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A STUDY ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS'
PRONOUNCEMENT OF THE SEVEN WOES
AND LAMENTS IN MATTHEW 23

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A STUDY ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS'
PRONOUNCEMENT OF THE SEVEN WOES
AND LAMENTS IN MATTHEW 23

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I dedicate this thesis to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Apocrypha and Other Writings:

1-2 Esd	1-2 Esdras
1-2 Macc	1-2 Maccabees
Jdt	Judith
Sir	Sirach/Ecclesiasticus

Dead Sea Scroll and Related Text:

1QH	Hodayot ^a
1QM	Milchamah
1QpHab	Pesher Habakkuk
1QS	Serek Hayachad
4QpNah	Pesher Nahum
Q	Qumran

Jewish Pseudepigrapha:

1 En	1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse of Enoch)
2 Bar	2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch)
2 En	2 Enoch (Slavonic Apocalypse of Enoch)
Jub	Jubilees
Sib. Or	Sybilline Oracles
T. Mos	Testament of Moses

Mishnah, Talmud, and Related Literature – General Abbreviations:

b. Babylonian Talmud

m. Mishnah

Mishnah, Talmud, and Related Literature – Individual Tractates:

Pesh Pesahim

Sanh Sanhedrin

Shabb Shabbat

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PREFACE

One of the profound proclamations of Jesus in His ministry is “I will build My church” (Matt 16:18). This proclamation shapes my ministry mindset and motivates my love for His church. Christ, the head of the church, demands His servants to minister to His sheep under the sovereign will of God in accordance with the Word of God. He expects His servants whom He has called to live with integrity for His service.

Matthew 23 has been one of the most prominent chapters emphasizing the theme of “hypocrisy versus integrity” in God’s ministry. It has been, indeed, refreshing and rejuvenating for my soul toward my shepherding endeavor to do what is in His mind and heart for His sheep. Matthew 23 has captured my heart’s desire to devote my time and energy in performing laborious study expounding the prominent theological principles for the edification of the church of God. This laborious study prepares me how to move forward of the service of God’s ministry. Additionally, Matthew 23 has also been life changing, guiding me to get closer to God and to what God desires in His ministry. In short, Matthew 23 has been an important life turning point in my Christian walk with God. I truly thank God for His guidance and His marvelous providence along the way of writing this thesis.

Dr. Pennington, my DMin research thesis supervisor, has offered continual support with his knowledge and prayers during the writing of this thesis. His books and writings have been a great influence on me, uncovering many thoughtful insights which other scholars have often overlooked. As my supervisor for this thesis, his meticulous reading and cogent comments were extremely valuable. Without his insight and counsel as the first reader, the thesis could not have been completed successfully. He has

graciously encouraged me in words and deeds through virtual and in-person meetings, even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Special thanks go to Karl Kwekel who has generously showed his compassion and patience as my prime English editor throughout my thesis writing. His corrections exemplified clear organization of thoughts about what to correct and how to correct my English sentences and structures. In addition, his comments for corrections demonstrated rigorous critical engagement with the intention to better express my thoughts in English. No words can convey my sincere gratitude for what he has done for me. May our Lord Jesus Christ remember his endurance and his love for a needy brother in Christ.

Also thanks to my beloved wife, Chloe, who has sacrificed in many ways to support me till the end of my thesis writing. As always in everything I do, she is a source of help and strength, even as she deals with her physical illness throughout the years. It is to Chloe that I owe my deepest debt of gratitude. There are really no words that can express my grateful appreciation to my two beloved children, Leah and Paccan, for what their prayers have meant as they indulged me in my doctoral academic pursuit. Their constant support and words of encouragement to my doctoral studies are extraordinary.

Finally, I wholeheartedly praise and worship God for His plan and His sovereign will who has graciously and mercifully led me to pursue my doctoral degree till the graduation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. It is to God alone who deserves all the glory, honor, praise, and worship forever, Amen!

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December 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 23 is included in the final discourse of the five major discourses in the Gospel of Matthew. This final discourse extends all the way to Matthew 25:46. This final discourse encloses important teachings of Jesus. The collection of Jesus' teachings in this final discourse is commonly known as the *Olivet Discourse* because it is delivered on the Mount of Olives. Matthew 23 can be structurally divided into three main sections. The first section addresses a warning against the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:1-12). The second section deals with seven¹ woes on the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:13-36). And the final section is the lamentation of Jesus over the city of Jerusalem (Matt 23:37-39). The greatest concentration of Matthew 23 is the oracles of the seven woes (Matt 23:13-36). The seven woe oracles are often found with some frequency in the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament. Indeed, they are correspondingly highly familiar throughout the Ancient Near East, especially within the Jewish context. Generally, Jesus pronounces "woe" more than any other prophet both in the Old and the New Testaments. Matthew specifically records the pronouncement of Jesus in the sevenfold of woes of Matthew 23. He ends Matthew 23 with Jesus' lamentation which

¹ The use of "seven" woes may be significant, as the number "seven" in the Bible signifies "completion." The oracles of these seven woes points to "a total corruption" or "a fullness of corruption" of the Jewish religious leaders. For more information sees W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 3:285; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 2:666.

conveys an important message for the hope of Israel.

Familiarity with the Literature

This study intends to interact with the Gospel of Matthew, with Matthew 23 as the primary source. Matthew 23 is in the final discourse in the Gospel of Matthew.² Jesus' emotions change from disgust to rage to lament in Matthew 23. In Jesus' final words, He breaks down in tears as He laments over the city of Jerusalem. Matthew 23:39 serves as the final verse which closes Jesus' public ministry. From this point onward, all His instructions are made in private.³

Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees⁴ is by far the longest and the most severe pronouncement in the entire Gospel. Morris, in his commentary *The Gospel according to Matthew*, asserts that Jesus' denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23 is not comparable to other denunciations of the scribes and Pharisees in any of the other Gospels. Morris, Nolland, France, Davies and Allison likewise agree that not all the Pharisees come under Jesus' condemnation as "hypocritical" leaders. Jesus is particularly referring to certain Pharisees of His own day.

² Many commentators and scholars agree in general, with very minor variation that Matthew 23:1-25:46 is the final discourse or the final block of the five large sections of Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of Matthew. Lists of some commentators and scholars include Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 535; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew, A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 920; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 856.

³ Michael Card, *Matthew: The Gospel of Identity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 206.

⁴ The term "the scribes and Pharisees" and "the Pharisees," and the "Jewish religious leaders," is used interchangeably throughout this study. The term "the Pharisees" is regularly used as the main representative for the scribes and for the Jewish religious leaders.

Thus, the focal point of Matthew 23 is far beyond individual scribes and Pharisees. Rather it addresses their fundamental approach to the Jewish religious life and ethics.⁵ Besides, Morris understands that the Pharisaic system typically put its emphasis on rules and regulations, that it voids genuine piety and godliness.⁶ The Pharisaic system, which overemphasizes on rules and regulation, is pointless to draw closer to God without genuine repentance (cf. Matt 3:7-12). France speaks about Matthew 23 in two broad ways. First, he notices that the tone of Jesus is radically sharp, and His accusation is harsh. These include “child of hell,” “blind guide” twice, “blind fools,” “blind men,” “blind Pharisees,” “snakes, brood of vipers.” Second, France continues to highlight from the text that the use of offensive statements (or charges) about the scribes and Pharisees are overwhelming. These statements include “violence and greed,” “bones of the dead and all uncleanness,” “hypocrisy and lawlessness,” “murdering the prophets and the righteous.”⁷ Nolland’s approach sees Matthew 23 as being closely linked to the preceding chapters (Matt 21:12-46; 22:1-45; 23:1-39) with the prospect of judgment for the temple or Jerusalem.⁸ As Nolland points out, the prospect of judgment for the temple and Jerusalem is intended as a preparation for the discourse in Matthew 24-25. He rightly observes that the textual presentation in Matthew 23 (paralleled in 5:48. 23:32-33)

⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 570; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 535; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 920; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 855; W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 3:324. Cf. Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 1:330

⁶ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 569-570.

⁷ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 867.

⁸ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 920.

provides both a conclusion for the final woe and a conclusion for the whole set of woes in Matthew 23.⁹ Davies and Allison in their three-volume set of the commentary, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, provides verse by verse and section by section commentary in which all linguistic, historical, and theological issues are discussed in detail about Matthew 23. They carefully evaluate Matthew's viewpoints that Matthew focuses on the theme of "obedience" rather than with correctness in thinking about one's faith. They also observe that the charge of hypocrisy against the Pharisees has made the Pharisees' disjunction of word and deed (i.e., obedience to the Word of God) as an example of how Christian should not behave.¹⁰ They particularly perceive that the seven woes mirror the plot of the whole Gospel, in which the Jewish religious leaders dispute and lead to Jesus' death.¹¹ They agree that the seven woes constitute a climax, not a *novum*, as all of the major accusations have already been made in Matthew 1-22.¹²

Keener in his *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* offers a lengthy description of the scribes and Pharisees. He appends an excursus of their background before the exposition of the text. He summarizes that both scribes and Pharisees are Jewish religious leaders who should have lived what they taught (Matt 23:2-4), who should not have sought marks of honor (Matt 23:5), who should not have sought honored treatment (Matt 23:6), and who should not have sought honorary titles (23:7-11). They

⁹ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 932.

¹⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:280, 307-8.

¹¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:307.

¹² Examples of some accusations include Matt 3:7; 5:20; 5:33-37; 6:1-18; 9:10-13; 11:21; 12:1-8; 15:7; 15:14; 16:5-12; 22:18 in Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:307-8. They also assert that even the polemical harshness of Matt 23:13-33 is (as recollection of 22:1ff proves) not unique; new only is its concentrated repetition.

should have exalted God's business alone (Matt 23:12).¹³ He also includes worthwhile discussions on impending judgment upon the religious establishment (Matt 23:33-39) in the words of Jesus coupled with a true lament over the city of Jerusalem.¹⁴

One of the fascinating works about Matthew 23 is *The Intention of Matthew 23* written by Garland. The denunciation in Matthew 23 is not restricted merely to Jewish leaders or Judaism; it is a stern warning to the entire Jewish community, specifically its leaders who have been charged with special responsibilities.¹⁵ One interesting discovery made by Garland in his exegesis of 23:13-29 is that the woes are not expressions of sorrowful pity but angry judgments and a malediction.¹⁶ He persuasively affirms that the first six woes are not just an attack on the ethical contradiction of the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees; rather it presumably signifies an attack on Pharisaic misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the basic principles of the Mosaic law.¹⁷ The seventh woe in Matthew is clouded by what seems to be tortuous logic as both Matthew and Luke (11:47) share a parallel woe which contains a reproach for the building of the tombs of the prophets. Garland concludes that Matthew is showing more interest in the guilt of murder by his transition in the following verse (verse 31).¹⁸ Moreover, the charge should rather be viewed as a severe warning to Christian leaders in the time of Matthew.

¹³ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 535-46.

¹⁴ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 554-57.

¹⁵ David E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, *Supplements to Novum Testamentum* 52 (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 62-63.

¹⁶ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 64-66.

¹⁷ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 159.

¹⁸ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 166.

To summarize, one of the profound contributions of Garland's work about Matthew 23 is that he believes Matthew 23 places the prime responsibility for the religious leaders. The main emphasis of Matthew 23 is not to polemicize against these religious leaders, but to elucidate that they are the cause for Israel's rejection and to trigger a stern warning for unfaithful leaders. Hence, Garland's final word carries both redemptive-historical and pedagogical purposes: First, it summarizes Matthew's super-sessionistic view of Israel. Second, it warns the church not to repeat the sins of Israel.¹⁹

Newport discusses Matthew 23 in *The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23*. He credibly argues that the source of Matthew 23:3-31 is a pre-70 CE Jewish-Christian polemical tract, and the remaining verses in Matthew 23:32-39 are a later redaction. In addition, he suggests that other Matthean materials appear to be of the similar traditional extraction as 23:2-31.²⁰ Garland and Newport share a common ground that the overall purpose of Matthew 23 is to expose the problem of the rejection of Jesus by the Jews and to declare God's rejection of Israel.²¹ Newport further develops his analysis and concludes that Matthew 23 contains a division: verses 2-31 form a controversy dialogue which has little to do with eschatological matters. On the other hand, verses 32-39 are presenting an attack upon all Jews.²² Newport observes that the incidents recorded in Matthew 23 are within the historical context of Jesus' time and His

¹⁹ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 214-15.

²⁰ Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 1995), 76-77.

²¹ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 215; Newport, *The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23*, 155.

²² Newport, *The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23*, 155.

ministry. For Newport, the treatment of the seven woes is authentic. It possesses a great impact during Matthean community.²³ However, Newport has a slightly different view from Garland about the seventh woe. He perceives that the phrase “you are sons of those who murdered the prophets” (Matt 23:31) is used as the basis for eschatological speculation. Newport clarifies that the seventh woe, in practice, has caused the attack to mushroom to a general criticism against the Jew’s generation and is not restricted to the scribes and Pharisees.²⁴ Newport’s scholarship with his treatment of the seven woes supplies relatively little to the present study.

Void in the Literature

Numerous commentators, scholars, and authors contribute a variety of sound exegesis and thorough theological studies about the oracles of the seven woes of Matthew 23:13-36. They specifically emphasize the historical, contextual, and literary structure, as well as the theological analysis of Matthew 23. They conduct extensive linguistic and grammatical analysis in order to offer exegetical criticisms. Some of the commentators provide exposition of the Greek text with thoughtful exegesis. The commentator Morris offers a vigorous exegesis of the series of seven woes in Matthew 23:13-33. He provides very little Greek textual exegesis but contributes a lengthy theological interpretation and analysis in his work. Morris’ theological and contextual analysis of the seven woes seem to be personalized and individualized with less interconnection to the passage before and

²³ Newport, *The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23*, 114-15.

