

CHAPTER 5

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF JESUS' WORDS: "THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES SIT IN MOSES' SEAT (Matt.23:2)" & WHY IT MATTERS

"Let God be true but every man a liar." ~ Paul

Even though Jesus Himself said, "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat," relatively few in today's Church of God seem to understand, see the importance of, or accept what He was saying. This subject is very relevant to understanding Pentecost and other doctrines. Contrary to Christ's teaching, there is a marked, determined belief that it was actually the Sadducees who sat in the position of authority. But, as Paul said, "Let God be true, but every man a liar (Rom.3:4)."

Many believe that whoever *controlled* Temple ritual, feasts, the Hebrew calendar, etc., in 31 A.D., would have set the date for Pentecost. Also the apostles' example apparently confirmed that date. However, history does NOT favor the Sadducees having control of/or setting any Temple policy or doctrine, during or near the time frame of Acts 2! Indeed, history affirms, Just as Yeshuah said, that it WAS indeed the PHARISEES who had the greater control and influence and not the Sadducees!

All calendar matters, important policies and scriptural interpretations were set by the ruling Council of Sanhedrin – not by the Sadducees! The earliest recorded mention of

the Sanhedrin is about 57 B.C. However, their rule is believed to predate that reference by centuries. While *some* of the 71 members of the Sanhedrin were Sadducean, they did not dominate the council. The Sanhedrin was largely composed of Sages, Rabbis and Pharisees. Many historians believe the famous Pharisee, Rabbi Gamaliel (whose voice changed the mind of the entire council of the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:34-40) was the chief member of the council at the time.

Notice what the *Encyclopedia Judaica* says regarding the historic power of the Sanhedrin:

It was the place ‘where the Law went forth to all Israel’ (Sanh.11:2 Tosef., Sanh.7:1) and was the final authority on halakhah.... (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol XIII, page 838)

[“Halakhah” is the interpretation of the Laws of Scripture.]

Notice the interpretation of the Laws of Scripture went forth to all Israel from the Sanhedrin – not from the Sadducees! Continuing further (from the same section in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*) it states:

A tribe, a false prophet, or the high priest may not be tried save by the court of seventy-one: ...They may not add to the [City of Jerusalem], or the Courts of the Temple save by the decision of the court of seventy-one.

It continues:

They may not burn the red heifer save according to the instructions of the court of 71". (Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol 14, page 838)

Even though the sacrificial Temple ritual of burning the red heifer for purification from sin was done by the priests (Num.19:2-10), they were required to do it according to the instructions or interpretations of the Sanhedrin. This is in accordance with what Jesus said and the original pattern given in God's Law.

Consider: Moses was a prophet and a judge. He was not a priest. Aaron was the high priest; yet, Aaron received his instructions from Moses – not the other way around. This is why Jesus said "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat" (Matt.23:2). The priests answered to them in the performance of their duties!

WHAT JESUS DID SAY:

Let's look at the context of some important statements our Lord made. In the latter parts of Matthew 22 and Mark 12, Jesus was correcting the Sadducees who did not believe in angels, or in free moral agency, or in the resurrection. Powerfully, Jesus told the Sadducees that they did not understand the Scriptures or the power of God, and He explained the Truth to them from God's Word. Christ's understanding of the Law, and the way he handled and corrected the Sadducees, impressed some of the Pharisees who overheard this conversation, so that they also began to gather around. The Pharisees then proceeded to test Jesus'

understanding of God's Law by asking Him which was the most important commandment of all. Jesus' answer and conversation with the primary questioning Pharisee and his response – led Jesus to say to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God" (Mark 12:18-34). This was of central importance, because it was during this conversation that Jesus stated which party (or sect) had authority in matters of Law. Let's see this event unfold in its context in Matthew's account:

*Matt 22:23 – The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him,
24 saying: "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother.
25 Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother.
26 Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh.
27 Last of all the woman died also.
28 Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her."
29 Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.
30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.
31 But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying,
32 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."*

33 *And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.*

34 *But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.*

35 *Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying,*

36 *"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"*

37 *Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'*

38 *This is the first and great commandment.*

39 *And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*

40 *On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Emphasis added.)*

These words of Jesus are imperative! Notice what occurred after this crowd had grown and now included 1) many Sadducees, 2) many Pharisees, and 3) Jesus' disciples. Jesus, "in the presence of them all" (which includes us, by record of this event), gave the critically important instruction as to which party or sect had authority in matters of Law.

