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SHORT TITLE

MATTHEW 23: JESUS' POLEMIC

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Theological Studies, St. Louis,
Department of Biblical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Theology

By
[Name]

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MATTHEW 23: THE COMPREHENSIVE
POLEMIC OF JESUS CHRIST

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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CHAPTER I

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CHAPTER I

THE OBJECTIVES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Artists, poets, and preachers sometimes tend to picture Jesus as sweetness and love personified. Such a picture, which apparently arises out of an emotional response to Jesus as Savior, is valid only to the extent that it recognizes other significant aspects of the work and mission of Jesus. He is indeed the Savior of men, but His role as Teacher of men is certainly as central in a properly balanced picture of Him. Matthew must be credited with passing on extensive and meaningful material which presents Jesus the Teacher. In this evangelist's picture of the Teacher it is clear that Jesus was greatly concerned about the proclamation of truth and equally aroused by any attempt to undermine that truth. There is no lack of material that illustrates Jesus' positive teaching on the nature of the kingdom He is establishing, of His role in God's plan, of the relation of man to God, of the role of God's children among men, of the function of the law, of the nature of discipleship, and many more specific areas. There is furthermore a significant amount of material which illustrates how Jesus attacks erroneous positions, defends His own teaching, and discredits those who would oppose Him. It is such an extended statement of the Teacher, a statement of attack and criticism recorded by Matthew, that is the subject matter of this paper.

The writer intends to establish the thesis that the twenty-third chapter of Matthew's Gospel is in the structure of his Gospel and in the public ministry of Jesus a comprehensive polemic of our Lord, bringing together into an extended discourse all of the basic errors of the religious system officially taught among the Jews of His time.

The history of the scribal-Pharisaic movement will be traced from its beginnings to the time that it stood unrivaled, after the destruction of the Temple. The nature of the countless legal prescriptions, which are the chief concern and the major product of the movement, will be observed. The protests by the group as it met with Jesus in the synagogues and in the countryside of Palestine will be noted. The issues that come from these clashes will be traced to their climax in the Temple polemic, the form and text of which are discussed in some detail. The conclusion of it all is that Jesus and the Pharisees stood in essential conflict, for the teachers of the Jews had reduced the practice of religion to a series of hypocritical observances which blindly failed to see the will of God and the person of the Messiah. Because the scribes and Pharisees had removed themselves and their disciples from the kingdom, they are summarily rejected and given over to the judgment of Gehenna.

Although the opinions of some who disagree are stated and evaluated, the integrity of the evangelist in accurately recording a discourse in its correct setting is assumed in

this study, and suggestions that the evangelist has collected sayings, misplaced them, and even added to them content which is not representative of Jesus are rejected. In keeping with this assumption, the writer has found it unnecessary to engage in a search for the one from whom the invectives first came. Because of the same assumption, no attempt is made to validate the attitudes and activities which Jesus ascribes to the scribes and Pharisees; they have not been misrepresented.

In his use of rabbinic writings, this writer has attempted to work with the caution suggested by Loewe that the reader be guided not only by the fact that the written material is quite late in origin but also by the fact that these writings have a period of oral transmission behind them and represent points of view which go back long before the process of codification began. Thus one can neither generalize on their comparatively late origin in the form known to us nor on the likelihood that they are entirely representative of a much earlier age. These writings are an essentially reliable witness to the thought of the era with which this paper is concerned to the extent that they apparently transmit subject matter with care.¹

Because the study depends on Matthew's statement of the polemic, the writer has limited his study of the conflict which precedes the climax to the incidents which Matthew

¹ L. G. Montefiore and Herbert Loewe, A Rabbinic Anthology (New York: Meridian Books, n.d.), pp. 709-13.

records. It is, after all, on the content and structure of Matthew's Gospel that the thesis, to a large degree, depends.

In the historical study of the scribes and Pharisees in times preceding the ministry of our Lord, the writer has attempted to use sources that avoid prejudice against the movement. As a matter of fact, it is evident in many of the sources used that their authors intend to defend the Pharisees in their teaching and goals. All historians of this period are dependent to a major degree on Josephus, who at times is apparently less objective and accurate than would be desirable. Nonetheless, it is on Josephus and those who represent him that the writer's historical sketches stand.

"Comprehensive polemic" intends to say that Jesus attacks the teaching and life of the scribes and Pharisees at its very basis. The polemic is also "comprehensive" in that it includes not a sect of Judaism but the theological position of the bulk of the Jews, who looked to the scribes and Pharisees for their examples and ideals. Furthermore, the polemic is "comprehensive" in the structure of Matthew's Gospel because it represents every issue that had previously been a cause of conflict. Finally, the polemic is "comprehensive" in that it is uncompromising in the judgment it announces.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE AND HISTORY OF THE SCRIBAL-PHARISAIC MOVEMENT

The discourse of Matthew 23 attacks the scribes and Pharisees, both in critical statements about them and in denunciations directed to them. Thus it becomes a concern of the interpreter to determine the exact nature of these groups, including their history and characteristic theological positions, the similarities or dissimilarities that may be noted as they are compared with other Jewish groups, and finally, the percentage of the Jewish populace which is being addressed, either explicitly or implicitly, under these names. The writer proposes first to sketch briefly the history of each group, then to treat them jointly in stating their major theological bias, and finally to describe the influence of the scribes and Pharisees over the people in general.

The Origin of the Name "Pharisee"

Often it is true that one may learn much about the nature of a particular party or group through a study of the name by which it is known. Unfortunately, this is not the case with the Pharisees, for etymology has no addition to make to what

is known of the Pharisees from historical sources."¹ The difficulty is twofold: (1) one cannot state conclusively in what sense the term is applicable to the group, (2) nor can it be established whether the Pharisees chose this name for themselves or whether others bestowed it on them. Surely it is possible that it may be a name which they assumed; on the other hand, "such an appellation might have been bestowed on them in a derogatory sense by those who resented their pretensions to superior purity or were otherwise prejudiced against them."² Apparently, any fixed conclusions on the basis of the name are therefore impossible; yet many theories seem applicable and one of them probably represents a correct conclusion.

The Greek term *Φαρισαῖος* is derived from the Hebrew *פְּרִישִׁי* from the verb *פָּרַשׁ*.³ A Hebrew lexicon states the root meaning of this verb as "to make distinct."⁴ One may safely conclude on this basis that the term describes a person who

¹George Foot Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), I, 62.

²Ibid., I, 61.

³R. Travers Herford, "Pharisees," The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, edited by Isaac Landman (Revised edition; New York: Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Company, c.1948), VIII, 474.

⁴Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, editors, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Corrected edition; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 831. Hereafter this work will be referred to as BDB.

is somehow separated. But in what particulars? And from whom?

It might be suggested that the name simply describes the separation of this group from the heathen who had invaded their land and surrounded them. However, Eaton concludes that the term connoted "something more specific than the separation from the Gentiles, which, since the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, was characteristic of all who would be genuine Jews."⁵ Actually God willed such separation for His people long before the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (Lev. 20:26; Deut. 7).

It has also been suggested that the name refers to the separation which marked off the Pharisees from the Sadducees. Herford reports this suggestion but quickly adds his opinion that the term "was probably known and used before that separation took place."⁶ But since Herford does not specify the date of origin of the term nor the date of the separation to which he refers, evaluation both of the suggestion and of Herford's negative reaction is impossible.

Eaton and Herford come to a common conclusion on the nature of the separation. Eaton says, "It referred to their separation from the great mass of even their orthodox country-

⁵David Eaton, "Pharisees," Dictionary of the Bible, edited by James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1898), III, 826.

⁶Herford, op. cit., VIII, 474.

men."⁷ Herford concurs when he says that they "separated themselves from the less observant portion of the population."⁸ Moore agrees that the above explanation of separation is "commonly inferred" and has probable validity.⁹ Prince states that this meaning of the term is "perfectly clear."¹⁰

It would seem that a consensus of opinion has been reached. However, Graetz states very explicitly that the "Pharisees received their name from the fact of their explaining the Scriptures in a peculiar manner, and of deriving new laws from this new interpretation."¹¹ Moore also allows that the verb שָׁרַף might mean "not only 'separate,' but 'distinguish,' or 'express distinctly,' and so, 'interpret.'"¹² The special connotation of the term "Pharisees" then might be "the exegetes." With this possibility the lexicon agrees.¹³

⁷Eaton, op. cit., III, 826.

⁸Herford, op. cit., VIII, 474.

⁹Moore, op. cit., I, 60.

¹⁰J. D. Prince, "Scribes and Pharisees," Encyclopedia Biblica, edited by T. K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1903), IV, 4322.

¹¹H. Graetz, History of the Jews (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, c.1893), II, 17-18.

¹²Moore, op. cit., I, 62.

¹³BDB, p. 831. The lexicon lists "declare" and "explain" as possible meanings.

However, the objection is made that the form of the name Pharisee "is not what this theory would require."¹⁴

The two possible root meanings of the Hebrew term, and the several semi-valid theories that are based on each, make a conclusive solution to the first problem impossible. The choice of theory would be better guided if one knew whether the Pharisees chose the name for themselves or whether their enemies applied it to them in some derogatory sense; but there is no conclusive evidence here either. It is a matter of record that the Pharisees sometimes called themselves the **אֶרְבֵּי**, brethren, a name which would imply that they were the genuine Israelites, members of the true congregation of Israel.¹⁵ The name **פְּרִישִׁים** could be equally complimentary, and thus chosen by the Pharisees, or it could be quite derogatory, and thus chosen by the Sadducees or other rivals of the Pharisees.

In the absence of conclusive information, one must hesitatingly be content with Herford's conclusion: "The name, whatever it really means, is probably nothing more than a party epithet having no close connection with the principles of those to whom it was applied."¹⁶

¹⁴Herford, op. cit., VIII, 474.

¹⁵Eaton, op. cit., III, 826.

¹⁶Herford, op. cit., VIII, 474.

A Brief History of the Pharisees

Just as the linguist has difficulty in isolating the exact sense in which the name "Pharisees" is applicable to the group, so the historian has difficulty in discovering the exact time of the origin of this remarkable group which very quickly became the most influential of Jewish parties. There is simply no record of the origin and the antecedents of the Pharisees. It seems safe to conclude, however, that although the group makes its first appearance as a distinct party during the latter half of the second century B.C., it represents tendencies which can be traced much farther back in Jewish history.¹⁷ It is most unlikely that a group with the organization and strength and popular appeal of the Pharisees at the time of Hyrcanus should have suddenly sprung up without antecedent movements or a rather long period of development.

Certain Jewish writers contend that the movement of Pharisaic ideals began at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and that the specific Pharisaic movement was a natural outgrowth of the exclusiveness which these men enforced.¹⁸ But to make Nehemiah a Pharisee and Eliashab a Sadducee (see Nehemiah 13) is far from legitimate. Events of their time indicate that already then there was a division of tendencies, one to

¹⁷Eaton, op. cit., III, 821.

¹⁸Moore, op. cit., I, 57.

exclusiveness, the other to assimilation of pagan culture. But the victory of Nehemiah "was the victory of Judaism generally, not of Judaism in its specific Pharisaic form."¹⁹ One is forced to find the beginning of the specific party spirit which led to Pharisaism somewhat later.

During the period of enforced Hellenization among the Jews under the strong hands of the Seleucids, Hellenism apparently made considerable progress both among the priests²⁰ and among the Jewish people generally.²¹ These Hellenizers among the Jews probably did not intend to become apostates from the Jewish religion, but wanted to remove the narrowness from Judaism and to become more tolerant so that they might participate in the advantages of Greek culture.²² Apparently this seemed logical enough to many until the atrocities of Antiochus began. Then the mass of the people began to fear the end toward which Hellenism might lead, and a reaction movement started.²³ This reaction movement had a nationalistic character from the beginning and certainly was fanned into a powerful glow by the rumblings for Jewish independence

¹⁹Eaton, op. cit., III, 321.

²⁰II Maccabees 4:14f.

²¹I Maccabees 1:11ff.

²²Eaton, op. cit., III, 322.

²³Ibid.

which were a part of the period.

Very shortly this defensive feeling took form in the party of the Chasidim. Their emphases were both nationalistic and pietistic. In keeping with the first, they were willing to fight even on the Sabbath day; in keeping with the second, they struggled everywhere for an absolute adherence to the old law.²⁴ Actually such a party in many respects would be as old as Judaism itself, but the conditions of the time seem to have crystallized the leanings of certain men and brought them together into a distinct company, resolved to stand by the threatened law.²⁵ They found two objects of their criticism: the hated Seleucids, who threatened from without, and the worldly and indifferent among their countrymen, even among the priests. Certainly they suffered from no lack of popularity among the masses of their countrymen. They raised the Maccabees to power; they were devoted to Judaism in its highest form. Surely all of those who were interested in the liberation of their faith and their country rallied around such leadership.²⁶ After the Chasidim involved

²⁴Max Weber, Ancient Judaism, translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952), p. 385. This fighting on the Sabbath was during the time of Judas Maccabeus (I Macc. 2:29-44).

²⁵Eaton, op. cit., III, 322.

²⁶Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (New American edition; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), I, 96.

themselves with the Maccabean struggle, doubtlessly their following became even stronger and more devoted, for conquest and religious revival, both popular among the Jews, seem to have gone hand in hand. Moore characterizes the period as follows:

The wars in which the Jews engaged, first for religious liberty, then for the independence of Judaea, and finally for the reconquest of the whole land of Israel, aroused an aggressive national spirit which was reflected in religion. Triumphant Judaism was under no temptation to assimilate itself to the religions of the heathen over whom its God had given it the victory. Some enthusiasts saw in the events of the time the Lord's deliverance foretold in ancient prophecies and the dawning of the yet more glorious day that was to follow. The Jews in other lands shared in this exaltation of spirit. As in older times, the triumphs of the Lord were a revival of religion, in the sense, at least, of enthusiasm for it and heightened loyalty to it.²⁷

It is commonly surmised that the Pharisees were the successors of this group. With this opinion this writer has no quarrel, except that it is apparently a mistake to assume that the Chasidim simply changed their name to the Perushim and thus the Pharisees were on the scene as the dominant party. Bright and Edersheim report that the later bearing of the Maccabees alienated the nationalists, the Chasidim, and subsequently the party sinks out of view.²⁸ Then when fresh national calamities arose, a new nationalistic party

²⁷Moore, op. cit., I, 56.

²⁸John Bright, A History of Israel (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), p. 449; Edersheim, op. cit., I, 96. For both authors the end of the Chasidim is apparently deduced from the absence of later references to them.

was awakened and fell into immediate conflict with the Maccabean sympathizers; thus the Pharisees and the Sadducees have their real beginning, in the form in which they are later known, during the time of Jonathan.²⁹ If the above is an accurate report of history, one must conclude that the Pharisees were neither a group of original thinkers which rose in the middle of the second century B. C., nor were they the obvious children of a former Jewish movement. The Chasidim were surely the progenitors of the Pharisees in thought and emphasis, but the two parties are reactions to slightly different difficulties and the second does not grow without interruption out of the first.

History records none of the activities of the Pharisees until the time of Hyrcanus, shortly before the beginning of the first century B. C. Josephus reports that Hyrcanus was a disciple of the Pharisees and that they loved him greatly.³⁰ Surely this would indicate that the party has some previous history of indefinite duration of which little is known. Apparently, both the Pharisees and Sadducees existed as groups at the time of Hyrcanus, for Graetz reports that Hyrcanus was able to use both parties according to their special skills

²⁹Edersheim, op. cit., I, 96.

³⁰Josephus, Ant. XIII, x, 5, cited according to the edition of Benedictus Niese, editor, Flavii Iosephi Opera (Second edition; Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1955), III, 204. Hereafter volume and page references to this edition will be given in par., e.g. (Niese, III, 204).

and interests, the Sadducees as soldiers and diplomats, the Pharisees as teachers of the law and judges.³¹ In turn, both parties honored him, the one "as the head of the state, the other as the pious high priest."³² However, after Hyrcanus had become old, he apparently broke his ties with the Pharisees in a fit of anger which, according to Josephus' somewhat fanciful story of intrigue, was occasioned by the slandering of his good name by a Pharisee.³³ Josephus reports that Hyrcanus went so far as to abolish the decrees which the Pharisees had imposed upon the people and to punish those that observed them.³⁴ Other historians doubt the accuracy of all of the details of the story, but agree that in the time of Hyrcanus the Pharisees had reached full party status and that they broke decisively with the Maccabees.³⁵

Under Alexander Jannaeus, the son of Hyrcanus, the struggle between the Pharisees and the Hasmonians was at its peak. Apparently, the masses of the people sympathized with the Pharisees, or at least shared the concerns of the Pharisees. At any rate, once at a Feast of Tabernacles where

³¹Graetz, op. cit., II, 31.

³²Ibid.

³³Josephus, Ant. XIII, x, 5-6 (Niese, III, 204-06).

³⁴Ibid. Josephus also credits this incident with being responsible for all of the subsequent hatred of the people for the Hasmonians.

³⁵E.g., Eaton, op. cit., III, 823.

Alexander was officiating as high priest, the crowd became convinced that he was being negligent in the ritual and began to throw things and slander him, leading to six thousand deaths at the hands of his mercenaries. Later there was a general rebellion against him, very bloody and long. Finally Alexander "celebrated his triumph by the crucifixion of 800 prisoners at Jerusalem," leading to the flight of eight thousand more who feared a similar fate.³⁶ Moore expresses some doubt that the Pharisees were involved in any of this since none of the sources mention them as agitators or belligerents during this period of strife.³⁷ Josephus, however, seems to imply that the old Pharisaic complaint that the Maccabees were descendants of a captive continues through this period.³⁸ Certainly the issues involved in the struggle would be a concern to the Pharisees, and, furthermore, Eaton reports that "Jannaeus was a man of such an utterly worthless character that he very soon alienated the people from him and made them sympathize with the Pharisees."³⁹ This writer would conclude that the Pharisees certainly were involved in these struggles and had the majority opinion on their side, although

³⁶Moore, op. cit., I, 63-65.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Josephus, Ant. XIII, xiii, 5 (Niese, III, 220).

³⁹Eaton, op. cit., III, 824.

the power still lay with the anti-Pharisaic ruler.

There is some question, then, whether the masses of the people were forced to revise their thinking to any great degree when Alexandra not only legalized Pharisaism but also commanded the populace to obey the Pharisees. At any rate, the rule of Alexandra was the beginning of a new era for the Pharisees, for under her they had not only popularity but also official sanction. It seems that Alexandra acted on the deathbed advice of her husband to "let the Pharisees do anything that they pleased."⁴⁰ Josephus summarizes the situation as it developed under Alexandra when he says, "She governed other people, and the Pharisees governed her."⁴¹ In keeping with the royal favor which the Pharisees now enjoyed, the teachings which had been peculiarly theirs now became a part of the national legislation, for Alexandra "restored all the ordinances that the Pharisees had introduced in accordance with ancient tradition and her father-in-law Hyrcanus had annulled."⁴² The exact nature of the detail of their regulations and ordinances at this time is not recorded, but if it is true that the books of Judith and Tobit

⁴⁰Moore, op. cit., I, 65.

⁴¹Josephus, BJ I, v, 2 (Niese, VI, 26). Translation is from William Whiston, translator, The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus (Philadelphia: The John G. Winston Company, 1957), p. 614.

⁴²Moore, op. cit., I, 65.

give some indication of the situation at this time, then one would conclude that "much of which we otherwise know only in the rabbinical sources of the first and second centuries of our era was custom and law in the preceding centuries."⁴³

Conclusions about the position of the Pharisees during the unsettled years under Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II must be reached largely by inference forward from the time of Alexandra and backward from the time of Herod. Surely it is historically sound to conclude that the tremendous prestige of the Pharisees in government and in the Sanhedrin at the time of Alexandra was short lived. Josephus makes a revealing comment about the reaction of Aristobulus II to the situation under his mother's rule when he reports that Aristobulus was displeased at what was done and had determined to change things if he had the opportunity.⁴⁴ Nothing contradicts the opinion that he remained firm in his resolve until he was able to enact it. There is indeed some evidence that he expelled Pharisees from the positions they held.⁴⁵

This historical sketch has now arrived at the time when Roman influence becomes very direct in Palestine. Certainly the Pharisees would have little respect for men who accepted

⁴³Ibid., I, 71.

⁴⁴Josephus, Ant. XIII, xvi, 2 (Niese, III, 228).

⁴⁵Weber, op. cit., p. 391.

Roman settlements for their affairs. Thus if the Pharisees had experienced the disfavor of the Hasmonean rulers, one can be quite sure that the rulers now experienced the disfavor and open disapproval of the Pharisees. The Psalms of Solomon were apparently composed in a single generation in the middle of this first century B. C., for their historical allusions and dominant ideas fit the period exactly.⁴⁶ Furthermore, they are certainly Pharisaic in origin, for they fit the spirit and interests of the Pharisees exactly.⁴⁷ These Psalms, then, are primary sources for the attitude of the Pharisees toward their rulers and countrymen at the time, as well as for the emphases of Pharisaic teaching at the time. The Psalms make the charge that the "sinners," that is, the non-pious group which was apparently made up of the entire nation except for the "righteous" Pharisees, had experienced a kind of prosperity which led to insolence and false security.⁴⁸ These and other charges are apparently directed at least in part to the monarchy, which is said to be non-Davidic and therefore not legitimate.⁴⁹ Certainly the king

⁴⁶R. H. Charles, editor, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1913), II, 628-30. This conclusion is reached on both linguistic and historical grounds.

⁴⁷ibid.

⁴⁸Psalm of Solomon 1, ibid., II, 631.

⁴⁹Psalm of Solomon 17, ibid., II, 647-51.

and his followers are all declared to be cowardly in the performance of righteousness and justice and are explicitly named sinners.⁵⁰ The period before Herod is characterized, then, as one in which the rulers and the Pharisees felt a mutual antagonism for each other, resulting in a loss of Pharisaic prestige in high places. That they had lost the love of their countrymen, however, seems to be not allowed by the situation revealed at the time of Herod the Great and the ministry of our Lord.

In discussing the Pharisees at the time of Herod the Great, Josephus, in a section that seems to seek Roman approval, suggests that the Pharisees were capable of strongly opposing kings, and that they refused to give their assurance of their good will to Caesar and to the government that he had established.⁵¹ Of Herod it is known that he was not given to affection for those who did not cooperate with his interests. Pharisaic influence in the palace was surely limited. Yet the influence of the Pharisees in the palace was not totally absent, for Josephus reports that Herod's in-laws were deceptively ensnared by this party, and that they sometimes paid the fines that were imposed upon the

⁵⁰E.g., Psalm of Solomon 17:21-22: "From the chief of them to the least (of them) all were sinful; the king was a transgressor, and the judge disobedient, and the people sinful." Translation by G. Buchanan Gray, *ibid.*, II, 649.

⁵¹Josephus, *Ant.* XVII, ii, 4 (Niese, IV, 77).

Pharisees by the king.⁵²

Pharisaism gained in prominence among the Jews after this time until finally the group was without a strong rival party. Weber states this final triumph as follows:

Their final rule began with the fall of the Temple: then all Judaism became Pharisaic, the Sadducees became a heterodox sect. Even before this the transformation of religious authority had begun, a transformation decisive for their rule. The hereditary aristocracy had to give way before the aristocracy of the learned.⁵³

Moore credits the final victory of the Pharisees largely to the influence of a rabbi prominent after 70 A. D., Johanan ben Zakkai. This man was a Pharisee surrounded with prominent disciples and colleagues from the same party, as well as a council that was purely Pharisaean.⁵⁴ Regardless of the specific cause or influence, Pharisaism reigned supreme after the destruction of Jerusalem, and had tended in that direction for some decades before.

The Pharisees also have an interesting history of internal development. This history is much more difficult to uncover, however. Two prominent schools of Pharisaism that arose at about the time of Herod can not be overlooked: the Shammaites and the Hillelites. The names are taken respectively from Shammai and Hillel, two very influential contemporary rabbis of that time. In many particulars these men

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Weber, op. cit., p. 391.

⁵⁴Moore, op. cit., I, 85.

and their respective disciples had opposing points of view. Shammai was a native Judaeen, while Hillel came to Jerusalem from Babylonia when already a mature man. Briefly stated, the school of Shammai was made up of enthusiasts for the authority of the tradition of the elders while the school of Hillel is chiefly responsible for certain changes and adaptations of hermeneutical norms to find Scriptural support for binding points of view through deduction and analogy. During the ministry of our Lord the Shammaites were apparently more numerous, but after the fall of Jerusalem the Hillelites reach ultimate predominance.⁵⁵

The history of the Pharisees is one of ups and downs, but the ultimate result of their influence on Judaism was that it became Pharisaic almost in its entirety. Weber characterizes their history very succinctly:

Under John Hyrcanus they constituted a powerful party; Salome Alexandra delivered the Sanhedrin up to them; Aristobulus expelled them again; Herod sought to win their good will. Their final rule began with the fall of the Temple.⁵⁶

Biblical Usage of the Term "Scribe"

The term *γραμματεὺς* is used very frequently in the Septuagint; thus the Old Testament use of the term can be

⁵⁵This information and more is given in ibid., I, 77-85, q. v. for an excellent discussion of these schools.

