

What Does the Bible Mean by “Lawlessness”?

Matthew 7:21–23, 1 John 3:4, False Disciples, and the Difference Between Calling Yeshua “Lord” and Living Under His Authority

A printable companion for tracing lawlessness through Matthew, 1 John, Paul, the New Covenant, and the difference between religious profession and a life genuinely submitted to the King.

Use this packet beside the full Bible study. Read the passages. Write what the text actually says. Test both sides of the argument. Let the passages build your definition.

Don’t take my word for it—Open your Bible.

openyourbible.org

BEFORE YOU STUDY

What Do I Believe Right Now?

Write your present understanding before you begin. Return to this page after the study and see what changed.

When you hear the biblical word “lawlessness,” what do you think it means?

Can someone call Yeshua “Lord” and still live lawlessly? What would that look like?

What separates ordinary human failure from a life characterized by lawlessness?

THE CORE WARNING

Read Matthew 7:15–27 as One Movement

Read Matthew 7:15–27 slowly. Do not begin at verse 21.

Trace the flow around “workers of lawlessness.” Yeshua moves from false prophets and fruit, to doing the Father’s will, to impressive spiritual claims, to lawlessness, and then immediately to hearing and doing His words.

What does Yeshua say reveals a tree?

According to verse 21, who enters the kingdom of heaven?

What do the people in verse 22 call Yeshua?

What three kinds of spiritual activity do they claim?

What does Yeshua say about His relationship to them?

What does the wise builder do with Yeshua’s words?

What does the foolish builder do differently?

Build the Context

Fruit:

The Father’s will:

Lawlessness:

Hearing Yeshua:

Doing Yeshua’s words:

LORD, LORD

Religious Language Is Not the Same as Submission

Read Matthew 7:21–23 again, then Matthew 21:28–32.

The rejected people know the right title. They say “Lord, Lord.” In Matthew 21, one son says the right words to his father but does not do what he was asked. Put those scenes beside each other.

What is the difference between saying “Lord” and actually living under lordship?

Which son in Matthew 21 did the father’s will?

What does that parable teach about words and allegiance?

An Impressive Spiritual Résumé

The people in Matthew 7 appeal to prophecy, casting out demons, and mighty works. Their argument is “Look what we did.” Yeshua does not answer by asking for one more achievement; He speaks about knowing them and calls them workers of lawlessness.

What does this passage suggest about spiritual gifts as proof of character or relationship?

Why does this passage NOT teach salvation by accumulating religious works?

Write the difference between “religious activity” and “faithful allegiance.”

WORD STUDY: ANOMIA

ἀνομία — anomia

Common translation range: lawlessness, iniquity, wickedness, wrongdoing. The word belongs to a family related to nomos, law. It can describe conduct contrary to law and rightful order, while context determines how specifically the law concept functions.

What does the word's connection to law keep us from erasing?

What questions can this one Greek noun NOT answer by itself about New Covenant application?

“Depart From Me” and Psalm 6

Read Psalm 6:8 and Matthew 7:23.

What language echoes between the two passages?

Does Psalm 6 sound like one accidental mistake—or a pattern of wickedness?

Lawlessness in Matthew 13

Read Matthew 13:36–43.

What happens to those who practice lawlessness at the end of the age?

What does this tell you about lawlessness and the completed Kingdom?

LAWLESSNESS CAN WEAR RELIGIOUS CLOTHES

Matthew 23:23–28

Read Matthew 23:23–28 carefully.

This passage is a major safeguard against defining lawlessness only as lack of visible religious observance. Yeshua addresses people known for meticulous practice and still describes them as inwardly full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

What “weightier matters” have they neglected?

How do they appear outwardly?

What does Yeshua say is happening inwardly?

Why does this passage make “lawlessness = not doing enough religious things” too shallow?

Lawlessness and Love

Read Matthew 24:9–14, especially verse 12.

What happens to love when lawlessness increases?

How does this challenge the idea that law and love are enemies?

Write one way religious precision can coexist with a lawless heart.

