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THE THEOLOGY OF THE PHARISES

A Thesis presented to the  
Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

by

Victor A. Bartelt

Concordia Seminary  
April 15, 1942

*a good, thorough investigation.*

*W. M. R.*  
Approved by

Theron Fischer

W. M. R. Reuter, M. A.

### FOREWORD

The author wishes to express his gratitude to Dr. Theo. Graebner, Prof. A.M. Rehwinkel, and Dr. Paul Bretscher for their helpful advice, and for the use of their library which they considerately offered in order to make this paper possible.

## PREFACE

It is not the purpose of this paper to give a complete presentation of the theology of the Pharisees. In the words of Hereford, "To accomplish anything like that would need a very large volume. Weber devoted a whole book to it; and he might well have written a second, to include all that he had left out of the first."<sup>1</sup> Hence, if a scholar as Weber could not cover everything which pertains to the doctrines of the Pharisees in one voluminous book, how could a complete and detailed analysis of their theology be congested into a short thesis as this?

The purpose, therefore, of this paper is to give the reader a general overview concerning the doctrines of the Pharisees, to present, as well as is possible in a short treatise as this, the outstanding characteristics of their theology, and especially to discuss those teachings which are prominent in the New Testament and which brought them into such bitter conflicts with our Savior.

It should be mentioned here that everything which is included under the Theology of the Pharisees is given in the Haggadah. The Haggadah is merely a term designated for this particular phase of Pharisaism. The practical side of Pharisaism was designated by the word, Halachah, the theoretical, or doctrinal, by the word, Haggadah. Since both the theoretical and the practical must be considered in theology, both will be discussed in this paper.

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1 Hereford, The Pharisees, p.227.

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## I. OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW

The attitude which the Pharisees took in regard to obedience to the law is, without a doubt, their most important doctrine. For it was the outstanding characteristic of a Pharisee to obey the law in all of its minutest details. The Pharisees were strict observers of the law, hence very legalistic. What this law was, is briefly summed up in two passages of Scriptures: "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat."<sup>1</sup> "But he (Jesus) answered and said unto them (Pharisees), Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your traditions?"<sup>2</sup> Thus the law which the Pharisees followed was the law given by God to Moses plus traditions. It will be the purpose of this section to show a) how it came about that the Pharisees adopted and clung to the Law of Moses, b) what was meant by the word, "traditions," and c) the sincerity of the Pharisees in their strict observance of this law.

### 1. The Pharisees and the Written Law

It is often said that the Old Testament is the book of the Law and that the New Testament is the book of the Gospel. If understood correctly, certainly, all will agree to this statement. For, though one must concede that the Old Testament contains also a certain amount of Gospel, yet he will have to admit that it is to the greatest extent a

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 23, 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 15, 3.

book of the Law. This Law, which God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai,<sup>1</sup> was the guide for the children of Israel in all their moral, ceremonial, and political dealings until the time of Christ; and its moral aspects are still the rule for all Christians today.

The fact should by all means be stressed that the children of Israel were required to obey many more rules than people of today have to obey. They had to observe, for example, the Sabbath law;<sup>2</sup> they had special laws for menservants and for womenservants;<sup>3</sup> they had to observe the various festivals; Passover,<sup>4</sup> the Feast of Harvest,<sup>5</sup> the Feast of the Tabernacle,<sup>6</sup> and the Day of Atonement,<sup>7</sup> to all of which the people had to bring sacrifices; they had to obey the laws of purification,<sup>8</sup> especially also the priests.<sup>9</sup> Daily sacrifices had to be made in the temple.<sup>10</sup> These are only a few of the many laws given by God to his chosen people of Israel.

In regard to all these commandments the word of the Lord was, "obey!" The children of Israel had to observe all these rules and regulations, and they should fulfill them in true faithfulness and sincerity. If they failed in any one point, they sinned against their God and were required to bring their sacrifices to the priest in order

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1 Ex.20 ff.

2. cfr. Ex.20,8; 34,21; 35,3.

3 cfr. Ex.21,1-11

4 cfr. Ex.12,1ff; 23,14 ff.

5 cfr. Ex.23,16.

6 cfr. Ex.23,16b.

7. cff. Ex.30,10ff; Lev.16.

8 cfr. II Chron.30,18; Ex.19,10.

9 cfr. Ex.30,20; 40,12; Num.8,6.

10 cfr. Ex.29,38ff; Lev.6,20; Num.28,3.

that atonement might be made for their transgressions. As soon as the Israelites in general became lax and as a people rebelled against Him and refused to obey His laws, then He punished, even as He had threatened them.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, the history of Israel is a good commentary to show what God expected from His people and what the punishment was if they refused to obey Him. Whenever they fell away from Him, He punished them. He used the various nations about Israel as a scourging rod. But as long as they obeyed His commandments and walked in His statutes, or whenever they would again repent of their wrong-doing, then He would always gladly forgive their iniquities, would bless them and make them prosperous among the heathen nations. To their leaders He gave the valuable advice, that, if they hoped to be successful leaders, they must at all times diligently study and observe the book of the Law.<sup>2</sup>

God expected His chosen people to observe these laws and follow these statutes until such a time when He himself would make a change.<sup>3</sup> Even while the people were in exile, and also after they returned from Babylon, God still demanded this obedience.<sup>4</sup>

And when the children of Israel returned from the exile, they considered it their duty to obey God's divine Will. They took a much more conscientious attitude toward the observance of the law of Moses than their forefathers before the exile had done. They had set their minds on

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1 cfr. Lev.26,14ff.

2 cfr. Josh.1,7; II Chron.29,30; Ezra 3,2; 7,10.

3 cfr. II Chron.30,18

4 cfr. Ezra 3,1ff.; 7,1ff.; Neh.8,1.



obedience, on walking exactly as God had directed them. No longer would they give way to the heathen idolatry as their forefathers had done, nor rebel against the true God.

This change which came over these post-exilic Jews is very noteworthy. Surely, certain events must have taken place in order to change a group of people, who for over a period of five hundred years had always been so ready to rebel against God and His commandments, and who now were determined to follow Him and to obey His statutes. In order to explain this change the following considerations are mentioned:

a) The very fact that some people came back to Jerusalem shows that they were more of the religious type. They were the kind who would be glad to obey God's Law. For they came back to Jerusalem because that city meant something to them. They remembered the importance of the temple at Jerusalem. They knew God's command, forbidding temple worship in any other place. Those who had been lax in their obedience and trust in God, those who were more worldly-minded undoubtedly cared little whether they were living in Babylon or Jerusalem; hence they would not go to the trouble of coming all the way back to Jerusalem again. But those which did return were, without a doubt, the ones who wanted to do God's Holy Will. Naturally they would then also go back to the Law of Moses and do their best to keep it.

b) Proportionately there were many more priests among the people after the exile than there were before. When

the children of Israel came out of Egypt, they numbered 603,500 men<sup>1</sup> plus 22,000 priests, or Levites.<sup>2</sup> This made one priest for every twenty-seven, plus a slight fraction, persons. The number which returned after the exile were 37,997 plus 4,363 priests,<sup>3</sup> making one priest for between eight and nine persons. Hence there were after the exile about three times as many priests in comparison to the rest of the people as there were before the exile, and if anyone should lay stress on the observance of the Law of Moses it should be the priests.

c) It so happened that when the people returned from the exile they were led by men who were extremely legalistic and almost fanatical in their emphasis on obedience to the law. This can readily be seen from the exhortations given to the people by Ezra. There was one point which he desired to drive home to the minds of the Jews and that was to return to the observance of the Mosaic Law.<sup>4</sup> So emphatic was he on this point that he even went beyond that which was demanded in the Law of Moses. He commanded the people to put away their strange wives.<sup>5</sup> Nehemiah, too, placed that same emphasis on the Law. He urged all the people, the Levites, priests, porters, singers, and Bethinims, to enter upon an oath henceforth to walk in the Law of God given to Moses.<sup>6</sup>

d) Finally, these Jews which returned had seen, and were very conscious of the terrible punishment which God

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1 Num.1,46.

2 Num.3,39.

3 Ezra 2,64.

4 Neh.8,11f.

5 Ezra 10,18.

6 Neh.10,28,29.

had sent upon them and upon their forefathers who had refused to obey this law. Lest the same condemnation should befall them again, they were now going to observe the Law of God and walk in His statutes. This thought is clearly expressed by Ezra in one of his prayers to God: "Should we again break thy commandments and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? Wouldst not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?"<sup>1</sup>

Though there may be other factors which play a role in the cause of the great emphasis on the Mosaic Law after the exile, yet these four considerations, I think, explain to a rather large extent why this attitude was taken.

In order, now, that these Jews might carry out their obedience to this Law, it was almost essential for them to separate themselves, as much as possible, from the heathen people which had flowed into Judea and Jerusalem while the Jews had been in exile. For the heathen would not want to subject themselves to the same regulations as these Jews now were going to do. For this reason Ezra and Nehemiah practically insisted that the people make this separation and keep themselves apart from the evils of the heathen. And their efforts brought results. The people did separate themselves from the other people:

"Now when Ezra had prayed and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children... And Shechaniah ... said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God and have taken strange wives of the people of the land...

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1 Ezra 9,14.

