



## **Chapter 23**

# ***Our Lord's Last Public Message***

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**Theme:** Jesus warns the multitude against the scribes and Pharisees; pronounces woes upon the scribes and Pharisees; weeps over Jerusalem

This chapter concludes the clash between the Lord Jesus and the religious rulers. He warns the multitudes about them and then denounces the religious rulers in unmistakable terms. No words that ever fell from the lips of our Lord were more scathing. It is a merciless condemnation. If you read this chapter carefully, it will blanch your own soul.<sup>1</sup>

### **Matthew 23:1**

**Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,**

#### **Spurgeon: The King's Warning Against False Teachers**

Then spake Jesus to the multitude: the King commenced his final address to the people. He was soon to withdraw himself from them; but first he would put them on their guard against their false teachers. They had heard what he had said to the scribes and Pharisees; now they would hear what he said of them. And to his disciples: according to Luke, Jesus spoke to his disciples "in the audience of all the people." His theme was one that concerned the whole population as well as his own disciples. He knew that he would shortly be taken away from them; therefore he warned them against those who would seek their ruin: "Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do." It was the duty of Moses to expound to the people the Law of God. The scribes and Pharisees occupied his place; but alas! the Spirit that guided him was not in them. They spoke as from the chair of Moses, *ex cathedra*, as we say; and as far as they really filled his seat, and followed his sayings, their words were to be obeyed. Our Savior could not have intended the people to heed their false comments and foolish glosses upon the Law of Moses; for he had already declared that by their traditions they had transgressed the commandment of God, and made it of none effect.

At this time, however, our Lord was speaking of another grievous fault in the scribes and Pharisees; namely, that they said one thing and did another: "But do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not." Sad indeed is the state of that religious teacher of whom the Searcher of hearts has to say, "Do as he says, and not as he does." Many such are with us still, preaching one thing, and practicing another. May the Lord preserve the people from following their evil example!

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:119). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

## **Matthew 23:2**

### **Saying, *The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:***

[**Moses' seat**] means that they put themselves in the position of Moses' authority, they would be the first to espouse Moses as an authority.

They sat there formerly by Divine appointment: they sit there now by Divine permission. What our Lord says here refers to their expounding the Scriptures, for it was the custom of the Jewish doctors to sit while they expounded the law and prophets, (Matthew 5:1; Luke 4:20-22), and to stand up when they read them.

By the seat of Moses, we are to understand authority to teach the law. Moses was the great teacher of the Jewish people; and the scribes, etc., are here represented as his successors.<sup>2</sup>

**Barnes: Moses' seat**, Moses was a legislator of the Jews. By him the law was given; and the office of explaining that law devolved on the scribes and Pharisees. In the synagogues they sat while expounding the law, and rose when they read it. By *sitting in the seat of Moses* we are to understand authority to teach the law. Or, as he taught the nation by giving the law, so they taught it by explaining it.

**JNTC: The seat** (Greek *kathedra*) **of Moshe**. The Midrash Rabbah says:

“They made for him [Moses] a *kathedra* like that of the advocates, in which one sits and yet seems to be standing.” (Exodus Rabbah 43:4)

*Pesikta diRav Kahana* 1:7 mentions the seat of Moses, and the editors of the English edition comment:

“The particular place in the synagogue where the leaders used to sit was known metaphorically as the seat of Moses or as the throne of Torah, symbolizing the succession of teachers of Torah down through the ages.” (William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, *Pesikta diRav Kahana*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975, p. 17)

A third-century C.E. “Chair of Moses” from Korazin (11:21) is on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem; a photograph and description may be found in *Biblical Archeology Review* 13:5 (1987), pp. 32–35. According to the Hebrew University scholarly journal *Tarbitz* I, p. 145, they can also be found in Hamot, Tiberias and Delos (Greece).

**The Torah-teachers and the *P.rushim* ... sit in the seat of Moshe**, exercising the power of “the *cohen* or judge in office at that time” (Deuteronomy 17:8–13), officially interpreting the *Torah*. There are some who understand this verse to mean that, according to Yeshua, the Oral *Torah*, as expounded in Orthodox Judaism, is binding on Messianic Jews today. I do not believe this, because I think Yeshua had already initiated a process transferring halakhic authority from the *cohanim*, judges and rabbis to the emissaries and later leaders of the Messianic Community. See 18:18–20&N and *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, Chapter V.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

<sup>3</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 23:2). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

**ESV: The scribes and the Pharisees** were two distinct groups, though there was some overlap between them: the scribes were the professional interpretative experts on the Torah itself, while the Pharisees were experts in theological matters that the Torah raised. **Moses' seat.** Traditionally understood as referring symbolically to the authority of Moses. However, recent archaeological evidence has revealed a literal chair found in early synagogues. Whether literal or figurative, it refers to a place from which experts on the law taught.

### **Matthew 23:3**

**All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.**

“Do as I say, not as I do.”

[**whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not**] Obey God's Word even if it comes from hypocrites, but do not live like them.

**They say, and do not.** The interpretation they give to the law is in the main correct, but their lives do not correspond with their teaching. It is not the duty of men to imitate their teachers unless their lives are pure; but they are rather to obey the law of God than to frame their lives by the example of evil men.

The Pharisees' traditions and their interpretations and applications of the laws had become as important to them as God's law itself. Their laws were not all bad—some were beneficial. The problem arose when the religious leaders (1) took man-made rules as seriously as God's laws, (2) told the people to obey these rules but did not do so themselves, or (3) obeyed the rules not to honor God but to make themselves look good. Usually Jesus did not condemn what the Pharisees taught, but what they *were*—hypocrites.

**ESV: so practice and observe whatever they tell you.** Jesus recognized the Pharisees' official function as interpreters of the Law of Moses, and insofar as they accurately interpreted Scripture, they were to be obeyed. However, “so” (Gk. *oun*) connects this verse with [v. 2](#) and the mention of Moses, and therefore “whatever they tell you” should probably be limited to “whatever they tell you about the Law of Moses” and does not include the Pharisees' later extensive additions to Mosaic laws which rabbinic teachers made. **but not what they do.** Jesus is about to show that much of the Pharisees' **practice** and their extrabiblical tradition is wrong.

**Yashanet.com:** All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do, but do not ye after their works ...

It would appear that Yeshua is telling the people to obey the Pharisees, while at the same time telling them not to follow them. In order to understand this passage, it is

important to recall that much of Yeshua's criticism of the Pharisees was because they taught commandments of men that made void the commandments of God (Matthew 15:13). Hence, the problem is not with the Pharisees teaching Torah, but with anything that contradicts Torah.

The human ordinances of the Pharisees placed emphasis on outside observance and not on what would change the inner man (see verses 24-28 below). Yeshua considered these teachings to be as "leaven," (Matthew 16:11-12), which if left unchallenged, would corrupt all the people.

Certain manuscripts of the Hebrew Shem Tob<sup>1</sup> book of Matthew offer a different translation to this section, making a distinction between what Moses said and what the Pharisees taught:

*Upon the seat of Moses the Pharisees and Sages sit, and now, all which **he** (Moses) will say unto you-keep and do; but their ordinances and deeds do not do, because they say and do not.*

The key thing to note here, is that even though the Pharisees were teaching Torah, they were also promoting "lawlessness" as their teachings were not based in a humble faith in God but in self-righteousness that misused the Torah and often negated it.

### **Matthew 23:4**

**For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers.**

They point out the narrowest road to destruction. Practicing religion is not in itself condemned, but focussing only on its outward forms—the acts of piety to be seen of men—is wrong.

**Clarke: They bind heavy burdens**—They are now so corrupt that they have added to the ceremonies of the law others of their own invention, which are not only burdensome and oppressive, but have neither reason, expediency, nor revelation, to countenance them. In a word, like all their successors in spirit to the present day, they were severe to others, but very indulgent to themselves.

**JNTC:** Compare the remarks of the modern Orthodox rabbi H. Loewe: "Rabbi Me'ir used to say, 'If I have ruled for others leniently, for myself I decide with stringency.' And conversely, in branding excess, Rabbi Huna describes the Pharisee who, lenient to himself, teaches others to obey the hardest rules." (C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, New York: Schocken Books edition, 1974, p. lxxix)<sup>4</sup>

**ESV: Heavy burdens** describes the extrabiblical tradition of the rabbis that was a pillar of the Pharisaic branch of Judaism. It was intended as a means of making the OT relevant to new life situations, but its massive obligations had become burdensome and oppressive.

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<sup>4</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 23:4). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

## **Matthew 23:5**

**But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,**

Jesus' point is that the Pharisees are doing all this for show. He is not saying all that wear phylacteries are for show, nor is He indicting some of the observances were their cultural pattern of style of worship. We all are victims of cultural background or style of worship. Jesus is referring to the condition of their heart, they are doing these things to be seen of men, not because of their love for God.

**[works they do for to be seen of men]** The works of the hypocrites were done to be seen by others. Like many today, outward style in dress and beautiful forms of religion made the sum of their godliness.

**[seen of men]** To be looked at as a clown or actor.

**[phylacteries]** A small square box containing a parchment or skin (about 1 1/2 x 18 inches) on which were written Exodus 13:1-10; Deut. 6:4-9; Deut. 11:13-21. Worn on the arm and forehead by men only. Common people wore them only during prayers, but they were worn continually by the Pharisees who sought to enlarge the boxes so as to attract attention. Jesus did not condemn the wearing of them but the show made of them in public. They became badges of vanity and hypocrisy and amulets to drive away evil spirits.<sup>5</sup>

“Phylacteries”: Ex 13:9-16; Deut 6:9.

**[hem]** Greek: *kraspedon* (GSN-2899), a tassel of twisted wool (Matthew 9:20; Matthew 14:36; Matthew 23:5; Mark 6:56; Luke 8:44). One was required at each of the four corners of the outer garment (Numbers 15:38-41; Deut. 22:12). Pharisees considered tassels special marks of sanctity and sought to enlarge them (Matthew 23:5). One thread of each tassel was to be deep blue to remind them of their duty to keep the law.

“Hem of the garment” talking about tzit-tzit or fringes, may also have been a symbol of rank.