⁵⁶Weber, op. cit., p. 391.

traced. The Septuagint translators use *γραμματεὺς* to translate different Hebrew terms and therefore to describe different functions. The term is used to translate derivatives of רָשָׁף and derivatives of רָפָה . The lexicon lists uses of the participle form רָשָׁף as a term to describe the prefects of the people of Israel in Egypt and in the desert, and to describe magistrates in the towns of Palestine.⁵⁷ Thus it is the name of a civil or, in some instances, military official. As a translation of רָשָׁף therefore, *γραμματεὺς* has little of its usual or expected connotation. But it is also the translation of רָפָה , the participle of רָפָה . This term describes the act of counting or taking account of. The participle describes a secretary, one who musters rolls, and the like. Finally, in uses in Jeremiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah it describes a person skilled in sacred writings.⁵⁸ There is a definite development in the use of the term רָפָה and thus in its translation *γραμματεὺς*.

In the use of the term as a title for Ezra the meaning begins to border on the New Testament connotation, although surely with no stigma attached. In the New Testament the term is used most often in conjunction with Pharisees, although on occasion without association with a party group, and on rare occasions with the Sadducees. It is virtually

⁵⁷BDB, p. 1009.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 707-08.

always used in the plural. It describes those men who had made acquaintance with the law a profession and who were the recognized teachers of the people.

A Brief History of the Scribes

A history of the scribes in form and scope parallel to the history of the Pharisees is impossible for two reasons: (1) Before the emergence of the Pharisees, the scribes are in no sense a group that acted and spoke collectively; and (2) After the emergence of the Pharisees, they are so nearly identified with this group that they have no separate history. If the term "scribe" be used as descriptive of a student and teacher of the law, such men must have existed from the time of Moses, for the necessity of such people in Jewish society, for whom the law stood central in faith and life, is obvious. But whether such a scribe would have been a professional man who devoted his entire life to legal studies is not known. Apparently not, however, for law study and application was the work of the priests until the time of Ezra and after.⁵⁹ Weber suggests, furthermore, that the Jewish rabbi sought his living from other sources in times even more modern than these.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Emil Schttrer, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, translated by Sophia Taylor and Peter Christie (Second edition; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), II, i, 313.

⁶⁰ Weber, op. cit., p. 460.

The Scriptures report that Ezra gave special attention to the study and teaching and interpretation of the law because of the needs of his time. Perhaps a tradition for assemblies at which various men filled the role of law teacher began with him. But there is still no evidence that the scribes were an organized group of professional men even after the death of Ezra. Prince says,

The first thing which tended to turn the religious students called Scribes into a fierce politico-religious faction was the attempts of Antiochus Epiphanes. . . . to Hellenize the entire Jewish people.⁶¹

Thus the appearance of the scribes as a group is concurrent with the appearance of the Chasidim, and with the exception of some of them, their history is subsequently that of the Chasidim, and later the Pharisees.⁶²

The scribes and Pharisees had common aims; they were naturally aligned to each other. They grew to a position of primacy together. Schürer says,

As Pharisaism rests upon the foundation of the law as developed by the scribes, so did it also in its turn govern the farther development of Jewish law. When the Pharisaic party had once been formed as such, all the more famous scribes, at least all those who influenced the later development, proceeded from its midst. There were indeed Sadducean scribes. But their work has left no trace behind it in history. All the influential scribes belonged to the Pharasaic party. This may be assumed as self-evident, and is confirmed by the fact, that the few cases in which

⁶¹Prince, op. cit., IV, 4327.

⁶²CE. Schürer, op. cit., II, i, 313, for an overview.

the party position of the scribes is named, they are as a rule designated as Pharisees.⁶³

This writer has found no disagreement with the judgment that the scribes antedate the Pharisees and had begun to formulate the body of tradition to which the Pharisees were later attracted. Furthermore, there is no disagreement with the statement that the Pharisees controlled the further development of Jewish legal tradition, once the scribes and Pharisees were aligned together.

The scribes were then the group of Jews who were professionally devoted to the study and exposition of the law. Surely then, there was always a close tie between the scribes and Pharisees; from the beginning of the Pharisaic party, its leaders must have been orthodox scribes.⁶⁴

Unique Teachings of the Scribal-Pharisaic Movement

When Josephus states that he himself was a member of the Pharisees, he characterizes the party as being related to the Greek Stoics.⁶⁵ One who realizes the characteristics of the Jewish party and of the Greek philosophy would conclude that they were very remote cousins, if at all related. Perhaps Josephus is simply trying to represent his party favorably to the Romans. It is the opinion of this writer that

⁶³Ibid., II, ii, 11.

⁶⁴Prince, op. cit., IV, 4322.

⁶⁵Josephus, Vita 2 (Niese, IV, 323).

the Pharisees are quite unique in teaching and practice and method, and that they are therefore best characterized by their conflict with other parties, not by their similarities to them.

The Pharisees thought of themselves as being in the main stream of Jewish faith and practice as it had always been. Rabbinic literature, in all its length and breadth, attempts to demonstrate that the Jewish religion as interpreted by the Pharisees was continuous with the religion represented in the older parts of the Hebrew Scriptures.⁶⁶ They felt that they were following the lead of Ezra and the early scribes "in developing the idea of the Torah as the full revelation which God had made to Israel."⁶⁷ They took no credit for raising the Torah to the supreme place in Jewish life, believing that Ezra had already done that and that they were simply following his example. Such an elevation of the Torah theoretically did not divide between levels of Scriptures, for although the five books of Moses certainly became the foremost section of the written text, the prophetic writings fell into the same category, broadly conceived, for the prophets simply attempted to apply the Torah to the people of their day. In this sense, the Pharisees felt themselves

⁶⁶Herford, op. cit., VIII, 474.

⁶⁷Ibid.

to be in the tradition of the prophets.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, among the Pharisees the writings of Moses reigned supreme.

If the Pharisees held such presuppositions about the primacy of the law to be correct, it would follow quite naturally that the diligent student of the Scriptures would be primarily a student of the law. As a matter of fact, it would become the duty of the Pharisees as religious leaders to know the teachings of the Torah in detail, to obey what was there commanded, and to encourage others in such knowledge and observance. Apart from the special emphases which Pharisaism took, this was the ambition of the Pharisees.⁶⁹ If Josephus may be assumed to be representative of popular opinion, the Pharisees realized their ambition in the eyes of the people. Josephus says that they "are esteemed most skilful in the exact explication of their laws,"⁷⁰ and that they "excel all others in the accurate knowledge of the laws of their country."⁷¹

Evidently it was enthusiasm for safeguarding the law which led the Pharisees to develop an entire series of special directives and limitations which were meant to guard

⁶⁸Ibid., VIII, 474-75.

⁶⁹Ibid., VIII, 474.

⁷⁰Josephus, BJ II, viii, 14 (Niese, VI, 185). Translation from Whiston, op. cit., p. 676.

⁷¹Josephus, Vita 38 (Niese, IV, 353). Translation from Whiston, op. cit., p. 13.

against any possible infringement of the divine law.⁷² In this development they begin to separate themselves from other Jews. Moore illustrates how this worked:

Thus--to take an example from the first page of the Mishnah--things which by the letter of the law must be completed before morning, by rabbinical rule must be done before midnight, "to keep a man far removed from transgression."⁷³

All of the faithful Jews had a great reverence for the authority of the Scriptures, but if the doctrines of Pharisaism were to gain the same reverence, the next logical step for them would be to make this "barrier around the law" as binding as the law itself. Two possibilities for accomplishing this were open to the Pharisees: they could cite the Scriptures as the actual authority for all their teachings through a special method of exegesis, or they could establish a second authority. The positions of the rival schools of Hillel and Shammai, already stated, indicate that the Pharisees attempted both.

With regard to the use of Scriptures as support for precepts, the Pharisees refused to admit a break from or rejection of the Scriptures, but instead spoke of their teachings as being a "natural development" from the written Word.⁷⁴ They held that the Torah contained the full revelation

⁷²Moore, op. cit., I, 33.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Herford, op. cit., VIII, 475.

of God and that in their teachings this revelation was being drawn out and unfolded into greater clearness.⁷⁵

In fact, however, the Pharisees brought into existence a second authority. The priests had always held that only the written text of the Torah was binding and that where further directives were needed the priests would make such directives on their own authority. The Pharisees held, however, that along with the written text there was, and had been since the time of Moses, an unwritten tradition which supplied that part of God's revelation which the written text failed to state.⁷⁶ They held that this traditional material, which regulated and explained the observance of the written law, was just as binding on Jews of every generation as the written Scriptures.⁷⁷ So the Pharisees spoke of two Torahs: the written Torah, the product of Moses, and the oral Torah, resting on a continuous line of tradition "from Moses to Joshua, to the Judges, and down to the Pharisaic sages."⁷⁸

In this zeal for the unwritten law, the Pharisees distinguished themselves from other Jewish religious parties,

⁷⁵Ibid., VIII, 474.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Prince, op. cit., IV, 4323.

⁷⁸Samuel Sandmel, A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1956), pp. 25-26.

notably the Sadducees. "Scripture is the only authority, said the Sadducees; Scripture and Tradition, said the Pharisees."⁷⁹ Josephus concurs exactly:

The Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the laws of Moses; and for this reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers.⁸⁰

Because of the controversy that arose, the Pharisees were obliged to make a strong case for their point of view. Apparently they were satisfied that they had done this, for at several places the Mishnah blames all national calamities on those who interpret Scripture differently from the Pharisaic rule, and condemns such persons to eternal perdition.⁸¹ In practice, then, the oral law was actually placed above the written law. This position of the oral law is demonstrated by the Pharisees' prohibition of the reading of the Hagiographa on the Sabbath, lest attention be diverted from the things that the rabbis had to say.⁸² Edersheim says of their Halakhoth that they

⁷⁹Moore, *op. cit.*, I, 68.

⁸⁰Josephus, *Ant.* XIII, x, 6 (Niese, III, 206). Translation from Whiston, *op. cit.*, p. 397.

⁸¹Edersheim, *op. cit.*, I, 314.

⁸²*Ibid.*, I, 100.

were either simply the laws laid down in Scripture; or else derived from, or traced to it by some ingenious and artificial method of exegesis; or added to it, by way of amplification and for safety's sake; or, finally, legalized customs.⁸³

But the Pharisees stated that God had communicated them all to Moses, and explained that Moses had not written them down because God did not wish them to be in such form that they could be taken away from the Jews by their Gentile conquerors.⁸⁴ Such reasoning did not satisfy the Sadducees, but the Pharisees maintained the validity of the logic strongly, and evidently such logic seemed reasonable to a large percentage of the Jewish population.

The exact content of all this body of the traditions of the elders cannot be stated here, for it is far too extensive. Edersheim characterizes it with the following statement:

They provided for every possible and impossible case, entered into every detail of private, family, and public life; and with iron logic, unbending rigour, and most minute analysis pursued and dominated man, turn whither he might, laying on him a yoke which was truly unbearable.⁸⁵

In content, this tradition spoke to all points of the written

⁸³Ibid., I, 98.

⁸⁴Ibid., I, 99.

⁸⁵Ibid., I, 98. In this quotation from Edersheim, as in those above, the evaluative comment represents an expected bias which one would not find in Jewish apologists. But Edersheim's systematic report of the scope and nature of the multiple ordinances of the rabbis is objective and excellent.

law, and more; its purpose was to explain the law in such a way that it would be applicable to every situation, and to provide a safeguard that the provisions of the written law might remain inviolate.

The Pharisees were thus the strongly legal party among the Jews. Eaton says,

Their piety was strictly legal; the essence of religion consisted in the accurate knowledge and scrupulous observance of the law and tradition, which were the norm of all life, national, social, and individual.⁸⁶

Among themselves they required such strong adherence to their traditions that only those rabbis were given honor who strictly followed in teaching and practice what had been passed on to them by their teachers.⁸⁷ One can readily understand how such a value system can quickly degenerate into a slavish regard not only for the text of the law, but also "for a purely arbitrary supplementary oral code which had exceeded the legitimate functions and authority of tradition."⁸⁸ And such a system of values tends to allow for purely formal law observance. Even a Jewish writer admits,

Pharisaism, as a religion which lays the chief stress on obeying the declared will of God, and doing in the right way what was commanded, offers peculiar temptations to those who were content to do the outward act and took no thought for the inward motive.⁸⁹

⁸⁶Eaton, op. cit., III, 825.

⁸⁷Edersheim, op. cit., I, 98.

⁸⁸Prince, op. cit., IV, 4323.

⁸⁹Herford, op. cit., VIII, 475.

Certain specific doctrinal formulations of this sect must also be stated, especially teachings that met with direct opposition among the Sadducees. One such doctrine concerned the place of "fate" in human affairs. The Pharisees held that God was absolutely omnipotent and that His providence never failed; therefore, God's cooperation must be assumed in all human actions, be they good or bad.⁹⁰ Perhaps in order to vindicate his thesis that the Pharisees were much like the Stoics, Josephus repeatedly mentions the role of "fate" in the views of the Pharisees.⁹¹ Their opinion about the role of fate in human affairs separated the Pharisees both from the Sadducees and the Essenes, who stood respectively on the extremes of making it of no consequence and absolute. Ederšheim illustrates how the Pharisaic position worked itself out for the individual:

All that concerned his mental and physical capacity, or that would betide him, was prearranged. His name, place, position, circumstances, the very name of her whom he was to wed, were proclaimed in heaven, just as the hour of his death was foreordered. There might be seven years of pestilence in the land, and yet no one died before his time. Even if a man inflicted a cut on his finger, he might be sure that this also had been preordered.⁹²

Fate did not play such a role, however, that a man

⁹⁰Eaton, op. cit., III, 826.

⁹¹Josephus, Ant. XIII, v, 9 (Niese, III, 182); Ant. XVIII, i, 3 (Niese, IV, 142); BJ II, viii, 14 (Niese, VI, 185-86).

⁹²Ederšheim, op. cit., I, 318.

could not be held morally responsible for his own acts. Actually, the presence of evil in man was traced by the Pharisees to an innate evil yetzer (perhaps best understood as "inclination") which God had created in man alongside a good yetzer. To this extent, a man had no control over the presence of evil in himself. But since God had given the Torah as an antidote or remedy also for the control of the evil yetzer, man was declared by the Pharisees to be morally responsible for the control of this yetzer. The rabbis held the yetzer to be a strong influence which many could not combat, so undesirable that God regretted ever having created it. But it was man's obligation to reduce the influence of the evil yetzer through the application of the law and to live in hope of that life to come in which God would remove it from him entirely.⁹³ Judging from the many warnings of the rabbis and the stories of men whose evil yetzer overcame them, one must judge that it was held to be very difficult to control.

The Sadducees objected to this view, arguing that man could hardly be held responsible for his own actions if fate controlled his destiny to such a degree; divine justice would

⁹³All of these characterizations of the evil yetzer and more may be found in G. G. Montefiore and Herbert Loewe, A Rabbinic Anthology (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), pp. 295-314. These are twenty pages of selected quotations from the rabbinic writings on the subject, in the editors' words, "only a few passages" (p. 295) of the many extant statements on the subject.

become empty; the righteous man might suffer while the sinner enjoyed prosperity. The Pharisees countered with another doctrine with which the Sadducees disagreed. They held that divine justice would manifest itself after death in the rewards to the righteous and the punishment of the wicked.⁹⁴ Again the Psalms of Solomon are instructive for the views of the Pharisees.⁹⁵ Moore has stated the view of the Pharisees about the judgment and the life to come succinctly when he says of them that they believed "in the survival of the soul, the revival of the body, the great judgment, and the

⁹⁴Graetz, op. cit., II, 18-19.

⁹⁵The conclusions of Psalms of Solomon 14 and 15 are significant and are here quoted in the translation by G. Buchanan Gray as found in Charles, op. cit., II, 645-46.
Conclusion of Psalm 14:

For the ways of men are known before Him at all times,
And He knoweth the secrets of the heart before they
come to pass.

Therefore their inheritance is Sheol and darkness and
destruction,

And they shall not be found in the day when the
righteous obtain mercy;

But the pious of the Lord shall inherit life in gladness.

Conclusion of Psalm 15:

And the inheritance of sinners is destruction and
darkness,

And their iniquities shall pursue them unto Sheol
beneath.

Their inheritance shall not be found of their children,

For sins shall lay waste the houses of sinners.

And sinners shall perish for ever in the day of the
Lord's judgment.

When God visiteth the earth with His judgment.

But they that fear the Lord shall find mercy therein,

And shall live by the compassion of their God;

But sinners shall perish for ever.

life of the world to come."⁹⁶ The Sadducees rejected such a formulation on the basis of their belief that no such thing is explicitly stated in the Old Testament. Thus the dispute really centered again in the Pharisaic understanding and development of the Old Testament text in their traditions. A similar and related argument raged over the existence of angels and spirits.⁹⁷

Finally, the Pharisees were very eager cultivators of Messianic ideas, longing specifically for a temporal Messiah.⁹⁸ Evidently the Pharisaic teachings of the resurrection were as significant to them as they were because Messianic hopes were attached to these teachings. They looked forward to a time when the reign of God would break in on the kingdoms of the world and a Messianic kingdom be established in which the saints of God would be given the power of which they were now deprived.⁹⁹ The Messiah was to be the Son of David, sinless but not divine, raised up by God to deliver the people of God from oppression. He would furthermore drive out sinners from their midst so that all the participants in the kingdom would be holy, a kingdom of the sons of God on

⁹⁶Moore, op. cit., I, 68.

⁹⁷Acts 23:8.

⁹⁸Prince, op. cit., IV, 4324.

⁹⁹Eaton, op. cit., III, 326.

earth.¹⁰⁰ So that the saints who had died could participate in this kingdom, there had to be a resurrection from the dead. Furthermore, there was to be a final end of all things, a general resurrection, and a world to come.¹⁰¹

The Influence of the Movement

It has been indicated from time to time that the Pharisees were quite popular among the Jewish people. It has been noted that a number of theories suggest that their name might possibly have been given them because of their exclusiveness. Exclusiveness and popularity are indeed a strange combination, but they seem to have been found together in this group. Their exclusiveness was both by necessity and by choice. The form of holiness which they practiced and the amount of education which seemed necessary for their adherents made it almost impossible for common peasants to be received into their number.¹⁰² The Pharisees insisted that only those who were willing to shoulder the "yoke" through strict training and holiness of life, could become one of their number.¹⁰³

But their exclusiveness was also by design. A sharp line was drawn between the inner circle of Pharisees and the

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Montefiore and Loewe, op. cit., pp. 581ff.

¹⁰²Weber, op. cit., p. 390.

¹⁰³Ibid.

masses of the people, for a man became a Perusha only when he segregated himself entirely from impure persons and objects.¹⁰⁴ The Pharisees chose to remain separate even from the great mass of their "orthodox" countrymen, who were unclean in the eyes of the Pharisees because of their failure to observe all the rules of Levitical purity. Association with the ceremonially defiled would mean defilement for the man who was otherwise pure; therefore they remained entirely aloof.¹⁰⁵ So there was a voluntary segregation and exclusiveness, not only from the despised Hellenists, but also from non-observant Jews.

So sharp was this division that the Pharisees referred to all non-Pharisees with the inclusive term am ha-arets. In a situation bordering on ritualistic caste segregation, there was a fixed contrast between the Pharisaic "saints" and the am ha-arets, the ignorant men of the country who neither knew nor observed the law.¹⁰⁶ The term for the non-Pharisees was taken from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah where it refers to the heathen and half-heathen inhabitants of Palestine.¹⁰⁷ The Pharisees used the same term for those Jews who were not real Israelites, that is, not Pharisees.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 386.

¹⁰⁵Eaton, op. cit., III, 826.

¹⁰⁶Weber, op. cit., pp. 386-87.

¹⁰⁷Ezra 9:1f.; Nehemiah 10:28-31.

Knowledge or piety among non-Pharisees changed the situation not at all; unless a man washed properly before meals, carefully observed the Sabbath, and obeyed the many prescriptions of the oral law, he could be nothing more than an ha-aretz.¹⁰⁸

To add to the distinction between themselves and the vulgar herd, the Pharisees also chose for themselves a name which indicated both their close fellowship with one another and their distance from others. They called themselves the Haberin, the brothers. Again the corruption of an Old Testament term is involved. In Old Testament times every Israelite was the haber of the other; the Pharisee acknowledged as his haber only a man who scrupulously observed the law.¹⁰⁹

The only middle position for which the Pharisees allowed was that of the neeman. The association which the Pharisees formed had two ideals: to observe meticulously all the laws of Levitical purity and to contribute punctiliously all religious dues.¹¹⁰ The neeman involved himself only with the second. He agreed to tithe what he ate, what he sold, and what he bought, and he agreed never to be a guest with

¹⁰⁸Robert H. Pfeiffer, History of New Testament Times with an Introduction to the Apocrypha (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), pp. 55-56.

¹⁰⁹Eaton, op. cit., III, 326.

¹¹⁰Edersheim, op. cit., I, 311.

an an ha-aretz. The full haber undertook both Pharisaic ideals and remained even farther apart from the masses; he could carry on almost no commerce with them, nor could he entertain any common Jew while such a visitor was clothed in garments which were possibly impure.¹¹¹ Certainly then the inner circle of the Pharisees was exclusive by design.

Such exclusiveness led to hatred in certain instances, but generally the mass of the people looked up to the Pharisees with respect. So, in actuality, the Haberim, who never numbered more than a few thousand at one time, held a very significant control over the masses of Jews who did not accept their rigid discipline.¹¹² In this sense, the Pharisees were not a sect at all, for in creed the multitudes were with them. Prince says,

They were really from their first development representative of orthodox Judaism who distinguished themselves from the mass of their orthodox co-religionists rather by the strictness of their observances than by any distinction from accepted doctrine.¹¹³

They did not separate themselves from the Jewish community. They worshipped in the Temple and synagogues with their countrymen, and their views on the law and resurrection were

¹¹¹Ibid., I, 312.

¹¹²Herford, op. cit., VIII, 474.

¹¹³Prince, op. cit., IV, 4322. This would, of course, not include God's faithful, who were the real orthodox Jews.

not at all peculiar to themselves.¹¹⁴ After Pharisaism had reached a peak, the mass of the nation was inclined to it; yet, not all Jews were Pharisees because only among the rabbis and leaders were purity and law observance high enough to warrant membership in the circle. One must distinguish between the Pharisees in the narrow and broad senses: the former are the Haberim; but the Jewish population was so in sympathy with Pharisaic doctrine that broadly speaking most of the nation may be called Pharisees.¹¹⁵

During their time, the Pharisees were apparently the only group concerned about developing the religious and moral life of the people.¹¹⁶ To this end they used the synagogues and schools in every Jewish community. It follows that every Jewish family was in this way influenced by their teaching. Not all of the Pharisees were scholars, but the Pharisees found themselves in the happy position of having most of the rabbis and scribes in whole-hearted sympathy with their cause.¹¹⁷ And the rabbis and the scribes were the men of influence in the synagogue. Through this chain the Pharisees were able to use synagogues both in Palestine

¹¹⁴Eaton, op. cit., III, 327.

¹¹⁵Sandmel, op. cit., p. 161. Cf. also Moore, op. cit., I, 59.

¹¹⁶Herford, op. cit., VIII, 474. Again excluding God's faithful.

¹¹⁷Moore, op. cit., I, 66.

and in the Diaspora for the propagation of their interpretations of the Scriptures and their particular emphases. Nor was there much possibility for protest because the regulations of the scribes were not to be questioned.¹¹⁸ This transfer of the center of religious life from the Temple to the synagogue, which was soon accomplished, eventually preserved Judaism, for Pharisaic Judaism was able to continue even though the Temple was destroyed.¹¹⁹

From the beginning, Pharisaism had a natural appeal among many Jews because it had always been an opposition party to the Sadducean high-priestly rulers, who caused much dissatisfaction among the Jews.¹²⁰ The opponents of Pharisaism continued to be the aristocratic Sadducees and those whom they influenced.¹²¹ It seems that the point at issue between the two parties was never Temple worship in competition with synagogue worship, but rather a conflict of how exclusive Judaism needed to be and how the law was to be interpreted. A number of Pharisees were priests and the Pharisees had certainly included in their legislation a great many ordinances that had to do specifically with Temple functions.¹²² As a matter of fact, the Pharisees gained so

¹¹⁸Ibid., I, 33-34.

¹¹⁹Herford, op. cit., VIII, 474.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 475.

¹²¹Weber, op. cit., p. 387.

¹²²Edersheim, op. cit., I, 322.

much influence in Temple affairs that they could demand that priests live correctly in the Pharisaic sense if they were rightly to fulfill their function.¹²³

The Pharisees not only gained the upper hand in the Temple, the real domain of the Sadducees, but they bested the Sadducees in all prestige. Josephus says that the Sadducees could persuade only the rich, while the Pharisees had the multitudes on their side.¹²⁴ Moore agrees that the Sadducees had no following among the masses.¹²⁵ Even those Sadducees that sat in the Sanhedrin or held civil offices were forced to adapt the Pharisaic practices so that the multitudes would tolerate them.¹²⁶ The influence of the Pharisees was supreme in the synagogues, Temple, and among the people.

And the Pharisees wielded some influence during all of their history among the royalty of Palestine. How they fared with certain of the Hasmonean princes has already been stated. They were not entirely in sympathy with these rulers, who served also as high priests, for these monarchs were neither of the family of David nor of the legitimate high

¹²³Weber, op. cit., p. 387.

¹²⁴Josephus, Ant. XIII, x, 6 (Niese, III, 206).

¹²⁵Moore, op. cit., I, 70.