²⁴ Newport, *The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23*, 155-56.

after Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woes.²⁵ Morris also emphasizes little on the correlation between the oracles of the seven woes and the lamentation.

Davies and Allison offer an in-depth and thorough exegesis of Matthew 23, especially on the oracles of the seven woes. The exegesis includes the parallels between the woes of Matthew 23 and those in Luke 11. They agree that the oracles of the seven woes is nothing new, but repeated only for emphasis.²⁶ Nonetheless, Davies and Allison leave three loose ends concerning Matthew 23. First, they stress little on the congruity and correlation between Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woes and Jesus' lamentation at the end of Matthew 23. Nevertheless, their discussions suffer from a comprehensive flow of thought highlighting the core message in Matthew 23. Second, they lack close observation about the Matthean interpretation of "wholeness, perfectness, and completeness" in Matthew 5:48 (cf. Matt 23:13-36 about the Pharisaic hypocrisy). Third, they view Matthew 23 as sitting at one of the crucial positions in the five main discourses in the Gospel of Matthew, and thus, it is significant. But they provide no explanation for the reason of its significance.

Keener gives a thorough exegesis and sound theological study of Matthew 23:13-33, with the repeatedly theme – "religious." He also offers some discussions in his excursus about the scribes, about the Pharisees, about tithing in theory. However, he specifies little or no essential connection and interrelatedness to the text that appears

²⁵ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 578-88.

²⁶ Davies and Allison agree that the same vices and virtues have already been assailed and praised before (cf. Matt 18). Additionally, the contents in Matt 23 are not new, but the woes constitute a climax. All of the major accusations and criticism to the Pharisees have already been made. More information sees Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:279-80, 307-9.

before and after.²⁷ Keener is lacking in providing a comprehensive overview of the core message from his exegesis in Matthew 23. Thus, he offers little explanation of Jesus' lamentation and its interrelatedness with the oracles of the seven woes.

Nolland heavily focuses on the Greek textual variance in his exposition of Matthew 23:13-33.²⁸ Nolland likewise provides slight interconnection and interrelatedness in his theological study and exegetical analysis for the chapters before and after Matthew 23.²⁹ He does provide a substantial bibliography for reference. Nevertheless, he says little about the consequences or implications of the individual woes. He also overlooks the significance of the seven woes, which has strong correlation with Jesus' lamentation in Matthew 23:37-39.

France, a well-established commentator, presents Matthew 23:13-33 by paying specific attention to the textual variance, word choices, and quotations of texts, theological analysis, and their relationship to the overall theme in general. He makes good connection to the context throughout his exegesis; but the consequences and implications to the text following (Matt 23:37-39 and Matt 24-25) appear in a vacuum. Scholars, such as Garland present an exegesis of each individual woe by first expounding its meaning and then performing a horizontal analysis, figurative and literal interpretations, and ends his discussions by drawing relationships to 23:27-28.³⁰ However, his work undervalues the severity of the oracles of the seven woes that Jesus

²⁷ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 546-59.

²⁸ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 929-43.

²⁹ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 920.

³⁰ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 124-62.

has pronounced. Newport, similarly, exegetes each individual woe. His work mostly references the exegesis work done by Garland. Newport produces little in-depth exegesis, and his exegesis is primarily restricted to theological interpretation, and it stems largely from *Sitz im Leben*.³¹

In a nutshell, Matthean scholars and commentators often overemphasize on the exegesis, contextual, literary, and structural analysis, as well as the theological interpretation on the whole in Matthew 23. Although they have specifically carried out an in-depth analysis and discussion, especially on the seven woes, their discussions are all far too brief to discuss the significance of the comprehensive flow of thought between the oracles of the seven woes and Jesus' lamentation in Matthew 23. They regularly overemphasize on the individual woe, and thus their discussions highlight little comprehensive flow of thought in Matthew 23. Additionally, none of their discussions are adequately satisfying in addressing the significance of the seven woes and laments. Additionally, the interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy is inconsistent with the entire Matthean context (cf. Matt 5:48; 19:21; 22:37-40; 23:13-36). Since the treatment of the significance of the oracles of the seven woes and lamentation of Jesus are far too brief, a new comprehensive study is in order. We need to investigate and discuss in a greater detail the significance of the comprehensive flow of thought with the intent in order to underline the core message in Matthew 23. For this reason, special attention, and careful research upon the oracles of the seven woes, Jesus' lamentation, and reconsideration of the Matthean interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy is essential.

³¹ Newport, *The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23*, 117-56.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study, primarily, is to discuss the significance of the seven woes and laments in Matthew 23. The significance of the seven woes and laments in Matthew 23 conveys two core messages: First, a severity of warning (Matt 23:13-36; cf. 23:1-12); second, an invitation to life – redemption and salvation (Matt 23:37-39).³² Secondly, we are convinced that the two core messages address several significances between and within the oracles of the seven woes and laments. Therefore, the secondary purpose of this study hopes to perform a rigorous examination to evaluate the difference and common significance (or the intersection point of significance) between and within the oracles of the seven woes and laments. Thirdly, we are committed to observe a closer Matthean interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy. Hence, the final purpose of this study will reconsider the Matthean interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy in the entire Matthean context (Matt 23:13-36; cf. Matt 5:48; 19:21; 22:37-40). The outcome of this study hopes to consolidate the significance of the seven woes and laments with an intention to outline twelve Christ-like church leaders Jesus’ desires, in addition to offer three integrity issues in God’s ministry.

The Approach of the Study

The approach of this study assesses three defects in most discussions found in Matthew 23. First defect, the studies of Matthew 23 evidently lack a close scrupulous examination to discuss the significance of the seven woes and laments. Therefore, it elaborates little of the comprehensive flow of thought between the oracles of the seven

³² The Messiah will come when His people repent (Cf. Acts 3:19-20). Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are derived from English Standard Version (ESV).

woes and the laments in Matthew 23. Second defect, the studies of Matthew 23 also lack an adequate discussion for addressing the difference and common significance (or the intersection point of significance) between and within the oracles of the seven woes and laments. Third defect, the interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy is inconsistent in the entire Matthean context (Matt 5:48; 19:21; 22:37-40; 23:13-36). Therefore, a rigorous study is required to reconsider the Pharisaic hypocrisy in the entire Matthean interpretation (Matt 5:48; 19:21; 22:37-40). In brief, our examination will be guided by a few key factors that ought to be taken into consideration where relevant in order to ascertain and fulfill the research purposes of this study. They include the following:

The Oracles of Woe

What are the definitions and the uses of the oracles of woe in the Old and New Testaments (especially in the Synoptic Gospels), the Septuagint (LXX), and the Second Temple literature? Who pronounces the oracles of woe? What are the contents of the oracles of woe?

The Portrayal of the Pharisees

Who are the Pharisees? What is the origin of the Pharisees? What is the historical background of the Pharisees? What roles do the Pharisees play in the Pharisaic community, specifically in the post-70 CE? What is the Matthean portrayal of the Pharisees in Matthew 23?

Jesus' Pronouncement of the Oracles of the Seven Woes and Jesus' Lamentation in Matthew 23

What are the literary, structural, historical, narrative, discourse, and polemic

analyses of Matthew 23? What is the analysis of the oracles of the seven woes of Matthew 23? Is the pronouncement of the seven woes of Matthew 23 authentic?

The Overall Assessment of Matthew 23

What initiated the pronouncement of the oracles of the seven woes in Matthew 23? What is the comprehensive flow of thought in Matthew 23? What is the significance between and within the oracles of the seven woes and laments in Matthew 23? What is the Matthean interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy in the Matthean context?

The Organization of the Study

This study is devoted to a scrupulous examination of the significance of Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woes and Jesus' lamentation over the city of Jerusalem in Matthew 23. This study is divided into five chapters. In each of these chapters, with the key factors discussed above guiding our analysis, the standard approach will be first to assess the biblical meaning of the oracles of woe from various perspectives. We will then narrow our analysis to the target audience of Matthew 23, especially the portrayal of the Pharisees in Matthew 23. In addition, we will also conduct extensive research to evaluate the significance of Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woes and Jesus' lamentation over the city of Jerusalem in Matthew 23. The findings from each chapter will be then gathered and summarized to perform an overall assessment with the aim to achieve the research purposes defined earlier. In brief, each chapter addresses and assesses a different dimension of the oracles of the seven woes, as well as the laments in Matthew 23. This study will outline and conclude with several prominent yet practical lessons for Christ-like church leaders Jesus' desires as an application for today's church leaders. The

chapters of this study are organized as follows:

Chapter Two: The Biblical Meaning of the Oracles of Woe. The aim of this chapter will provide a better understanding of the “woe oracles” by providing a detailed word study, deriving some valuable significant meanings from the biblical perspective of the Old and New Testaments, the Septuagint (LXX), and the Second Temple sectarian literature. The uses of the woe oracles will be outlined and then vigorously discussed. By surveying the biblical understanding of the origins of the phrase “woe oracles” from various perspectives, the primary hope is that the structural analysis and the origins of the “woe oracles” will be enhanced. Secondly, the discussions of the woe oracles will shed significant light upon the Synoptic Gospels, in particular, Matthew 23. Thirdly the ability to interpret the “woe oracles” within a defined context, chiefly in Matthew 23, which relates to the pronouncement of the “seven woes” by Jesus, will be significantly enriched. Fourthly, a greater appreciation of the various nuances with which the phrase is employed will be considerably studied. Finally, a study of this prophetic prefatory exclamation of the continuity of the woe oracles from the Old Testament will be beneficial to the study of prophetic literature, to the study of Christology, to New Testament studies, and most importantly to the Matthean scholarship.

Chapter Three: The Portrayal of the Pharisees. This study contends that useful information about the Pharisees can be briefly gleaned from the literature of the past till the New Testament, specifically, from the Gospel of Matthew.³³ This chapter will discuss

³³ No readers can ever be completely free from bias. Thus, when studying the New Testament’s references to the Pharisees, it is significantly important that so far as possible readers set aside

the origins and history of the Pharisees. It will then provide a brief survey of the Pharisees from the Second Temple period to the late first century. It will also focus particularly upon the Pharisees' roles and practices during the Hasmonean period of the Hellenistic era. It will then continue to examine first century Pharisaism up to the post-70 CE period of the Roman era. It will likewise highlight various encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees in the Synoptic Gospels. Specific emphasis will be placed on the portrayals of the Pharisees in Matthew 23. This study neither aims to provide an exhaustive exploration nor the Pharisees' historical analysis and background study of the Pharisees. Nor will it include their lengthy debates with Jesus about their perspectives of nomianism or antinomianism. Rather, this study aims to investigate pertinent information about the Pharisees, particularly in the Gospel of Matthew. Specific attention will be given to the encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees. Finally, this chapter hopes to shed valuable insights about portrayal of the Pharisees from the past through the New Testament period. Finally, it hopes to offer some modest but fresh perspectives about the Pharisees.

their presuppositions, particularly any previous prejudice about the Pharisees and allow the text to speak for itself. As Stanton remarks, "Presuppositions are involved in every aspect of the relationship of the interpreter to his text... different conclusions... arise from the prejudice of the individual interpreter in Graham Stanton, "Presuppositions in New Testament Criticism," in *New Testament Criticism*, ed. I. H. Marshall (London: Paternoster, 1977), 61f. In addition, numerous studies concerning the Pharisees have been already published. All references to the Pharisees in the New Testament need careful analysis, and the interpretation of the texts must be subjected to critical scrutiny in the light of the picture that the New Testament's authors paint. Some useful scholarships about the Pharisees and Jesus and their relationships encompass Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Hyam Maccoby, *Jesus the Pharisees* (London: SCM Press, 2003); E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992); N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996); N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2013); N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992); R. Deines, "The Pharisees – Good Guys with Bad Press," in *Biblical Archaeology Review* 39.4 (2013): 22, 57-58.

Chapter Four: Jesus' Pronouncement of the Seven Woes and Jesus' Lamentation in Matthew 23. This chapter is divided into two broad sections: First, an overview (the macroscopic view), and second, a closer look (the microscopic view). In the macroscopic section, the emphasis is on exploring the overview of the setting, literary and contextual analysis, intended audience, and purpose of Matthew 23. It embraces the narrative analysis, structural analysis, discourse analysis, polemic analysis, synoptic connections, as well as distinctive characteristics of Matthew 23. The microscopic section purposely takes a closer look at the literary analysis and structure of Matthew 23:1-12, 13-36, 37-39. Specific attention is given to a verse by verse exposition in Matthew 23. Additionally, this chapter will specifically explore the authenticity of Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woes, the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (along with Matthew's interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy) and the parallels between the woe oracles in Matthew and Luke, which are inclusively pertinent to the oracles of the seven woes. Finally, this chapter will perform a detailed biblical exegetical exposition of the series of the seven woes (Matt 23:13-36). The chapter will end with noteworthy concluding remarks.

Chapter Five: Analysis, Discussion, and Conclusion: An Overall Assessment. This chapter aims to analyze and to discuss further the pronouncement of the seven woes. The outcome of the analysis and discussion is used to outline the significance of the seven woes. The significance of the seven woes is then further intersected with Jesus' lamentation (Matt 23:37-39) to highlight the distinctiveness and commonality between the seven woes and laments. The significance of the seven woes and Jesus' lamentation serves to underscore the core message in Matthew 23. The final overall assessment of this

study is summarized and consolidated. This chapter will conclude with twelve prominent lessons for today's Christ-like church leaders.³⁴ This chapter will end with a final word as a concluding remark for Christ-like church leaders.

³⁴ The phrase "church leaders" here include church pastors, church elders and deacons, and group leaders.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL MEANING OF THE ORACLES OF WOE

The phrase “woe oracle” is a genre of literature. It is typically found with some frequency in both the Old and New Testaments. This phrase is familiar throughout the Ancient Near East and during the Second Temple period, specifically within Jewish literature. By divine guidance, God chooses to use words and forms already in use among the Israelites as a fitting vehicle to convey a precise message that could be easily understood by the people of a particular culture and within the recognized historical setting.