**Enlarge the borders of their garments.** This refers to the loose threads which were attached to the borders of the outer garment as a fringe. This fringe was commanded in order to distinguish them from other nations, and that they might remember to keep the commandments of God, Numbers 15:38-40, Deuteronomy 22:12. They made them broader than other people wore them, to show that they had peculiar respect for the law.

**Clarke: All their works they do for to be seen of men**—In pointing out the corruptions of these men, our Lord gives us the distinguishing characteristics of all false teachers, whether Jewish or Christian.

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<sup>5</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

1. They live not according to the truths they preach. They say, and do not, Matthew 23:3.
2. They are severe to others, point out the narrowest road to heaven, and walk in the broad road themselves. They bind on burdens, etc., Matthew 23:4.
3. They affect to appear righteous, and are strict observers of certain rites, etc., while destitute of the power of godliness. They make broad their phylacteries, etc., Matthew 23:5.
4. They love worldly entertainments, go to feast wherever they are asked, and seek Church preferments. They love the chief places at feasts, and chief seats in the synagogues, Matthew 23:6.
5. They love and seek public respect and high titles, salutations in the market-place, (for they are seldom in their studies), and to be called of men rabbi—eminent teacher, though they have no title to it, either from the excellence or fruit of their teaching. When these marks are found in a man who professes to be a minister of Christ, charity itself will assert he is a thief and a robber—he has climbed over the wall of the sheepfold, or broken it down in order to get in.

**JNTC:** *T. fillin* are small leather boxes containing parchment scrolls on which are written excerpts from the *Tanakh* (specifically, Deuteronomy 6:4–9, 11:13–20, Exodus 13:1–16). Observant Jewish men past *bar-mitzvah* age (13) strap one on one arm and the other around the head during the morning weekday synagogue service, in literal obedience to Deuteronomy 6:8, “You shall bind them [that is, God’s *mitzvot*] for a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes.” Other English versions of the New Testament have here the word “phylacteries”; this transliterates the Greek word used in the text, “*phulakterion*,” which means “safeguard, amulet, charm,” and thus does not reflect the purpose of *t. fillin*.<sup>6</sup>

### **Matthew 23:6**

**And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,**

**[uppermost rooms at feasts]** Places of honor (Mark 12:39; Luke 20:46).

**[chief seats in the synagogues]** Seats in front of the ark, facing the congregation and reserved for the elders and doctors of the law (Mark 12:39; Luke 11:43).

**ESV: place of honor.** Seating at banquets was assigned to guests based on their rank or status. **best seats in the synagogues.** Excavations at early Galilean synagogues indicate that bench seats were built along the sides of the synagogue. In any meeting place, some seats are regarded as better than others.

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<sup>6</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 23:5). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

## **Matthew 23:7**

**And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.**

[greetings in the markets] Loved formal salutations in public.

[**Rabbi**] A title of a teacher (John 3:2; Luke 9:38). A favorite title claimed by Pharisees (Matthew 23:7). One was made a rabbi by laying on of hands by the Sanhedrin who gave him a key as a sign of the authority conferred upon him to teach others, and a table-book as a sign of diligence in study. The key was worn as a badge of honor and was buried with him. Jews called John (John 3:26) and Jesus such (John 1:38,49; John 3:2; John 6:25) even though they were not ordained as rabbis (cp. John 20:16).

**Clarke: To be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi** My teacher! my teacher! The second rabbi is omitted by several excellent MSS., by most of the ancient versions, and by some of the fathers. Griesbach has left it in the text, with the note of doubtfulness.

There are three words used among the Jews as titles of dignity, which they apply to their doctors—Rabh, Rabbi, and Rabban; each of these terms has its particular meaning: rabban implies much more than rabbi, and rabbi much more than rabh.

They may be considered as three degrees of comparison: rabh great, rabbi greater, and rabban greatest. These rabbins were looked up to as infallible oracles in religious matters, and usurped not only the place of the law, but of God himself.

**5-7** Jesus again exposed the hypocritical attitudes of the religious leaders. They knew the Scriptures but did not live by them. They didn't care about *being* holy—just *looking* holy in order to receive the people's admiration and praise. Today, like the Pharisees, many people who know the Bible do not let it change their lives. They say they follow Jesus, but they don't live by his standards of love. People who live this way are hypocrites. We must make sure that our actions match our beliefs.

**5-7** People desire positions of leadership not only in business but also in the church. It is dangerous when love for the position grows stronger than loyalty to God. This is what happened to the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Jesus is not against all leadership—we need Christian leaders—but against leadership that serves itself rather than others.

**JNTC: *Rabbi*** renders Greek *rabbi*, which transliterates the Hebrew (compare 8:19N). The word means, literally, “my great one,” and, less literally, “my master,” “my teacher.” It became a title of respect used for *Torah* scholars by everyone, even those of the same or higher rank. Thus the Talmud says, “Whenever King Y’hoshafat, King of Y’hudah, saw a *talmid chakham* [“wise student,” “scholar”] he would rise from his throne, embrace him and kiss him, and call him, ‘*Avi, avi*’ [“My father, my father”], ‘*Rabbi, rabbi*’ [“My teacher, my teacher”], ‘*Mari, mari*’ [“My lord, my lord”].” (Makkot 24a; parallel Ketubot 103b)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 23:7). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.



These men liked to have titles. These men liked to be recognized. They liked to wear certain religious garments and habits which set them apart from other people and drew attention to their high position. Our Lord is condemning all of this.

**And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi**—It is the spirit rather than the *letter* of this that must be pressed; though the violation of the letter, springing from spiritual pride, has done incalculable evil in the Church of Christ. The reiteration of the word “Rabbi” shows how it tickled the ear and fed the spiritual pride of those ecclesiastics.<sup>8</sup>

### **Matthew 23:8**

**But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.**

[**Master**] Greek: *kathegetes* (GSN-2519), leader, guide. Here and in Matthew 23:10.

[**and all ye are brethren**] No one among you is higher than another, or can have from Me any authority over the rest (1 Peter 5:1-8).

**ESV: 8–10 not to be called rabbi, . . . call no man your father . . . Neither be called instructors.** Jesus' disciples should not try to gain authority over one another as teachers or masters, since Jesus is ultimately each disciple's teacher and master (**you have one teacher . . . one instructor**), to whom the disciple is accountable. Jesus does not literally forbid use of the titles “teacher,” “doctor,” or “father” for all time in all circumstances, but he prohibits his disciples from using these terms in the way the Pharisees used them, in a spirit that wrongly exalted leaders and reinforced human pride.

**Spurgeon:** In the Church of Christ, all titles and honors which exalt men and give occasion for pride are here forbidden. In the Christian commonwealth we should seek to realize a truer "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," than that for which the world clamors in vain. He who is called "Rabbi" robs Christ of his honor as the only Master or Teacher of his disciples: "for one is your Master, even, Christ." He also takes from his fellow-Christians the privilege that they share equally with him: "and all ye are brethren." Those who use such titles as "Holy Father" and "Right Reverend Father in God" would have a difficulty in explaining any our Savior's words: "Call, no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven." In the tenth verse, our Lord's words might be rendered: "Neither be ye called leaders (guides, instructors): for one is your Leader (Guide, Instructor), even the Christ (the Messiah)." If we follow him, we cannot go wrong.

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<sup>8</sup>Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Mt 23:7). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

## **Matthew 23:9**

**And call no *man* your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.**

[**father**] Greek: *pater* (GSN-3962), generator, nearest ancestor, founder of a race or, in this case, founder of Christianity. Members of the Sanhedrin were called fathers (Acts 7:2; Acts 22:1), but this was not to be a practice among Christians. It is used of God 244 times and of earthly fathers 140 times. It is used of idolatrous priests (Judges 17:10) and of Abraham, the founder of Israel and great example of faith (Romans 4:11-18). It is also used of one who converts men to God through the gospel, so this is not the thing Jesus condemns (1 Cor. 4:15). The "fathers" of Matthew 23 were the hypocrites who lorded it over others solely because of religious position and power. Here He condemns all three titles that Jewish doctors greatly cherished and that fostered their hypocrisy and religious pride.<sup>9</sup>

**Barnes:** **And call no man your father,** This does not of course forbid us to apply the term to our real father. Religion requires all proper honour to be shown to him, Exodus 20:12, Matthew 15:4, Ephesians 6:1-3. But the word *father* also denotes *authority, eminence, superiority, a right to command, and a claim to particular respect*. In this sense it is used here. In this sense it belongs eminently to God, and it is not right to give it to men. Christian brethren are equal. God only has supreme authority. He only has a right to give laws, to declare doctrines to bind the conscience, to punish disobedience. The Jewish teachers affected that title because they seem to have supposed that a teacher formed the man, or gave him real life, and sought therefore to be called father. Christ taught them that the source of all life and truth was God; and they ought not to seek or receive a title which properly belongs to him.

**And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven, &c.**—To construe these injunctions into a condemnation of every title by which Church rulers may be distinguished from the flock which they rule, is virtually to condemn that rule itself; and accordingly the same persons do both—but against the whole strain of the New Testament and sound Christian judgment. But when we have guarded ourselves against these extremes, let us see to it that we retain the full spirit of this warning against that itch for ecclesiastical superiority which has been the bane and the scandal of Christ's ministers in every age. (On the use of the word "Christ" here, see on Mt 1:1).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

<sup>10</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Mt 23:9). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

## **Matthew 23:10**

**Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.**

[**Master**] Greek: *kathegetes* (GSN-2519), leader, guide. God and Christ are jealous of these honors for they are the only ones who have any right to these titles. God is the only Father of Christians and Christ is the only leader and head of the church (Ephes. 1:20-23; Col. 1:18,24).

**JNTC: But you are not to let yourselves be called “Rabbi” ... “Father” ... “leaders.”**

The Hebrew Christian scholar Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum holds that this passage prohibits Messianic Jewish congregations from calling their leaders “rabbis” (“The Quest for a Messianic Theology: Statement,” in *Mishkan* #2 (Winter 1985), pp. 1–19; with “Response” by myself in the same issue, pp. 20–23; and “A Comment” by him in *Mishkan* #3, pp. 67–68).