¹²⁶Edersheim, op. cit., I, 320; Josephus, Ant. XVIII, i, 4 (Niese, IV, 142-43).

priestly family.¹²⁷ The Pharisees abhorred the rule of Herod and the Romans.¹²⁸ When they refused to take the oath of allegiance to Herod, he was forced to play the politician and let it pass.¹²⁹ Actually, the Pharisees meddled little in politics and did not incite the people against Herod nor subsequent rulers. They asked only that they be left alone to practice and teach their doctrines, and rose to arms only when this was denied them.¹³⁰ The Pharisees believed that the fate of the state, like that of the individual, rested on God, not man. Man must concentrate on his moral conduct and leave the rest to God's Messiah.¹³¹ With all of this the Sadducees, of course, disagreed. But because the Pharisees tied themselves to neither the Temple nor the state, they were able to survive them both, and their influence did not lessen when both fell, never again to be restored.

Finally, the influence of the Pharisees reached the Jews of the Diaspora the world over. It was their emphasis on exclusiveness that encouraged little Jewish communities to keep themselves pure from the surrounding pagans.¹³²

¹²⁷Eaton, op. cit., III, 827.

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹Moore, op. cit., I, 76-77.

¹³⁰Ibid., I, 77.

¹³¹Graetz, op. cit., II, 18.

¹³²Eaton, op. cit., III, 823-24.

Furthermore, the Haberim had groups "in all cities where Jews lived,"¹³³ so that no Jew would have escaped their teachings.

Because of the united stand of the scribes and Pharisees, it is apparent that when Jesus addresses them, He is not addressing two groups as separate, distinct parties, groups of different theological leanings, nor even groups of different backgrounds or development. In attacking the acts and teaching of the Pharisees, He is attacking the acts and teachings of the scribes. In attacking the scribes, He is attacking the Pharisees. The scribes and Pharisees in New Testament times were, for all practical purposes, one group, teaching one body of doctrine and advocating identical practice.

And yet it must not be assumed that "scribe" is simply another name for "Pharisee." In the first place, the production of a theological viewpoint belongs more exactly to the scribes. The practicing and advocating of that viewpoint belongs more exactly to the Pharisees. The Pharisees were propagandists for the teachings of the scribes.

In the second place, the terms are descriptive in different areas. "Pharisee" is descriptive of a religious viewpoint (in modern idiom, e.g., "Methodist" or "neo-orthodox"); "scribe" is descriptive of a profession (e.g.,

¹³³Weber, op. cit., p. 386.

"theologian"). Thus the terms are not coextensive. And yet the term "scribe" suggests "Pharisee." When an ancient Jew was called a scribe, it was altogether likely that he would be a Pharisee. Scribe suggests Pharisee in much the same way that monk today suggests Roman Catholic.

Through the influence which the scribes and Pharisees exerted on the people generally, almost all the Jewish populace was drawn under the sway of their teaching and became a following for their point of view. Many of the people were, of course, non-Pharisees and non-scribes; but very few of the people were anti-Pharisees and anti-scribes. So it is clear that when Christ addressed the scribes and Pharisees, He is not addressing a segment of the Jewish people to the exclusion of the masses. He is instead addressing leaders and a point of view which the masses had adopted as their own. In a sense then, He is attacking the religion of the Jews. The writer tends to agree with Sandmel's oversimplification regarding the addressees of Matthew 23: "Although Pharisees is the term used, Jews are meant."¹³⁴

¹³⁴Sandmel, op. cit., p. 161.

CHAPTER III

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE SCRIBAL-PHARISAIC PARTY AND JESUS

The Incidents of Conflict and Statements of Difference

It is obvious from a simple reading of Matthew 23 that the rift between Jesus and the Pharisees, as it is there described, was deep. The language is strong, almost violent, and is evidence of more than a surface difference of opinion. It is also obvious that the area of difference is not limited to one or two subjects; the points of contention are many. One may conclude that there had developed between Jesus and the Pharisees a great gulf, both wide and deep.

One also finds that Matthew reports this prior history of quarreling in rather extensive detail.¹ The study of the subject matter of these exchanges makes apparent a history of growing conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, which helps the reader understand why there should have been animosity of the proportion represented in the Temple discourse. Since it is the function of this section of the paper simply

¹From the fact that Matthew devotes so large a proportion of his writing to this conflict one may safely conclude that the issues of the Jewish-Christian conflict were a major concern of the people to and for whom he wrote. His selection of so many of these incidents is surely the result of the need for clarification of the real issues.

to survey and list the issues of conflict during the ministry of Jesus, the comment on individual incidents is neither intensive nor extensive. Each incident is simply reduced to its more apparent issue or issues.

John the Baptist, the man who prepared the way for Jesus' ministry with his preaching, had already singled out the Pharisees, along with the Sadducees, for the harshest kind of law preaching (Matt. 3:7-10). He accuses them specifically of false security, warning that judgment is upon them as an axe which is already striking the root of the tree. He demands that they repent, that they prove their repentance by bearing appropriate fruit and that they stop supposing that they will escape the judgment of God because they name Abraham as their ancestor. That is to say, he destroys the false security of supposing that they are God's favorites and reduces them to the level of every other creature, a level from which God's favor cannot be demanded, a level which can expect only God's destructive wrath. Matthew does not state the reaction of the Pharisees, but they certainly did not leave John with the satisfaction of their having been complimented by him.

Shortly thereafter, Jesus Himself levels the supreme insult at the Pharisees and doctors of the law by declaring worthless that in which they supposed they excelled, the observance of the law (Matt. 5:17-20). It had been prophesied that a new covenant would be established, different from the

old, but one in which the Law would continue to play a prominent role (Jer. 31:31-34). In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus wishes to establish that His mission is not to annul the Law, but to make it binding. So emphatic is He in this point that He says no detail of the Law, no letter, not even a little mark of the Law, will pass away until such a time as everything will have been accomplished or fulfilled.

The man who sets aside even tiny parts of the Law's demands can look for only the lowest place in the kingdom of heaven. But even for this lowest place in the kingdom, performance in keeping the Law must be better by far than that of the Pharisees. The implication is very pointed. The degree of Law observance practiced by the Pharisees did not even qualify them for the lowest seat in the kingdom of heaven.²

In neither of the above instances is there any record of prior agitation by the Pharisees. Perhaps John and Jesus

²Similar statements by Paul in Romans may be noted to clarify these statements of Jesus in a way which does not allow for the charge that He outdoes the Pharisees in their own way of thinking. That Jesus' high concern for the Law is not out of character with His mission as Redeemer Paul clarifies in Rom. 3:31: "Do we then overthrow the Law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the Law." That the intended distinction in Law observance is in the kind of righteousness, Paul clarifies in Rom. 10:2-4: "For I testify that they have a zeal for God but it is uninformed. For in their ignorance of the righteousness which comes from God and in their attempt to establish their own, they have refused to submit to the righteousness which comes from God. For Christ is the end of the Law for the attainment of righteousness for everyone who believes." (The first quotation is from the RSV; the second is the writer's own translation.)

were both speaking on the basis of the record and reputation of the Pharisees, although there may have been previous skirmishes between them of which there is no record. As the ministry of Jesus progresses, however, Matthew records a number of instances in which there is actually a dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees, or in other instances at least a specific event to which a statement of protest is attached. One such occasion was that on which Jesus first forgave and then healed the paralytic (Matt. 9:1-8; Matthew does not specify that the objectors were Pharisees, but Luke in his parallel account makes this identification, Luke 5:21). The announcement of the forgiveness of sins led to an immediate protest from the scribes and Pharisees in attendance. Jesus had, in their estimate, usurped God's prerogative and this act constituted blasphemy. Jesus' response did not deny that forgiving sins is God's exclusive right, but it did insist that He, the Son of Man, had been given the authority on earth to forgive sins. This response, and the healing miracle as the proof of its validity, led the crowd to glorify God, "who had given such authority to men" (Matt. 9:8). No response by the Pharisees is stated, but they either failed to understand or refused to accept Jesus' claim to an authority given Him by His Father, for their later protests indicate that they continued to question His authority.

Another skirmish took place when Jesus attended the banquet which Matthew prepared in Jesus' honor and to which

he invited tax-collectors and other such disreputable characters (Matt. 9:10-13). The Pharisees were disturbed at Jesus' apparent lack of sound judgment in choosing His associates. Jesus discounts their criticism by stating that it is His mission to find, invite, and treat the "sick," the sinners. Besides, He finds fault with them for not using the statement, "I require mercy, not sacrifice," as a proper theme statement for rightly evaluating a man's observance of the Law. The force of the statement is that God establishes the "how" of law observance. It is a quotation of Hosea 6:6, where the statement stands in a context of God's displeasure with His people for their many sins. God's displeasure is not quieted although careful sacrifice be offered for every sin. God wants His covenant to be kept, not sacrifices to be made to cover failures. The thought is also found in I Sam. 15:22 where Saul is discredited for wishing to make numerous sacrifices when, in fact, he had disobeyed God's specific command. Micah 6:8 also echoes the wording in suggesting that God demands that His will be done, not that numerous sacrifices be offered. In the context of eating with sinners, Jesus used the passage to tell the Pharisees that He was fulfilling God's will of love when He dealt compassionately with sinners. The Pharisees were evaluating Him with a faulty standard. Again, Matthew does not record any reaction on the part of the Pharisees.

Some time later Jesus and His disciples were walking

through some fields of grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-8). Because His disciples were hungry, they began to pluck some of the grain and eat it. The Pharisees noticed what was going on and were quick to challenge Jesus by asking why His disciples are doing what is forbidden on the Sabbath. The problem is not walking on the Sabbath, nor trespassing on someone's property, nor even stealing grain. Jewish law and social custom did not condemn these things if held to a certain prescribed limit. But picking food in quantity in order to eat it was a violation of a work limit set by accepted Sabbath regulation. Jesus reminds the Pharisees of a precedent established by David (I Sam. 21:1-6) in eating and permitting his men to eat the consecrated bread (Lev. 24:5-9) in the Temple, although this too was forbidden. Then too, he reminds them that the priests in the Temple broke the Sabbath regulations in performing their duties, but this did not discredit them. Jesus is again reproving the Pharisees for their concern for the detail of certain regulations without concern for the key to law observance, "I require mercy, not sacrifice." There was an order of precedence which the Pharisees failed to take into account. The Sabbath with its regulations does not legislate the activity of the Son of Man; the Son of Man controls the Sabbath. The form or mode through which God is served is never greater than the God who is being served. The Pharisees had confused the comparative significance of the object and the mode of

worship.

This time Matthew does record a reaction of the Pharisees. Jesus entered a synagogue where there was a man with a diseased arm (Matt. 12:9-14). Evaluating the situation very quickly, they frame a question which was intended to frustrate any thought that Jesus might have had of healing the man. They ask, "Is it permitted to heal on the Sabbath?" Both the affirmative and the negative answer would be detrimental to Jesus' purpose. But Jesus reminds them that the day of the week would have little bearing on a decision they might make as to whether they should rescue a sheep which is about to perish. The argument is that concern for the welfare of a man is certainly of more note than concern for the welfare of a sheep. And then the answer: Doing good is permitted on the Sabbath. There are many parallels in the Gospels in which Jesus defends His good deeds on the Sabbath. The incident is climaxed in the healing of the arm. Again the Pharisees react; they begin to lay a plot among themselves to do away with Him. They plan a murder on the Sabbath because He had healed a man on the Sabbath. Jesus withdraws to avoid having anything come of the plot.

The next incident in which Jesus and the Pharisees clash is occasioned by the favorable reaction of a crowd to a miracle of restoring sight and speech to a man possessed by a demon, a miracle performed by Jesus in the presence of a group which included some Pharisees (Matt. 12:22f.). The

crowd reacts with what borders on being a confession of the real identity of Christ: Could this be the Son of David? The Pharisees are quick to assure the people that Jesus is in league with the prince of the devils and thus has some authority over them. Jesus points to the obvious folly of the devils' involving themselves in such an arrangement. Besides, the Pharisees are casting doubt on the method and power used by their own people in casting out devils, if it is possible that such a thing is done through the power of Beelzebub. Jesus leaves them with the other much more likely option. If He is casting out devils by the power of the Spirit of God (as their own people claim to be doing), then this miracle becomes sure evidence that the kingdom of God has broken in on them in the presence of Christ.

There follows immediately a stern call to repentance (Matt. 12:30-37), if not addressed exclusively to the antagonists above, nevertheless certainly including them in its demands. As John the Baptist associated the coming of the kingdom with the call to repentance, so Jesus appends the demand that the approach of the kingdom be met with repentance to His announcement that the kingdom of God is present in Him. Included is the invective that the fruit of this "vipers' brood" is consistent with their evil hearts. And it is on the basis of the evil words which come from their mouths that they will be condemned.

The Pharisees react to this strong language by challenging

the right of the speaker to make such statements. They ask for a sign (Matt. 12:38-42). Jesus responds by saying that a generation which seeks a sign is wicked and godless. The only sign they will have is the sign of Jonah. It applies because the Son of Man will spend an identical time in the grave as that spent by Jonah in the fish. Then Jesus continues the denunciation of the Pharisees, pointing out that foreigners participate in the denunciation of these people who reject Jesus. Foreigners believed and repented when they heard the words of Jonah and of Solomon; this generation of Jews refuses to believe and repent when they hear the words of one greater than either Jonah or Solomon. Therefore it is the present generation which needs to fear the judgment.

The Pharisees challenge Jesus again when Matthew presents them asking Jesus why His disciples break the long-established tradition of washing hands before eating (Matt. 15:1-9). Jesus does not comment on whether or not they do. Instead, He accuses the Pharisees of bypassing a much more serious obligation. It may be that His disciples break a tradition, but the Pharisees break God's law by insisting on following their tradition. The specific instance has to do with the fourth commandment. Pharisaic tradition said that a thing which might have benefited a father or mother may be given over to God. They argued that it was a higher dedication of a thing to dedicate it to God than to dedicate it to a father or mother. (The wording allows for the understanding that

even a fictitious dedication of a thing to God absolves one of any obligation of giving that thing to a parent.) Thus under the guise of serving God they were doing disservice to their parents. They were violating the fourth commandment. That they attack His disciples while at the same time they break God's law, Jesus calls hypocrisy. He identifies the Pharisees as the people to whom Isaiah was speaking when he said that the people pay lip-service but not heart-service; their worship is of no value because they have substituted their directives for God's directives.

Jesus uses the occasion to comment to the crowd about the Pharisaic concern for eating with unwashed hands. He says: "A man is not rendered unclean by what goes into his mouth, but by what comes out of it" (Matt. 15:10). The Pharisees by this time are seething. The disciples report this fact to Jesus. He explains that they should disregard the Pharisees because they would be rooted up; His heavenly Father had not planted them and they could not survive. Besides, the Pharisees are blind people attempting to lead other blind people. They would all fall into the ditch. Thus Jesus summarily rejects the worth of the Pharisees as men qualified to lead the people (Matt. 15:11-14).

Much to Jesus' disappointment, the disciples did not understand what He meant by His statement of things going into and coming out of the mouth. Peter asks for a clarification and Jesus explains (Matt. 15:15-20). What goes

into the mouth simply passes through the system and is gone. But what comes out of the mouth originated in the heart and is a vocalization of the evil of the heart. This filth defiles a man, not the dirt that passes into his mouth from unwashed hands. It is foolish to have the Pharisaic concern for clean hands when at the same time one is not concerned about his foul heart.

After Jesus fed the four thousand, the Pharisees and Sadducees came back on the scene once more. They were still concerned about Jesus' claims and demanded of Him a sign from heaven, apparently pretending that such a sign would help them to evaluate Jesus more properly (Matt. 16:1-4). St. Paul says that it is characteristic of Jews to look for signs (I Cor. 1:22). Matthew says specifically that the request was meant as a test, and not as an honest request for help. Jesus tells His petitioners that their request for a sign betrays their wickedness, for it is a wicked generation that asks for a sign. Consistent with this evaluation, He refuses to give them any sign except for one they already had: the sign of Jonah. With this refusal He leaves.

As Jesus and His disciples are making their way across the sea, He still has these Pharisees and Sadducees on His mind. He tells His disciples to be on their guard against the leaven of the Sadducees and Pharisees (Matt. 16:5-12). Leaven reminded the disciples of their lack of bread and they supposed that Jesus was making some comment about this

situation. But it was not so. Their preoccupation with the lack of bread was so foolish, Jesus reminds them, for they had just witnessed several miraculous feedings of thousands. No, it is not yeast that the Pharisees and Sadducees might use or have for sale that should concern the disciples; it is their teaching which had permeated the whole nation. "Be on your guard against their teaching," Jesus is saying.

This teaching of the Pharisees, to the extent that their teaching was the official teaching of the land, mars the disciples' immediate reaction to the glories of the Transfiguration. They had seen Elijah on the mountain, and were reminded of the popular opinion that the Messiah would not come until Elijah had come back on the scene (Matt. 17:9-13). Jesus first tells the disciples that this is correct; it is, after all, Scriptural that Elijah should come first (Mal. 3:23). But the teachers of Israel had erred in not identifying this Elijah when he came. That Elijah was John the Baptist. Elijah had come and the Messiah had come. But the Jews were still looking for both of them. As a matter of fact, these same people who had been telling of the coming Elijah had contributed to his death. Similarly, these "Elijah-preachers" were going to lay violent hands on the Son of Man Himself. They failed to recognize precisely what they were looking for.

The Pharisees were again on hand some time later to interrupt Jesus' work with the crowds, this time with another

test question. They now wonder what Jesus might say about the legality of divorce (Matt. 19:3-9). Jesus gives the Scriptural answer: God created male and female, sons and daughters were to leave their parents in order to marry, marriage made the two a single entity, this union is made by God, and it is inseparable by man (Gen. 1:27; 2:24). But the Pharisees are intent to find out whether Jesus would state approval or disapproval of the concession made by Moses, whereby a man might divorce his wife through a specific declaration to that effect (Deut. 24:1-4). Jesus replies that Moses made such a concession because the Jews were hard-hearted; strictly speaking, God did not intend that marriage should be dissolved. Then Jesus takes it upon Himself to state God's position on the dissolution of marriage and a subsequent remarriage: it is not to be done, and when it is done, it is done under pain of committing adultery unless the divorced party was guilty of unchastity. This is a strict ruling, as is evident from the reaction of the disciples (Matt. 19:10). Jesus dared to evaluate critically what Moses had said and ventured a principle which was to supersede that of Moses.

No specific reaction of the Pharisees is stated at this point, but this usurping of the absolute authority of their champion surely contributed to the growing determination to put Jesus to death, a situation which Jesus recognizes when He tells His disciples as they make their way to Jerusalem

that the chief priests and doctors of the law will condemn Him to death and hand Him over to foreigners to be cruelly treated and crucified (Matt. 20:18-19). The conflict and bickering between Jesus and the religious leaders of the Jews had reached such proportion that they planned His death.

Upon His arrival at Jerusalem, Jesus appeared daily in the Temple, there to do such things as teach the people, drive out the salesmen and bankers, and heal the blind and crippled. One morning when Jesus appeared in the Temple, the chief priests and elders were there to meet Him and to ask by what authority He did such things (Matt. 21:23-27). This question Jesus answered with another question, for which each of the alternative answers would embarrass the chief priests and elders in their position. That is to say, Jesus used the question as a device to demonstrate the folly of rejecting the validity of John's baptism and of doing this in secret for fear of the people. Was John's baptism from God or from men? Neither answer was safe. If the baptism was from God, then why did they not accept it? If they said it was from men, how would they appease the many people who approved of John and called him a prophet? They refused to answer. Neither did Jesus answer their question.

Jesus makes use of this impasse as an occasion to teach. He tells a parable which asks whether it is better to say "yes" to a request but then not to do it, or to say "no" to

the request but then to do it anyway (Matt. 21:28-32). Is a man's membership in the kingdom judged by what he says or by what he does? The hearers give what is obviously the correct answer: the second option is better. But then Jesus makes the point. In the specific case of John's preaching, prostitutes and dishonest tax-collectors who had been saying "no" to God's will had afterward done the will of God by paying attention to John. On the other hand, the pious among the Jews who had always been saying "yes" to God's will had afterward not done the will of God--they refused to pay attention to John. Jesus had led these Jewish authorities to state by their own answer to the question posed by Jesus that the prostitutes and tax-collectors had done the better thing.

And then another parable. A landowner planted a vineyard and equipped it well; then he gave it over to caretakers and went away (Matt. 21:33-43). When it became time to reap some of the reward that was rightfully his, he sent servants to collect. But the people who were supervising the vineyard beat the servants and killed them. The owner sent more servants; their reception was the same. Finally, the landowner determined to send his own son, assuming that they would surely respect him. But no; they threw the son out of the vineyard and killed him too. And then Jesus posed a question: What should the landowner do to those caretakers? The listeners answered correctly that he should do away with them and give the vineyard over to others. Jesus concludes

the parable by stating the truth which it presents. The Scriptures say that the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone (Ps. 118:22-23). God's builders had rejected a special stone; He was now to be the chief cornerstone of another building. This is the giving over of the vineyard to others, just as the chief priests and elders said should be done. God was doing this because they, Jewish officialdom, were the caretakers who abused and killed God's servants and were now seeking the death of God's Son. The kingdom of God will be taken away from the Jews and given to a people who will give to God the yield that He wants.

Matthew states that the chief priests and Pharisees were the chief listeners to these parables and recognized that they had been directed at them (Matt. 21:45-46). The axe of which John had spoken earlier was swinging away at their roots. Jesus had told these chief priests and Pharisees in no uncertain terms that they were opposing God. Repentance might have been the reaction, but instead they wished to arrest Him and be done with Him. Their wishes could not materialize at this point because of Jesus' popularity with the people. The people recognized Him as a prophet and the Pharisees did not wish to give the impression that they would do violence to a prophet. They hoped to avoid the appearance of doing exactly what Jesus said they were doing.

A very short time later, Matthew tells of the Pharisees agreeing on a plan to trap Him in His own words (Matt. 22:15-22). They were still being cautious so that they would give no bad appearance; they did not wish to incur the anger of the people by simply laying hands on Jesus. They wanted Him, rather, to say something of which the crowds would disapprove and thereby recognize that He was undesirable. With the question prepared, some of the Pharisees took with them some Herodians (strange company for a group that despised the Herod family) and went to Jesus. After attempting to set a favorable situation by telling Jesus how honest and forthright they had noticed Him to be, they asked whether or not it is permissible for Jews to pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus immediately named their compliment and question hypocrisy and told them that He was aware of the kind of trickery to which they were resorting. And then to the point of the question, He led them to say that the image and inscription on the money they were using were Caesar's. They were using Caesar's money. He therefore directed them to pay Caesar what was due Caesar and to pay God what was due God. This is not what the questioners expected; they were unprepared to continue. Therefore they went away and left Him alone for a little while.

Later the same day the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees on a question involving the resurrection of the dead. Encouraged, they came to Jesus again

with another question intended to discredit Him (Matt. 22:34-40). A Pharisee asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment in the law. Jesus answered with what any Jew would have recognized as a summary statement of the Moral Law, stating that love to God and love to neighbor, in that order, constitute the precepts on which everything in the law and prophets hang (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18). With that there was no argument.

Turning to the Pharisees assembled, Jesus asked them the most significant question He ever addressed to them: "What is your opinion of the Messiah? Whose son is He?" They answered that the Messiah is the Son of David, an answer which is both correct and Scriptural. But then, Jesus wanted to know, why did David speaking by inspiration call Him Lord? The Pharisees had no answer. The answer stood before them in the Christ, born of the house of David but conceived by the Holy Ghost, but the Pharisees were by this time too blind to see the answer. They had again been frustrated in an attempt to trap Jesus, and at this point they give up on any further plans to go about getting Jesus into trouble in this way.

Then follows immediately the chapter which is the special concern of this study. It is indeed true that there is a history of quarreling and skirmish which would lead Jesus to use His most violent language on record. The rift between Jesus and the Pharisees was deep; it had grown

deeper and deeper in their contacts during the days of His ministry.

The Issues of the Conflict

While it is true that the other evangelists state other incidents of conflict, it is also true that Matthew gives a picture of the nature and details of this conflict which is quite extensive and detailed. It is an essential conflict as he describes it, for it brings into sharp contrast the person and work of Christ and everything for which the Pharisees stood. The conflict is both tragic and ironic. It is tragic because it makes altogether clear that the very people whom God had been preparing for many centuries for welcoming the Messiah had in fact defected and perverted God's plan. It is ironic because the very "godliness" of those who prided themselves in being true Israelites is the cause of the conflict.

The writer herewith attempts a systematic grouping of the issues of the conflict, as it worked itself out during the ministry of Jesus. The writer reduces the issues to simple statements for the sake of an overview and for the sake of easy comparison with the content of the polemic of Matthew 23. The issues are stated as directed against the Pharisees:

1. The Pharisees reject the Messiah.
 - a. They fail to recognize Him.

- b. They plot to kill Him.
- 2. The Pharisees are actually outside the kingdom.
 - a. They are hypocrites.
 - b. They are falsely secure.
- 3. The Pharisees do not keep the law.
 - a. They fail to observe its real demands.
 - b. They emphasize rite over right.
- 4. The Pharisees are poor leaders.
 - a. They seek their own honor.
 - b. They mislead the people.

Each of the statements as listed above is an indication of Pharisaic hypocrisy, for the Pharisees claimed for themselves the exact opposite of each charge. The emphasis of Jesus' part in the conflict, then, is exposure of the real nature of Pharisaism, an evaluation which carries with it the condemnation of Pharisaism.

