

# Hednesford Pentecostal Church

Who Were the Pharisees?

## Bible Version

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The gospels mentioned numerous religious groups and religious titles, many of which appear to be opposition to Jesus. These include the Scribes, the Doctors of the Law, the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

If we are going to grasp the full meaning of events in the gospels as well as the Book of Acts then we need to understand the context in which they happened. That means knowing something of these various groups.

The purpose of this brief study is to describe these groups, their influence in Jesus' time and how modern Judaism emerged from that period. This study warns us of the various dangers that exist for those who are religious professionals or who adopt an extreme religious view. The various groups described have their modern day counterpart in Christian churches. Little wonder Jesus tells us:

Mat 16:6.           Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees."

## 2. BACKGROUND

The Israel that Jesus lived in was a complex religious society that did not truly reflect the Mosaic Law. Ever since Joshua's generation died out the spiritual state of Israel had been in constant change. From that time until the Babylonian exile the Israelites kept worshipping the idols of neighbouring countries. But challenges also came from internal change. Use of the Tabernacle fell into decline, something that King David assisted when he removed the arc from the Tabernacle, separating arc and altar. Some interpret David's action as a positive development of worship, but it was certainly contrary to the Mosaic Law.

Once Solomon's temple was built, the worship of God returned to a more scriptural pattern, but the idolatry continued often promoted by wayward kings. As a result God sent the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and His Temple, and to take His people into captivity for seventy years.

With the loss of the Temple, the altar and the arc, the Jews in exile could not follow the Mosaic sacrifice laws. Instead Jews would meet together for prayer and reading of Scripture, this is believed to be the start of the synagogues. Temple worship was eventually restored when the people returned to their homeland, but things were still changing. Movements were starting that would become major players in Jesus' day.

Although the Jews had returned to their homeland, they were not independent of external rule and their culture was being invaded by external influences. Their own ruling classes in particular were seen to embrace a Hellenistic rather than a traditional Hebraic culture. As a result pious Jews who deplored the Hellenistic influence would meet together for encouragement. These were known as the *Hasidim*, the "godly people". Generally they assisted those who opposed their Greek oppressors, such as the Hasmoneans and Maccabees.

Under the Tabernacle and Temple worship the authority to teach the Law rested solely with the priesthood.<sup>1</sup> But as the ruling priests were seen to embrace Greek culture the Hasidim began to study and teach Scriptures themselves. A rival powerbase was beginning to emerge. Evidentially this movement would become known as the Pharisees.

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<sup>1</sup> Mal 2:7. "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

### 3. SADDUCEES

The Sadducees<sup>2</sup> were the ruling class in Judea at the time of Jesus, consisting of the rich, the merchants and aristocrats. The high priests were selected from the Sadducees by the Roman Governor. Keeping the peace with the Roman authority served the Sadducees' purposes well. They were enjoying privileges and prospering in the present climate and resisted anything that threatened this.

The Mosaic Law placed the role of interpreter of the Law on the shoulders of the priesthood. The Sadducees were keen to stress this, rejecting the Pharisees "Tradition of the Elders". The New Testament describes how the ruling council in Judea, the Sanhedrin, was split between the Sadducees and Pharisees.<sup>3</sup>

The Sadducees taught that only the first five books of the Old Testament were to be taken literally or were binding as Law. As such they rejected any belief that could not be proven in these books alone. As a result they did not believe in life after death, the resurrection of the body or angels.<sup>4</sup> They believed that God's blessing, rewards and punishments were in this life only.

Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees did not consistently confront Jesus. They tried on one occasion to ridicule Jesus and the resurrection, but instead were silenced by Jesus' answers.<sup>5</sup> Near the end of Jesus' ministry we read how they were feeling threatened by Jesus' popularity<sup>6</sup> and they were complicit in Jesus' arrest, trial and execution.

### 4. SCRIBES

A scribe was one who had chosen a profession of literary studies and who would serve as a copyist, editor or teacher of the Law. It was their role to interpret the Mosaic Law and provide people with rules for conduct. This had originally been the role of the priest.

In Jesus' day the scribes had become the new upper class in Jewish society. Some scribes came from the ranks of the priests, but not exclusively. There was little prestige in being a standard priest, but there was a great deal of prestige in being a scribe, especially if one went on to become a doctor of the law.

There was a minimum of seven year training period for someone who wanted to become a scribe. This usually started at the age of fourteen. Those who wished to elevate to higher things would spend over twenty five years studying. The famous historian Josephus was a scribe.

