

Woe To The Pharisees!

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the religious leaders of Jesus' day. They were highly educated and had memorized most, if not all, of what Protestants call the Old Testament. The Jewish scriptures included the Old Testament but not the New Testament. Both religious sects were organized. The Pharisees controlled the synagogues and the Sadducees, the aristocrats of the day, controlled the Sanhedrin Council and the temple. Both groups were highly respected by the Jewish people. However, today they are not respected by many people and the name Pharisee now has the negative meaning of one who is a hypocrite and self-righteous. Most likely they were not habitually unkind to their children or unloving to their wives. Most likely they were charismatic and successful in their businesses. They were either middle or upper class. They were staunchly patriotic and anti-Rome. They were proud men who did not like Jesus Christ because He challenged their teaching, criticized them and threatened their position of respect among the people.

PHARISEE INVITES JESUS TO LUNCH. Our study begins with one of these men - a Pharisee who invited Jesus to lunch. Verse 53 reveals that there were many others present at the lunch. The attendees included scribes and Pharisees. This means that Jesus was going to have an incredible audience during this lunch.

Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined at the table. Luke 11:37 (NASB)

The phrase "when He had spoken" is a poor translation of the Greek. A better translation is "as He was speaking" since the verb "spoken" is in the aorist tense. The ESV translates it better with "while Jesus was speaking." In the preceding verses Jesus had just told a crowd that the

only sign they would receive from Him was the sign of Jonah because the nation of Israel was wicked (Luke 11:29). He said that the Queen of Sheba and men of Nineveh would

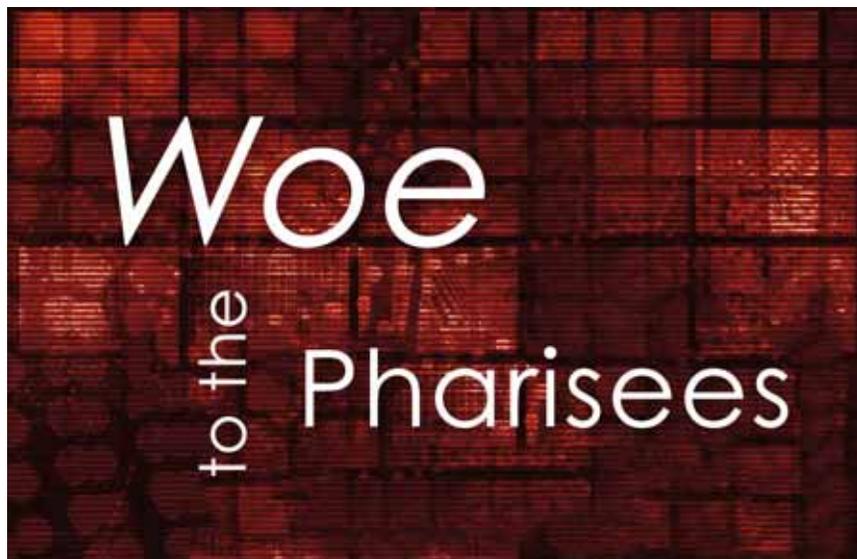
condemn them at the judgment because they were wicked and as a result rejected Him (Luke 11:31-32). He had just told them that they were full of evil, and therefore, would not understand spiritual truth (Luke 11:33-36). Verse 37 states that as He was speaking, one of the Pharisees invited Him to lunch. That must have been a surprise! One wonders why was Jesus invited to lunch?

Maybe some of us would be more surprised that Jesus actually accepted the Pharisee's invitation. Still others are thrilled that He did because now we know how to respond

to those who disagree with us doctrinally and slander our character. Yes it is true that we are warned in the New Testament to not receive false-teachers into our homes or give them a greeting to peace and well-being.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this

teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. 2 John 10-11



But it is important to notice that Jesus had lunch with the Pharisee and not in Jesus' home. Apparently, Jesus did not give Him a greeting either since we are simply told that "He went in and reclined at table." That is, He lay down before a table as was the custom of the time.

JESUS DID NOT WASH HIS HANDS. Now notice that Jesus did not wash His hands when He reclined to eat.