CHAPTER IV

THE CLIMAX OF THE CONFLICT

Form of the Discourse

Whenever one concerns himself with the study of an extended discourse, such as this twenty-third chapter of Matthew, he finds a significant number of studies that concern themselves with similarities and dissimilarities among the Synoptics in wording and content, with the possibilities of common and different sources, written or oral, and with the likelihood of rearrangement and conflation of materials. The great variety of individual conclusions reached is in itself an indication of the subjective character of such studies; this fact alone leads this writer to judge that the studies are highly speculative and, therefore, inconclusive.

So that a hearing may be given to representative points of view and so that the reporting of various conclusions may be less random and more systematic, the writer places his sources into three groups according to the conclusions they reach: (1) Those who hold the discourse to be a fabrication, or at least a significant expansion of authentic materials, originating in the need for polemical materials in the anti-Jewish struggles of the late first century; (2) Those who hold the discourse to be a collection and arrangement of substantially authentic materials; (3) Those who hold the discourse

to be a reliable record of the content and form of a single, continuous statement of Jesus. Actually many authors do not fall precisely into one group or another; to the extent, then, that it is possible for an author's conclusions to include features of two of these theories the categories are not mutually exclusive.¹

An apologist for the Pharisees like Sandmel quite logically belongs to the first group. He says,

The passage is not from Jesus, it is a partisan utterance from a period of extreme antagonism; least of all is it to be taken as a fair or accurate description either of Pharisaism or of Judaism.²

Bacon also suggests that the passage does not represent Jesus. With specific reference to the arrogance of the rabbi as contrasted with the humility of the Christian teacher, he says,

The contrasted pictures cannot, of course, be taken as an impartial description of Synagogue rabbi and Christian catechist as they were in Mt's time. The bitter hatred evinced is itself a needed corrective to our judgment. Its chief service to the historian is its lurid reflection of the hostility between the opposing camps. This is one of the unfortunate, but characteristic notes of the environment.³

Although Bacon does list a series of written sources from which Matthew's material comes, including Mark, Q, and others,

¹E.g., many authors credit both the arrangement and expansion of materials to the writer of the first Gospel.

²Samuel Sandmel, A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1956), p. 162.

³Benjamin W. Bacon, Studies in Matthew (New York: Henry Holt and Company, c.1930), pp. 246-47.

he is also very explicit in stating that Matthew used an oral tradition which grew out of the bitter enmity of the Christians toward the scribes and Pharisees.⁴ Thus Bacon feels that some of the statements here are representative of the people of Matthew's day and are not actual words of Jesus.

Knox also addresses himself to this problem with similar results when he discusses the similarity and relationship of the materials of Matthew, Mark, and Luke on this subject. Although he holds that some of the material has a common source, he believes even of this material that it came to the writers of Matthew and Luke in different forms, each provided with unique new material which arose out of fresh disputes with the Pharisees. Some of the material has little claim to being authentic, including the form of a series of woes given it by the compiler, and some is so poorly constructed that it appears to have arisen in a rather low level of anti-Jewish controversy.⁵

Such a view is extreme. Nor do the bulk of New Testament scholars agree that so much of the discourse may simply be dismissed as non-authentic. The majority of scholars of recent times take a position approximating the second stated above. Filson says that the chapter "is an editorial collection, shaped somewhat by Jewish-Christian conflicts with

⁴Ibid.

⁵Wilfred L. Knox, The Sources of the Synoptic Gospels (Cambridge: The University Press, 1953), I, 93-102.

rabbinical circles," but he also says that it "represents common early Christian tradition."⁶ And this, in essence, is the view of many more.

B. H. Streeter states the view that Matthew Twenty-Three represents a compiling, editing, and arranging of a number of sources. The writer selects the following conclusions as significant in this connection: (a) Matthew's written sources were Q, M, and Mark; (b) Some of the material may not be from Jesus at all, but, instead, invented in a later period of conflict for the sake of a more comprehensive polemic; (c) Luke was more faithful in preserving the several contexts of Q, while Matthew has placed the material entirely into one of the several contexts; (d) Matthew's purpose guided the arrangement of the material in the discourse.⁷

W. C. Allen's conclusions are similar, but not identical. Significant in his belief that Matthew Twenty-Three is an amassed discourse are the following: (a) Matthew is prone to drawing materials together into longer discourses; (b) It is improbable that the materials of Matthew and Luke are taken

⁶Floyd V. Filson, A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, in Black's New Testament Commentaries, edited by Henry Chadwick (London: Adam & Charles Black, c.1960), p. 243.

⁷Barnett Hillman Streeter, The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), pp. 253-54, 275.

from a common written source.⁸

Alfred Plummer is in basic agreement with Allen but features some conclusions of his own: (a) Matthew's discourse is a gathering of Jesus' statements on several occasions; (b) Matthew and Luke did not have a common source for this material; (c) Matthew's material is taken chiefly from the Logia, with some material from a possible second written source, of which Luke had a rough parallel; (d) Luke probably places the materials that he has in common with Matthew into their more exact historical context; yet much of Matthew's material might well belong to the historical context in which he places it.⁹

Dibelius is also not convinced that the material is from Q. He argues that to make comparisons with Q as though it were a document of established scope and form is invalid.¹⁰ So for him the nature of this or any other discourse is not explained by its dependence on Q plus certain unique materials. He finds evidence in I Clement, however, that early Christians

⁸Willoughby C. Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew, in The International Critical Commentary, edited by Samuel Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles Briggs (Third edition; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), pp. lxiv-lxv, 243.

⁹Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), pp. 313-14.

¹⁰Martin Dibelius, Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums (Third edition; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1959), pp. 234-39.

did group statements of Jesus without concern for their original contexts. He argues that this was done also in the traditions available to the editors of our Gospels or that sayings may have been grouped by the editors of our Gospels themselves. Occasional references to Matthew Twenty-Three in this connection make it likely that he supposes this discourse to be such a collection.¹¹

Theodor Zahn does not speculate as to the exact method of collection, but states, nevertheless, that Matthew has collected Jesus' sayings on this subject and put them together as though they had been an extended discourse by Jesus, when in fact they were not.¹²

Adolf Harnack and Vincent Taylor agree with much of the above, except that they find that Matthew relies heavily on Q, the original order of which Luke preserves better than Matthew. Matthew's order is different because of his interest in arranging the sayings topically.¹³

¹¹Ibid., pp. 243-48; a very similar argument is found in Hermann Frhr. von Soden, Urchristliche Literaturgeschichte (Berlin: Verlag von Alexander Duncker, 1905), pp. 64-71, 92, where he specifically names the woes against the Pharisees "zusammengestellten Weherufe" (p. 92).

¹²Theodor Zahn, Das Evangelium des Matthäus, in Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, edited by Theodor Zahn (Fourth edition; Leipzig: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922), I, 649-50.

¹³Adolf Harnack, The Sayings of Jesus, in New Testament Studies, translated by J. R. Wilkinson (London: Williams & Norgate, 1908), pp. 95-105, 177-79; Vincent Taylor, The Gospels: A Short Introduction (Seventh edition; London: The Epworth Press, 1922), pp. 21-24.

Beilner admits that a reconstruction of the original form of the "woe discourse" which perhaps underlay the wording of Matthew and Luke is very difficult because of the dissimilarities of form given the woes by the two writers. He holds that it is clear that the two Evangelists are not reproducing in order an original form which was available to both. He also holds that the form of contrast in the woes, what the Pharisees did contrasted with what God commanded, is original with Christ. Finally, he concludes that Luke is responsible for a schematic placing of the woes--Luke ascribes harsh words to Jesus every time He is in the home of a Pharisee--and that Matthew has expanded the woes of the source with materials otherwise available to him.¹⁴

One could continue to state the conclusions of men who have adopted a kind of collection theory for this chapter. But the conclusions are quite similar, with original contributions limited to details. It is enough to say that a large group of exegetes suppose that this chapter of Matthew is a collection of sayings of Jesus from different contexts placed into one. Most agree that Mark and Q are

¹⁴Wolfgang Beilner, Christus und die Pharisäer (Vienna: Verlag Herder, c.1959), pp. 208-13; cf. the argumentation of Adolf Schlatter, Der Evangelist Matthäus: Seine Sprache, sein Ziel, seine Selbständigkeit (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1948), pp. 692-93, that the woes of Luke and Matthew are oriented differently and, therefore, have only content in common.

among the written sources. With some notable exceptions, they agree that Matthew here, as elsewhere, puts into a single context materials that are more accurately placed by Q and subsequently by Luke. Some suggest that Matthew had the benefit of other written sources; those who see no evidence of other written sources suggest oral tradition or the bitter feelings of late first century Christians as sources for the materials peculiar to Matthew. The point of it all is that Matthew, or his source, has constructed an extended discourse in order to put into one statement a polemic of Jesus which is as comprehensive as possible.

Several hypotheses apparently lie at the base of such argumentation. One is that the first Gospel in the form that we have it dates from the end of the first century; related to this dating is the conclusion that the writing is not by Matthew the Apostle. Such a judgment must be based on internal evidence, for it is certainly not on the basis of the witness of the early Church that such a conclusion is reached. But the apparent dependency on Mark, the apparent allusions to a Church which needs to carry on after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the apparent Sitz im Leben of anti-Jewish controversy--the chief arguments for late dating--are judgments based on less than compelling internal evidence. Nor do any of these judgments, even if they are valid, force the writing of the first Gospel out of the period of the lifetime of the Apostles. The internal

evidence is not so convincing that it makes void the traditional view that the first Gospel comes to us from the pen of Matthew the Apostle.

A second hypothesis for the conclusion that Matthew has collected sayings in order to form a discourse is that the writer of the first Gospel depends on sources. If the Gospel is the product of second-generation Christians this must be true.¹⁵ Literary analysis of verbal similarities and dissimilarities among the Gospels is also used to support this theory. But using verbal similarities to establish dependence has varying degrees of validity. A comparison of the wording of Matthew and Luke with the wording of Mark, an extant document, is valid investigation, although establishing dependency is an inductive leap even in this case. But to go through the same process with non-extant Q substituted for extant Mark must always remain a speculative process.

The writer has a second objection to this process. It is apparently assumed that similarity of wording indicates a singular literary statement in the oral or written tradition

¹⁵cf., e.g., the statement about the authors of the Gospels by Major in H. D. A. Major, T. W. Manson and C. J. Wright, The Mission and Method of Jesus (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., c.1938), p. xvii: "It is doubtful whether any of them were eye-witnesses to what they describe and relate. They had therefore to depend upon information derived from others, some if not all of whom were eye-witnesses." Manson in the same work reproduces much of the opinion of the source critics already noted; see, e.g., p. 388.

at the Evangelist's disposal and that the tradition, in turn, represents a single oral statement by Jesus. The assumption that similar statements in different parts of two respective Gospels are the record of a single statement of Jesus because of the similarity of wording is too venturesome to be convincing. The assumption that each Evangelist has preserved an accurate context, especially when he carefully places a statement of Jesus into a specific context, is much less speculative. The conclusion, which must follow, that Jesus made similar statements with similar words on several occasions is also quite palatable. This writer judges that the context given by the Evangelist gives more specific information about the time and place of the statement of Jesus than any possible, or even likely, explanations based on the consideration of subjective conclusions about sources.

The writer has a third objection to the theory that Matthew has collected sayings of Jesus in this discourse. He is negatively impressed with the circular character of the argument that the longer discourses of Matthew are collections. Evidence is gathered to support a conclusion; then the conclusion is used to support what had first been evidence. Thus in the case of Matthew, his longer discourses are some of the prime evidence for the priority of Mark and Q and the like; because Matthew's discourses are more extensive, the conclusion is that Matthew used, rearranged, and

expanded these written sources. But then the conclusion that Matthew is a rearrangement and expansion of written sources is used to support the suggestion that Matthew Twenty-Three is a conflation of materials which actually belong to other historical contexts with some additions of his own.¹⁶ This may be careful literary analysis, but it is hardly careful logic.

Those who hold the discourse to be a single, continuous statement of Jesus rarely argue the point extensively. They apparently simply deduce this from their conviction that Matthew has faithfully and reliably recorded an authentic discourse spoken by Jesus.¹⁷ The writer, who believes that the discourse is indeed a continuous utterance of Jesus, will support his conclusion with his own observations. His conclusion is based both on the limitations of the "collection of sayings" explanation of the origin of the discourse, as outlined above, and on certain positive evidence to the contrary. First, while it is certainly true that Mark has

¹⁶This is the method of argumentation, stated or implied, of most of the sources quoted earlier.

¹⁷This is the method of R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, c.1943), p. 893; Henry Barclay Swete, The Gospel According to St. Mark (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. 290. B. C. Butler, The Originality of St. Matthew: A Critique of the Two-Document Hypothesis (Cambridge: The University Press, 1951), pp. 72-106, has a rather extensive discussion arguing for the originality of St. Matthew's discourses.

stated the parallel material in extremely abbreviated form, he has placed a statement of warning against the scribes at precisely the same place. The paragraph immediately preceding the polemical statement in both Gospels is the "David's Son: David's Lord" question. Immediately following is the "widow's mite" incident in Mark, not found in Matthew. But then both Gospels agree in stating the prophecy of the destruction of the Temple. The incidents recorded in the more remote context, both preceding and following, also agree. That Matthew's long discourse and Mark's short statement are representations of the same speech of Jesus is evident from this identical placing.

But the problem still remains of how extensive the discourse spoken by Jesus on this occasion actually was. Has Mark abbreviated it, or has Matthew expanded it? The opinion of some that the discourse was actually comparatively brief and extended by Matthew with materials taken from elsewhere has already been stated. The lack of evidence for this conclusion has also already been noted. One must be careful that no assault be made upon the integrity of the evangelist through asserting that he constructed a discourse or fabricated a context under the pretense of ascribing the words to Jesus in a specific place and time. Apart from this consideration, Matthew's possible use of sources may not summarily be rejected on any a priori basis. But such speculation about the use of sources must not be permitted to overrule what evidence there is. Luke reports that Jesus

pronounced a series of woes upon lawyers and Pharisees at the table of a Pharisee in his home in Perea; Matthew reports that Jesus stated a series of warnings and pronounced seven woes on the scribes and Pharisees in the Temple in Jerusalem. Speculation about sources and compilation and the like can hardly change this evidence.

Besides, it is altogether likely that Matthew records a complete punitive discourse spoken by Jesus on this occasion, while Mark and Luke abbreviate it. There are many instances in Scripture of abbreviation of longer speeches. Many of the speeches recorded in the book of Acts are doubtlessly summary statements of speeches that actually went on for an hour or more. (See Luke's comment, Acts 2:40, on Peter's Pentecost sermon.) On the basis of similar procedure elsewhere, then, one might judge that Mark and Luke have chosen to abbreviate a statement that Matthew chose to give in fuller form. But it is not only the generalization on the basis of other Scriptural evidence that supports such a conclusion here. Mark writes into his text of this passage a clue that he was abbreviating the statement. To introduce the statement, he says, "In His teaching He said" (Mk. 12:38). Apparently, Mark is giving an indication with this introductory remark that he is stating an extract of the things that Jesus said. Thus there is some likelihood that Matthew is giving a complete punitive discourse while Mark and Luke give only a succinct summary of it. This more complete treatment

of the subject by Matthew is in accord with his practice of reporting in detail the conflict between Jesus and Jewish officialdom throughout his Gospel, apparently because of the background and need of his addressees.

Finally, there is no apparent lack of unity or coherence in the discourse as it is reported by Matthew. On the contrary, similarity of thought and wording as well as smooth progression of subject matter indicate a distinct unity. Unless Matthew is to be credited with artfully contriving a speech from selected sources, it is likely that this chapter reports a well-organized and carefully worded speech of Jesus. These observations are those which lead the writer to credit Jesus with both the form and matter of the speech, rather than giving Matthew the credit for either.

There are two problems associated with the writer's conclusion: (1) Is the fact that there are seven woes coincidental or by design? (2) If Mark and Luke are stating a summary of the discourse, how does it happen that the woe they choose to state is not even a part of the discourse as Matthew reports it? The answers to both questions are difficult to find. It may be that Matthew intentionally aimed at the number seven in stating the woes.¹⁸ The writer is not content with the assumption that Jesus stated fewer than seven and that Matthew added some for reasons stated

¹⁸Plummer, op. cit., p. 316.

earlier. But it may be that Matthew reduced the number of woes which Jesus spoke to seven because of some association which that number may have.¹⁹ If it is true that Matthew reduced the number of "woe statements" to seven, then perhaps he omitted the one that deals with devouring widows' houses. Any reason for its omission by Matthew is difficult to find, unless Matthew intends that there be specifically seven woes reported. Why Mark and Luke should have chosen it above all the others may find an answer in the fact that they go on immediately to tell of the offering of the widow in the Temple. But this is not conclusive. It is enough to say that there are possible explanations which are consistent with preserving the integrity of the evangelists.

Unique Character of the Discourse

The discourse of this chapter has as its subject matter basic faults which Jesus found with the teaching and practice of the scribes and Pharisees. With what Fahling calls "thunderbolts of denunciation"²⁰ Jesus systematically exposes and condemns the errors to which Pharisaism had fallen prey. The condemnation is unique in its thunder, but it is

¹⁹John 20:31f. and John 21:25 establish that the Evangelists used a selection process; of course, it may also be that it was Jesus, and not Matthew, who chose to state seven woes.

²⁰Adem Fahling, The Life of Christ (Second edition; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946), p. 549.

occasioned by a series of background incidents and statements which suggest that such a climax was inevitable. As a matter of fact, much of the subject matter of this final discourse had been stated before, notably in the Sermon on the Mount, in the statement of Jesus at the home of the Pharisee, and in numerous clashes between Jesus and Pharisees as He went about teaching and performing miracles. But the application on former occasions had been different and the treatment of the subject less extensive. Thus although this extensive invective grows somewhat naturally out of a history of conflict, it is nevertheless unique.

It is unique in its finality. In the structure of Matthew's Gospel it is the transition between controversies and apocalyptic discourse.²¹ Specifically, it is the introduction for the disciples to the "eschatological sermon" which Jesus delivered on the Mount of Olives later the same day.²² As such, it is the final public teaching of Jesus before His death. Furthermore, it is a part of that teaching which deals with the final days of the Temple and of Jerusalem, with the inevitable end of all those who do not wait

²¹Sherman E. Johnson and George A. Buttrick, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, in The Interpreter's Bible, edited by George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), VII, 528.

²²Joh. Ylvisaker, The Gospels (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1932), p. 282; cf. also Martin Franzmann, Follow Me: Discipleship According to Saint Matthew (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), p. 177.

for the coming of the Lord, and with the end of the world. The discourse is therefore final. It "appropriately constitutes Christ's Farewell to the Temple, to its authorities, and to Israel."²³

The discourse is unique in its broad scope of absolute and uncompromising denunciation of the men to whom the Jews looked as teachers and of the teachings to which the Jews looked for their ideals. The discourse follows immediately upon the "David's Son: David's Lord" incident. Jesus' question had confounded the religious leaders of the people and led over very naturally to a solemn warning to the people that they should not be misguided by such leaders as the scribes and Pharisees.²⁴ "By their inability to answer the question about David's Son and David's Lord the pharisaic doctors had clearly demonstrated their incompetence as Israel's teachers."²⁵ Jesus now characterizes this incompetence by condemning their teachings, their actions, and their hypocrisy.

There is some speculation that the discourse may be too denunciatory to be accepted as valid. Thus the speech is

²³ Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (Thirty-seventh edition; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wa. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), II, 406.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Fahling, op. cit., p. 549.

criticized as being inaccurate and unfair²⁶ and as being too broadly addressed to scribes and Pharisees as a group.²⁷ Another author questions Jesus' competence in evaluating the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees when He, on account of His Galilean origin, did not know their teachings in detail.²⁸

Others suggest that the denunciation is not actually as broad in scope as is commonly supposed. Sandmel says, "Since Matthew is setting forth a legalistic Christianity, he cannot directly repudiate the legal process of the Pharisees, but only the Pharisees themselves."²⁹ A statement of Graetz attempts the same limitation: "Jesus made no attack upon Judaism itself."³⁰ These men are suggesting that Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees is limited to their person, and is not an attack on their teaching. It is interesting that A. B. Bruce concludes almost the exact opposite: "While pronouncing unqualified condemnation on the system, He was

²⁶Israel Abrahams, Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels (Second series; Cambridge: The University Press, 1924), pp. 30-31; Sandmel, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

²⁷Robert H. Pfeiffer, History of New Testament Times with an Introduction to the Apocrypha (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, c.1949), p. 55.

²⁸H. Graetz, History of the Jews (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, c.1893), II, 149.

²⁹Sandmel, op. cit., p. 160.

³⁰Graetz, op. cit., II, 155.

ready to acknowledge that those who were associated with it might be, in the conventional sense, exemplary."³¹

Objections to the obvious import of the discourse simply evidence the bias of their authors. They simply do not agree with the content of the speech; they evaluate the Pharisees differently. But the very fact that these apologists of the Pharisees single out this discourse to comment so extensively and disagree so strenuously with its content tends to confirm this writer's earlier statement: The discourse is unique in its broad scope of absolute and uncompromising denunciation of the men to whom the Jews looked as teachers and of the teachings to which the Jews looked for their ideals. It draws a very pronounced line between what the Pharisees taught and did and what was acceptable in the sight of God.

The discourse is also unique in the wrath it expresses. Such a statement of holy wrath is unparalleled in Jesus' ministry, both in its length and intensity. Although the Gospels rarely specifically ascribe anger to Jesus,³² one can hardly mistake the anger that arose in Jesus on this occasion in view of the incompetence, blindness, error, arrogance, and hypocrisy which He saw as the marks of the Pharisees. Edersheim has caught this tone in his words:

³¹Alexander B. Bruce, The Kingdom of God: Christ's Teaching According to the Synoptical Gospels (Sixth edition; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), p. 190.

³²E.g., Mark 3:5.

These are the forthpouring of His holy wrath, the last and fullest testimony against those whose guilt would involve Jerusalem in common sin and common judgment. Step by step, with logical sequence and intensified pathos of energy, is each charge advanced, and with it the Woe of Divine wrath announced.³³

The final plaintive statement addressed to Jerusalem is evidence, however, that Christ's anger was tempered by sorrow.³⁴

This discourse is unique in its finality, unique in its uncompromising denunciation of the Jewish leaders, unique in the wrath it expresses. It is the inevitable climax of long and bitter conflict. Jocz and Schlatter characterize the discourse very well in this setting. Jocz says,

The Synoptic tradition does not merely present Jesus as a moral teacher castigating the sins and shortcomings of religious devotees; he stands out, rather as a royal figure making supreme claims. It is difficult to escape the impression that the clash between Jesus and the Pharisees is of a fundamental nature. The issues involved are greater than mere petty failings. The actual cause of the friction cuts right across the very essence of religious life. The clash between Jesus and the Pharisees is ultimately the clash of two vital principles in constant opposition to each other: the categorical imperative of eternity, and the ever compromising principle of time.³⁵

Schlatter notes that at the very time in which the falsehood

³³Edersheim, op. cit., II, 411.

³⁴Franzmann, op. cit., pp. 168, 171; sorrow is linked to anger also in Mark 3:5.

³⁵Jacob Jocz, The Jewish People and Jesus Christ (London: Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 1949), p. 21.

and unrighteousness of Pharisaic "righteousness" is reaching its consummation in the cross which the leaders of Jerusalem are preparing for Jesus, He lays bare the cause in Pharisaism out of which the struggle arose. Pharisaic godliness carries a flaw in itself which destroys. In the Pharisee's pious effort to overcome ungodliness he demonstrates his incompetence; this incompetence is his flaw. Thus Jesus unveils the objectionable character of the Pharisees in His last words, words which lead over without interruption to His crucifixion.³⁶

Study of the Text

The discourse opens with an introductory statement which names the speaker and the one spoken to. In the first section of the discourse, Jesus talks about the scribes and Pharisees, but is directing His remarks specifically to His own disciples as well as to the crowds. It is likely, however, that these statements were made in the hearing of the scribes and Pharisees, for Jesus seems simply to turn to them while He continues His discourse at verse thirteen.

The opening word of the chapter is one of Matthew's favorites: **Τότε**. A perusal of his Gospel shows that he often uses the term to tie what follows with what precedes in a

³⁶Schlatter, op. cit., p. 672.

sequence relationship.³⁷ It is reading too much into the word to suggest that it necessarily means "immediately," but Plummer is doubtlessly correct when he suggests that it "is probably meant to assign what follows to the time indicated in the previous chapter."³⁸ The time designation is not as explicit as *ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ* of 22:23, but by working forward from the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and backward from Jesus' announcement in 26:1 that the Passover is two days away, it is likely that the denunciatory discourse belongs to the same day as what precedes, beginning with 21:20, and what follows, continuing to 26:2, namely Tuesday of Holy Week.

The second verse seems to be a simple declaratory statement, but it introduces a number of problems. The verse states that the scribes and Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. But the identity of the chair of Moses, the tense of the verb, and the implications of sitting on that chair are problematic. The identity of the scribes and Pharisees is less of a problem. The historical sketches above have already attempted to identify them exactly, including a discussion of these names by which they are called. Jesus is attacking the adherents to a religious point of view and the professional teachers of the people,

³⁷E.g., Matt. 26:36,38,45,50,52,56.

³⁸Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

groups which overlap almost entirely, and which because of their influence number among their followers almost all of Israel.

