

But I Say to you ...

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By Diana Mitchell, 4/25/2022, 8/27/2026

God speaks in the Bible, but so do Moses, Jeremiah, and Paul. We have to study the Bible in order to be able to understand who is speaking, when, and why. Read, for example, the story of Zelophehad's daughters from the beginning to the end. God clearly tells Moses how to handle their situation, but in the end, Moses gives in to the men in their tribe, and seems to add to what God had already told him to do.

According to the new interpretation of God's previous instructions, after marriage, the daughters of Zelophehad would no longer possess the land allotted to them as an inheritance from their father. It would instead become the possession of their husbands. It would thus remain within the tribe if they married within the tribe, which the new instruction said they had to do. That was Moses adding to what God had already said about their situation. This was culture over God.

In contrast, six times in Matthew's Gospel Jesus says, "but I say to you" as a prefix for text that corrects their understanding of Torah. This text is preceded by text in Matthew 5:1-16 that sets the stage in their minds to understand that they are not hearing an ordinary prophet speak. Jesus does this by going up into a mountain and then giving them 10 minus 1, 9, "blessed" statements that formed a clear unit like the Ten Commandments. When Jesus says "I am come" in Matthew 5:17, he adds the final and most important statement of the blessed unit, the one that correlates to the 1st of the Ten Commandments, completes the set of 10, and establishes—similar to the Ten Commandments—two clear parts within the whole. Jesus includes in his "I am" statement in Matthew 5:17 an authoritative reference to the law, the prophets, and his mission to fulfil and not destroy (*see* Deuteronomy 18:18, and Matthew 7:12). Then, in Matthew 5:18-19, as he stands on the mountain, Jesus makes the pivotal statement that leaves no doubt as to who he is, "For truly I say to you" (NASB, and *see* Exodus 19:10-20:17 and Deuteronomy 5:1-22). He reinforces this statement in Matthew 5:20 with the words "For I say to you" (NASB).

After having established who is speaking to them, in Matthew 5:21-48 Jesus reveals the deeper meaning of Old Testament scriptures, and in so doing confirms God's ways over cultural norms.

As Jesus revealed the deeper meaning of the text, likewise, we owe it to God, and to ourselves, to study and find that deeper meaning within the difficult texts of the Bible because when we do find those deeper meanings, we develop a better understanding of who God is, and we learn to recognize God's voice as the "but I say to you" in scripture, and in our lives.

The Zelophehad texts.

The beginning: Numbers 26:33, and 27:1-11, especially verses 27:5-7.

The end: Numbers 36:1-13, especially verse 36:3.