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**The Jews Relative Independence**

We are working with the Intertestamental Times, the 400 years of silence as some refer to it. This period between Malachi and Matthew is preparatory for the NT times. We've been looking at it from the standpoint of prophecy as described mainly in the Book of Daniel, and from the standpoint of history as described mainly by Jewish documents and secular historians. What we've found just prior to the period of God's silence is that Israel lived under Babylon. And due to Daniel and his three friend's prominence in the Babylonian administration, life was good and prosperous. Jews could correspond with one another, they could own exceptional real estate, they could serve in the government, et. al. When Babylon was defeated by Persia life continued to be good except during the one period when Haman was in power and tried to destroy the Jews. But in the main Persia was favorable to the Jews, the kings permitted them to return to the land, rebuild the Temple, adorn it and restore the city walls. The general tranquility the Jews lived in under Babylon and Persia account for the general unity of the Jews in the land. However, when Persia was defeated by Alexander the Great and his policy of Hellenism gradually was implemented the tranquility disappeared as Jews considered whether they could adopt Hellenism and remain faithful to the Law of Moses. It must be understood, as Edersheim notes, "that, in heathenism, theology, or rather mythology, had no influence whatever on thinking or life...To the pious Jew, on the contrary, the knowledge of God was everything; and to prepare for or impart that knowledge was the sum total, the sole object of his education."<sup>i</sup> What in essence this quote indicates is that Greek culture and Jewish culture were in total collision. Yet, of course, accommodations such as learning the Greek language of *Koine* were seen as necessary since without it they could not communicate in normal every day transactions. Over time it was considered necessary to translate the Hebrew Bible into the Greek Septuagint. But as far as further training in Greek

thought the Talmud illustrates by a conversation between an uncle and his nephew. When the nephew asked his uncle “whether, since he knew the whole “Thorah” (the law), he might be allowed to study “Greek wisdom,” his uncle reminded him of the words (Josh 1:8), “Thou shalt meditate therein day and night.” “Go, then, and consider,” said the older Rabbi, “which is the hour that is neither of the day nor of the night and in it thou mayest study Grecian wisdom.”<sup>ii</sup> This attitude was held among the pious (Hasidim) but, of course, others were taken in by Greek wisdom and having made a beginning in the Greek language made an exploration of Greek learning. Herein lies the fundamental conflict among the Jews which came to a head in the time of the Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes IV, ruler of the Seleucid kingdom who sought to force Hellenism on the Jew.

Antiochus is one of the most important figures in all of history, he ruled from 175-163BC and his realm was very large, including Syria, Babylon and Far East to the Indus River. Despite its large extent he intended to expand it further by encroaching on the other Greek kingdoms, in particular the Ptolemaic kingdom in Egypt. He was a globalist in aim and in a way, a second Alexander the Great, even re-naming cities after himself in the likeness of Alexander, though never reaching his greatness. He gave himself the title Epiphanes which means “The Illustrious One” though the Jews called him Epimanes which means “The Madman” because he came to Jerusalem and outlawed the Torah and all its religious practices without having an inkling of the kind of resistance he would face, even defiling the altar by putting a statue of Zeus on it, what the Jews called an abomination of desolation. He is extensively prophesied in the Book of Daniel because he was to be a foretaste of the anti-Christ. If you know Antiochus you’ll know anti-Christ, they are that closely related in their character and career. Antiochus came and rose in the political ranks by deception and this stirred up armies against him but he was victorious in defeating them. He deceived the Jews and brought them into an agreement with himself but then he turned against the Jews committing the abomination of desolation and forcing his culture of Hellenism on them and the Jews were divided and those who fought against him would win great battles and ultimately be victorious.

The anti-Christ’s character and career will follow the same path. He will use deception to rise in the geopolitical ranks and stir up armies but he will defeat them, he will deceive and come into a treaty with the Jews but then he

will commit an abomination of desolation in the temple and force his global culture on the Jews and the Jews will be divided and those who resist him will be victorious and enter the kingdom. So it's the exact same pattern and that's why I say if you know Antiochus you know anti-Christ.

