



Matthew Lesson 31

June 8, 2021

“The *Megillah* of Matthew”

23:13-30

Tonight we continue in chapter 23. Yeshua is still teaching in the Temple on Monday afternoon, *Nisan* 12, three days before His death on the stake. His most recent words have been very critical of the *Torah* teachers and Pharisees. He continues His criticism of them with this next group of verses, called “The Seven Woes,” because each description begins with “Woe to you.” He was speaking to the hypocritical *Torah* scholars and Pharisees, although His words would apply equally to anyone who acted in this same way. I point out that this was not a blanket condemnation of Pharisees, but only those who fit this description. There were also many good, honest and G-d fearing Pharisees in Israel. What does the word “woe” mean? The dictionary describes it as a condition of deep suffering caused from misfortune, affliction, or grief, ruinous trouble or calamity. Yeshua was saying that the end result of the actions of these men was going to be “woe to them,” not only the physical woes of the earth, but the woes of spiritual judgment.

(1) 13 “*But woe to you, Torah scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not enter yourselves, nor do you let those enter who are trying to go in.*” 14 (Some manuscripts include verse 14) (Matthew 23:13 TLV). Yeshua called them “hypocrites.” Our English word comes from *hupokritēs* (hoop-ok-ree-tace'), a Greek word which was originally used for actors in plays. Our modern use of the word means someone who pretends to be what they are not for the purpose of deceiving; presenting themselves as something that they are not. These men were supposed to show the people the way into the kingdom of heaven, but were shutting its doors on them. Rather than follow *Torah*, they built and enforced their own rules. And they rejected Yeshua, the One who came to show them the Way. They, who should have been the people’s guides, had blocked the gate, keeping ADONAI's people out instead of welcoming them in.

(2) 15 *“Woe to you, Torah scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel over land and sea to make one convert. And when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of Gehenna as yourself”* (Matthew 23:13-15 TLV). The Pharisees went to great lengths to make proselytes, converts to Judaism. Yeshua was not condemning the making of proselytes, but condemning the belief system which they were teaching. Those whom they converted would also follow the teachings, the wrong teachings, of the Pharisees even more closely than the Pharisees did themselves! They misinterpreted the meaning of righteousness in *Torah* and made their converts even more spiritually perverted than they were.

(3) 16 *“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘Whoever swears by the Temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the Temple, he is obligated.’ 17 O fools and blind ones! Which is greater, the gold or the Temple that made the gold holy? 18 And you say, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.’ 19 O blind ones! Which is greater, the offering or the altar that makes the offering holy? 20 Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and everything on it. 21 And whoever swears by the Temple, swears both by the Temple and by Him who dwells in it. 22 And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it”* (Matthew 23:16-22 TLV). “Swearing” refers to the making of oaths. During His Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua gave His ruling about oaths. He said: 33 *“Again, you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall carry out your oaths to Adonai.’ 34 But I tell you, do not swear at all—not by heaven, for it is the throne of God; 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. 37 But let your word ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’—anything more than this is from the evil one”* (Matthew 5:33-37 TLV). The Pharisees were masters in the making of rules of every kind which they then enforced on the people. Since the swearing of oaths was already deeply built into the culture of this generation, it was easy for the Pharisees to manipulate the people in this way. According to them, the responsibility of an oath was directly related to the sacredness of the object or the person by which the oath was taken. Because *Torah* prohibited swearing oaths on ADONAI Himself, they would swear by objects which were closely connected to Him, such as His throne or the Temple. The Pharisees came up with a way of separating objects which would securely bind someone to their promise from objects which were not significant enough to require a person to keep their word. A crafty person could

swear an oath by something non-binding which could then allow him to not keep the oath. The Pharisees said that swearing by the Temple was not a meaningful enough oath, but swearing by the gold of Temple meant that they were bound to the oath. This is what Yeshua was referring to. Yeshua condemned the practice of making oaths and said: “Let your yes be yes and your no be no.” We’ve all heard the oath given to witnesses in a trial: “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you G-d?” This was the way that it was originally stated, but the word “affirm” is now inserted as an alternative to the word swear. For someone who does not want to swear, this is letting your yes be yes as prescribed by Yeshua. Another addition to the original oath is “under pains and penalties of perjury.” These words can be used in place of “So help you G-d,” which also lets your yes be yes.