Now, therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives... and let it be done according to the Law."<sup>1</sup>

"And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Bethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone having knowledge, and having understanding, they clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's Law, which was given by Moses, the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His judgments and His statutes."<sup>2</sup>

So insistent, yes, almost fanatical, did they become in their idea of separation that they would not permit even the Samaritans, who, so to speak, were their half-brothers, to help in the rebuilding of the temple, in spite of the fact that these Samaritans offered their assistance and desired to worship God together with them.<sup>3</sup>

Hereford in his book, Pharisaism, emphasizes this separation of the Jews from the heathen and also shows the importance which these Jews laid upon the Torah:

"There, then, provided for the Jews an enclosure, marked off from the Gentile-world, within which to live their religious life; and he gave them the Torah, as being the full revelation which God had made through Moses, for their guide in the life they should henceforth live there. Clearly, no one would enter that enclosure, or remain within it, unless he really and seriously meant to live on the lines of Torah. And that is why, from the time of Ezra, the importance of Torah becomes so marked, and insistence on it so emphatic; why, in short, from that time, the Torah dominates the whole field of religion for those who followed the lead of Ezra. They virtually declared that they would stand or fall by the Torah."<sup>4</sup>

It is no wonder, therefore, that the Pharisees were such "scrupulous observers of the law."<sup>5</sup> For they again

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1. Ezra 10,1-3

2 Neh.10,28,29.

3 cfr. Ezra 4,1ff

4 Hereford, op.cit. p.70

5 Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol.IX, p661.

two to three centuries after Ezra, stressed the same obedience to the Law as Ezra had done. "The religion which they thus set themselves to realize in its full extent was essentially the religion of Torah as Ezra had moulded it."<sup>1</sup> They merely carried out "the method and principle of Ezra," and stood in the same line with him as the legitimate successors and continuators of the prophets."<sup>2</sup> That these Pharisees must have stressed the same Law of Moses as Ezra had done, one can see from the statement of our Savior; "for they sit in Moses' seat."<sup>3</sup>

However, there was a movement which came into Judea through the rise of Greek power, which really brought Pharisaism to the fore, which placed the Pharisees into a group separate from even their fellow Jews, and which caused them to lay more stress on the observance of the Torah than the people of Ezra's time possibly ever had thought of doing. This movement was Hellenism. Before this movement entered Judea the people, so to speak, were all Pharisees. Of course, they were not called by that name. But they all more or less held to the observance of the Torah as had been laid down by Ezra, and they kept themselves separated from the heathen nations. However, when Hellenism, the philosophies and cultures of the Greeks, was introduced into Judea, many of these Jews disregarded the great stress which Ezra and his followers had placed on the Torah and fell victims of this new movement.

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1 Herford, Pharisaism, p.42.

2 Ibid., p.65

3 Matt.23,2.

Finkelstein states that this movement influenced mainly the rich.<sup>1</sup> Though it is true that the rich are usually more inclined to laxity in regard to following God's will, since they may rely on their wealth instead of in God, yet, I believe, that it is forcing the issue too much to claim that Hellenism was confined ~~to~~ to the aristocrats. Hereford, though he too concedes that "its effects were most conspicuous in the ranks of the wealthy and powerful, the nobles and the priestly aristocracy who came into closest relations with the court and depended most upon the royal favor,"<sup>2</sup> yet, I believe, is more correct when he states, "Hellenism had its attractions for all, high or humble,"<sup>3</sup> and when he lays particular stress on the fact that this was "not a division between the upper and the lower."<sup>3</sup>

This Hellenistic movement can undoubtedly be well compared to the Modernistic movement of our present era. Just as today many people wish to adopt the "new ideas" of the world and to conform with the views and opinions of the world thinkers and philosophers but still desire to remain within the pale of Christianity, so many of the Jews considered themselves "modern" and advanced in learning and culture if they could adopt the new philosophies brought over from Greece. But still these same Jews wanted to cling to Judaism and remain among the adherers of the Torah.

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1 Finkelstein, The Pharisees, Vol. I, p. 10ff. Finkelstein discusses the Pharisees from a totally political and social viewpoint.

2 Hereford, Pharisaism, p. 36.

3 Ibid., p. 36.

That many of the Jews were eager to take over the ideas of Hellenism, and as a result soon forgot many of their own teachings can be seen from the following quotation from Finkelstein:

"They threw themselves into Hellenism with the zeal and energy of neophytes. Their own laws, customs, and traditions were forgotten in this lost infatuation. They built a gymnasium, like those of the Greeks, in Jerusalem and shocked the Semitic sense of propriety by taking their exercise and playing Hellenic games quite naked."<sup>1</sup>

It was only natural that a great opposition should rise up against this "Modernism" of the second century before Christ, that the more strict Jews would again lay stress on Judaism and on their observance of the Torah of Moses. And it is this opposition which gave rise to the Pharisees. It was the Pharisees now who clung scrupulously to God's Holy Law and raised their voices in protest against the admirers of the Hellenistic movement. At first these objectors were called the Hasidim, the pious or righteous ones, and because of their objections were subjected to severe persecutions. These persecutions became quite prominent under Antiochus Epiphanes, or Antiochus IV, ca.168B.C. and continued until the beginning of the first century before Christ. However, instead of achieving their purpose of destroying the objectors, these persecutions, as frequently happens, only confirmed them in their views and caused them to become united into a party.

It seems, too, as if their objections did bring some results. For immediately after the Maccabean Wars there seems

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1 Finkelstein, The Pharisees, Vol. II, p.571.

to have been somewhat of a decline in the prominence of Hellenism. However, after it had been once introduced into the land, it was impossible to eradicate it; and even though it did decline to a certain extent, yet it had left its devastating influences.

"Gradually a divergence appeared, not wholly unlike that which had led to the rebellion. The princes of the Maccabean house naturally looked for supporters in the great families to whom belonged the chief positions of rank and wealth, especially those connected with the temple. The religion of Torah was mixed up with politics to a degree which displeased those who did not belong to the governing class. There was, therefore, again a movement towards a stricter interpretation of the Torah... to correspond with the movement towards what might be called 'worldliness.'... These two extremes had names by which they were distinguished. Those who formed the governing class, the great families and the chief priests, were the Sadducees. Those who maintained the full strictness of the religion of Torah were the Pharisees."<sup>1</sup>

As a result objection also continued. As time went on these objectors, who had been called the Hasidim, gradually became known as the Pharisaic party. They received the name, "Pharisees," from the fact that they separated themselves from other people, from those who were lax and "worldly minded Hellenists," since they wanted to stress the fact that they were strict observers of the Law of Moses. The word is derived from the Hebrew word, פָּרָשׁוּ, which in Aramaic is פָּרָשׁוּ, and in Greek, Φαρισαῖοι, and which means "the separated ones." Because the Torah placed great stress on cleanliness and laid down many regulations concerning purification, these Pharisees now, giving their attention especially to this factor, separated themselves from everything

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1 Hereford, Pharisaism, p.40-41.



that was unclean. It was strictly against their regulations<sup>1</sup> to associate with any of the Am-harez, people who failed to observe the purification laws of the Torah (אֲמֹרֵי הָאֲרָצָה - people of the land). "He who takes upon himself to be a Chader (Pharisee, cfr. below) sells neither fresh nor dry fruits to the Am-harez, buys from them no fresh, does not enter their houses as a guest, nor receives them as guests within his walls."<sup>2</sup> Some even became rather radical and made statements as the following: "A Jew must not marry a daughter of an Am-harez, because they are unclean animals, and their women forbidden reptiles, and as for their daughters the Scripture writes, 'Cursed by he that lieth with any manner of beast' (Deut. 27, 21)"<sup>3</sup>

This name the Pharisees received undoubtedly from their enemies who applied it in a reproachful sense, "those who for the sake of their own special cleanness separated themselves from the bulk of the nation."<sup>4</sup> Schuerer points out that this latter was certainly the original meaning of the name. Though they were called this out of contempt,

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- 1 The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. IX, p. 661 gives the following pledge for membership:
    - a) Strict observance to Levitical purity.
    - b) Avoid association with the Am-harez (ignorant and careless heathen). Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, Vol. I, p. 213: "Am-harez is that group of the population whose Jewish education was slight and whose orthodoxy was looked upon with much suspicion."
    - c) Payment of tithes and dues of priests, Levites, and poor.
    - d) Conscientious regard for vows and for other people's property.
  - 2 Schuerer, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, Div. II, Vol. II, p. 5
  - 3 Baron, op. cit. Vol. II, p. 203.
  - 4 Schuerer, op. cit. Div. II, Vol. II, p. 22.

yet they readily accepted the name after it was once given to them. "And they might well have done so, for from their standing the 'separation' from which they obtained the name was one thoroughly praiseworthy and well-pleasing to God."<sup>1</sup>

That this name was given to them by their enemies rather than by themselves can also be seen from the fact that they called themselves Chaberim (ח'ב'ר'י'ן), "the neighbor." To them a Chaber meant "one who strictly observes the law, especially the laws relating to cleanness and uncleanness."<sup>2</sup> In regard to this Moore has the following statement: "they called themselves by preference 'associates' and formed societies, pledging themselves by mutual agreement to a strict observance of the laws, in particular those concerning ceremonial purity and the religious taxes."<sup>3</sup>

Moore is very correct when he states that the Pharisees placed particular stress on "ceremonial purity and the religious taxes." For they were especially concerned about the exactness of the washings of the priests and about their system of tithing. Since the command that Aaron and his sons should wash themselves when they went into the temple is repeated three times,<sup>4</sup> these Pharisees felt that the priests should wash themselves three times, once when they would enter the temple, once more when they would approach the altar, and thirdly, when they would again leave.<sup>5</sup> Their strict rules concerning the tithes the Pharisees based on Num.18,21:

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1 Schuerer, op.cit., p.22;

2 Ibid. p.22

3 Moore, History of Religions, p.63.

4 cfr. Ex.30,15ff.

5 cfr. Finkelstein, The Pharisees, Vol.I, p.273ff.

"And behold I have given the children of Levi all the tenth of Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Pharisees were a group who laid great stress on the obedience of the Torah in opposition to the Hellenism which threatened to destroy the Judaistic religion. They, therefore had a very high regard for the law of Moses. It was to them the foundation upon which they stood. Bousset states:

"Das Gesetz ist dem Juden Freude und Krone des Daseins. Ja, es ist geradezu die Substanz des Lebens... Das Gesetz sichert dem Israeliten seine Stellung zu Gott. Wo Gesetz ist, ist ewiges Leben... viel 'Thora'viel Leben."<sup>2</sup>

Certainly, this high regard for the Torah is a factor which is very commendable. Had it not been for these Pharisees, Judaism undoubtedly would have been wiped out.

"It is indeed difficult to believe that they (the Jewish people) would have survived, if the policy of Balaam had not been carried out. And if they had not, what would have become of the Jewish religion? And how would the great spiritual treasure of the prophets have become available for those who in a later age were to depend so largely upon it?"<sup>3</sup>

The Pharisees are, therefore, that group which God used in order to preserve His Law during that period which elapsed between the post-exilic writers and the time of Christ.

However, the great stress which the Pharisees laid on the Law brings to one's mind also the counter-part of the Law, namely, the Gospel. What attitude did the Pharisees take in regard to the Messiah promised by Moses in such passages as Gen. 3,15; 12,3; 49,10; Deut. 18,15ff.? From all

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1 cfr. also Deut. 14,22-23.