The book that describes the historical precedent for this pattern is a book called 1 Maccabees which is part of the Apocrypha. It's a book that contains history, tradition and lore. Of 1 Maccabees one author says, "The book is a sober and, on the whole, trustworthy account of the Jewish struggle for religious liberty and political independence during the years 175–135 b.c., i.e. from the accession of Antiochus Epiphanes to the death of Simon the Maccabee."<sup>iii</sup> 1 Maccabees 1:10ff says, "A scion of this stock was that wicked man, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus...<sup>11</sup>At that time there appeared in Israel a group of renegade Jews, who incited the people. 'Let us enter into a covenant with the Gentiles round about,' they said, 'because disaster upon disaster has overtaken us since we segregated ourselves from them' Some of them, you see, thought that they could have a better life if they Hellenized but from the comment of this author they were 'renegade Jews.' Nevertheless, "The people thought this a good argument, and some of them in their enthusiasm went to the king and received authority to introduce non-Jewish laws and customs. They built a sports stadium in the gentile style in Jerusalem. They removed their marks of circumcision and repudiated the holy covenant." They had a reverse surgical procedure to undo circumcision. Why did they want to do that? So that when they competed in the games in the nude they looked like Greeks. This is an indication of apostasy, especially among the ranks of the high priest Jason, since he was supporting Antiochus' Hellenization policies. With Jason in charge Antiochus set off to attack Egypt. On his return he was angry and he attacked Jerusalem and "entered the temple and carried off the golden altar, the lampstand with all its equipment, the table for the Bread of the Presence, the sacred cups," et al. "and took them all with him when he left for his own country." Two years later he smooth talked his way into Jerusalem once more but launched a sudden attack, killed many Jews and set the city on fire. "He pulled down houses and walls on every side; women and children were made prisoners, and the cattle seized." He turned Jerusalem into a military garrison. "The king then issued a decree throughout his empire." This is his decree of Hellenism. "his subjects were all to become one people and abandon their own laws and religion. The nations everywhere complied with the royal

command, and many in Israel accepted the foreign worship, sacrificing to idols and profaning the Sabbath. Moreover, the king sent agents with written orders to Jerusalem and the towns of Judaea. Ways and customs foreign to the country were to be introduced. Burnt-offerings, sacrifices, and libations in the temple were forbidden; Sabbaths and feast days were to be profaned; the temple and its ministers to be defiled. Altars, idols, and sacred precincts were to be established; swine and other unclean beasts to be offered in sacrifice. They must leave their sons uncircumcised; they must make themselves in every way abominable, unclean, and profane, and so forget the law and change all their statutes. The penalty for disobedience was death.” This is why they called him the Madman. And it was this policy of Hellenization that caused a deep division in the nation that ultimately sets up the distinct groups in the NT. Then, “On the fifteenth day of the month Kislev...’the abomination of desolation’ was set up on the altar. Pagan altars were built throughout the towns of Judea...All scrolls of the law which were found were torn up and burnt. Anyone discovered in possession of a Book of the Covenant, or conforming to the law, was put to death by the king’s sentence.” “On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the pagan altar which was on top of the altar of the Lord. In accordance with the royal decree, they put to death women who had had their children circumcised. Their babies, their families, and those who had circumcised them, they hanged by the neck.” Yet,” and here’s where you find the resistance. “Yet many in Israel found strength to resist,” now these are the Hasidim as we’ll discover, the Hasidim found strength to resist “taking a determined stand against eating any unclean food. They welcomed death rather than defile themselves and profane the holy covenant, and so they died.” It’s a very serious time, a very difficult time for the Jews. And it was at this time that Mattathias, an elderly priest who lived at Modin was put in a position to resist and take a stand. “The king’s officers who were enforcing apostasy came to the town of Modin to see that sacrifice was offered, and many Israelites went over to them. Mattathias and his sons stood in a group. The king’s officers spoke to Mattathias: ‘You are a leader here,’ they said, ‘a man of mark and influence in this town, with your sons and brothers at your back. You be the first now to come forward and carry out the king’s order... Then you and your sons will be enrolled among the King’s friends; you will all receive high honours, rich rewards of silver and gold, and many further benefits.” So the king is ultimately trying to buy him off. To this Mattathias replied in a ringing voice: “Though all the nations within the king’s dominions

