

Jesus and the PHARISEES

A Jewish Perspective

The Jerusalem Talmud records a significant observation by a rabbi who flourished in the third century of our era. Reflecting on the history of his people, he said, "Israel went into exile only after it became divided into twenty-four sects."¹

Although we cannot be sure of the exact number, there can be no doubt that at the time of the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., the Jewish community comprised numerous parties, sects and brotherhoods. Recent scholarship has questioned and effectively destroyed the concept of a monolithic "Judaism" that existed during the Second Temple (516 B.C. - 70 A.D.). Furthermore, Josephus' famous listing of the standard divisions — Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and the "Fourth Philosophy" (the Zealots) — is simply not adequate in conveying the mosaic of Second Temple Judaism. The new source material (e.g. Dead Sea Scrolls) which has become available in recent years, as well as a reassessment of information from the known sources (e.g. the Pseudepigrapha) have indicated a number of "hidden streams" during the period prior to the fall of the Temple.

"The names of numerous groups and sects and trends within Ju-

by William C. Varner

daism are known from this age — Pharisees and Sadducees, high-priestly families and country folk, Samaritans and Dositheans, sophisticated Hellenized Jews of the great cities of the Diaspora, and ascetic, separatist sects like the Essenes, the number of types and varieties could probably be reckoned in dozens."²

A recent compendium produced by Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant scholars explores the familiar theme of the "Messianic idea" in what the authors call the various "Judaisms" that existed "at the turn of the Christian era."³ It is the thesis of this book that anything like a "normative Judaism" during this historical period is a figment of popular imagination that simply never existed. The diverse viewpoints surely shared certain "loci communes," but were so diverse as to be styled "Judaisms," not just "sects of Judaism," by these scholars.

During Jesus' ministry He undoubtedly encountered in one way or another many, if not most, of these groups. Sadducees, Zealots, and Herodians are all mentioned in the gospels, as well as numerous

references to what the rabbis called the *ame ha 'aretz* (the people of the land). These were the common folk, often untrained in the "schools" and unobservant in ceremonial details, who also provided so many of the followers of Jesus in those early days. (See further, John 7:49; Luke 18:9-14; Acts 4:13.)

The most famous group Jesus encountered, however, was the Pharisees.⁴ While their membership may not have totaled more than a few thousand in His day, their influence was felt far beyond their *havurot* ("brotherhoods"). They were often associated with the scribes, most probably professional scholars in the Torah, but sometimes were clearly distinguished from them.⁵ Some of the most stinging rebukes Jesus issued were directed toward the Pharisees. Probably the strongest diatribe is recorded in Matthew 23. At least seven times in that chapter, Jesus pronounced the following condemnation: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" He condemned and illustrated their rapaciousness, their selfishness, their inward spiritual emptiness, and their emphasis on "scruple" while neglecting the "weightier" matters of

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God's angels in Daniel 4:13.

Curse Theology a Failure

Curse theology is itself a curse to the Church. It is speculative and extrabiblical. It plays into Satan's hand by overstating his powers and misses the balance of systematic study of proper biblical demonology and Satanology. It sidetracks Christians and derails them from healthy growth. It fails to explain the origin of human trouble and dilemmas of life and offers a useless solution.


It minimizes the real power of the Cross in salvation and the power of grace and God's Spirit in sanctification. It obscures the biblical means of grace and warfare outlined in Ephesians 4-6, Hebrews 12 and Romans 12. Rebecca Brown's concepts are a failure biblically. They should be rejected and refuted.

Endnotes:

1. See further, *The Great Christian Rumors* by Rich Buhler.
2. See *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Religion*, pp. 136-137.
3. *The Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Oct-Dec., 1988, pp. 2, 10-11.
4. Bailey's medical suspension for malpractice and abuse (supposedly after her conversion) along with the whole bizarre and sordid story was investigated and chronicled by Personal Freedom Outreach in several *Journal* articles. These articles have been compiled and are available in booklet form, *Drugs, Demons And Delusions — A Christian Investigation of the Testimony and Claims of Rebecca Brown*,

M.D.