When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. Luke 11:38 (NASB)

As a boy my mother always made me wash my hands, wrist and elbows before I ate anything. I had to wash off all the dirt on my hands and arms. If I missed an area, I had to go back and wash again; but that is not the type of washing that is referred to in verse 38. Jesus did not wash His hands, and He did not ceremonially wash His hands either. The literal Greek states that Jesus "had not washed before the meal." The NASB adds a word of explanation when it adds "ceremonially." The ESV, KJV, NKJV and NIV translate the passage correctly. The Greek word for "washed" is translated from the Greek *baptizo* which means "to immerse or to dip." But Jesus did not wash His hands as I did as a boy. This act of washing was a ritual washing of the hands. The washing was not designed to clean hands but to rid one of ceremonial defilement or uncleanness. Ceremonial uncleanness could occur, for example, if a person accidentally touched a Gentile or something that a Gentile had touched.

One such rule occurs in Yadayim 1.1 which states,

R. Yose says, "And on condition that for the last among them, there should not be less than a quarter-log [of water]. They add [to the water] used for the second [pouring], but they do not add [to the water] used for the first [pouring of the water over the hands]."¹

Therefore, to rid oneself of ceremonial defilement, they poured water *over* the hands. Alfred Edersheim writes,

"Purification" was one of the main points in Rabbinic sanctity.

1. Jacob Neusner. The Mishnah. Yale University Press. 1988. p. 1123.

By far the largest and most elaborate of the six books into which the Mishnah is divided is exclusively devoted to this subject (the Seder Tohoroth, purifications). Not to speak of references in other parts of the Talmud, we have two special tractates to instruct us about the purification of "Hands" (Yadayim) and the "Vessels" (Kelim).²

The Mishnah contains an incredible 224 pages of detailed rules about purification of cleanliness.

Purification and tithing were two great obligations of those of the fraternity of the Pharisees.³ It is reported that the Sadducees,

... taunted, that the "Pharisees would by-and-by subject the globe of the sun itself to their purifications . . ."⁴

The quote reveals that ritualistic purification or washing was a major obligation and compulsion of the Pharisees.

The sad truth about any ritual is that after awhile the heart grows cold and the original reason for the ritual is lost as the mechanics of how to perform the ritual with excellence becomes more important. The same problem occurs in church worship services. People often select a church because of the quality of the music program or for the great musical entertainment, or the pastor helps them understand the Bible. Usually when people comment about the preaching, they describe an emotional response and some new discovery about God. Sad to say, some today are like the Pharisees. But some *are* interested in studying the Bible so that they can know God, be rescued from our sins and understand God's will. Others select a church for its entertainment value or the charisma of the pastor and not for the quality of the Bible teaching. Unfortunately, churches are often evaluated by the external and not the internal. The Pharisee was not any different. He was surprised that Jesus had not ceremonially washed His hands and he voiced his objection. He was upset that Jesus did not follow the ritual.

2. Alfred Edersheim. The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973. Part One, p. 358.

3. Ibid. pp. 312-313.

4. Ibid., p. 313.

BEAUTIFUL OUTSIDE, BUT UGLY INSIDE. Then Jesus condemned them.

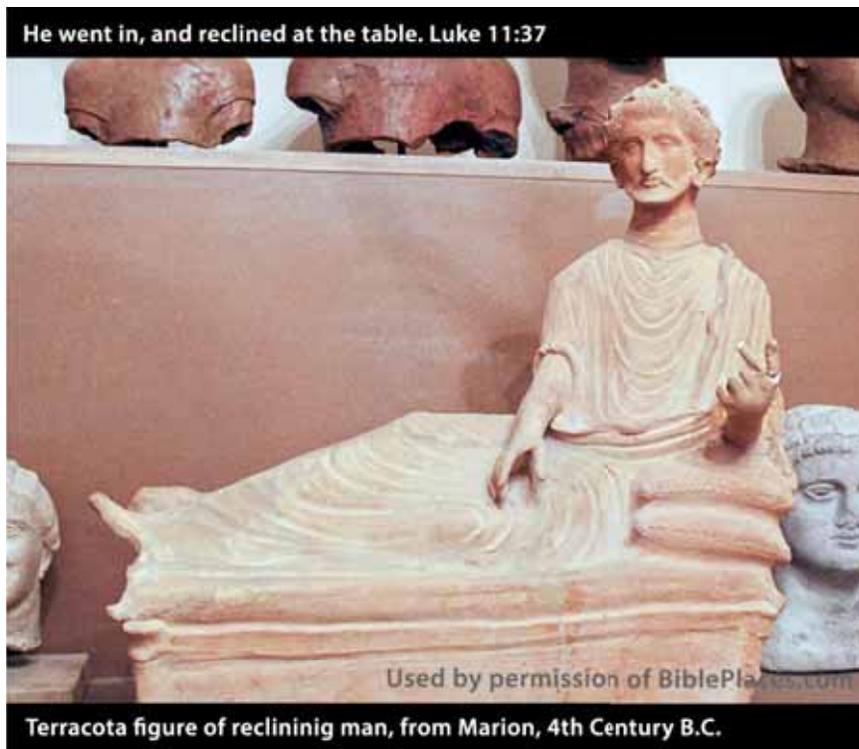
But the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness." Luke 11:39 (NASB)