Word Study Analysis

Historical setting and literary context are two vital areas for word study analysis. A thorough word study analysis determines the use of the word in these contexts for sound interpretation.¹ Thus, this section aims to examine the biblical meaning of the phrase “woe oracle” within its defined context. The examination of the phrase will be achieved by performing a thorough analysis from various perspectives of the Old and the New Testaments, the Septuagint (LXX), and the Second Temple sectarian literature.

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, Benjamin L. Merkle, and Robert L. Plummer, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 484. For more information, see pp. 475-490.

The “Oracles of God”

When the prophets of the Old Testament speak the words that God has placed in their mouths, the favorite method that the prophets used to express the Word of God is called the *oracle*. Oracles signifies divine speech of God. BDAG defines “oracles of God” (*ta logia tou theou*) as “a saying, pronouncement of God.”² An oracle exclusively refers both to divine responses to a question asked of God and to pronouncements made by God without His being asked. In one sense, oracles are prophecies since they often refer to the future; but oracles sometimes deal with decisions to be made in the present. Usually in the Bible, the communication is from Yahweh, the God of Israel. In times of idol worship, however, Israelites seek a word or pronouncement from false gods (Hos 4:12). Many of Israel’s neighbors seek oracles from their gods. Although the word “oracle” is not used very frequently in the Old Testament, oracles are common in that period. This difference is that the Hebrew word translates “oracle” may also be translated as “burden,” “saying,” and “word.” The word “oracle” appears only seventeen times in the Old Testament (KJV).³ On one occasion, the translators render the Hebrew word דְבַר (dabar) as “oracle.” The Hebrew word דְבַר (dabar) means “word.” This rendering is found in 2 Samuel 16:23. The word “oracle” commonly conveys the message of God’s revelation. The other sixteen renderings of “oracle” in the Old Testament confirm that the translators render the Hebrew word דְבַר (debir) as “oracle.” This is an obscure word that means “back, part behind, hindmost chamber.”⁴ The Hebrew word

² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 601, 616. Hereafter it is referred as “BDAG.”

³ “KJV” is an acronym for “King James Version” Bible.

⁴ Francis Brown, Edward Robinson, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-*

דְּבִיר (debir) is a very special word in the Old Testament period.⁵ The word “oracle” (logion) occurs thirty-five times in the LXX, and four times (only plural) in the New Testament (Acts 7:38; Rom 3:2; Heb 5:12; 1 Pet 4:11).⁶ As a general rule of thumb, the prophets know two kinds of oracles: The oracle of *weal* and the oracle of *woe*. The oracle of weal would be known by the word blessed while the oracle of woe would be known by the word doom.

The “Oracles of Woe”

At a glance, BDAG offers two broad meanings of “woe” (Hebrew as אֵי, הוֹי; Greek as οὐαί). The first meaning is an interjection that denotes pain or displeasure, such as “woe” and “alas.”⁷ The second meaning is a state of intense hardship or distress, i.e., woe.⁸ The word “woe” is predominantly defined as an onomatopoeic exclamation. In the Old Testament, it is frequently used as a lament for the purpose of displaying an outburst of emotion. Additionally, it is also used to describe a funeral lament (1 Kgs 13:30) and to attract attention (Isa 55:1). It primarily occurs in prophetic speeches, regularly in a series

Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 182.

⁵ The Hebrew word דְּבִיר (*debir*) first appears in 1 Kgs 6:5, where God describes Solomon’s Temple. 1 Kgs 6:16 clearly explains that the word דְּבִיר (*debir*) refers to the “Holy of Holies” parallels *debir*, or “oracle,” explaining what the oracle is. The oracle of which God speaks here is none other than the Most Holy Place, the inner room wherein the Ark of the Covenant resided. Other translators render *debir* as “Holy Place,” “sanctuary,” “inner house,” “hinder room,” “back room,” “recess,” and “inner sanctuary.”

⁶ Darrell L. Bock, ed., *The Bible Knowledge Word Study: Acts – Ephesians* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 2006), 142.

⁷ BDAG, 734. Some biblical verses include Matt 11:21; Luke 10:13 (cf. Jer 13:27), 18:7b; 23:13-16, 23, 25, 27, 29; 24:19; 26:24; Mark 13:17; 14:21; Luke 21:23; 22:22; Rev 8:13. In addition, Olmstead comments that οὐαί often with dative of person or thing concerning whom (which) pain is expressed in Wesley G. Olmstead, *Matthew 15-28: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 217.

⁸ BDAG, 734. Some biblical verses are 1 Cor 9:16 (cf. Hos 9:12); Rev 9:12a; 11:14.

of such, and to signal the announcement of impending destruction. In the New Testament, “woe” functions as a prophetic denunciation (Matt 11:20-24; Jude 11) or a lamentation (Matt 23:37-39).⁹ The woe oracles chiefly appear in the Synoptic Gospels but are more largely found in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew’s “woe” exclamations are found in 11:20-24, 18:8, 23, 24:19. Matthew 26:24 follows the Matthean tradition of connecting Jesus with the prophets of the Old Covenant.

Lown and Nida categorize οὐαὶ under the semantic domain “Trouble, Hardship, Relief, Favorable Circumstances.” They express οὐαὶ as a state of intense hardship or distress – “disaster, horror”. After the first disaster comes, two more disasters are still to come (Rev 9:12). Some languages may not have a noun for “disaster,” but the meaning of the Greek word οὐαὶ may be expressed as “how greatly one will suffer” or “what terrible pain will come to one.”¹⁰ In addition, Hagner defines the “woe saying” as “a painful statement of displeasure involving an implied judgment.”¹¹ Hagner’s viewpoint rightly portrays Jesus as the agent of God’s judgment. Jesus’ pronouncement of the seven woes is not merely attacking verbally those who do not agree with Him, but He is formally pronouncing judgment on the Jewish religious leaders which implies that He Himself owns the authority to judge the world.¹²

⁹ Kenneth J. Archer, “Woe,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 1385.

¹⁰ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, ed. Rondal B. Smith and Karen A. Munson (New York: Unite Bible Societies, 1988), 1:243.

¹¹ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 2:668.

¹² N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992), 387. Note the obvious contrast with the blessings in Matt 5, and together a parallel with the list of covenant blessings and curses in Deut 27-30.

The Septuagint (LXX)

In LXX, **יְהִי** and **יִנָּח** are primarily translated by **οὐαὶ** with the dative. This is also the word used in Matthew 23 when Jesus denounces seven woes against the spiritual religious leaders of Israel. Infrequently, the translation of **οὐαὶ** with the substantive (nominative case) is also found. The Greek word **οὐαὶ** usually (sixty-nine times) represents **יְהִי** and less frequently represents **יִנָּח**. The LXX is rather inconsistent in rendering the woe oracles,¹³ but it often translates “woes” indiscriminately as **οὐαὶ**. The word **οὐαὶ** is an onomatopoeic exclamation of expressing strong emotion, especially pain or anger. In the LXX, **οὐαὶ** appears sixty-nine times,¹⁴ and regularly represents the Hebrew **יְהִי**, occasionally **יִנָּח**, all derived from the root meaning to “howl.” Moreover, the interjection **οὐαὶ** is exclusively attested in the LXX, where it occurs approximately sixty-five times, with a third of the occurrences being found in Isaiah with twenty-two occurrences.¹⁵ The Hebrew **יְהִי** and **יִנָּח** are regularly used in a wide variety of contexts to express pain or anger (Isa 1:14; Jer 10:19), grief (Prov 23:29), despair (1 Sam 4:7), lamentation (1 Kgs 13:30), dissatisfaction (Isa 1:4), a threat (Ezek 16:23), or simply to

¹³ “Woe oracles” or “woe interjections” are used interchangeably throughout this entire study.

¹⁴ Alistair I. Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen? A Study of Jesus as Judge in Matthew 21-25* (Waynesboro, VA: Paternoster, 2004), 102. Wilson observes the Greek term **οὐαὶ** is employed approximately sixty-seven times in the Septuagint (LXX). See for some scriptural examples: Num 21:29; 1 Sam 4:7, 8, 21; 1 Kgs 12:24; Hos 7:13; 9:12; Amos 5:16, 18; 6:1; Mic 7:4; Nah 3:17; Hab 2:6, 12, 19; Zeph 2:5; 3:18; Isa 1:4, 24; 3:9, 11; 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22; 10:1, 5; 17:12; 18:1; 24:16; 28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1; Jer 4:13; 6:4; 10:19; 13:27; 22:18; 26:19; 27:27; 28:2; 31:1; Lam 5:16; Ezek 2:10; 7:26; 13:3, 18. It is evidently clear that the exclamation is found predominantly in prophetic works, particularly in Isaiah and Jeremiah. The form is also found occasionally in the Wisdom tradition such as Prov 23:29; Ecc1 4:10; 10:16; Sir 2:12-14; 41:8.

¹⁵ Moisés Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 3:561; Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation, 1978), 3:1051.

attract attention (Isa 55:1).¹⁶

Second Temple Literature

The woe oracles are extensively found in Jewish sectarian literature from the Second Temple period. Some of those are found in the Apocrypha, which include Judith 16:17, Sirach/Ecclesiasticus 2:12-14; 41:8, 2 Esdras 13:16, 19, and 1 Maccabees 2:7. In addition, the woe oracles also appear in the Jewish Pseudepigrapha, such as 1 and 2 Enoch. 1 Enoch particularly is comprised of four series of woes (94:6-95:7; 96:4-8; 98:9-99:2; 100:7-9). 2 Enoch, especially 13:64-70, consists of series of seven paired blessings and curses (cf. Luke 6:20-26).¹⁷ The idea of “travail” is common in several strains of Jewish literature, particularly, the apocalyptic literature. This idea can be also found in Daniel (7; 9:20-27; 12:1-4), 1 Enoch (80:2-8; 99:4-9; 100), Jubilees (23:11-25), 4 Ezra (4 Ezra 5:1-13; 6:17-28; 7:10-35), Sybilline Oracles (3.538-44, 633-51, 796-807; 5.512-31), 2 Baruch (25-27; 32:1; 70), Testament of Moses (8; 10:1-10), the Qumran literature (e.g., 1QH 3; 1QM 12; 19), and rabbinic literature (e.g., m. Sota 9:15; b. Sanh 93; 98).¹⁸ The Qumran literature shows significant woe oracles, some against Jerusalem and its leaders.¹⁹ One prominent example is 1QpHab 10:5; 11:2 cites the woe oracle of Habakkuk 2:12, 15, and interprets it as a reference to the wicked priest in Jerusalem who opposed the “Teacher of Righteousness.” The Qumran 4Q162 2:2-10 speaks of Isaiah

¹⁶ Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3:1051.

¹⁷ See Greek Apocalypse of Ezra 1:9, 24 for more information.

¹⁸ Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, ed., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 1180.

¹⁹ 1QpHab 12:5 (in Hab 2:17), 14; 1QS 2:5-9

5:11-14 and renders those implicated in that woe as the men of mockery in Jerusalem who rejects the Torah. The Talmud includes some noteworthy woe oracles.²⁰

The Old Testament

The Old Testament embraces a variety of woe oracles. Westermann rightly classifies the woe oracles as a subtype of judgment oracle, and he has not only noted the introductory cry of woe but also noted that an accusation of woe, which follows the lament lexeme, is an announcement of judgment.²¹ According to Hoyt, the structural analysis of the woe oracles in the Old Testament reveals three distinct sections.

First, the lament section. In this section, the woe oracles contain the initial cry of woe and describes the lamentable state of the people and their sinful actions.

Second, the hortatory section. The woe oracles may contain a section of appeal founded upon hortatory discourse (imperatives and jussives) that encourages the audience to change their actions and to respond to the sin in their midst before judgment comes.

Third, the judgment section. The woe oracles often embrace a judgment section founded upon a predictive discourse (*yiqtol* and *weqatal* verbs) and may include a הִנֵּה plus a *qotel* to indicate the imminent aspect of the judgment.²²

The woe oracles range in tone from an exclamation (Isa 1:24; Jer 47:6), to a

²⁰ For some the Talmud examples includes Shabb 10a; Pesah 65a, 87b; Yoma 72b, 86a; Sanh 7b.

²¹ Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (1967; repr., Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 190-194.

²² JoAnna M. Hoyt, "Discourse Analysis of Prophetic Oracles: Woe, Indictment, and Hope," *Hebrew Studies* 60 (2019): 158-160.

mourning cry (1 Kgs 13:30; Jer 22:18), to an expression of pity (Isa 1:40), to an imprecation, which essentially denotes extreme hostility (Isa 33:1; Hab 2:6-19). Additionally, the woe oracles consist of a mixture of anger, grief, and alarm about the excruciating consequences that would come upon Israel due to its sin. The woe oracles have been developed from prophetic announcements of judgment, covenant curses (Deut 27:15), or even from funeral lamentations (Jer 22:18).²³ It is likewise originated in the context of wisdom literature as the counterpart of the blessing statements, such as Psalm 1:1 (אֲשֶׁר־יִי־אִישׁ).²⁴ Worth noting is that the prophet's attitude in the woe oracles is not merely one of anger. Such oracles can express both malediction and lamentation, with the context being decisive as to the precise nuance for precise interpretation.²⁵

Since "blessing" is classified as a wisdom-type ascription, the "woe" is a prophetic-type ascription. In brief, it is the converse of the beatitude. Many of the woe oracles in the Old Testament announce the doom looming on the horizon for the people. The coming disaster is plainly implied in the woe. The Old Testament prophets become increasingly bitter in their indictments of the spiritual obduracy of the people (Zech 11:17). Thus, these woes are not solely warning of imminent calamity: they, indeed, serve as a pronouncement that God's vengeance will befall the subject.²⁶

²³ Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 190-95; R. Clements and R. Collins, "Woe," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:945-46.

