

Paul Sloan, *Jesus and the Law of Moses: The Gospels and the Restoration of Israel within First-Century Judaism* (Baker Academic, 2025)

“Throughout the Torah more widely, God instructed Israel in how they ought to obey him and live justly toward each other. This sequence of events implies that Israel does not keep these commandments in order to become God’s covenantal people; they are already God’s covenantal people whom he redeemed from slavery, and so now they expressed their allegiance to him through this obedience (13).”

“God is aware of Israel’s sinfulness and ‘stubbornness’ (on display since the crossing of the sea; Deuteronomy 9:6–7), and knowing this, he both commands their obedience and instructions how they can procure the forgiveness and atonement on offer through the divinely prescribed sacrifices. Thus Israel’s commission of transgressions is an assumed aspect of the covenantal relationship (13).”

“Thus, rather than pitting Leviticus and/or Pharisaism against Jesus on the basis of compassion, one ought to say that Jesus and the Pharisees agreed that God was compassionate and forgiving. What often distinguished Jesus from the Pharisees in the synoptic gospels was Jesus is claimed that he was the divinely authorized herald and executor of the restoration that was breaking in *now* (25).”

“Positively... (31).

“The Law’s commandments constitute the stipulations by which Israel maintains the covenant and enjoys its inherent blessings. Violating the covenant results in God’s employment of punitive curses through which Israel is disciplined. Importantly, the covenantal agreement assumes that Israel will commit transgression – hence the divinely prescribed sacrificial system. Thus Israel’s commission of certain transgressions does not automatically incur the covenant curses (43).”

The Discipline - (44)

“What Deut. 28 names ‘curses,’ Lev. 26 calls ‘discipline’ intended to turn Israel back to obedience. After describing a handful of hard times (terror, consumption, fever, being ruled by other enemies), God says: ‘if also after these things you do not obey me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins’ (46-47).”

“But exile, subjugation, and an abandoned temple are not God’s last word. God promises that the discipline will end, and he will restore his people. The main text from the Law on this matter are Deut. 4:27-31; 30:1-6; and Lev. 26:40-45... And they are told that their exile and captivity are how they ‘pay for’ or ‘accept’ the cost of their iniquity (Lev. 26:41, 43) (47).”

“Key to these texts, then, is that endurance of the penalty and returning to God are the means through which Israel pays the debt accrued by their sin, exhausting the wrath manifest in various judgments, and arrives at the restoration (47).”

“In their state of punitive exile, then, what is expected of Israel is an eschatological ‘return.’ This terminology and the covenant-restoration realities it encodes ought to contextualize the interpretation of the Gospel’s presentations of John and Jesus calling Israel to return to God in the last days (48).”

“The Synoptic Gospels operate within this restorationist framework and portrayed Jesus as its herald and executor, which is suggested by their depiction of him as the one anointed to proclaim ‘release to the captives’ and ‘to heal the broken’ (Isaiah 61:1 AT) (49).”

“Significantly, each beatitude’s promised outcome is one that Israel’s Scriptures name as a benefit of the restoration. Nearly every line of the Beatitudes derives from passages that describe Israel’s punitive state due to covenant violation and the divine act of restoration that resolves such plights (76).”

“Each of these plights is a punishment named by Lev. 26, Deut. 28, and prophetic literature as discipline resultant from Israel’s covenant violation, and each is named by Jesus as a situation to be resolved (77).”

“With these pronouncements, Jesus is not requiring sinless perfection. Mercy and forgiveness are assumed aspects of the divine-human relationship both in the Law and the Jesus’ instruction (79).”

“But Jesus’s instruction does place obligations on his hearers, as he states in the conclusion of his teaching: ‘Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine, and does them’ is like one who builds on a foundation of rock, but everyone who hears ‘and does not do them’ is like one who builds on sand, a house doomed to fall (Matt. 7:24-27) (79).”

“Jesus is a Jewish teacher instructing his Jewish disciples about the restoration of Israel from the Law given to Israel. Thus, the ‘newness’ of his teaching is not that of a new pattern of religion - ‘Christianity now, Judaism before’ - but that of *restoration*: Israel was disciplined, but now Israel will be restored (p. 79).”

“First, the instruction (5:21-48) is introduced by his assertions in 5:17-20, wherein he claims that he came not to abolish the ‘Law or the Prophets’ but to fulfill them. Consequently, Matt. 5:17-20 serves as the hermeneutical key to Jesus’s subsequent teaching, which is therefore not the Law’s abolishment but its fullest keeping (p. 80).”