Jesus' reply is truly shocking. What is the inside of a cup and platter? Most of us would think that the outside of a cup is the handle and the underside, while the inside is where the liquid is poured. But what about the plate? Is the underside the exterior to the plate and the inside is where the food rests? That must be what Jesus means because He tells us that the inside is dirty. As I am writing this, I am eating my lunch. I have some cheese on my plate which I accidentally smeared on the plate and my cup of coffee is ringed with coffee stains. When I am finished eating, the plate will look worse. Now imagine not washing the the cup and plate where the food has been but only washing the rest of cup and plate. Then imagine using the same dishes again tomorrow and each subsequent day for weeks and weeks without thoroughly washing them. That is the picture of the Pharisees. They were like filthy cups and plates reeking with moldy old food and stains. The ceremonial washing was not real washing. It was only external. They were more interested in the external and not their internal, spiritual condition. Jesus said that their inside was full of robbery and wickedness.

Jesus' rebuke reminds us of Isaiah 1:12-17 when God told the nation of Israel that He hated their sacrificial offerings, prayers and times of worship because their hearts were full of evil. Therefore, God would not listen; instead He would hide His eyes.

*When you come to appear before Me,
Who requires of you this trampling of My courts?
Bring your worthless offerings no longer,
Incense is an abomination to Me.
New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies —*

*I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly.
I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me;
I am weary of bearing them.
So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you;
Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen.
Your hands are covered with blood.*



*Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight.
Cease to do evil,
Learn to do good;
Seek justice,
Reprove the ruthless,
Defend the orphan,
Plead for the widow. Isaiah 1:12-17 (NASB)*

Isaiah 58:2-3a records Israel's complaint that God did not

listen to them. Then in verses 3b-7 God answered them and declared that they were ugly on the inside. In Amos 5:21-24, Micah 6:6-8, and Malachi 1:6-2:3, God rebuked the Israelites repeatedly for not cleaning up their insides. Do you see what God wants from you? The next time you are in church worshipping God, just know that God is looking at your inside and not at your external performance. This means we can worship God with our hands by our sides. Someone who cannot lift their hands in the air can rejoice that God is looking at their heart and not at their hands and arms. The person confined to a bed may actually be worshipping God more than the leader at church who is leading the congregation in song. God is more interested in your heart. That was the spiritual point that Jesus was making.

Then Jesus continued rebuking them.

You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? Luke 11:40 (NASB)

I am amazed at Jesus and the apostles. They actually rebuked people. Today some church visitors or members become angry if a pastor rebukes them. We need to remember that Jesus did! There is a time for rebuke: when our conduct does not measure up.

HOW TO BE CLEAN. Then Jesus told the Pharisee what God expected from him. He gave the audience “the solution.”

But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you. Luke 11:41 (NASB)

The word “charity” comes from the Greek *eleemosyne*. This word occurs in Matthew 6:2-4; Luke 12:33; Acts 3:2-3; 9:36; 10:2, 4, 31; Acts 24:17. The word is sometimes translated as “giving to the poor, charity or alms.” Understanding that “charity” referred to “giving money to the poor” is important since the Pharisees believed that giving alms or money to the poor gave a person favor with God. Obviously that was an external behavior. The Pharisees took great pride in giving to the poor. Remember in Matthew 6:1-2 that Jesus rebuked them for having a trumpet sound off

when they gave money to the poor in the synagogues and in the streets so that men would notice them. Therefore, when Jesus told the Pharisees and scribes to give from within, He used their word for giving money to the poor. The message is clear. Give from the inside. Be serious and really give from the heart. He was talking about self-sacrifice from the heart. Jesus’ point is very simple. When the heart is right, then the external behavior will be right. Consequently, ritual washing was not necessary. It is the heart that needs to be washed clean. Jesus was calling for a radical change of their hearts and of our hearts!