My view is that a literalistic approach here is inappropriate, since Yeshua also warns against being called “father” or “leader,” terms everyone uses. The context leads me to believe that Yeshua here is prohibiting believers from accepting unearned honors, rather than outlawing three titles. A leader is to be humble, a servant (20:25–28); if he is given any title at all, he is not to become puffed up. Others in the community are to guard against making invidious distinctions between “clergy” and “laity” by bestowing titles.

My own objection to the use of the title “rabbi” today is not theological but ideological and practical. What should a “Messianic rabbi” be? A pastor under another name? I think the term “rabbi” sets up Jewish expectations which ought to be fulfilled. A Messianic Jewish congregational leader who accepts the title “rabbi” without having training adequate to qualify him as a rabbi in a non-Messianic Jewish setting is accepting honor which he has not earned and to which he is not entitled; and this *does* violate Yeshua’s injunction.

Should a Messianic rabbi have *s. mikvah* (ordination; see 21:23N)? If so, should it be Messianic or non-Messianic? If Messianic, who is qualified to grant it? Messianic Judaism at present has very few ordained rabbis and no accrediting agency. At present, in order not to embarrass the Messianic Jewish movement, I urge leaders without rabbinic training to resist letting themselves be called “rabbi.”<sup>11</sup>

## **Matthew 23:11**

**But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.**

[**servant**] Greek: *diakonos* (GSN-1249),

**Spurgeon:** This is nearly the same lesson that is recorded in (Mt 20:27.) Our Lord had to repeat many times this law of his kingdom: "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant." You are all equal; but if there is one amongst you who claims to be the greatest,

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<sup>11</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 23:8). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

he shall be the servant of all. Where our King rules, any one of his disciples who exalts himself shall be abased; while, on the other hand, the one who humbles himself shall be exalted. The way to rise is to sink self; the lower we fall in our own esteem, the higher shall we rise in our Master's estimation.

### **Matthew 23:12**

**And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.**

[**exalt himself shall be abased**] Religious lordship and domination by any man has no place in Christianity (Luke 14:11; Luke 18:14; Proverbs 16:18).

**11-12** Jesus challenged society's norms. To him, greatness comes from serving—giving of yourself to help God and others. Service keeps us aware of others' needs, and it stops us from focusing only on ourselves. Jesus came as a servant. What kind of greatness do you seek?

**Yashanet.com:** The key to this section is verse 12: *"And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."*

Yeshua is teaching not to seek leadership (as many are often too eager to do), as this places a person under greater responsibility. As He points out in verse 14, there is a "greater condemnation" for such leaders who err.

This is consistent with the teachings of "James":

**James 3:1** - *My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.*

And also the Talmud:

**Talmud, Avot 1:10** - *Despise the position of Rabbi.*

### **Matthew 23:13**

**But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.**

**ESV: First woe: the shut door.** The woes are a mixture of condemnation, regret, and sorrow. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees are false leaders who have drawn the people away from the kingdom of heaven instead of toward it.

“scribes, Pharisees and hypocrites” treated as synonyms. Two problems, one that they are missing it themselves, and two, that they are preventing others from going in!

*Entering the kingdom—shutting up the kingdom* The poor in spirit enter the kingdom, but the proud in spirit keep themselves out and even keep others out. **The Greek verb indicates people trying to get in who cannot.** It is bad enough to keep yourself out of the

kingdom, but worse when you stand in the way of others. By teaching man-made traditions instead of God's truth, they "took away the key of knowledge" and closed the door to salvation (Lk 11:52).

**[shut up the kingdom of heaven against men]** Withhold from men the truth and teach false doctrines.

**JNTC: 13–36** Nowhere is it clearer than here and at 21:12–13 that the image of "gentle Jesus, meek and mild" falls short of reality. The repeated slashing litany, **Woe to you hypocritical Torah-teachers** ("scribes"; see 2:4N) **and P.rushim!** angers Jews, mystifies Gentiles and embarrasses Christians, who find Yeshua's remarks intemperate, antisemitic, even "un-Christlike." But Yeshua, like all the prophets, spoke the words of God without fear or favor. He comforted those who were open to him and made repeated invitation to those who opposed him; but when it had become evident that these particular *Torah-teachers* and *P.rushim* were hardhearted, closed-minded and interested only in confuting or trapping him, he seized the initiative, revealing his accusers for what they were. Was he "unloving" toward them? Love must sometimes be tough. Even less was he antisemitic: his within-the-family correction was aimed at making these Jewish brothers of his live up to their high calling (and he partly succeeded; see Ac 15:5, 21:20, 23:6). If Yeshua was unloving or antisemitic, one must say the same of all the Jewish prophets from Moses to Malachi.

A truer measure of antisemitism—as it developed in the Church—is the ease with which the terms "scribes" and "Pharisees" are uncritically equated with "hypocrites," falsely implying that *all* of them were. For Yeshua, in addressing "*you hypocritical Torah-teachers and P.rushim*" rather than "*the hypocritical Torah-teachers and P.rushim*," restricts his scathing denunciation to a specific group of them. See 3:7N, Mk 12:38N, 1 Th 2:14–16&NN. The Jewish scholar Menahem Mansoor, writing in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, also recognizes this:

"While the Pharisees, as a whole, set a high ethical standard for themselves, not all lived up to it. It is mistakenly held that the New Testament references to them as 'hypocrites' or 'offspring of vipers' (Matt. 3:7; Luke 18:9ff., etc.) are applicable to the entire group. However, the leaders were well aware of the presence of the insincere among their numbers, described by the Pharisees themselves in the Talmud as 'sore spots' or 'plagues of the Pharisaic party' (Sot. 3:4 and 22b)." (*Encyclopedia Judaica* 13:366)

The Mishna remarks that the "plagues" (or "hits" or "self-inflicted wounds") "of Pharisees . . . ruin the world" (Sotah 3:4). The Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds both comment on this in famous passages delineating seven kinds of Pharisees (J. B'rakhot 14b, Sotah 20c; B. Sotah 22b). The following is a hybrid combining elements from both Talmuds with rabbinic expositions; it mentions eight kinds:

There are seven kinds of Pharisees: the "shoulder" Pharisee, who ostentatiously carries his good deeds on his shoulder so all can see them; the "wait-a-moment" Pharisee, who wants you to wait while he performs a *mitzvah*; the bruised Pharisee, who runs into a wall while looking at the ground to avoid seeing a woman; the "reckoning" Pharisee, who commits a sin, then does a good deed and balances the one against the other; the "pestle" Pharisee, whose head is bowed in false humility, like a pestle in a mortar; the Pharisee who asks, "What is my duty, so that I may do it?" as if he thought he had fulfilled every

obligation already (compare Pp 3:5–6&NN); the Pharisee from fear of the consequences if he doesn't perform the commandments; and the Pharisee from love—either love of the rewards God promises for performing the commandments, or love of *Torah* itself [no matter which, he is understood here to be the one good kind of Pharisee].

Continuing with B. Sotah 22b:

“Abaye and Raba said to the teacher [of the above passage], ‘Don't mention the Pharisee from love and the Pharisee from fear, because Rav Y'hudah quoted Rav as saying, “A person should always engage himself in *Torah* and *mitzvot* even if not for their own sake [i.e., even if motivated by fear of punishment or love of reward; see above]; because from doing them not for their own sake he will come to do them for their own sake.” ’ Rabbi Nachman ben-Yitzchak said, ‘What is hidden is hidden, and what is revealed is revealed—the Great Tribunal will punish those who rub themselves against the walls, simulating humility [that is, God penetrates hypocrisy, reads hearts and judges truly; compare Lk 16:15&N, Yn 2:25].’ ”

The passage concludes with this quotation from Alexander Yannai, the Hasmonean ruler of Judea (103–76 B.C.E.), who hated the Pharisees:

“King Yannai said to his wife, ‘Fear neither the Pharisees nor those who are not Pharisees; rather, fear the *tsvu.in* who ape the Pharisees, because their deeds are like the deed of Zimri (Numbers 25:14) but they expect a reward like that of Pinchas (Numbers 25:11).’ ”

The literal sense of the Aramaic word “*tsvu.in*” is “dyed, colored,” from which comes the metaphorical meaning, “hypocrites”; it also means “hyenas.”<sup>12</sup>

The Lord uses the term *woe* eight times in this section and calls scribes and Pharisees hypocrites seven times. He accuses them of blocking the way to heaven by their false leadership.

**But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men**—Here they are charged with *shutting heaven* against men: in Lu 11:52 they are charged with what was worse, *taking away the key*—“the key of knowledge”—which means, not the key to open knowledge, but knowledge as the only key to open heaven. A right knowledge of God's revealed word is eternal life, as our Lord says (Jn 17:3; 5:39); but this they took away from the people, substituting for it their wretched traditions.<sup>13</sup>

**ESV: 13–36** Woes of Judgment against the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. Jesus now addresses the scribes and Pharisees directly, declaring a series of seven “woes” upon them that echoes the criticisms he has repeated throughout his ministry. These seven woes stand in contrast to the first seven “blessings” that introduce the Sermon on the Mount and describe Jesus' true disciples (5:3–9).

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<sup>12</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 23:13). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

<sup>13</sup>Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Mt 23:13). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.



**Spurgeon:** While our Savior was speaking to the people and his disciples, the scribes and Pharisees may have again drawn near. At any rate, his next words were addressed to them: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" This is the first of eight "woes", in which the Lord Jesus both foretells the doom of the hypocrites gathered before him, and reveals the depth of his pity even for them. In seven of the eight "woes" he calls them "hypocrites", in one he addresses them as "blind guides." This first "woe" was pronounced against them because, as far as they could, they "shut up the kingdom of heaven against men." This was a terrible charge to be brought against them by him who could read their hearts, and who could truthfully say to them, "for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." They ought to have helped men into the kingdom; instead of doing so, they hindered those who were entering. Are there not false teachers, nowadays, who put stumbling-stones instead of stepping-stones in the way of those who are entering the kingdom of heaven?