These are the people who sat on Moses' seat. Thus the problem of identifying Moses' seat is met. To begin with, it should be noted that *καθέδρα* is the same term used to describe the seats of those who were selling pigeons in the Temple (Matt. 21:12). This use alone indicates that the term need not have a special religious or juridical significance. The term is used in the Septuagint in Psalm 107:32, where it translates *יְשִׁיבָה*. The phrase is "chairs of the elders," but there is no apparent intent of loading the term to suggest an official or authoritative position of the elders. It apparently should simply be understood to say "assembly" of the elders.³⁹ Daube notes that the expression "sitting on Moses' seat" occurs also in rabbinic literature and contends,

We read in the Bible that Moses "leaned" his hands on Joshua, in order to bestow on him part of his glory. The Midrash explains that Joshua was thereby permitted to enunciate teachings, deliver judgments and sit on a special chair like Moses--obviously the privileges resulting from ordination in New Testament times.⁴⁰

³⁹Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, editors, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Corrected edition; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 444. Hereafter this work will be referred to as BDB.

⁴⁰David Daube, The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism, second in the series of Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion (London: The Athlone Press, 1956), p. 208.

For the rabbinic opinion that the law was passed on from man to man there are many statements that may be cited, but the specific reference to the "chair like Moses" is unclear. Strack-Billerbeck reports that when the scribes and Pharisees are said to sit on Moses' chair, they are described as "Inhaber der Lehrgewalt."⁴¹ The author adds quickly that the evidence is chiefly from a fourth century rabbi who speaks of a special type of armchair (Lehnstuhl), for the use of the schoolmasters, which is also called a Moses-chair (קתדרא דמשה).⁴² Other evidence for the use of the term is also cited, but all of it is from the fourth century. The fact that the term for chair used by these rabbis is the Greek word written with Hebrew letters is also peculiar. One can doubtlessly conclude that there is at least sparse evidence for the use of the term by the rabbis. But it is highly doubtful that this rabbinic use is instructive for Jesus' use of the term. First, it is not at all apparent that Jesus was referring to a literal chair called by such a name. Furthermore, the value of rabbinic parallel, especially of such late date, is questionable. It could well be that Jesus is coining a term that is intended to describe the position of the teacher of the law. It has been

⁴¹Herman L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, in Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922), I, 909.

⁴²Ibid.

suggested that "Moses' seat was probably the name given to the chair in the synagogue where the authoritative teacher of the law sat."⁴³ That there were such prominent seats in the synagogues is a matter of record.⁴⁴ But again, one must be hesitant in assuming apart from evidence that "Moses' seat" is the name given an actual chair. The context of verse three demands that the "chair" be thought of as some type of designation for the position of the teacher of the law. But the absence of specific identification forces the conclusion that Jesus may as well be engaging in a metaphor as calling a specific chair by its proper name.

Something must also be said about the rather troublesome aorist tense of *ἐκάθισαν*. Robertson calls it a gnomic aorist and thus makes it timeless.⁴⁵ Lenski says that the aorist is historical and suggests that they usurped the seat,⁴⁶ but he cites no parallels to support his view. Plummer surmises that the aorist may suggest that the statement originally read, "The Scribes and Pharisees sat in Moses' seat, when they taught you to observe the Law"; he considers his judgment

⁴³Johnson and Buttrick, op. cit., VII, 528.

⁴⁴See e.g., Matt. 23:6.

⁴⁵A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, c.1934), pp. 836-37, 866.

⁴⁶Lenski, op. cit., pp. 893-94.

to be supported by his understanding of verse three.⁴⁷ Allen guesses that "the editor writes from his own standpoint, and looks back upon the period when the scribes and Pharisees were in power."⁴⁸ Black is convinced that "the tense defies analysis on Greek lines"; it is rather to be understood in the sense of a Semitic perfect, which corresponds to the Greek aorist, perfect, and present tenses. He cites a number of instances in which a Greek aorist is used to represent the present connotation of the Hebrew perfect, thus stressing "present states or general truths."⁴⁹ His most convincing example is the parallel of Mark 1:8 with Matthew 3:2, in which Mark uses an aorist to say what Matthew says with a present. Blass judges it to be similar to a perfect tense used to denote a continuing effect on either the subject or object; in the case of a number of perfects and aorists, including this one, he contends that although the effect is not stated it is implied. He suggests that the specific effect which is here to be supplied is "they are still sitting there."⁵⁰ Broadus says, "Literally

⁴⁷Plummer, op. cit., p. 314.

⁴⁸Allen, op. cit., p. 244.

⁴⁹Matthew Black, An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts (Second edition; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 93.

⁵⁰F. Blass and A. Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, translated and revised by Robert W. Funk (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, c.1961), p. 176.

the verb is sat, 'have sat,' have taken a seat there-- which leaves it to be understood that they so remain."⁵¹

It should be noted that both Broadus and Blass cite Hebrews 8:1 as a parallel for what they are suggesting. This passage states that Christ "sat on the right hand of the throne," using the same aorist of the same verb as Matthew uses here. Surely the stress of the verb is on the past time in which Christ assumed this seat, but, equally as surely, no hint is intended that this situation is not continuous. The writer concludes that, whether the use is Semitic or not, the aorist does not imply that the activity is entirely in the past; he agrees with Blass that the effect of the act continues.

It is suggested by some that the phrase "took their seat on Moses' chair" implies that the scribes and Pharisees usurped a position that was not rightfully theirs. Thus Lenski says,

With *ἐκάθισαν* Jesus states merely the fact, which does not in any way admit the right of these men to Moses' seat. They were not called to their seat as Moses had been. He assumed the seat reluctantly, but these false followers of his assumed his seat of their own accord and were determined to have and hold it. They were self-appointed usurpers and acted as though their dicta were as binding as the revelations God made to Moses.⁵²

⁵¹John A. Broadus, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, in An American Commentary on the New Testament, edited by Alvah Hovey (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), I, 464.

⁵²Lenski, op. cit., pp. 893-94.

This is almost identical with the position of Zahn:

The reference to sitting on Moses' seat is nothing less than an acknowledgment of the right growing from the office of the scribes and Pharisees to be teachers who set the standards for the people. However, it is an usurpation to seat oneself on a throne or a chair of instruction, even if it is empty. Moses was the called leader of his people, reluctant to accept the position. He was also the lawgiver in a restricted sense, in that he was the agent of God's giving of the Law. There must always be interpreters of the Scriptures and teachers of the Law, also in the kingdom of God. But those to whom this discourse is addressed not only placed themselves in this position without a call from God but also thought of themselves as lawgivers like Moses.⁵³

There can be no doubt that Jesus did not approve of the whole teaching of the scribes and Pharisees. This discourse and Matthew 15 are evidence enough to make this assertion entirely sure. But the suggestion of Lenski and Zahn that Jesus in this simply declaratory statement is criticizing the office of teacher which they hold seems to this writer to be beginning the attack before Jesus began it (cf. Deut. 17:10ff.).

This writer does not agree, however, with the judgment of Streeter that the statement with the subsequent demand of verse three is an all-inclusive statement of approval, and thus in conflict with other statements of Jesus. To this point Streeter says,

Here we have attributed to our Lord an emphatic commandment to obey, not only the Law, but the scribal interpretation of it. That is to say, He is represented

⁵³Zahn, op. cit., I, 650.

as inculcating scrupulous obedience to that very "tradition of the elders" which he specifically denounces in Mk. vii. 13.⁵⁴

Streeter criticizes the redactor, not Jesus, for this contradiction.⁵⁵

It is quite correct that one cannot reach a decision on the exact import of verse two without, at the same time, reaching a decision on the nature of the command of verse three. The fact that they are tied together with the connective *οὐν* makes them more directly related than Zahn admits when he suggests that the connective relates the material to all of what follows, including the criticism of the Pharisees' life and teaching.⁵⁶ Nor is Lenski correct in simply fabricating a meaning for the connective which would allow for his theory of usurpation.⁵⁷ Surely the approach of Broadus, A. B. Bruce, and Plummer is much more forthright and realistic; they hold that Jesus is not challenging the right of the scribes and Pharisees to teach.⁵⁸ Fahling seems to have allowed the force of the statement to stand when he suggests as its meaning:

⁵⁴Streeter, op. cit., p. 257.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Zahn, op. cit., I, 650.

⁵⁷Lenski, op. cit., p. 894.

⁵⁸Broadus, op. cit., I, 464; A. B. Bruce, op. cit., p. 191; Plummer, op. cit., p. 314. Plummer goes on, and astray, with a suggested different reading for the whole statement.

They continued in the office of this great man of God, and as far as they were actually engaged as interpreters of the Mosaic Law, they were right in demanding obedience.⁵⁹

The "as far as" clause, something of a limitation, is a device used also by other authors as they comment on the statement.⁶⁰ It is apparently the intent of these men to qualify the statement of Jesus so that it may not be construed as an absolute; yet they do not doubt that Jesus recognized the authority of these teachers and demanded obedience to them.

It is interesting to note in passing that apologists for Judaism find no need to qualify the statement in any way. Thus Moore says,

It is to be observed, however, that notwithstanding all the faults he finds with the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus recognizes them as the legitimate interpreters of the law, and bids his disciples obey their injunctions.⁶¹

Moore finds such a statement of the approval of this authority quite natural, for he feels that the mediating of the law to the people was the entirely valid role of the Pharisees.⁶² Jocz is also careful to point out that it was

⁵⁹Fahling, op. cit., p. 549.

⁶⁰Ylvisaker, op. cit., p. 583; Allen, op. cit., p. 244.

⁶¹George Foot Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), I, 262.

⁶²Ibid., I, 66-67.

the deeds of the Pharisees that Jesus attacked, while at the same time showing respect for their teaching.⁶³

The most balanced view is the one above which admits that Jesus recognizes a valid position of teaching the Law and states correctly that in Jewish society the scribes and Pharisees hold that position; if the position is valid and the law is being taught, obedience is rightfully demanded. But the qualification also belongs to this balanced view. This simply cannot be a blanket approval of the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. The entire series of clashes between Jesus and these people make this impossible. There is nothing in the statement itself, however, which seems to allow for the qualification, except for the specific mention of Moses' seat. Lenski's attempt to limit the statement by forcing a difference between Pharisaic sayings and teachings is without support.⁶⁴ Nor is there any support for Edersheim's qualification of the statement, namely that obedience is demanded only in the area of outward observances.⁶⁵ **πάντα ὅσα** does not allow for compromise. Nor do the imperatives **ποιήσατε** and **τηρεῖτε** allow for anything short of acting in accord with what they say. Where, then, is the

⁶³Jocz, op. cit., p. 328; cf. also p. 27.

⁶⁴Lenski, op. cit., pp. 894-95.

⁶⁵Edersheim, op. cit., II, 406-07.

room for qualification? It is in the fact that obedience is demanded because the scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Just as their authority is not absolute, but dependent on Moses, so the demand for obedience cannot be absolute, but dependent on their actually carrying on in the tradition of Moses.

Such demand for obedience with qualifications is not without parallel. Jesus did not allow the scribes and Pharisees to overrule the fourth commandment with their principle of the higher dedication of what might have been used for the parents' support (Matt. 15:3-9), but He Himself said that when the love of parents conflicts with following Him, the one who continues to follow parents becomes unworthy of Him (Matt. 10:34-38). Obedience to parents, therefore, has at least one qualification: the higher demand of obedience to God. St. Paul states the command that everyone be subject to higher powers (Romans 13:1) and St. Peter says simply, "Honor the king" (1 Pet. 2:17), and yet God was pleased that the men in the fiery furnace defied the king (Daniel 3). Obedience to rulers is not without qualification. Perhaps more to the point is obedience to pastors. Within several verses of each other are the commands, "Obey them that have the rule over you" (Hebrews 13:17) and "Don't be carried about with strange doctrines" (Hebrews 13:9). Obediences to spiritual overseers is not without qualification.

So in Matthew 23:2-3, doing what the Pharisaic teachers

say is demanded. But just as rulers, parents, and pastors derive their authority from God, so the scribes and Pharisees derive their authority from Moses and thus from God. Obedience to the scribes and Pharisees is therefore not without qualification. Peter is altogether right when he says to the members of the Sanhedrin, some of whom were surely a part of Jesus' audience on this day, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:27). Those who sit in Moses' seat are to be obeyed to the extent that they represent Moses, the representative of God.

Doing what the Pharisaic teachers say is specifically commanded, but doing what the Pharisaic teachers do is specifically forbidden. The fact that the imperative **ποιεῖτε** is present tense rather than aorist might suggest that the people had used the apparent observance of the law by the scribes and Pharisees as a pattern that they strove to follow in their own lives; with the present imperative in the prohibition Jesus may well mean specifically that the people are to stop acting in accord with their deeds.⁶⁶ Lenski likely has found the truth of the matter when he says, "The scribes and the Pharisees were greatly revered by the common people, and thus their example was constantly followed. Jesus tells the people to stop this."⁶⁷

⁶⁶Robertson, op. cit., p. 851.

⁶⁷Lenski, op. cit., p. 895.

The Pharisaic right to demand obedience when they speak the law is confirmed; their right to continue to demand that the people copy their observances is denied. The short statement at the end of the verse explains the distinction: "for they say and do not do." In this context, the statement is probably not altogether broad so as to suggest that the Pharisees simply didn't do what they said. The context has been speaking of law statement and law observance; thus although "they speak" has no explicit object, the intended object is surely "the law," both Biblical and traditional. The statement in its full import seems to be, "They state the law, the standard for judging observance, and fail to meet this standard in their own practice." Thus the statement becomes an explanation, the reason why the people should obey when the scribes and Pharisees speak but why they should not follow when the scribes and Pharisees act. They are right in stating the demands of the law, but they are wrong in supposing that their observances meet those demands.⁶⁸

Verse four states that the scribes and Pharisees place on the shoulders of men the heavy burdens which they have put together and refuse to alleviate the crush of this burden even slightly. Lenski believes that Jesus has gone on to a

⁶⁸This is the approximate position of Allen, op. cit., p. 244, and William Bruce, Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew (London: James Speirs, 1910), p. 495.

new subject.⁶⁹ But consistent with the implications of the preceding verse stated above, this writer tends to agree with Allen, who says, "The verse gives an example of the failure to 'do' referred to in v. 3."⁷⁰ The scribes and Pharisees are right in that they state the demands of the law, but they are wrong in that they suppose that their observances meet those demands. "The law was given not as a burden, but as a privilege. But the Pharisaic interpretation of it made it a burden upon life."⁷¹ Living under the heavy burdens imposed by the Pharisees does not bring success in observing and keeping the law; as a matter of fact, in its missing the real nature of law observance, the burden actually constitutes not keeping the law. The verse is a commentary on "saying and not doing." It objects to Pharisaic doing as a failure to recognize the real thrust of the law. This is an objection that Jesus had expressed earlier when He accused the Pharisees of not understanding "I require mercy, not sacrifice" (e.g., Matt. 12:1-8). Dibelius says,

The Law with its precepts could have become for men the occasion for recognizing the absolute will of God. But men have defrauded themselves of this opportunity by

⁶⁹Lenski, op. cit., p. 395.

⁷⁰Allen, op. cit., p. 244.

⁷¹Ibid.

their expansion of the precepts into a legal system.⁷²

But apart from the place of the verse in its context, there remains the problem of what it is that the verse specifically says. The problem is whether or not the verse contrasts what the scribes and Pharisees force men to do with what they themselves do. Perhaps the verse says that they force men to endless heavy observances while they themselves do not lift a finger to observe these same things. Or perhaps the verse says that they load men down with observances and refuse to lighten the load even a little bit. One hesitates to conclude that the verse accuses the Pharisees of failing to do what they demanded of others. Most exegetes attempt to avoid such a conclusion. Some accomplish this by suggesting that the heavy burdens refer to something other than the numerous Pharisaic regulations; others suggest that the fault of the Pharisees here named is that they refuse to remove these burdens, not that they refuse to assume them. It would indeed be surprising that Jesus here should accuse the Pharisees of refusing to shoulder the burdens they placed on others. While the Gospels often state that the Pharisees failed to keep the real heart of the law, the suggestion is never made that they in fact did not observe the Sabbath, fast, tithe, stay away from uncleanness, attend

⁷²Martin Bibbelius, Jesus, translated by Charles B. Hedrick and Frederick C. Grant (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c.1949), p. 126.

to prayer, and the like. Perhaps the Pharisees cannot be absolutely equated with the "righteous" often mentioned in Jesus' teaching, but when the Jewish nation is divided into the "lost sheep" and the "righteous" it is quite apparent that the Pharisees are included in the latter group. The Gospels admit freely that the Pharisees were quite adept at observances and rites and were constantly striving to achieve righteousness. There is no reason to doubt that the Pharisees as a group burdened themselves with the burdens they placed on others. That it should be so was declared by the rabbis. Loewe states, after noting a number of rabbinic decrees to this effect, "The Pharisees strove to make everyone scrupulous: they put no burdens on others which they themselves refused to shoulder."⁷³ The revered Shammai said, "Do not make the Law light for thyself and heavy for other others. . . ."⁷⁴

This writer tends, therefore, to reject the opinion of A. B. Bruce when he is not surprised "to find our Lord hinting that the Rabbinical law-makers were the greatest law-breakers."⁷⁵ He assumes that the scribes were resorting

⁷³Herbert Loewe, "The Ideas of Pharisaism," in The Contact of Pharisaism with Other Cultures, edited by Herbert Loewe, in Judaism and Christianity (London: The Sheldon Press, 1937), II, 47.

⁷⁴quoted in G. G. Montefiore and Herbert Loewe, A Rabbinic Anthology (New York: Meridian Books Inc., 1960), p. 405.

⁷⁵A. B. Bruce, op. cit., p. 196.

to "evasive inventions for releasing themselves and others from the obligations they had created."⁷⁶ That the Pharisees did employ legal fiction "in order to safeguard principles while relaxing hard conditions" is supported by Loewe.⁷⁷ But that they used this device to excuse themselves from legal observances is not supported; all available information suggests the contrary.

Lenski also holds that Jesus is accusing the scribes and Pharisees of failing to do what they require others to do. But he maintains that the binding of heavy burdens upon men is accomplished when they preach all law and no Gospel; then they themselves fall short of honest obedience of that Law.⁷⁸ The writer is not favorably inclined toward this exegesis because it reads more than is warranted into the text. Lenski is doubtlessly right in suggesting that the scribes and Pharisees did not teach law and Gospel properly; but the text of this verse does not make that accusation.

The legal prescriptions of the scribes and Pharisees are accurately described as "heavy burdens." Weber points to the difficulty that any average Jew would face in all the demands for strict training, for observance of countless laws, for separation from all but the pious. The form of

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Loewe, op. cit., p. 52.

⁷⁸Lenski, op. cit., pp. 895-96.

holiness which the scribes and Pharisees practiced and demanded was so far beyond the potential of the peasant that such a person seldom was a part of the movement.⁷⁹

The Pharisaic interpretation of the law made the law, which had been given as a privilege, a burden upon life.⁸⁰ The Pharisaic demands were heavy burdens in sheer bulk.

A. B. Bruce describes them as

an enormous multiplication of rules to make the written law cover the whole ground of human conduct,--a huge development of what may be called a scribe-made law; a burden even to think of, how much more to practice!⁸¹

By their very nature they are heavy burdens, for they are strict and detailed.⁸² They are also heavy burdens in the estimate of those on whom they are imposed. Schürer characterizes this well when he says,

Nothing was left to free personality, everything was placed under the bondage of the letter. The Israelite, zealous for the law, was obliged at every impulse and movement to ask himself, what is commanded? At every step, at the work of his calling, at prayer, at meals, at home and abroad, from early morning till late in the evening, from youth to old age, the dead, the deadening formula followed him. A healthy moral life could not flourish under such a burden, action was nowhere the

⁷⁹Max Weber, Ancient Judaism, translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952), p. 390.

⁸⁰Allen, op. cit., p. 244.

⁸¹A. B. Bruce, op. cit., p. 193.

⁸²W. F. Besser, Das Evangelium St. Matthäi (Zehnter Band; Halle a. S.: Richard Muhlmann's Verlagshandlung, 1892), p. 643. Cf. also Plummer, op. cit., p. 314.

result of inward motive, all was, on the contrary, weighed and measured. Life was a continual torment to the earnest man, who felt at every moment that he was in danger of transgressing the law; and where so much depended on the external form, he was often left in uncertainty whether he had really fulfilled its requirements.⁸³

The Pharisaic teaching of divine retribution added to the weight of the burden. "He who did much had to expect from God's justice the bestowal of much reward; while on the other hand every transgression entailed its corresponding punishment."⁸⁴ Such extensive, detailed, difficult, demanding, and formal regulations, which constituted the Pharisaic body of law, are accurately described as heavy burdens. It seems evident that these are the very burdens which Jesus had in mind in the use of the term "heavy burdens."

It should be noted that the rabbis admit freely that their legislation tended to be heavy. Edersheim lists a series of rabbinic statements which justify his conclusion that the rabbis admitted that their ordinances always made the burden heavier, never lighter.⁸⁵ Strack-Billerbeck also lists a whole series of statements in which the descriptive adjective "heavy" is used freely of the scribal precepts,

⁸³Emil Schürer, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, translated by Sophia Taylor and Peter Christie (Second edition; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), II, ii, 125.

⁸⁴Ibid., II, ii, 91.

⁸⁵Edersheim, op. cit., II, 407-08.

and the entire body of legislation is described as an attempt to make the written law more stringent and binding.⁸⁶ When Jesus stated that the scribes and Pharisees placed heavy burdens upon the shoulders of men, they may well have agreed.

Matthew uses similar terminology in a statement of Jesus that contrasts notably. Jesus speaks of His own **φορτίον**, but says of it that it is light. He invites those who are burdened (not necessarily to be identified with burdens imposed by the Pharisees) to take His yoke because His burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30). The reader is instructed in the nature of the Pharisaic burdens by this contrast. The message of the Pharisees is as different from the comfort which Christ offers as heavy burdens are from a light burden. They pretended to represent God in imposing their laws upon His people, but instead they had completely misrepresented Him. Thus the conclusion that Christ and the Pharisees could have very little in common is supported. The incompetence of the scribes and Pharisees which Christ had demonstrated with the "David's Son: David's Lord" question is altogether evident.

But the conclusion that this verse accuses the Pharisees of imposing heavy burdens upon the people while they themselves refuse to alleviate them even a little depends still on the establishment of the meaning of the latter

⁸⁶Strack and Billerbeck, op. cit., I, 911-13.

clause. There is no evidence in Hellenistic Greek that *κινέω* is used to suggest some idea of "doing" or "performing." Therefore it is unlikely that the clause means that the scribes and Pharisees fail to follow their own legislation. The Greek term means "remove" or "move."⁸⁷ To the latter meaning belong the two New Testament instances of its use to describe the shaking of heads (Matt. 27:39; Mark 15:29). The former meaning obviously is intended in the warning to the church at Ephesus in which their repentance is demanded so that Christ does not "remove" their lamp from its place (Rev. 2:5). One must suppose the same literal transitive sense of the word in the passage under study. There is no evidence for assuming another meaning, and, besides, the normal meaning fits well into the sense of the verse. The verse does not contrast the efforts of the people with the efforts of the scribes and Pharisees. There is indeed a strong contrast expressed in the use of the terms "shoulder" and "finger" as descriptive of the amount of exertion. But the intended contrast is between the terrible effort which the scribes and Pharisees force the people to make and their own unwillingness to stir a finger to remove

⁸⁷Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, translated and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, c.1957), p. 433. Cf. also Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, edited by Henry Stuart Jones and Others (Ninth edition; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 952.

some of the weight of that burden.

The verse is then an example of Pharisaic saying and not doing. But the "not doing" is not found in refusal of the Pharisees to shoulder their own burdens; it is found instead in the making of burdens. They say that the will of God must be done, but then they work with such a standard of performance that the will of God is hidden completely and, in fact, lost. They say that men must serve and worship God, but they are not serving and worshipping God by observing their countless regulations. They are simply loading heavy burdens on people and are not even permitting them to do what really must be done. A. B. Bruce has caught the tragedy of the situation:

This business of hedging once begun was a serious affair. The law itself, as reconstructed by Ezra, was a hedge to the religion of Israel, as a people in covenant with God. And now in turn it was discovered that it too needed a hedge. And the second hedge needed a third, and the third a fourth, and so on ad infinitum, till there was nothing but a vast expanse of hedges, and the true thing for which all the hedging had taken place, the true worship and service of God, had somehow disappeared. The immense development of concentric hedge-work found its historic monument in the Talmud, that vast pyramid in which Judaism lies entombed. It was that pyramid the scribes, without knowing it, were busy building, stone upon stone, during the night of legalism.⁸⁸

Jesus warns the people that the Pharisees with all of

⁸⁸Alexander B. Bruce, Apologetics; or, Christianity Defensively Stated, in The International Theological Library, edited by Charles A. Briggs and Stewart D. F. Salmond (Third edition; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, c.1892), p. 283.

their keeping of the law are actually failing to do the very thing which they say must be done, to serve God and do His will. Their works do not accomplish that which they claim for them. Now Jesus turns His emphasis to the sham character of the works of the scribes and Pharisees. He accuses them of making a show of piety, sheer externalism, and of using their acknowledged piety as an occasion for glorying in their honor, crass vanity. Moore objects to this criticism of the scribes and Pharisees as a group:

Men who make a show of more piety or virtue than they possess are not peculiar to any creed or age, and the higher the value set on religiousness the more they have flourished. The Pharisees had endeavored by teaching and example to establish a higher standard of religion in Judaism, and had gained the reputation of being more religious than their Sadducean opponents or the ignorant and negligent mass of the people. That many men cared more for the reputation than for the reality, is only what human nature would lead us to expect; and that many sincere Pharisees thought better of themselves in comparison with other men than it is good for any man to think, and that their superior airs were often very disagreeable, may be taken for granted. But that the Pharisees as a whole were conscious and calculating hypocrites whose ostentatious piety was a cloak for deliberate secret villainy is unimaginable in view of the subsequent history of Judaism.⁸⁹

One may criticize Moore for assuming that deliberate villainy is the charge; Jesus seems more intent on pointing out ignorance and blindness (Matt. 23:16; John 3:10), along with general incompetence and the basic faults of the system. But apart from this, Moore's objection serves chiefly to support the statement of Plummer: "The Pharisees fell victims

⁸⁹Moore, op. cit., II, 193.

to the peril which is inseparable from all externals in religion: 'All their works they do to be seen of men.'⁹⁰

It might also be argued that it is unfair to attack the scribes and Pharisees for a danger they realized and strove to correct. Rabbinic writings with extensive detail attack pride and ostentation and encourage humility.⁹¹ But Edersheim sees in these many warnings the establishment of the fact that there was widespread externalism and self seeking.⁹² In any case, the extent to which the Pharisees were given to ostentation may be a concern of the historian, but such a study has little value in establishing the meaning of this text. Jesus very obviously says, "They do all their works with the goal of being seen by men."