2 Bousset, Die Religion des Judentums in neutestamentlichen Zeitalter, p.137.

3 Herford, Pharisaism, p.69.

outward evidences it seems as if the Pharisees completely lost sight of the Redeemer, of Him who should come into the world to save them from their sins. That does not mean, however, that after the exile the Gospel was entirely forgotten, for Messianic prophecies are mentioned by Daniel,<sup>1</sup> by Zachariah,<sup>2</sup> and by Malachi.<sup>3</sup> But by the time that the Pharisees became prominent, it is quite apparent, that they had lost the saving Gospel and were placing all their hope and trust in the obedience of the Law.

## 2. The Pharisees and the Unwritten Law

Had the Pharisees really clung solely to the Mosaic Law, and had they obeyed it in the manner in which God had intended it, then all unfavorable criticisms made against the Pharisees would be out of place, then all these critics, who accuse Jesus of unjustly and unfairly condemning the Pharisees, would be correct. But the Pharisees, as time went on, developed and regarded as divine law a vast system of traditions. "They were also the school of tradition, devoted to the development and promotion of the unwritten law."<sup>4</sup> They were "scrupulous observers of the law in accordance with tradition."<sup>5</sup> And it was this factor, primarily, which brought such sharp accusations against them from our Savior. It was this characteristic which he was denouncing when he said, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."<sup>6</sup>

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1 Dan. 7.13; 9.24.

2 Zech. 3.8; 9.9; 13.1.

3 Mal. 3.1; 4.2.

4 Moore, History of Religions, p. 56.

5 Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. IX, p. 661.

6. Matt. 15.9.

How this system of tradition originated has been explained in two different manners, one by Finkelstein, the other by Hereford. Since Finkelstein throughout his work presents the Pharisees from a social and economic viewpoint, he naturally also connects the origin of the Oral Law with the economic and social development of the people.<sup>1</sup> In answering the question, "Where did these Pharisees derive this Oral Law?" he says, "The answer to these questions must be sought in the development of Jewish legal institutions during the Second Commonwealth, and shows that the issue of the Oral Law... was fundamentally social and economic rather than academic and theological."<sup>2</sup>

Finkelstein's line of presentation is the following: According to the Torah all final decisions concerning the various disputes which arose among the people, whether they concerned bodily injury, physical damage, or religious ceremonial, had to be made by the authority of the priests in the temple. <sup>3</sup> However in the exile this duty of the priest ceased, and many of the priests had to seek other occupations for a livelihood. It was quite natural that they, who had labored somewhat in the law, should now take up the work of a scribe, whose duty it was to copy

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1 cfr. Finkelstein, The Pharisees, pp.261-270.

2 Ibid. p.261.

3 Deut.1,17: "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's; and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me."  
Deut.19,17: "Then both the men, between whom the controversy is shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and judges, which shall be in those days." cfr. also Deut.17,8; 21,2.

the law, to be a public secretary and notary. However, when there was a shortage of a priest somewhere, due to absence or illness, these "scribe-priests" were called in to substitute. Thus the office of the priest and the scribe became somewhat combined.

When the Jews returned to Jerusalem, the function of the scribe did not cease. Ezra himself was one of these scribes.<sup>1</sup> These scribes continued to serve as teachers and synagogue leaders. When no priest or prophet could be found, then again the scribe would take over the synagogue functions.

The result of all this now was that the priest was no longer the sole interpreter of the Law. In fact, the scribes soon became more learned in the Law than the priests. For "while he (the priest) was concerned only with that part of the Torah which dealt with the temple and the sacrifices, the scribes knew the whole of it."<sup>2</sup> Then, too, the scribes had more time to devote to the study of the Law, for they were free from "the burdens of wealth and of grinding toil... The priest's time was taken up with service at the temple, attention to business, contact with friendly farmers, and dutiful attendance on his superiors, but the poor plebeian scholar-scribe did his daily stint, ate his meagre fare, and proceeded to his book."<sup>3</sup>

It is only natural that this would give rise to two opposing parties, the priests and the scribes. This

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<sup>1</sup> Ezra 7.6

<sup>2</sup> Finkelstein, The Pharisees, p.264.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.264.

became especially noticeable when the priests, because of the wealth which they accrued through their temple sacrifices, allied themselves with the patricians and with the upper middle class groups, while the scribe remained a poor humble plebeian. "After all he (the scribe) was a mere craftsman, living in a community where craftsmen were regarded as little better than paupers. No father, who could raise his child to inherit his farm, would train him to the vocation of a copyist."<sup>1</sup>

And now, "the interpretation of the Law given respectively by priest and scribe were necessarily colored by their diametrically opposed social connections. The priest in his decisions followed the patrician precedents and sympathies of the temple, the scribe the inherited ideas of his plebeian class."<sup>2</sup> But it made little difference what kind of an interpretation the priest made. In official circles his explanations were never questioned. They were accepted as the true meaning of the written word whether they were actually right or not. The scribes, on the other hand, had more difficulty in substantiating their interpretations. Whenever they presented an opinion which was not in exact harmony with Scripture, all they could do was to base the authority of the same on tradition.

For this reason it became necessary for the scribes to regard the Oral Law, or tradition, very highly. In fact, they soon held tradition of greater importance than

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1 Finkelstein, The Pharisees, p.264.

2 Ibid. p.265.

the Written Law. They pointed out that this tradition went all the way back to the Law of Moses, that God had given to Moses both a written Law and an unwritten Law,<sup>1</sup> and that Moses handed the unwritten as well as the written down from generation to generation.<sup>2</sup>

Since the scribes later on became Pharisees, this doctrine of tradition became part of the Pharisaic principle. And this Oral Law was always denied by the priests, who later developed into the party of the Sadducees, not because it was anti-scriptural, but because the plebeian Pharisees advanced teachings contrary to their patrician principles.

Thus Finkelstein, from a purely social and political viewpoint, explains the origin of these traditions. However, though there may be truth in much that he says, yet it seems that in many of his explanations his statements are based more on his pre-conceived opinion than on actual facts. For, one must remember that these Jews which returned were religious-minded people. They had the Law of Moses. They, as was mentioned, were determined to walk according to this law. In my estimation, it was the Law plus tradition which determined their political and social life, and not the political and social life which developed the Law with its tradition.

Consequently, I believe, that the explanation which Hereford gives is much closer to the actual facts. His ap-

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1 Finkelstein, The Pharisees, p.265.

2 Ibid. p.266.



prone is the following:<sup>1</sup>

When the people returned from Babylon, Ezra again established the Torah. This was to be learned and followed. But many questions of casuistry arose in the various customs and observances which had developed before and during the years of the exile. Was this right? Was that right before God? Whenever these difficulties arose, the answer was sought in Scriptures. Very often Scriptures gave the direct answer. But many cases arose which were not expressly dealt with in the Torah; and in such cases it became the duty of those who had most deeply studied the Law to make a decision in best keeping with the Law. These decisions then gradually became customs and were called the Tradition of the Elders, or the Halachah.

By the time Pharisaism became established this body of decisions had grown tremendously. None of the decisions were written down, but were preserved in the memory. The Pharisees considered them part of the Torah, for they felt that they were "successive unfoldings of what had been hidden in the Torah from the beginning."<sup>2</sup>

Thus one can possibly best understand the rise of these traditions, if he compares them to the development of the traditions of the Catholic Church. Whenever an explanation on some casuistic question was needed, an answer was given; and gradually, as time went on, these explanations became law. Hence, the origin of tradition was, as it seems,

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<sup>1</sup> cfr. Herzfeld, Pharisaism, pp. 91ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 93.

to the greatest extent academic and theological, and not social and economical, as Finkelstein claims.

However, regardless of how the traditions originated, one thing is certain, and that is that the Pharisees legally insisted on their observance. In fact, as is pointed out by several writers, they frequently considered these traditions of more importance than the written Law of Moses.

"And he (the Pharisee) would further say that the unwritten was more important than the written, because the unwritten unfolded what was concealed in the written, and extended its application. But it was all Torah."<sup>1</sup>

"And if there was one thing more than another that a Pharisee would extol as divine, it was the Halachah, because it was to him the express direction of God how rightly to serve Him."<sup>2</sup>

It is possibly true, as Hereford says, that the purpose of the tradition was to make the Torah "not merely in theory, but in practice a complete guide of life."<sup>3</sup> At least this would be true as long as the authors of the various decisions would make a correct interpretation of the Torah, and would not permit themselves to be influenced by personal or possibly party prejudices. If interpreted correctly, then they, who would follow such traditions, would certainly be carrying out the Will and Command of God as He gave it to His servant, Moses, on Mt. Sinai.

But, I am afraid, that human nature undoubtedly at times gained the upper hand in many of these interpreters of the Law, and, although Hereford again claims that "what

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1 Hereford, Pharisaism, p.94.

2 Ibid. p.96.

was to be regarded as Halachah was only determined after careful deliberation,"<sup>1</sup> yet this system of unwritten law undoubtedly also made a good and easy fountain for many personal or party opinions and prejudices. Several authorities expressly state that the Pharisees paid little attention to exact and correct interpretation of Scriptures.

"Neither sect (Pharisee or Sadducee) determined its views by such artificial and spurious principles as 'literal' and 'liberal' interpretation of Scriptures. They both were ready to adhere to the letter of the Law or to depart from it as best suited the needs of their following... Like the Pharisees, they (Sadducees) were not so much interested in agreeing with Scripture as in having the Scriptures agree with them."<sup>2</sup>

The same truth is brought out in the following, only a bit more mildly:

"The Pharisees...could appropriately insist upon the validity of the Oral Law. It represented a legal evolution of customs and convictions as they had slowly grown out of the natural life. They could acknowledge the changes brought about through centuries of progressing life, as part of a living tradition, reconciling them with the written law wherever necessary through a continuous hermeneutic reinterpretation of the Torah, rather than through its literal application."<sup>3</sup>

Josephus too agreed with this opinion:

"The Pharisees have imposed upon the people many laws taken from the tradition of the Fathers, which are not written in the Law of Moses."<sup>4</sup>

However, in most cases, when it came to actual practise, the decisions of the various interpreters became part of the unwritten law, not so much because they were the interpretation of the Torah, nor because of individual

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1 Hereford, Pharisaism, p.97.

2 Finkelstein, The Pharisees, p.101.

3 Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, Vol.I.,p.166.

4 Josephus, Ant. XIII, 10,6.

prejudices, but mainly because of usage.