### **Matthew 23:14**

**Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.**

Prov 28:9. Prayer of the wicked = abomination. While this verse is not in some manuscripts of Matthew, it is found in Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47. Instead of mourning over their own sins, and mourning with needy widows, the Pharisees took advantage of people in order to rob them. They used their religion as a "cloak of covetousness" (1 Thess 2:5).

**[devour widows' houses]** A reference to robbing widows of property (cp. 2 Tim. 3:5-9).

**[long prayer]** Prayers were sometimes three hours long and three times a day (cp. Matthew 6:5-9).

**[ye shall receive the greater damnation.]** This teaches degrees of punishment in hell (Matthew 11:22; Matthew 12:41; Matthew 23:14; Mark 6:11; Mark 12:40; Luke 10:14; Luke 11:31-32; Luke 20:47; Rev. 20:11-15).

**Barnes: Damnation.** Condemnation. The word here probably refers to future punishment. It does not always, however. It means, frequently, no more than *condemnation*, or the Divine disapprobation of a certain course of conduct, as in 1 Corinthians 11:29: "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself." That is, he that eateth and drinketh in an unworthy manner—disorderly, not with reverence—is guilty, and his conduct will be disapproved or condemned by God: referring solely to the impropriety of the manner of partaking of the Lord's Supper, and not at all to the worthiness or unworthiness of the person. 1 Corinthians 11:29. Comp. Romans 14:23.

**13-14** Being a religious leader in Jerusalem was very different from being a pastor in a secular society today. Israel's history, culture, and daily life centered around its

relationship with God. The religious leaders were the best known, most powerful, and most respected of all leaders. Jesus made these stinging accusations because the leaders' hunger for more power, money, and status had made them lose sight of God, and their blindness was spreading to the whole nation.

In other words, these men made long prayers, but they were heartless and crooked in their business dealings.

**Spurgeon:** The second "woe" was supported by two most serious accusations, which our Lord would not have uttered if they had not been true: "ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer." Either of these sins by itself would have been very grievous; the two together were sufficient to sink those who were guilty of them to the lowest hell. The men who had defrauded widows would have to answer for their misdeeds to the widows' "Judge " (Ps 68:5). Those who had sought to cover their crimes with the cloak of superior sanctity deserved to be stripped before the people they had deceived, and to hear the King's righteous sentence: "Therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation." These words prove that there are degrees of punishment, as there are gradations in glory. All the ungodly will be judged and condemned by the Righteous Judge, but "the greater condemnation" will be reserved for the hypocrites who have "for a pretense" made "long prayers" while, behind the mask, they have been devouring the property of widows and the fatherless.

### **Matthew 23:15**

**Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.**

**ESV: Second woe: entrapped converts.** Jesus does not criticize proselytism per se, but the manner in which the Pharisees zealously sought converts, only to place them under the burdensome weight of the many requirements in their extrabiblical traditions. **child of hell.** Literally, "child of Gehenna," a reference to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, just south of Jerusalem, where refuse was burned. Jewish and NT writings used it as a metaphorical picture of eternal punishment

No sectarian proselytizing. A proselyte is a convert to a cause. The Pharisees were out to win others to their legalistic system, yet they could not introduce these people to the living God. Instead of saving souls, the Pharisees were condemning souls!

A "child of hell" is the equivalent of "child of the devil," which is what Jesus called the Pharisees (Mt 12:34; 23:33; Jn 8:44). A "child of the devil" is a person who has rejected God's way of salvation (righteousness through faith in Christ). This person parades his own self-righteousness through whatever religious system he belongs to. The convert usually shows more zeal than his leader, and this "double devotion" only produces double



condemnation. How tragic that people can think they are going to heaven, when actually they are going to hell!<sup>14</sup>

**[compass sea and land to make one proselyte]** An idiom for doing all in their power to make converts, not to God, but to their own sect.

**[proselyte]** Greek: proselutos (GSN-4339), a newcomer, a convert from a Gentile religion to Judaism (Acts 2:10; Acts 6:5; Acts 13:43).

Two Classes of Jewish Proselytes:

1. Proselytes of righteousness who received circumcision and vowed to keep the whole law of Moses and all requirements of Judaism.
2. Proselytes of the gate (Exodus 20:10; Deut. 5:14; Deut. 24:16-21) who dwelt among Israel, and, although uncircumcised, observed the "seven precepts of Noah" which, according to the rabbis, were laws against idolatry, blasphemy, homicide, unchastity, theft or plundering, rebellion against rulers, and the use of "flesh with the blood thereof." They were called the scabs of the Jewish church. History records that they were more bitter against Christ and Christians than Jews, fulfilling this verse.

**[child of hell]** Greek: gehenna (GSN-1067). "Child of hell" means one destined to hell (John 17:12 and Luke 12:5).

**Compass sea and land**—A proverbial expression, similar to ours, You leave no stone unturned; intimating that they did all in their power to gain converts, not to God, but to their sect. These we may suppose were principally sought for among the Gentiles, for the bulk of the Jewish nation was already on the side of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees' converts were attracted to Pharisaism, not to God. By getting caught up in the details of their additional laws and regulations, they completely missed God, to whom the laws pointed. A religion of deeds puts pressure on people to surpass others in what they know and do. Thus, a hypocritical teacher was likely to have students who were even more hypocritical. We must make sure we are not creating Pharisees by emphasizing outward obedience at the expense of inner renewal.

**JNTC: You go about over land and sea to make one proselyte.** Modern Judaism does not consider itself a missionary religion, and already by the time the Talmud was written Jews had become cautious about receiving converts (see Yevamot 47a). But in the second century B.C.E. the Idumeans were forcibly converted to Judaism, and apparently in Yeshua's time there was still active proselytizing by the Jewish community. For more on this topic, see 1C 7:17–20N, 2C 4:1–2N, Ga 5:3N.

Orthodox Judaism has a strand that clearly calls for missionary activity on behalf of Judaism, as is seen in the following citation from the *Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvot*:

“The Sages say that this Commandment [to love *Adonai* your God with all your heart, soul and might] also includes an obligation to call upon all mankind to serve Him

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<sup>14</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Matthew

(exalted be He), and to have faith in Him. For just as you praise and extol anybody whom you love, and call upon others also to love him, so, if you love the Lord to the extent of the conception of His true nature to which you have attained, you will undoubtedly call upon the foolish and ignorant to seek knowledge of the Truth which you have already acquired.

“As the *Sifre* says [on Deuteronomy 6:5]: ‘And thou shalt love the Lord thy God: this means that you should make Him beloved of man as Abraham your father did, as it is said, “And the souls they had gotten in Haran” [Genesis 12:5].’ That is to say, just as Abraham, being a lover of the Lord—as Scripture testifies, ‘Abraham My friend’ [Isaiah 41:8]—by the power of his conception of God and out of his great love for Him, summoned mankind to believe, you too must so love Him as to summon mankind unto him.” [*Maimonides: The Commandments*, translated by Charles B. Chavel, Volume 1, Commandment 3, page 5]<sup>15</sup>

Oh, they were great at going out and witnessing, but they were not bringing anyone to God. None of their converts were actually born again.

**Yashanet.com:** ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves  
The Pharisees were not shy about evangelizing. However, as Yeshua points out, many of them interpreted the Scriptures in their own (self-righteous) way, that was not in accordance to the truth of Torah. Not much has changed to this day, with countless church denominations sending missionaries all around the world, teaching people to follow a Messiah who tells them that "they are not under the Law" - a message alien to the true gospel message.

**Spurgeon:** The third "woe" related to the unholy zeal of the scribes and Pharisees in gaining adherents to Judaism and their own party, and by the process making them even worse than themselves. They freely gave time and trouble to the work with the prospect of a very slight return: "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte." They would, as it were, drag the Great Sea with a seine net in the hope of entangling one proselyte in its meshes; or they would go over all the land in order to persuade one Gentile to be circumcised so as to become "a Jew outwardly." The result to the proselyte was only evil: "When he is made, ye make him two fold: more the child of hell than yourselves." Perverts usually become bigots. The proselyte would naturally imitate the vices of his hypocritical teachers, without having that knowledge of the Scriptures which might to some extent exercise a wholesome restraint upon them. The circumcised heathen would be a Judas rather than a Jew, a veritable "son of perdition."

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<sup>15</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 23:15). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

### **Matthew 23:16**

**Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!**

**ESV: Third woe: binding oaths.** The Pharisees distinguished between oaths made **by the temple** and those made **by the gold of the temple**, and between oaths made **by the altar** and those made **by the gift** on it. As in much of their belief system, they focus on misguided superficial distinctions and overlook the higher principles of the law.

**Spurgeon:** The form of the fourth "woe" differs from all the rest; in the other seven, our Savior said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! "In this case, his words were, "Woe unto you, ye blind guides!" They were nominally the religious guides of the Jews; but they were really "blind guides." Sin, prejudice, bigotry, and hypocrisy had blinded their eyes. They reckoned themselves to be the wise men of the nation; but Jesus addressed them as both "fools and blind." There are none so stupid as those who will not learn, and none so blind as those who will not see. This was the case with the scribes and Pharisees; they were willfully foolish and willingly blind.

Our Lord here condemned their misleading teaching concerning oaths. They actually taught that, if a man swore "by the temple", his oath was not binding; but that, if he swore "by the gold of the temple", he was bound by his oath; and, in like manner, they declared that an oath "by the altar" was not binding; but that, if a man swore "by the gift that is upon the altar", he was bound by his oath! We marvel not at our Savior's indignant exclamation: "Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?.. the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?" The sanctity lay in the temple and the altar, not in the gold or the gift.

Jesus had forbidden all swearing (Mt 5:34-36); so that he was not exalting one form of oath over another, but rather pointing out the folly and blindness of the scribes and Pharisees in reversing the right order of things. If any swearing, had been permissible, an oath "by the temple" must have been more binding than one "by the gold of the temple" yet these false teachers said, "It is nothing." When men once quit the plain teaching of Christ, it is easy for them to go into all manner of heresies and absurdities.

### **Matthew 23:17**

**Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?**

Pharisees held that they were not responsible to pay vows sworn by the temple or the altar (Matthew 23:16,18), but Jesus held that all vows must be paid and that the temple was greater than part of its material and the altar was greater than a gift upon it (Matthew 23:17,19-22).

