

Sudanese Christmas in Jerusalem

The tables were laden with gold and burgundy decorations, fairy lights and an ever growing pile of desserts from the congregations' many self-taught pastry chefs, but the guests had not yet arrived. There were probably 150 of us waiting at the church after the service, ready to celebrate that afternoon with a congregation of Sudanese refugees living in Tel Aviv. JCF arranged tour buses for them to come to Jerusalem and organized a Christmas feast to share with members of the Narkis Street Congregation.

The set up was nearly complete when we received a call from one of the bus drivers, "We're here in Tel Aviv waiting for them, but they won't come out!" We replied, "They won't come out of where?" The driver said, "Out of the church. They won't stop praying!" We shared smiles and then got on the phone to the Sudanese pastor to let him know that the bus drivers were anxious to get moving.

After a 45 minute drive, three bus loads of Sudanese caught a glimpse of Mount Zion and "the city of the great king," many for the very first time. They stopped to worship the Lord at a lookout point from which they could see the whole old city flanked by the Kidron and Hinom valleys.

We welcomed them all to the church with mountains of steaming rice, roasted chickens, and spicy vegetables prepared by a Bethlehem family in the catering business. The feast was enormous. Joyful songs in English, Arabic, and Dinka mingled with laughter. Cheer was in the air. When the meal ended the dancing began. A little shuffle of the feet and we were off dancing to intense African rhythms and singing to our Lord. Bags of Christmas goodies for each child tumbled out of the boxes as we said goodbye. We left with our spirits lifted by finding the Lord's love in strangers. Though we were many, we became one body, as we all shared in one festive meal.

Thank you to those of you who gave so generously over the last year to touch the poor all over Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. The thanks are yours and the reward is yours. "When you give a feast, invite the poor ... and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." (Luke 14: 13 - 14)



JCF



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Jerusalem Cornerstone Foundation

אבן פינה

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Our Classroom

Biblical Language Center (BLC) teaches intensive biblical Greek & Hebrew courses during the summer. A unique teaching method that makes learning fun, effective and for everyone.

Biblical Studies in Israel (BSI) an accredited one-year Undergraduate program of Land, Language and Literature of the Bible at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Study Tours bringing the Bible to life through in-depth thematic tours. Tours are customized to suit the specific needs of groups for any size and age

Our Outreach

Israel Relief Providing financial assistance for urgent situations to those in the Land needing help. A portion of this fund is also set aside for educational scholarships for the needy.

Funds needed: food vouchers, housewares & clothing vouchers, emergency medical & dental assistance, general needs

Children's Fund Helping children caught in great need due to the ongoing conflicts.

Funds needed: orphanages, school supplies, holiday gifts, general assistance for children

Our World

www.jerusalemcornerstone.org for further details on our projects, programs and the communities we live and work in, visit our world on our website

But I tell you... Do not think that I have come to abolish the law.

by Aaron Hornkohl

The formulation of Jesus' six pronouncements in Matt 5:21-48 – "you have heard that it was said . . . , but I say to you . . ." – often leaves readers with the impression that Jesus here contradicts Old Testament (OT) law. It is therefore not surprising that this section of the Sermon on the Mount is traditionally dubbed The Antithesis of the Law. According to the most extreme view, Jesus nullifies OT law completely and substitutes His own words for it. A less extreme approach has Him accepting OT law as far as it goes, but radicalizing it to require a higher standard for His followers. In reality, however, Jesus neither contradicts nor goes beyond the OT, but merely corrects certain misapplications and selective interpretations prevalent in first-century Judaism, all the while affirming the OT and calling His listeners to thorough and wholehearted observance.¹

Jesus' positive attitude toward the OT is already evident in the immediately preceding section (Matt 5:17-20), where Jesus states that He has come not to do away with, but to rightly apply² Scripture; that until everything takes place, the validity of the OT is as permanent as heaven and earth,³ that greatness in Jesus' kingdom is measured in proportion to one's observance.

¹ Though limitations of space preclude even a cursory discussion, in all fairness to first-century Judaism, it should be noted that Jesus was not alone in His dissatisfaction with certain superficial interpretations of Scripture.

² The Greek word πληρόω, traditionally rendered "fulfill," is probably a translation of the Hebrew verb לקיים, a word common in Second Temple Hebrew (including the later books of the Hebrew Bible). Though it can mean 'fulfill (a prophecy, etc.)' as in Ezek 13:6, in reference to law, it is a technical term meaning, first, 'perform, observe' (in contradistinction to the verb לבטל 'cancel, fail to observe'), and, with specific reference to rabbis, 'interpret, explain'. Jesus' legal exposition in vv. 21-48 confirms this understanding of the word in its immediate context, though this does not preclude a polyvalent meaning in Matthew's work as a whole.