²⁴ Erhard Gerstenberger, "The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81, no. 3 (1962): 249-63.

²⁵ David E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 52 (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 64-68.

²⁶ David E. Garland, "Woe," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 80.

The prophets in the Old Testament often cried “woe!” (״וה around fifty-one times, and ״א around twenty-five times) against Israel’s sins. Some examples of explicit onomatopoeic interjection of woes include Isaiah 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22; 10:1; Amos 5:18; 6:1, 4; Habakkuk 2:9, 12, 15, 19; Zechariah 11:17.²⁷ Worth noting is that ״א appears as an independent interjection without *le* only twice. This interjection is seen once in the judgment context against Israel’s enemies in the Balaam oracle (Num 24:23b), and once in a judgment context against Jerusalem (Ezek 24:6, 9). These two passages clearly illustrate the range of word usage from that of almost a pure interjection (Num 24:23) to that of an invective or threat, with *le* implied (Ezek 24:6, 9). Interestingly, the earliest use of ״א (ca 1450 BC) is in Numbers 21:29. The other uses of similar ״א include Numbers 21:27 and 29. The use of ״א in its incipient form is very similar to its fuller expression used by the classical prophets (Jer 13:27; Ezek 16:23-24; Hos 7:13²⁸).²⁹

The Hebrew word for “woe” (״וה) is used with a following preposition only four times (‘*el* Jer 48:1; ‘*al* Jer 50:27, Ezek 13:3; and *le* Ezek 13:18). Additionally, it is used in only eight places as an independent interjection without any direct connection to a following word (Isa 1:24, 17:12, 55:1; Jer 30:7, 47:6; Zech 2:10 (twice), 2:11). Its

²⁷ ״וה simply involves a summons with no connotation of impending doom. See the brief syntactical analysis of woe oracles as exclamation in B. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 681-83. See also R. Clements, “The Form and Character of Prophetic Woe Oracles,” *Semitics* 8 (1982): 17-29.

²⁸ Hos 7:13 is unique in that it consists of a parallel structure of two clauses and syntactical units. More information sees, R Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), 2:2334.

²⁹ Steven Horine, “A Study of the Literary Genre of the Woe Oracle,” *Calvin Baptist Theological Journal* 5 (1989): 75.

predominant use is found when it is combined with a participle twenty-six times and in its combination with a noun or adjective nine times.³⁰ These figures include the times when הוֹי is clearly being used in a lament context (1 Kgs 13:30; Jer 22:18, 34:5 (four times); and when translated *ho* in Amos 5:16 (two times). The earliest use of הוֹי occurs in 1 Kings 13:30 (ca 920 BC). It is used here as an interjection of sorrow or grief and is set in a context of the lament over the death of the prophet. Moreover, it is used in a similar way also by later prophets as seen in Jeremiah 22:18, 34:5 and in Amos 5:16. The word הוֹי is used later in the “woe oracle” as a pure, independent interjection. Its usage in the “woe oracle” form is always set in the context of a prediction of disaster (cf. Amos 5:18, 6:1; Isa 5:8ff; Jer 23:13; Ezek 34:2; Zech 11:17). As a pure, independent interjection, it is used as a request or summons cry – “Alas” (cf. Isa 1:24, 17:12, 18:1, 55:1; Jer 47:6; and Zech 2:10, 11).

The Old Testament prophets pronounce woe against the official leaders in Israel for their arrogance in failing to fulfill their covenantal responsibilities through idolatry and social injustice to Israel. The six woes of Isaiah 5 (5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22) center on Jerusalem and Judah (Isa 5:3, 7, 17). Isaiah’s woe against Samaria (Ephraim; Isa 28:1-6) transitions into judgment upon priest and prophet (Isa 28:7) and those who rule in Jerusalem (Isa 28:14). Additionally, Isaiah 29 denounces Jerusalem (Ariel) for its lack of genuine reverence (Isa 29:13-14), even while its religious observances continue on schedule (Isa 29:1). Isaiah 30 and 31 pronounce the doom of an alliance with Egypt (Isa 30:1-4, 7; 31:1).

³⁰ According to Horine, “Due to the ambiguity between participial and nominal uses in three occurrences the figures may be twenty-three times with a participle and twelve times with a noun or adjective” in Horine, “A Study of the Literary Genre of the Woe Oracle,” 76.

Jeremiah 4-6 addresses three woes to Jerusalem (Jer 4:13, 31; 6:4) as judgment approaches due to the sins of king, princes, prophets, and priests (Jer 4:9; 5:13, 30-31; 6:13). These sins include the ignorance of God’s covenant (4:22, 5:1-5, 21). Jeremiah 13:27 specifically pronounces woe on Jerusalem after singling out its kings, priests, and prophets for rebuke (Jer 13:13). Jeremiah 22:11-17 and 22:18-30 denounces King Shallum and King Jehoiachim respectively. Jeremiah 23 is explicitly pronouncing severe woe on destructive shepherds (Jer 23:5, 11, 13-22, 25-40 cf. 10:21).

Ezekiel 16 reveals the sin of Jerusalem by using pervasive sexual metaphors and pronounces a double woe against Jerusalem (Ezek 16:23). Moreover, Ezekiel 24 twice pronounces woe on Jerusalem as a bloody and rebellious city (Ezek 24:6, 9). There are significant woes against the leaders of Jerusalem and special judgment for Jerusalem (Mic 1:5; 2:1, 9, 12; 2:7, 12; 3:1, 5, 9-11). The five woes of Habakkuk 2 denounce the sins of Israel’s leaders (Hab 2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19). Zephaniah pronounces the woe that is coming to the corrupt princes, judges, prophets, and priests in Jerusalem (Zeph 3:1-7).

The New Testament

The Greek word for “woe” is *ὄαλ*. It is the most commonly used translation for *וָיָה* and *וָיָא* in the LXX (sixty-nine) times. The word *ὄαλ* is used in the four Gospels’ accounts a total of twenty-seven times. Jesus most probably spoke Aramaic predominantly during His time on the earth, and thus, would have used the word *וָיָה*.³¹ The fact that the range of usage of *ὄαλ* in the New Testament parallels the range of *וָיָה* in

³¹ There is no denying that Jesus spoke Aramaic: the transliterated words attributed to Him in the New Testament are Aramaic. More information sees Steven E. Fassberg, “Which Semitic Language Did Jesus and Other Contemporary Jews Speak? *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (2012): 280.

the Old Testament seems to support this idea. The Greek word οὐαὶ is used by Jesus as a warning and lamentation for mankind in general in Luke 17:1.57. In Matthew 24:19 (cf. Mark 13:17; Luke 21:23), Jesus expresses pity and deep compassion and sorrow over those who would be hindered in their attempts to flee the doomed city of Jerusalem. Jesus' woe over the fate of Judas (Matt 26:24, Mark 14:21, Luke 22:22) expresses pity and acute sorrow.³²

Broadly speaking, the word “woe” in the New Testament is customarily viewed by source critics as originating in Q material.³³ The oracles of οὐαὶ appear forty-six times in the New Testament, thirty times in the Synoptics, once in Paul (1 Cor 9:16), once in Jude (verse 11), and fourteen times in the Apocalypse (Rev 8:13; 9:12; 11:14; 12:12; 18:10, 16, 19). The word οὐαὶ, aside from four isolated instances (Mark 13:17; 14:21; 1 Cor 9:16; Jude 11), are all found in Matthew, Luke, and Revelation (thirteen to fifteen times each).³⁴ The word οὐαὶ has no theological significance, but it serves to lend solemnity of message in a variety of important contexts. Several New Testament's passages seem to express sympathetic sorrow rather than angry condemnation. One of these passages is Luke 6:24-26. Indeed, Luke 6:24-26 comprises four woes (corresponding to the blessings of 6:20-23) explicitly connotating warnings for those who do not follow Jesus. The repeated οὐαὶ signifies Jesus' sadness at what He knows is the

³² Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3:1053.

³³ Matt 11:21; 18:7; 23:13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29; 24:19; 26:24 and synoptic parallel; cf. 1 Cor 9:16; Jude 11; Rev 8:13; 9:12; 11:14; 12:12; 18:10, 16, 19.

³⁴ David L. Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 278; Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 3:561.

inevitable end of any who continue to carry on blindly in self-sufficiency.³⁵

The οὐαὶ in the Gospels. Luke 6:20-28 contains a series of four *macarisms* (blessings) balanced by a series of four οὐαὶ (denouncements indirect “woe to”).³⁶ Jesus pronounces these four woes to warn those who will not follow Him. The repetition of οὐαὶ seems to express Jesus’ great sadness over the end of those who follow their own ways.³⁷ Interestingly, the balancing of the series of blessings and woes seems to identify Luke 6:20-28 as a wisdom context. According to Horine, the transition to the “bless the ones cursing you” also seems to support this idea of a pedagogical context. Again, as seen earlier, the use of repetition seems to add intensity to the thrust of the message.³⁸ In the Gospels, οὐαὶ can be distinctively rendered as an expression of sorrow and pity. Silva offers three conceptual views of οὐαὶ: hardship, judge, and lament.³⁹ Various woe oracles serve more than one view or imply more than one meaning. The significant meaning of the word “woe” pronounced by Jesus can be a lament or a warning, or both. For instance, Jesus utters a woe for the world because of the inevitability of temptations to sin (Matt 18:7), and this is essentially a lament as well as a warning. It is quite a different matter for the one causing other to stumble; this woe serves as a stern warning. Those who lead others to sin are in danger of fiery Gehenna (Matt 18:6-9). Furthermore, Jesus pronounces a woe on the one who betrays the Son of Man (Matt 26:24; Mark 14:21; Luke

³⁵ Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 3:562.

³⁶ Waldemar Janzen, “AŠRÊ in the Old Testament,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 58, no. 2 (1965): 220.

³⁷ Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3:1053.

³⁸ Horine, “A Study of the Literary Genre of the Woe Oracle,” 93-94.

³⁹ Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 3:562.

22:22) concerning the fate of Judas. This particular woe for Judas is essentially an expression of deep sorrow as well as a stern warning to the one who by his treachery would cut himself off from entering the kingdom of God. Divine wrath is clearly an element in the woe for Judas. The expression “that man” (Matt 26:24), evidently applied to Judas, suggests that severance from Christ has, in effect, already taken place that Judas is putting himself outside of God’s mercy.⁴⁰ Sorrow and compassion are evident in Matthew 24:19 (Mark 13:17; Luke 21:23), which express a deep concern for those, who on account of family responsibilities, may be hindered in their escape from the doomed city of Jerusalem. The woe oracles over women who are pregnant at the time of the great tribulation laments the reality that when the cataclysm comes, they will be able to flee only with difficulty (Matt 24:19; Mark 13:17; Luke 21:23). Condemnation is more apparent in Matthew 11:21 (Luke 10:13), which documents Jesus’ stern rebuke of several cities (Chorazin, Bethsaida, and even Capernaum) for their lack of response when He has been active in their midst for so long.⁴¹ Green and McKnight perceive that the woes Jesus pronounced against the Galilean cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida are not lamenting but maledictions akin to a curse.⁴²

The Uses of the “Oracles of Woe” in the Old and the New Testaments

The uses or functions of the “woe oracles,” though different between the Old and the New Testaments, both share some common characteristics.

⁴⁰ Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 3:562.

⁴¹ Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 3:562.

⁴² Green and McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 80.

The Uses of הוי and אוי in the Old Testament

Generally, it is important to realize that the woe oracles in the Old Testament is often used as an oracle of condemnation and never as an oracle of warning. Thus, admonition (warning) must be distinguished from condemnation (woe).⁴³ In this admonition, the Old Testament prophets told the people what is expected of them if the judgment of God is to be averted (Amos 5:16). The admonition sometimes has the appearance of a conditional announcement of judgment, but it also takes other forms. On the contrary, the woe oracle is the phrase applied to prophetic speeches, which frequently begin with the cry “woe,” followed by a description of the addressees and commonly also an announcement of judgment. In addition, there is never any condition given by which the situation can be alleviated in a woe oracle, for the judgment is always set.⁴⁴ The woe oracle in the Old Testament often appears in a form of a “prophecy of disaster.” According to Hayes, there are two main types of prophetic speech: First, the “prophecy of disaster,” which predicts future disaster or punishment. Second, the “prophecy of salvation,” which predicts divine intervention on behalf of those in need (usually Israel). The woe oracle occurs almost exclusively in the “prophecy of disaster.”⁴⁵ A typical example of a “prophecy of disaster” is found in Jeremiah 28:15-16, in which the second part of verse 16 signifies the oracle of woe where the judgment is denounced. There has

⁴³ John H. Hayes, *Old Testament Form Criticism* (1974, repr., San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1977), 166-167; Gene M. Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament* (1971; repr., Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1973), 66; Horine, “A Study of the Literary Genre of the Woe Oracle,” 77-78.

⁴⁴ Hayes, *Old Testament Form Criticism*, 166-167; Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament*, 66; Horine, “A Study of the Literary Genre of the Woe Oracle,” 77-78.

