

Lecture 13

John's words to the Sadducees and Pharisees

My tribute to my wife; Most of you enjoy and appreciate these lectures or teachings. I want you to know that these lectures would not happen without my wife. I cannot cope with the stresses of life very well at all. My wife shields me from these things. When I can not make myself sandwich or bowl of soup she does it for me. She understands that simple demands for the most part are too much for me at times, and she takes care of them. That I can sit in my office and can work on these lectures are thanks to her! I want you to know that without her these lectures would not happen and would not be as readable as they are because she edits them. Most times I am quite tired after teaching and need to sit quietly for a day or two after: her taking care of me allows me to recover quickly. So as you listen today and you wish praise me, instead take time to thank Hashem for my wife and when she is in here thank her.

Today let us look at the Pharisees through the eyes of the Jew and understand the Pharisees as viewed by the Jews. To do this I am referring to a *Dictionary of Ancient Rabbis* Edited by Jacob Neusner. Neusner is a prominent Jewish scholar today and he has made the Jewish Oral Torah available to Messianics and Christians as well Jews. His works cover a huge body of ancient Jewish writings. He is not liked by the Orthodox community because of his lack of commentary in the translations that he has completed (The think that this should have orthodox commentary along with it). The majority of Jewish scholars appreciate his work, he is observant as well.

The word Pharisee in Greek is φαρισαιοι -- in Hebrew פרושים -- in Aramaic פרישאי. Why is it important for us to understand them through Jewish eyes? It is because we have seen through the eyes of the Church separate from the history and from their works. We catch the same views as the Sadducees which we will look at two weeks. Neusner opens with discussion about them;

“Party representing the religious views, practices, and hopes of the kernel of the Jewish People in the time of the Second Temple and in opposition to priestly Sadduces”¹

¹ *Dictionary of Ancient Rabbis*; Selection from *The Jewish Encyclopedia* Editor Jacob Neusner originally pub by Funk and Wagnall, published Hendrickson. Aug 2003. pg 327

5 The first thing we must note is that represented a “*Kernel*” or
portion of the Jewish People. Just as we agree that our politicians
do not necessarily represent us fully, it was the same in Israel. The
second thing is that they stood in opposition to the Sadducees so
for someone to make the Pharisees and Sadducees one unit, or tell
10 us that are one in the same who stood together is silly or
profoundly ignorant.

Pharisees Neusner states;

15 “‘*Perisha*’ (the singular of ‘*Perishaya*’) denotes ‘one who
separates himself’ or keeps away from things impure, in
order to attain the degree of holiness and righteousness
required in those who would commune with God”²

20 This means that they were concerned about purity or ritual
cleanness. This is not a concern with kindness but with
maintaining boundaries that kept people at arms length that
threaten that purity “pledged themselves to strict Levitical purity.”
They were not necessarily priests (the Chief Priest or Leading
25 Priests were Sadducees). They had their own brotherhood which
was separate for the people of the land or the *Am ha-aretz*. Though
they were scrupulous with regards to giving tithes (both first and
second) it was that they gave it to the poor with sense of
superiority. They grew out of a division after the Maccabean revolt
30 when the priests started mixing political power with the
priesthood³.

They believed that they had the Mosaic and prophetic authority
for their interpretation as found in Mishnah^{4,5}. They drew this out
35 of:

40 *Deut 17:8-9* "If any case arises requiring decision between
one kind of homicide and another, one kind of legal right
and another, or one kind of assault and another, any case
within your towns that is too difficult for you, then you
shall arise and go up to the place that the LORD your God
will choose. (9) And you shall come to the Levitical priests
and to the judge who is in office in those days, and you
45 shall consult them, and they shall declare to you the
decision.

² Neusner pg 327

³ Ibid pg 328

⁴ Ibid pg 328

⁵ Ber 48b; Shab 14b; Yoma 80a; Yeb 16a: see pg 328 for a full list

5 From this text they argued their right to make those decisions regarding the Torah. (It is important to note we do not disagree with this even in CTOMC: we are in the process of developing this within our community. There is considerable discussion regarding this within the Messianic context and we will deal with this more later.)

10 One of the bigger disputes was whether a daily sacrifice made by the High Priest should be the Temple treasury or by the High Priest himself. The Pharisees believed that it should be paid by the Temple treasury; letting the sacrifice being paid by the treasury allowed all people to participate in the sacrifice, it was argued. The Sadducees refused this. The water libation made during Sukkot, as well as beating of the altar with willow branches originated by custom and is not in the Torah, showing again that the Pharisees had great influence even though in the temple they were not priests. The Sadducees refused but gave in because of popular demand; this led to more bad feelings between the Sadducees and the Pharisees⁶.

It was the Pharisees that were keen to bring joy to the festivals. The debate regarding festivals is found in the example is Rosh Shanah which was just Yom Teruah till it was changed by the Pharisees⁷. The Pharisee made it more meaningful to the people by calling it the New Year. Why? From it they counted the years for the Sabbath and the Jubilee years because based upon an agricultural mindset made it meaningful for the people of the land. The other Key difference is that the Pharisees were much more compassionate than Sadducees when it came to death penalties and other penalties.

Another key difference is the addition of wine at Passover. The list of differences is extensive and far beyond this paper to cover. As we go through the life of the Master we will see that he followed many of the laws/customs that were added by the Pharisees. Yet he also argued for truth and justice as priorities over the oral Torah; that underlining principles of the Written Torah must be the principles of the oral Torah and if those principles conflict with oral Torah then the oral Torah must be over ruled.