1ST WOE TO THE PHARISEES. Then using three woes Jesus started revealing that the Pharisees were spiritually dead. After He condemns the Pharisees, He will condemn the lawyers also with three more woes.

But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. Luke 11:42 (NASB)

This first woe of condemnation strikes at the heart of what it meant to be a Pharisee. The fraternity of the Pharisees were committed to three vows or principles. Alfred Edersheim states,

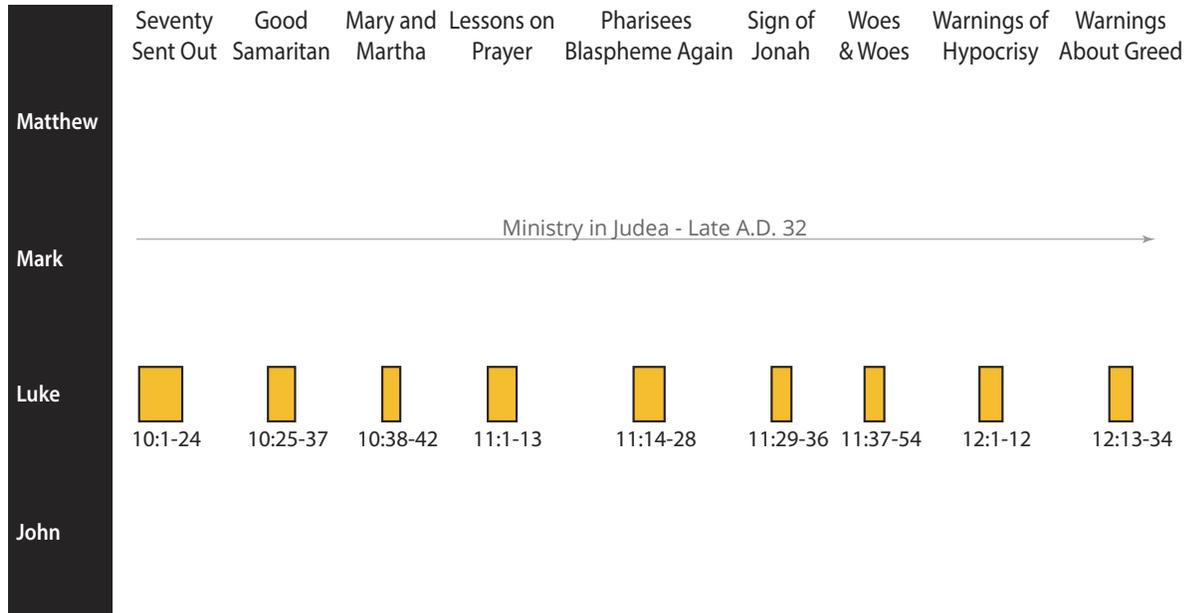
Indeed, the three distinctions of a Pharisee were: not to make use nor to partake of anything that had not been tithed; to observe the laws of purification; and, as a consequence to these two, to abstain from familiar [conversation] with all non-Pharisees.⁵

This quote reveals that Jesus seriously condemned them for tithing the smallest of things such as mint, rue and herbs, and carefully following ritualistic cleansing while ignoring the first and most important commandment, to love God. What a condemnation! He struck at the very heart and principle of what it meant to be a Pharisee. The fraternity of Pharisees was committed to tithing and purification. Imagine being overly committed to tithing the smallest of plants while ignoring the greatest commandment to love God.

⁵ Ibid., Part One, p. 312 and Part Two, p 212.

Life and Heart of Jesus

Ministry In Judea - Late A.D. 32



2ND WOE TO THE PHARISEES. The next woe was a rebuke to the Pharisees because they were proud men who sought the honor of the people.

Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. Luke 11:43 (NASB)

A. T. Robertson states that the chief seats in the synagogue were arranged in a semi-circular bench that faced the congregation.⁶ These seats “were on a platform looking to the audience.”⁷ Alfred Edersheim agrees stating that these seats were before the Ark of the Covenant and faced the people. These seats were reserved for the rulers of the synagogue (the Pharisees) and the honorable.⁸ The Pharisees were graduates of rabbinic schools. In the middle of the synagogue was an

elevated pulpit or *Luach* from which the Law was read. One would read the Law while another man preached while sitting down.⁹

Professor Rachel Hachlili of the University of Haifa reports,

The synagogues of Late Antiquity, by contrast, emphasized prayer and ceremonies; their functions were liturgical and ritualistic.