⁴⁵ Hayes, *Old Testament Form Criticism*, 159, 162-63; Horine, “A Study of the Literary Genre of the Woe Oracle,” 78.

been substantial controversy among the form critics about the woe oracle, which mainly centers around the “origin” of its uses. The original meaning of the woe oracle in the Old Testament includes: First, the wisdom sayings; second, the funeral lament; third the curse formula.⁴⁶

First, the wisdom sayings. The first origin of the uses of woe oracles is in the wisdom sayings. The significance of the wisdom sayings can be applied to the study of the woe oracle from the use of יָנַח in the wisdom texts. The word יָנַח is used to emphasize a resultant, negative state (death) of an individual who has violated the moral stipulations of Yahweh’s Law (Mosaic Covenant). The use of יָנַח obviously presents the way which leads to death. Death or destruction predominantly characterizes the impending state of the recipient of a woe oracle. Thus, the wisdom sayings and the woe oracles are related to the blessing and cursing of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut 27-28).⁴⁷ Additionally, Wolff affirms that “the pedagogic [wisdom] woe-sayings... contained no elaborated element of threat. The function [usage] is to issue a warning against the way which leads to death.”⁴⁸

Second, the funeral lament. The second origin of the uses of the woe oracles is in the form of funeral lament. The Hebrew יָהָה has its origin in the funeral lament. The first appearance of יָהָה in the use of a funeral lament is found in 1 Kings 13:29-30. Subsequently, Jeremiah uses יָהָה in a lament context just before the exile (Jer 22:18). The

⁴⁶ Gerstenberger, “The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets,” 259-60; Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977), 244; For detailed discussions, see Horine, “A Study of the Literary Genre of the Woe Oracle,” 78-93.

⁴⁷ Gerstenberger, “The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets,” 259-60.

⁴⁸ Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, 244.

Hebrew word **יָהּ** is employed as a funeral cry from the eighth or ninth century at least to the exile.⁴⁹ It is later incorporated within the prophecies of doom beginning with Amos, where it begins to lose some of its original force as a pure funeral lament. Its distinctive use as a pure funeral lament eventually loses its full force and becomes more of an invective or threat in a later context. The lament cry and the woe cry share significant similarities. Both announce to the community a sad event (death or judgment). Both summon attention for emotional participation regarding the sad news, which is about to be declared, and both announce a resultant state (future) which is irreversible. The prophet is, in a sense, God's hired professional mourner (i.e., God's prophet) in both cases. He is the first to announce both the "woe cry" and the "death wail."⁵⁰

Third, the curse formula. The third use of the woe oracles, mostly appearing as **יָהּ**, is in a curse formula. Westermann positively observes that the woe oracles have many common points of contact with the curse formula. First, they are found (at times) in a series (Isa 5:8ff, 28:1 to 33:1; Hab 2). This series corresponds considerably with the series of the curse formula in Deuteronomy 27:15-26. Second, the woe is used in relation to a "social accusation," and the curses in Deuteronomy 27 as well are exclusively concerned with the common life of the community.⁵¹ Third, the woe oracle and the curse formula are often associated with God's Law stipulated in the Mosaic Covenant. Fourth, the curse formula and the pronouncement of judgment have a close affinity. Westermann

⁴⁹ James G. Williams, "The Alas-Oracles of the Eighth Century Prophets," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 38 (1967): 88.

⁵⁰ Gerstenberger, "The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets," 263-64; Richard J. Clifford, "The Use of "HÔY" in the Prophets," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (1966): 459-60.

⁵¹ Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 193.

underscores that “the most important complex that shows such connection is the Balaam story in Numbers (22-24).⁵² Fifth, both are subordinate to the historical actions of God concerning His people. Sixth, they are similar in form and style.⁵³ Nonetheless, the woe oracles are not to be confused with the curse formula. Also, to be noted is that they have certain elements in common, namely: form, and to a certain extent, the content. The major difference between the curse formula and the woe oracles is that the curse (like the wisdom texts) describes an activity that is hypothetical, potential, not yet having occurred. On the other hand, the woe oracle condemns a person, group, or nation and gives a description of the reprehensible activity which has already occurred. In Jeremiah 11:3 and 17:5, Jeremiah uses both forms, “cursed” and “woe to,” as distinct from each other within the main body of his prophetic writings. The curse sayings are “reflex of one violating his relationship to God.”⁵⁴ These sayings are significant because those condemned in the woe oracles are condemned for the same basic reason. Both the curse formula and the woe oracle presuppose the future intervention of Yahweh against the offender. Both wisdom and curse contexts generally deal with a potential state which brings about the required condemnation; whereas the woe oracles essentially deal with an already existing state of transgression.⁵⁵

⁵² Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 193.

⁵³ Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 193-195.

⁵⁴ Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament*, 1:168.

⁵⁵ Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 195; Clifford, “The Use of “HÔY” in the Prophets,” 459-61; Horine, “A Study of the Literary Genre of the Woe Oracle,” 92-93.

The Uses of οὐαὶ in Jude and the Book of Revelation

Remarkably, οὐαὶ is not used in judgment contexts in the New Testament outside the Gospels except in Jude and in the Book of Revelation. Its occurrences in the Book of Revelation (twenty-six times) and Jude (one time) are equal to its frequency of use in the Gospels (twenty-seven times).⁵⁶ It is also noteworthy that the woe oracles are used primarily in God's dealings with Israel. This incident is seen not only in the Gospels but also in Revelation, where it does not appear until chapter eight when God prepares to renew His dealings with Israel. As in the Old Testament, the increased frequency of the woe oracles indicates imminent and irreversible punishment.

The Uses of οὐαὶ in the Synoptic Gospels

In general, the majority of the forty-six uses of οὐαὶ in the New Testament are in contexts that involve a prophetic pronouncement of judgment on those who reject or deny Jesus Christ.⁵⁷ The outcry of woe combines the ideas of wrath and pain, and anger and sorrow.⁵⁸ While Jesus communicates salvation to His beloved disciples with His blessedness (*μακάριοι*), He then communicates judgement to the scribes and Pharisees with the seven woe oracles (*οὐαὶ*). As a whole, Matthew 11:21,19 these woe oracles express proleptic condemnation, anticipating the downfall of the Jewish religious leaders. The word οὐαὶ becomes a synonym for three specific judgments declared by an angel

⁵⁶ Horine, "A Study of the Literary Genre of the Woe Oracle," 94.

⁵⁷ With exception to 1 Cor 9:16 in which Paul speaks of judgment that he will receive if he refuses preaching the Gospel.

⁵⁸ Frederick Dale Brunner, *The Christbook: Matthew 1-12* (Dallas: Word, 1990), 1:443; Philip F. Esler, "Intergroup Conflict and Matthew 23: Towards Responsible Historical Interpretation of a Challenging Text," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 45, no. 1 (2015): 50.

(Rev 8:13; 9:12; 11:14).⁵⁹ There is a significant wealth of evidence supporting the use of woe oracles within the Synoptic Gospels. The comprehensive view on the uses of οὐαὶ in the Synoptic Gospels is documented in table 1.⁶⁰ The summary of table 1 concludes that Jesus is the prime denunciator of the woe against the spiritual religious leaders in the Synoptic Gospels. Matthew (thirteen times) and Luke (fifteen times) have the great majority of the use of οὐαὶ, visibly derived from their individual redactions of Q material. Eight of these Q material texts are found in both Matthew and Luke,⁶¹ three are designated Matthean,⁶² and six are uniquely Lukan.⁶³ Mark has only two uses of οὐαὶ, both triple-tradition texts (Mark 13:17, par. Matt 24:19, Luke 21:23; Mark 14:21, par. Matt 26:24, Luke 22:22). The skillful use of the series for the purpose of intensity is emphasized by Jesus in the series of seven denunciatory woes on Israel's spiritual religious leaders in Matthew 23:13ff. The use of the series of woes signifies the bitterness of Jesus' denunciations. The number seven exceeds that of all other uses in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.⁶⁴ Intensity of expression corresponds proportionally

⁵⁹ See BDAG, 734, #2 for further discussion.

⁶⁰ Table 1 is extracted, modified, compiled, and summarized from Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 278-81; Green and McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 80; Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 3:561-62.

⁶¹ Matt 11:21 par. Luke 10:13 (each text has two uses of οὐαὶ); Matt 18:7 par. Luke 17:1 (each text contains two uses of οὐαὶ); Matt 23:13 par. Luke 11:52; Matt 23:23 par. Luke 11:42; Matt 23:27 par. Luke 11:44; Matt 23:29 par. Luke 11:47.

⁶² Matt 23:15, 16, 25. However, Matthew 23:25 is similar to Luke 11:39, a text that in its Lukan form which does not contain the word οὐαὶ.

⁶³ Luke 6:24, 25a, 25b, 26; 11:43, 46. Luke 6's woe texts are found in symmetrical arrangement with Lukan beatitudes, which are nearly parallel to Matthew 5:3-12. Nevertheless, Luke 11:43, 46 comprises of material that is like Matthew 23:4, 6-7, texts derive from a parallel context but without the word οὐαὶ.

⁶⁴ Isaiah 5:8ff contains only a series of six.

to the number of repetitions in a series. This context, therefore, indicates extreme intensity. Interestingly, Jesus employs the woe oracle in a form more akin to the early form of the curses in Deuteronomy 27:15-26. Jesus' use of form contrasts with the freer form used by both the exilic and post-exilic prophets, except for Zechariah 11:17. The context of Matthew 23:13-38 includes an element of acute sorrow as Jesus laments over the city of Jerusalem. This context seems to parallel the use by both Amos and Jeremiah, in which the woe oracles is situated near a lament passage (cf. Amos 5). The uses of the woe oracles in the Old Testament and the New Testament, though diverse, still share common characteristics. The woe oracles pronounced by Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, fundamentally serve two main functions: First, as prophetic pronouncement; second, as lamentation.

Concluding Remarks on the Oracles of Woe

A study of the woe oracles can produce much benefit for the proper biblical understanding and sound interpretation of Scripture in its context. Studying the Old and the New Testaments, the LXX, and the Second Temple sectarian literature pertinent to the woe oracles can produce informative lessons and significances. The emphasis of the woe oracles in the Old Testament is largely proportioned to three sections: Wisdom sayings, funeral laments, and curse formula. The consideration of these three relationships is essential for proper interpretations of the Old Testaments' passages within its historical setting and literary context by analyzing its structure and its original intended meaning.

The uses of the woe oracles in the New Testament overlap the uses in the Old Testament in terms of its severity and intensity of the pronouncement, as well as the

consequences of the woe that follows. The woe oracles, distinctively pronounced by Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels (largely in the Gospel of Matthew), can be categorized into two main sections: First, as prophetic pronouncement; second, as lamentation. The pronouncement of the seven woes is evidently seen in Matthew 23 where Jesus pronounces against the spiritual religious leaders in Israel. Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woes lend solemnity for an invitation to life. The emphasis of invitation to life conveys the message for repentance and redemption (i.e., salvation). Jesus expresses pity and deep compassion in addition to acute sorrow over those who would be hindered in their attempts to flee the doomed city of Jerusalem. Jesus Himself issues stern warnings and deep lamentations for mankind with the view for their repentance. For instance, Jesus' words to Judas are essentially an expression of deep sorrow as well as a stern warning to the one who by his treachery would cut himself off from entering the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 23:37-39, lamentation follows the pronouncement of the seven woes. Thus, Jesus' lamentation comes from at least as much grief as anger.

Table 1. The Uses of οὐαὶ in the Synoptic Gospels

Pericope ⁶⁵	Matthew	Mark	Luke	Does Jesus pronounce the woe?
Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation			6:24	Yes
Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry			6:25a	Yes
Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep			6:25b	Yes
Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets			6:26	Yes
Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes	11:21 (2X) ⁶⁶		10:13 (2X)	Yes
Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!	18:7 (2X)		17:1 (2X)	Yes
Woe to lawyers who impose heavy burdens that they themselves do not share	cf. 23:4		11:46	Yes
Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces	cf. 23:6-7		11:43	Yes
Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces	23:13		cf. 11:52	Yes

⁶⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are derived from English Standard Version (ESV).

⁶⁶ "2X" indicates οὐαὶ appears twice in that specific Bible verse.

Table 1 continued

Pericope⁶⁷	Matthew	Mark	Luke	Does Jesus pronounce the woe?
Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves	23:15			Yes
Woe to you, blind guides, who say, “If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath	23:16			Yes
But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others	23:23		cf. 11:42	Yes
Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence	23:25		cf. 11:39- 40	Yes
Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness	23:27		cf. 11:44	Yes
Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you blind the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous	23:29		cf. 11:47	Yes

⁶⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are derived from English Standard Version (ESV).

Table 1 continued

Pericope⁶⁸	Matthew	Mark	Luke	Does Jesus pronounce the woe?
Woe ⁶⁹ for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days!	24:19	13:17	21:23	Yes
Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born	26:24b	14:21	22:22	Yes

⁶⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are derived from English Standard Version (ESV).

⁶⁹ ESV Bible uses “Alas.” We remain using “woe” for consistency.

CHAPTER 3

THE PORTRAYAL OF THE PHARISEES

The Origin of the Pharisees

The Pharisees' name is probably derived from the Hebrew/Aramaic "Perisha" means "the separated one." The term "Pharisees" also means "specifiers," those who exact in the law.¹ Most scholars associate the term "Pharisees" with a root implying "separatists."² They are spiritual descendants of the Hasideans, separating themselves from all pagan practices that would defile pure Jewish religion and ways of life. The Pharisees' roots are found in the schism in Israel between the Hasideans who advocated pure Jewish culture, and the Hellenists, who adopted Greek ways during the Seleucid dynasty, particularly under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC).³

To fully comprehend the originality of the Pharisaic development is considered one of the most challenging tasks for historians, as well as for Jewish scholars and Christian. Furthermore, the struggle to understand the origin and evolution of Pharisaism

¹ Albert I. Baumgarten, "The Name of the Pharisees," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102, no. 3 (1983): 411-28.

² George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 2:60; Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, Library of Early Christianity 7 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 162; Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 5 (New York: Edwin Mellen Press 1984), 58; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 538.

³ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 758.

resulted in unending debates for many scholars, both past and present. Understanding the origin of the Pharisees often yields important clues concerning their agenda and their influence. Regrettably, the New Testament gives no information about the origins of the Pharisees. The New Testament briefly accepts the Pharisees as an established part of the social scene in the first-century Palestine. It also accepts the Mount of Olives as a part of Jerusalem's backdrop.⁴ Past scholars have extensively postulated a wide range of dates for the emergence of the Pharisees. These range from the Hasmonean period back to the time of Ezra or earlier. As Rivkin rightly affirms,

no society can exist... with fixed, immutable laws, however divine they may be deemed to be. No sooner was the Pentateuch canonized than exegesis inevitably followed. The divine Law had to be studied with great care so that law might keep pace with life. A class of *Soferim*, Scribes or exegetes, thus sprang up as a necessary consequence of the canonization of the Pentateuch. This class, which looked to Ezra as their prototype, made the study of the Pentateuch their special concern and soon attained such mastery and skill that they replaced the priests as the caretakers of the Law. These *Soferim* were the forerunners, it is alleged, of the Pharisees. Long before the Hasmonean Revolt, so it is reasoned, they had pondered the Pentateuch, wrestled with the text, and drawn inferences that were not explicitly set forth therein.⁵

The earliest date for the existence of the Pharisees is the time of Jonathan the Hasmonean.⁶ This is attested to by Josephus, who states that they, together with the Sadducees and the Essenes, are flourishing at that time.⁷ Josephus' attestation is widely acknowledged by many historians.

⁴ Roger Amos, *Hypocrites or Heroes? The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Pharisees in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 122.

⁵ Ellis Rivkin, *A Hidden Revolution* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1978), 185. The Hasmonean dynasty ranged from 167-37 BCE. It is believed that the existence of the Pharisees is around 167 BCE.

⁶ Rivkin, *A Hidden Revolution*, 185.

⁷ F. Josephus, *The Jewish Antiquities: Books 12-14: Loeb Classical Library*, trans. R. Marcus (London: William Heinemann, 1961), 13: 171-3.

Brief Historical Background

The Pharisees, as Josephus portrays, have been playing an active role in the Hasmonean period and onwards (140-60 BCE). The Hasmonean period is within the Hellenistic period. Saldarini writes that the major role of the Pharisees in this period is pictured as a “patron-client relations.”⁸ Moreover, the Pharisees are part of Hyrcanus’ (134-104 BCE) circle of retainers, and as a group they have achieved significant influence, explicitly over how a legitimate Jewish ruler ought to behave with regard to the ancestral laws and customs.⁹ In addition, Josephus comments that the prime role of the Pharisees during this period is closely in relation with the Hasmonean rulers through main events.¹⁰ The Pharisees are influential spiritual and religious leaders during the period of John Hyrcanus (134-104 BCE).¹¹

The Pharisees eventually have standing both in Jewish society generally and with the monarch in particular. Furthermore, the Pharisees are an influential group in most religious matters, and they seek power and authority as to control as many religious matters as possible.¹² The Pharisees love God’s laws that whoever please them would

⁸ Both the Pharisees and Jesus are probably perceived as patrons by the mass of people with whom they dealt. The “patron-client” relations are common in the ancient Mediterranean world and survive there in varied forms to the present day. More information sees, Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 56-59.

⁹ Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 87.

¹⁰ F. Josephus, *The Jewish War: Books I-III: Loeb Classical Library*, trans. H. S. T. J. Thackeray (London: William Heinemann, 1961), 1: 5.2-3, 110-14; 1: 29.2, 571; 2: 17.2-3, 410-11; Josephus, *The Jewish Antiquities: Books 12-14: Loeb Classical Library*, 13: 10.5-7, 288-99; 13: 15.5-16.6, 398-432; F. Josephus, *The Jewish Antiquities: Books 15-17: Loeb Classical Library*, trans. R. Marcus and A. Wikgren (London: William Heinemann, 1963), 15: 1.1, 3-4; 15: 10.4, 370; 17: 2.4-3.1, 41-47; F. Josephus, *The Life against Apion: Loeb Classical Library*, trans. H. S. T. J. Thackeray (London: William Heinemann, 1926), 38: 190-91; See also Lester L. Grabbe, *An Introduction to First Century Judaism, History and Religion of the Jews in the Time of Nehemiah, the Maccabees, Hillel and Jesus* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 42.

¹¹ Josephus, *The Jewish Antiquities: Books 12-14: Loeb Classical Library*, 13: 5, 288-92. See also Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 86-87.

¹² Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 87; Grabbe, *An*

gain the favor of God.¹³ According to Saldarini's sources, the Pharisees continue to seek influence and political power during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus¹⁴ (103-76 BCE), but by the time that Alexander is on his throne, the Pharisees are out of favor.¹⁵ He severely punishes those who rise against him. Josephus asserts that the Pharisees hold considerable power and authority during the reign of Salome Alexandra (76-67 BCE).¹⁶ During the reign of Salome Alexander, the Pharisees are committed to observe a strict Jewish way of life based on devotions to the covenant and Torah. They are committed to knowing, interpreting, and observing the ancestral laws of Judaism. Indeed, they long to build up a holy community of Israel.¹⁷ When Salome is on throne, the Pharisees are a powerful group, but they misuse their authority and exercise their power excessively on Judaism community.

After the death of Salome Alexander (47-46 BCE), the Herodian family gains Rome's favor. Herod the Great is enthroned with Roman support. As Sander's sources state, the Pharisees who live in their past glory are in an ineffective position during the reign of Herod the Great, though they remain as a substantial group socially and

Introduction to First Century Judaism, History and Religion of the Jews in the Time of Nehemiah, the Maccabees, Hillel and Jesus, 43.

¹³ Josephus, *The Jewish Antiquities: Books 12-14: Loeb Classical Library*, 13: 5, 288-92; Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 86.

¹⁴ Alexander Jannaeus is one of the sons of John Hyrcanus.

¹⁵ Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 89.

¹⁶ Josephus, *The Jewish Antiquities: Books 12-14: Loeb Classical Library*, 13, 395-403; Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 89.

¹⁷ Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 95; Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66 CE*, 383.

religiously.¹⁸ During Herodians' reign, Herod only tolerate the Pharisees opposition about religious concerns. He would have crushed them at all costs for interference in political issues.¹⁹ By the time the Herodians becomes a great power, the Pharisaic community has begun to concentrate more on the study of the Torah and its interpretation. They likewise focus more on their synagogue, and the practice of ritual purity.

The Pharisees and the synagogue are inseparable. Moreover, they are highly associated with a local synagogue ruler to align practice with the Pharisaic *halakhah*, and to debate with other groups concerning the interpretation of the Torah.²⁰ Therefore, the Pharisees conceptualize the tradition of the Torah in their synagogues. One of the prominent events during the Herod the Great's reign in the early first century CE is the emergence of the two most popular Pharisaic leaders – Hillel and Shammai.²¹ At this juncture, Pharisaism is being torn apart by internal clashes, such as the rise of Zealots, and the constant rivalry between the houses of the Pharisaic leaders, as mentioned earlier – Hillel and Shammai.²² Generally, the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai are

¹⁸ Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66 CE*, 395.

¹⁹ F. Josephus, *The Jewish Antiquities: Books 15-17: Loeb Classical Library*, trans. R. Marcus and A. Wikgren (London: William Heinemann, 1963), 17, 42-45; J. Schaper, "The Pharisees" in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. W Horbury and W. D. Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3:420.

²⁰ A. Runesson, "The Origins of the Synagogue in Past and Present Research – Some Comments on Definitions, Theories, and Sources," *Studia Theologica* 57 (2003): 60-76; A. Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue: A Socio-Historical Study* (Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001), 222. For detailed information, read A. Runesson, "Rethinking of Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 1 (2008): 95-132.

²¹ L. H. Schiffman, "Beit Hillel and Beith Shammai," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. R. J. Zw Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 108; I. M. Gafni, "The Historical Background," in *The Literature of the Sages*, ed. S. Safrai and P. J. Tomson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 10.

²² J. Schaper, "The Pharisees" in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. W Horbury and W.

the titles of the two parties that conflicted with each other over the interpretation of the Torah. Specifically, the House of Hillel is moderate: flexible and willing to teach the laws to anyone and to make it applicable in daily life. Meanwhile, the House of Shammai is conservative: stricter in the interpretation of the laws and its practices. Additionally, the House of Shammai directs their teachings to noble families and refuses to teach the laws to commoners. The House of Hillel discourages political involvement, whereas the House of Shammai strongly stands for both religious-political involvement. The Shammaic Pharisees remain as the dominator in their community until the fall of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE. As Gafni remarks, the debates between the two houses are not conclusively resolved even after the fall of Jerusalem. The process is visibly reflected in the Mishnah.²³

The Pharisees in Post-70 CE

The Pharisaic community, under the leadership of one of the Hillelites, namely Yohanan ben Zakkai²⁴ became the leading community of the Jews after the fall of Jerusalem. Yohanan ben Zakkai is an important Jerusalemite Hillelite teacher and the

D. Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3:423.

²³ I. M. Gafni, "The Historical Background," 11.

²⁴ Yohanan ben Zakkai is a disciple of both the Houses of Hillel and Shammai based on the description in m.*Abot* 2:8 as "Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai received the law from Hillel and from Shammai" in H. Danby, trans., *The Mishnah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 448. Additionally, Yohanan ben Zakkai is described as the disciple of Hillel. Thus, majority of scholars see him as the disciple of Hillel rather than Shammai in Ben Zion Bokser, trans., *The Talmud: The Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 223; I. B. Gottlieb, "Yohanan Ben Zakkai" in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 748.

founder of Yavneh.²⁵ They against the Christians with the Matthean community.²⁶ The Pharisees are the prime dominator from 175 BCE till 135 CE, and they recruit many followers.²⁷ Countless legal disputes between the House of Hillel and House of Shammai take place from pre-70 CE till after post-70 CE.²⁸ The disputes after post-70 CE have shifted from the two houses to individual rabbinic masters.²⁹ In spite of the legal disputes, they learn to accept the rabbis' individual differences and appear to maintain social stability. In actuality, they become tolerant and foster legal diversity within the Jewish community.³⁰ The fall of the Jerusalem temple has significant effect for every Jew since the temple is the heart of every cult. Both individual and communal prayers, as well as the study of the Torah (inclusive of the Oral and Written Law), the practice of Torah, and the performance of good deeds replace the temple sacrifice. The emphasis after the fall of the Jerusalem temple, on the whole, shift from the temple rites to the practice of daily purity.³¹ This shift is prominent in the history of Judaism because it has eventually altered the Judaism's routine. The alteration is obvious in which the emphasis has shifted from

²⁵ J. Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of the Pharisaic Judaism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973), 122.

²⁶ W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 106.

²⁷ Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66 CE*, 400. See also Hyam Maccoby, *Revolution in Judea* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1980), 164-167.

²⁸ Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of the Pharisaic Judaism*, 100.

²⁹ Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*. Library of Early Christianity 7 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 228-29.

³⁰ Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 228; Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of the Pharisaic Judaism*, 121.

³¹ Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of the Pharisaic Judaism*, 91-92; Runesson, "Rethinking of Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict," 109-10; M. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), 44.

temple-centered sacrifice to daily purity-centered ritual.

The New Testament Period

The New Testament evidently finds the Pharisees remaining effectively in power and authority under the Roman political supremacy. Rivkin summarizes the situation, “The Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles Paul all attest to the hegemony of the Pharisees. The overarching framework of presuppositions, laws and modes of communication is so Pharisaic that Jesus, Paul, and the earliest disciples could confront the Pharisees only with tools the Pharisees have devised and fashioned.”³² The Pharisees initiate the Pharisaism movement, which Deines defines,

as a separate movement *within* the nation for the nation, whose legitimacy was indeed *accepted* by large parts of the people, even though its requirements were not *observed* to an equal extent. This provides us in my opinion also with justification to consider Pharisaism as normative Judaism, not because all *lived* according to Pharisaic halakhah, but also Pharisaism was by the majority acknowledged as [the] legitimate and authentic interpretation of the divine will for the chosen nation.³³

The Pharisees played an extremely prominent role in the first century. In addition, The Pharisees’ movement named as *Pharisaism* is the dominant movement of Judaism in the first century. Maccoby contends that “asserting the existence of a normative Judaism in the first century, and which actually goes back to identifying this normative Judaism with Pharisaism, in accordance with the copious ancient testimony to this effect.”³⁴

³² Rivkin, *A Hidden Revolution*, 275.

³³ R. Deines, “The Pharisees Between ‘Judaisms’ and ‘Common Judaism,’” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, vol. 1, The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2001), 501.

³⁴ Maccoby, *Jesus the Pharisees*, 76.

Who are the Pharisees? Josephus remarks,

the Pharisees, who are considered the most accurate interpreters of the laws, and hold the position of the leading sect, attribute everything to Fate and to God; they hold that to act rightly or otherwise rests, indeed, for the most part with men, but that in each action Fate co-operates. Every soul, they maintain, is imperishable, but the soul of the good alone passes into another body, while the souls of the wicked suffer eternal punishment... The Pharisees are affectionate to each other and cultivate harmonious relations with the community.³⁵

Amos stresses that if Pharisaism is normative Judaism, most Jews are by definition “Pharisees.” Most of the sixty-seven occurrences (out of ninety-eight times) of the words “the Jews” refers to the “Pharisees.”³⁶ Interestingly, Jesus and His disciples never reference themselves as “Pharisees.” The only person in the New Testament who does is the apostle Paul. In the New Testament, the term “Pharisees” always denotes people who exercise authority as officials of some sort. The terms “Pharisees,” “the teachers of the law,” and the “Jews” frequently designate officials whose primary duty is enforcement of the Torah, particularly during the New Testament period.³⁷ Therefore, “the Jews” and “Pharisees” often signify “officialdom,” which Saldarini describes as “official representative of the governing class” during the period in the New Testament.³⁸

The Pharisees in the New Testament. The Pharisees rank among the prime in the number of occurrences in the New Testament. Not only does the Greek word *Φαρισαίων* occur ninety-eight times,³⁹ but it is broadly supplemented by various

³⁵ Josephus, *The Jewish War: Books I-III: Loeb Classical Library*, 2: 8.14, 162-63, 166.