SIN IS LAWLESSNESS

1 John 3:4 in Context

Read 1 John 1:5–2:6 and 1 John 3:1–10 before isolating 1 John 3:4.

The Greek statement is direct: ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία — hē hamartia estin hē anomia. Sin is lawlessness. But the same letter also speaks about confession, forgiveness, cleansing, and Yeshua's advocacy when believers sin.

What does 1 John 1 say about claiming to have no sin?

What provision does John give believers who do sin?

How does this context keep 1 John 3 from becoming sinless perfectionism?

Practice, Pattern, and Repentance

What is the difference between stumbling into sin and making rebellion your settled practice?

When Yehovah confronts you, what does repentance sound like?

When Yehovah confronts you, what does lawlessness sound like?

KNOWING GOD AND KEEPING COMMANDMENTS

Read 1 John 2:3-6; 3:10-24; 5:1-5

How does John connect knowing God with commandments?

How does John connect righteousness with concrete love?

What does 1 John 3:23 summarize?

Why should a summary not automatically be treated as an exhaustive statute list?

Does Anomia Mean “Torahlessness”?

Torah is foundational divine instruction and therefore belongs in the discussion. But the noun anomia does not, by itself, settle how priesthood, sacrifice, sanctuary, national judicial legislation, Gentile inclusion, and other covenant changes function under Messiah.

What does the word “Torahlessness” capture helpfully?

What could it smuggle into the text if used as though it settles every covenant question?

Working Definition - First Draft

Based on Matthew and 1 John so far, write a provisional definition of lawlessness.

GRACE AND LAWLESSNESS

Romans 6

Read Romans 6, especially verses 14–23.

What question does Paul anticipate after saying believers are “not under law but under grace”?

What is his answer?

How does Paul describe the former life in verse 19?

What does grace change in Paul’s slavery/master imagery?

Titus 2:11–14

Read Titus 2:11–14.

What does grace TRAIN believers to renounce?

What kind of life does grace train believers to live?

What did Yeshua give Himself to redeem His people FROM?

What does He purify His people to become eager for?

Finish this sentence in your own words: Grace is the cure for lawlessness because...

THE HEART OF LAWLESSNESS

The Mystery of Lawlessness - 2 Thessalonians 2

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12.

List the attitudes/actions connected with the lawless one.

What role do self-exaltation and opposition to God play?

What does this passage suggest is the spiritual center of lawlessness?

The Echo of Genesis

The study connects lawlessness with the ancient temptation toward moral autonomy: Who determines good and evil? Will humanity receive Yehovah's definition, or seize the right to define it for itself?

What is the difference between wrestling honestly with Scripture and looking for permission to ignore it?

Complete the sentence: Lawlessness ultimately says, "_____."

THE NEW COVENANT AND LAWLESSNESS

Jeremiah 31 + Hebrews 8–10

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34; Hebrews 8:6–13; Hebrews 10:11–18.

Where does Yehovah place/write His instruction in the New Covenant?

What does He promise to do with sins and lawless deeds?

How do forgiveness and transformation appear together?

Ezekiel Adds the Spirit

Read Ezekiel 36:22–28.

What does Yehovah give His people?

What does He say His Spirit will cause them to do?

Continuity + Change

Which New Covenant changes keep us from saying “Sinai simply continues unchanged”?

Which New Covenant promises keep us from saying “God no longer cares about righteous obedience”?

TURN THE MIRROR BOTH WAYS

The Lawless Sabbath Keeper

The study deliberately asks whether someone can keep the seventh-day Sabbath, eat clean, know Hebrew terminology, and still live lawlessly through cruelty, pride, dishonesty, hatred, or refusal to reconcile. Matthew 23 says outward precision can coexist with inward lawlessness.

Which “weightier matters” are easiest for religious people to neglect while defending visible practices?

Where could selective obedience show up in my own life?

The Lawless Grace Believer

The other mirror asks whether “grace,” “relationship,” or “not under law” can become shields against repentance. Romans 6 and Titus 2 refuse that use of grace.

What would it look like to use grace as an alibi rather than receive grace as transformation?