³ The two "until" phrases in v. 18, "until heaven and earth pass away" and "until everything takes place," are likely synonymous, both indicating the OT's validity until the end of the age (cf. Luke 16:16).

ance and teaching of the law; and that Jesus' followers must be even more legally devout than the Pharisees. It is difficult to imagine a passage more emphatically affirming of the OT.

The so-called *Antitheses* themselves also testify to Jesus' unqualified endorsement of OT law. First, the unique formula "you have heard that it was said," rather than the more common "it is written," indicates a critique not of law, but of wrong interpretations thereof. Second, far from innovations, the fundamental premise of each of Jesus' "but I say to you . . ." pronouncements is already present in OT law. Jesus may add innovative applications to the basic OT laws that He cites (though, as we shall see, even here He often relies on OT precedent), but in no way does He contradict, deviate from, or even go beyond their basic principles. Rather, cognizant of the profound righteousness demanded by OT law – with its requirements of right action as well as attitude – He charges His audience to follow it to the letter. For the wondrous character of OT law lies in the fact that, because its demands are both internal and external, true adherence to its letter is impossible without adherence to its spirit.

vv. 21-26. "You have heard that it was said . . . 'Do not murder' . . . But I say to you that anyone who is angry with a brother will be subjected to judgment." Jesus quotes the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:13; Deut 5:17), then appears to call his listeners to a more stringent standard. He forbids not only murder, but even anger against one's fellow. But is this not the point of Lev 19:18 "you will not be angry with⁴ your countryman"? Jesus merely reminds His audience that the OT stand-

⁴ Traditionally, the Biblical Hebrew verb נָסַר in Lev 19:18 (and elsewhere) has been considered an Aramaic bi-from of Hebrew נָצַר 'guard, keep, preserve', with the more specialized nuance 'preserve, retain wrath'; hence the translation "bear a grudge." However, a number of scholars now recognize two homonymous verbs: נָסַר 'get

Good News from the Middle East:

“You shall not avenge nor bear any grudge...”

by Liz Kopp

In his book “Bread for the Journey,” Henri Nouwen wrote, “When we are free from the need to judge or condemn, we can become safe places for people to meet in vulnerability and take down the walls that separate them. Being deeply rooted in the love of God, we cannot help but invite people to love one another. When people realize that we have no hidden agendas or unspoken intentions, that we are not trying to gain any profit for ourselves, and that our only desire is for peace and reconciliation, they may find the inner freedom and courage to leave their guns at the door and enter into conversation with their enemies.”

While world powers debate solutions for the Middle East, one group has moved on and is living out the reality of reconciliation. The Parent Circle Families Forum (www.theparentcircle.org) consists of approximately 250 Israeli families and 250 Palestinian families who have lost immediate family members. They have decided to come together in spite of the existing conflict. “We have chosen to convert the feelings of anger and revenge, helplessness and despair, into energies of hope and action, as messengers of a process of reconciliation.” They do this through seminars, art exhibits, a bilingual radio program and website, summer camps, workshops, t.v. series, and hope; the kind of hope that empowers Israelis and Palestinians to embrace one another in spite of the fact that they have lost loved ones at the hand of the other.



Stepping Forth: Manar approaches the end of university

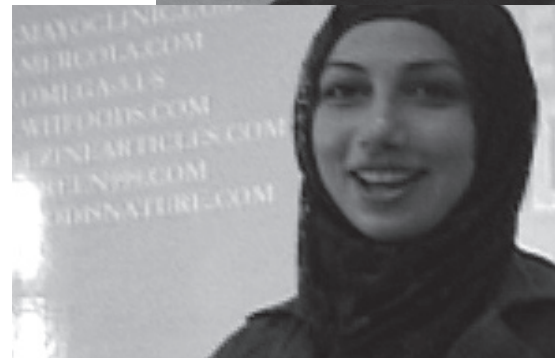
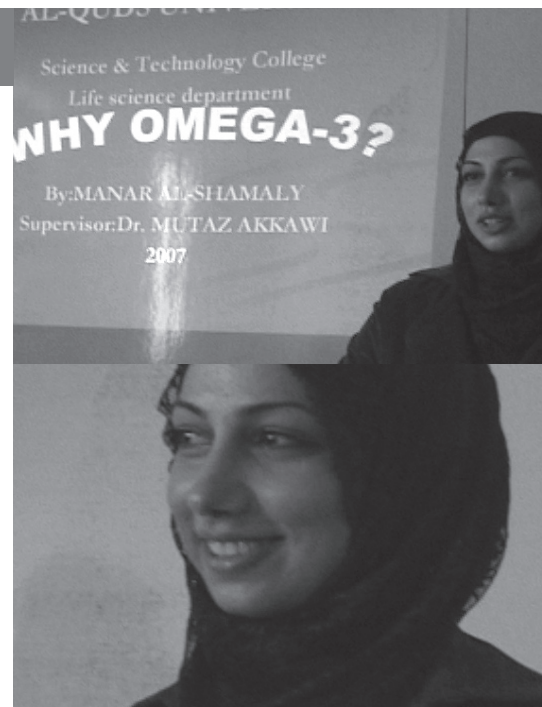
by Bethany Slater