"A considerable portion of what subsequently became valid law had on the whole no point of connection with the Torah, but was at first only a manner and custom. This or that had been done thus or thus, and so imperceptibly custom grew into a law of custom. When anything in the legal sphere had been so long, usually that it could be said, it has always been thus, it was law by custom. It was then by no means necessary that its deductions from the Torah should be proved; ancient tradition was already as such binding. And the recognized teachers of the law were enjoined and competent to confirm this law of Customs."<sup>1</sup>

Although these traditions developed primarily out of custom and usage, and though it was not necessary to prove everything from the Torah, yet the Pharisees wanted it understood that this tradition was in full agreement with the Torah. All interpretations had to be derived from the Law of Moses. However, they left a big enough loop-hole in the Torah, so that all traditions could easily be deduced from Moses's Law. Whatever could not be proved from the written Law of Moses, was proved from the so-called "unwritten law" which they claimed God had also given to Moses. Their traditions, which now, too, were unwritten, were merely a continuation, a fuller development, of that unwritten law which God had given to Moses. But whether it was written or unwritten, it was all Law.

As a result, the word, "Law", in the eyes of the Pharisees was a very wide term. It included all the laws laid down in the Torah by Moses and all the customs and usages which had developed for over a period of several hundred years, known as "traditions."

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<sup>1</sup> Schuerer, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, Div. II, Vol. I., p. 332.

The following customs of the Pharisees were claimed by them to have originated in the oral unwritten law:

"They styled themselves 'the sages' or the 'associates! Tassels on their dress; scrolls and small leather boxes fastened on forehead, head, and neck, inscribed with texts of the law; long prayers offered as they stood in public places; rigorous abstinences; constant immersions; these were the sacramental badges by which they hedged themselves around."<sup>1</sup>

Mark, in his Gospel, also mentions some of these customs which were based on tradition:

"For the Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables."<sup>2</sup>

Yes, in the words of Finkelstein, the word, "law", included:

"Every aspect of human behavior, religious ceremonial, protection of health, the interpretation of literature, the regulation of calendar, the relation of Israel to its neighboring peoples, ethics, manners, beliefs, and civil and criminal jurisprudence. The law determined such questions as whether or not one might greet a bereaved person, praise a bride extravagantly, or arrange banquets on the ninth of Tishri and Purim. It regulated one's diet, one's dressing habits, and one's relations with one's wife."<sup>3</sup>

In fact, practically everything that pertained to any phase of one's life came under the word, "law."

Josephus mentions that "they follow the conduct of reason and observe what it prescribes as good for them."<sup>4</sup> There can be no doubt as to the validity of this statement. And, because these Pharisees interpreted the Law according

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1 Stanley, History of the Jewish Church, Vol. III, p. 334.

2 Mk. 7, 3-4.

3 Finkelstein, The Pharisees, pp. 91-92.

4 Josephus, Ant. XVIII, 1, 2.

to their reason, they, as usually happens when reason is used as the basis of interpretation, adopted many peculiar customs, and came into many disagreements, first of all between themselves, and then also with other bodies, as for example, the Sadducees.

Christ mentions some of their peculiar teachings in the 23rd chapter of Matthew:

"Whoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor."<sup>1</sup>

"Whoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty."<sup>2</sup>

Since Scriptures did not expressly state whether the daily sacrifices in the temple<sup>3</sup> were to be public or private sacrifices, an argument arose concerning them between the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees, being more of the aristocratic type, held that they were private and should be paid by the individual. The Pharisee maintained that they were public and should be financed by the public. Concerning the dispute, Josephus agrees with the Pharisees: "The Law ordains that at the public expense a lamb of a year old shall be slain daily, both at the opening and closing of the day."<sup>4</sup>

As to the value of the sacrifices the Pharisees claimed that they were "atoning ceremonies for the whole people."<sup>5</sup> But since all this was reasoned out, they differed

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 23.16.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 23.18.

<sup>3</sup> cfr. Ex. 29, 38.39.

<sup>4</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* III, 10.1.

<sup>5</sup> Belkin, *Philo and the Oral Law*, p. 83.

among themselves as to how these sacrifices could atone for the sins. All based their ideas on biblical verses, yet there was a variety of opinions.

"The conservative Shammaites said that the Tamid (the technical term for the daily sacrifice) sacrifices merely 'subdued' the sins of the Israelites; the Hillelites believed that the Tamid washed off the sins; and Ben Azzai held that after the Tamid was offered, everyone became as free from sin as a child a day old."<sup>1</sup>

Concerning the Sabbath, here the Pharisees found enormous capacity for the expansion of prohibitions. The Command of the Lord was that it should be a day of rest, that no work should be done on that day.<sup>2</sup> In this instance the Pharisees adhered strictly to the letter and forbade every manner of work on this day. So severe were they in their prohibitions that they even forbade people to eat the fruit which fell off of a tree on the Sabbath day.

"The men of Jericho did not dare to violate the Pharisaic law quite so publicly; but they could not refrain from eating the fruit which fell from the tree on the Sabbath. Yet, according to the Pharisaic conception of the Law, this, too, was prohibited. Only that could be eaten on the Sabbath which was prepared for use when the holy day set in. Since the fruit was still attached to the tree on Sabbath eve, it remained prohibited for the entire day, no matter what happened to it."<sup>3</sup>

They also forbade their soldiers to fight on the Sabbath day. They would rather lose the battle than to have their soldiers raise their arms on the battlefield on this day.

"More than once Jerusalem was taken without resistance because its soldiers refused to fight on the Sabbath day."<sup>4</sup>

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1 Belkin, Philo and the Oral Law, p.53. Note that some must also have held that a child was born without sin.

2 Ex.31.15: "Whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death."

3 Finkelstein, The Pharisees, p.69.

4 Ibid. p.130.

Disagreement arose also among the Pharisees as to when one should cease working for the Sabbath. The Hillelites permitted work during the night preceding the Sabbath until sunrise, but the Shammaites prohibited this.

And yet, that the Pharisees did allow also exceptions to their strict observance of the Sabbath can be seen from the words of Jesus. If one of their sheep or an ox would fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, they too would lift it out.<sup>1</sup>

Between the Pharisees and the Sadducees there arose, furthermore, controversies a) over the date of Harvest Festival-- was it to be observed on the fiftieth day after the first day of Passover (Pharisees), or was it on the seventh Sunday after the Passover Week (Sadducees)? b) over the time when the sacrificial fire should be lit on the Day of Atonement -- was the fire to be placed upon the incense after one had entered the Holy of Holies (Pharisees), or should the fire be put upon the incense in the outer hall and have the priest enter the "mysterious darkness with the sweet-smelling smoke before him"?<sup>2</sup> (Sadducees) c) over the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles -- should the festival include the water-libation, signifying the rainy season which should follow, should there be the processions around the altar with citron, a cluster of palm, myrtle and willow branches, with the riotous celebrations (Pharisees), or should all these

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<sup>1</sup> cfr. Matt.12,11; Lk.13,15.

<sup>2</sup> Finkelstein, The Pharisees, p.115.



unbiblical ceremonies be omitted? (Sadducees) d) over what constituted "purity" -- was a bath sufficient to make one who had become unclean clean (Pharisees), or must such a person take his bath and then wait until even before he could be clean? (Sadducees) 1 and e) over tithing -- should the herbs also be tithed (Pharisees), or should they be exempt? (Sadducees) 2

Thus, though the Pharisees wanted to abide by the Law of Moses, yet they wanted to twist it around in such a manner as to fit their views and their customs. If the Torah agreed with their views, then they clung to it to the letter, but when their opinion differed from the written Law, they were only too ready to interpret it in such a manner as befitted their views.

In addition to this, one must further keep in mind that everything that came under the term, "law", was not fixed. Changes were always being made, new rules were always being added. "It was the nature of the Halachah that it never could be a thing finished and concluded. The two sources whence it arose were continually flowing onwards."<sup>3</sup>

1 A man could become unclean in many ways, by touching a dead body (Lev.11,28), by having an issue (Lev.15,7), by having sexual intercourse (Lev.15,16), etc. In all of these passages it is pointed out that in order to become clean one had to bathe himself and wait "until even." Hence the Sadducees in this doctrine held the correct view.

2 Scripture did not state that herbs should be tithed. Hence the Savior also told these Pharisees, "for ye tithe mint, and rue, and all manner of herbs." (Lk.11,42) So strict were they in this respect that they regarded the separation of "corners" (cfr. Lev.23,22) as sin, for thereby these corners escaped tithing, since the poor were exempt from the tithe.

3 Schurer, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, Div.II, Vol. I, p.334.

As there were constantly changes being made in the life of the people, the Pharisees always met them by a change or an addition in their "law." "The Pharisees had already found a formula for reconciling the divine origin of the Law with its adaptation to the changing needs in life, through the never-ceasing flow of tradition."<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, the Pharisee had a big mouth-full to chew when he agreed to observe the "law." That word meant, as was mentioned, almost everything which pertained to his social, political, and religious life; and it all came under the one word, "Torah," no matter whether it was written or unwritten law.

The great emphasis which these Pharisees now laid on this oral and written law gave rise to one of the causes for their rejection of Jesus. Though they were filled with awe and undoubtedly, also, with a certain amount of admiration for Him,<sup>2</sup> yet, the fact that Jesus so often transgressed some of the points of their "law" planted bitter hatred in their hearts toward Him.

Possibly the greatest animosity arose from the fact that Jesus disregarded the regulations pertaining to the observance of the Sabbath. For, as was pointed out, the Pharisees, possibly more so than any other law, adhered strictly to the sabbatical regulations. Yet, Jesus brazenly went through a field of corn with his disciples and plucked off the ears on the Sabbath Day.<sup>3</sup> With no regard to their rules whatever He openly healed the man who had dropsy,<sup>4</sup> cured the

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1 Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, Vol. I, p. 304.

2 cfr. Jn. 7, 46

3 cfr. Matt. 12, 1ff.

4 cfr. Lk. 14, 1ff.

the infirm man at the pool of Bethesda<sup>1</sup> and entered the synagogues and healed a woman who had been sick for eighteen years,<sup>2</sup> all on the Sabbath Day.