The focal point of the early buildings was the center of the hall, while that of the later synagogue was the Torah Shrine built on the Jerusalem-oriented wall. In the early structures, benches were constructed along all four walls; they faced the center for the hall. In the later synagogues, the benches faced the Torah Shrine. Architectural decoration in the pre-destruction buildings was simple. The later synagogues were richly ornamented both outside and inside and included mosaic floors and wall paintings.¹⁰

It is not uncommon even today to find pastors, a worship

6. A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament Baker Book House. 14930. Vol. 2, p. 167.

7. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 180.

8. Alfred Edersheim. The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah. Eerdmans Publishing. 1973. vol. 1, p. 436. He also references Tos. Megill. ed. Z. iv. 21.

9. Ibid.

10. Rachel Hachlili. “Synagogues—Before and After the Roman Destruction of the Temple.” Biblical Archaeology Review. May/June 2015

leader, other staff members and elders sitting on a platform so that everyone can see them. In some churches the front row of the congregation holds the chief seats. Only the pastor sits there and no one else can sit there. It is the row of honor.

The Pharisees had a serious problem with pride. In Matthew 6:2 we are told that the Pharisees had someone blow a trumpet when they gave alms or money to the poor in the synagogue or in the streets. In Matthew 6:5 Jesus tells us they would stand in the synagogue or on the streets while they prayed. All of this was done in order to be noticed by others. All three gospels report that Jesus stated that they loved the chief seats in the synagogues. More than likely it had become a custom that special seats be reserved for these leaders. When the Pharisees arrived, they knew where they were to sit. Maybe the seats had special padding and ornamentation. Maybe the seats had name plates for each Pharisee who attended that synagogue. This should not be true of spiritual leaders.

3RD WOE TO THE PHARISEES. The first woe condemned the Pharisees for paying great attention to little details of behavior while ignoring justice and love for God. The second woe condemned them for their pride and the third woe reveals their root problem.

Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it. Luke 11:44 (NASB)

Their root problem was that they were spiritually dead - spiritually lifeless. They were like a tomb in the ground covered over with grass and plants. They were hidden tombs. No

one knew they were tombs. According to the Mosaic Law a person became unclean if they touched a corpse, a human bone, or a grave.

The one who touches the corpse of any person shall be unclean for seven days. Numbers 19:11 (NASB)

Also, anyone who in the open field touches one who has been slain with a sword or who has died naturally, or a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean for seven days. Numbers 19:16 (NASB)

Jesus revealed that the Pharisees were like a grave. They



should have been avoided because they were spiritually dead. They were consumed with external ritual and spiritually lifeless. They were empty. They did not have a real relationship with God. Yet, they and everyone else thought they were spiritually alive because they were graduates of rabbinic schools and taught the people. We can

be confident that the people thought that someone who knew and taught the scriptures was spiritually alive. Jesus said, “No!”

A COLD HEART. Do you wonder how the Pharisees felt when Jesus spoke these strong words? I wonder. Yet, we are told that one of the lawyers objected.

One of the lawyers said to Him in reply, “Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too.” Luke 11:45 (NASB)

Verse 45 tells us that one of the lawyers, an expert in the Mosaic Law, felt insulted. Today, we can be confident that

some church member would have considered Jesus' words to be unloving and rude. More than likely someone would have objected. When is the last time that your pastor warned the congregation with a series of woes?

The lawyer revealed that he had a pride problem. As a result, he felt insulted. Proud people do not like to be insulted. They feel like they do not deserve to be treated like that. Today, people object and complain too. Yet they will lead a protest or gossip about the pastor. They might even contact the church leaders and demand that the pastor be rebuked and warned to be more loving and caring in his sermons. Sadly, some people will protest if anyone is offended in a sermon with the idea that they are sinners. Anyone who would feel insulted with the truth that they are sinners reveals that he/she has a heart problem. They are cold.

1ST WOE TO THE LAWYERS. Now notice how Jesus responded.

But He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers." Luke 11:46 (NASB)

Jesus did not apologize. Jesus did not ask for forgiveness for offending him. In our culture today, people do not apologize when they offend others. Instead they just do something special or nice for the one they insulted. That is supposed to communicate that they are apologetic. That is pride refusing to humbly apologize. But Jesus did not apologize for offending him because He spoke the truth. His words were not insulting. They were descriptive.