Matt 23:1 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."

Jesus told His disciples (and us) in the presence of both the Sadducees and Pharisees that it was the scribes and

Pharisees who sat in the “seat” (the office of responsibility and authority) of Moses! It was the Pharisees whom Jesus said had power to give instructions on “observances”! What Jesus said was just as important as what He did not say.

WHAT JESUS DID *NOT* SAY:

Jesus did *NOT* say that the *Sadducees* sat in Moses’ seat! What else did Jesus NOT say that is also very important to understand? Jesus did NOT say the scribes and Pharisees sit in Aaron’s seat. Jesus was saying the office of power over “observances” in the Law lay in the seat of Moses – not Aaron – and He said that office resided with the Pharisees, not the Sadducees! While there were both Pharisaic and Sadducean priests, most of the priests during that time were Sadducees. The priests CARRIED OUT the functions, policies, observances and ordinances, but **THEY DID NOT SET POLICY** or Law independently of the Pharisees! This truth also is borne out in **MANY** historical accounts. Man is to live by every word of God (Luke 4:4), so let’s not underestimate the importance of Jesus’ Words, just as He spoke them. What Jesus DID and DID NOT say in this regard, provides us with important distinctions which guide and protect us from much confusion!

Notice what Josephus said about the power and influence of the Pharisees being *over* that of the Sadducees in the days of Hyrcanus and Queen Cleopatra. Since Cleopatra lived from about 69 to 30 B.C., this account would be shortly before the birth of Jesus Christ:

5. However, this prosperous state of affairs moved the Jews to envy Hyrcanus; but they that were the worst disposed to him were the Pharisees, who were one of the sects of the Jews, as we have informed you already. These have so great a power over the multitude, that when they say anything against the king, or against the high priest, they are presently believed.

Then from the next section:

6. And concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them, while the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side. (Josephus: *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book xiii, Chapter 10, portions of Sections 5 and 6)

Josephus was NOT a distant commentator opining centuries or millennia later! This is the historical account of “the man on the ground,” in the region, among HIS own people, and quite near the same time frame. He recorded current and recent events as an historian!

History records that the Sadducees had become deeply Hellenized by Greek influence and were perceived as only being interested in preserving their position and class wealth. These facts, combined with their refusal to embrace such core Biblical beliefs as the existence of angels and the resurrection from the dead, brought about their rejection by the masses as being corrupt puppets of the pagan Gentile Hellenists! Many of these Sadducean priests were appointed at this time by the foreign Hellenistic Gentile

rulers. This was contrary to God's instructions. The Sadducean alliance and support from the Herodian dynasty did allow them to achieve some lost power and influence (as mentioned on page 75 of Dr. Schiffmann's book, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*). But their ability to influence matters was always kept in check by the dominating power of the Pharisees because they had popular support from the masses and power through their Sanhedrin authority. At other times, the Sadducees would try to overcome the leading power of the Pharisees, by allying themselves with the Gentile Samaritans. (More on that later).

As the Sadducees changed and became more and more hellenized, they increasingly lost the trust of the masses, who were holding fast to the traditional laws that were being taught in the synagogues by the Pharisees and the sages or rabbis. History records this development taking place long before the days when our Lord and John the Baptist came on the scene!

Notice further what the famous historian Josephus said regarding the Pharisees and their influence over Temple worship and sacrifice in section 3:

3. Now, for the Pharisees, they live meanly, and despise delicacies in diet; and they follow the conduct of reason; and what that prescribes to them as good for them they do; and they think they ought earnestly to strive to observe reason's dictates for practice. They also pay a respect to such as are in years..." After a few more comments on their beliefs, Josephus states "on account of which doctrines they are able greatly to persuade the body of the people; and whatsoever they

do about Divine worship, prayers, and sacrifices, they perform them according to their direction; insomuch that the cities give great attestations to them on account of their entire virtuous conduct, both in the actions of their lives and their discourses also.
(Emphasis added)

