

Daniel #19

July 14, 2024

Series Title: Daniel's Visions Of the Ages

Today's Message: Appendix: When Protective Fences Become Prisons; Matthew 23; Galatians 2:11-21

We concluded Daniel last week. But I wanted to take a week to trace the history of the Pharisees, which we mentioned in our last message in Daniel. It is not critical to our understanding of Daniel as much as it is helpful in our understanding of the ministry of Jesus.

During His ministry He was face to face with the religious leaders. There was three groups of leaders that were prominent in the gospel accounts. The Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Scribes or *the teachers of the law*. Until we studied Daniel, and in particular when I began reading the book of Maccabees, I knew very little about these three groups, maybe we could call them sects.

I knew that the Sadducees were more political and more politically influential than the Pharisees or Scribes. I knew that they did not believe in the resurrection or life after death. I didn't know that the Temple High Priest was more tightly connected to the political machine of Rome. In fact, even though the office of the High Priest usually was handed down to successive generations, occasionally the ruling family would be outbid, as was the case when Antiochus IV had the faithful, very Jewish High Priest Onias removed as the Priest and a man named Jason was became High Priest because he had the highest bid for the job. Even he was later removed, being replaced by someone who bid even higher for the job. So, the political connection of the Sadducees remained in place even into the period of the time of the ministry of Jesus. And, we may not like the Sadducees, but they served a very important to role in the accomplishment of the purpose Jesus came to earth. And that was to give His life as a ransom for many. But we are not going to talk about the Sadducees today.

We are going to take some time getting to know something about the Pharisees and how knowing something about them can help us better understand the New Testament. We will get to know them by looking at the origin, the distinctives, and the downfall and uselessness of the Pharisees and Scribes. And when we finish the message, you will see how fortunate we have been that God the Father opened our eyes so that we could see the glory of the Gospel in the person of Jesus Christ.

- I) The Origin and Distinctives of the Pharisees and Scribes
 - A) The Scribes go back much farther in history than the Pharisees.
 - 1) Just as their name suggests, they were charged with the responsibility of preserving the OT Scripture.
 - (a) They would copy the Scripture with absolute precision making sure that not one "jot or tittle" was neglected. And, if so much as the smallest mistake was made, it was discarded.
 - (b) Ezra, for example, was a Scribe. **Turn to Nehemiah 8.**
 - (i) As the scribe, Ezra both read and taught the Book of the Law of Moses.
 - (a) The Levites also taught the Book of the Law of Moses as Ezra read.
 - (ii) The main ministry of the scribe, or *teacher of the law*, was, as Nehemiah 8:8 says:
 - (a) To read the law
 - (b) To make the law clear
 - (c) To give it meaning so that the people could understand it.
 - 2) They were experts in the law, as were the Pharisees.
 - (a) Both the oral and written law.
 - 3) There is much written in non-biblical writings about the importance of the Scribes/ teachers of the law from the time of Ezra to the time of the Maccabean Revolt, which occurred from 167-160.

- (a) No doubt the Scribes played a big role in teaching and directing the people to return to faithfulness to the “book of the law of Moses” instead of succumbing to the Greek way of life, which was driven by lust of the eyes, the pride of life, sexual immorality and idolatry.
 - (i) Faithfulness to the law of Moses would mean to observe the law, including a return to Sabbath keeping, circumcision, and temple worship including sacrifices and offerings.
- 4) Being a scribe was an honorable position. The position carried great authority.
- B) The Pharisees came along much later than the Scribes.
 - 1) The Maccabean revolt and the formation of the Pharisees.
 - (a) Judah, son of Mattathias, became known as **Judah Maccabee, Or Judah, The Hammer!**
 - (i) Judah Maccabee forced reform in Israel by war and dismantling the Grecian stronghold.
 - (a) All who opposed reform were killed as a means to purify Jerusalem from paganism.
 - 2) A sect called the Pharisees was formed during the time of Antiochus IV. They resisted his efforts to rid Israel of every vestige of Jewish culture and life by replacing it with the Greek language, customs and religious practices. Their resistance brought great suffering to their followers.
 - (a) Perhaps many of these men who became the Pharisees were also teachers of the law, who remained faithful to the Law of Moses, even at the risk of losing their own lives.
 - (i) They had to be among those mentioned in Hebrews 11:37b-38¹, until the **revolt** made it possible for them to emerge from hiding and begin reformation in Israel.
 - (b) The Pharisees were instrumental in backfilling the revolutionary efforts of *The Hammer* through teaching the law of Moses to the people leading them to repent and turn to God.
 - 3) Distinctives of the Pharisees
 - (a) They were the “rabbis” who worked at making the Law of Moses accessible to the people.
 - (b) They were instrumental in establishing synagogues as centers of worship and teaching.
 - (i) Whereas they promoted synagogues, the Sadducees concentrated on the Temple.
 - 4) It would appear that the original intentions of the Pharisees were orchestrated by God. He was reforming His people, and the Pharisees were instruments. At one time they went about the work of bringing the people back to God. They worked hard in reforming Israel in the following ways by:
 - (a) Attempting to open the kingdom of heaven to the people of Israel.
 - (b) Making strong efforts to rescue the erring and wandering sheep of Israel.
 - 5) **Yet, in time, the fences, which were established to protect and bless Israel became a prison for the people, confining them to a life of bitterness and slavery to rules and regulations.**
 - (a) We will see this clearly in the next section!