³⁶ Amos, *Hypocrites or Heroes? The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Pharisees in the New Testament*, 134.

³⁷ Amos, *Hypocrites or Heroes? The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Pharisees in the New Testament*, 136.

³⁸ Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 189.

³⁹ Amos, *Hypocrites or Heroes? The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Pharisees in the New*

alternative terms such as “scribes, teacher of the law” (Greek γραμματεῖς, sixty-three times), “lawyer” (Greek νομικοὶ, nine times),⁴⁰ and “teacher of the law” (three times). The phrase “scribes, teacher of the law” (Greek γραμματεῖς) occurs twenty-two times in Matthew, twenty-one times in Mark, fourteen times in Luke, one time in John, four times in Acts, and one time in 1 Corinthians.⁴¹ Additionally, the word “lawyer (Greek νομικοὶ) occurs nine times; once in Matthew, six in Luke, and twice in Titus. A majority of these words are often used synonymously or interchangeably with “Pharisees,” although they sometimes carry distinct nuances that must be discerned from the context.⁴² The phrase “scribes, teacher of the law” (Greek γραμματεῖς) signifies someone who can read and write; it is often associated with “Pharisees (Greek Φαρισαίων), nineteen times in the New Testament.⁴³ Noticeably, when “scribes, teacher of the law” is used in conjunction with the word “Pharisees,”⁴⁴ both nouns are frequently plural and always precede “Pharisees” (Greek Φαρισαίων), except in Mark 7:1, 5 and Luke 15:2. No fewer than twenty-four occurrences of “scribes, teacher of the law” (Greek γραμματεῖς) appear in conjunction

Testament, 134.

⁴⁰ Most references of the word “lawyers” appear in the Gospel of Luke (7:30; 11:45; 11:46, 52; 14:3).

⁴¹ The Greek word γραμματεῖς occurs sixty-three times in total. The solitary instance in John 8:3 appears in the passage concerning the woman is caught in the act of adultery, which many scholars consider out of place in the Fourth Gospel, and it belongs properly in the Synoptic Gospels. See Amos, *Hypocrites or Heroes? The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Pharisees in the New Testament*, 12n3.

⁴² Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 134, 144, 174; Amos, *Hypocrites or Heroes? The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Pharisees in the New Testament*, 1-2, 6.

⁴³ Matt 5:20; 15:1; 23:2, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; Mark 2:16; 7:1, 5; Luke 5:21, 30; 6:7; 11:44, 53; 15:2; John 8:3.

⁴⁴ That nineteenth of the sixty-three occurrences of “teacher of the law” (Greek γραμματεῖς) in the Synoptic Gospels are in conjunction with the “Pharisees” (Greek Φαρισαίων) may accord with Rivkin’s conclusion that the Pharisees constituted “the scholar class of the Torah” in Rivkin, *A Hidden Revolution*, 179.

with the chief priests, who are Sadducees rather than the Pharisees. This conjunction represents their administrative assistants or legal advisors rather than Pharisaic teachers of the law.⁴⁵ Amos writes that the phrase “scribes and Pharisees” is in regular usage and the two often go together naturally.⁴⁶ The word “lawyer (Greek νομικοί) is commonly linked with the word “Pharisees” (Greek Φαρισαίων) in two of its nine New Testament occurrences – Luke 7:30 and 14:3.

Many passages in the New Testament label the Pharisees as self-righteous or hypocritical persons.⁴⁷ The Synoptic Gospels imply that the Pharisees (join with other religious leaders) plot to kill Jesus (Matt 12:14; Mark 3:6). The Fourth Gospel documents the similar plot that leads Jesus to address the Pharisees, “You are of your father the devil” (John 8:40-44).

The Pharisees principal agenda in the New Testament. Numerous aspects of the agenda of the Pharisees can be discussed here, but some are beyond the scope of this study. Thus, only two principal aspects are outlined: First, dealing with ritual purity. Second, dealing with interpreting and enforcing the laws. After the fall of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, the focus of the Pharisees moved from temple-centric to ritual purity centric. Wright accentuates that the prime agenda of the Pharisees in the New Testament times as “the Pharisees, broadly speaking, should be understood in terms of an overriding concern for *purity*... but... the main issue at stake for a Pharisee is not simply ‘how to

⁴⁵ Amos, *Hypocrites or Heroes? The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Pharisees in the New Testament*, 135-36.

⁴⁶ Amos, *Hypocrites or Heroes? The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Pharisees in the New Testament*, 13.

⁴⁷ For example, Matt 23:13-29, Jesus addresses the Pharisees as “hypocrites” six times.

maintain one's own personal purity,' but 'how to be a loyal Jew faced with pagan oppression from outside and disloyal Jews from within.'"⁴⁸ This emphasis is reflected in Matthew 15:1-6 and Mark 7:1-13 in which Jesus disciples' fail to wash their hands before eating. In addition, the Pharisaic concern is for ritual purity similar for the priests in Leviticus though most priests Pharisees apart from the high priests who are mostly Sadducees.⁴⁹ The second agenda of the Pharisaic concern is the interpretation and enforcement of the laws. Jesus acknowledges the role of the Pharisees as interpreters of the law (Matt 23:2f; cf. John 9:22; 12:42). Based on the knowledge of the laws that they have acquired in the past; they have sufficient ability to interpret the laws and are capable to teach others. The Pharisees' duties regarding the laws do not stop at its interpretations and enactment. The Pharisees are responsible for the enforcement of the laws. The New Testament Scripture clearly highlight that the Pharisees introduce legislation to excommunicate any Jews who acknowledges that Jesus is the Messiah. In the light of this excommunication, the Pharisees have the authority and power to administer excommunications and, to some extent, to determine who is and who is not a member of the Jewish community.⁵⁰ Saldarini concludes that the Pharisees own a great power to act as "supervisory role" in Jewish society.⁵¹ Several scriptural examples include Matthew 9:11-13; 12:2; 15:1-6; Mark 7:1-13.⁵² In reality, the Pharisees have arrogated the main

⁴⁸ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 83.

⁴⁹ Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66 CE*, 438-40; Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 217.

⁵⁰ Amos, *Hypocrites or Heroes? The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Pharisees in the New Testament*, 143-44.

⁵¹ Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 189.

⁵² Though the first and third of these incidents in the Scripture verses do not infringe the laws,

functions of legislature, judiciary, legal professional, and police officer. In summary, they play a significant role in the Jewish society, and have great influence over the power and authority of the Roman empire.

The encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees.⁵³ Jesus and the Pharisees have many encounters recorded in the Synoptic Gospels. Encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees regularly take the form of a conflict over Jesus' teaching and the Pharisees' own interpretation of the law.⁵⁴ The precise reason behind the scenes for the Pharisees' objections are often unclear, but their hostility toward Jesus is purposeful and is never far from the surface. Each encounter gradually worsens the relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees. Finally, they have plotted a plan to kill Jesus. Table 2 summarizes the major encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees with relevant parallel references.⁵⁵

Matthew's portrayal of the Pharisees. Matthew's arguable preference for the term "Pharisees" (Greek Φαρισαῖος) and the unique and unusual contexts in which Matthew employed it results in an impression of the Pharisees which is distinct from other ancient portrayal. Contrary to Mark, Matthew offers many more prominent references to the Pharisees, which are dispersed throughout the Gospel. The portrayal of the Pharisees in Matthew poses several particular challenges to the exegete since

they appear that the role of the Pharisees is enforcement. The oral law, which as an interpretation of Torah, they regarded as equally binding with it.

⁵³ The "Pharisees" in this section represents the teachers of the law and the other Jewish leaders throughout the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John.

⁵⁴ Mary Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 254:86-87.

⁵⁵ Table 2 is extracted, modified, and summarized from Amos, *Hypocrites or Heroes? The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Pharisees in the New Testament*, 13-71.

countless Matthean references to the Pharisees pertain to the distinctive concerns and themes of the Gospel.⁵⁶ Therefore, this section focuses only on more specific portrayal with a direct impact on the Pharisees in Matthew. Some significant issues that arise from the way that the portrayal of the Pharisees relate to that of other Jewish groups in the Gospel will be briefly presented. A concern with the textual units is sidelined. A detailed and exhaustive exegesis of Matthew 23 will be conducted in the next chapter.

The Pharisees hold predominate leadership in Matthew's Gospel. The foremost portrayal of the Pharisees in Matthew shows that they are highly predominant in the Jewish community. In fact, in the narrative of the four Gospels, the word "Pharisees" dominates the social landscape.⁵⁷ Matthew repeatedly portray the Pharisees as distinct from the populace, enjoying privilege and influence compatible with their leadership status. Several prominent studies of Matthew regarding Jewish leadership affirm that the Pharisees are the most prominent of all the leadership groups. Matthew redacted his sources to increase their prominence.⁵⁸ The Pharisees, when pair with the chief priests, shared their power and influence (Matt 21:45; 27:62-66).⁵⁹ Matthew's redaction of

⁵⁶ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 70-71.

⁵⁷ The word "Pharisees" leaves around 200 mentions, approximately close to the potential total of 240 mentions of prominent theological keywords as "cross" (twenty-eight times), "remission, forgiveness" (seventeen times), and "redemption" (ten times). For more explanation, see Amos, *Hypocrites or Heroes? The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Pharisees in the New Testament*, 1.

⁵⁸ Some prominent studies include: R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Exeter, NH: Paternoster Press, 1989), 220-1; G. D. Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel according to St Matthew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 120-1; Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 84; Andrew J. Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social Word of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 80; D. C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 119.

⁵⁹ The chief priests occupy an undoubtedly privilege and authoritative position: they sat on the Sanhedrin, have access to both the High Priest and governor and command a guard of soldiers (Matt 27:65-66). Urban C. Von Wahlde, "The Relationships between Pharisees and Chief Priests: Some Observations

Markan materials support this view. Matthew maintained all Markan references to the Pharisees and replaced Mark's "scribes," "elders" and/or "chief priests" with "Pharisees" (Matthew 21:45; 22:15, 34f, 41).⁶⁰ In many cases, Matthew's probable redaction of his sources suggests that the evangelist increased the prevalence of the term "Pharisees." They are, in actuality, neither ubiquitous; nor does Matthew's redaction serve to include the Pharisees at the expense of all other oppositions. The chief priests, elders, and scribes feature significantly in the events leading to Jesus' passion without the inclusion of the Pharisees. Thus, Matthew places the scribes alongside the Pharisees, and occasionally he refers to the action of the Jewish scribes apart from either the Pharisees or chief priests and elders (Matt 7:29; 9:3, 17:10).⁶¹ Garland concurs that although the Pharisees positively receive greater prominence in Matthew than in the other Synoptic Gospels, they are not always the focus of the opposition.⁶²

The Pharisees are teachers of the law. The Pharisees not only served as predominant leaders; they are also the teachers of the law. Matthew frequently associates the Pharisees and scribes as a learned class. They teach, although without authority (Matt

on the Texts in Matthew, John and Josephus," *New Testament Studies* 42 (1996): 518-20.

⁶⁰ Note that the Pharisees also replace the scribes of the Pharisees (Matt 9:11), and disciples of the Pharisees (Matt 9:14 and 22:15). The scribes are omitted from Matthew's parallels to Mark 9:14; 11:27; 14:43 and 15:1, yet they are neither replaced nor leave the Pharisees as sole opponents, but rather focus attention on the chief priests and elders. For more information about Matthew's redaction of Q material, see Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 73-76.

⁶¹ Pickup suggests that since "scribes of the Pharisees" in Mark 2:16 may have influenced Matthew's strong association (even identification) of the two groups, "scribes" is only retained in Matt 9:3 because it precedes Mark 2:16 in Martin Pickup, "Matthew's and Mark's Pharisees," in *In Quest of the Historical Pharisees*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Bruce D. Chilton (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2007), 95. See also Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 75.

⁶² David E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 52 (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 45.

7:9), which probably means without appealing to their personal authority. Their opinion is both sought (Matt 2:4) and widely known (Matt 17:10). Matthew's Pharisees form opinions and instructed others: their teachings are cautiously regarded (Matt 23:4, 13, 15). Matthew placed a higher emphasis on the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees because teaching is a profound theme, specifically in Matthew 15 and 23. Jesus' denunciations against the Pharisees indicates that the scribes and Pharisees enjoy some degree of influence among the Jewish community, especially reference to their teachings. They have regarded themselves authoritative in their teachings, allowing them to promulgate their opinions and teachings among their followers and potential converts.⁶³ The influence of the scribes and Pharisees is a malign alternative to that offered by Jesus and His disciples because they have shut off the kingdom of heaven from others (Matt 23:13). Moreover, the teaching role of the Pharisees and the scribes is implied in Jesus' denunciation of them as "blind guides" (Matt 15:14; 23:26), and with the scribes (Matt 23:24). The description "guide" assumes their role as leaders, teachers or exemplars.⁶⁴ The phrase "blind guides" literally describes the Pharisees who have been entrusted with the task of leading the people of God, but in reality, led them astray.⁶⁵ Johnson acknowledges that Jewish rhetoricians, such as Josephus and Philo, and literature like 1QS 4:14 adopted figurative "blindness" as a standardized charge against the opponent.⁶⁶

⁶³ Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 49.

⁶⁴ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 81.

⁶⁵ Alistair I. Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen? A Study of Jesus as Judge in Matthew 21-25* (Waynesboro, VA: Paternoster, 2004), 106.

⁶⁶ Luke T. Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108, no. 3 (1989): 440.