obey him...yet I and my sons and brothers will follow the covenant of our fathers. Heaven forbid we should ever abandon the law and its statues. We will not obey the command of the king, nor will we deviate one step from our forms of worship.’ As soon as he had finished, a Jew stepped forward in full view of all to offer sacrifice on the pagan altar at Modin, in obedience to the royal command. The sight stirred Mattathias to indignation; he shook with passion, and in a fury of righteous anger rushed forward and slaughtered the traitor on the very altar. At the same time he killed the officer sent by the king to enforce sacrifice, and pulled the pagan altar down. Thus Mattathias showed his fervent zeal for the law, just as Phinehas had done by killing Zimri son of Salu. ‘Follow me,’ he shouted through the town, ‘every one of you who is zealous for the law and strives to maintain the covenant.’ He and his sons took to the hills, leaving all their belongings behind in the town.” So the Maccabean revolt had begun. Antiochus, in response, sent his forces stationed at the garrison in Jerusalem out into the hills to make a quick end to these rebels. Knowing that Jews kept the Sabbath they attacked on the Sabbath and the Jews did nothing and were massacred, “men, women and children, about a thousand.” This caused great grief and so Mattathias said that if they refused to fight the Gentiles on the Sabbath then they would all be destroyed. So they agreed among themselves that they must defend themselves if attacked on the Sabbath and they went throughout the land cleansing the land of all the pagan altars. Now Mattathias was old so he passed the military mantle to his son Judas who was a brilliant tactician, knew the topography and was very bold and it was Judas who would engage in many remarkable battles against Antiochus’ commanders. Four such occasions are sufficient to get the point. First, near Samaria the Seleucid General “Apollonius...collected a gentile force...to fight Israel. When Judas heard of it, he marched out to meet him, and defeated and killed him. Many of the Gentiles fell, and the rest took flight.” As a result Judas and the rebels gained supplies and equipment. Second, near Beth-Horon the Syrian General Seron, having “heard that Judas had mustered a large force...said to himself, ‘I will win a glorious reputation in the empire by making war on Judas and his followers, who defy the royal edict.’” Secretly he moved close to Jerusalem with a force far greater than Judas’. When Judas’ army realized that they were heavily outnumbered and had themselves been without adequate rest and food they despaired of life. But Judas rose to the occasion and gave a moving speech calling on the God of heaven to give victory despite the numbers and lack of food and rest. With boldness he launched a sudden

attack against Seron's army who broke before him and fled into the hills. Judas became very famous. But Antiochus became furious. He paid out of his treasury a year's salary to all his soldiers so that they would be ready at all times to destroy the Jews. Third, in a battle south of Mizpah, an army of 50,000 led by three generals was pre-empted by Judas and his army of only 6,000. Outnumbered, the surprise attack caused them to flee in defeat. Fourth, in a battle north of Hebron, led by the commander-in-chief Lysias, an army of 60,000 hand-picked infantry and five thousand cavalry planned to attack Judas and his army of only 10,000. Once again Judas pre-empted the attack and utterly defeated them. Upon this victory "Judas and his brothers said: 'Now that our enemies have been crushed, let us go up to Jerusalem to cleanse the temple and rededicate it.'" So "early on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, the month Kislev..." almost exactly three years after it was defiled (Dec 25, 165BC), "sacrifice was offered as the law commands on the newly made altar of burnt-offering. On the anniversary of the day when the Gentiles had profaned it, on that very day, it was rededicated, with hymns of thanksgiving, to the music of harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people prostrated themselves, worshipping and praising Heaven that their cause had prospered." The amazing story of the Maccabean's successful result is commemorated by the eight day celebration of Hannukah, each year at the same time we celebrate Christmas they celebrate Hannukah. This is a remarkable story, of course, and a fulfillment of the prophecies in Dan 11. But why did it happen? What's the divine view point interpretation of the history? What covenant promised the Jews blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience? The Mosaic Covenant. What was this covenant chiefly designed to do? Keep them separate from the other nations. What was Antiochus' policy? To make them like the Greeks; to Hellenize them. And remember there were some renegade Jews who wanted to go along with it. They thought life would be easier if they just became Greek. By doing so they were asking for the curse of God. But also there were those who resisted and they were blessed by God and they were able to win victories that rival, in some cases, those won by Joshua at the time of the conquest. So this was the story of the resistance that broke out with Mattathias, and how his son Judas led the rebels to victory over Antiochus. The results were religious freedom though they still were political captives, required to pay taxes to Greek kings.

