the armor of God and preparing for spiritual warfare. According to this interpretation, *everyone* would specifically refer to spiritually violent *men* like *John* who took *the kingdom by the force* of resisting their sin nature, the corrupting patterns of this world and its temptations of luxury and prestige.

This second interpretation is akin to Jesus's exhortation to diligently seek to enter *into the kingdom* by the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13-14). And if this is the case, it means that the only way to enter is to overcome by *forcing your way into the kingdom* by relying on *God's* spiritual power.

If the second interpretation is what Jesus meant, then it reinforces the idea that such spiritual resistance against the schemes of the devil is commendable (James 4:7).

Perhaps Jesus has both in view, in that *the kingdom of God* is going to provoke a strong response one way or the other. Like the choice of masters between God or money, the response to *the Kingdom* will either be humble submission or adamant resistance.

Jesus makes the comparison: ***But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.***

After informing the Pharisees that the Age of *the Law and the Prophets* has ended and the Age of the Messianic *Kingdom* has arrived and that everyone is responding one way or the other, Jesus reminds them that the Laws of *God* are enduring.

He told the Pharisees *it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for a single stroke of the Law to fail*. It will all be accomplished. *God* is not mocked. It is easier for natural laws of this *earth*, indeed even this very *earth* itself to be undone than for *God's Law* to lose its authority. *God* set the physical laws of the universe when He created all that is (Genesis 1:1). Someone can choose to ignore gravity, but gravity will still operate on them. In the same way, *God* set the spiritual and moral laws of the universe when He created all that is (Colossians 1:16). *God's* moral laws can also be disbelieved, but they will still operate notwithstanding.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that "until" *heaven and earth pass away, the Law* will stand (Matthew 5:18). Once again, *God's Law* did not and does not lose its relevance just because the Age of *the Law* has ended and the Age of the Kingdom has come. *The Law* will be enforced at least until the current *earth* is abolished and the New *Heaven* and the New *Earth* are given.

It is worth noting that the basic idea behind that *Law*, as interpreted by Jesus, is

1. *God* should be acknowledged and followed as the Maker of all things (as this passage reinforces)
2. The way *God* set things up to work best is for the humans He created to freely choose to serve one another in love (Matthew 22:36-40).

Experience would confirm that the greatest fulfillment transpires when a team, family, company, or community serves a unifying mission with their diversity of gifts. This verse seems to assert that the moral principles of cause-effect will stand in place so long as the earth remains.

Understanding all three of Jesus's expressed thoughts in this passage along with Jesus's comparison within the preceding context of the Pharisees' scoffing (Luke 16:14); and Christ's rebuke of their foolish attempts of self-justification (Luke 16:15), we see that He was warning them that *God's* perspective is supreme.

The gospel of *the kingdom* was and is being preached and people are having to take a side. It is better for us to accept the Creator God as our authority over what is highly esteemed rather than the scoffing of ignorant men. Will we choose the side that outlasts heaven and earth or will we choose the moral fashions and opinions of our day?

Biblical Text

16 "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. 17 But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.