In Jesus' day there were two main parties of scribes; the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. The former were fiery fundamentalists and the latter were more liberal. Men from both the Pharisees and Sadducees became scribes.

By the New Testament period it had become accepted that the official scribes' interpretation of the Law was more important than the Law itself. To transgress the words of a scribe was a greater

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<sup>2</sup> Some scholars have proposed that the term Sadducees come from the name Zadok, the High Priest in David and Solomon's reign.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 23:6-8. But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" {7} And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. {8} For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection; and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.

<sup>4</sup> Matt 22:23, Acts 23:8

<sup>5</sup> Mark 12:18-27

<sup>6</sup> John 11:48

offence than breaking the Law itself. The scribes believed there were “secrets” of interpretation and forbidden degrees of knowledge, that were not to be expounded before three or more persons. In addition they taught that some chapters of Scripture were to be explained only to sages. They believed that the common people were incapable of truly understanding Scripture because God had hidden it from them, but that He had revealed it to the Scribes.<sup>7</sup>

This exclusive and secretive belief system meant that their religion deteriorated into cultic behaviour. Unfortunately in church history the same error has been repeated a number of times by various groups.

Jesus said:

John 5:39-40. "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. {40} But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

The searching of Scripture had become a technical profession to the scribes, but they did not have the word living in them. The word did not produce life in these professionals because they approached the word using their intellect rather than faith. They also considered themselves critics of the word rather than submitting themselves to the word's authority.

### 5. DOCTORS OF THE LAW

A scribe who was particularly gifted and ambitious could rise to the position of a Doctor of the Law. To reach this level required years of study bringing the scribe to about 40 years old. With this title came the prestigious right to be a member of the ruling Sanhedrin, sitting with the High Priests and aristocrat families. He could now be a judge, an arbitrator in family law, hold an administration office in government and be a notary, writing out contracts of sale, covenants of espousals, bills of repudiation<sup>8</sup>.

### 6. ESSENES

The Essenes are not mentioned in the New Testament but they were present in Judea in Jesus' day and their existence should be noted. They were a religious community that were noted for their strict observance of the Law. They followed a very disciplined lifestyle and kept isolated from all those who did not observe their way of life.

The people who lived at Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, were probably Essenes. This particular group followed a monastic life style and their teachings were anti-women. It appears that they were following a similar line to the Greek Stoics who taught that asceticism and celibacy enabled men to seek the higher things in life<sup>9</sup>. They believed that women distracted men from searching for truth.

Their observance of the Law led to stricter observance of the Sabbath and greater ritualistic cleansing than even the Pharisees. The Essenes would bath before meals, not just wash their hands. It was a requirement in their sect that everyone *had to* sell all their property and give it to the common purse. All possessions were considered to belong to everyone. They also avoided all luxuries. They were famed for the hospitality and their taking care of their sick and elderly.

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<sup>7</sup> *Smith's Bible Dictionary.*

<sup>8</sup> *Smith's Bible Dictionary.*

<sup>9</sup> For the Greeks higher things meant the search for wisdom. For Hebraic Jews it meant the study of the Law.

Considering their strict adherence to the Mosaic Law we might initially think it strange that Essenes would not participate in the Temple Worship. Instead they worshipped God in their own communities. Presumably they considered the Temple worship, with its Roman appointed High Priest, corrupt.

Although the Essenes were looking for the coming of the Messiah, they rejected Jesus.

The early church in Jerusalem had a number of practises that were similar to the Essenes. They practised the selling of lands and houses and the laying the money at the apostles' feet. This of course was voluntary and not a demand made upon joining the church. The early church also held all things in common<sup>10</sup> and distributed their goods among the poor and the widows. It is not known whether the example of the Essenes had helped develop some of these practises.

### 7. SYNAGOGUES

The synagogues were a movement that started in the inter-testament period. They were centres where Jews would meet together for prayer and the reading of Scripture. When the Jews had returned to the homeland, the priest Ezra had given great emphasis upon the teaching of the Law and prayer. His work also helped form the canon of the Old Testament as we know it.

Not all Jews returned to Israel. Many preferred to stay in their new homes where they had settled and prospered. They continued to meet and these meetings were being formalised into the synagogues. The oldest known synagogue was in Alexandria, Egypt and dates from between 246 and 221 BC. The oldest known synagogue in Israel dates from the first century BC.