### **Matthew 23:18**

**And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.**

### **Matthew 23:19**

**Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?**

**The altar which makes the sacrifice holy.** Exodus 29:37–38: “... the altar will be most holy, and whatever touches the altar will become holy. This is what you are to offer upon the altar: two lambs a year old every day, continually.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Matthew 23:20**

**Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.**

**Spurgeon:** The Jews invented fantastic forms of swearing in order to evade the use of the divine name. Our Lord therefore next proved the utter failure of all their attempts. Swearing "by the altar" was swearing "by all things thereon." An oath "by the temple" was really "by him that dwelleth therein." The binding force of the oath could not lie in the mere building; but in the most High God, who condescended to dwell therein. Many Jews would swear "by heaven", although they would not call God to be a witness to their adjuration; but Jesus showed that they were doing the very thing they tried to avoid: "He that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon." The only right course for us is to obey our Lord's command, "I say unto you, swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."

### **Matthew 23:21**

**And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.**

### **Matthew 23:22**

**And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.**

All oaths forbidden (Mt 5:33-37).

**McGee:** The Pharisees were teaching that if you swore by the temple or the altar, you were not bound to keep your oath. But if you swore by the *gold* of the temple or by the *gift* on the altar, the oath was binding. They were splitting hairs, of course, and they were

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<sup>16</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 23:19). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

placing the emphasis on material things rather than upon the spiritual purpose for which they were to be used.<sup>17</sup>

The religious authorities taught that oaths based on the temple, the altar, and heaven were not binding; however, oaths sworn by the gold of the temple, the gift on the altar, or God *were* binding. Jesus pointed out the absurdity of such teaching, and called the leaders blind guides.

### **Matthew 23:23**

**Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.**

**ESV: Fourth woe: neglecting the weighty matters of the law. tithe.** The Mosaic law required giving a tenth of all that one produced for the ongoing work of the Lord through the Levites and priests (e.g., Lev. 27:30–33). **mint, dill, cumin.** The Pharisees were so scrupulous in following this injunction that they paid a tithe even from their smallest garden crops. Jesus does not say that they were wrong in this (“**These you ought to have done**”), but that they should do this **without neglecting** the far more important matters.

He is referring to the tithing of spices and grains— trivia vs. the important traits: justice, mercy, and faith (Cf. Micah 6:8).

**[mint]** A sweet scented plant. A garden herb, in the original so called from its agreeable flavour. It was used to sprinkle the floors of their houses and synagogues, to produce a pleasant fragrance.

**[amise]** Dill. Only here. Known commonly among us as *dill*. It has a fine aromatic smell, and is used by confectioners and perfumers.

**[cummin]** A plant used for seasoning foods. A plant of the same genus, like *fennel*, and used for similar purposes. These were all herbs of little value. The law of Moses said that they should pay tithes of the fruits of the earth, Deuteronomy 14:22. It said nothing, however, about herbs. It was a question whether these should be tithed. The Pharisees maintained, in their extraordinary strictness, that they ought. Our Saviour says that they were precise in doing small matters, which the law had not expressly commanded, while they omitted the greater things which it had enjoined.

**[omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith]** This is still the program of many who look at outward appearances in religion more than the inward state of the heart.

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<sup>17</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:121). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**[ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone]** Since Christ sanctioned tithing it should be practiced. His teachings were not to confirm the law for a few days and then be abolished. They were to take the place of the law which was "until John." Since then the kingdom of heaven is preached (Matthew 11:11-13; Luke 16:16). If we do away with this doctrine sanctioned by Christ just because it was part of the law, then on the same basis we can do away with more of His teachings which were part of the old covenant. The only parts of the law we have a right to reject as part of the New Testament are those that are not found in the New Testament or are not made a part of it.

**Barnes: Ye pay tithes.** A tenth part. The law required the Jews to devote a tenth part of all their property to the support of the Levites, Numbers 18:20-24. Another tenth part they paid for the service of the sanctuary, commonly in cattle or grain; but where they lived far from the place of worship, they changed it to money; Deuteronomy 14:22-24 Besides these, there was to be every third year a tenth part given to the poor, to be eaten at their own dwellings, Deuteronomy 14:28,29. So that nearly one-third of the property of the Jews was devoted to religious services by law. This was beside the voluntary offerings which they made. How much more mild and gentle are the laws of Christianity under which we live!

**JNTC: Tithes.** The *cohanim* and *Levi'im* were debarred from owning hereditary land but were to be given a tithes (tenth) of all produce (Leviticus 27:30-33, Numbers 18:21); a second tithes was to be consumed by the owner in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 14:22-27); and a tithes for the poor replaced the second tithes in the third and sixth year of the seven-year cycle that culminated in the year of *shmittah*, in which the land was allowed to lie fallow. The rabbinic elaboration of the law of tithes is found in Talmud tractates *Ma'aserot* and *Ma'aser Sheni*.

**The weightier matters of the Torah—justice, mercy, trust.** Yeshua seems to be alluding to Micah 6:8: “... what does *Adonai* require of you but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God?”

**These ... you should have attended to—without neglecting the others!** Yeshua clearly upholds keeping even the minutiae of the Law. Those who encourage Messianic Jews to stop observing the *Torah* are ignoring his advice both here and at 5:17-20&NN above. Nevertheless, the main point in this and the following verse is that one should properly order one's priorities so as to live a life pleasing to God.<sup>18</sup>

**Spurgeon:** In this fifth "woe" our Lord called the scribes and Pharisees both "hypocrites" and "blind guides." They were "hypocrites" as to their own character and conduct, and "blind guides" as the religious leaders of the nation. Jesus first spoke of their scrupulous attention to certain minor matters: "Ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin." Some of them were so punctilious about paying tithes that they even gave to the temple service the tenth of the herbs they bought in the market, as well as of those they grew in their gardens. Although they were so particular about things that were of secondary importance, they "omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment (or, justice) mercy, and faith." Their hearts were not right in the sight of God, therefore their

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<sup>18</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 23:23). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

minds were unbalanced; they counted the lesser requirements of the Law as of the first importance, while they "omitted the weightier matters" altogether. Our Lord did not blame them for paying the tithes; but he showed that they ought first to have exercised "justice, mercy and faith": "these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." No commandment of God is non-essential; but that which relates to the condition of the heart and the life in the sight of the Lord Jehovah must receive our first and best attention.

Jesus used a very expressive simile to set forth the inconsistency of the scribes and Pharisees: "Ye blind guides, which strain at (or, out) a gnat, and swallow a camel." They rewarded trifles as if they were of first importance, and so, as it were, strained out gnats from their wine, lest they should be choked; but they committed great sins without any compunctions of conscience, and thus, in effect, swallowed a camel, an unclean animal, equal in size to an almost innumerable quantity of gnats. There are gnat-strainers among us still, who apparently have no difficulty in swallowing a camel, "hump and all."

### **Matthew 23:24**

***Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.***

The Pharisees majored on the minors. They had rules for every minute area of life, while at the same time they forgot about the important things. It is usually the case that legalists are sticklers for details, but blind to great principles. This crowd thought nothing of condemning an innocent man, yet they were afraid to enter Pilate's judgment hall lest they be defiled (Jn 18:28).

### **Tithing**

- The Old Testament Law required tithing (Lev 27:30; Deut 14:22ff).
- Abraham had practiced tithing long before the Law was given (Gen 14:20).
- Jacob followed his grandfather's example (Gen 28:20-22).
- The principles of Christian giving under grace (2 Cor 8-9).
- We are not content simply to give a tithe (10%), but we also want to bring offerings to the Lord out of hearts filled with love.

Justice, mercy, and faithfulness are the important qualities God is seeking. Obeying the rules is no substitute. While it is good to pay attention to details, we must never lose our sense of priorities in spiritual matters. Jesus did not condemn the practice of tithing. But He did condemn those who allowed their legalistic scruples to keep them from developing true Christian character.

**[strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel]** Strain out gnats but gulp down camels.

**23-24** It's possible to obey the details of the laws but still be disobedient in our general behavior. For example, we could be very precise and faithful about giving 10 percent of our money to God, but refuse to give one minute of our time in helping others. Tithing is important, but giving a tithe does not exempt us from fulfilling God's other directives.

The Pharisees strained their water so they wouldn't accidentally swallow a gnat—an unclean insect according to the law. Meticulous about the details of ceremonial cleanliness, they nevertheless had lost their perspective on inner purity. Ceremonially clean on the outside, they had corrupt hearts.

The hyperbole here is humorous and would certainly catch ancient hearers' attention. Wanting to avoid the impurity caused by a dead insect in their drink, Pharisees would strain out an insect as small as a fly (and anything larger than a lentil) before it could die in order to preserve the fluid (cf. Lev 11:32, 34). Pharisees considered gnats, which were smaller than lentils, exempt from this impurity, but the scrupulous Pharisee of Jesus' hyperbole would not have taken any chances. Yet Jesus charges hyperbolically that they would leave a camel (the largest land animal in Palestine and ritually unclean) in the cup and gulp it down. Their attention to the law's details was fine, but they had missed the main point (Mt 23:23).<sup>19</sup>

### **Matthew 23:25**

**Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.**

**[make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess]** You ceremonially cleanse outward things which typify inward cleansing but you never purify the inward man from which come the issues of life (Matthew 15:18-20; Mark 7:19-21).

**Barnes: Full of extortion and excess.** The outside appeared well. The inside was filled with the fruit of extortion, oppression, and wickedness. The meaning is, that though they took much pains to appear well, yet they obtained a living by extortion and crime. Their cups, neat as they appeared outward, were filled not with the fruits of honest industry, but were extorted from the poor by wicked arts. Instead of *excess*, many manuscripts and editions of the Greek Testament read *wickedness*.