Watch what Jesus did. He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well!" His message was that the lawyers were just as guilty as the Pharisees. If Jesus had apologized, He would have sent the wrong message that the lawyers were not like the Pharisees. That would have been deceptive.

Jesus accuses them of two sins. First, they impose extremely severe rules for the people to follow. Just read the Mishnah and that will become obvious. The Greek word for "burden" is *phortion* and it refers to a massive load. In Acts 27:10 the word refers to the cargo of a ship. No one can carry

such a heavy load by themselves. The Greek word for "hard" is *dysbastaktos* and it means "difficult, hard or irksome." These two words together reveal the load was impossible to carry. Have you ever tried to lift a load that was too great to lift, let alone carry? I have carried an extremely heavy box of books when I moved from one house to another. Now imagine carrying 50 boxes loaded with books. That is a good description of the burdens that the lawyers imposed on others. These loads were enormous. They were tons of little, exacting, picky detailed laws and rules that people had to keep day after day. Sabbath after Sabbath, feast after feast. There were thousands of rules to keep. There were even traditions of the fathers to keep (Mark 7:3). In Acts 15:10 Peter describes these loads as a yoke that the fathers could not bear.

Yet these lawyers had schemed and devised little rules that helped them escape from keeping the same rules they imposed on others! Matthew 15:4-6 is an example of a rule that they created that enabled them to escape keeping God's laws. William Barclay writes,

The limit of a Sabbath day's journey was 2,000 cubits (1,000 yards) from a man's residence. But if a rope was tied across the end of a street, the end of the street became his residence and he could go 1,000 yards beyond that; if on the Friday evening he left at any given point enough food for two meals that point technically became his residence and he could go 1,000 yards beyond that!

One of the forbidden works on the Sabbath was the tying of knots, sailors' or camel-drivers' knots and knots in ropes. But a woman might tie the knot to her girdle. Therefore, if a bucket of water had to be raised from a well a rope could not be knotted to it, but a woman's girdle could, and it could be raised with that!

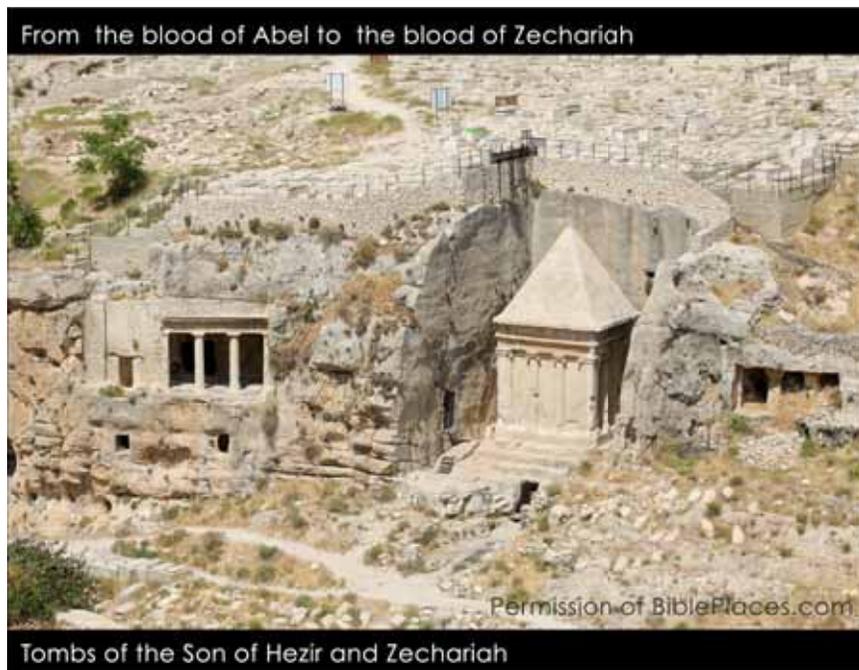
To carry a burden was forbidden, but the codified written law laid it down, "he who carries anything, whether it be in his right hand, or in his left hand, or in his bosom, or on his shoulder is guilty; but he who carries anything on the back of his hand, with his foot, or with his mouth, or with his elbow, or with his ear, or with his hair, or with his money bag turned upside down, or

between his money bag and his shirt, or in the fold of his shirt or in his shoe, or in his sandal is guiltless, because he does not carry it in the usual way of carrying it out.”¹¹

This illustrates Jesus’ statement that they would “not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers.” They devised rules that allowed them to do what they wanted.