“Third, the contrasts Jesus makes between his teaching and the Law are not intended to contradict what the Law requires. Rather, the content following ‘but I say to you’ draws from other parts of the Law to rightly interpret the referenced portion (81).”

“In Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus is not ‘revoking’ legal edicts based on his opinion; rather his instruction allude to Commandments that either override or condition the keeping of the passage he quotes (82).”

“In these cases, the positive command, exerts pressure on and ‘overrides’ the prohibition, such that the negative command is violated, but the Law is thereby kept. In other words, one commandment is being interpreted in light of another, and even when one commandment is broken to fulfill another, such breaking has as its goal the *keeping* of the law (82).”

“Jesus’s manner of legal reasoning throughout Matthew 5:21–48 is comparable to this example and those containing overrides. That is, the portion quoted/referenced with ‘You have heard that it was said...’ is not related or disputed as if Jesus simply disagrees with the Law itself; rather, other portions of the Law exert control either because they are regarded as weightier, exerting an influence on the keeping of the quoted portion, or because the restoration he announces activates accompanying legal overrides (82).”

## Murder

“First to note that Jesus does not counter the murder prohibition. Nor does Jesus prohibit anger only because it is the interior disposition that leads to murder, as if ‘Do not murder’ legislates only observable action but Jesus goes further by making demands of the heart that the Law does not legislate (86).”

“Jesus is interested in stemming sins from the heart, of course, but in this case, he is not contrasting ‘an observable action’ with ‘the interior disposition that leads to it,’ but as instead of addressing ‘what makes one liable to legal judgment.’ (86).”

## Lev. 19:18

“And there is a precedent for such a ruling. Leviticus 19:18, programatic for Jesus’s interpretation of the Law (Matt. 22:39-40), says not to take vengeance or ‘bear a grudge against’ your people, proscribing prolonged ‘anger’ or ‘wrath’ (86).”

“To clarify, I am not suggesting that Jesus’s prohibition of anger quotes or directly alludes to the language of Lev. 19:18; rather, Jesus’s prohibition of anger may have extended from Lev. 19:18’s prohibition of grudges and resentment, reflecting an interpretation of Lev. 19:18 attested in Sirach 28 and CD 9 (87).”

## Reconciliation

“Rather, Jesus’s instruction is likely indebted to Lev. 6:2-7, wherein God requires that if anyone wrongs a neighbor, whether through robbery, extortion, a false vow, or basically in any way in which one may sin against another, that person must first go and repay the principal and add fifth to the one wronged, and then the guilty may make their offering for atonement and forgiveness (87).”

## Matthew 5:27-32 — Adultery and Divorce

“Once again, there is no contrast between the quoted portion and Jesus’s instruction. Rather, he interprets the prohibition of adultery (Exod. 20:14) by another commandment’s prohibition of coveting/lust (Exod. 20:17), stating that once one has violated the commandment against coveting, one has thereby ‘already’ violated the commandment against adultery (88).”

“Jubilees (composed around 200 years before the Gospels) has Abraham command his children ‘that we should keep ourselves from all fornication and pollution... and let them not fornicate with her [any woman or girl] after their eyes and hearts (Jub. 20:4). Evidently illicit actions of the eyes and heart constituted fornication (88).”

Maybe Numbers 15:37-41

“The LORD said to Moses: **38** Speak to the Israelites, and tell them to make fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and to put a blue cord on the fringe at each corner. **39** You have the fringe so that, when you see it, you will remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and not follow the lust of your own heart and your own eyes. **40** So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and you shall be holy to your God. **41** I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God.”

“For a married woman to have sexual relations with someone other than her husband is adultery, clearly the implication in v. 12. Given first-century understandings of adultery that makes sense. She dishonors her husband. But given those same first-century understandings, for a male to marry another after divorce (v. 11) simply cannot be adultery. Adultery against whom?... Adultery means to dishonor a male by having sexual relations with his wife. Take this definition quite literally. Since it is males who embody gender honor, and since only male equals can challenge for honor, a female cannot and does not dishonor a wife by having sexual relations with the wife's husband. Nor can a married man dishonor his wife by having sexual relations with some other female. A husband's relations with a prostitute do not dishonor the honorable wife (Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, 241).”

### *Divorce*

“In this instruction, Jesus quotes a requirement within a casuistic setting. Because one is not required to divorce one’s wife, the prescription regarding ‘a certificate of divorce’ is a commandment in the case that another contingency (divorce) arises. Consequently, this reading and employment of Deut. 24:1 entails that Jesus is not countering the Law. This law does not mandate divorce, and thus Jesus’s prohibition of divorce in some circumstances does not violate a commandment (89).”