Almost equally vexing for the Pharisees was the Savior's attitude towards the laws of purification. The Pharisees were much concerned about the washings before meals and about keeping themselves pure at all times. But Jesus paid little attention to such observances. This penetrated the legalistic nerve of the Pharisee and made him ask Jesus, "Why do thy disciples transgress the traditions of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat."<sup>3</sup>

Then, Jesus also greatly offended these Pharisees by associating with the publicans and sinners, those men whom the Pharisees classified as belonging to the Am-harez. Such "filthiness" they were not allowed to touch. But Jesus, who had come into this world to save all people, naturally associated with them, went into their homes and ate with them. No wonder, that the Pharisees cast the following accusation at the feet of Jesus' disciples: "Why eateth your master with publican and sinners?"<sup>4</sup>

Hence, it is not at all surprising that the Pharisees hated Jesus. When Jesus, in addition to breaking their "laws" constantly rebuked them, it was only natural that this should increase the tenor of their hatred against Him.<sup>5</sup>

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1 cfr. Jn.5,1ff.

2 cfr. Lk.13,10ff.

3 Matt.15,2.

4 Matt.9,11.

5 For another important reason why the Jews turned against Jesus, cfr. P. 42. 52.

The Pharisees, adhering scrupulously to their law and tradition, felt perfectly justified in condemning Jesus for transgressing these laws. And Jesus, on the other hand, having the full knowledge of the true Law of God, had every reason for rebuking them and asking, "Why do ye also transgress the commandments of God by your traditions?"<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The Sincerity of the Pharisees

There can be no doubt whatever that, at the beginning of the Pharisaic movement, the Pharisees, that is, the majority of them, were very sincere and conscientious in their strict observance of the Law.

"Building upon the foundations of the Priestly Code, which had spiritualized many sacrifices by making of them ceremonies leading to forgiveness of sins, the Pharisees demanded inner repentance as a prerequisite without which no sin against God could be forgiven."<sup>2</sup>

"The outward forms and ceremonies by no means excluded the religion of the heart. The Pharisees were acknowledged to be moral, chaste, temperate, and benevolent."<sup>3</sup>

"The Pharisees never regarded the mere doing of the action as sufficient; in all and every case there must be the purpose of serving God, the intention of pleasing him."<sup>4</sup>

To carry out all the details of this law was not even considered a burden by them. In fact, it was their end and aim to gain a complete interpretation of the Torah, if that were at all possible, and then to live up to their interpretation. They were simply those "who were specially exact about the interpretation and observance of the law,

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1 Matt. 15, 3.

2 Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, Vol. I, p. 297.

3 Graetz, History of the Jews, Vol. II, p. 20.

4 Hereford, Pharisaism, p. 101-102.

hence they were the rigidly legal, who spared themselves no pain and privations in its punctual fulfillment... To carry this (law) out was the beginning and end of all its endeavors."<sup>1</sup>

No matter how small or trivial a thing might be, if the Pharisee knew that God wanted him to do it, he felt a joy in doing it. No one ought to question the why or the wherefore of these things. It was God who commanded, not the people. It was their duty to obey. If one would pick out an instance of minute regulation in an apparent unimportant matter, as for example, the rules dealing with an egg laid upon the Sabbath, and ask a Pharisee about it, one would undoubtedly obtain the following answer:

"The Torah, the divine revelation, extends over the whole life; and its principles, when drawn out and applied to that particular case, yield the results stated in the Halachah, bearing thereon. The divine will is taught me in regard to that; and what concerns me is the doing of the divine will, and not the smallness of the occasion in regard to which I do it."<sup>2</sup>

✓ Thus one can see that the Pharisees at one time were very sincere in their observance of the law. However, one will also have to admit that this system of strict adherence to the Law lent itself quite readily to abuse. Though the rule from the beginning was that every Pharisee should perform his deeds with the proper intent in the heart, yet there were probably some then already who merely went through the outward obedience of many of the rules. And it is quite evident that, as time went on, this sincerity gradually gave

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<sup>1</sup> Schuerer, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, Div. II, Vol. II, p.10.

<sup>2</sup> Hereford, Pharisaism, p.103.

way to a mere externalism and cold formalism.

There are two explanations which may be given in order to shed a little light upon the cause of this change:

a) It was quite natural that, as the Pharisees became more prominent, they would feel more and more the importance which they had gained as religious leaders in the world. And the more beautiful a peacock becomes, the prouder he likes to strut. Why should not the Pharisee gradually present himself as beautiful and as prominent as possible? And with the flexible and everchanging oral law, he could constantly add new frills and new laces to his cloak of work-righteousness and still bring everything under the Torah of Moses.

This explanation agrees very well with the words of Jesus when He accuses these Pharisees of pride and haughtiness, of desiring the upper seats in the synagogue.<sup>1</sup>

b) Though the preceding explanation seems quite plausible and in agreement with Scriptures, yet there is a second consideration which bears just as much, possibly even more, weight as this first one. Everyone is fully aware that human nature has great difficulty in finding the "happy medium" of life. People, in general, have the inclination to go from one extreme to the other. Hence there undoubtedly is much truth in this that the Pharisees, being very pietistic at first and going to the extremes in their conscientious and

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<sup>1</sup> cfr. Lk.11,43; Mk.12,38.

legalistic observance of the law, swung way to the other extreme, laid aside their sincerity and piety and became rationalistic. However, they did not want to go so far as to step out of the Law. The only result would be that they would now observe it merely outwardly.

Thus they became externalistic and coldly formalistic. Though they still adhered to the law, yet the spirit of true obedience to that law was missing. Certainly, Jesus correctly described them when He said, "their heart is far from me." 1

As was pointed out, both of these explanations are quite plausible and it is rather hard to determine which one bears the greater weight. However, it is certain that the Pharisees were at one time very sincere, and that by the time of Jesus had fallen into hypocrisy, into mere externalism, and were, as Jesus calls them, "blind leaders of the blind." 2

Hence the Savior strongly rebuked them, constantly kept calling them hypocrites and "a generation of vipers." 3 Had they held to the purpose for which they had organized, had they adhered to the Law of Moses in the manner in which God had prescribed, certainly, the Savior would have had no reason for condemning them. But, by the time He came into the world, they no longer obeyed the Law of God out of love for their Lord. They had set up all sorts of petty rules

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1 Matt. 15, 8.

2 Matt. 15, 14.

3 Matt. 3, 7; cff. also Matt. 16, 3; Matt. 23, 1ff.

and regulations and made much of their ostentatiousness in order to impress the people with their seeming piety. And all their obedience to the law was only an outward formalism, their heart was not with God, they had completely lost the true spirit of the law.

One will have to admit, however, that there were exceptions. There were a few Pharisees even at the time of Jesus who still were sincere and were not affected by this pride and cold externalism. Nicodemus, who no doubt was a Pharisee, in all sincerity was a real seeker of the truth.<sup>1</sup> Then there was also Paul. Certainly, no one can deny that his religious life was of the heart! Gamaliel too seems to have been a very conscientious observer of the law.<sup>2</sup> But, one must keep in mind that these were the exceptions and not the rule. And it seems as if at the time of Jesus there were only a few of such sincere Pharisees.

✓ That the sincere and non-externalistic Pharisees were in the great minority is substantiated by the classification of the Pharisees made by the Talmud. This places the Pharisees into seven different groups:<sup>3</sup> a) the shoulder Pharisee, one who, as it were, wears his good actions ostentatiously on the shoulders, b) the wait-a-little Pharisee, one who ever says, "Wait a little, until I have performed the good act awaiting me," c) the bruised Pharisee, one who, in order to avoid a woman, will run against a wall to bruise

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<sup>1</sup> cfr. Jn. 3, 1ff.

<sup>2</sup> cfr. Acts 5, 33ff.

<sup>3</sup> This classification is taken from The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. IX, p. 665.



himself and bleed, d) the pebble Pharisee, one who walks with his head down as the pebble in mortar, e) the ever-reckoning Pharisee, one who says, "Let me know what good I may do to counteract my neglect," f) the God-fearing Pharisee, one who fears God like Job, g) the God-loving Pharisee, one who loves God as Abraham. x

One can see immediately that five of these groups are eccentric fools, are hypocrites, who are doing all these silly and ridiculous things merely to put on an outward show of piety. Only the last two groups give any signs of sincerity. And who knows how many of the Pharisees at the time of Jesus belonged to the last two groups? Possibly very few!

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Thus the Pharisees were a group guided completely by the one word, "law." This "law" as was mentioned, included the written Torah of Moses and the unwritten tradition, which, too, was to have originated with Moses. To carry out this "law" was the beginning and the end of their endeavors. In doing this they were at first very sincere. But, as time went on, they gradually lost the spirit of the law and swung from true piety to cold formalism.

The "law" was, therefore, the cause of the success, and again the cause of the downfall of the Pharisees. Going back to the Law of Moses had made them prominent, but by losing the spirit and, as a result, by trying to cling to

the law and to fulfill all the minute details, which they had added to the Torah, outwardly, lead them into externalism and hypocrisy.

It is for this reason that one makes the statement that the law played the most important role in their theology. What follows in Section II will be some of the other doctrines, which, too, in a certain sense are connected with the law, which, however, because of their distinctive nature, will be treated separately. They are the doctrines of God and His divine providence over man, of the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul, of the doctrine of angels, and of the relationship of the Church and State.

## OTHER DOCTRINES

As was pointed out in the preceding pages, the foundation of Pharisaism was the Law of Moses. What God had taught His people on Mt. Sinai had been the basis of all their teachings concerning the law. As one gives attention now to some of the other doctrines of the Pharisees, he will again note that the foundation for these will be found also in the Torah of Moses, or, if not there, then, in the writings of the patriarchs and prophets, which, according to the Pharisees, were merely further expositions of what was contained in the Torah. For, the following doctrines are, to a large extent, in close agreement with the teachings of the Old Testament writings.

## 1. Divine Providence of God -- Free Will of Man

In the doctrine of the Divine Providence of God one can immediately see this close relationship between the teachings of the Pharisees and of the Old Testament. For, the Pharisees had practically the same conception of God as the Old Testament patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had.

And why shouldn't this be the case? After all, they were Jews, they were true sons of Abraham. Since they adhered so strictly to the law of Moses, it is only natural that the God of Abraham and the God of Moses should be their God. They too believed that God was the Almighty Heavenly Father who spake: "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect."<sup>1</sup> He was to them the omniscient, the

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1 Gen.17.1.

omnipresent, the holy, the just, the merciful, and the forgiving God. In Him they must put all their trust. Him they must always obey. In times of distress they must turn to Him for help and for guidance; and in time of success, offer Him praise and thanks. He was always close at hand, near at their side, always ready to help and to comfort.