This fifth woe pictures the Pharisees with their emphasis on the externals. This is a picture of the average church today that is so busy making the outside of the cup and platter clean. They go through all the ceremonies. They want to have the best equipment. They talk so nice and piously on the outside, but inside they do not deal with sin. In most cases, they do not even like the word *sin*. But all of the external ceremonies cannot clean up their inner corruption. The Pharisees substituted ritual for reality, formality for faith, and liturgy for God.<sup>20</sup>

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hyperbole **Hyperbole.** A rhetorical exaggeration, a figure of speech often used by Jewish wisdom teachers to underline their point. The point of Jesus' hyperbolic illustrations is generally to grab the hearer's attention and force that hearer to take his point seriously.

<sup>19</sup>Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Mt 23:24). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>20</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:121). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



**Spurgeon:** The sixth "woe" is uttered against the scribes and Pharisees with regard to their eating and drinking: "Ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess." They had frequent washings, both of themselves and of their vessels for eating and drinking. They did well to "make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter"; the evil consisted in the method of filling and emptying the vessels. They were filled by "extortion", and used for "excess"; therefore all the outside washing was of no avail. Singling out one of the evildoers, our Lord said, "Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter," get rid of "extortion", in gathering and "excess" in consuming; then the clean cup and platter will be in harmony with that which is within them.

### **Matthew 23:26**

***Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.***

**ESV: Fifth woe: clean outside, filthy inside. clean the inside.** While seeking external purity, the Pharisees were oblivious to the corrupt internal condition of their hearts.

The vessel which He is referring to is ourselves.

"Blind guides" is a perfect description, one that must have brought a smile to the lips of the listeners. Jesus had used it before (Mt 15:14). The Pharisees were blind to the true values of life. Their priorities were confused. They would take an oath and use some sacred object to substantiate that oath—the gold in the temple, for example, or the gift on the altar. But they would not swear by the temple itself or the altar. It was the temple that sanctified the gold and the altar that sanctified the gift. They were leaving God out of their priorities. All oaths forbidden (Mt 5:33-37).

Jesus knew that the Pharisees wanted both the gold and the gifts on the altar. This is why the Pharisees practiced "Corban"—anything dedicated to God could not be used for others (Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:10-13). These men were not seeking for the righteousness of God; they were greedy for gain. They worked out a "religious system" that permitted them to rob God and others and still maintain their reputations.

Jesus used two illustrations: the cup/platter and the sepulcher. They both stated the same truth: it is possible to be clean on the outside and at the same time defiled on the inside. The Pharisees were careful to keep the outside very clean, because that was the part that men would see; and they wanted the praise of men. But God sees the heart (1 Sam 16:7). When God looked within, He saw "greed and self-indulgence" (Mt 23:25, NIV).

## **Matthew 23:27**

**Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.**

**ESV: Sixth woe: whitewashed tombs.** The Pharisees were like **tombs**, which in Jesus' day could be **outwardly** very **beautiful** but **within** held nothing but death and decay. These tombs were customarily **whitewashed** to identify them clearly to passersby, since people would be rendered unclean for seven days through any contact with them (Num. 19:16; cf. Luke 11:44).

During the feasts in Jerusalem, they would whitewash the sepulchers so that they were marked, so that a stranger would not inadvertently stumble upon a grave which would ceremonially make you unclean, and thus, not be able to celebrate Passover.

Jewish people were careful not to touch dead bodies or anything relating to the dead, because this would make them ceremonially unclean (Num 19:11ff). They would whitewash the tombs lest someone accidentally get defiled, and this was done especially at Passover season. What a graphic picture of the hypocrite: white on the outside, but filled with defilement and death on the inside!

“Blessed are the pure in heart,” was our Lord’s promise. “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life” (Prov 4:23, NASB). D.L. Moody used to say, “If I take care of my character, my reputation will take care of itself.” The Pharisees lived for reputation, not character.

**[whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness]** Tombs were whitewashed one month before the passover to warn all persons about contacting uncleanness (Numbers 19:16). They were also decorated various ways (Matthew 23:29).

**Barnes: Like unto whited sepulchres.** For the construction of sepulchres, Matthew 8:28. Those tombs were annually white-washed, to prevent the people from accidentally coming in contact with them as they went up to Jerusalem, The law considered those persons unclean who had touched anything belonging to the dead, Numbers 19:16. Sepulchres were therefore often whitewashed, that they might be distinctly seen. Thus "whited," they appeared beautiful; but within they contained the bones and corrupting bodies of the dead. So the Pharisees. Their outward conduct appeared well; but their hearts were full of hypocrisy, envy, pride, lust, and malice—fitly represented by the corruption within a whited tomb.

**McGee:** To me this is the most frightening figure of speech which our Lord used. As I said previously, the cup and platter (saucer), clean on the outside and dirty on the inside, picture the average church in our day. But I am afraid that this simile of the tomb pictures the average church-goer—beautiful on the outside, but on the inside they are dead in trespasses and sins. They have a form of godliness, but they deny the power of it to make

them new creations in Christ. My friend, until that happens to you, your church membership is null and void; it is nothing but hypocrisy. When I read that over half the population of the United States are church members, I wonder why in public places I see ninety-nine percent of the crowd drinking cocktails, using profanity, and telling dirty stories. We have a whole lot of marble tombs walking around, spiritual zombies, dead in trespasses and sins.<sup>21</sup>

**Spurgeon:** The reason given for the seventh "woe" reveals what the scribes and Pharisees really were like in Christ's sight: "Ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." The annual whitewashing of the sepulchers had recently taken place, so the burial-places looked at their best; but inside the tombs corruption was doing its deadly work. They were whitewashed, not only for sanitary purposes, but mainly to keep people away from them, lest they should become defiled. Our Lord certainly did not flatter the scribes and Pharisees by this comparison; but the more closely it is examined, the more appropriate to their abominable character will it be proved to be. However much they might "outwardly appear righteous unto men", "within" they were "full of hypocrisy and iniquity." Well might the holy Jesus cry "Woe!" unto such foul sinners.

### **Matthew 23:28**

**Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.**

**[outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity]** The way of millions today in churches whose Christianity goes no deeper than what can be seen (1 Samuel 16:7; 2 Cor. 10:7; 2 Tim. 3:5; 1 Peter 3:3).

**25-28** Jesus condemned the Pharisees and religious leaders for outwardly appearing saintly and holy but inwardly remaining full of corruption and greed. Living our Christianity merely as a show for others is like washing a cup on the outside only. When we are clean on the inside, our cleanliness on the outside won't be a sham.

**And far from *Torah***, or: "and wickedness"; Greek *anomia*. An especially cutting denunciation when aimed at those who considered themselves the authoritative expositors of the Law.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:122). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>22</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 23:28). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

## **Matthew 23:29**

**Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,**

**ESV: Seventh woe: descendants of murderers of the prophets.** In scheming to have Jesus executed, the religious leaders show that they are following in the footsteps of their ancestors, who had persecuted and **murdered** God's **prophets**.

There have always been counterfeit believers in the world, starting with Cain (Gen 4:1-15; 1 Jn 3:10-15). The Pharisees and their kind are guilty of all the righteous blood shed in the name of "religion." The first martyr recorded in Old Testament Scripture was Abel (Gen 4), and the last one recorded was the Prophet Zechariah (2 Chr 24:20-22—the Hebrew Bible ends with 2 Chronicles, not Malachi). What will be the result of this long history of murders? Terrible judgment! "This generation" (the "generation of vipers," Mt 23:33) would taste the wrath of God when the cup of iniquity was full (Gen 15:16; Mt 23:32). Some of this judgment came when Jerusalem was destroyed, and the rest will be meted out in eternity.

**[Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous]** Last of eight woes for eight sins (Matthew 23:13-29):

1. Unwillingness to let common people enjoy religious freedom and pure truth (Matthew 23:13)
2. Greed and pretended holiness to secure secular ends (Matthew 23:14)
3. Pretended zeal to win converts to God but with no view in mind other than to make instruments to serve their own oppressions and cruelty (Matthew 23:15)
4. False doctrines and interpretations of Scripture and ungodly means in escaping responsibility in vows which were made in hypocrisy (Matthew 23:16-22)
5. Superstition in scrupulously attending little things and things not commanded; and omitting things of great importance that are definitely enjoined (Matthew 23:23-24)
6. Maintaining hypocrisy and pretended saintship by outward religious show (Matthew 23:25-26)
7. Deep inward depravities and abominations covered only by outward forms of religion (Matthew 23:27-28)
8. Pretended concern for the holiness of the people which goes no further than whitewashing tombs and bragging about their own supposed regrets for the sins of their fathers while at the same time plotting every conceivable means to commit worse sins than their fathers did (Matthew 23:29-30)<sup>23</sup>

**Spurgeon:** The eighth "woe" referred to their false professions of reverence for "the goodly fellowship of the prophets" and "the noble army of martyrs": "Ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous." They pretended to have such regard for the holy men of the past that, being unable to honor them in person, they would set up monuments to their memory, and adorn their resting places with tokens of

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<sup>23</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

respect. They also testified as to what they would have done if they had lived in the days of their fathers: "we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophet." What bitter irony there was in such language from the lips of men who were even then plotting the death of the Lord of the prophets and of the righteous of all ages! Thus do men still speak with seeming horror of the dark deeds of past persecutors, whose linear descendants they are, not only according to the flesh, but also after the spirit.

Out of their own mouth our Lord condemned the hypocrites: "Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets." In effect, Jesus said to them, "You confess that you are the sons of the murderers of the prophets. That admission carries with it far more than you imagine. You are their sons, not only by birth, but also by resemblance; you are veritable children of them which killed the prophets. If you had lived in their day you would have committed the crimes you pretend to condemn."

### **Matthew 23:30**

**And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.**

**[If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets]** They were worse than their fathers for they killed the Messiah and His followers (Matthew 23:34-36).

**Yashanet.com:** If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers

Here is yet another verse with a worrisome lesson for today. These religious leaders were condemned, as future generations would be, for not having a proper regard for God's Torah. If the Pharisees had been following Torah in its proper context, they would have recognized Yeshua as the Messiah.

### **Matthew 23:31**

**Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.**

It was traditional for the Pharisees to build, improve, and embellish the tombs of the martyrs. But it was "their fathers" who killed the martyrs! Not their biological fathers, of course, but their "spiritual fathers"—the hypocrites of the past ages.