(4) 23 *“Woe to you, Torah scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! You tithe mint and dill and cumin, yet you have neglected the weightier matters of Torah—justice and mercy and faithfulness. It is necessary to do these things without neglecting the others. 24 O blind guides, straining out a gnat while swallowing a camel”* (Matthew 23:23-24 TLV)! The Pharisees scrupulously tithed their agricultural production and they even gave ten percent of their garden spices of dill, mint and cumin. In doing this, they majored in minutia but neglected the main points of *Torah*. They added their own customs while neglecting justice, mercy and faithfulness. In focusing on minor things they “strained a very small gnat from the water they drank, a picture representing the minor issues. But by ignoring the major issues, they swallowed a camel, the much weightier issues of justice and mercy.

(5) 25 *“Woe to you, Torah scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and uncontrolled desire. 26 O blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, so that the outside may become clean as well”* (Matthew 23:25-26 TLV). The Pharisees’ emphasis on legalism and outward appearance was like washing the outside of the cups and plates but not the insides. They might look clean on the outside, but they would be filthy in all the ways that matter. You wouldn’t want to drink something from them. The Pharisees only cared about how they appeared to the people. They put on a good show and wanted everyone to see them as clean, religiously perfect, and spiritual. But inside they were full of greed and self-indulgence.

(6) 27 *“Woe to you, Torah scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, you appear righteous to men on the outside, but are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”* (Matthew 23:27-28 TLV). Despite their pious outward appearances, those hypocrites had hearts which were unclean. In Yeshua’s day, it was routine to whitewash the tombs and there were several large tombs just opposite the eastern wall of the Temple Mount in Yeshua’s day. It is very possible that He used these same tombs as His example and may have even gestured in that direction from Solomon’s Portico on the Temple Mount as He spoke these words. One which is still there today is the tomb of Absalom, David’s son. It is highly decorated on the outside and beautiful. But even though the tombs were beautiful on the outside and whitewashed in that day, they were full of death and were unclean to Jews. Yeshua’s point was that on the outside, the Pharisees appeared to be most holy, but inwardly, He said that they were *“full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”*

(7) 29 *“Woe to you, Torah scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the monuments of the tzaddikim. 30 And you say, ‘If we’d been alive in the days of our forefathers, we wouldn’t have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ 31 So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers! 33 O snakes, you brood of vipers! How will you escape the condemnation of Gehenna”* (Matthew 23:29-33 TLV)? Because they were hard-hearted and had rebelled against ADONAI, they had become participants in the same crimes as their ancestors who persecuted and killed the prophets. The ancient Israelites rejected G-d’s messengers who had called for them to repent and the Pharisees and *Torah* teachers were doing the same thing and just as guilty as them. This was just one more example of their hypocrisy, presenting one picture of themselves while the opposite was true.

34 *“Because of this, behold, I’m sending you prophets and wise men and Torah scholars. Some of them you will kill and execute at the stake, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city”* (Matthew 23:34 TLV). Yeshua said that because the Pharisees and *Torah* teachers had rejected the prophets that He was going to send them more prophets and *Torah* experts, those who would prophesy and interpret *Torah* the right way. They would execute Yeshua, Himself, on the stake. *Shimon Kefa* is said to have been crucified upside down on a cross at his own request, because “he said that he wasn’t worthy