II) (Matthew 23) The Downfall and Uselessness of the Pharisees and Scribes

- A) Fast forward to the ministry of Jesus. Now, instead of commending them, He denounced them!
 - 1) They changed. They became as wicked, or more wicked than the pagan Greeks.
 - (a) (23:4) Instead of leading people to God and His word, they burdened the people.
 - (b) (23:5-12) Instead of leading the people humbly, they now displayed self-righteousness.
 - 2) The Seven Woes: Jesus pronounced seven woes of judgment upon them!
 - (a) Woe to them! They shut the kingdom in the faces of people who are seeking God.
 - (b) Woe to them! They ruin those they influence.
 - (c) Woe to them! They are blind guides! They lead people away from God instead of to Him!
 - (d) Woe to them! They adhere to the minor things and neglect the important things of the law such as justice, mercy and faithfulness. “You strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!”
 - (e) Woe to them! They worry about outward displays of religion but are inwardly polluted.
 - (f) Woe to them! They are dead inside. Full of dead men’s bones. Appear righteous but inside they are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

¹ Hebrews 11:37b-38: “They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.”

- (g) Woe to them! They are of the same spirit as those who killed the prophets. And, when He says, "Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!" He is declaring that they are murderers bent on murder and unwilling to repent!
 - (i) **The tragedy of the Pharisees and Scribes is this: As zealous as they were to uphold the Law of Moses, now they were as equally zealous to steal, kill, and destroy people in the name of the Law!**
 - (a) They are killing the very ones they are to lead to God and His Christ!
- B) The Greatest sin of the Pharisees
- 1) They misused and misappropriated the Law of Moses.
 - (a) The law, according to Galatians 3:24, was to lead us to Christ.
 - (i) Here was the situation that the Pharisees and scribes should have been aware:
 - (a) Gal. 3:23: The Law held people as prisoners, locked up until faith was revealed. Or, to say it another way, the law locked people up **until Christ was revealed!**
 - (b) Gal. 3:24: The Law was to lead us to Christ, so that sinners would be justified by faith in Christ, not by works of the Law!
 - (c) Gal. 3:25: Now that Christ had come, people who look to Christ are under His Lordship and free from the guardianship of the Law. Run to Christ, not the Law!
 - 2) They were ignorant of the purpose of the Law and of the Prophets too!
 - (a) Concerning New Birth:
 - (i) Jesus confronted Nicodemus that night when he visited Jesus.
 - (a) Nicodemus was confused by Jesus' statements, "You must be born again." And, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and of Spirit."
 1. Jesus said to Nicodemus in response to his confusion, "You are Israel's teacher, and do you not understand these things?" (John 3:1-10)
 - (b) Concerning the Scriptures:
 - (i) John 5:39-40: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life."
 - (ii) Jesus confirmed to His disciples (and to us) the truth about the Scriptures concerning Himself in Luke 24:25-27: "He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.'"
 - 3) The sin of the Pharisees was that they sought to attain a righteousness by Law keeping rather than obtaining the righteousness of God, which comes through faith in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).
- III) **Beware! The sin of the Pharisees is still active in the world today!**
- A) The Scriptures warn against trying to attain a righteousness by observing the law:
 - 1) Romans 3:20a: "Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law;"
 - 2) Galatians 2:16c: "...because by observing the law no one will be justified."
 - B) The law has a purpose:
 - 1) Romans 3:20b: "...but rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."
 - 2) Romans 4:15: "The Law brings wrath." Meaning, the law judges us as guilty before God.
 - C) The Scriptures repeatedly point us to Christ, saying that our justification comes through faith in Him, and not by law keeping!
 - 1) Romans 3:28: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."
 - D) Beware of anyone who claims that a person must observe the law to be justified before God!
 - 1) Galatians 2:21: "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through [law keeping], **Christ died for nothing!**"