"He (God) wounds and heals, in one action. The woman in travail, those that go down to the sea, travelers in deserts, captives in prison, east and west, north and south, He hears them all, in one act (of hearing)"<sup>1</sup>

In order to show the great trust which some of the Pharisees had in this God, Finkelstein relates the following story, which probably was legend, but which really portrays the ideal trust for which the Pharisees were striving:

"Returning to his native city, he (Hillel) saw a large crowd massed in the market place, uttering painful and pathetic cries. It was obvious that some accident had occurred, and Hillel's companions were anxious for the safety of their families. The saint alone retained his equanimity. 'I know that there is nothing wrong in my home,' he quietly remarked to his followers. And with that assurance he proceeded into the city to inquire after the cause of the commotion."

Finkelstein continues: "Hillel would have been lacking in true faith, had he, noticing the disturbance, feared for his own wife and children. When he had left, he had entrusted them in the care of God. To display any anxiety was to suspect the Guardian. Accidents might indeed occur, but only to those who lacked full trust."<sup>2</sup>

The Pharisees placed much stress also on the Oneness of God. They believed that there existed only one God, and they were always ready to condemn the heathen who were wor-

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1 Hereford, Phariseism, p.261

2 Finkelstein, The Pharisees, p.258.

shipping the idols made of wood and stone. They were, therefore, completely monotheistic, and they emphasized this teaching especially because of the polytheism of the heathen who lived about them.

It was again in the writings of the Old Testament that the Pharisees found the basis and proof for their monotheistic teachings. Moses had constantly told the people, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One Lord."<sup>1</sup> This passage the Pharisees also emphasized. To them it was known as the Shema, and it was read daily in the temple, once in the morning and again in the evening, in order to impress upon the minds of the people that they were to worship and honor but one God.

Other passages from the Old Testament also clearly brought out this same truth concerning the Oneness of God:

"For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of Lords."<sup>2</sup>

"Know, therefore, this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord, He is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath; there is none else."<sup>3</sup>

"Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last, and beside me there is no God."<sup>4</sup>

"I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me."<sup>5</sup>

The Pharisees were also aware of the many passages of the Old Testament where God in no mild terms warned the people against worshipping other gods.<sup>6</sup> Not only did He

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1 Deut. 6, 4.

2 Deut. 10, 17.

3 Deut. 4, 31.

4 Is. 44, 6.

5 Is. 45, 5.

6 ofr. Deut. 4, 28; Ps. 115, 4.

forbid them to worship other gods, but He also issued the command that they should not worship Him in the form of some idol, that is, to build some altar, or make some figure out of wood or stone, and have that represent the true God, to whom they would fall down, and whom they would worship.

It is not at all surprising that the Jews which returned after the exile should lay such great stress on this monotheistic teaching of the Old Testament, and emphasize this doctrine that Jehovah is Lord alone, and to Him must go all praise and honor. For, idolatry had been the primary cause for the downfall of the Chosen people of God. Already in the wilderness they had made themselves a Golden Calf and had worshipped it.<sup>1</sup> Solomon had been guilty of worshipping other gods.<sup>2</sup> When the Kingdom of Israel divided, Jeroboam caused the people to sin by building strange altars at Bethel and at Dan. It was this sin which the Prophets always mentioned against the kings of Israel.<sup>3</sup> When the Assyrians came to destroy Samaria and to lead Israel into captivity, the Lord expressly mentions idolatry as the cause for this catastrophe.<sup>4</sup> The same cause is again expressly stated for the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup>

The remnant which returned to Jerusalem was very conscious of this grave sin which had caused the downfall of God's chosen people. And, as was pointed out, since these were undoubtedly of a more pious nature, it is little

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1 Ex.32,1ff.

2 I Ki.11,5.

3 cfr. I Ki.12,28-30; I Ki.16,2; 16,19; 16,28; etc.

4 II Ki.17,6ff.

5 II Ki.21,10ff.

wonder that they laid such emphasis on worshipping only the True and Living God.

"Ist bereits in exilischen und nachexilischen Zeitalter der monotheistische Glaube der Propheten Gemeingut der Masse geworden, so hat es in den letzten Jahrhunderten vor der Zerstörung des Volkstums erst recht das ganze Dasein dieses Volkstums durchdrungen."<sup>1</sup>

When the Pharisees became prominent, they still clung to this same monotheistic teaching; they too stressed the doctrine that there is but one God, the Holy One of Israel, and Jehovah is His name.

This attitude of the Pharisees was another cause for their rejection of Jesus. Since Jehovah was the only True and Living God, He alone had the power to forgive them their sins. Hence, when Jesus said to the young man, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," the Pharisees immediately accused Him of blasphemy: "Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?"<sup>2</sup>

Though all Christians today also accept the monotheistic teaching of the Old Testament, yet this word has a different meaning for us today than it had for the Pharisees. To Christians today it means one God who is three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. But to the Pharisees it meant one God who is one Person.

"It was perhaps with reference to Christian doctrine that the Rabbis laid stress on the belief that God has no son... The Holy One, blessed be He, saith 'I am not so'; but (Is.44,6), 'I am the first, 'I have no father; and I am the last,' I have no son; 'And beside me there is no god,' I have no brother."<sup>3</sup>

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1 Bousset, Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter, p.347.

2 Lk.5,20,21.

3 Hereford, Pharisaism, p.265

"A God who is Creator and absolute Monarch of the universe can have no rival. Jewish monotheism, therefore, denotes belief in the existence of one God, and connotes denial of Divine attributes to any other being."<sup>1</sup>

However, one ought never to criticize the Pharisees too severely for their conception of the one and only Lord, Jehovah. For, though the Old Testament does indeed contain the doctrine which today is known as the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, yet it is very doubtful that any of the Old Testament writers had as clear a knowledge of this doctrine as Christians have in the light of the New Testament today. And, though the Old Testament writers often spoke about the Spirit of God<sup>2</sup> and of the Messiah as God<sup>3</sup>, yet, nowhere in the Old Testament do these teachings so clearly and expressly reveal the doctrine of the Holy Trinity as the mentioning of them in the New Testament do. If, therefore, it is highly probable that many of the patriarchs and also many of the prophets of the Old Testament writings had but a vague and unclear idea of the true concept of Jehovah, how could the Pharisees, who based their doctrine of God on these writings, have that clear concept of a triune God as Christians have it today?

Hence, though the idea of three Persons did not exist among the Pharisees, yet one ought to commend them for having stressed the monotheistic doctrine, and for having upheld this teaching in opposition to all the neighboring polytheism of the heathen.

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<sup>1</sup> Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. VI, p. 298.  
<sup>2</sup> cfr. Gen. 1, 2; 6, 3; Job 33, 4; Is. 11, 2; 63, 10; Mic. 2, 7.  
<sup>3</sup> cfr. Gen. 4, 1; Is. 9, 6.



The Pharisees held, furthermore, in agreement again with the Old Testament writings, that this God was the creator of all things. He had made the world and all things which are in the world. "That God existed before any of these worlds and was the Creator of all of them, was little short of a truism."<sup>1</sup>

Since God had created all things, it was only natural that the early Israelites should also believe that the same God ruled and controlled everything. It was God who sent them sunshine and rain so that their crops would grow. It was God also who would send droughts, plagues, locusts, hails, so that the crops would fail. Whatever, therefore, happened, happened because of the divine will of God:

Had man remained a true child and believer in God, undoubtedly no dispute would have ever arisen against this divine providence of God. But all know that the Israelites were not all true believers. Hence, when they started following the dictates of their reason instead of following the word of God, they soon met with difficulty. They could not comprehend how God could partake in every event which happens in this world. It is possible that such reasoning was, as Finkelstein points out,<sup>2</sup> more prominent in the cities, where people usually are more liberal minded, than in the country. In the city one also always finds clever and shrewd business men, who are ever ready to cheat and outwit a person. Here then a man's success depended, at least as it seemed, not on God's divine providence, but rather on the skill and

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<sup>1</sup> Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, p.299.

<sup>2</sup> Finkelstein, The Pharisees, p.195ff.

cleverness of the individual. The more shrewd and clever a man was, the wealthier he became.

However, how were the poor plebeians in the city to reason? They came into contact with this philosophy of the rich, and it undoubtedly made them very conscious of their free will. Yet they knew that if they followed such reasoning, then, they would have to attribute their poverty and their ill-fortune to themselves. This paradox of the plebeian, Finkelstein claims is apparent in the teachings of the Pharisees.<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not Finkelstein is correct in all that he says in regard to this matter, is hard to say. But from other sources it is very apparent that the Pharisees did teach that God was the author of all things, and yet man had a free will.

"The Pharisees taught faith in God, holding that all things are from Him. Yet at the same time they could not deny human free will, which lay at the basis of their doctrine of responsibility for sin. Thus they maintained both teachings without succeeding entirely in reconciling them."<sup>2</sup>

"And the judgment of all is ordained and written on the heavenly tablets in righteousness -- even the judgment of all who depart from the path which is ordained for them to walk in. And if they walk not therein, judgment is written down for every creature and for every king."<sup>3</sup>

"While they (Pharisees) hold that all things are done by Fate (Divine Providence) they do not deny the freedom of men to act as they see fit. Their notion is that it has pleased God to create such a temperament whereby what He wills is done, yet so that the choice is given men to pursue vice or virtue."<sup>4</sup>

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1 Finkelstein, The Pharisees, p.202.

2 Ibid. p.251.

3 Asher 5,13, taken from Finkelstein, Op.cit. p.252.

4 Josephus, Ant. XVIII,1,3.

"The Pharisees ascribe everything to fate and to God; yet they maintain that it lies principally with man to do what is right or otherwise; although Fate shares in every action."<sup>1</sup>

It can be seen that the Pharisaic doctrine of the providence of God and the free will of man, was, as it seems, again quite in keeping with the Old Testament. In Prov.3,9.10 it is stated: "Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first fruits of thine increase. So shall thy barns be filled with plenty and thy vats shall overflow with new wine." In other words, if one honors and trusts in the Lord, He will bestow the riches. Yet, in Prov.10,4 it reads: "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich." Here it does not say that the Lord will make rich, but that the diligent and the industrious person is the one who will gain riches. Again, if "a man's goings are of the Lord,"<sup>2</sup> so that a man cannot look to his way, why should there be such a command as "trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding."<sup>3</sup> Again, when Israel had fallen into sin, and as a result was reaping the whirlwind of destruction, God told them: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help."<sup>4</sup> It is, therefore, very evident that Scriptures teach both the divine providence of God, and yet, they also teach the free will of man. These two doctrines still cause Christians great difficulty today, and no doubt they were no soft-shelled nut for the Pharisees and ancient Jews to crack.