2ND WOE TO THE LAWYERS. Jesus announces three woes on the lawyers. The second woe is recorded in Luke 11:47-51.

Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs. For this reason also the wisdom of God said, “I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.”
Luke 11:47-51 (NASB)



In this woe, Jesus condemns the lawyers because they, along with the Pharisees, were complicit in the death of the prophets. They did not directly kill the prophets of the Old Testament, but they did indirectly. One wonders if there was

something unique about the tombs of the prophets?

The Greek word for tomb is *mnemeion*. The tomb was actually a monument according to Louw and Nida.¹² Matthew 23:29 reveals that the religious leaders did construct monuments to the prophets and the righteous.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, “If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.” So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Matthew 23:29-31 (NASB)

Verse 29 states that the religious leaders adorned the monuments or *mnemeion* of the righteous. But in our study we are also told that monuments were built for the prophets. Jesus is simply stating that the lawyers were not any different than their forefathers. By their actions of building the monuments,

they demonstrated that the prophets had indeed been murdered; but they tried to make themselves look more spiritual. Jesus pulled the cloak back and revealed that they hated the prophets too! The gospels reveal that they had rejected John the Baptist (Matthew 3:7-10; 11:7-19; 21:32) and they will reject Jesus Christ within nine months.

Then Jesus told them that He would send them prophets and His apostles. In reaction, the religious leaders would murder and persecute some of them. Consequently, they would prove that they were just like their forefathers. That

11. William Barclay. The Gospel of Luke. The New Daily Study Bible. Westminster John Know Press. 2001.

12. Lou and Nida. Greek-Lexicon of the New Testament. United Bible Societies. 1988. p. 93, 7.76.

is exactly what they did. They were guilty of the blood of all of the prophets from the beginning of time. They were like their unrighteous forefathers.

Jesus makes His point clear when He says that they are guilty of the deaths of all the prophets from Abel down to Zechariah. The Zechariah that Jesus refers to was killed between the altar and the house of God or the court of the temple. Abel's death was the first murder in human history and it is recorded in Genesis 4:1-8.

But who is the Zechariah to whom Jesus refers? This is an issue since there are as many as 26 different Zechariahs in the Old Testament.¹³ Matthew 23:34-35 gives us more information about this Zechariah.

Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Matthew 23:34-35 (NASB)

The gospel of Matthew states that the Zechariah whom Jesus refers to is the prophet Zechariah who wrote the prophecy we call Zechariah (Zechariah 1:1, 7). However, 2 Chronicles 24:20-22 records that Zechariah, son of Jehoiada, was murdered in the temple court. There are no biblical records of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, dying in the courtyard. This would appear to be a problem of confusion. Consequently, there are a number of proposed solutions to explain this apparent discrepancy.

- *Textual Error* - Some have suggested that there is a textual error in the Greek manuscript and the Matthew passage should read the "son of Jehoiada" and not "son of Berechiah."
- *Zechariah, son of Berechiah* - Others think that the Zechariah Jesus referred to was the prophet Zechariah,

and that he was murdered in the court, even though scripture does not record it. This explanation is possible since scripture does not record everything. For example, most of the details Jesus' life are not recorded.

- *Zechariah, son of Johoiada* - Most likely the Zechariah whom Jesus refers to is the Zechariah recorded in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22. It is not uncommon in the Old Testament for a man's grandfather to be referred to as his father. Note that Zechariah 1:1 states that Zechariah's father was "the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo." Then in Ezra 6:14 we are told that Zechariah was the son of Iddo, skipping any reference to Berechiah. Therefore, it is possible that Zechariah was a descendant of Berechiah, Iddo and Johoiada. This seems to be the most likely solution. This is also consistent with the layout of the Jewish scriptures called *The Tanakh* since the first book in the Tanakh is Genesis and the last book is Chronicles (1 and 2 Chronicles). Abel's murder is the first recorded and Zechariah is the last recorded murder in the Tanakh. That is, the religious leaders did not like the prophets from the beginning to the end.

3RD WOE TO THE LAWYERS. Jesus' last woe of rebuke is that they did not understand the Bible because they did not know how to understand the Bible.

Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering." Luke 11:52 (NASB)

The Greek word that Jesus used for "key" is *kleis*. The word refers to a method for acquiring something. The Sadducees and Pharisees had memorized much if not all of the Old Testament or the Tanakh. Yet they did not understand it. For example, in Matthew 22:29 Jesus said this to the Sadducees,

But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. Matt. 22:29 (NASB)

13. Herbert Lockyer. All the Men of the Bible. Zondervan Books. 1958. pp. 343-345.

Imagine how the Sadducees must have felt. They had the Pentateuch memorized, but Jesus revealed that they did not understand what they had memorized. Why? They were not empowered by the Holy Spirit to help them understand scripture (Jude 19; 1 Corinthians 2:12-14) and they did not understand scripture literally. They read the scriptures and then tried to understand it symbolically and figuratively. They would even assign numbers to each Hebrew letter and then conclude the sum of the letters implied some special meaning. They would quote fellow rabbis as the authority for understanding passages of scripture. Thus they appealed to tradition as the basis for understanding scripture (Matthew 15:3, 6) rather than grapple with the plain, literal meaning of the scriptures.

Consequently, they did not understand and could not know how to have eternal life. One good example was Nicodemus, a religious leader (John 3:1) and teacher (John 3:10). We are told that he did not understand how to have eternal life (John 3:1-2). The rich young ruler did not know how to have eternal life (Luke 18:18-27). He was a ruler in the Sanhedrin Council.

In Matthew 23:15 Jesus rebuked the Pharisees that their converts were going to hell.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. Matthew 23:15 (NASB)

They believed that rule-keeping would take them to heaven. They focused on the external and not their heart. Jesus told the woman at the well that we must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23). Instead, they worshiped with external ritual. Notice Romans 10:9 says salvation by faith is a heart issue and not the keeping of rules, regulations and the Ten Commandments.

... if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. Romans

10:9-10 (NASB)
Woe To The Pharisees

THE PHARISEES REVEAL THEIR HEART. One would think that the Pharisees would have responded with introspection, sorrow and even remorse. Instead, they wanted to murder Him.

When He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, plotting against Him to catch Him in something He might say. Luke 11:53-54 (NASB)

We are told that Jesus left the meeting. The Greek word that is translated as “left” comes from the root word *exerchomai* and it has the meaning of “to come out of.” It refers to leaving an enclosed two or three dimensional area. We should remember that Jesus had been invited to a meal (Luke 11:37). We were also told that scribes and Pharisees were in attendance at this meal. That is, Jesus and the scribes ate together in an interior room or outside in the courtyard.

Therefore, we are told that once Jesus left the group, they became hostile. The Greek word for hostile is *enecho*. It has the sense of hostility combined with antagonism. It can be translated as “hold a grudge against someone.”¹⁴ That word reveals these scribes, which included the lawyers, and the Pharisees wanted to hurt Christ in some way. The phrase “and question Him closely on many subjects” indicates that on subsequent occasions these religious leaders challenged Jesus with questions with the hope that Jesus would stumble in His reply.

The Greek words for “plotting” and “catch” are *enedreuo* and *thereuo*. These are hunting words. The first word means “to lie in wait for, to prepare a trap.”¹⁵ The second word means “to catch or to ensnare” as in a net. That is, these religious leaders plotted against Jesus with trick questions hoping to catch Him in a mistake. They wanted to trap Him and kill Him. Matthew 22:23-40 provides a great example of trick questions.

CONCLUSION. This study reminds me of a man who was known by many in the congregation for his critical,

14. Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. Christian Copyrights. 1983, 216.

15. Ibid. p. 215.

complaining spirit. He had his own idea as to how other Christians should live their lives. One day he invited me to breakfast. When I asked him if there was some special topic that we wanted to discuss, he just laughed and said he just wanted to have breakfast. Eventually, the day of the breakfast came and we sat down together at a table in a restaurant. Shortly after we placed our order, he launched into a series of criticisms about me and other church members. After breakfast I left realizing that he had caught me in a trap and I had been ambushed!

The Pharisees and lawyers, a subset of the scribes, were lacking in love and grace. They did not really love God. They were committed to religious rules and ritual. They were people who lacked a relationship with God. They assumed that God was interested in external behavior. They failed to realize that God wants our hearts. God wants us to know Him (Jeremiah 9:23-24) and to love Him (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Matthew 22:36-40). Let's know Him, love Him and serve Him.