

JESUS CONFRONTS THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

Matthew 23
Yeshua §143

It is Day Two of Crucifixion/Resurrection Week. Jesus has bested several attempts by His enemies to discredit Him. In Matthew 23, Jesus takes the lead and confronts the scribes and Pharisees.

WARNINGS AGAINST THE ATTITUDES OF THE PHARISEES

MATTHEW 23:1-12 (ESV)

(1-3) When teaching, rabbis sat on a raised seat in the synagogue called “Moses’ seat”. Jesus affirmed their authority to teach Scripture. Much of their teaching was correct. Jesus warns, “obey the Scriptures properly taught, but do not copy the lifestyle of rabbis who do not practice what they preach.

(4) They did this primarily through teaching the Oral Law with its thousands of additional requirements.

(5-7) Deuteronomy 6:4-9 instructs the Jews to bind God’s laws as a sign on their hand and as a frontlet between their eyes. Phylacteries are leather boxes worn on the hand or forehead during morning prayers. Phylacteries contained Scripture parchments. Jesus did not criticize phylacteries or fringes. He criticized using them for show - like the bigger your Bible the more spiritual you are.

(8-12) Spiritual leaders should not seek celebrity status nor should followers elevate their spiritual leaders to celebrity status.

WARNINGS AGAINST THE PRACTICES OF THE PHARISEES

MATTHEW 23:13-36 (ESV)

(13-15) The Oral Law does not lead to kingdom life. Being disciplined by a prideful, hypocritical Pharisee did not lead to kingdom life. Why verse 14 is missing in the ESV is explained in the footnote.¹

(16-22) Here, Jesus exposes the Pharisees’ upside down, materialistic value system. They valued the gold that adorned the Temple rather than the Temple which held the Shechinah glory of God. They valued the animal sacrifice roasting on the Altar rather than the Altar by which atonement was made.

(23-24) Tithing their spices was appropriate but far less important than exercising justice, mercy and faithfulness. On a number of occasions, the Pharisees insisted mercy be withheld from the suffering because healing violated their Oral Law!

(25-28) It was customary at Feast time to give tombs a fresh coat of paint to clearly mark them and prevent someone from touching and becoming ritually unclean. The Pharisees look righteous on the outside, but their character is hypocrisy and disobedience to the Law of Moses.

(29-36) Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees as following in the footsteps of their forefathers who murdered God’s prophets. They murdered the prophets because they did not want to hear or obey God’s Word. Speaking as The Prophet (Deut. 18), Jesus prophesied they, too, would murder those whom Jesus sent them from 33AD to 70AD; the apostles, prophets and wisemen of the early church. They imprisoned Peter, stoned Stephen to death, murdered James the head of the Jerusalem church, gave Saul (Paul) authority to hunt down Christians.

¹ New American Standard Bible (1995): ¹⁴Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because ³you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation. That ver. 14 is an interpolation derived from the parallel in Mk 12:40 or Lk 20:47 is clear (a) from its absence in the earliest and best authorities of the Alexandrian and the Western types of text, and (b) from the fact that the witnesses that include the passage have it in different places, either after ver. 13 (so the Textus Receptus) or before ver. 13. Metzger, Bruce Manning, United Bible Societies. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.)*. London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994.

In so doing, judgment for the murders of all the prophets beginning with Abel in Genesis 4:8 to the last - Zechariah in 2 Chronicles 24:21 (the last book of the Hebrew Scriptures), fell on this generation of scribes and Pharisees. This judgment was the Roman conquest of 70AD. Mention of the holocaust of 70AD grieved Jesus.

JESUS LAMENTED AND PROPHESED HIS RETURN (23:37-39) **MATTHEW 23:37-39 (ESV)**

The magnificent Temple of Jerusalem was called the *Beit-Ha'Mikdash*, The Holy House. Some shortened it to *Ha-Beit*, The House. In 70AD the Romans reduced the Temple to a rock pile. The disciples picked up on this and the next section records their conversation with Jesus about the fate of Israel.

In verse 39, Jesus sets the condition for His return. He will come again when the nation repents and cries out to Him the Messianic welcome of Psalm 118.

What did Jesus criticize and what do we need to look out for in our own lives?

- Do we preach but not practice?
- Do we put on a show to make ourselves look like a "good Christian"?
- Do we seek the praise of man and the place of honor? Do we elevate our spiritual leaders to celebrity status?
- Do we teach/counsel others from our ideas or from the wisdom of God's Word?
- Do we want to be seen as Christians, but have no intention of obeying Jesus' commands or serving His Kingdom?
- Are we obeying Jesus in the major issues of life (sexual purity, stewardship, marriage, life pursuit, treatment of others, faithfulness to God)?
- Are we greedy (I want more) and self-indulgent (I deserve...)?
- Do we accept correction from God' Word, from the Holy Spirit or from a Christian brother or sister? Are we humble and teachable?

We are never talking about being sinlessly perfect. We are not hypocrites if we are struggling against sin but have occasional failures. Hypocrisy is deliberate deception about who we really are. Let's not beat ourselves up and slap a label on ourselves or others that's not helpful. The proper way to handle our sin is to confess it (agree with God we did wrong), rejoice Jesus paid the penalty for it and then do the works of repentance (take concrete steps to change the attitude or action that needs to change). 1 John 1:9 is our guide.