**Children of them,** Resembling them; approving their conduct; inheriting their feelings. They not only showed that they were descended from them, but that they possessed their spirit, and in similar circumstances would have done as they did.

### **Matthew 23:32**

**Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.**

**Spurgeon:** This is one of the most terrible sentences that ever fell from Christ's lips. It is like his message to Judas, "That thou doest, do quickly." The "measure" of Israel's iniquity was almost full. The Savior knew that the scribes and Pharisees were determined to put him to death, and so to complete their own condemnation. This crowning sin would fill up the measure of their fathers' guilt, and bring down upon them the righteous judgment of God.

### **Matthew 23:33**

**Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?**

Quoting from Gen 3:15, when God declares war on Satan. The Seed of the Woman is a title of the Messiah.

When Jesus called the Pharisees "serpents... generation of vipers," He was identifying them with Satan who is THE serpent (Gen 3:1ff). In His Parable of the Tares, Jesus made it clear that *Satan has a family* (Mt 13:38). Satan is a murderer and a liar (Jn 8:44), and his children follow his example. The Pharisees were liars (Mt 23:30) and murderers (Mt 23:34).

**Barnes: Damnation of hell.** This refers, beyond all question, to future punishment. So great was their wickedness and hypocrisy, that if they persevered in this course, it was impossible to escape the damnation that should come on the guilty. This is the sternest language that Jesus ever used to wicked men. But it by no means authorizes ministers to use such language to sinners now. Christ knew that this was true of them. He had an authority which none now have. It is not the province of ministers to denounce judgment, or to use severe names; least of all to do it on pretence of imitating Christ. He knew the hearts of men; we know them not. He had authority to declare certainly that those whom he addressed would be lost; we have no such authority. He addressed persons; we address characters.

**Spurgeon:** Our Lord spoke very severely, but faithfulness required such language as this. A good surgeon cuts deep; so did Jesus. Our modern preachers would not talk like this, even to scribes and Pharisees who were crucifying Christ afresh, and putting him to an open shame. He is not the most loving who speaks the smoothest words; true love often compels an honest man to say that which pains him far more than it affects his callous hearers.

### **Matthew 23:34**

**Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and *some* of them ye shall kill and crucify; and *some* of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute *them* from city to city:**

“I”: Jesus is doing the sending of the prophets (first person singular).

- Isaiah: sawed asunder.
- Jeremiah: imprisoned in filthy dungeon.
- Zechariah: slain between the porch and the altar.

**Spurgeon:** Our great King knew that his earthly life was soon to end; he was, in fact, about to utter his final farewell to the people gathered in the temple. But, before leaving them, he delivered a royal and prophetic message: "Behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes." None but the King of kings could speak thus without blasphemy. These "prophets, and wise men, and scribes" would be Christ's ascension gifts to the Church and the world. He foretold what kind of reception his servants would have from the Jews: "And some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them I shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city." All this was literally fulfilled.

The object of the King in sending his last representatives was that the guilty city should be left for ever without excuse when its measure of iniquity should be full, and its awful doom be sealed. "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." The destruction of Jerusalem was more terrible than anything that the world has ever witnessed, either before or since. Even Titus seemed to see in his cruel work the hand of an avenging God. Truly, the blood of the martyrs slain in Jerusalem was amply avenged when the whole city became veritable Aeldama, or field of blood. The Kingly Prophet foretold the time of the end: "Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation." It was before that generation had passed away that Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed. There was a sufficient interval for the full proclamation of the gospel by the apostles and evangelists of the early Christian Church, and for the gathering out of those who recognized the crucified Christ as their true Messiah. Then came the awful end, which the Savior foresaw and foretold, and the prospect of which wrung from his lips and heart the sorrowful lament that followed his prophecy of the doom awaiting his guilty capital.

### **Matthew 23:35**

**That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.**

**[That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth]** Because they rejected greater light, killed the greatest executive of God—the Son from heaven—and stubbornly refused all offers of God's mercy confirmed by the greatest signs and wonders of all times, judgment was to fall in a greater measure than upon any other generation.



**[Zacharias son of Barachias]** This was no doubt Zechariah the prophet (Zech. 1:1). Here we learn of his death in the temple. It could not be the one in 2 Chron. 24:20-21 who was the son of Jehoiada.

**Abel** was the first person murdered in the Old Testament (see Gen. 4:8); **Zechariah** was the last. Zechariah's death is recorded in 2 Chr. 24:20–22, the last book in the Hebrew canon. Jesus was saying that from the beginning of the Bible until the end, true followers of God had often been treated in this manner. **son of Berechiah:** In 2 Chr. 24:20, Zechariah is called the son of Jehoiada. Zechariah the prophet is called the son of Berechiah in Zech. 1:1. It is possible that Jehoiada was the grandfather of the murdered Zechariah and Berechiah was his father. It is less probable, although possible, that Zechariah's father had two names: Jehoiada and Berechiah.<sup>24</sup>

**JNTC: Hevel (Abel).** See Genesis 4:8.

**Z'kharyah Ben-Berekhyah, whom you murdered between the Temple and the altar.** There is a discrepancy. According to 2 Chronicles 24:20–21, Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada was killed “in the court of the house of *Adonai*”; while Zechariah 1:1 identifies the writer of the book as the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, but the *Tanakh* does not indicate how he died. Possibly Jehoiada had the additional name Berechiah (it was not uncommon to add names); or Jehoiada, who lived to be 130 (2 Chronicles 24:15), was Iddo's father or was Iddo himself (Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 speak of Zechariah as the “son of” his grandfather Iddo; see 1:1N on “son of”). Josephus speaks of Zechariah the son of Barach as having been killed in the temple, and Targum Yonatan assigns the same kind of death to Zechariah the prophet. Others would explain the discrepancy as a copyist's mistake.<sup>25</sup>

### **Matthew 23:36**

**Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.**

As we review these tragic *woes* from the lips of our Lord, we can see why the Pharisees were His enemies. He emphasized the inner man; they were concerned with externals. He taught a spiritual life based on principles, while the Pharisees majored on rules and regulations. Jesus measured spirituality in terms of character, while the Pharisees measured it in terms of religious activities and conformity to external laws. Jesus taught humility and sacrificial service, but the Pharisees were proud and used people to accomplish their own purposes. The holy life of Jesus exposed their artificial piety and shallow religion. Instead of coming out of the darkness, the Pharisees tried to put out the Light...and they failed.

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<sup>24</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>25</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 23:35). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.



**34-36** These prophets, wise men, and teachers were probably leaders in the early church who were persecuted, scourged, and killed, as Jesus predicted. The people of Jesus' generation said they would not act as their fathers did in killing the prophets whom God had sent to them (Matthew 23:30), but they were about to kill the Messiah himself and his faithful followers. Thus they would become guilty of all the righteous blood shed through the centuries.

Jesus was giving a brief history of Old Testament martyrdom. Abel was the first martyr (Genesis 4); Zechariah was the last mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, which ended with 2 Chronicles. Zechariah is a classic example of a man of God who was killed by those who claimed to be God's people (see 2 Chron. 24:20-21).

### **Matthew 23:37**

**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not!**

**Jesus Laments over Jerusalem** v. 37-39 summarizes all of history in three parts:

- 1) the *purpose* of all history
- 2) the *tragedy* of all history
- 3) the *triumph* of all history

The *purpose* of all history: that God might gather His children together.

(Jerusalem is a synecdoche for all of Israel.) The image of the mother bird gathering and covering her brood is a familiar one. Moses used it in his farewell sermon (Deut 32:11). It is a picture of love, tender care, and a willingness to die to protect others. Jesus did die for the sins of the world, including the nation of Israel: but "His own received Him not" (Jn 1:11).

"And ye would not": The *tragedy* of all history.

In the final analysis man is responsible for his destiny (Rev. 22:17).

Christ's last heart-rending plea to Israel.

Jesus wanted to gather his people together as a hen protects her chicks under her wings, but they wouldn't let him. Jesus also wants to protect us if we will just come to him. Many times we hurt and don't know where to turn. We reject Christ's help because we don't think he can give us what we need. But who knows our needs better than our Creator? Those who turn to Jesus will find that he helps and comforts as no one else can.

Jerusalem was the capital city of God's chosen people, the ancestral home of David, Israel's greatest king, and the location of the temple, the earthly dwelling place of God. It was intended to be the center of worship of the true God and a symbol of justice to all people. But Jerusalem had become blind to God and insensitive to human need. Here we

see the depth of Jesus' feelings for lost people and for his beloved city, which would soon be destroyed.

**JNTC: 37–39** As if to refute the theology, developed later by the Church, which teaches that God is no longer interested in the Jewish people as such, Yeshua here gives the condition for the salvation of national Israel, as distinct from salvation of individual Jews and Gentiles. In these verses, at the end of his ministry, he addresses the nation of Israel, speaking to its capital, **Yerushalayim**, and thus continues the *Tanakh's* tradition of corporate salvation, which will come when Israel as a nation blesses the Messiah, **who comes in the name of Adonai**. (It is clear from 21:9 in its context that this phrase here refers to Yeshua himself.) The fact that Yeshua will not return until Israel receives national salvation is a powerful motivator for evangelizing Jewish people (see Ro 11:11–12&N, 15&N, 31&N); in fact Jewish evangelism can hasten his coming (2 Ke 3:12&N). For more, see 5:5&N, Ac 4:12&N, Ro 11:23–29&NN, 2C 1:20&N. (Also see Maimonides' "Letter to Ovadyah the Proselyte," quoted in Ro 4:16N.)

**Under her wings.** Compare the use of such a natural metaphor in the Talmud. A non-Jew comes to Shammai requesting to become a proselyte in order to be appointed *cohen gadol*. Shammai drives him away with a stick, but Hillel receives him and teaches him in a way that enables him to see for himself that the *Torah* prohibits a proselyte from holding that office. He returns to Hillel and thanks him: "Gentle Hillel, blessings on your head for bringing me under the wings of the *Sh.khinah*" (Shabbat 31a). Likewise Moshe is described as being taken to his burial place "wrapped in the wings of the *Sh.khinah*" (Sotah 13b).