5. Rebecca Brown, M.D., *He Came to Set the Captives Free*, pg. 62.
6. Rebecca Brown, M.D., *Prepare for War*, pg. 224.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 35.
8. Rebecca Brown, M.D. with Daniel M. Yoder, *Unbroken Curses*. See pp. 149-175 for the biographical sketch of Daniel from which the information in this section has been acquired.
9. Personal interview with Sheriff Greg Baloun by M. Kurt Goedelman, April 2, 1996.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Lake Park (Iowa) News*, Aug. 8, 1991, "Former resident faces state, federal charges," pg. 1.
12. Department of Correctional Services, Third Judicial District, Pretrial Release form of Danie [sic] M. Yoder. Filed 91 Sep -9. Copy on file.
13. Bail Bond, Form 10-H-1, dated 91 Sep -9. Copy on file.
14. Information form, State of Iowa, Plaintiff, vs. William Joseph Stewart a/k/a Daniel Michael Yoder, Defendant. Filed 91 Oct 18. Copy on file.
15. Written Arraignment and Plea of Not Guilty, State of Iowa, Plaintiff, vs. Daniel Michael Yoder, Defendant. Filed 91 Nov 12. Copy on file.
16. Application and Order to Amend, State of Iowa, Plaintiff, vs. William Joseph Stewart a/k/a Daniel Michael Yoder, Defendant. Filed 91 Oct 18. Copy on file.
17. Pretrial Release form, op. cit.; Written Arraignment and Plea of Not Guilty, op. cit.; Plea of Guilty, Count II, State of Iowa, Plaintiff, vs. Daniel Michael Yoder, Defendant. Filed 92 Apr 29. Copy on file.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Plea of Guilty, op. cit.
20. *Ibid.*, (upper case in original).
21. Judgment Entry, State of Iowa, Plaintiff,

- vs. William Joseph Stewart A/K/A Daniel Michael Yoder, Defendant. Filed 92 Apr 29. Copy on file.
22. Final Disposition Report, William Joseph Stewart A/K/A Daniel Michael Yoder. Filed 5/5/92. Copy on file.
23. *Unbroken Curses*, op. cit., pg. 51.
24. *Ibid.*, pg. 60.
25. *Ibid.*, pg. 70.
26. *Ibid.*, pg. 72.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-77.
28. *Ibid.*, pg. 13.
29. *Ibid.*, pg. 15.
30. *Ibid.*, pg. 17.
31. *Ibid.*
32. A saner, safer and more Scriptural view of the sanctification process (which is the historical orthodox view) can be found in the book *Sin and Temptation — The Challenge to Personal Godliness* by John Owen, abridged by James Houston and edited by Dr. J.I. Packer or *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges.
33. *Unbroken Curses*, op. cit., pp. 24-25.
34. W.E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, pg. 54.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.
36. *Unbroken Curses*, op. cit., pp. 30-32.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.
38. *Vine*, op. cit., pg. 45.
39. Keith L. Brooks, *The Books of the Bible Summarized*, pg. 92.
40. C.J.S. Thompson, *The Hand of Destiny — Folklore and Superstition for Everyday Life*, pg. 173.
41. See further, *The Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 4, op. cit., pg. 11.
42. *Unbroken Curses*, op. cit., pp. 39-40.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.
44. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, pg. 391.
45. J.R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, pg. 94.
46. *Unbroken Curses*, op. cit., pg. 96. 

Jesus and the Pharisees

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justice, mercy, and faith.

These statements and their frequent citations have resulted, unfortunately, in the word "Pharisee" becoming a synonym in the English language for "hypocrite." Consider the following definition of "Pharisaic" in *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*: "pretending to be highly moral or virtuous without being so; hypocritical."

These denunciations of Pharisaic practices have been highly criticized by some writers. They have charged that Jesus and the early church writers presented a false caricature of the Pharisees that is not consistent with what the Jewish sources say about them. Consider for example, the two following comments, one from an older scholar and one from a contemporary Jewish writer:

"If Pharisaism had been, in its true intent and real effect, anything like what he (Jesus) sup-

posed, then of course his denunciation would have been well deserved. But he only saw its outward appearance, he did not know it from within, nor apparently ever try to understand it. ... Pharisaism was no 'organized hypocrisy,' no dead corpse of a once living religion. It was very much alive, and is alive still."⁶

"Jews maintain that the Pharisees were unfairly maligned in the Gospels, which accuse them of rigid formalism, self-righteousness, hypocrisy, and exter-

nalism. In truth, the Pharisees ... stressed devotion of the heart, worship of God for its own sake, and the obligation to go beyond the letter of the law."⁷

One of the reasons why there may be such sensitivity in this area is that Jesus' condemnation was not limited to some antiquarian sect with no relevance for Jewish life today. Of all the various Jewish parties that flourished during the Second Temple, only the Pharisees (along with the quasi-Jewish Samaritans!) survived the devastation of 70 A.D. as an identifiable continuing entity. The reconstructed Judaism of the second and third centuries was, in essence, based on the Pharisaic beliefs and practices of pre-70 A.D. Without apology, modern scholars affirm that Talmudic Judaism and modern "Orthodox" Judaism are essentially Pharisaism.