She approached us a slender reed-like figure wrapped in olive green, and greeted us with a timid smile. Manar was nervous. In a few short minutes she would be giving a speech for her peers and professors that must demonstrate mastery of her subject and the research techniques she has been taught these last few years. My husband and I were there to let her know how proud of her all of us at Jerusalem Cornerstone Foundation are and to video her speech for her family and friends.

Manar is a young Palestinian woman, living in the ancient town of Bethany, now named El Azaria after Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead there. She attends Al Quds University at the Abu Dis campus. About 11,000 people live in this Jerusalem suburb whose ultimate political status has been uncertain for a while. The area suffered an economic downturn, losing sixty percent of its customer base and property value, after it was cut off from the rest of Jerusalem by the security barrier built in 2003. Its future was a major sticking point during the failed Oslo Peace Accords. Manar, like many other young Palestinian students, is struggling to do the normal things of life like go to class and prepare for the future. But the unsteady political environment makes concentrating and planning difficult. Even during her speech we saw some tension at the University. A rowdy group of young political activists passed through the hallway chanting slogans. Manar managed to stay composed. Her speech was one of the best we heard that day: clear, well-researched, and delivered with confidence.

Manar has spent the last three years studying Biology and Medical Technology, instead of getting married. When Manar turned eighteen, her parents felt they had no choice but to accept an arranged marriage proposal to alleviate pressure on the family's finances. Her mother has supported the family of nine entirely from the proceeds of her part-time cleaning jobs. Thankfully her situation was brought to the attention of JCF and the family was convinced to allow JCF and others to sponsor Manar's university education. Now this bright young woman is nearly finished with her Bachelor's Degree and is looking forward to getting a job as a laboratory technician so that she can help support her family.

We left Manar standing near her home with her mother, sister, aunt and a bundle of fresh flowers: a white lily, amidst red and orange blossoms. They were her first bouquet of flowers in honor of her achievement and bestowed by her mother, with loving pride and great sacrifice.



ard itself goes beyond murder to the anger behind it.⁵ Even Jesus' command to reconcile with man before God (23-24) is no more than a restatement of OT law (Lev 5:20-26; Num 5:6-8).

vv. 27-30. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ but I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” It is often argued that Jesus demands a higher standard by outlawing not only adultery, but the lust that leads to it. However, the OT already forbids the latter. “Do not desire your neighbor's wife” (Ex 20:17; Deut 5:21) is just as much one of the Ten Commandments as “Do not commit adultery” (Ex 20:14; Deut 5:18).⁶

vv. 31-32. “It was said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife must give her a legal document.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” The issue of divorce in the OT is complicated by the lack of a comprehensive treatment there. The few explicit cases (Deut 21:10-14, 22:13-19, 28-29, 24:1-4) are all very specific and assume general background knowledge not provided in the OT. Suffice it to say, divorce was permitted in certain circumstances and absolutely forbidden in others. Jesus opposes a contemporary interpretation of Deut 24:1 (perhaps that of the School of Hillel), whereby a man could divorce his wife on almost any grounds simply by writing her a certificate of divorce.⁷ Jesus (like the School of Shammai) evidently interprets the Hebrew term תּוֹרֵק רֵבֶדֶךָ in Deut 24:1, literally “nakedness of a thing,” as a reference to sexual sin, and only permits divorce in such cases.⁸

angry' and נָטַר 'guard, keep'. Either way, the verb in Lev 19:18 clearly refers to anger and aptly lends itself to Jesus' thrust.

⁵ For rabbinic parallels to Jesus ban on insults see Babylonian Talmud *Bava Metsia*, 58b-59a.

⁶ The force of the quotation is heightened by the words “to desire her” in Matt 5:28, the Greek of which (ἐπιθυμήσεις) echoes the Greek of Ex 20:17/Deut 5:17 (οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις) in the LXX. See also Job 31:1.