In summary Hester says, "At first Jewish resistance was passive, but later, in desperation, this resistance became a burning flame. The illustrious

Antiochus underestimated the devotion of the Jews to their faith. Under the circumstances it appeared that their cause was absolutely hopeless, but such was not the case. Though they could not foresee it, they were on the threshold of one of the most glorious epochs in their history.” (Hester, p 322). By glorious epoch he’s referring to a period of the Jews political independence which was gained some twenty years after Antiochus. Judas was killed in battle shortly after their victory. But for the time being they had religious freedom. This was sufficient for some and insufficient for others. For those who wished for political freedom they pressed on. Judas’ brother Jonathan, another son of Mattathias, took charge but he was assassinated soon after by a Syrian general who hoped to take control. However, another brother, Simon, swiftly came in and took the reins. The Syrian ruler Demetrius II Soter needed his support and so in a bargain Soter made Simon the high priest and agreed to free the Jews from paying any taxes forever. “This pact made in 143 B.C. began a new era in Jewish history. At long last they had gained political independence. The subsequent reign of Simon was one of great prosperity.” 1 Maccabees reports, “They tilled their land in peace, and the land gave her increase, and the trees of the plain their fruit...Simon provided food for the cities and furnished them with the means of fortification...and he strengthened all the distressed of his people, he was full of zeal for the law, and every lawless and wicked person he banished. He made the sanctuary glorious, and multiplied the vessels of the temple.” (I Mac. 14:8-15.) However in 135BC Simon was assassinated by Ptolemy his son-in-law, who planned to take the throne. But John Hyrcanus, Simon’s son, out-manuevered Ptolemy and became the ruler. “Under John Hyrcanus (135-105 B.C.) there was a period of rapid expansion. He annexed Idumea, Samaria and Perea to Judea. He beautified Jerusalem. He was the first Jewish ruler to issue coins. As high-priest he offended the strict Pharisaic part and later identified himself with the Sadducees, the rival religious party of the Jews.” Now you’ll see here that Hyrcanus was the fourth ruler since the Maccabean revolt and that it was in his time that there is the origin of the groups we know as Pharisees and Sadducees in the NT. However, it should be noted that the origins and developments of these groups are not strictly clear. The suggestion in this quote is that the Pharisees were expelled from the Sanhedrin due to some offense of the high-priest. Yet it is clear that the Pharisees developed out of a prior group. We will discover that this group had been around since at least the time of Ezra and was known as the Chasidim (aka Hasidim) and that these two substantially differ. The earlier