Fruit, Not Purchase Price

Why is obedience better understood as fruit than as the purchase price of salvation?

FAILURE, IGNORANCE, AND TEACHABILITY

Fruit Takes Time

A new believer may be ignorant of many things. A mature believer may still discover long-held assumptions that need correction. The study distinguishes ignorance patiently being corrected from resistance to the One doing the correcting.

How should remembering my own growth affect the way I treat believers who have not reached my conclusions?

What About Genuine Ignorance?

List several different heart situations that can exist behind the same outward action: ignorance, confusion, weakness, conviction/struggle, deliberate refusal.

Why should this make us cautious about acting as chief inspector of someone else's salvation?

The Wise Builder

Read Matthew 7:24–27 one more time.

Both builders hear Yeshua. What is the decisive difference?

Complete the study's simple picture of the opposite of lawlessness: Hear the King. _____ the King. _____ on what the King says.

BUILD THE EVIDENCE

Do Not Answer From One Verse

Use this page to summarize what each passage contributes. Write only what the passage itself supports before drawing your final conclusion.

Matthew 5-7 - righteousness, fruit, Father's will, hearing/doing:

Matthew 7:21-23 - "Lord, Lord" and lawlessness:

Matthew 13:36-43 - lawlessness and the Kingdom:

Matthew 23:23-28 - outward religion / inward lawlessness:

Matthew 24:12 - lawlessness and love:

1 John 3:4 - sin and lawlessness:

1 John 1-3 - practice vs. stumbling/repentance:

Romans 6 - grace and lawlessness:

Titus 2:11-14 - grace trains / Yeshua redeems from lawlessness:

2 Thessalonians 2 - self-exaltation and ultimate rebellion:

Jeremiah / Ezekiel / Hebrews - forgiveness + internal transformation:

What pattern emerges when all of these are read together?

TEST THE CLAIMS

Do Not Give Either Side a Free Pass

“Lawlessness is just generic bad behavior and has nothing to do with God’s law.” What evidence challenges this?

“Lawlessness means failing to keep Mosaic Torah exactly as ancient Israel did.” What covenant questions remain unresolved by anomia alone?

“Matthew 7 proves everyone who does not keep seventh-day Sabbath is rejected.” Does the passage name Sabbath as the issue?

“Matthew 7 teaches salvation is earned by obedience.” What do the rejected people themselves appeal to?

“Spiritual gifts prove someone is right with God.” How does Matthew 7 answer?

“If I keep Torah outwardly, I cannot be lawless.” How does Matthew 23 answer?

“Grace means lawlessness no longer matters.” How do Romans 6 and Titus 2 answer?

TEST THE TORAH-OBSERVANT SHORTCUT

“Anomia = Torahlessness, so one Greek word settles the whole Torah-continuity debate.” What does the word NOT decide by itself?

“Someone who worships on Sunday is automatically a worker of lawlessness.” Does Matthew 7 say that?

“If I keep Sabbath and eat clean, Matthew 7 is mainly about other Christians.” What does Matthew 23 do to that assumption?

“The more commands I visibly keep, the more righteous I necessarily am.” What passages in this study challenge that?

COFFEE BREAK REFLECTION

The full study asks a deliberately personal question: after all the theology, who is actually King? Use this space for the part of the study that turned the mirror toward you rather than someone else.

Where am I most tempted to use correct doctrine, religious practice, or grace-language to avoid a harder heart issue?

What would a soft, teachable response to Yehovah look like in that area?

YOUR FINAL RESPONSE

Return to Your First Definition

How has your definition of lawlessness changed?

Why is “lawlessness = one mistake” too broad?

Why is “lawlessness = failure to reconstruct ancient Israel exactly” too narrow?

How do Matthew 7 and Matthew 23 keep BOTH religious profession and outward observance under examination?

Write Your Definition

Biblical lawlessness is...

Prayer / Application

Yehovah, where are You asking me to become more teachable, submitted, merciful, faithful, or obedient?

What is one concrete response I can make this week?

NOTES