“Though Jesus does not cite various opinions and then distinguish his own, his instruction coincides with that of the school of Shammai, teaching that divorce is permissible on the grounds of sexual immorality (90).”

The text that Jesus cites is Deuteronomy 24:1-4:

“Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house 2 and goes off to become another man’s wife. 3 Then suppose the second man dislikes her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house (or the second man who married her dies); 4 her first husband, who sent her away, is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that would be abhorrent to the Lord, and you shall not bring guilt on the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession.”

Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh argue that the first century understanding of marriage is quite different than ours today:

“For an understanding of divorce one must understand what marriage meant in a specific culture. Under normal circumstances in the world of Jesus, individuals really did not get married. Families did. One family offered a male, the other a female. Their wedding stood for the wedding of the larger extended families and symbolized the fusion of the honor of both families involved. It would be undertaken with a view to political and/or economic concerns -- even when it might be confined to fellow ethnics, as it was in first-century Israel. Divorce, then, would entail the dissolution of these extended family ties. It represented a challenge to the family of the former wife and would likely result in family feuding (Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, 240).”

Retaliation - Matthew 5:38-42

“In this famous instruction, Jesus refers to the principle of legally implemented retaliation as stated in Exodus, 21:24, Deuteronomy 19:21, and Leviticus 24:20. It is not clear that he is singling out one of these context over another, though the prohibition against ‘resisting’ or ‘opposing’ in Matthew 5:39 may be informed by the context of the principal in Deuteronomy 19: 18–19... (93).”

“Jesus’s instruction not to oppose the one who wrongs suggest that he is not overturning ‘eye for eye’ as a permissible legal outcome in judicial settings but is instructing his disciples to act in such a way that will obviate such cases in the first place. There will be no need to employ the legal sentence (‘eye for eye’) if his disciples pursue peace and reconciliation beforehand and thus avoid going to court at all (93).”

Translating Matt. 5:39 - “But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer”

“Generally, the Greek term can simply refer to ‘opposition.’ But ‘opposition’ can take many forms: does Jesus prohibit self-defense, recourse to legal retaliation in judicial setting, or retaliation in any form, whether judicial or extrajudicial? Translating as ‘do not retaliate’ simulate covers all the grounds while leading the situation provide a precise significance; however, its use in conjunction with a law legislative judicial process – and Jesus’s examples, half of which concern lawsuits in lending – suggests that the primary nuance is prohibit recourse to judicial retaliation (93).”

“Peacemaking and reconciliation are emphatic elements of Jesus’s teaching. However, such elements are far from unique in the Jewish legal and wisdom traditions(94).”  
Prov. 24:29; 25:21; Sirach 28:1-8

“These examples are quite general, but they communicate the point clearly: how to respond to insult and injury was debated, implying that ‘eye for eye’ retaliation was not automatically assumed to be the required or correct response (95).”

“Rabbinic material refers almost exclusively to monetary compensation as the expected penalty for injury... The astute reader will recognize, however, that accepting monetary compensation for injury is not the same as Jesus’s admittedly posture-correcting teaching to turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile, lend without scruples, and give away both cloak and shirt. But such instruction is informed not by a completely unique insight into the Law and ethics, but by the conviction both that the promised restoration was afoot and that the restoration would affect the applicability/permisibility of the reference commandment ‘eye for eye’ (96).”

“This reading recognizes that the Law is not ‘one-size-fits-all;’ rather, time regulates the application of certain commandments (96).”

Page 99 Deut. 15 and Lev. 25

“Matthew 5:38–42, then, like much of Jesus’s teaching, is conditioned by his conviction that the time of restoration is at hand. As God’s time of release/forgiveness has been announced, those who wish to participate in the forgiveness must likewise forgive (101).”

“Because they must forgive, his disciples may not use the permission of ‘eye for eye.’ Significantly, then, Jesus is not haphazardly revoking a command; rather, his instruction is legally informed. Just as what is permissible in some years (debt collecting) becomes prohibited in the year of release, so ‘do not retaliate’ (i.e., ‘do not exact moral debts) is a legally informed decision based on his conviction about the ecological time (Jubilee), which is governed by certain legal requirements (101).”

“Consequently, he is teaching that the restoration *qua* Jubilee overrides the permission to exact debts and requires generosity (material and spiritually) as Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25 mandate (101).”