distinguished by the Hebrew *paras* which means “to separate, to make distinct, to make clear, intelligible.” (cf Lev 24:12; Num 15:34; Neh 8:8) and the latter distinguished by the Hebrew “Peru-shim,” i.e. “the separators,” as applied by John Hyrcanus and those who sided with him against those who were offended. It was this second term that gave rise to the word Pharisee. So the term was originally used by the opponents of this group as one of contempt. However, the Pharisees did adopt the name for themselves but with its alternative Hebrew meaning, “the exponents” of the Law. They saw themselves as the expositors of the Law, both written and oral. Recall that oral law had grown up alongside the written law during the time after Ezra. Oral law was developed because it was thought that the new historical circumstances were not addressed by the written law. Therefore oral law was developed in order to give rules for living in the new circumstances. Those credited with the development of the oral law were the scribes. They claimed the source of oral law to be secret laws that were shared with Moses on Mt Sinai. In any case, by the time of the NT the scribes are almost entirely associated with the Pharisees. The Pharisees considered themselves to be the proper “exponents” of both written and oral law

So it was during the period of upheaval surrounding the Maccabean revolt and the following transitional years that the NT groups known as the Pharisees and Sadducees began to form as the strongest elements in Jewish society. As most know these two groups were opposed to one another at just about every point. So we want to look at both parties. Edersheim says that the Pharisees are commonly known to readers of the NT but that “there is no subject on which more crude or inaccurate notions prevail than that of Pharisaism” and that there is no single group more important to understanding “Judaism at the time of our Lord” or better provides the backdrop for His words and deeds.

As their name suggests, they were “separate.” They formed a distinct fraternity among other guilds such as the Sadducees and the Herodians. The Pharisees are to be thought of, not as a sect, but as a fraternity. They took upon themselves vows and obligations and were completely loyal to one another. While an outsider could take the vows and become a member it was common to think of the “fraternity” as “hereditary; so that St. Paul could in very truth speak of himself as “a Pharisee the son of a Pharisee.” His sister was also a member of the Pharisaic party in the familial sense. So the



Pharisees formed a very distinct group in society with its own rules and orders. As such, if you were living in the NT times you would be able to recognize a Pharisee at a mere glance. For example, if you walked behind him on the road you would see him stop to pray at the appointed times of prayer. If he were in town you would see him standing at the street corners or open air markets with feet together and bending so low “that every vertebra in his back would stand out separate” as he engaged in lengthy prayers. If you saw him face to face you would see in him an attitude of superiority. All these set the Pharisee apart. Yet the most obvious distinguishing characteristic was their ornate dress. Altogether they wore eighteen different garments; inner garments, outer garments, even gloves to protect them from touching unclean things. Their foreheads and left arms were clothed with large phylacteries which held Bible verses used as magic charms to warn away or call up spirits. In his mannerisms he would avoid every touch of persons which he considered to be unclean, even those of lesser degrees in his fraternity. As a fraternity there were various degrees as distinguished by the vows one would make to maintain various degrees of Levitical purity and Sabbath observance. For some the degree of purity was so rigorous that if a woman were drowning he would refuse to rescue her for fear of touching a female or if the victim were a child he would first remove his phylacteries before lending a hand. Such examples are not exaggerations but true illustrations of how the strictest Pharisees lived. This is why Jesus called them whitewashed tombs and blind guides, for they had made much of little things while neglecting the weightier things of the law (cf Matt 23). Religion for them had become mere external ritualism. Inside they were spiritually dead. Of course their strange behaviors over nitpicky things were buttressed by strange interpretations of the law which, in their words, put “a hedge about the Law” so that one would not even get close to breaking it! Yet by so doing the Lord said they had nullified the word of God (cf Mk 7). This was not the mere appraisal of an outsider but inscribed in the words of their own Mishnah, “It is more punishable to act against the words of the Scribes than against those of Scripture.” And yet the most astonishing fact in all of that was they held sway over the entire Jewish nation and were but a tiny number comparatively speaking. Edersheim notes, “the number of the fraternity amounted at the time of Herod only to about six thousand. Yet this inconsiderable minority could cast Judaism in its mould, and for such terrible evil give its final direction to the nation!” Indeed it was they who led the nation in rejecting the Messiahship of Jesus.