Immediately following in section 4, Josephus continues by contrasting the power and influence of the Pharisees with the comparatively weak influence of the Sadducees:

4. ...But the doctrine of the Sadducees is this: That souls die with the bodies; nor do they regard the observation of anything besides what the law enjoins them; for they think it an instance of virtue to dispute with those teachers of philosophy whom they frequent: but this doctrine is received but by a few, yet by those still of the greatest dignity. But they are able to do almost nothing of themselves; for when they become magistrates, as they are unwillingly and by force sometimes obliged to be, they addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees, because the multitude would not otherwise bear them. (Josephus: *Antiquities Of The Jews*, Book 18, Chapter 1, parts of Sections 3 and 4)

Here we have a clear concise historical accounting, not just mere commentary after the fact! The Sadducees were obliged to serve, as they were of the priestly line, but they had to “addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees.” Indeed, here is historical confirmation of Jesus’ words: *“The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat!”*

Those who have not wanted to believe the Jewish accounts in the Mishna and Talmud, which supported the accounts of Josephus, have attempted to use commentators from

centuries and millennia *later* to try to discredit these and many other accounts. But thanks to more archaeological evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls, we can now CONFIRM that the statements made in Josephus, the Mishna, and the Talmud are correct!

Jesus did NOT say that the Sadducees sat in Moses' seat!
Jesus did NOT say the scribes and Pharisees sit in Aaron's seat. Jesus was saying **the office of power over "observances" in the Law lay in the seat of Moses – not Aaron – and He said that office resided with the Pharisees, not the Sadducees!**
~Don E. Haney

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FROM THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS:

In fact, the Dead Sea Scrolls CONFIRM that the Pharisees had the GREATER CONTROL over TEMPLE SERVICE from the Maccabean Hasmonean period until the destruction on the Temple in 70 A.D., just as the words of the Rabbis, the TALMUD, the MISHNA, JOSEPHUS, PHILO, EDERSHEIM, JESUS CHRIST, and other scholars verify and attest!

Notice what Dr. Schiffmann says about the Pharisees after spending decades reviewing the Dead Sea Scrolls and other archaeological evidence found among the Dead Sea Caves:

They (Pharisees) are said to have been extremely scrupulous in observing the Torah and to have been expert in its interpretation. (Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, page 77)

On page 78, Dr. Schiffman states:

Recently, scholars have been inclined to discount such reports as a later reshaping of history in light of post-destruction reality. We will see, however, that the Halakhic Letter, found at Qumran, proves that the views assigned to the Pharisees in a number of Mishnaic disputes are exactly those in practice in the Jerusalem Temple. (Emphasis added)

Sadly, I have seen churches often quote the historical *Works of Josephus* when his writings supported their teachings. Some of those same churches undermine Josephus when his writings go contrary to their beliefs, by quoting from such commentators as *Morton Smith* and *Jacob Neusner*, who wrote many centuries after the fact, and who attempted a discrediting of Josephus's historical accounts. A seeming bias of the *Pentecost Study Material*, referred to above really becomes clear when this paper imputes and infers, on page 31 that Josephus wanted to "rewrite history," and, on page 32, accuses him of "playing politics!" This is an INCREDIBLE unsubstantiated accusation since so many in that church once repeatedly quoted from Josephus in support of other beliefs they held or to establish history otherwise. Such "double-dealing" is

curious and sad, at the least! Thankfully, we not only have Josephus' exhaustive records to go by, but a considerable volume of new archeological evidence that verifies Josephus' records, as well as those of the Mishna, the Talmud and Philo, just to name a few!

One would hope that any teacher, student or doctrinal committee member, would be inclined to reverse various prior beliefs and/or statements and decisions about the numbering of Pentecost – given the amount and the clarity of the new Pentecost evidence. How might truth seeking churches have responded in the past, if they would have had access to the considerable new exegetical Scriptural evidences, combined with the substantial new archaeological evidences? One would expect they would have changed their minds.