Specific examples of such a show of religion are the widening of phylacteries and the enlarging of fringes. The wearing of phylacteries was apparently a practice introduced because of an external interpretation of Exodus 13:9,16 and Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18, as Edersheim says.⁹³ They were little boxes which contained portions of Exodus and Deuteronomy, attached to the forehead and left arm with leather straps.

⁹⁰Plummer, op. cit., p. 315.

⁹¹Montefiore and Loewe, op. cit., pp. 470-89.

⁹²Edersheim, op. cit., II, 408-09.

⁹³Ibid.

They were worn at the time of prayer as a sign of allegiance and of great respect for the Law.⁹⁴ How many Jews wore them as a matter of regular practice is difficult to determine. Kennedy quotes the Babylonian Talmud to support his claim that the great masses of the people paid no attention to this "enactment of the scribes."⁹⁵ Edersheim concludes on the basis of Talmudic evidence that priests, Levites, and other Temple officials did not wear them during their actual service in the Temple.⁹⁶ He even suggests that the wearing of phylacteries may have been "the badge of a party," and not a universally acknowledged obligation at all.⁹⁷ That the Pharisees were given to this practice at certain times in their history is evident from the many references to it in rabbinic writings; that they attached value to it is evident from the claim that beautiful tephillin tend to make a man beautiful before God.⁹⁸

⁹⁴Madeline S. Miller and J. Lane Miller, Harper's Bible Dictionary (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, c.1952), p. 557.

⁹⁵A. R. S. Kennedy, "Phylacteries," Dictionary of the Bible, edited by James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1898), III, 873.

⁹⁶Alfred Edersheim, The Temple, Its Ministry and Services (Revised edition; New York: James Pott & Company, n.d.), p. 74.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Montefiore and Loewe, op. cit., pp. 279, 191.

But regardless of how common the practice of wearing phylacteries may have been, it is the size of these items to which Jesus is calling attention. He is not criticizing the understanding of the Old Testament passages which led to this practice; He is rather naming the width of the phylacteries of the scribes and Pharisees as evidence of their doing their works with the goal of being seen by men. Perhaps a modern analogy might be found in the criticizing of wearing lapel crosses so large that they cover the entire lapel.

There is even less information available on the practice of wearing fringes or tassels on garments. It is a directive of Numbers 15:38-39 that the Jews put tassels on the corners of their garments as a reminder of the necessity of following the Lord's commandments, rather than following their own hearts and eyes. The Septuagint in this passage uses the same word for those tassels as Matthew uses for the tassels he is describing, *κράσπεδα*. There can be little doubt that the tassels to which Jesus here refers are those fringed edges on the corners of the garments which were to be worn by Jews. But again He is not criticizing the practice; He says that the Pharisees enlarge their fringes. The practice of the Pharisees with these tassels must have been very similar to their practice with the phylacteries: they made them large so that they would be especially noticeable. The apparent reason for all of this was to make the badges

of their faith as obvious as possible. William Bruce calls this the widening and enlarging of the outward forms of religion.⁹⁹

The content of verses six and seven is not difficult to establish. The verses say in very simple fashion that the scribes and Pharisees like the place reserved for the guest of honor at a meal, the prominent seats in the synagogues, the greetings addressed to them in the marketplaces, and the recognition of their position implied in the address "Rabbi." Likely the terms *πρωτοκλισία* and *πρωτοκαθεδρία* are used not in the sense of proper names but because of their descriptive character. These are simply prominent places at a table or in the synagogue. The rabbis certainly are careful to direct their countrymen to regard the scribes as honorees and to reserve for them places of honor. With what Edersheim calls "elaborate directions,"¹⁰⁰ their places are assigned according to rank, age, learning, and the like.¹⁰¹ That the Pharisees should have loved to be recognized and greeted in public places is entirely consistent with their way of dressing (verse 5) and with their general estimate of their place in Jewish society. With these

⁹⁹William Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 497.

¹⁰⁰Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, II, 409.

¹⁰¹Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, I, 914-16.

statements of Jesus there is no problem.

But there is something of a problem connected with the scribes and Pharisees being called *רַבִּי*. Weber notes that Jewish sources attest that this was not a fixed title until after the fall of the Temple.¹⁰² Thus it is argued that Jesus would not have used the term and that Matthew's introduction of the term is an anachronism. Grant is even more radical:

The passage, like the Gospel of Matthew as a whole, must be late; the evidence seems to prove that the titles "rabbi," "father" (abh), and "master" (rab or rabban) were not in common use until after the re-organization of the Jewish schools in the period following the fall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70.¹⁰³

But Schürer has found the obvious flaw in such argumentation. He points out that the term may well not have been used as a title until after the time of Christ, but that before that time it was a perfectly normal form of address for one whom a man acknowledged to be his master.¹⁰⁴ He states the probable evolution of the term:

From this respectful address the title Rabbi was gradually formed, the suffix losing its pronominal signification with the frequent use of the address, and רַבִּי being also used as a title (Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Akiba).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²Weber, op. cit., pp. 391, 460.

¹⁰³Frederick C. Grant, An Introduction to New Testament Thought (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), p. 295.

¹⁰⁴Schürer, op. cit., II, i, 315.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

The writer judges the opinion of Schürer to be perfectly likely. The term is simply the combination of the normal Hebrew and Aramaic word for "great one" or "master" with the normal personal pronoun suffix "my." Just as a man would call his son "My son" and a child would call his father "My father," so a student might call his teacher "My master," or the same address may well have been used by a comparative illiterate in the law when speaking respectfully to one well trained in the law. It is somewhat analogous to an evolutionary process in the use of a term in British history. In times past a peasant might have addressed a wealthy landowner as "My Lord" because he was just that. The fact that there is today a House of Lords and a man who is properly called Lord Boothby shows that the form of address became a title. But to argue that "Lord" was not a normal title in centuries past does little to establish that a peasant would not have addressed his master as "My Lord." The term *רַבִּי* is not used in the Bible except in Matthew, Mark, and John. Most often it is a form of address used when speaking to Jesus. But it is never used as a title in the sense that Schürer speaks of above. It is never "Rabbi Jesus" as a modern might say "Pastor Jones" when addressing his minister. Apparently people simply addressed Jesus by calling Him "My Master." Of course, if the term is purely and simply an Aramaic common noun, it is strange that Matthew does not translate it into Greek, as

Luke does. Perhaps it is safest to assume that the term had become or was in the process of becoming a fixed title during Jesus' ministry, or at least before the Evangelists wrote.

Although admittedly the directives come from a later time, the rabbis did demand for themselves such titles of respect. Edersheim cites a few instances and states that there are others "too painful to repeat."¹⁰⁶ Strack-Billerbeck lists certain uses of the term in rabbinic writings, and notes that some of them were quite early, although perhaps not in the sense of a title in the earlier uses.¹⁰⁷ Again, the whole discussion must be reduced to this: Jesus says that the scribes and Pharisees like to be called "Rabbi" or "My master" by men.

Jesus interrupts His characterization of the scribes and Pharisees at this point in order to direct a word of warning to His disciples and the crowds about the proper use of titles among them. It is first to be noticed that Jesus does not tell them to refuse to be called rabbi, father, or master, as though all three imperatives said almost the same thing. They are not to be called rabbi or master, but they themselves are not to call anyone on the earth father.

¹⁰⁶Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, II, 409.

¹⁰⁷Strack and Billerbeck, op. cit., I, 916-17.

Zahn, Allen, and Plummer agree that "father" was a name of respect and awe for a teacher of an earlier generation.¹⁰⁸

Plummer is most explicit:

There was no need to charge the disciples to refuse the title of "Father," for no one was likely to give it to them. But they were to abandon the practice of appealing to the authority of "the Fathers," which had done so much evil in perpetuating misleading traditions.¹⁰⁹

Thus in the second prohibition regarding titles, Jesus forbids that His disciples credit anyone with the title "Father," with the usual connotations of the term. The reason for the prohibition is that, strictly speaking, only the heavenly Father is rightly called by that name. Schlatter expresses this when he says, "Gott ist es, durch den die Jünger leben, also seine Söhne. Darum gehört der Name 'Vater' ihm allein."¹¹⁰

The disciples are forbidden to accept the title "Rabbi," a term with connotations that have already been stated. The reason for the prohibition is double: they have only one Teacher and they are all brothers. Thus to arrogate to themselves a position above their brothers is a violation of the nature of their brotherhood and a usurpation of the position of their real Teacher. Lenski finds the force of

¹⁰⁸Zahn, op. cit., I, 651-52; Allen, op. cit., p. 245; Plummer, op. cit., p. 316.

¹⁰⁹Plummer, op. cit., p. 316.

¹¹⁰Schlatter, op. cit., p. 670.

the statement when he says,

We all are equally God's children, and his saving truth belongs equally to all of us, none is dependent upon another, all religious autocracy is abolished. Any title that is contrary to this equality of brethren in Christ Jesus, even the desire for such a title and honor, is arrogation as far as the brethren are concerned and wicked usurpation as far as our one real Teacher is concerned.¹¹¹

The titles "Rabbi" and "Father" are readily identifiable with Aramaic terminology that was popular among the rabbis. "Rabbi" is itself an Aramaic term and "Father" is likely the translation of Abba. But the specific Jewish title to which Matthew may have had reference with the term **καθηγητής** is difficult to name. The term is used only here in the Bible. Zahn suggests that it is probably the Jewish **רַבִּי = רַבִּי**, a title used of Jesus in Mark 10:51 and John 20:16. He holds that it was likely a title used for unusually revered teachers.¹¹² Strack-Billerbeck lists a whole series of possible equivalents.¹¹³ The exact nature of the term is difficult to determine. Arndt-Gingrich suggests that it simply means "teacher."¹¹⁴ As such it would simply be a synonym for **διδάσκαλος** of verse eight, an identity which probably helps to explain the textual confusion at this point.

¹¹¹Lenski, op. cit., p. 899.

¹¹²Zahn, op. cit., I, 652.

¹¹³Strack and Billerbeck, op. cit., I, 919-20.

¹¹⁴Bauer, op. cit., p. 389.

At any rate, the term is surely a recognition of position as are "Rabbi" and "Father" and is, in the words of Jesus, not properly given to the disciples, for it properly describes only Him.

Edersheim reminds his readers that one is not to understand the forbidding of the use of these titles "with Pharisaic painful literalism."¹¹⁵ The commentary is given in the verses which follow: the disciples are to seek greatness in service and to await honor from God, who will exalt their humility. Commentary is also given in the verses that precede, for the fault of the scribes and the Pharisees is that they love (*φιλοῦσιν*) to be called by such titles. Thus Zahn is correct when he says that Jesus "is not here condemning the use of the title but the faulty value placed on . . . titles of honor."¹¹⁶ And William Bruce is correct in his judgment: "Our Lord could not mean to prohibit the use of the language that expressed the ordinary and necessary relations between teachers and their scholars"¹¹⁷

Jesus goes on to state the better way. Instead of seeking honor in titles, the disciples are to gain honor in service. In God's reversal of what seems normal, it is

¹¹⁵Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, II, 410.

¹¹⁶Zahn, op. cit., I, 651.

¹¹⁷William Bruce, op. cit., p. 497; cf. also Ylvisaker, op. cit., p. 585.

humility that constitutes greatness, while self-sought honor is reduced to nothing. Richardson has made use of this reversal when he defines humility as "the quality of mind and heart which makes a man content with the privilege of serving another; it is the antithesis of pride and self-exaltation."¹¹⁸ It is not suggested that the disciples must avoid positions of honor and leadership. But they are to cultivate humility in their positions. "Humility does not consist in occupying a lowly place, but in cultivating a lowly state: and a lowly state is one in which there is an abnegation of self."¹¹⁹

Beginning with verse thirteen, the discourse becomes even more pointed, direct, and vehement. For now Jesus aims His denunciations directly at the scribes and Pharisees, no longer simply warning His disciples and the crowds about them. Turning to face those He is attacking and using a very pointed second person form of address, He heaps up a series of withering woes. There is at this point a change in the procedure of the preaching, but it continues to have the same purpose. The discourse is a warning to the people and to the disciples of the perverse teachings and empty acts of the scribes and Pharisees. The woes are proclaimed in the

¹¹⁸Alan Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1958), p. 306

¹¹⁹William Bruce, op. cit., p. 499.

hearing of this same audience; they were surely meant to have their effect on their specific addressees, but they were nonetheless intended for the instruction of the crowd.¹²⁰ Thus there is no break in the discourse at this place; it simply becomes more intense.¹²¹

There have been many attempts to group the woes according to their content or intensity or the like. Thus Plummer suggests, "The first three Woes treat of the Pharisaic teaching, the last three of the Pharisaic character; the fourth is transitional, treating somewhat of both."¹²² The limitation of any such grouping is that it tends to oversimplify; in adopting such an outline one is inclined to overlook the broad impact of each of the woes. They are not mutually exclusive in subject matter and therefore not subject to outlining in the strictest sense. They do not strike at seven faults of the Pharisees and, as a result, collectively characterize the overall hypocrisy of the Pharisees. They are instead seven illustrations of the same malignancy, which renders the whole of Pharisaism corrupt. They are seven blows all striking the same blind hypocrisy with God's

¹²⁰Rudolph Ewald Stier, The Words of the Lord Jesus, The Risen Saviour and the Angels, translated by William P. Pope, revised by James Strong and Henry B. Smith (Fourth American edition; New York: N. Tibbals, 1864), I, 437.

¹²¹Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, II, 410.

¹²²Plummer, op. cit., p. 317.

holy wrath. The writer does not wish to suggest that there is no progression in the statement of the woes. On the contrary, there is evidence of careful thought in placing them in the order in which they occur so that they lead up to a fearful climax. Surely murdering the prophets is a more intense accusation than making foolish distinctions in oaths; total internal corruption is a charge with more intensity than misguided zeal in making converts. But this is a progression in intensity, not in subject matter. The blows fall harder and harder; Jesus tells what He sees as He looks deeper and deeper into the corruption that characterized the modern counterpart of God's chosen people.

A series of woe statements occurs also in Isaiah 5. Thus the literary form of this section of Jesus' Temple Sermon is not without Scriptural parallel. One remembers also the series of exclamatory blessings, the Beatitudes, which Jesus spoke in His Sermon on the Mount. Although they are the exact opposite in intent and content, the literary form of the "blessed" statements and of the "woe" statements is closely parallel.

One is impressed with the identical form of each of the seven woes. The opening words in each case are *Οὐαὶ ὑμῖν*. In every instance this is followed by a vocative of direct address: "scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." In the case of the third woe there is an exception; there the vocative is "blind guides." Then in each of the woes, again excepting

the third, there is a **ὅτι** clause which states the reason for the verdict "woe."

One must conclude that the woes of this chapter are carefully worded. This leads quite naturally to the conclusion that they are not occasioned by a wild emotional outburst but represent the sober judgment of Christ in words carefully weighed for their clarity and exactness. They state the fact of a verdict of guilty upon those who have been observed as they are, not as they seem to be.

The term **ὠαί** is difficult to define. It is used broadly enough so that Arndt-Gingrich makes the general conclusion that it is an "interjection denoting pain or displeasure."¹²³ But to use such a broad description of the term in the discourse under study is to water down the real impact of the term. Matthew himself offers some help in giving the term more exact content in his other uses of it. In Matthew 11:21 Jesus says, "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!" If one asks what He might have meant by this "Woe," he finds that the text itself suggests the answer. "It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you" (Matt. 11:22). When talking about offending little ones and about offense in general, Jesus says "Woe to that man by whom the offense comes" (Matt. 18:7). Again when one concerns himself about the thrust of that "Woe," he finds

¹²³Bauer, op. cit., p. 595.

that Jesus has just said, "It would be better for him that a millstone be hanged about his neck and that he be drowned in the middle of the sea" (Matt. 18:6). Being thrown into everlasting fire is named as the consequence of carelessness in giving offense (Matt. 18:8,9). Finally, when Jesus spoke of His betrayer, He said, "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed" (Matt. 26:24). The same verse continues by explicitly stating "It would be better for that man if he had not been born." So it is apparent that Jesus uses the term in the context of judgment, final and severe. To say "Woe to you" is to announce the angry judgment of God upon a man. But it is more than an announcement of judgment; it is the judgment of God. Thus when Jesus says "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees," He is doing more than expressing His displeasure toward the acts of the scribes and Pharisees. He is saying more than that He was hurt by their refusal to turn from their wicked ways to Him. Nor is this a warning of possible judgment, should the situation continue. Jesus is announcing the dreadful judgment of God. In the Temple, in the audience of the Jewish crowds and His disciples, He is performing the role that will be His on the Day of Judgment. The woes are "judgment and verdict rendered by the supreme Judge himself."¹²⁴

The meaning of the recurrent term *ἵποκριτής* must also

¹²⁴Lenski, op. cit., p. 903.

be stated. The term occurs twice in the Septuagint, in each case to translate the Hebrew **הַיִּטֵּף**, more often translated **ἀσεβής**, **ἀνομος**, or **παράνομος**. Apparently **ὑποκριτής** in its stricter sense is too specific a translation for this Hebrew word.¹²⁵ Arndt-Gingrich lists together the family of words **ὑποκρίνομαι**, **ὑπόκρισις**, and **ὑποκριτής**. For each of the terms lexicons find a history in Attic Greek in which the terms have to do with playing a part on the stage.¹²⁶ Thus in Attic Greek the terms were descriptive of an actor, one who appears playing a role. The specific connotation of the stage is apparently absent in the New Testament uses of these terms, but this history of the words cannot be overlooked. The accusation in the word as Jesus uses it is that the scribes and Pharisees had assumed a role in which they portrayed to the people an image which was not really theirs.¹²⁷ They appeared to be pious, but they were not really pious. They appeared to be God's chosen leaders, but they were really blind guides. They appeared to be concerned for the law, but they had not even understood the law. And so all of the woes remove the actor's mask from the scribes and Pharisees and say, "That is the way you look, but this

¹²⁵BDB, p. 338.

¹²⁶Bauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 852-53; Liddell and Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 1885-86.

¹²⁷Fahling, *op. cit.*, p. 550.

is what you are."

Broadus characterizes the first woe as follows:

The image is of the people at large moving towards the open gate of the kingdom, and on the point of entering; but their religious leaders, heading the procession, refuse to enter themselves, and practically shut the gate in the people's face. They do this by denying that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and striving to turn the popular mind away from the rising persuasion that Jesus is the Messiah (21:9, 15, 44f.), and from entering the Messianic kingdom through penitent faith. They paraded themselves as leaders of the people, while really they were misleaders.¹²⁸

This characterization of the woe by Broadus has caught the nature of the hypocrisy here uncovered by Jesus. Apparently they were leading the people in the way of truth and life, but actually they were blocking that way. Apparently they were opening doors for themselves and others, but actually they were closing them.

The metaphor of locking the door with a key is interesting. Jesus had given His disciples keys to this same door which leads to the kingdom of heaven, but He had instructed them in their use so that the keys would serve both to lock and unlock (Matt. 16:19). In their interpretations of the Torah, the rabbis were said to possess the keys of the doors of heaven; but Jesus accuses them of poor stewardship of those keys, for they had used them as keys which lock and do not unlock.¹²⁹ Actually, they had not gotten the right

¹²⁸Broadus, op. cit., I, 469.

¹²⁹Richardson, op. cit., p. 317.

key, for only Christ opens in such a way that the gate remains open and shuts in such a way that the gate remains shut (Rev. 3:7).

This locking is apparently going on in the face of the people who are trying to enter. *οἱ ἐρχόμενοι* are those who are in the process of entering. The suggestion is surely here that the appeal of John the Baptist and of Christ was greater than is sometimes supposed, and that their efforts might have been quite fruitful had it not been for the coldness and opposition of the scribes and Pharisees.¹³⁰ It is true that the scribes and Pharisees held positions of such influence that they could have accomplished this. For the closed door in front of the people who were on their way in, Schlatter places the blame on the office of the rabbi itself; he says,

Wenn das Wort verdorben wird, den göttlichen Willen verleugnet und den Menschen in seinen sündlichen Verhalten bestärkt, dann schlieszt der Verwalter des Schlüssels die Pforte zum Reiche zu, und der schuldvolle Widersinn dieses Verhaltens gipfelt darin, dass der Rabbi nicht nur für sich selbst seine selbstisch verdorbene, von Gott abgewandte Frömmigkeit festhält, sondern auch denen, die sich zu Gott nahen wollen, den Zugang zu ihm unmöglich macht. Das Rabbinat stellt sich zwischen das königliche Wirken Gottes und die Gemeinde und bewirkt, dass diese Gottes Werk nicht sieht.¹³¹

St. Paul escaped those who blocked the door, but his unique rescue stands in contrast to the many for whom the door

¹³⁰Plummer, op. cit., p. 317.

¹³¹Schlatter, op. cit., pp. 672-73.

remained closed.¹³²

Just as the scribes and Pharisees were playing a role which portrayed them falsely by pretending to be leaders of the procession to the doors of the kingdom, while actually they were locking the door, so they were hypocrites in that they did not enter themselves. Jesus had already characterized them as the son who spoke the answer which the father was looking for but then failed to do what he asked (Matt. 21:28-32). Those who professed membership in the kingdom actually refused to enter.

They achieved the locking of the kingdom through their doctrine and life. Their multitude of human ordinances which demanded outward observance hindered the law from performing its real function; their lives, which sought the mere appearance of godliness, were evil examples which led to godless hypocrisy.¹³³ Spirituality which seeks its own acclaim is a denial of God's rule and necessarily conflicts with His purpose and work.¹³⁴ They worked with the Scriptures, to be sure, but their interpretations served to hide and obscure the very truths which would have kept the door to the kingdom open wide.¹³⁵ The "godly" were accomplishing Satan's

^{132A}B. Bruce, The Kingdom of God, p. 205.

¹³³Ylvisaker, op. cit., p. 586.

¹³⁴Schlatter, op. cit., p. 674.

¹³⁵Plummer, op. cit., p. 317; Allen, op. cit., p. 245.

purpose.¹³⁶ They had abused their office; they were leaders quite different from what they seemed to be. Edersheim says,

Had they taught men the Scriptures, and shown them the right way, they would have been true to their office; but woe to them who, in their position as leaders, had themselves stood with their back to the door of the Kingdom, and prevented the entrance of others.¹³⁷

That verse fifteen should follow immediately upon verse thirteen is supported by the overwhelming majority of textual witnesses. Nor is the support for placing the woe regarding the devouring of widows' houses first in the series of woes of much note. The major ancient manuscripts, prominent minuscules, and a significant number of ancient versions all favor omission of this woe entirely. The fact that Mark and Luke record the omitted statement may suggest that it was really spoken on this occasion; but textual evidence forces one to conclude that it is not authentic in Matthew's Gospel.

The second of Matthew's woes deals with the making of proselytes. It seems as though the scribes and Pharisees might have had on their lips the protest that they were not blocking the kingdom of heaven, for, in fact, they were carrying on a mission program with mighty effort, and that Israel was growing in numbers and in area, so that there were adherents to the Jewish faith the world over. Jesus could hardly be right in His accusation that they were locking

¹³⁶Lenski, op. cit., p. 904.

¹³⁷Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, II, 411.

the kingdom when many heathen were being joined to God's people through circumcision.¹³⁸ This possible protest of the scribes and Pharisees would, of course, not have been valid, for Jesus had spoken about entry into the kingdom of His Father, not about entry into the Israel according to the flesh. At any rate, Jesus berates them for compounding their folly and error by zealously making proselytes.

It is a strange contrast in Pharisaism that its adherents should at the same time have been most exclusive and yet concerned for gaining converts. A. B. Bruce rightly says of their normal attitude toward outsiders,

The orthodox religious Jews of Christ's time abhorred all dogs without the gates of the holy city; pagans, semi-pagan Samaritans, publicans who, though Jews by birth, were the representatives of foreign domination, and even the people of their own race who were ignorant and negligent of the commandments of the scribes--the "sinners" or "lost sheep of the house of Israel."¹³⁹

Edersheim acknowledges this exclusiveness but finds weighty evidence that this same exclusive Judaism had great zeal for proselytism. He says,

Yet the bitter complaint of classical writers, the statements of Josephus, the frequent allusions in the New Testament and even the admissions of the Rabbis, prove their zeal for making proselytes.¹⁴⁰

Weber agrees that "a zealous propaganda endeavor" was exerted

¹³⁸Schlatter, op. cit., p. 674.