45 *Mat 3:7-8 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (8) Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.*

Many times we have read this verse as anti Jewish or anti Semitic. Let us stand back and understand that John is not saying

⁶ Ibid pgs 330-331

⁷ Ibid pg 330

5 that the people of the land or everyday Jews were part of this
group. He was telling them to live according Torah and not
according to the tradition and control of the spiritual life of Israel
that both groups were caught up in. In fact, as we know too well in
our day and age, politics is unconcerned with morality: it is only
10 concerned with power. Here we find the key that John is talking
about. Many times they fought intense political battles that were
more concerned about winning that about the morals. Both are
lumped together for that reason. These are not same and in fact
Paul was a Pharisee and we will see that the Master was more
15 closely aligned with Pharisees than with Sadducees.

*Luk 3:7-14 He said therefore to the crowds that came out
to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned
you to flee from the wrath to come? (8) Bear fruits in
20 keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to
yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell
you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for
Abraham. (9) Even now the axe is laid to the root of the
trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is
25 cut down and thrown into the fire." (10) And the crowds
asked him, "What then shall we do?" (11) And he
answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with
him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise."
(12) Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to
30 him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" (13) And he said to
them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do."
(14) Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?"
And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by
threats or by false accusation, and be content with your
35 wages."*

Here Luke elaborates on what he means and again this is an appeal
regarding the principles that were present in the early church.

40 Matthew only mentions the Pharisees and Sadducees together in
3 places: here, then in Matthew 16:1-12 and finally in Matthew
22:34. Matthew has the Master interacting with Pharisees and
Scribes more often Matthew 5:20; 12:38; 15:1; 23:2, 13-15, 23ff.
In Mark and Luke the Sadducees are mentioned only once in these
45 books but never in association with the Pharisees. We should
understand from this that writers are reflecting the reality that
Pharisees were outside the temple and were religious leaders of the
day apart from the Temple. Also if we understand Matthew as
being a Jew believing in the resurrection, therefore in camp of the
50 Pharisees, we must understand he is then dealing with the

5 difficulty as an insider and as part of the community; much like
Martin Luther until the enforced separation from Roman Catholic
Church. It is important to note that the believers were fully part of
the synagogue at the time of writing of Matthew. Matthew is not
10 anti-Semitic, but a critic of the current religious leadership of the
day.

Yochanan in Matthew's recollection was doing as Yeshua
would do: calling upon the leadership to be more concerned about
their own personal relationship with Hashem and with others
15 instead of the politics of the believing community. Judaism and its
attachment to the land makes this very difficult but very clear. The
Jews wanted a political system based on religion and the revolt by
the Maccabees provided that. It became corrupt and was
overthrown because of its corruption, and Jerusalem fell because
20 the politics of the day destroyed it.

*Mat 3:9-10 And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We
have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able
from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. (10)
25 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree
therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and
thrown into the fire.*

This verse is an important verse in that it deals with the
30 underlining assumption that is still prevalent in Judaism, that Jews
that are even barely observant are part of the world to come⁸. So
that racial status was the key to salvation and that is an issue in
Galatians as well. Yochanan was teaching that actions that
demonstrate faith is what counts, not family status. This is much
35 the same in the church where a public declaration of belief is all
that is needed. In both cases actions are not part of the
demonstration of allegiance. Yochanan's stones are for him a way
of saying what you see as impossible is possible: by the miracle of
salvation all can be made into the children of Abraham. It is not by
40 family lineage. This is key argument throughout all of the writings
of the Apostles. It is also possible that Matthew in quoting
Yochanan is pointing to:

*Isa 51:1-2 "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness,
45 you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you
were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.
(2) Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore*

⁸ Just to understand that the idea Noahide laws and covenant with did not
emerge till after the writing of Talmud 500CE

5 you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might
bless him and multiply him.

Here again the idea of the rock would have played on the idea of
repentance and belonging to Abraham.

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Verse 10 is Yochanan play on this text;

15 *Jer 17:5-8 Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who
trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart
turns away from the LORD. (6) He is like a shrub in the
desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in
the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt
land. (7) "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD. (8) He is like a tree planted by
20 water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not
fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is
not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to
bear fruit."*

25 So again that idea is that even in the Tanach a tree is likened to a
righteous man bearing fruit in its season. This quote is from the
Mishnah and I think this more what Yochanan had in mind:

30 *He used to say: Anyone whose wisdom exceeds his good
deeds to what is he likened?- to a tree whose branches are
numerous but whose roots are few; then the wind comes
and uproots it and turns it upside down; as it is said: 'And
he shall be like an isolated tree in an arid land and shall
not see when good comes; he shall dwell on parched soil in
35 the wilderness, on a salted land, uninhabited' {Jeremiah
17:6}. But one whose good deeds exceed his wisdom, to
what he is likened?- to a tree whose branches are few but
whose roots are numerous; even if all the winds in the
world were to come and blow against it, they could not
40 budge it from its place; as it is said: 'And he shall be like a
tree planted by water, toward the stream spreading its
roots, and it shall not notice the heat's arrival and its
foliage shall be fresh; in the year of drought it shall not
worry, nor shall it cease from yielding fruit.{Jeremiah
45 17:8}⁹*

John more then likely was saying you study at the expense of
good deeds. Today we as Messianic are at great risk for that as we
throw out the teachings of the Church and try to unlearn the old

⁹ M Avot. 3:22

5 and learn new lessons, we often get caught in study and not in service.