In June of 1992, *Bible Review* magazine printed an article by Professor Lawrence H. Schiffman, entitled “New Light on the Pharisees – Insights from the Dead Sea Scrolls.” Let's review a few important excerpts from it:

Modern critical scholarship has challenged much of what Talmudic sources (including the Mishnah) say about the Pharisees of the pre-destruction period on the ground that the scant evidence preserved in these texts actually comes from the post-70 period. Many scholars have simply rejected out of hand the claims made in post-destruction rabbinic literature that the Pharisees were the dominant religious group in the affairs of the Temple as early as the Maccabean period and during the reign of the Hasmonean dynasty that succeeded the Maccabean uprising. Yet ultimately, rabbinic claim to authority rests on the continuity of

the Pharisaic-rabbinic tradition from pre-destruction to post-destruction times. For the rabbis, the traditions of the Pharisees had been transmitted orally to the tannaitic masters of the Mishnah and in this way had formed the basis for post-destruction tannaitic Judaism. But to the modern critical historian the evidence was sparse. Accordingly, any light that might be cast on the history of the Pharisees and their teachings in the pre-destruction period would be critically important. With new evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls it is now possible to demonstrate that for much of the Hasmonean period Pharisaic views were indeed dominant in the Jerusalem Temple. In short, the reports of the religious laws, or halakhah, attributed to the Pharisees in later Talmudic texts are basically accurate. (Emphasis added)

For example's sake, let's recall what Mr. Armstrong's WCG doctrinal team stated in their 1974 study paper - since this erroneous and seemingly biased "scholarship" affected not only over 140,000 of their own members, but many tens of thousands of other people:

Since the Sadducees were in control of the Temple ritual in 31 A.D., Pentecost must have been observed on a Sunday, and not on the sixth of Sivan as would have been the case had the Pharisees been in control. Apparently, all of the Jews acquiesced to the Sadducees' reckoning and kept the same day. Whoever controlled the Temple, its rituals and ceremonies, would have controlled the offering of the wave sheaf – thereby setting the date for Pentecost!

All in the Church of God agree that the New Testament apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ

would not have been keeping Pentecost on the wrong day. Neither would they have been assembled on the same day as the Jews at the Temple – unless the day they were all keeping in 31 A.D. was the correct day.

Indeed, how might various sincere influential Messianic and Christian Church leaders count Pentecost differently than they did (and still do) once they are made aware of this new evidence? Will they be able to change their “tradition?” With God’s Holy Spirit, I believe that we all can change and grow, when presented with truth!

One ought to be particularly concerned, if still following past decisions that were based upon the *Pentecost Study Material*, or other ancillary material and/or reasoning. This is especially so, given the great importance that some churches have placed upon who controlled Temple ritual. This has been such a significant part of their basis of rejection of the “Jewish reckoning” of counting Pentecost from the morrow after the first annual Sabbath of Unleavened Bread, not the weekly Sabbath!

How might such doctrinal teams have responded if they were to have had this new overwhelming evidence, as it would have necessitated different conclusions? How might such doctrinal teams respond in the future? It is now up to the brave truth seekers to grow and pass on these evidences to others.

Finally, on page 54, Professor Schiffman continues in his June 1992, *Bible Review* article referenced above:

MMT is a foundation text of the Qumran sect. It was written in the early Hasmonean period when the Temple was managed and its ritual conducted in accord with Pharisaic views. The Hasmoneans made common cause with the Pharisees in order to cleanse the Temple of the excessive Hyalinization that they blamed to a great extent on the Sadducean priests who had become, in their view, too Hellenized.

He continues,

Thus, evidence of the ideological underpinnings of Pharisaism and its halakhic principles can be found in the Qumran corpus.

Continuing,

In fact, the scrolls provide extensive and wide-ranging testimony about the pre-destruction history of the Pharisees and about their ideology. MMT and the Temple Scroll provide evidence of Pharisaic dominance over the Temple ritual in the early days of the Hasmonean period. (Emphasis added)

There is so much more that could be quoted, but time and space prevent it. This NECESSARY PROOF is regarding the important Holy Day when God commanded the gathering of His people for the receiving of His Holy Spirit (Lev.23:21, Luke 24:49)! Few things could be more important.