By Jesus' day most towns and villages in Israel had a synagogue with designated leaders and a formalised custom of service. Synagogues also existed in major cities throughout the Roman Empire where there was a Jewish colony. The books of Acts records synagogues in Athens, Damascus, Antioch, Iconium, Thessalonica, Beria and Ephesus.

The synagogue contrasted greatly with the temple worship. In the latter only the priesthood could participate, but all males could participate at the synagogue. They had become centres for many community activities; tax office<sup>11</sup>, local school and court of law.

Although the synagogues never rivalled the New Temple they would form the backbone and focal point of Judaism once Herod's temple was destroyed. By Jesus' day the presence of the synagogue was part of the powerbase of lay movements such as the Pharisees.

### 8. THE PHARISEES

Throughout the gospels there is one group of people that Jesus clashed with repeatedly, the Pharisees. Jesus argued with them, told parables about them and warned his disciples not to be like them. They called Jesus Beelzebub (chief of demons); sought to trap him in his words in order to get him in trouble with the Romans; were complicit in Jesus' murder and they persecuted the early church.

So who were the Pharisees? The term Pharisees comes from the Hebrew word *perusim*, meaning "separated ones" or "separatists", but it is a term that other people called this group. They did not have a name for their movement as they considered themselves to be the true Israel. However they call themselves *hakamim*, which means sages. They also loved being called rabbi (my teacher).

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 2:44-45. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, {45} and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

<sup>11</sup> For the Romans

This group was a voluntary, lay movement that had developed from the *Hasidim* (godly people) which had emerged following the exile to Babylon. They were a strict religious sect that sought to change society by bringing about ritualistic purity. Although they were not from the priesthood or ruling class in Israel they acted like a political pressure group that sought to influence the political and religious rulers. They were totally opposed to the Hellenistic life style that many of the ruling class had embraced. They also opposed the Sadducees' and priesthood's weaker form of Judaism.

The Pharisees were not all professional scholars, although many of the Scribes did align themselves with the Pharisees' movement. They were however passionately devoted to the Torah. As a result of their study of the law they built up an oral body of interpretation and application of the law which was known as "the tradition of the elders."

After the destruction of Herod's Temple and the dispersion of the Jews it was the Pharisaic Judaism with the Tradition of the Elders that primarily determined orthodox Judaism as it is known today.

### 9. TRADITION OF THE ELDERS

To the Pharisees and many of the scribes the Tradition of the Elders was the most important aspect of Judaism. This man-made tradition was originally an oral interpretation and application of the Mosaic Law but which was committed to paper in the second century AD. This was called the *Mishnah*. Between 400 and 600 AD a commentary, or *Talmud*, on the *Mishnah* was written. These are the basis for the present day Rabbinical writings.

The Tradition of the Elders sought to explain in practical ways what the Law of Moses meant. It was believed that observing the Tradition of the Elders meant pious Jews were protected from ever breaking any Mosaic commandment. So when the commandment declares that a person should not work on the Sabbath, the Tradition of the Elders defined what work was. The Law of Moses forbade the Israelites boiling a young goat in its mother's milk<sup>12</sup>. From this commandment came the "Kosher Kitchen" which demands two sets of kitchen utensils (including fridges) to separate dairy produce from meat produce.

As mentioned earlier things went bad when the work of the scribes was considered of greater importance than the God-given revelation received by Moses. Rabbis taught that there were two forms of the Law the written Mosaic Law and their oral tradition. They claimed that the latter superseded and explained the former.

The Scripture declared:

Deut 12:32. "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

These doctors of the law blatantly broke this commandment.

Jer 8:8. How can you say, 'We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us'? But behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made *it* into a lie.<sup>13</sup>

It was against this Tradition of the Elders that Jesus thundered condemnation.

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<sup>12</sup> Exo 23:19

<sup>13</sup> *New American Standard Bible*

Mat 15:7-9. "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy<sup>14</sup> about you, saying: {8} 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. {9} And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

The destruction of the Temple brought to an end the role of the priesthood and the sacrificial system. All the Laws related to the offering of sacrifices were now redundant. The resulting power vacuum was filled by the rabbis as they took the central role of Judaism. These rabbis would declare that they had become the final voice God.

Today in Christian circles it is not uncommon to hear quotations from the *Talmud*, but it should be realised that the teaching of the *Talmud* is erroneous compared with the Old Testament commandments and is anti-Christian in content and deliberately anti Jesus Christ. This is illustrated in the following quotations from the Talmud which are taken from a study called "the Tradition of the Elders" by Buddy Lawrence at Hebraic Foundations<sup>15</sup>.