Of course they were not always evil. Their origins ultimately are to be traced back to the time of Ezra and his reforms. Ezra had called the people to repent of their intermarriages with foreign wives and as a consequence the men repented and took vows to keep themselves separate from heathenism. This group became “known...as Hasidim” (aka Chasidim), a word meaning “the pious.” At the time of Alexander the Great their vows began to be put to the test. By the time of Antiochus they naturally “gathered round the Maccabees for Israel’s God and for Israel.” Edersheim says, “Their very origin as a party stretched back to the great national struggle which had freed the soil of Palestine from Syrian domination. As soon as religious freedom was won they stopped fighting since they had no political ambitions.” The group called Hasidim were interested in religious freedom only, they had no political ambitions. Once religious freedom was attained they were satisfied. “when the descendants of the Maccabees declined into worldly pomp and Grecian ways,” even combining “the royal crown of David with the high-priest’s mitre...” they “deserted those Maccabees whom formerly they had supported” and “called on them to resign the high-priesthood.” In all likelihood the final break occurred under John Hyrcanus (135-105BC). When he offended them many of them voiced their convictions and were martyred. At that time they were labeled the Pharisees or “separators” and the Hasidim disappeared as a class giving way to the Pharisees. The most obvious difference between the earlier group and the latter being that the Hasidim had been more concerned with the inner spiritual life whereas the Pharisees became increasingly devoted to external ritualism. It is said that the Pharisees “were bound by these two vows—that of tithing and that in regard to purifications.” Tithing and purifications became the prevailing practices of the Pharisees that gradually separated them from non-Pharisees. As far as tithing was concerned, the Pharisees bought and sold from one another only and were free from paying tithe on what was purchased on the assumption that the selling Pharisee had paid all tithes on what was purchased. This assumption was not granted to non-Pharisees and any buyer had to pay a tithe on what was purchased. This laid a heavy burden on all non-Pharisees and is perhaps what is behind the condemnation of Jesus where He said, “they tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move then with so much as a finger.” As far as purifications were concerned, the Pharisees were rigorous in maintaining Levitical purity and the degree of purity divided even the Pharisees into four orders. Generally

speaking he could neither buy nor sell anything to a non-Pharisee; he could neither eat at his table nor admit him to his own; nor could he conduct any act in his presence if it might be connected with the laws of purity. Perhaps this is what lay behind the condemnation of Jesus that “you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.” The Pharisees became slavishly addicted to a system of religious and ascetic externalism. Of course this system ultimately contravened the spirit of the Law. “As the most varied questions would here arise in practice, which certainly were not answered in the law of Moses, the “traditions,” which were supposed to explain and supplement the Divine law, became necessary. In point of fact, the Rabbis speak of them in that sense, and describe them as “a hedge” around Israel and its law...The result was a system of pure externalism, which often contravened the spirit of those very ordinances, the letter of which was slavishly worshipped...”

In conclusion, “...when we bring the picture of Pharisaism, as drawn in Rabbinical writings, side by side with the sketch of it given by our Lord, we are struck not only with the life-likeness, but with the selection of the distinctive features of Pharisaism presented in His reproofs. Indeed, we might almost index the history of Pharisaism by passages from the New Testament. The “tithing of mint and anise,” to the neglect of the weightier matters of the law, and “the cleansing” of the outside—these twofold obligations of the Pharisees, “hedged around,” as they were, by a traditionalism which made void the spirit of the law, and which manifested itself in gross hypocrisy and religious boasting—“

In conclusion, tonight we have seen that the Jews under Greece faced the pressure to Hellenize. Already in place from the time of Ezra was a group called Hasidim who had vowed to resist heathenism. When the pressures to Hellenize under Antiochus IV arose they resisted. When the leadership of the Maccabees stepped forward they formed a band of rebels. In providentially guided victories against impossible odds Antiochus was defeated, religious freedom was restored and the temple was cleansed. At this point the Hasidim stopped fighting. However, the high-priesthood was corrupted by the power lust of the Maccabees and consequently the Hasidim resisted them even to the point of martyrdom. When at last they were ejected from the Sanhedrin

the Hasidim came to an end as a class and the separated Pharisaic fraternity originated. Increasingly their emphasis on tithing and purification led to an ascetic externalism that nullified the Scriptures. Unfortunately this small group held sway over the majority such that when Jesus contravened their traditions by Scripture they rejected Him as the Messiah. As a consequence they were blinded further by divine judgment and destined for military defeat and exile by Rome. Sadly Jesus said in Luke 19:42ff, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup>“For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, <sup>44</sup>and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.”