Notice what the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* says about the Sadducean party submitting to the Pharisees:

PHARISEES

The Sadducean party came from the ranks of the priests, the party of the Pharisees from the scribes. The characteristic feature of the Pharisees arises from their legal tendency, that of the Sadducees from their social position. When once the accurate observance of the ceremonial law was regarded as the true essence of religious conduct, Pharisaism already existed, but not as a distinct sect or party. It appears that during the Greek period, the chief priests and rulers of the people took up an increasingly low attitude toward the law; the Pharisees united themselves more closely into an association that made a duty of the law's punctilious observance. They appear in the time of John Hyrcanus under the name of "Pharisees," no longer indeed on the side of the Maccabees but in hostile opposition to them. The reason for this was that the Maccabaeans' chief object was no longer the carrying out of the law but the maintenance and extension of their political power. The stress laid upon religious interests by the Pharisees had won the bulk of the nation to their side, and Queen Alexandra, for the sake of peace with her people, abandoned the power to the Pharisees. Their victory was now complete; the whole conduct of internal affairs was in their hands. All the decrees of the Pharisees done away with by Hyrcanus were reintroduced, and they completely ruled the public life of the nation. This continued in all essentials even during subsequent ages. Amid all the changes of government under Romans and Herodians the Pharisees maintained their spiritual authority."

Unger's continues:

They had the greatest influence upon the congregations, so that all acts of public worship, prayers, and sacrifices were performed according to their injunctions. Their sway over the masses was so absolute that they could obtain a hearing even when they said anything against the king or the high priest; consequently they were the most capable of counteracting the design of the kings. Hence, too, the Sadducees, in their official acts, adhered to the demands of the Pharisees, because otherwise the multitude would not have tolerated them. (Schurer, *History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ, div. 2, 2:28*). (From *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois. Copyright (C) 1988.)

Indeed, the historical and archaeological evidence that the Pharisees, not the Sadducees, controlled Temple ritual and Halakhah (interpretation of law for Israel) is quite considerable indeed. You can see the relevance these facts have on the date and keeping of Pentecost!

Many say, "Oh, it doesn't matter who controlled the Temple in Acts 2." But that has not been the position of many doctrinal committees. They have established doctrines based in part on whom they believe controlled the Temple in Christ's time. These doctrines are now practiced and believed by many! There is definitely sufficient evidence to prove that the Pharisees continue to follow the same method for counting Pentecost as the ancient Hebrews and the Temple Jews within the Acts 2 timeframe.

It can be proven either scripturally *OR* historically. The Holy Scriptures, archaeology and history complement and confirm one another. That is why they are each examined carefully in this book.

When a person has been taught misinformation for a considerable period of time, the truth and reality become most difficult to face. This difficulty may be even more challenging to overcome for the well-meaning, but misguided ministers who may feel their reputation is also at stake, as they both believed *AND* taught the misinformation they were given. But the blessed rewards from God are worth it, and God's people will respect him who has the humility to accept his error and overcome it – as God has called all mankind to learn from his error and change. This challenge is made more difficult for some because of an

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~ Lawrence H. Schiffman**

egregious pyramid church government system that speaks like a lamb but bites like a serpent. Claiming control (as the very government of God) for the sake of unity within their system, the unknowing victims

are limited from knowing the joy and freedom that growth in God's Word brings. It can be a form of religious tyranny. If the reader would like to know more of what God's Word says about true leadership, as compared to the Babylonian system that has become the pattern of government for many

Churches of God, you may want to obtain a copy of the book, “*Satan’s Seat of Tyranny*” from the website: www.godslawislove.org *Your past is not as important as your future!* God is freeing us from the deceits of Satan so that we can grow and worship God freely in spirit and truth (2 Tim 2:26, John 4:24). God calls us to a life of learning, growing and overcoming. Still waters go stagnant! Historical evidence can be very helpful in augmenting and clarifying scripture – especially for those who have been trained to see *only* certain passages and to see them *only* in a certain light. Are you ready to embark on the exciting path of learning through Biblical knowledge AND exegetical Bible study and related research? Some teach by telling their audience all the answers, assuming they are incapable of thinking for themselves. Others teach by encouraging study methods that will enable everyone to uncover, recognize and prove the true jewels of truth for themselves. I prefer the latter.

Concerning the matter of who controlled the Temple, remember it was Jesus who said, “The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.”

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