⁷ Over-cooked or over-salted dinner constituted sufficient grounds. According to the later Rabbi Akiva, a man was even permitted to divorce his wife if he found “another fairer than she.”

⁸ The exact meaning of the Hebrew עֵרוֹת דְּבַר in Deut 24:1 is difficult. Against Hillel's view, on the basis of the use of עֵרוֹת elsewhere in the OT, especially its sexual connotation in the sphere of relationships, the

Here again His argument is not with OT Scripture, but with how certain contemporaries interpreted it.

vv. 33-37. “. . . you have heard that it was said . . . ‘Do not break an oath, but fulfill your vows to the Lord’. But I say to you, do not take oaths at all.” The quote is from Deut 23:22-24 (21-23 in some translations).⁹ Of note here is v. 23 (22) “If you refrain from making a vow, you incur no guilt.” Again, far from contradicting Scripture, Jesus invokes it.

vv. 38:42. “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’” But I say to you, do not resist the evildoer.” The principle of *lex talionis* or retributive justice is made explicit in Ex 21:24, Lev 24:20, and Deut 19:21. It constitutes a legal improvement over more antiquated means of dispensing justice, such as feuds and vendettas, in that an impartial judicial body pronounces judgment and ensures punishment proportional to the crime. The OT idea of *lex talionis* is thus not a principle by which to live everyday life, but a judicial concept to be applied by the courts. The basic OT principle for responding to mistreatment in everyday life can be found in Lev 19:18, with its command to refrain from vengeance. But does this not lie at the heart of Jesus' principle of non-resistance?¹⁰

vv. 43-48. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor’ and ‘hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.” This phrase would seem to indicate something more serious than burnt dinner. Against Shammai's view that it refers to adultery, most scholars cite Deut 22:22, which stipulates the death penalty for adulterers. Premarital sex was to result in either marriage (Deut 22:28-29) or execution (Deut 22:20-21). Suspicion of adultery was to be dealt with according to the ordeal detailed in Num 5:12-27. The lack of the qualification “except for immorality” in Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:16 (cf. Matt 19:9) is best explained as an instance of leaving the obvious unstated.

⁹ Other OT references to the importance of keeping vows include Ex 20:7; Lev 19:12; Num 30:2; Deut 5:11, to list just a few.

¹⁰ The examples that Jesus provides in the following verses – turning the other cheek, relinquishing one's coat in addition to one's tunic, going the extra mile, loaning to the one who asks to borrow – have been seen as shrewd ways of forcing the offending party into legal jeopardy, but this reading clashes with Jesus' call in the following verses for love of both neighbor and enemy. Incidentally, the first and last cases have OT scriptural basis (Lam 3:30 and Deut 15:7-11).

“Jesus’ argument is not with Old Testament scripture but with how certain contemporaries interpreted it.”

cute you.” The command to “love your neighbor” is from Lev 19:18b, while “hate your enemy” could be inferred from any number of passages.¹¹ First century exegesis of Lev 19:18b focused on the identity of “your neighbor.”¹² In context, however, there can be little doubt.

First, Lev 19:17-18

deals explicitly with Israelites. To be sure, God also cares for foreigners, but the command to love them is reserved for Lev 19:34.¹³ Second, the first half of Lev 19:18 clarifies the identity of the “neighbor” in the second half. The two halves are in opposition: “Do not take vengeance against or be angry with your countryman, but love your neighbor . . .” The “neighbor” of 18b and the “countryman” of 18a are one and the same – someone who has wronged you and against whom you are tempted to take vengeance, i.e. an *enemy*. But this is precisely the point of Jesus' command to “Love your enemy.” Again, Jesus calls his listeners back to the true intent of the OT law.

Conclusion. Far from contradicting or going beyond the principles of OT law, Jesus in Matt 5:21-48 affirms it, beckoning his Jewish contemporaries to shun selective and superficial interpretations of Scripture and to abide by the all-embracing righteousness embodied in OT law. This understanding of Jesus words reflects the eternal value and validity of the OT that He affirms and resolves the theological difficulties of having God the Son abrogate and replace the words of God the Father.

¹¹ Most notably Deut 23:3-6, 25:17-19, and certain references to enemies in the Psalms.

¹² Cf. Luke 10:29. One problem is the Hebrew word עֵרֵב, which can mean anything from ‘fellow’ to ‘lover’, and another is the ambiguous grammatical status of כְּמוֹךָ which can refer (adverbially) to the verb “love,” i.e. “love your neighbor as yourself,” or (adjectively) to the noun “neighbor,” i.e. “love your neighbor who is like you.”

¹³ For more on God's attitude towards foreigners see, among other passages, Ruth, Isa 19:18-25, and 56:1-8.