"He who occupies himself with Scripture gains what is no merit." "He who occupies himself with Mishnah gains merit for which people receive a reward." "He who occupies himself with Talmud--there is no source of greater merit than this." (Talmud, Shabbat 15c and Baba Metzia 33a)

"He who transgresses the words of the scribes sins more gravely than the transgressors of the words of the law." Sanhedrin X, 3, f.88b

"A Nazarene is one who follows the false teaching of 'that man' [Jesus] who taught them to worship on the first day of the Sabbath." Abhodah Zar 6a.

In Bava Metzia 86a, Rabbi Nahmani is called to heaven to settle a debate between God and the 'rest of the fellowship.' and to teach God who is clean and who is not.

In Berakhot 7A, God asks a rabbi for a rabbi's blessing. (According to the Talmud God himself is a student of the rabbi's tradition. He studies the Talmud three times a day.)

"Some teachings were handed on orally, and some things were handed on in writing ... we conclude that the ones handed on orally are more precious." Hagigah 1:7V

"If a Gentile hits a Jew, the Gentile must be killed." Sanhedrin 58b "When a Jew murders a gentile there will be no death penalty.

What a Jew steals from a gentile he may keep." Sanhedrin 57a

"Gentile girls are in a state of niddah (filth) from birth." Zarah 36b

Here are some statements about Jesus:

"He and his disciples practiced sorcery and black magic, led Jews astray into idolatry, and were sponsored by foreign, gentile powers for the purpose of subverting Jewish worship." Sanhedrin 43a

Gittin 57a, says Jesus is in hell, being boiled in 'hot excrement.'

Rosh Hashnah 17a, says that minim (takes in Hebrew Christians) and others who reject Talmud will go to hell and be punished for all generations.

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<sup>14</sup> Isa 29:13

<sup>15</sup> HF017 – The Tradition of the Elders

Yebamoth 63a, teaches that Adam had sexual intercourse with all the animals in the garden of Eden.

Hagigah 27a, states that no rabbi can ever go to hell.

Erubin 21b, says that whosoever disobeys the rabbis deserves death and will be punished by being boiled in hot excrement in hell.

Menahoth 43b-44a, says that a Jewish man should pray the following prayer each day; "Thank you God for not making me a gentile, a woman, or a slave."

Ketubot 11b: "If a grown-up man has intercourse with a little girl, it is nothing, for having intercourse with a girl less than three years old is like putting a finger in the eye."

### 10. JESUS' CRITICISMS

Jesus' sharpest criticisms were reserved for the religious groups within Israel in his day. He condemned a system that:

- made it harder for people to find God,
- had replaced the word of God with man-made regulations
- was concerned with ritualistic purity but neglected the principles of God's word.
- that majored on external appearances but allowed internal corruption to flourish
- produced arrogant pride in its professionals
- condemned and excluded the guiltless
- that was full of hypocrisy

Jesus accused the self-righteous religious professionals of his day of being spiritually blind play-actors:

Mat 15:14. "Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."

He warned the populous that despite their great religious show and their total self-confidence that the scribes and Pharisees were excluded from heaven.

Mat 5:20. "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

He also told the people:

Mat 23:1-7. Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, {2} saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. {3} Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. {4} For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. {5} But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. {6} They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, {7} greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'

Jesus didn't come to lessen the heavy load of a performance attempt at salvation. He came to replace it with the gift of salvation given to those who believe. Until this new salvation was revealed the people had to submit to those who taught the Law of Moses.

But the Scribes and Pharisees did not fulfil the Law, everything they did was for show. They were also intoxicated with the public honour and respect they received in society. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warned that this public recognition was the only reward they would get.

Mat 6:2. "Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Mat 6:5. "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Scripture declares that the Pharisees were full of greed.

Luke 16:13-15. "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." {14} Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. {15} And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

Jesus does not say that it is bad idea to try and serve God and wealth, but he says emphatically it can't be done. Covetousness had hardened the hearts of the Pharisees and stopped their ears.

The Pharisees were full of pride:

Luke 18:11-12. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men; extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. {12} 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

The Pharisees considered that the normal Jews were damned.

John 7:46-49. The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" {47} Then the Pharisees answered them, "Are you also deceived? {48} "Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? {49} "But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."

The ruler's religious pride is seen in their disdain for the common people. But their system is based upon intellectual knowledge of the law and the tradition of the elders, rather than faith, mercy and love.