to be killed in the way that his Messiah was.” They would kill others, in fact all of Yeshua’s disciples are said to have died as martyrs for Him. *Ya’acov*, Jacob, Yeshua’s disciple, the brother of John, was beheaded by King Herod Agrippa. This is reported in Acts 12. *Ya’acov*, Jacob, the brother of Yeshua who was the *nasi*, the leader of the Jerusalem congregation after Yeshua’s death, was beaten to death by a mob of Pharisees. They actually threw him off the pinnacle of the Temple, the very place where *HaSatan* tempted Yeshua to throw Himself off. This is reported in Eusebius’ “Ecclesiastical History.” *Sha’ul* said: *24 “Five times from the Jewish leaders I received forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned”* (2Corinthians 11:24-25a TLV). And ultimately, he was executed, not by the Jewish leaders, but by the Romans. These prophets and wise men, the ones which Yeshua prophesied about which included Himself and His disciples, were sent with the truth, but were rejected, beaten, stoned and killed.

35 “And so, upon you shall come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the Temple and the altar. 36 Amen, I tell you, all these things will come upon this generation” (Matthew 23:35-36 TLV). Yeshua pointed out the death of Abel by his brother Cain and the death of Zechariah as a righteous man murdered by the unrighteous. Zechariah was killed during the reign of King Joash because he spoke against the Asherah poles and worship at high places: *20 Then the Ruach Elohim came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the kohen. He stood above the people and said to them, “Thus says God, ‘Why do you transgress the mitzvot of Adonai? You will not succeed. Because you have forsaken Adonai, He has also forsaken you.” 21 But they conspired against him, and by order of the king, they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the House of Adonai* (2Chronicles 24:20-d21 TLV). Yeshua said to the Pharisees that all their unrighteous acts of bloodshed would come upon this generation. And the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple were the coming fulfillment of Yeshua’s words.

37 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem who kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate! 39 For I tell you, you will never see Me again until you say, ‘ Baruch ha-ba b’shem Adonai. (Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord)” (Matthew 23:37-38 TLV)! Still speaking in the Temple, Yeshua poured

out His heart, His feelings for His brothers and sisters. He had so much pain for the Pharisees and all the people of Jerusalem. He desired to cover them and protect them but they would not allow Him. When He said “your house is left to you desolate” He meant that the Temple, *habayit*, Hebrew for “the house,” would be destroyed! Desolate means “deserted of people and in a state of bleak and dismal emptiness.” And Yeshua’s words were fulfilled forty years later. Facing the Pharisees, He said to them “You will never see me again.” And He left the Temple. He never faced them or spoke to them in ministry again while He was on earth and said that He would not again until they acknowledged that He came in ADONAI’s name. But their descendants will see Him again when they say “*Barukh haba b’shem ADONAI.*” Yeshua used *remez* to hint back at Psalm 118. *26 Baruch haba b’Shem Adonai— Blessed is He who comes in the Name of Adonai. We bless you from the House of Adonai*” (Psalm 118:26 TLV). Yeshua in effect, said: “you must say to me “we bless you, Yeshua, from the House of ADONAI” and you are welcome to be here.” *Barukh haba b’shem ADONAI* will be “all Israel’s” prayer in the near future when they recognize that Yeshua is their *Mashiach*. And then, this will happen. *10 “Then I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication, when they will look toward Me whom they pierced. They will mourn for him as one mourns for an only son and grieve bitterly for him, as one grieves for a firstborn”* (Zechariah 12:10 TLV). We are looking forward to and expecting that this will happen. ADONAI’s word is true. He said through Jeremiah: *33 “No longer will each teach his neighbor or each his brother, saying: ‘Know Adonai,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest.” it is a declaration of Adonai. “For I will forgive their iniquity, their sin I will remember no more”* (Jeremiah 31:33 TLV). And, He said through *Sha’ul*: *26 “and in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer shall come out of Zion. He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. 27 And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins”* (Romans 11:26-27 TLV). His covenant with them is “The New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 and their salvation will happen when they “look upon Him whom they pierced and mourn for Him.”

Tonight we conclude our lesson with Yeshua leaving the Temple for His final time. It happened on Monday afternoon, *Nisan* 12, 30 CE, 4

three days before His death on the stake for us. *Shalom aleichem!*