"Pharisaic Judaism became normative Judaism. Its principal features — the synagogue, the rabbi, prayer, Torah study, and belief in the oral law — became the modes of religious expression guiding Jewish life ever since. All Jewish life today, therefore, stems from the Pharisaic tradition and derives its central religious characteristics from it."⁸

Did Jesus (or the early Church writers, as some critical scholars affirm) unjustly caricature the Pharisees in his denunciations? By examining what the Pharisees said about themselves in their own writings perhaps we can conclude whether Jesus treated them unfairly according to their own norms.

In addition to the New Testament, there exist various descriptions of the Pharisees both in Josephus and in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds. Flavius Josephus, who spent time among the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes before joining a Pharisaic *havura* gives the following distinguishing characteris-

tics of the group. (1) They were meticulous about observing the law, both in its written and oral forms; (2) They affirmed the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body; and (3) They had a greater influence on the common people than did the other sects.⁹ It was the Pharisaic emphasis on the oral law (*torah shb'al peh*), called the "tradition" in the Gospels, with which Jesus had the greatest conflict (cf. Matthew 15:1-9). It is written, "It is more culpable to teach against the ordinances of the scribes than against the Torah itself."¹⁰ In other words, if the traditional interpretation is binding, it is in fact the final authority, and not the written Torah.

There is a passage, appearing in slightly different forms in both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, that sheds an abundance of light on the self-perception of the Pharisees.¹¹ This passage describes seven different types of Pharisees. A paraphrase of the difficult Talmudic language describes the following seven: (1) The "shoulder" Pharisee wore his good deeds on his shoulder so everyone could see them. (2) The "wait a little" Pharisee always found an excuse for putting off a good deed. (3) The "bruised" Pharisee shut his eyes to avoid seeing a woman and knocked into walls, bruising himself. (4) The "hump-backed" Pharisee always walked bent double, in false humility. (5) The "ever reckoning" Pharisees was always counting up the numbers of his good deeds. (6) The "fearful" Pharisee always quaked in fear of the wrath of God. (7) The "God-loving" Pharisee was a copy of Abraham who lived in faith and charity.¹²

From this passage, it is evident that later Pharisaic rabbis engaged in a healthy dose of self-criticism. While percentages cannot be dogmatically determined from the examples, it is striking that six of the seven "types" were something far short of the Pharisaic ideals. There-

fore, when Jesus castigated the Pharisees for hypocrisy and false piety, He was only pointing out what the Pharisees recognized about many of their own numbers!

One modern Jewish scholar has commented on a variation of this line of thought.

"Matthew's Gospel is particularly antagonistic to the Jewish establishment. But when Jesus refers to Pharisees as "hypocrites" (Matthew 23:13) and a "brood of vipers" (Matthew 23:33), he is berating fellow Jews. Jesus undoubtedly regards his violent language as following the tradition of the prophets when they castigated fellow Jews of their day. In other words, it is a *family quarrel*. Jesus looks upon himself as continuing the Jewish tradition of self-criticism."¹³

Thus, in the strong language He employed, Jesus followed in the footsteps of the prophetic example and also presaged the Pharisaic self-criticism of the Talmud.

Doubtless, there were godly Pharisees who lived up to their ideals. Representatives of the seventh group, the God-loving Pharisees, even appear in the New Testament. In Luke 13:31, we read, "The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, 'Get out and depart from here; for Herod will kill you.'" This passage shows that among the Pharisees were those who admired and respected Jesus. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who become followers of Jesus, were most probably Pharisees, as well as Saul (John 3:1; 7:50; 19:38,39; Acts 22:3; Philippians 3:5).

"The sharp rebukes Jesus administered to the Pharisees and their frequent appearance as his antagonists have obscured the considerable area of agreement between them. He had many

friendly contacts with certain Pharisees (Luke 7:36ff; 11:37; 13:31-33; 14:1; Mark 12:28-34; Matt. 23:1,2). These verses, if nothing else, should have made unnecessary the lesson many Christians have had to learn from Jewish scholars, that 'Pharisee' was not synonymous with 'hypocrite'.¹⁴

Let it be understood, therefore, that Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees was not universal, and that it was consistent with the Pharisees' own recognition that they often fell far short of their own goals and aspirations.

Another factor regarding the diversity that existed among the Second Temple Pharisees should be considered. In the generation prior to the public ministry of Jesus, there lived and taught two great Pharisees — Hillel and Shammai. These two constituted one of the series of "Pairs" (zugot) who led the Pharisees in the last two centuries before the turn of the era. Both Hillel and Shammai led great "schools" in Jerusalem. They and their disciples, called the Bet Hillel and the Bet Shammai in rabbinic literature, represented two distinct currents in the Jewish approach to halacha — the conservative and the progressive. Generally speaking, Shammai followed a more stringent and literal interpretation of the law, while Hillel expounded a more flexible application of its demands.