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1 Josephus, Bellum. II, 8,14.

2 Prov.20,24.

3 Prov. 3,5.

4 Hosea 13,9.

Indeed, the Pharisees were quite aware of the difficulty involved in these two "opposing" doctrines. However, they did not try to harmonize the two, in fact, they found it quite convenient to leave them separate.

"If a man tried to further his material interests by ordinary methods of prudence, the Pharisees smiled at his naivete in thinking that he could achieve success without the aid of God. 'There is no wisdom, nor counsel, nor understanding, in opposition to the Lord.' Human judgment itself was but an instrument in the hands of God. But if anyone tried to draw the conclusion that man was not responsible for his acts, the Pharisees insisted that he was."<sup>1</sup>

However, as was frequently the case, the Pharisees fell into dispute also over this doctrine, especially in regard as to the cause of victory or defeat in battle. Finkelstein claims that the patrician Pharisees claimed that victory was due to the generalship and diplomacy of the leaders, whereas the plebeian entirely attributed such victory to God.<sup>2</sup> Gratz makes no distinction between the Pharisees and states:

"The fate of the state, like that of the individual, depended not upon man, but upon God. It was not human strength, nor human wisdom, nor the warriors' prowess that could determine the weal or the woe of the Judean people, but divine providence alone. Everything happened according to the eternal decrees of the divine will. Man was responsible only for his moral conduct and the individual path he trod. The results of all human endeavor lay outside the range of human endeavor."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the Pharisees held, so to speak, a middle ground. The Sadducees claimed that God had nothing to do with human happenings and that all depended on the individual, the Essenes claimed that all depended on God and that

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1 Finkelstein, The Pharisees, p.252-253.

2 Ibid. p.251.

3 Gratz, History of the Jews, Vol.II, p.18.

man had no choice whatsoever. The Pharisees took the middle between these two saying that "some actions, but not all, are the work of fate; and that regarding some of them it is in our power to decide whether or not they shall come to pass."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Resurrection into the Messianic Kingdom

No one who accepts Scripture can dispute that the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the body. For, Paul, who himself was a Pharisee, says, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question;"<sup>2</sup> And in the same chapter it reads, "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angels, nor spirits, but the Pharisees confess both."<sup>3</sup> It is very evident, therefore, that the Pharisees accepted this teaching.

Here again the Pharisees, without a doubt, obtained their doctrine from their study of the Torah and the other Old Testament writings. For, that the bodies of the departed would some day rise again is quite frequently mentioned in the psalms and in the prophets.

"God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave; for He shall receive me."<sup>4</sup>

"As for me I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness."<sup>5</sup>

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death; O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction."<sup>6</sup>

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1 Josephus, Ant., XVIII, 1, 3.

2 Acts 23, 6b.

3 Acts 23, 8.

4 Ps. 49, 15.

5 Ps. 17, 15; cfr. Ps. 16, 9.

6 Hosea 13, 14; cfr. Is. 25, 8; 26, 19; Ezek. 37, 1; Dan. 12, 2.

Job too very emphatically expressed this doctrine when he cried out, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."<sup>1</sup>

That the Pharisees obtained this doctrine from the Old Testament writings is also confirmed by Schuerer:

"He who says that the resurrection of the dead is not to be inferred from the law, hath no part in the world to come."<sup>2</sup>

Since, therefore, it is quite evident that the Old Testament was the basis for this Pharisaic doctrine, one will have to reject Finkelstein's and Moore's assertion that this developed from the Persian doctrine of the resurrection.

"The premises of the Jewish eschatology are, therefore, in the religion itself, but the development of these premises into a definite and articulate scheme must be attributed in the first instance to Persian influence."<sup>3</sup>

It must be remembered, however, that the Pharisees believed in the doctrine of the resurrection only for the righteous. The ungodly were to remain "under the earth" and be punished for their wicked life.

The Pharisees held "that the souls of the wicked shall be detained forever in prison under the earth, while those of the virtuous rise and live again, removing into other bodies."<sup>4</sup>

They taught "that every soul is imperishable, but that only those of the righteous pass into another body, while those of the wicked are, on the contrary, punished with eternal torment."<sup>5</sup>

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1 Job 19, 25.

5 Schuerer, Op.cit. p.13

2 Schuerer, History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, Div.II, Vol.II, p.13.

3 Moore, History of Religions, Vol.II, p.56.

4 Davis, Dictionary of the Bible, "Pharisees," p.602.

"They hold the belief that an immortal strength belongs to souls, and that there are beneath the earth punishments and rewards for those who in life devoted themselves to virtue or vileness, and that eternal punishment is appointed for the latter, but the possibility of returning to life for the former."<sup>1</sup>

"... and that souls have an immortal vigor in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards and punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life. The latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and to live again."<sup>2</sup>

Whenever one speaks about the Pharisees doctrine of the resurrection, he must also mention their doctrine of a Messiah. For, when a Jew who believed in the resurrection died, he had but one hope, and that was to arise and to live in the glorious Kingdom which the Messiah would establish on earth.

"What the Jew craved for himself was to have a part in the future golden age of the nation, as prophets depicted it. It was the Jews object to take part in the universal reign of God and when he died, he died in hopes of hearing the blowing of the trumpet announcing the coming of the Messiah."<sup>3</sup>

"The righteous will rise to life eternal in the glory of the Messianic Kingdom."<sup>4</sup>

So closely was the doctrine of the Messiah connected with the doctrine of the resurrection that the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, denied also the doctrine of the Messiah. "The Sadducees, by denying the resurrection and immortality in general, renounced at the same time the entire Messianic hope."<sup>5</sup>

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1 & 2 Josephus, Ant. XVIII, 1, 3. 14.

3 Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, p. 168.

4 Schuerer, Op. cit., Div. II, Vol. II, p. 13.

5 Ibid. p. 14.

Since the Jew believed that he someday would arise and live again in the glorious Kingdom of the Messiah on earth, his whole conception of the Messiah was different from that of a Christian today. He did not believe that the Messiah would come into the world in order to free all men from sin and from the arch-enemy, the devil. He felt that the Messiah would be a great leader, from the dynasty of King David, who would subdue all nations, conquer all the enemies, especially at the time of the Pharisees, the great Roman Empire, and set up the Jewish Kingdom as the great world power.

The very fact that the Israelites were under constant subjection from the time of the exile, did not discourage this view of the Pharisees, but rather encouraged it. For, they felt that the greater their sufferings became, the sooner the end of foreign domination would arrive, and their great Messianic Conqueror would appear.

"The more Roman expansion impressed everyone with its apparent finality and the worse the condition of Jewry became, the more imminent the end of days seemed to all. The only solution seemed to be miraculous redemption."<sup>1</sup>

When this Messiah would come, he would, as the Pharisees believed, first of all subdue all the foreign nations and establish the Kingdom of David. Then, during this reign, he would establish peace. It would be a glorious reign, where there would be no pain, no suffering, no laborious toiling, no wars, no hardships. Bousset gives a very good

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<sup>1</sup> Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, p.223.



description of what the Pharisees believed the glorious reign would be like:

"Vor allem ist darauf zu achten, dass er an vielen Stellen als der grosse Friedenskoenig gezeichnet wird, unter dessen Herrschaft paradiesische Zustände auf Erden herrschen werden. An manchen dieser Stellen verbindet sich mit diesem Bilde das andere des Kriegshelden, der erst den Frieden schafft.

"Ein besonders gutes Beispiel fuer diese Auffassung der Messiasgestalt gibt Bar.29. Da heisst es, dass nach allem Unglueck der letzten Zeit der Messias anfangen wird, sich zu offenbaren. Dann wird er die, 'welche uebrig sind,' mit dem Fleisch den Ungeheuer, Leviathan und Behemoth, speisen. Dann soll die Erde ihre Frucht zehntausendfaeltig geben; die Weinstoccke werden von einer wunderbaren Fruchtbarkeit sein. Morgenwinde, die aromatischen Duft bringen, Abendwinde mit heilsamen Tau und vom Himmel fallendes Manna sollen die Frommen erquicken.

"II Bar.73:

'Alsdann wird Gesundheit herabsteigen im Tau,  
Und Krankheit wird sich entfernen.  
Sorg und Truebal und Seufzer wird unter den Menschen vergehn,

Freude wird auf der ganzen Erde wandeln.

Die wilden Tiere sollen aus dem Walde kommen

Und dem Menschen zu Dienste sein;

Die Nattern und Drachen werden aus ihren Loechern  
herauskriechen

Und sich den kleinen Kindern zur Verfuegung stellen.

Die Frauen sollen ohne Schmerzen Kinder gebaeren, die  
Schnitter sich bei der Feldarbeit nicht machen.'<sup>1</sup>

Again one can see a third reason here why these Pharisees and the rest of the Jews rejected the Savior. Jesus just did not fit into the picture which the Pharisees had concerning the Messiah. They expected the Messiah to come from some royal family, from the lineage of David. Though Jesus was truly from this lineage of David, yet, in their eyes he was merely a son of Mary and of a Galilean carpenter, and a brother of James, Josea, Simon, and Judas.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bousset, Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter, p.298.

<sup>2</sup> cfr. Matt.13,55; Mk.6,3.

They expected the Messiah to be a great earthly ruler, but Jesus boldly stated, "My kingdom is not of this world."<sup>1</sup> They wanted Him to establish a realm of temporal peace, but Jesus brought only spiritual peace, about which they understood nothing. With such a misconception of the True Messiah, it is no wonder that they regarded Jesus as a religious radical and trouble maker.<sup>2</sup> They had their minds set on a temporal Redeemer, and they were anxiously waiting for the day of His appearance.

As even today there are many radicals who predict days when the final Judgment will appear and make all manner of preparations for it, so also at the time of the Pharisees there existed a certain group, known as the Zealots, who too could not wait for God to set the date on which the Messiah should come, but who by themselves decided that the Messianic Kingdom could be established only through an armed uprising.<sup>3</sup> This led to many decades of guerrilla warfare against the Romans.