¹³⁹A. B. Bruce, Apologetics, pp. 4-5.

¹⁴⁰Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, II, 411.

hand in hand with "inconsiderate segregation from the ritualistically impure."¹⁴¹ Although exclusiveness and mission activity do not seem to be normal associates, apparently both were practiced with vigor among the Pharisees.

But how is mission activity to be criticized? It is subject to criticism in its apparent goal. If mission activity were carried on in the interests of the heathen in order to give them the truth and thus to spread the true religion, it has no fault. But the mission zeal of the Pharisees was directed to the goal of propagandizing a particular faith in order to win another adherent to their party.¹⁴² It is surely consistent with the Pharisaic emphases that they should have sought proselytes of righteousness, who accepted all of the rigorous rules and practices and thus became "complete Jews in every way."¹⁴³ For a man who simply chose to worship the God of the Jews they could have had little concern, but their zeal would have been warmed by a prospect who would adopt the full Jewish ritual in the attempt to affiliate with the Pharisaic brotherhood.¹⁴⁴ Thus the zeal for proselytes on the part of the scribes and

¹⁴¹Weber, op. cit., pp. 417-18.

¹⁴²William Bruce, op. cit., p. 501; cf. also Plummer, op. cit., p. 318.

¹⁴³Lenski, op. cit., pp. 904-05; cf. Schürer, op. cit., II, ii, 311-16.

¹⁴⁴Weber, op. cit., p. 420.

Pharisees was more exactly a zeal for new adherents to the ritual. It is therefore a false zeal, the same false zeal which made its appearance somewhat later in the Judaizers who followed St. Paul's visits in Asia Minor and Europe. It is safe to conclude that Jesus is therefore attacking the making of converts to Pharisaism, not converts to Judaism. The nature of Pharisaic zeal, the apparent scanty success, and the accusation of the doubly evil character of such converts all support this conclusion.¹⁴⁵ Such proselytizing results in new adherents to the cause becoming more hellish than the missionaries who won them.¹⁴⁶

The zeal of the Pharisees in their attempts at making converts is entirely clear in Jesus' description of their activities. Distance, whether on sea or land, does not deter them in their efforts. Devoting so much effort in order to gain converts only one at a time does not discourage them either. They keep on travelling over sea and land in order to make just one proselyte.

Because the convert meets the standards of the Pharisees, he is equally as hateful in the view of Jesus. Because he has the new enthusiasm of a convert and is such a fertile field for the scribes to plant and nourish their godless legalism, he becomes twice as hateful as his teachers. Jesus'

¹⁴⁵Plummer, op. cit., p. 317.

¹⁴⁶Schlatter, op. cit., pp. 674-75.

accusation is really centered, then, in His charge that the scribes and Pharisees make their proselyte twice as much a son of Gehenna as they themselves are. Although not central in the statement, there is in the comparison "twice as much" the suggestion that the traditional scribes and Pharisees are themselves sons of Gehenna. Especially to residents of Jerusalem, "Gehenna" would suggest the smouldering fires and stench of the valley near the city.¹⁴⁷ But Jesus did not intend to say, nor did His hearers understand Him to say, that the scribes and Pharisees, traditional or neophyte, were somehow associated with the local garbage dump. The Valley of the Sons of Hinnom or the Valley of Hinnom (the Greek *γέεννα* is simply the Greek rendering of the Hebrew *גֵּי הַיָּם*¹⁴⁸ was in Jewish popular belief the place of the Last Judgment.¹⁴⁹ In Jesus' preaching it is the place of punishment after death where the unfit for the kingdom are thrown (Matt. 5:29; Matt. 18:9) and are destroyed (Matt. 10:28). Jesus said and was understood to say that the scribes and Pharisees with their converts belonged to hell. To be the "son of" anything, both in the New Testament and in rabbinic writings, is a way

¹⁴⁷Filson, op. cit., p. 245.

¹⁴⁸Bauer, op. cit., p. 152; Strack and Billerbeck, op. cit., I, 93L.

¹⁴⁹Strack and Billerbeck, op. cit., IV, 1029-1118.

of expressing belonging or membership and identity.¹⁵⁰ Matthew has used a term (Matt. 8:12) which in its contrast is quite instructive. Jesus described the actual descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας. According to the description, then, the Jews belong to the kingdom. In this second woe Jesus says that the scribes and Pharisees, and in a compound sense their proselytes, belong to Satan and hellfire.

It is in the comparison of Matthew 8:11-12 and Matthew 23:15 that one also finds the explanation of the hypocrisy of which the scribes and Pharisees are accused. It will be remembered that in the structure of each of the individual woes the scribes and Pharisees are charged with hypocrisy because they do or say something. In the second woe, they are said to be hypocrites because they zealously make converts who become sons of Gehenna. But in what sense is this hypocrisy? The scribes and Pharisees are playing a role which hides their true character when they claim for themselves that they most validly hold the title "sons of the kingdom" and that they are gaining more sons for this kingdom, when in fact they are "sons of Gehenna" and are making their converts doubly as worthy of the latter title. The "sons of the kingdom" are being thrown into outer darkness (Matt. 8:12).

¹⁵⁰Ibid., I, 476.

Sandmel characterizes the third woe as saying simply that "the Pharisees respect the gold of the Temple more than the Temple itself."¹⁵¹ But this misses the point entirely. The third woe ridicules the Pharisaic distinctions in the binding character of various oaths. For a proper understanding of Jesus' criticism, it must be remembered that Jesus said to His disciples that they should not swear at all (Matt. 5:33). He listed heaven, the earth, Jerusalem, and one's own head as things by which one might be inclined to swear (Matt. 5:34-36), but rejects such casuistry that would distinguish the validity of such oaths, for they are all oaths taken before God, regardless of the specific item named. And Jesus rejects "not only the casuistry of oaths but the oath itself."¹⁵² The disciple's simple yes or no should invariably be so truthful that no oath is required to establish truth (Matt. 5:37). Now in His third woe to the scribes and Pharisees Jesus did not forbid the oath itself but rejected distinctions in validity of oaths. "He calls them blind guides of the people of God, not because they required the oath but because they in their teaching dealt frivolously with the oath."¹⁵³

The Pharisees distinguished between the kind of oath for

¹⁵¹Sandmel, op. cit., p. 161.

¹⁵²Fransmann, op. cit., p. 47.

¹⁵³Ibid.

which its speaker "is obligated" and the kind which "is nothing." Strack-Billerbeck states that while the specific distinctions here attacked by Jesus are not to be found in rabbinic writings, the rabbis surely did distinguish between oaths and did make use of the Aramaic counterparts of **ὀφείλει** and **οὐδέν ἐστιν**.¹⁵⁴ Jesus lists two such distinctions (vv. 16 and 18) and implies a third (v. 22). He rejects these specific distinctions as representing perverse values, for He maintains that the scribes and Pharisees have made the less important item the one that binds and the more important the one that does not;¹⁵⁵ Jesus would hold the Temple to be more sacred than its gold, the altar more sacred than the gift on it, and heaven more sacred than the throne of God.

But Jesus does not follow up this statement of reversal. He does not distinguish the thing by which the oath is made; He maintains that every oath goes back to God and is made with Him as witness. Jesus preserves the sanctity of every proper oath or vow. "Specialization is not to be considered an indication of greater earnestness."¹⁵⁶ All distinctions are arbitrary and attach excessive value to the letter or

¹⁵⁴Strack and Billerbeck, op. cit., I, 931-32.

¹⁵⁵Filson, op. cit., pp. 245-46.

¹⁵⁶Fahling, op. cit., p. 551.

form of an oath, thereby diminishing its sanctity.¹⁵⁷ So it is really not simply the conclusions of their casuistry that Jesus condemns; it is the casuistry itself. Schlatter says, "In der Erweichung der die Wahrheit verlangenden Verpflichtung sah Jesus einen Vorgang, der das ganze religiöse Verhalten verdarb."¹⁵⁸ Plummer says,

It is grievous enough that people should be encouraged to think that there are two kinds of truth, one of which is important, and the other not; viz. that which is sworn to, and that which is stated without an oath. . . . But to tell men that, even when they have sworn, they are not bound to tell the truth or abide by their promise, unless the oath is taken in a particular way, is far worse, and far more destructive of men's sense of honour and love for truthfulness.¹⁵⁹

Hypocrisy is not the specific charge of the third woe; blindness and foolishness are. The terms are self-explanatory. The scribes and Pharisees are fools because they make foolish distinctions; they are blind in that they cannot see the error of their teaching. Jesus had called them blind guides before (Matt. 15:14). The combination of the descriptive terms "blind and foolish" is ironic because it stands in direct contrast to "wise and prudent" (Matt. 11:25), terms used to describe the like of the scribes and Pharisees who rejected Christ. Men who can create oaths

¹⁵⁷Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, II, 412.

¹⁵⁸Schlatter, op. cit., p. 677.

¹⁵⁹Plummer, op. cit., p. 318.

that permit untruthfulness without guilt are blind in their own foolishness.

In the fourth woe the contrast between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees is made especially evident. They are characterized as being absolutely exact in their tithing. This is but a sample of their type of exactness. One recalls the whole history of Pharisaic objection to the failure of Jesus and His disciples to keep the Sabbath, to fast, and the like. Jesus did not conform at all to the Pharisaic ideal of exact observance. Now He directs a woe to the emptiness of their exactness.

The Pharisees had become so rule-conscious that their enthusiasm for exact prescriptions to cover everything knew no bounds. Plummer tells the ridiculous end of such enthusiasm in later scribes:

It is remarkable that the Scribes had reduced the heavenly Father to a sort of glorified Rabbi. According to their conception of Him, He studied the Law three hours each day; He kept its rules, and He was deeply interested in external observances. Formalism could hardly go farther than to maintain that God Himself is occupied in such things.¹⁶⁰

In such a system of preoccupation with detailed prescriptions, it is not peculiar that the scribes and Pharisees should have had rules regarding the tithing of tiny garden seeds. They left nothing to chance or to inner motivation; for everything there was a rule. Schürer says,

¹⁶⁰Ibid., p. 315.

In every department of life action no longer proceeds from inward motive, is no longer the free manifestation of a moral disposition, but results from the external restraint of statutory requirement. And such requirement reaches equally to everything, to the greatest as to the least, to the most important as to the most indifferent; every act, whether great or trifling, when estimated by a moral standard, is now of the same value; there is but one point of view for all: to do what is commanded, because it is commanded. And thus there is of course no higher vocation, than to be faithful to the letter for the letter's sake. All depends, not on the inward motive, but on the external correctness of an action.¹⁶¹

The tithe was specifically commanded by God (Numbers 18:21; Deut. 12:6). God had stated that all the tithe of the land should be His, seed and fruit alike (Lev. 27:30). It is consistent with Pharisaism that they should not have asked why God made such a demand, nor did they attempt to cultivate love and service toward God which would lead to such an offering. They were instead concerned to state precisely which items were to be tithed and which not. They chose to answer every conceivable question and problem about the extent of the tithe. Thus they answered affirmatively when asked to judge whether mint and dill and cummin must be tithed. They chose to make their teachings explicit, more explicit than the written law. Thus everyone was obliged to pay attention to their traditions to determine whether or not he was fulfilling the letter of the law. As a result, the traditions became more central than the written law

¹⁶¹Schürer, op. cit., II, ii, 95-96.

itself.¹⁶² Thus if one is concerned for knowing and observing the weighty and binding demands of the law, he must turn to the tradition of the fathers.¹⁶³ The fathers had made the extent of the tithe explicit; their rulings must be observed.

Jesus states that the scribes and Pharisees were in the habit of tithing *ἡδύσμον, ἄνηθον, and κύμινον*. The first two of these are almost surely the ancient counterparts of mint and dill.¹⁶⁴ The third is more difficult to identify. The Septuagint translators use *κύμινον* as the translation of the Hebrew *קִמְצוֹ* in Isaiah 28:25-27. Isaiah speaks of this thing as though it were commonly planted with rye and barley and the like. While that is not very explicit, one may deduce that it was something cultivated for its usefulness. The Hebrew lexicon says that it was a "plant grown as condiment."¹⁶⁵ Apparently then, it was cultivated for its use as a seasoning. Of all three of these items Plummer says, "They were useful for flavouring food and also as medicine."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶²Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, I, 97-98; A. B. Bruce, *The Kingdom of God*, p. 198.

¹⁶³Moore, *op. cit.*, I, 33-34; Broadus, *op. cit.*, I, 472.

¹⁶⁴Liddell and Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 765, 125; Bauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 345, 65.

¹⁶⁵BDB, p. 485.

¹⁶⁶Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

It is safe to assume that they were similar to some of the plants grown in a modern herb garden.

Jesus does not attack the tithing of such things but points the attention of the Pharisees to weightier matters that they neglect. It is not their scrupulosity which is wrong; it is rather scrupulosity at the expense of the broad principles of morality which is attacked.¹⁶⁷ Jesus attacks not their observances, but their values. They had made an either-or choice and had chosen the lesser at the expense of the greater; Jesus suggests a both-and observance with the greater retaining its rightful position.

The weightier matters of the law are "justice, mercy, and faith." Lenski's definitions of the terms seem accurate enough: *κρίσις* is the "act of judging righteously"; *ἔλεος* is the "act of showing mercy"; *πίστις* is the condition of "being trustworthy."¹⁶⁸ Lenski goes on to say, "All three refer to our relation to our fellow-men. All three are both virtues of the heart and acts that grow out of these virtues."¹⁶⁹ Schlatter agrees basically, although he is not convinced that *πίστις* excludes man's trust in God, the attachment to His goodness.¹⁷⁰ There can be little doubt that the trio is an

¹⁶⁷Ibid.

¹⁶⁸Lenski, op. cit., p. 908.

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

¹⁷⁰Schlatter, op. cit., pp. 679-80.

echo of Micah 6:8. If it was intended to be something of a loose quotation of Micah, then the third item in the trio is surely "faith," and not simply "faithfulness."¹⁷¹ It would seem likely that Jesus is accusing the scribes and Pharisees of being so engrossed in their traditions that they fail to listen to the instructions of the prophets with regard to the keeping of the law. In such a case, it is valid to turn to Micah 6:8 for the definitions of the terms. Franzmann has done this in his statement:

scribe and Pharisee could find in the Law prescriptions that made them scrupulous in tithing, but they withdrew from the pressure of the Law when it claimed of them justice for the oppressed, mercy for the fallen, and the committal of faith toward God.¹⁷²

Jesus states that both the central issues of the law and its details ought to be observed; but He emphasizes the former by first position in His statement and by the use of the term "weightier." That Jesus should here be concerned for the central issue is altogether consistent with His teaching and life. Dibelius says,

The center of Jesus' message, the announcement of the Kingdom of God, could readily be combined with the Jewish hope. The radicalism of this announcement, however, the exclusive insistence that "one thing is necessary," devalued the claim of all other duties, including the ritual, the legal, and the nationalistic.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹Filson, op. cit., p. 246.

¹⁷²Franzmann, op. cit., p. 168.

¹⁷³Dibelius, Jesus, p. 168.

Although Jesus does remove the ceremonial observances and the concern for details from the center of observance of the Law, He does not suggest that formal observances be neglected. Bruce says, "The formal may exclude the essential, but the essential does not exclude the formal. He who does the greater will not leave the less undone."¹⁷⁴ Although Moore is wrong in suggesting that Jesus' attitude toward the ceremonial law was "entirely orthodox,"¹⁷⁵ he is right in observing, "That justice and compassion and fidelity are 'weightier matters,' does not mean that neglect of mint, anise, and cummin is commendable."¹⁷⁶ The observance of the ceremonial has derived worth, however. Besser says, "Genauigkeit und Gewissenhaftigkeit in Geringsten hat vor Gott nur dann Wert, wenn sie aus der Gottesfurcht, Liebe und Treue des ganzen Menschen hervorgeht."¹⁷⁷

Jesus finally ridicules the values of the scribes and Pharisees in the proverbial statement about filtering out the gnat but gulping down the camel. It is not likely that Jesus is here discrediting the Pharisees for their attempts to keep

¹⁷⁴William Bruce, op. cit., pp. 503-04.

¹⁷⁵Cf. the many instances in which Jesus and the "orthodox" dispute the proper observance of the Sabbath, the legitimacy of associating with "sinners," and the like.

¹⁷⁶Moore, op. cit., II, 9-10.

¹⁷⁷Besser, op. cit., p. 660.

unclean insects out of their mouths.¹⁷⁸ He is rather using "gnat" as a picture for a tiny thing,¹⁷⁹ and "camel" as a hyperbole for anything large.¹⁸⁰ The point of the statement is that the Pharisees have created folly with their reversed values. They are indeed "blind guides."

Concerning the fifth woe Edersheim says, "From tithing to purification the transition was natural. It constituted the second grand characteristic of Pharisaic piety."¹⁸¹ In another connection he points out that tithing was the specific vow of the Heeman while levitical purity was the special vow of the Haber.¹⁸² Thus there is a kind of progression in the fourth and fifth woes. The woe regarding tithing uncovers a fault in anyone associated with Pharisaism, for tithing was demanded of all members, even those who were not a part of the inner circle. But the avoidance of uncleanness was apparently considered to be a more strenuous command, for it was demanded only of those in the inner circle. Thus purity, ceremonial cleanness, and the avoidance of the unclean were considered to be a higher kind of piety. But Jesus finds

¹⁷⁸Schlatter, op. cit., p. 690.

¹⁷⁹Strack and Billerbeck, op. cit., I, 933.

¹⁸⁰Plummer, op. cit., p. 319.

¹⁸¹Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, II, 413.

¹⁸²Ibid., I, 312.

hypocrisy in it too.

Just as Jesus had used the tithing of certain garden herbs as an example of the whole system of tithing developed by the Pharisees, so Jesus uses the purification of vessels as an example of the many prescriptions of cleanness demanded by the Pharisees. Schürer gives a rather detailed list of the many, many laws for the purification of vessels.¹⁸³ Jesus selects specifically the concern for carefully cleaning the surface of any cup or dish which the Pharisees might use. The concern is not simply with dirt or food that may be stuck to these dishes and removed through cleaning them, but rather with the possibility that something or someone ceremonially unclean may have touched them and thus rendered them unclean. Such a possibility the Pharisees wanted to avoid at any cost; therefore they were very concerned about making the dishes they used absolutely clean. Only in this way could the user of the cup or dish be assured that he would remain clean.

Jesus attacks the concern for exterior cleanliness because it is associated with an absolute lack of concern for the source of the contents of the cup or dish. He accuses the Pharisees of filling their dishes with what had been gained through extortion and greed. About this they were not concerned. Lenski points out that the combination of *γέμισεν* with *ἐξ*

¹⁸³Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 247, supplies the reference to Schürer.

and the genitive "points, not to what fills the vessels, but from what they are filled: 'with results of robbery and incontinence.'¹⁸⁴ Jesus is surely not suggesting that there is a scale model robbery going on inside the cup; He is instead suggesting that that which fills the cup has come from robbery. Arndt-Gingrich lists "what has been stolen" as a second meaning for **ἀρπαγή**.¹⁸⁵ A second source for the contents of the cup and dish is said to be **ἀκρασία**. There are variant readings but this is the most widely supported. Arndt-Gingrich suggests that this is the better reading because "Lack of self-control" belongs quite naturally to the cup.¹⁸⁶ On the basis of the textual evidence, this writer agrees with this conclusion, but not with the suggestion that the Pharisees are charged with overindulgence in the cup. Because the robbery and lack of self-control are simply linked together with **καί**, it seems more likely that they have the same relationship to the contents of the cup. The contents of the cup and dish are gained through robbery; they are gained through lack of self-control. Thus Plummer has come closer to correct understanding; **ἀκρασία** refers to

¹⁸⁴ Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 910; cf. Blass and Debrunner, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-95.

¹⁸⁵ Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

"insatiable lust for gain."¹⁸⁷ This is a second source from which the contents of the cup and dish come.

Again the Pharisees are guilty of reversed values. Their actions suggested that it made little difference from where and how one took what he ate and drank, as long as he ate and drank out of clean dishes. Jesus commands opposite values. First correct the taint on the contents of the cup and dish and the exterior cleanliness will take care of itself. The *εἰ* clause is surely consecutive.¹⁸⁸ Thus the statement suggests that inner cleanness results in outer cleanness. Allen states the whole of it very succinctly when he says, "Use the vessels only for food honestly procured, and it will be unnecessary to ask if the outside is ceremonially clean."¹⁸⁹ The Pharisees were hypocrites in that while they showed a great concern for keeping their food and drink clean by ceremonial washings, they were unconcerned about the purity of their methods in obtaining the food and drink; their dishes were clean but the contents were not.

It is in the sixth woe that the concern of Graetz that the honor of the Pharisees be preserved becomes somewhat hopeless. Graetz says,

But this devotion to outward forms and ceremonies by no means excluded the religion of the heart. The Pharisees

¹⁸⁷Plummer, op. cit., p. 319.

¹⁸⁸Blass and Debrunner, op. cit., p. 198.

¹⁸⁹Allen, op. cit., pp. 247-48.

were acknowledged to be moral, chaste, temperate and benevolent.¹⁹⁰

Jesus agrees that they gave the appearance of all of these virtues, but that it had anything to do with true religion of the heart He strongly denies. The Pharisees are like tombs, freshly white-washed, which have an attractive appearance but continue to be full of the same dead bones and uncleanness. The complaint of Abrahams is not valid; he contends that the metaphor is not natural because tombs were not painted in order to make them beautiful.¹⁹¹ But Jesus says nothing about why the tombs were painted; He simply says that when they are whitened they take on a beautiful appearance. Abrahams has missed the point of the metaphor. The comparison centers in the fact that there is no evidence on the exterior of the neat and well kept tomb of the decay and filth within. So it is with the Pharisees.

Jesus seems to be taking advantage of a picture which would be fresh in the minds of His hearers. Many of them were surely pilgrims who had come from elsewhere to celebrate the feast in Jerusalem. In the landscapes of greens and browns, the white patches of the freshly painted tombs must have stood out. The tombs were freshly painted at this time, for that painting normally took place on the fifteenth of the month of Adar, about one month before the Passover.¹⁹² Tombs

¹⁹⁰Craetz, op. cit., II, 20.

¹⁹¹Abrahams, op. cit., p. 29.

¹⁹²Allen, op. cit., p. 248; Filson, op. cit., p. 247.

which otherwise might have been unnoticed were thus made to stand out by their contrasting color.

It was a concern of the Pharisees that the tombs should be marked in this way, although that concern is not the thing that Jesus here attacks. It was a matter of grave concern for the Pharisees that a man should not become unclean by contact with death. Such contact would, of course, never be voluntary; but it could happen that a man unintentionally step on a grave which he did not know was there, and thereby become unclean. After all, graves were located almost anywhere and a man would not know how to avoid them unless he knew where they were. Thus it was a concern of the Pharisees that they be carefully marked so that they and others could avoid the risk of ceremonial defilement.¹⁹³ Such defilement, for example, could render a man unfit to observe the Pass-over.¹⁹⁴

The comparison would be even more caustic if one supposes that Jesus is suggesting that a man actually becomes unclean by coming too near a Pharisee. But that is not the real comparison. Jesus says that the scribes and Pharisees are like those whitened tombs in this that they too are white on their exterior, righteous, but inside they are full of decaying bones and every imaginable impurity, hypocrisy and lawlessness.

¹⁹³Schlatter, op. cit., p. 682.

¹⁹⁴Filson, op. cit., p. 247.

Here is Jesus' own definition of their hypocrisy, the term He used to describe the scribes and Pharisees in each of the woes. And such hypocrisy is built into the Pharisaic concerns. A. B. Bruce says,

As the little commandments of the scribes made men forget the great commandments of God, so the external rules of the scribes made them overlook the world within, the heart and its dispositions. In point of fact, the righteousness of the scribes very often coexisted with many base affections.¹⁹⁵

He also says,

A man could comply with all Rabbinic requirements, and even gain golden opinions by his public profession of piety, and yet be an utter miscreant. The worse the man, the more religious he was likely to be, because he found it more profitable. The righteousness in vogue put a premium on hypocrisy, and by that fact it was hopelessly condemned. The hypocrite, consummate at once in "righteousness" and in iniquity, was the reductio ad absurdum of Rabbinism, as he was its ripe fruit.¹⁹⁶

The scribes and Pharisees are hypocrites not only in the various ways stated in the earlier verses; they are hypocrites by their very nature.

The woes climax in the seventh.¹⁹⁷ The scribes and Pharisees are accused of honoring the prophets with decorated tombs while at the same time they oppose the teachings of the prophets and share in their murder. In their usual spirit of self-sufficiency and impenitence, which they shared with their

¹⁹⁵A. B. Bruce, The Kingdom of God, p. 199.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁹⁷Schlatter, op. cit., p. 684.

fathers, they made a show of piety in order to shelter themselves from any share in the guilt of their fathers. But Jesus points out that they bore the identical guilt of their fathers, unless theirs should be even greater--they were scheming to kill the Prophet who still lived.¹⁹⁸

The Pharisees apparently realized that their fathers had not acted wisely in persecuting and killing the prophets. They attempted to demonstrate how different from their fathers they were by speaking of the prophets as martyrs and by celebrating the prophets' memory with beautiful monuments.¹⁹⁹ But Jesus contends that they are the children of their fathers both physically and morally, their building of tombs notwithstanding. The murders of which their fathers were guilty were as yet unavenged. God would still work His vengeance on the children who shared in their fathers' guilt. Their own testimony identified the scribes and Pharisees as those children. Schlatter points to an ironic antithetical parallel. The Pharisees believed that they would inherit the merit gained by their fathers; Jesus agrees that there is indeed an inheritance, but it is of guilt.²⁰⁰

But it is not as though the scribes and Pharisees are simply the victims of their fathers' guilt; they actively

¹⁹⁸Plummer, op. cit., p. 320.