The Talmud records an incident that is characteristic of the differences between the two great scholars.¹⁵ A Gentile came to Shammai with the strange request that he be taught the entire Torah, but that it be done during the time he could stand on one foot! It is recounted that Shammai, a surveyor by trade, chased him away with a cubit stick. When this Gentile approached Hillel with the same request, instead of being scolded for such an impudent demand, he was told, "What is

hateful to you, do not do to your fellowman. This is the entire Torah. All the rest is commentary — now go and study." The parallels with Hillel's statement are readily recognized in Jesus' statement in Matthew 7:12 and Paul's "summary" in Galatians 5:14.

Other contrasting opinions illustrating the divergent approaches of Hillel and Shammai are:

1) Their disagreement over the length of the probationary period for entering the havurot of the Pharisees. Hillel said it should be thirty days, while Shammai insisted on a year.¹⁶

2) Concerning the Shema, the school of Shammai took the words "when you lie down and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:7b) with extreme literalism, claiming the Shema must be recited in a reclining position in the evening and only while standing in the morning. Hillel's school taught that the passage referred to times of recitation rather than the posture.¹⁷

3) Shammai and Hillel differed on what constituted the grounds for the bill of divorcement in Deuteronomy 24:1. Hillel allowed divorce for any cause, whereas Shammai limited it to sexual immorality.¹⁸ This discussion in the "schools" forms the background of the Pharisees' question to Jesus in Matthew 19:3: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?"

4) Shammai also was known for strictness in applying the law to his own family. For example, he insisted on his minor son fasting on Yom Kippur "but they (Bet Hillel) ordered him to feed him with his own hand." He is also said to have broken away the plastering over his daughter-in-law's bed, so her child, just born on the first day of Sukkot, could have a sukkah covering over his head!¹⁹

As has been mentioned, the Judaism that survived the destruction of

the Temple was Pharisaic. It is also interesting to note that it was the Hillel approach to the halakah that was adopted in the academies at Yavneh and in Galilee during the second and third centuries. It was Hillel-type Pharisaism that became the "Judaism" of subsequent generations.

The question that needs to be considered is whether the stringent, hyperstrict Pharisaic scruples that received the strongest condemnation from Jesus might be those most often espoused by the Shammai school. Thus, Jesus' harshest words may have been directed, on certain occasions, more toward a segment of the Pharisees than toward all of them. Perhaps this offers a solution to the problem raised by R. Travers Herford that Jesus condemned a Pharisaic practice of avoiding the parental responsibilities of the fifth commandment in Mark 7:5ff. "The alleged practice of evading the fifth commandment is nowhere known in the Halakah."²⁰ Perhaps this practice and others condemned by Jesus were found in Bet Shammai and not in Bet Hillel, which became the "normative" interpretation for the rabbis in the Talmud, while the Shammai opinion was rejected.

This is not an attempt to eliminate the real differences between Jesus and the Pharisees. For example, Jesus' association with "sinners" illustrates a different conception of separation from the world than the Pharisees had (Mark 12:15-17; Luke 9:9-13; Luke 5:27-32). Jesus affirmed clearly that at times the oral law, championed by the Pharisees, contravened the written law (Matthew 15:1-20). Furthermore, Sabbath-keeping illustrated a different set of priorities to Jesus and the Pharisees (Mark 2:23; 3:6). Greater attention to the dynamics of Jewish diversity in the Second Temple Period, however, can keep Christians from a misguided idea of Pharisaism and also keep Jews from blaming

Jesus and the New Testament authors for falsely caricaturing their ancient forbears.

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Endnotes:

1. *Jerusalem Talmud*, "Sanhedrin," 29C.
2. Michael Stone, *Scriptures, Sects, and Visions*. Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1980, pp. 57, 58.
3. *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, eds: Jacob Neusner, William Green, Ernest Frerichs. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987.
4. For a representative treatment of the Pharisees, see *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, Emil Schurer. T and T Clark, Edinburgh, 1979, Vol. II, pp. 381-403. For an older but sympathetic and thorough treatment, see *The Pharisees*, R. Travers Herford. Macmillan Company, New York, 1924.
5. For a treatment of the Pharisees that clearly distinguishes them from the scribes, see *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, Joachim Jeremias. SCM Press LTD, London, 1969,

pp. 246-267.