**God is abandoning your house to you, leaving it desolate.** As is clear from the use of the word "house" in Jeremiah 22:5, which Yeshua alludes to, he is not speaking here about the Temple, destroyed forty years later by Roman armies, but to the future generations of Israel, who will be desolate of salvation so long as they seek to achieve it by themselves ("abandoning your house to *you*") and do not welcome God's Messiah Yeshua.<sup>26</sup>

**Spurgeon:** What a picture of pity and disappointed love the King's face must have presented when, with flowing tears, he uttered these words! What an exquisite emblem he gave of the way in which he had sought to woo the Jews to himself: "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings "What familiar tenderness! What a warm Elysium of rest! What nourishment for the feeble! What protection for the weak! Yet it was all provided in vain: "How often would I have gathered thy children together.... and ye would not!" Oh, the awful perversity of man's rebellious will! Let all the readers of these lines beware lest the King should ever have to utter such a lament as this over them.

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<sup>26</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 23:37). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

## **Matthew 23:38**

**Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.**

[**house is left unto you desolate**] Referring to the nation as well as the temple (2 Samuel 7:5,18-19). Both were destroyed and both will be restored. Israel was here officially cut off as a nation at the end of Daniel's 69th week and will not be dealt with as such until Daniel's 70th week (Daniel 9:27).

Three Reasons the Temple Was Destroyed:

1. Because of their sins
2. To take away all possibility of continuing Judaism
3. To prove conclusive that the law was abolished, the old Jewish economy was brought to an end and the Christian dispensation introduced

**ESV: house.** In the OT, this is an expression for the temple; possibly here it has broader reference to Jerusalem's leadership. All Jewish religious authority will collapse with the destruction of the temple in a.d. 70.

**Spurgeon:** Nothing remained for the King but to pronounce the solemn sentence of death upon those who would not come unto him that they might have life: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." The whole "house" of the Jews was left desolate when Jesus departed from them; and the temple, the holy and beautiful "house", became a spiritual desolation when Christ finally left it. Jerusalem was too far gone to be rescued from its self-sought doom.

Amid all this gloom there was one gleam of light: "For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." After his death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus, appeared many times to his disciples, but not once to the unbelieving Jews. His personal ministry to them was at an end; but it would be renewed when he should come to them a second time, without a sin-offering, unto salvation, and then they would say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Long ages have passed since the King went away into the far country. The signs of the times all tell us that his coming draweth nigh. Oh, that Christians and Jews alike were on the look-out for the true Messiah, whose message to all is, "Behold, I am coming quickly!"

## **Matthew 23:39**

**For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.**

“til”: Logical linkage.

The *triumph* of all history = the coming of the Lord Jesus.

The theme of Matthew can be seen in these verses (v. 37-39).

“til”: A logical linkage. Jesus left the nation with a promise: He would one day return, the nation would see Him and say, “Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord!”

This is a quotation from Psalm 118:26, that great messianic psalm that was quoted so many times in His last week of ministry. Even the crowds had used those very words (Mt 21:9).

**(Hosea 5:15)** *I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me earnestly.*

**[till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord]** You will see Me again and will be glad to accept Me as your Messiah (Zech. 12:10-13:1; Isaiah 66:7-8; Romans 11:25-29).

**[Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord]** Compare the first time they said this (Matthew 21:9; Psalm 118:26).

**Barnes: Ye shall not see me,** The day of your mercy is gone by. I have offered you protection and salvation, and you have rejected it. You are about to crucify me, and your temple to be destroyed; and you, as a nation, be given up to long and dreadful suffering. You will not see me as a merciful Saviour, offering you redemption any more, till you have borne these heavy judgments. They must come upon you, and be borne, until you would be glad to hail a deliverer, and say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Blessed be he that comes as the Messiah, to bring deliverance. This has not been yet accomplished; but the days will come when the Jews, long cast out and rejected, will hail Jesus as the Messiah, and receive him whom their fathers slew, as the merciful Saviour, Romans 11:25-32.

**ESV:** As Jesus cites Ps. 118:26 (cf. Matt. 21:9), he identifies himself with God's Messiah and Savior who will once again come to his people, but only after a time of great judgment, when they are finally ready to receive him.

### **Dake: Twenty-one Characteristics of Hypocrites**

1. They demand respect as teachers (Matthew 23:2).
2. They teach, but do not practice (Matthew 23:3).
3. They demand service; not give it (Matthew 23:4).
4. They seek praise of men (Matthew 23:5).
5. They parade their religion (Matthew 23:5).
6. They seek chief banquet places (Matthew 23:6).
7. They seek chief places in church (Matthew 23:6).
8. They glory in personal attention (Matthew 23:7).
9. They glory in titles (Matthew 23:7).
10. They rob men of truth and life (Matthew 23:13).
11. They reject truth and life (Matthew 23:13).
12. They take advantage of widows (Matthew 23:14).
13. They exhibit long prayers (Matthew 23:14).
14. They are zealous to win men to their sect, but not to God (Matthew 23:15).
15. They root and ground converts in hypocrisy, but not to God (Matthew 23:15).
16. They profess to be the only guide in religion, but are blind to truth and practical Christianity (Matthew 23:16-22).
17. They propagate those parts of religion from which they receive most personal gain and honor (Matthew 23:16-22).
18. They strain at gnats and swallow camels; stress minor details and omit the fundamentals of religion (Matthew 23:23-24).
19. They glory in physical cleanliness, but live in moral filth (Mt. v23:25-26).
20. They exhibit outward religion and self-righteousness and ignore inward holiness in life and conduct (Matthew 23:2,7-28).
21. They pretend to be more righteous than their forefathers (Matthew 23:29-33).

### **Dake: The Doctrine of Tithing**

Tithing Before the Law of Moses:

It was practiced 430 years before the law (Genesis 14:20; Genesis 28:22; Hebrews 7:1-11).

Tithing under the Law of Moses:

1. He commanded (Leviticus 27:30; Malachi 3:10)
2. Five Purposes:
  - (1) For Levites (Numbers 18:21-24)
  - (2) Tithes of tithes for priests (Numbers 18:26; Neh. 10:37; Neh. 12:44)
  - (3) Tithes of tithes every three years for the poor and the ministers (Deut. 14:27-29; Deut. 26:12-14)
  - (4) To supply God's house (Malachi 3:10)
  - (5) To honor God (Proverbs 3:9-10)
3. When brought: yearly, along with all other offerings for the feast (Deut. 12:6-7; Deut. 14:22-26)

4. Belonged to God, not the people who paid them (Leviticus 27:30-34; Malachi 3:8)
5. Where brought (2 Chron. 31:12; Neh. 10:38; Neh. 12:44; Neh. 13:5,12; Malachi 3:8)
6. If borrowed: 20% interest had to be added when paid (Leviticus 27:31)
7. If exchanged: both it and the exchange must be paid (Leviticus 27:33)

#### Tithing In the New Testament:

1. Christ taught it (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42; cp. Matthew 5:20 with Luke 18:11-12; see Matthew 10:10; Luke 10:7-8). This was teaching for the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 11:11-14; Luke 16:16)
2. Paul Taught It:
  - (1) Condemned sacrilege (Romans 2:22), or robbing temples (Malachi 3:8-10) and using holy things (Leviticus 27)
  - (2) Teachers to be paid (Galatians 6:6)
  - (3) God ordained support of ministers (1 Cor. 9:7-14; 1 Tim. 6:17-18)
  - (4) Christians to give as God prospers them (1 Cor. 16:2)
  - (5) Melchisedec priesthood is eternal and must be supported by children of Abraham (Hebrews 6:20; Hebrews 7:1-11,17,21)
  - (6) Children of Abraham in faith must walk in his steps (Romans 4:12; Hebrews 7)
  - (7) Tithing is proof of obedience and appreciation of God's blessings (Romans 4:12; Hebrews 7:6-10; 1 Cor. 9:7-14; 1 Tim. 6:17-18; cp. Malachi 3:8-10; Proverbs 3:9-10; Genesis 14:20; Deut. 8:10-20)

#### Blessings of Tithing:

1. Blessings for obedience (see above)
2. God's house will not lack (Malachi 3:10).
3. God's ministers will not lack (1 Cor. 9:7-14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; Neh. 13:10; Malachi 3:8-10).
4. Material and spiritual blessings (Malachi 3:8-10; Proverbs 3:9-10; 2 Chron. 31; Neh. 13)

#### Examples of Paying Tithes:

1. Abraham (Genesis 14:20; Hebrews 7:1-11)
2. Jacob (Genesis 28:22)
3. Levi in Abraham (Hebrews 7:9)
4. Hezekiah and Israel (2 Chron. 31)
5. Nehemiah and Israel (Neh. 13)
6. Hypocrites (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42; Luke 18:12)
7. Christians (1 Cor. 9:7-14; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 8:1-15; Galatians 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; Hebrews 7)

#### **Parallel Between Beatitudes Matthew 5 and Woes Matthew 23**

A comparison between the Beatitudes of Matthew 5 and the Woes of Matthew 23

## False Righteousness

1. Entering the kingdom 5:3
  - Shutting up the kingdom 23:13
2. Mourners comforted 5:4
  - Destroyers condemned 23:14
3. Meek inherit the earth 5:5
  - Proud send souls to hell 23:15
4. Hungering for holiness 5:6
  - Greedy for gain 23:16–22

## False Righteousness

5. Obtaining mercy 5:7
  - Rejecting mercy 23:23–24
6. Pure in heart 5:8
  - Defiled in heart 23:25–28
7. Peacemakers = God's children 5:9
  - Persecutors are the devil's children 23:29f
8. Persecuted are God's children 5:10
  - Persecutors are the devil's children 23:29f

# Tithing

- The Old Testament Law required tithing  
Lev 27:30; Deut. 14:22ff
- Abraham had practiced tithing long before  
the Law was given Gen 14:20
- Jacob followed his grandfather's example  
Gen 28:20–22
- The principles of Christian giving under grace  
2 Cor 8–9
- We are not content simply to give a tithe  
(10%), but we also want to bring offerings to  
the Lord out of hearts filled with love.