Throughout his public ministry Jesus was brought into conflict with the Scribes and Pharisees because He broke their Tradition of the Elders and their Sabbath regulations.

Mat 12:1-2. At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. {2} And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!"

It was lawful for the disciples to help themselves to grain from their neighbour's field, so long as they did not use a sickle<sup>16</sup>. Hungry travellers could sustain themselves from the God given fruit, but they were not allowed to take any away. However the Tradition of the Elders stated that plucking the grain was work and therefore was not allowed on the Sabbath.

Mat 15:1-3. Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, {2} "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

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<sup>16</sup> Deut 23:24-25

The Tradition of the Elders had lengthy and elaborate procedures for washing hands and arms. Their accusation is not that the disciples were eating with dirty hands, but they hadn't followed the step by step instruction of how hands should be washed.

Mat 15:3-9. He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? {4} For God commanded, saying, 'Honour your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' {5} But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"; {6} 'then he need not honour his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. {7} Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: {8} 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. {9} And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

In his reply Jesus describes how these leaders transgressed the commandment of God by using their traditions. The example Jesus quotes involves one of the all-important Ten Commandments (5th). Instead of fulfilling this commandment by giving practical help to their aged parents, a tradition had been devised where by the son would simply have to say that whatever money he should have spent on caring for their parents was now dedicated to God. How much money the son kept for himself and how much was given to the religious system is not clear. Some commentators suggest that the money was simply bequeathed, but still available for the son's use during his life.

This shows that the "Tradition of the Elders" failed to understand the core principles of the Law.

Mat 23:23-28. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. {24} Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

{25} Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. {26} Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. {27} Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. {28} Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Jugs for pouring wine were often fitted with strainers so that no tiny dead gnat (an unclean creature) would be swallowed. These play actors took care not to become unclean by swallowing a gnat, but didn't notice the camel they swallowed. They would be quick to condemn those who did not wash their hands according to the ritualistic patterns they had created, but they plotted murder, paid bribes and told lies.

Jesus' strongest words against the religious leaders were delivered in the days before his death. Jesus proclaimed eight proclamations of trouble ahead for the scribes and Pharisees; even Isaiah only pronounced six woes<sup>17</sup>. These are not curses, but rather they are warnings which should be heeded. Instead of bringing repentance these pronouncements brought hatred towards Jesus. But perhaps the heart challenging words of Jesus are why many of the Pharisees and priests were saved later<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Isa 5:8-30

<sup>18</sup> Acts 6:7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Mat 23:13. "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

Mat 23:15. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

Man-made religion obscures the way of salvation and is a haunt for demonic deception.

### 11. CONCLUSIONS

The types of religious groups we see present in Israel in Jesus' day have been repeated in Christian history. There have been the empire churches that have sought political power, land and money. There have been monastic groups that like the Essenes have withdrawn from the world and lived a community lifestyle. There have been the liberal theologians who have been unable to see any spiritual dimension to life and religion. There have been the scribes who have been passionate about the detail of Scripture have cared little for people. There have been the Pharisees who convinced of their self-righteous have condemned the innocent and totally misrepresented God.

These errors repeat themselves when we fail to:

- Give God's word the priority in our life
- Fail to recognise our personal need of a saviour and of forgiveness
- Look down upon others for not being one of us

It is important for us to realise that the orthodox Jews today are taught the Talmud rather than the Scripture. If they were taught the scripture it would prepare them for faith in Christ Jesus, but the Talmud puts up barriers. There are Christian denominations which have raised their own traditions above the authority of the Bible and similarly obscured salvation in Christ Jesus.

Jesus said:

Mat 5:17. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.

Jesus fulfilled the law in that he kept it perfectly. He is the only person to fulfil the whole law. Jesus also fulfilled the law in the sense of completing it. He is the One Moses and the prophets spoke of. He is the One the sacrifices pointed to.

Faith in Christ Jesus is not opposed to Judaism, it is the fulfilment of Judaism. Jesus did not start a new religion He took the eternal purpose of God to the next phase. Jesus so vehemently attacked the religious leaders of the day because what they were doing was creating a false Judaism, one that had the form of religion but denied its power.

Today the beliefs of the Hassidim, the orthodox branch of Judaism, are based on the Talmud rather than the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul writes concerning the Old Testament that all scriptures "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."<sup>19</sup> But the Rabbinic teaching within the Talmud slanders Jesus and hinders people coming to him. It is the Talmud that helps blind the Jews today.

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<sup>19</sup> 2 Tim 3:15

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