From the synoptic evangelists we learn how influential the scribes were. They were teachers (Mt 7:29), jurists, lawyers, and (as we have already seen) some were members of the Jewish Council. They appear as individuals or as groups. According to Matthew, they were often in the company of the high priest and associated with Jerusalem, where they were accounted part of the Judaistic government (see Mt 2:4; 21:15). The combination of ‘Pharisees and scribes’ occurs nineteen times in the synoptic gospels (see Hillyer), **mainly to describe them as opponents of Jesus**. The scribes were the scholars and in New Testament times **were** mainly Pharisees. We read in Mt 23:7 that Jesus accused them of enjoying being addressed as ‘rabbi’.

<sup>938</sup> The scribes did more than interpret the Law; they made theosophic, cosmogonic and eschatological pronouncements (see Mt 23). Judged sociologically, they acted like prophets by making ‘the will of God’ known to the people through interpretation of the Law, legal judgements and legal instruction. Jesus condemned their one-sided and erroneous interpretation of God’s will (Mt 23).

<sup>939</sup> **As leaders of the Pharisaic community, prominent rabbis comprised one of the three parties in the Sanhedrin**, and in this way shared in Jesus’ prosecution and condemnation (Mt 26:57). The scribes are thus associated with the leadership of the Jewish people which was inimical to Jesus.

<sup>940</sup> The conclusion Matthew reaches at the end of the Sermon on the Mount is that **Jesus** ‘taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes’ (Mt 7:29). He acted like a rabbi, though he had not been ordained one

(Mt 21:23). In contrast to the traditions of ‘the men of old’ (= the traditions of the scribes), as the one sent by God, Jesus acted by his own authority and in his own name.

<sup>941</sup> Most of the scribes were vehemently opposed to Jesus and his teaching. In their view he was **disrespectful and disobedient to the traditions of the Law**. He and his disciples, for instance, ate with those who rejected the traditions (see Mk 2:16 par; Lk 15:2), and did so with unwashed hands (Mk 7:1–8 par). Jesus blasphemed by claiming to forgive sins (Mk 2:7 par). Despite his mighty works, the scribes still demanded that he produce visible signs from God (Mk 8:11 par).

<sup>942</sup> In his turn, **Jesus attacked the scribes** for their misuse of the customs they had inherited from previous generations (see Mk 7:1–23 par; their spiritual blindness in failing to recognize him in terms of the Scriptures (Mk 8:12 par); their arrogance in attributing his actions to demonic inspiration (Mk 3:22–27 par); and their hankering for fashionable clothes and public acknowledgement (Mk 12:38f par). As lawyers, their craving for property led them to ‘devour’ the houses of widows and orphans, so they themselves could live in luxury (Mk 12:40 par). Jesus warned the people that the actions of the scribes did not tally with their teachings (Mt 23:3). The seven crushing ‘woes’ which Jesus uttered against the scribes and Pharisees (Mt 23) sum up his view of the way they were perverting the nation.<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p 117.

<sup>ii</sup> Edersheim, *ibid*, p. 118.

<sup>iii</sup> Charles, R. H. (Ed.). (2004). *Apocrypha of the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, pp. 58–59). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

<sup>iv</sup> Du Rand, J. A. (1998). Groups in Jewish national life in the New Testament period. In A. B. du Toit (Ed.), *The New Testament Milieu* (Vol. 2). Halfway House: Orion Publishers.

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