¹⁹⁹Schlatter, op. cit., p. 685.

²⁰⁰Ibid., p. 686.

share in that guilt. Jesus tells them to fill up the measure of their fathers. The picture is apparently of a container into which the black guilt of national sin had been pouring for centuries. When the present generation has completed the pouring in of its own guilt, the container will be full and judgment will fall.²⁰¹ It is not as though the guilt of the fathers had not been quite enough to deserve judgment. But God had chosen to forbear and to be longsuffering. This patience could not continue with the added guilt of the present generation.²⁰² The progression is exactly that of the parable of the landowner whose servants were killed. When his son was killed, the landowner acted. So it is with Israel. Surely they will respect God's Son (cf. Matt. 21:37). But God's Son is rejected and killed by these wicked tenants and God's wrath can be contained no longer.²⁰³

Naming the scribes and Pharisees "snakes and vipers" and the choice of the words "flee from the judgment" echo very strongly the words of John the Baptist in his preaching by the Jordan (Matt. 3:7). One cannot tell whether Jesus is intentionally repeating John's evaluation or not; it is

²⁰¹Lenski, op. cit., p. 914.

²⁰²J. Marcellus Kik, Matthew Twenty-Four, An Exposition (Swengel, Pa.: Bible Truth Depot, 1948), p. 25.

²⁰³Schlatter, op. cit., p. 686.

certain, however, that He confirms it. The statement is also evidence that John was right in stating that judgment was about to strike the roots of the teachers of Israel. Jesus is here acting as that Judge. He is surely the Bearer of good tidings, but He came also to judge.²⁰⁴ Jesus sees no hope that the scribes and Pharisees will change. They are already hearing their final condemnation.

The statement of the thirty-fourth verse has a loose verbal parallel in Luke 11:49. There Luke seems to suggest that it is a quotation from some source; "the wisdom of God said" are his words. Matthew does not hint that the words are a quotation. Searching for some source is fruitless because commentators cannot identify anything that might be known as "the wisdom of God." Marsh suggests as an intelligent conclusion that it be understood as a periphrasis for "God," and that therefore it simply refers to the fact that God had foretold His sending of prophets and the fate they would meet.²⁰⁵ Whether the words are a quotation or not, there can be no doubt that in Matthew's statement Jesus has adapted the words to Himself.²⁰⁶ There is no reason to suppose that when Christ says "I am sending," He is speaking

²⁰⁴Plummer, op. cit., p. 321.

²⁰⁵John Marsh, The Fulness of Time (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1952), p. 93.

²⁰⁶Allen, op. cit., pp. 249-50.

of anyone other than Himself as the Sender. Plummer sees in the opening words of the statement a revealing parallel to Matthew 10:16. He says,

The "Behold I send" must be compared with the identical phrase in v. 16; the one looks back to the other. There Christ tells His Apostles that He sends them as sheep in the midst of wolves; here He tells the wolves what the real significance of their maltreatment of the sheep will be.²⁰⁷

The statement is not without its problems even when understood to say that Jesus is sending out His representatives. First, in what sense is this a result (*διὰ τοῦτο*) of the inability of the scribes and Pharisees to escape the judgment of Gehenna? Lenski has suggested a likely solution to his statement:

"On this account" means: because the judgment of Gehenna is already yours without hope of escape, therefore Jesus, their Judge, here and now dictates how it shall descend upon them.²⁰⁸

Plummer says,

The divine will is that all should listen and be saved. But with this desire is combined the just decree that those who refuse to listen shall be condemned; and therefore the condemnation of the rebellious may be said to be, not only the result, but the purpose, of the sending of the messengers.²⁰⁹

Secondly, who are the "prophets, wise men, and scribes"?

It has already been suggested that they are those who will

²⁰⁷Plummer, op. cit., p. 321. Cf. also Zahn, op. cit., I, 657.

²⁰⁸Lenski, op. cit., p. 917.

²⁰⁹Plummer, op. cit., p. 322.

represent and proclaim Jesus after His departure; thus they are the disciples and their coworkers.²¹⁰ But why are they called by these names? Schlatter attempts to identify each title with a specific role. He states that the "prophet" is the writer of Scripture, the "wise man" is the theologian, and the "scribe" is the administrator and instructor of the congregation.²¹¹ There is of course no evidence that the latter two titles were ever adopted by the early Christians, but that is not Schlatter's point. He feels that Jesus is intentionally using Jewish titles to describe His disciples' roles.²¹² With this Plummer agrees, and goes on to state a reason for what Christ did. He says,

The Messiah is to have, not only His Prophets, but His wise men and Scribes (xiii. 52), to match those of old time; and they will have no better fate than the Prophets of the Old Covenant. By using Jewish terms to designate the Christian missionaries, Christ continues to indicate the solidarity of His Pharisaic opponents with their murderous forefathers. In both cases there was bitter persecution of religious teachers for their unwelcome teaching.²¹³

Some of Christ's emissaries the scribes and Pharisees will kill and crucify. The latter term suggests that the Romans would participate in some of these deaths, but, just as in the crucifixion of Jesus, the real blame lies with the

²¹⁰Schlatter, op. cit., p. 686.

²¹¹Ibid., pp. 686-87.

²¹²Ibid.

²¹³Plummer, op. cit., pp. 321-22.

Jews.²¹⁴ Others will be scourged in synagogues and hounded from city to city around the world.

The result of it all is that the wrath of God for all of the unjust murders by the Jews will be brought together on the scribes and Pharisees. The beginning and end points of this period are stated. The beginning is the murder of Abel, an incident which is easily identifiable. The end is the murder of Zachariah, who is specifically said to be the son of Barachiah and to have been murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. In these specifics there is considerable difficulty. The son of Barachiah is the author of the Old Testament book that bears his name; but there is no evidence that he died this way. A Zachariah did die in this way, but he was the son of Jehoiada. The theories for the solution of the problem are many. Majority opinion supports identifying this Zachariah with the priest who was killed, the son of Jehoiada (II Chron. 24:20-22).²¹⁵ It is also suggested, however, that he is to be identified with a Zachariah known from Josephus, killed in 67 or 68 A. D.²¹⁶ Other suggestions are also given. If one omits the

²¹⁴Schlatter, op. cit., p. 687.

²¹⁵E.g., Plummer, Allen, Broadus, and Edersheim, whose views are stated in the following sentences.

²¹⁶Sandmel, op. cit., p. 162. Broadus, op. cit., I, 476, states that Augustine held this opinion; Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, II, 413-14, discredits this identification of Zachariah vehemently.

designation "son of Barachiah" for the moment, the theory that this victim was the Zachariah of II Chronicles has much to recommend it. Jesus would then be referring to the first and last murder of the Old Testament canon as it was arranged by the Jews.²¹⁷ Such scope is apparently intended by Jesus' statement. Besides, the place of the death of this Zachariah corresponds to the detail of Jesus' statement. As in the case of Abel's death, his death is accompanied by the threat that it will be avenged (Gen. 4:10; II Chron. 24:22). There is nothing in the text that supports any other Zachariah. Surely it was he of whom Jesus was speaking.

But why is he called the "son of Barachiah"? One suggestion is that Jesus did not actually say this, but that the Evangelist or an early copyist made a "mechanical slip" because "Zachariah, son of Barachiah" was such a familiar expression.²¹⁸ Allen admits the possibility of the above but states as equally possible that Jesus spoke of this Zachariah in this way "because the tradition of His age identified or confused the priest and the prophet."²¹⁹ Broadus suggests two possibilities: Jehoiada may have had the surname Barachiah, or Barachiah may have been the father of Zachariah and

²¹⁷Plummer, op. cit., p. 322; Allen, op. cit., p. 250; Broadus, op. cit., I, 476; Schlatter, op. cit., p. 688.

²¹⁸Plummer, op. cit., p. 322.

²¹⁹Allen, op. cit., p. 250.

Jehoiada his grandfather.²²⁰ Starke suggests that the man had two names.²²¹ One surely does best to leave the problem unsettled in the absence of conclusive information. This is the advice of Broadus, who adds the hopeful statement, "Not a few cases that long appeared as difficult as this have been cleared up by the progress of knowledge within the present half century."²²²

Jesus concludes the woe by stating the time in which this holy wrath is to be poured out: "on this generation." Apparently the destruction of Jerusalem and the slaughtering and scattering of the Jews were to be identified with the beginning of the "judgment of Gehenna" from which there was no escape. The murder of the Messiah and His Apostles, the climax of prophet killing, would bring on the present generation the full fury of God's wrath for the blood of all of His prophets.²²³ Perhaps the hypocrisy of decorating the tombs of the prophets had deceived the people, but the murderous designs of the scribes and Pharisees did not escape the eye of Jesus. They had precipitated judgment on their

²²⁰Broadus, op. cit., I, 476-77.

²²¹Christoph Starke, Das Evangelium St. Matthäi, in Synopsis Bibliothecae Exegeticae in Vetus et Novum Testamentum (Zweiter Abdruck; Berlin: Verlag von Eduard Beck, 1870), p. 356.

²²²Broadus, op. cit., I, 477.

²²³Plummer, op. cit., p. 320-21.

generation because they were murderers like their fathers.

The transition to all of the residents of Jerusalem and indeed to all of Israel is quite natural. The Jews had acknowledged the scribes and Pharisees as their teachers, and thus shared in their error, hypocrisy, and blindness. Just as the entire generation would share in the judgment, so the entire generation shared in that which led to judgment. That they shared in the murder of the prophets is made altogether explicit. Neither could they escape the judgment of Gehenna.

The validity of the placing of this lament over Jerusalem at this place is questioned because of its different placing by Luke. Allen is convinced that it belongs to an earlier time and that it was placed here by the editor because Jesus' statement about the murdering of the prophets reminded him of it.²²⁴ But this argument seems to suggest that the content fits the context too exactly to be legitimately placed here. This writer sees no validity in such argument. Butler suggests that Luke misunderstood the content of the lament and thus misplaced it.²²⁵ But this suggestion is equally objectionable, for Butler discredits Luke's account in a way identical to the discrediting of Matthew's account against

²²⁴Allen, op. cit., p. 251.

²²⁵Butler, op. cit., pp. 56-57; he argues that the "ye shall not see me . . ." statement makes no sense before Jesus arrives at Jerusalem.

which he argues. Plummer argues well that the context of each Evangelist is altogether natural, although he too assumes that it was uttered only once, probably at the time suggested by Matthew.²²⁶ That Jesus' thoughts in His discourse should have led to lament is quite natural. These were the people for whose benefit Jesus had come. How different things might have been had it not been for the leadership of the scribes and Pharisees! If only Jerusalem had listened to the preaching of John and Jesus, instead of blindly following their blind guides! For the creators of the errors which lead to judgment, Jesus has woes; for the residents of God's city, who had shared in the errors of their teachers, Jesus has tears. And yet, even for them, judgment cannot be averted.

The Lament opens with the double naming of the city. Such a form of double address is found often in the Scriptures,²²⁷ and, if it means anything special, it is likely an indication of greater emotion or concern.²²⁸ Schlatter finds in the spelling of the name (Matthew uses a different form elsewhere) a special intended effect.²²⁹ It is at

²²⁶Plummer, op. cit., pp. 323-24.

²²⁷Jesus uses the form of double address on other occasions: "Martha, Martha," Lk. 10:41; "Simon, Simon," Luke 22:31; "My God, My God," Mt. 27:46. Such an address is also put into the mouths of others: "Lord, Lord," Mt. 7:21, 22.

²²⁸Plummer, op. cit., p. 324.

²²⁹Schlatter, op. cit., p. 639.

apparently intended to be the name by which Jerusalem was customarily called by the Old Testament Scriptures, and wished to remind the hearers that Jerusalem is historically God's work and possession.²³⁰ It might have had the effect that calling someone by an intimate name would have. But this Biblical Jerusalem is more than the exact count of its population to the exclusion of the remainder of Israel. As the place of God's Temple and the center of all that was important to God's people, it is the home of all of Israel. Jerusalem is at times a figurative expression for the children of God in their former status as opposed to God's children in glory (cf. e.g., Gal. 4:25-26). The lament itself has this double view of the now as opposed to the then. Besides, it was not only the inhabitants of Jerusalem in a measurable, local sense that murdered prophets and stoned those who were sent. The writer does not deny that Jesus places the inhabitants of Jerusalem central in this lament. But He does not speak to them in any exclusive sense. Similarly, the judgment which is announced centered in the city, but had the effect of the destruction of the nation. This writer is convinced that Jerusalem must be understood in its broader sense. It is the dwelling place of the nation. In addressing the city and its children, Jesus is addressing the entire rebellious family of God.

²³⁰Ibid., p. 690.

The above conclusion removes the difficulty of trying to identify the many times (πορεύεις) that Jesus attempted to gather to Himself the people of Jerusalem. The Synoptics record no actual visits in Jesus' adult life before this last week. The suggestion that Jesus is talking about intended visits to Jerusalem which never materialized is unsupported.²³¹ It is true that John records a series of visits to the Holy City, and these could well be the attempts to gather the city to Himself to which Jesus refers. But one need not look for a number of times in which Jesus actually entered the gates of the city. His whole ministry was a series of invitations to the "children of Jerusalem" that they come to Him.

The picture of a hen gathering its chicks under its wings is especially instructive of the feelings of Jesus about the rejection of the people whom He came to call to the kingdom. It was a reversal which was altogether unnatural that God's people should not respond to the call of God's Son, "as unnatural as that a chick should not respond to the clucking of the hen."²³² And the picture was also meaningful to the hearers. They had comforted themselves, as had their fathers before them, in the assurance that they were under the shadow of the Shechinah. And the protective

²³¹Filson, op. cit., p. 249.

²³²Franzmann, op. cit., p. 171.

picture of wings over the people had been applied to God's relation to His people (Deut. 32:11; Psalm 36:8). A proselyte to Judaism was assured that he too was under the wings of the Shechinah.²³³ But the people who comforted themselves with this security had forsaken God's way and refused the call to return to the safety of the position under the wings of God's Messiah.

The will of the people was exactly opposed to the will of Christ. He came to the world, but the world did not recognize Him (John 1:10). But even worse, He came to His own people and they would not receive Him (John 1:11). Here Jesus expresses the same thought in two verb forms which are in "emphatic and sorrowful opposition": **ἠνέλησα** and **οὐκ ἠνέλησατε**²³⁴

The children of Jerusalem would not heed the call of God's Messiah. As a result, their house would be vacated. The weeping prophet Jeremiah had to report to his people this threat of God during his ministry (Jer. 22:5; Jer. 12:7). Now that the measure of the fathers has become full, this death sentence on those who had forsaken the will of God needed to be repeated. There is a problem in the exact identification of the "house." Many commentators judge that

²³³Julius Schniewind, Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, in Das Neue Testament Deutsch, herausgegeben von Paul Althaus (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), II, 237.

²³⁴Plummer, op. cit., p. 324.

the Temple is meant.²³⁵ The statement is meaningful with such an understanding. The house that is properly God's house now must be called "your house." God has forsaken it. But Schlatter suggests that it is not specifically "God" that is to be understood as the agent of the passive verb; it is Jesus.²³⁶ The context which follows seems to demand this. The fact that the people will not see Jesus anymore is tied to the forsaking of the house with *γάρ*. This would suggest that Jesus' leaving effects the vacating of the Temple. The whole function of the Temple, with its sacrificial ritual, had been to point forward to the coming of the Messiah, God's own Sacrifice. But the Messiah had found no reception in the Temple; He is leaving and the Temple is left empty.²³⁷

Plummer argues that "house" does not mean the Temple at all, but the city of Jerusalem.²³⁸ His list of examples of "house" in this sense is impressive. Strack-Billerbeck says that "house" means the Temple only when used without any suffix or when the suffix refers to God.²³⁹ But the

²³⁵Zahn, op. cit., I, 660; Schlatter, op. cit., p. 690; and many others.

²³⁶Schlatter, op. cit., p. 690.

²³⁷Ibid.

²³⁸Plummer, op. cit., p. 325.

²³⁹Strack and Billerbeck, op. cit., I, 943-44.

latter conclusion has little bearing on the use of the term at this place, because it is precisely in the nature of the judgment that the temple cannot be called God's house any more. The suggestion of Plummer becomes somewhat weak too in view of the fact that Jesus leaves the Temple for the last time immediately following this statement and that the attention of the disciples was apparently called to the Temple by this statement (Matt. 24:1). The writer concludes that Jesus is announcing the vacating of the Temple, for He is going away.

The chapter of denunciation and judgment ends with a ray of hope. It had been characteristic of God's judgment of His people that He should preserve a remnant. Jesus says that the people would see Him no more until they confess Him as the One who was to come. Jesus is suggesting that a believing remnant will greet Him at some later time with the Messianic greeting of the great Hallel. The passage is from Psalm 118. The content of this Psalm is very much a part of these last days of Christ on earth. Its Hosanna had been sung to Him by the crowds as He entered Jerusalem. He had used the picture of the rejected stone which became the cornerstone (Matt. 21:42). And it was surely this song that was on His lips as He made His way from the upper room to Gethsemane.²⁴⁰ "The one who is coming in the Name of the

²⁴⁰ Joachim Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus, translated from the second German edition by Arnold Ehrhardt (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), pp. 273-74.

Lord" is the Messiah, Christ. Until Israel confesses Him as that Messiah, however, Jesus would not be seen by them. There is judgment in the statement, but there is also hope. There is judgment, but it is not so all-embracing that it is only as enemies that all of Israel will confess that Christ is Lord on the last day.²⁴¹ There is hope, but it is not so broadly applied that all Jews may look forward to one day being a part of the chosen people again.²⁴² Israel is judged, but among them Christ will have His confessors.

When the Christ comes again in glory, and the song which only some sang at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and only the children sang to Him in the temple shall be the song of all nations, there shall be men of Israel, too, who shall raise that song.²⁴³

Grouping of the Denunciations

The discourse falls quite naturally into three sections: Warnings (vv. 1-12), Woes (vv. 13-36), and Lament (vv. 37-39). Each of these sections again is subject to division according to the several subject matters discussed. The first section has two such divisions:

1. The scribes and Pharisees state the demands of the law of Moses, but in their own multiplication of precepts they fail to observe the demands of the law. The people are warned not to do as they do.

²⁴¹Fahling, op. cit., p. 553.

²⁴²Kik, op. cit., p. 26.

²⁴³Fransmann, op. cit., p. 173.

2. The scribes and Pharisees seek greatness in loftiness. The disciples are warned not to forsake God's reversed standard of greatness in humility.

The second section has the seven woes. In each of them the charge is hypocrisy and the verdict is woe:

1. The scribes and Pharisees are hypocrites because they pretend to be leading the way in service in God's kingdom, but they are actually locking the door to the kingdom.
2. The scribes and Pharisees are hypocrites because they pretend to be active in spreading the kingdom, but they are actually multiplying their own godlessness.
3. The scribes and Pharisees are blind because they do not recognize the folly of their own double standards in establishing truthfulness.
4. The scribes and Pharisees are hypocrites because they pretend to be concerned for giving God His due, but they are actually weighing seeds while they neglect to give God the justice, mercy, and faith He requires.
5. The scribes and Pharisees are hypocrites because they pretend to be concerned for purity, but they are actually baptizing their own impure character with the washing of externals.
6. The scribes and Pharisees are hypocrites because they pretend to be righteous, but they are actually using the make-up of outward appearance to hide their unrighteousness.
7. The scribes and Pharisees are hypocrites because they pretend to be different from their fathers by celebrating the memory of the prophets, but they are actually partners in the murders of their fathers and are fabricating some of their own.

The final lament over Jerusalem broadens the scope of the discourse to include more directly than before also those who are led by the scribes and Pharisees. There is a progression of thought in this lament:

1. The children of Jerusalem share in the abuse of God's representatives among them.
2. The children of Jerusalem have failed to heed the call of God's Messiah.
3. The children of Jerusalem are judged in that the Messiah is leaving their Temple vacant.
4. But some of the children of Jerusalem will join in the final confession of this Messiah.

The subject matter of the conflict that built up to the climax of this discourse centered in the Pharisees' failure to understand and keep the law, failure to enter the kingdom, failure to qualify as legitimate leaders of the people, and failure to recognize the Messiah. It is entirely evident that all of these failures are specific accusations of the Temple Discourse. Now Jesus is acting as Judge, for each accusation brings with it the judgment that the Pharisaic hypocrisy has demanded.

CHAPTER V

THE COMPREHENSIVE NATURE OF THE POLEMIC

This final Temple Discourse is in the structure of Matthew's Gospel and in the public ministry of Jesus a comprehensive polemic, an extended discourse which brings together all of the basic errors of the faith officially taught among the Jews.

It is a polemic in an even higher sense than the term is ordinarily applied to an attack upon a religious point of view. For Jesus speaks from the vantage point of the perfect knowledge of the holy will of God as He accuses the scribes and Pharisees of having undermined that will of God among God's people. Thus it is a polemic that does not depend on the strength of its argumentation. Nor does it simply point out the errors of the scribes and Pharisees; it judges them. The discourse is not simply a series of denunciations; it is at the same time an announcement and an enactment of the wrath of God. Hypocrisy, blindness, self-seeking, and murder of the prophets are its charges; woe which leads to the judgment of Gehenna is its verdict.

The discourse is also comprehensive. It is comprehensive in that it attacks not an isolated sect of Judaism, but the theological position of the bulk of the Jews, who looked to the scribes and Pharisees for their examples and ideals. To be sure, most Jews were not scribes. Nor did the Pharisaic

brotherhood include many of the common Jews. But the precepts and example of the scribes and Pharisees were everywhere followed. The Jewish people of Jesus' time had freely granted the scribes and Pharisees the right to teach and lead them, and they viewed the practice of these teachers as the ideal of righteousness. And so it was the concern of every Jew as he travelled about and as he bought his food that he be wary of uncleanness that might be passed on to him. As he raised his crops and sold his products he was concerned about making an accurate tithe. As he attended his synagogue he was concerned that he listen carefully to the interpretation of the law given there. As the sun rose and set he was careful that he did not neglect his prayers. All of his values were Pharisaic values; all of his practice of godliness was guided by scribal precepts. He could not hope to achieve the real goals that were set before him; he had too little learning and too much interference from the daily demands of life. But his own lack of accomplishment only led him to honor the scribes and Pharisees more for their success in righteousness. There were, of course, God's faithful among the Jews; they tried to separate the good from the evil. And there were the Sadducees who did not approve of the teachings and influence of the Pharisees for other reasons. But the bulk of the Jews either chose to be influenced or could not help being influenced by the doctrine and life of these teachers. When

Jesus attacks the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees, He is attacking what the people assumed to be valid teachings. What Jesus calls hypocrisy the people called godliness. The polemic is comprehensive in that it is addressed not to the few but to the many.

The polemic is also comprehensive in that it names all the issues and occasions for conflict that had occurred as Jesus attempted to establish God's rule and truth among the people. There were indeed a series of conflicts between the Son of David and the sons of Abraham. Each of the battles that Matthew records grew out of a fundamental difference between what Jesus was teaching and what the scribes and Pharisees held to be true. There were many such incidents of conflict as Jesus went about preaching and healing; there were many issues which led to conflict. Each of these issues is repeated in the final public sermon of Christ. There is the difference of how one qualifies for membership in the kingdom. There is the difference of the direction in which the people are to be led. There is the difference in the evaluation of the Messiah. There is the difference of how the law is to be understood and observed. These differences had made themselves evident not only in formal statement and preaching, but also in the divergent practices of the Teacher and the teachers. These differences were fundamental and basic. That they be carefully analyzed and explained was important to Christ's achievement of His goal in teaching.

In the discourse of Matthew 23 He names them all. He states those things about the way of the Pharisees which could not stand if the way of God was to be sought and followed. The hypocritical doings of the Pharisees prevented the doing of God's will. All of this Jesus makes a part of His polemic. He has a final statement for every issue that had arisen while He walked among the people of the land. The polemic is comprehensive in that it overlooks none of the conflict which had occurred.

Finally, the polemic is comprehensive in that it is completely uncompromising in the judgment that it announces. That is to say, it is a complete and final polemic. From the fury of the wrath of God that is here expressed there is no turning aside. The sons of Gehenna reap their only possible reward: the judgment of Gehenna. The scribes and Pharisees had succeeded in leading the people to reject Christ. But their success brought with it Christ's rejection of them. For Christ left them; they were left to pray that the mountains may fall on them.

In the person of Jesus, God was at work among the Jews. They should have known of God's working among them; He had done this throughout their history. But Judaism had developed in such a way that the Jews did not attach themselves to the living, acting God. They chose rather to remember what He had done and to attach themselves to the record of His demands. They denied themselves the possibility of using the law to see God's will and work. In their self-satisfaction in having

achieved the highest level of righteousness, they could not recognize or approve of the One who let His light shine in order to glorify God and benefit men while it brought to Him rejection and crucifixion.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

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