The Pharisees, however, objected to such uprisings, and severely denounced these "brigands" who were trying to establish a Jewish Kingdom by force contrary to the will of God. "For them no armed clash could decide the struggle against Rome, but the power of the spirit alone."<sup>4</sup> They were willing to wait patiently until that day when God would

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1 Jn. 18, 36.

2 cfr. Lk. 23, 1-5.

3 Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, p. 220ff.

4 Ibid. p. 220.

send that Messiah, would then establish peace on the earth, and bring forth the righteous Jews from their graves to live in the glorious Kingdom upon earth.

### 3. Doctrine of Angels

So much disagreement exists among the Pharisees in regard to the doctrine of angels that it is rather hard to present exactly what their general view was. Scripture only tells us that the Pharisees believed that there were angels: "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angels, nor spirits; but the Pharisees confess both."<sup>1</sup>

From the Old Testament Scriptures enough references are made concerning angels so that it was quite possible for the Pharisees to gain their teachings from the holy writings. Already Abraham received messages from God through angels.<sup>2</sup> Repeatedly God sent his angels to the various patriarchs. It was an angel of the Lord which slew the host of Assyrians under Sennacherib.<sup>3</sup> David, the Psalmist, wrote: "Bless ye the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength."<sup>4</sup> Daniel even gives the name of two of the angels, Gabriel,<sup>5</sup> and Michael.<sup>6</sup> Zechariah in his short book speaks about angels at least twenty times. Hence the Pharisees had sufficient opportunities to learn that there were such beings as angels.

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1 Acts 23, 8.

2 Gen. 32, 29.

3 II Ki. 19, 35.

4 Ps. 103, 20.

5 Dan. 8, 6.

6 Dan. 10, 13, 20; 12, 1.

The many disagreements arose, however, because these Pharisees tried to explain the relationship between God and the angels. The faithful believers of God knew very well that one could not identify the angels with God, for, a) God had created the angels, and b) God himself had told them, "I the Lord thy God am one Lord." If one would identify the angels with God, then such a person would be a polytheist.

Finkelstein presents the following as the general view concerning angels: The angels were fallible creatures, just as capable of sinning as man. They were not really "spokesmen" for God, but were his courtiers and ministers. Heaven was regarded as a great divine court. God was the "King of the kings of kings." The angels "worship and flatter him; they make official obeisance to him; they tremblingly await his mighty nod; and are each prepared to carry out his imperious will, whether to slay or heal, to bind or loose, to guard or to destroy."<sup>1</sup>

Moore says in regard to this doctrine:

"There are angels who preside over natural phenomena, such as the motions of the stars, the rain and hail; the nations have their angelic regents or champions; there are guardian angels of individuals, and angels who record men's deeds; the destroying angels, with God's commission, bring death and disaster on earth and torment the souls of the wicked in their prison house."<sup>2</sup>

According to Finkelstein<sup>3</sup> this doctrine of the angels was very comforting to the Jews, especially to the

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1 Finkelstein, The Pharisees, p.174ff.

2 Moore, History of Religions, p.71.

3 Finkelstein, Op.cit., p.175ff.

poorer classes. Since these Jews were under continuous subjection, they felt that someday their "King of the kings of kings" would send his "innumerable phalanxes of immortal angels,"<sup>1</sup> who could defeat the thousands or ten thousands mortal soldiers of their earthly king. These poorer people, therefore, believed that these angels would be soldiers of their king who would establish the great earthly Jewish Kingdom.

Whether or not all the Pharisees held these views is, as was stated, hard to tell. Possibly the best way to close this short discussion on angelology is to quote again a few words from Finkelstein, which he states concerning the acceptance of this doctrine among the various classes of people:

"Either they followed their fathers in continuing to reject it, or they put upon it an interpretation which their poorer colleagues considered blasphemous. The result was a medley of opinion, which leaves the rabbinic doctrine of angels the least clear in the whole of talmudic theology."<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. Relationship Between Church and State

Before this discussion of the various Pharisaical doctrines is brought to a close, a few remarks should also be made concerning the view on the relationship between church and state. It is only natural that the Pharisees' idea of the position of the church towards the state should be influenced by the political and religious situation of

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1 Finkelstein, The Pharisees, p.175.

2 Ibid., p.181

the Children of Israel. When God gave his Law to His Chosen People, He also included regulations which should govern their political life, as well as their religious life. Since, as was stated, the Pharisees laid such stress on the Torah, they also to a great extent carried over the Israelites teachings concerning the church and the state, namely, that the political life and political problems should be settled by the religious laws. In regard to this Schuerer says:

"In politics too the standpoint of the Pharisee was genuinely the Jewish one of looking at political questions not from a political, but from a religious point of view."<sup>1</sup>

However, the political conditions under which the Pharisees lived were altogether different from those under which the Children of Israel lived. When God led the Children of Israel out of Egypt by means of His chosen leader, Moses, He was their Lord and King. He laid down the laws and rules which they were to follow. He gave them victory and He gave them defeat. When they came into the land of Canaan, He ruled them through judges. When they later desired a king as the heathen nations had, He ruled them through earthly kings. Throughout all these centuries He permitted them to remain a free and independent nation, subject only to Him and to the laws which He had laid down for them.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, lived at a time when Israel was not free and independent. Ever since the exile, this, so called, "theocratic rule" had ceased. The

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<sup>1</sup> Schuerer, A History of the Jewish People at the Time of Jesus Christ, Div. II, Vol. II, p. 17

Israelites were then placed successively under the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman rule. As a result they were now placed under other rules besides those given to them by God.

In respect to these foreign powers who were holding the Jews in subjection the Pharisees held the following view: as long as these foreign governments did not interfere with their religious teachings, they had no objection. But as soon as any government commanded them to do things contrary to their "law," then they were ready to rebel.

"The Pharisees were by no means a "political" party, at least not directly. Their aim, the strict carrying out of the law, was not political, but religious. So far as no obstruction was cast in the way of this, they could be content with any government. It was only when the secular power prevented the practice of the law in that strict manner which the Pharisees demanded that they gathered together to oppose it, and then really became in a certain sense a political party, opposing even external resistance to external force."<sup>1</sup> (This took place under Antiochus Epiphanes, John Hyrcanus, and Alexander Jannaeus.)

"From them (Pharisees) the independence of religious and ethnic individuality from political stricture was not only a sanctified tradition, but the very basis of Jewish life. When the new rulers, following in the footsteps of the enemy exalted the state above all else, the Pharisees denounced these rulers as enemies of Judaism."<sup>2</sup>

There were two different approaches in regard to the Jews relations to these foreign powers, and these two brought about two opposing views towards the proper attitude of these governments:<sup>3</sup>

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1 Schuerer, A History of the Jewish People at the Time of Jesus Christ, Div. II, Vol. II, p.17.

2 Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, Vol. I, p.164.

3 Taken from Schuerer, Op. Cit. p.17-18.

a) One approach was to consider the rules of these foreign powers as part of God's divine Providence. The domination by the heathen was the will of God. He had given the Gentiles such power in order to punish Israel for its many transgressions. But their domination would last only as long as it was God's will. The people must, therefore, willingly submit themselves to this chastisement, even though the government become harsh and tyrannical, as long as the observance of the "law" was not prevented.

Many of the Pharisees were undoubtedly influenced by this line of thinking. For, "in the time also of the great insurrection against the Romans, we see the chief Pharisee, like Simon, the son of Gamaliel, at the head of that mediatizing party which joined in the insurrection only because it was forced to do so, while it was at heart opposed to it."<sup>1</sup>

b) The other approach was the one which pushed the doctrine of Israel's election in the foreground. Since the Pharisees and most of the Jews had the "warped" opinion concerning the coming of the Messiah,<sup>2</sup> they felt that their nation was chosen by God some day to be the ruling nation on earth. Those who viewed the foreign domination with this election in mind felt that every rule of the heathen should be considered an abnormality

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<sup>1</sup> Schuerer, A History of the Jewish People at the Time of Jesus Christ, Div.II, Vol.II, p.18.

<sup>2</sup> cfr. p.50ff.



and that every one should strive to abolish such rule. Israel must have no other king than God alone, or rather, the ruler of the house of David, whom God alone would anoint.

Just how many Pharisees viewed the relation of the religious life to the political life from this approach is hard to tell. But the thought that obedience should be paid to the heavenly king rather than to the earthly certainly must have been in the minds of many of them. For, one can well guess what they were ready to tell Jesus when they asked him, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" had Jesus answered with a simple, "Yes." For, had he admitted that one should pay his tribute without stating it as tactfully as He did, they probably would have quickly accused him of disobedience to the Law of Moses.

Hence, it seems as if both opinions were held among the Pharisees. And when one remembers that the Pharisees differed among themselves in views concerning other doctrines, it is not all surprising to find opposing views also in regard to this one.

#### Conclusion

In closing this brief discussion on the Theology of the Pharisees, the author wishes to make three short comments:

a) First of all, as was pointed out in an earlier part of this paper, the Pharisees should be highly commended

for their adherence to the Torah of Moses, and for their efforts in saving Judaism in its battle against Hellenism. True, God could have preserved His Law in many other ways, but since He chose the Pharisees to fulfill this purpose during that century and a half preceding the advent of our Savior, one should certainly respect the Pharisees for the same.

b) Yet, secondly, to one who really understands the Pharisees, certainly, they must present an object of everlasting pity. For, though they undoubtedly lived the most righteous and upright lives of any people at that time, though they conscientiously strove to be true followers of God and of His Law, yet in the majority of cases no spiritual benefit was gained thereby. For, the same rule which applies to all people today applied also to them: "By the works of the law shall no man be justified."<sup>1</sup>

Especially does one sympathize with these Pharisees, when he calls to mind that their great aim was to strive for true orthodoxy; and in spite of the fact that they made such tremendous efforts to hold fast to the true Mosaic Law, yet in their great desire they lost the true spirit of the Holy Law, and as a result, lost also the goal.

c) Since, therefore, these Pharisees, though they outwardly lived exemplary lives, missed the high prize of every Christians calling, they should, thirdly, be a lesson to all those people who today feel that they can earn heaven

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. 3, 20.

through their work-righteousness. Two milleniums have passed since the Pharisees became a prominent movement, yet there are still many people, who think just as these Pharisees thought, that, if they live a good moral life, all will be well for them when they die, the Lord will be gracious to them, and certainly reward them for their upright lives. Certainly, as the Lord greatly rebuked the Pharisees in His day, so such people also today must be admonished and corrected, and be shown the true way to life eternal.

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