

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-05-10—THE DAY THE PRIESTS WERE UNSEATED

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

As the time for Jesus' crucifixion drew near, the Bible records several important events including His glorious entrance into Jerusalem as Savior and King, cleansing the Temple (of the moneychangers), and parables prophesying of His return. All of these were an important part of preparing the world for a coming new King, Temple, and Kingdom. But there was one other notable event.

Before getting into that particular event, imagine you are a manager at a company. One day your boss comes to you and says, "I know that you have been abusing everyone under you by forcing them to work under unbearable conditions and you refuse to help them at all. You go around wearing expensive suits and demand everyone treat you as if you were the president of the company. You even get away with extorting money from your staff because they are afraid of you. Moreover, I found out that your father was a convicted murder, something you actually brag about. But worst of all, you completely ignore all the rules and regulations of this company and even force your staff to break the rules. Because of all this, I am turning you over to the court judges and will make your life hell!"

After all that do you think you would have a job any longer? Unlikely. But that is a picture of what happened to the scribes and Pharisees. To fully appreciate the encounter the scribes and Pharisees had with Jesus Christ requires understanding their role and position over the people:

MATTHEW 23:1-2 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying: **"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat."**

Jesus said that the scribes and Pharisees have the same authority as Moses. What was Moses' responsibility?

EXODUS 18:19-22 "Listen now to my voice; I [*Jethro, Moses' father-in-law*] will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. 20 "And **you [Moses] shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do.** 21 "Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them *to be* rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. 22 "And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be *that* **every great matter they shall bring to you [Moses to judge],** but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear *the burden* with you.

Moses was given a responsibility to the nation of Israel by God to TEACH the Law, exemplify KEEPING the Law, and rightly JUDGE matters pertaining to the Law. That is the same position that the scribes and Pharisees held—they were to teach, keep, and judge the Law of Moses. However, Jesus said that they utterly failed to do these things as they proved by their own works:

MATTHEW 23:3-7 “Therefore whatever they [*scribes and Pharisees*] 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.’

This kind of hypocrisy has existed throughout history—as the saying goes, “Rules for thee but none for me.” The scribes and Pharisees bound heavy burdens above and beyond the Law of Moses upon the people that were oppressive but did nothing to ease their suffering. In contrast, Jesus said:

MATTHEW 11:29-30 “Take My [*Jesus Christ’s*] yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 “For My yoke *is* easy and **My burden is light.**”

According to Jesus, the Law of God is *not* a heavy burden but the scribes and Pharisees made it so. But they did much more than subject the people to burdensome rules and fail to keep it themselves—they actually ANNULLED the Law:

MATTHEW 15:6 “... **you [*scribes and Pharisees*] have made the commandment of God of no effect [*nullified*] by your tradition.**”

Jesus said in no uncertain terms that the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees NULLIFIED the Law of Moses. Given that, it is no surprise that Jesus told them:

MATTHEW 23:13-15, 25-33 “**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. 14 “**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore **you will receive greater condemnation.** 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.** ... 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.** 29 “**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 “and say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’ 31 “Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 “Fill up, then,

the measure of your fathers' *guilt*. 33 **"Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"**

Jesus reviled, denounced, and castigated the scribes and Pharisees for their words and works. In no small way, Jesus FIRED them from "Moses' seat" forever and then He replaced them.

MATTHEW 23:8-12 "But you [*the multitude & disciples*], **do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher [or Master], the Christ**, and you are all brethren. 9 **"Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.** 10 **"And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.** 11 "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Jesus completely rejected and ousted the scribes and Pharisees in their position of authority from the seat of Moses. Jesus then told the *people* that they are to look to Him as their only TEACHER and to God in heaven as their only FATHER.

Technically speaking though, Jesus did not immediately fire them. He was not yet the Passover sacrificial Lamb nor would He setup His Kingdom upon this earth for years to come. Instead of firing them, He simply took away their jobs by destroying the Temple in 70 A.D. so the scribes and Pharisees no longer had a position of authority, which achieved the same thing. But it was imperative that the priesthood was removed so that RIGHTEOUS authority over people was restored. Now, the true and righteous¹ eternal High Priest teaches and judges The Way, The Truth, and The Life. He is the only true source of undefiled and incorruptible power, authority, teaching, and judgment.

But there is still something puzzling about Matthew 23:3. Read it again and pay particular attention to the first part:

MATTHEW 23:3 "Therefore **whatever they [*scribes and Pharisees*] tell you to observe, that observe and do**, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."

Given His severe judgments and condemnations, why would Jesus tell the people to do everything that the scribes and Pharisees SAY? One source that sheds some light on the question is a Hebrew version of the book of Matthew, which was preserved as an appendix in a 14th century Jewish polemical attack against Catholic oppression, written by Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut. Research into this particular Hebrew text was done by a Karaite (Hebrew scripturalist) Jew named Nehemiah Gordon². In his book *The Hebrew Yeshua vs. The Greek Jesus*, he explains the seeming incongruity of Matthew 23:3 by referring to the Hebrew translation, which says:

¹ Rev. 19:11.

² Nehemiah Gordon's book *The Hebrew Yeshua vs. The Greek Jesus* can be found by going to <https://sabbathreflections.org/resources/books-references/> or <https://sabbathreflections.org/resources/documentaries/>.

[Shem Tov] Matthew 23:2-3 Saying, the Pharisees and sages sit upon the seat of Moses. 3 Therefore all that he [Moses] says to you diligently do, but according to their [*Pharisees and scribes*] reforms and their precedents do not do, because they talk but they do not do.

The Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew records Jesus saying to diligently do “all that [he] [Moses] says to you,” NOT the scribes and Pharisees. That makes much more sense, both within the context of the judgments and condemnations against the scribes and Pharisees and since the Law of God came through Moses. Instead of “they” in the Greek translations, substituting “he” reflects this:

MATTHEW 23:2-3 saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. 3 “Therefore whatever [he] [Moses] tells you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their [*the scribes and Pharisees*] works; for they say, and do not do.

Whether the Greek word for *they* (Gk. *ἐῖπωσιν*) in Matthew 23:3 is incorrect or not, the whole of the chapter (excluding the last three verses) in no uncertain terms warns against both the words and works of the scribes and Pharisees. Keeping the Law as recorded by Moses is what is required. But also, removing the authority of the scribes and Pharisees restored the people back to God the Father and the Master and Teacher (Rabboni³) Jesus Christ. People are now under Their authority, leadership, teaching, and judging of the Law. No more does a human have the authority of “Moses’ seat” and that includes all those who are ordained as a minister, pastor, or elder. As the Psalmist said:

PSALMS 123:1-2 Unto You [LORD] I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens. 2 Behold, as the eyes of servants *look* to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until He has mercy [*favor*] on us.

The *ekklesia* are to look to the heavenly throne for leadership, teaching, and judgment. After all, that is from where our salvation will come, not from men:

LUKE 21:27-28 “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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³ Rabboni = Master or Teacher. Only used in Mark 10:51 and John 20:16.