6. Herford, pp. 210, 211.

7. Yehiel Eckstein, *What Christians Should Know About Jews and Judaism*. Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1984, pg. 255. See also the discussion in *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, Jacob Jocz, pp. 17-21.

8. Eckstein, op. cit., pg. 258.

9. *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, 1.

10. *Mishnah Sanhedrin*, 11:3. Cited in Schurer, pg. 390.

11. *Jerusalem Talmud*, "Berachot," 14b; and *Babylonian Talmud*, "Sotah" 22b.

12. The passage from the English translation of the *Babylonian Talmud* is as follows: "AND THE PLAGUE OF PHARISEES etc. Our Rabbis have taught: There are seven types of Pharisees: the *shikmi* Pharisee, the *nikpi* Pharisee, the *kizai* Pharisee, the 'pestle' Pharisee, the Pharisee (who constantly exclaims) 'What is my duty that I may perform it?', the Pharisee from love (of God) and the Pharisee from fear. The *shikmi* Pharisee — he is one who performs the action of Shechem. The *nikpi* Pharisee — he is one who knocks his feet together. The *kizai* Pharisee — R. Nahman b. Isaac said: He is one who makes his blood flow against walls. The 'pestle' Pharisee — Rabbah b. Shila said: (His head) is bowed like (a pestle in) a mortar. The Pharisee (who constantly exclaims) 'What is my duty that I may perform it?' — but that is

a virtue! — Nay, what he says is, 'What further duty is for me that I may perform it?' The Pharisee from love and the Pharisee from fear — Abaye and Raba said to the tanna (who was reciting this passage), Do not mention 'the Pharisee from love and the Pharisee from fear'; for Rab Judah has said in the name of Rab: A man should always engage himself in Torah and the commandments even though it be not for their own sake, because from (engaging in them) not for their own sake, he will come (to engage in them) for their own sake. R. Nahman b. Isaac said: What is hidden is hidden, and what is revealed is revealed: the Great Tribunal will exact punishment from those who rub themselves against the walls" (*Sencino Edition*, Vol. VIII, pp. 112, 113).

13. Louis Feldman, "Is The New Testament Antisemitic?" *Moment*, December, 1990, pp. 32-35, 50-52.

14. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1987, pg. 408.

15. See *Babylonian Talmud*, "Shabbat", 31a.

16. *Tosephta Demai*, II, 12, 48. Cited in Jeremias, pg. 251, n. 22.

17. Cited by David Rausch, *Building Bridges*. Moody Press, Chicago, 1988, pg. 100.

18. *Babylonian Talmud*, "Gittin," 9, 10.

19. *Mishnah Yoma* 4:2; *Sukkah* 2:8, cited in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. XIV, pg. 1292.

20. Herford, op. cit., pg. 206.

Mark Bubeck

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Bubeck's thoughts on the world and the flesh are helpful, his views on the demonic present problems. Anyone teaching that demons can occupy Christians opens up the strange world of "deliverance" doctrines.

In *The Adversary*, Bubeck speaks of Jessie Penn-Lewis' book, *War on the Saints*, as "a classic in the study of Satan's war against believers."³ It is obvious he has borrowed some of his extreme views from this woman who could be called "the Mother of all deliverance teachings."

Penn-Lewis was a Welsh mystic who wrote *War on the Saints* in 1904. Six years earlier she had suffered a breakdown and spent weeks in bed.⁴ The current version of her book is heavily edited and a bit more palatable.

Bible expositor Donald Grey Barnhouse sounded a warning about Penn-Lewis years ago:

"Satan ... can never be on the throne of God nor can he ever come inside the body or being of one who has been born again ... We put forth this statement categorically in spite of the works of the English group known as the Overcomers, whose bible is frequently Mrs. Penn-Lewis' book, *War on the Saints*."⁵

Penn-Lewis believed the Church was entering the tribulation period and coinciding with that was a great demonic attack on the Church and Christians. She actually believed that demons could reside in the head, eyes, jaws, tongue, muscles of the face or in the nerve tissues of the brain in believers. They could be spatially located even in the bowels of Christians.⁶ Bubeck, too,

purports to having discovered demons of nausea and colon,⁷ so some of Penn-Lewis' excesses are being played out in Bubeck's books.

Bubeck has cobbled together ideas from Penn-Lewis, Charismatics, "deliverance" teachers and his own interpretations of purported encounters with demons.

In this Bubeck shows himself to be an empiricist, not a biblicist. Thomas Ice and Robert Dean Jr. show the difference:

"The empiricist will gather all the information he can from those who claim to have had some experience with an angel or a demon, or those who have helped deliver people from demonic influence. He will find out what they learned from these encounters and which methods, in their opinion, proved successful in delivering a