The act of misleading the “blind” is condemned in Leviticus 19:14 and Deuteronomy 27:18. Moreover, a blind person is entirely dependent on his guide, and if his guide is also blind then “both will fall.” The consequences of assuming the role inappropriately are serious.⁶⁷ The Pharisees’ claimed to be the leaders of the people faced similar consequences. Loader comments that Matthew uses a rhetorical convention but demonstrates its application to the (scribes and) Pharisees in particular. Hence, Jesus’ denouncement the Pharisees as “blind” applies to a polemic convention indicating that He opposes them. This denunciation signifies that the Pharisees are His opponents. Matthew employs this particular denunciation aspect as a standard polemic in his composition, particularly in Matthew 15 and 23.⁶⁸ Loader concludes from Matthew’s composition of this denunciation that the Pharisees are unable to perceive the right course and thus are unqualified to guide others.

The Pharisees are flawed in their interpretation of Scripture. The theme of the Pharisees’ flawed interpretation is discernible in Mark but emphasized by Matthew. In Matthew’s account, the Pharisees are considered to be among the Jewish leadership and exercised a particular role as qualified teachers of the law. They specifically love status and privilege (Matt 23:6-7), and yet they are “blind guides” whose teachings are burdensome (Matt 23:4). Their converts inherit their faults (Matt 23:15). Although the Pharisees practice a daily routine of piety and appear pious, they are labeled “hypocrites.” The Pharisaic hypocrisy marks one of Matthew’s prime portrayals denoting that the

⁶⁷ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 81.

⁶⁸ William R. G. Loader, *Jesus’ Attitude towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels*, WissUNT zum Neuen Testament Series, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 215.

Pharisees' outward appearance and behavior does not reflect their inner state and attitude. Marshall asserts that the Pharisees' piety is illusory, and thus their status is transitory.⁶⁹ Matthew repeatedly documents in his account some threatens that the Pharisees would be replaced.⁷⁰

Table 2. The Encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees

Text	The Encounters⁷¹	Parallel References
Matt 2:4	Herod enquired concerning the birth of Messiah	-
Matt 3:7	The Pharisees and Sadducees visited John the Baptist	John 1:19, 24
Matt 5:20	Higher righteousness	-
Matt 7:29	Jesus taught with authority	Mark 1:22
Matt 8:19f	A would-be disciple	-
Matt 9:3	Healing of the paralyzed man	Mark 2:6f; Luke 5:17-21
Matt 9:10-13	Dining with tax collector and sinners	Mark 2:16f; Luke 5:30-32
Matt 9:14	The question about fasting	Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33

⁶⁹ Matthew took over Mark's parable which warns that the vineyard will be given to other tenants (Mark 12:9) and clarifies its relevance to Jesus' audience of the chief priests and Pharisees (Matt 21:43; cf. Matt 12:41-42; 21:31-32) in Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 124.

⁷⁰ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 124.

⁷¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are derived from English Standard Version (ESV).

Table 2 continued

Text	The Encounters⁷²	Parallel References
Matt 9:34 ⁷³	Exorcism using demonic power	-
Matt 12:2	Breaking the Sabbath	Mark 2:24; Luke 6:2
Matt 12:14	The plot to kill Jesus	Mark 3:6; Luke 6:7
-	The Pharisees rejected God's way	Luke 7:29f ⁷⁴
-	Jesus dined in a Pharisee's home	Luke 7:36-50
Matt 12:24	Exorcism using Beelzebub	Mark 3:22
Matt 12:38 ⁷⁵	The request for a miraculous sign	-
Matt 13:52	Teachers of the law instructed about the kingdom	-
Matt 15:1-6	Breaking the tradition of the elders	Mark 7:1-13
Matt 15:12	The Pharisees took offense	Luke 11:45
Matt 16:1	The Pharisees (and Sadducees) asked for a sign	Mark 8:11
Matt 16:6	The yeast of the Pharisees (and Sadducees)	Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1
Matt 16:21	Jesus' first passion prediction	Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22
Matt 17:10-13	The question about Elijah	Mark 9:11-14
Matt 19:3	The question about divorce	Mark 10:2
Matt 20:18	Jesus' third passion prediction	Mark 10:33
-	The Pharisees asked Jesus to rebuke His disciples	Luke 19:39f

⁷² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are derived from English Standard Version (ESV).

⁷³ A similar incident is recorded in Matt 12:24, paralleled in Mark 3:22.

⁷⁴ Surely Luke is using hyperbole here: not everyone who has heard Jesus responded positively to Him. In addition, certainly not all the Pharisees rejected Jesus, but this is probably the general trend.

⁷⁵ Presumably, these Pharisees are the same as the teachers of the law who according to Mark 3:22 has come from Jerusalem. See also Matt 16:1 and Mark 8:1.

Table 2 continued

Text	The Encounters⁷⁶	Parallel References
Matt 21:15	The chief priests and the teachers of the law are indignant at Jesus' reception	-
-	The chief priests and the teachers of the law plot to kill Jesus	Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47
Matt 21:23	A delegation from the Sanhedrin questioned Jesus' authority	Mark 11:27; Luke 20:1
Matt 21:45f	The Pharisees understood the parable of the wicked tenants	Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19
Matt 22:15	The Pharisees (and Herodians) laid a trap	Mark 12:13; Luke 11:53f; 20:19f
-	The Sadducees' question	Luke 20:39
Matt 22:34f	The greatest commandment	Mark 12:28-32; Luke 10:25
Matt 22:41-46	Jesus challenged the Pharisees	Mark 12:35
Matt 23:2-4	Jesus acknowledged the Pharisees as teachers of the law	Luke 11:46
Matt 23:5-7	A warning about the teachers of the law	Mark 12:38-40; Luke 11:43; 20:46f
Matt 23:13-15	Woe to the teachers of the law (and the Pharisees)	Luke 11:52
Matt 23:29-36	The ending of the denunciation of the Pharisees	Luke 11:47-51
-	Friendly Pharisees advised Jesus to flee from Herod	Luke 13:31
-	Jesus challenged the Pharisees about the Sabbath	Luke 14:1-6
-	The Pharisees and teachers of the law complained about Jesus' befriending sinners	Luke 15:1f
-	The Pharisees asked about the kingdom of God	Luke 17:21f

⁷⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are derived from English Standard Version (ESV).

Table 2 continued

Text	The Encounters⁷⁷	Parallel References
-	The parable of the Pharisees and tax collector	Luke 18:10-14
-	The chief priests and teachers of the law plot to arrest and kill Jesus	Mark 14:1; Luke 19:47
-	Judas brought a crowd to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane	Mark 14:43; [John 18:3]
Matt 26:57	Jesus is brought to the Sanhedrin	Mark 14:53; Luke 22:66
-	Jesus is handed over to Pilate	Mark 15:1
-	The trial before Pilate	Luke 23:10
Matt 27:41	Jesus is mocked on the cross	Mark 15:31
Matt 27:62	The Pharisees and chief priests approached Pilate	-

A Closer Look at the Portrayal of Matthean Pharisees

It is worthwhile examining the correlation between Jesus and the Pharisees in prior to the exposition of the seven woe oracles in Matthew 23. As Cook writes, Matthew 23 is considered “the most systematic and sustained attack against the sects of Judaism in general and the Pharisees in particular.”⁷⁸ The Jewish leaders from various sects appeared aggressive, persistently looking for possible opportunities to denigrate Jesus. They specifically possess an evil motivation to kill Jesus, the Son of God. Matthew references

⁷⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are derived from English Standard Version (ESV).

⁷⁸ Donald E. Cook, “A Gospel Portrait of the Pharisees,” *Review & Expositor* 84, no. 2 (1987): 226.

the Pharisees twenty-nine times,⁷⁹ significantly more than Mark⁸⁰ and Luke.⁸¹

Additionally, Matthew designated the Pharisees' group both singularly and in relation to others. The Pharisees' group included the Sadducees, the scribes, the chief priests, and the Herodians. The Jewish group who emerged as Jesus' opponents during Jesus' time are the scribes and Pharisees, the Sadducees, the chief priests, and the Herodians. The Gospel writers largely pair Jesus' opponents either the scribes and Pharisees, or the Pharisees and Sadducees. At times, it is the Pharisees alone. Jesus' opponents have become the pivotal theme in the Gospel's narratives.⁸²

The Portrayal of Matthean Pharisees in Matthew 23

This sub-section deals with one of the major groups of Jewish leaders in Matthew 23 – the Pharisees. It is a pivotal matter to comprehend and assess the Pharisees

⁷⁹ Matt. 23:14 is omitted by ψ , B, D, L, θ and many other witnesses.

⁸⁰ Cook addresses that Mark refers to the Pharisees on relatively few occasions. Three times they are singled out for individual treatment (Mark 2:24; 8:11; 10:2); three times they are linked with the scribes (Mark 2:16; 7:1, 5), three times, with the Herodians or Herod (Mark 3:6; 8:15; 12:13); and once each they are related to the disciples of John (Mark 2:18) and to "all the Jews" (Mark 7:3). When observed against the background of the Markan outline, the Pharisees are mentioned ten times in the Galilean section of the gospel narrative in related sets of references (Mark 2:16, 18/2:24; 3:6/7:1, 3, 5/8:11, 15). Two of the sets include one reference to the Pharisees alone and another in which they are related to a second group or person (Mark 2:24; 3:6/8:11, 15). The two remaining sets have references only to the Pharisees linked to another group or person (Mark 2:16, 18/7:1, 3, 5). The reference to the Pharisees alone in Mark 10:2 occurs on the way to Jerusalem, and Mark's final mention of them (linked with Herod in Mark 12:13) occurs after Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem. It is significant that the Pharisees do not appear in the passion narrative. For more information, see Cook, "A Gospel Portrait of the Pharisees," 221-23.

⁸¹ The term Pharisee (or Pharisees) appears twenty-seven times in fifteen pericopes in the Lukan narrative. As with Mark and Matthew, Luke identifies the sect singularly or in relation to other groups (teachers of the law, lawyers, scribes) in J. A. Ziesler has an instructive footnote on the Pharisees and the groups to which the Evangelists link them in his articles, "Luke and the Pharisees," *New Testament Studies* 25 (1979): 150.

⁸² Boris Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: Their Redaction, Form and Relevance for the Relationship between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 323.

interaction with Jesus by looking more closely to its narrative account. In addition, this sub-section critically analyzes Matthew's intention in portraying of the Pharisees in Matthew 23.⁸³

Why does Matthew focus on the Pharisees? Matthew quotes the Pharisees as the main players in the controversial narrative account more than the Markan's and Lukan's narrations. Matthew often changes Markan's "scribes" into "Pharisees" several times in his narration. For instance, the "scribes of the Pharisees" in Mark 2:16 is summarized as "Pharisees" in Matthew 9:11. The scribes who come from Jerusalem in Mark 3:22 are designated as the Pharisees in Matthew 12:24. Although Mark's scribes (7:1, 5) are highlighted together with the Pharisees in Matthew 15:1, Matthew clearly designates that the criticism is for the Pharisees (Matt 15:12). Another example is "the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders" in Mark 11:27, 12:1-12 who are identified in Matthew 21:45 as "the chief priests and the Pharisees." A scribe who asks about the greatest commandments in Mark 12:28-34 becomes a Pharisee in Matthew 22:34-40. The presence of the scribes is seen when Jesus gives the riddle about the Messianic sonship (Mark 12:35-37), but Matthew alters it to the Pharisees (Matt 22:41-46). Jesus' criticisms of the scribes' love of honor, banquets and places in Mark 12:38-40 becomes the most detailed and sharpest criticisms directed against "the scribes and Pharisees" in Matthew 23.⁸⁴ In sum, Matthew often appears to consider Mark's scribes as the Pharisees. Indeed,

⁸³ We follow Matthew's redaction of the Pharisaic matter on Mark and the Q-source he shares with Luke. In addition, we follow the two-document hypothesis, despite having complexities, arguments, and problems, it is one of the most well-known and widely accepted conclusions of the twentieth century. This hypothesis accepted that Mark is the earliest written gospel, that Matthew and Luke used Mark and a second source designated as "Q."

⁸⁴ Pickup, "Matthew's and Mark's Pharisees," 93-94.

Matthew makes this point clear in 22:34-36. Although Matthew does not present all the scribes as identical with the Pharisees, there is an “unholy alliance” between individuals from different groups against Jesus.⁸⁵ Concisely, Matthew 23 is the obvious evidence that Matthew assembles and puts them all into one basket regardless of their differences.⁸⁶ In all these references, Matthew intentionally retains the Pharisees as the focus of the major controversial issues in his narrative account.

The presence of the Matthean Pharisees. Structurally, Matthew provides the Pharisees’ presence in every region watching closely over the words and deeds of Jesus in three broad areas. Matthew first remarks the Pharisees as the prime opponents of Jesus. Matthew introduces the Pharisees in the wilderness of Judea where John the Baptist is baptizing those who have repented in the river Jordan (Matt 3:1, 5-12). Matthew’s introduction to the Pharisees is awfully hostile (Matt 3:7-10)! Second, Matthew continuously highlights the presence of the Pharisees in Galilee after the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:17-20; 6:1-5, 16; 9:9-17, 32-34; 12:1-14, 22-37, 38-42; 15:1-20; 16:1-4). The controversy between the Pharisees and Jesus is intensified when Jesus heals a demonic man who is both blind and mute (Matt 12:22-37) in Galilee. Third, the presence of the Pharisees in Jerusalem is considered the peak of the controversy between the Pharisees and Jesus (Matt 19:1-9). From Matthew 21:23ff, the setting is in Jerusalem and the temple became the focal point of their controversy which leads to Jesus being arrested

⁸⁵ A. Runesson, “Purity, Holiness, and the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew’s Narrative World,” in *Purity, Holiness, and Identity in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Memory of Susan Baber*, ed. C. S. Ehrlich, A. Runesson, and E. Schuller (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 144-180, 155; J. D. Kingsbury, “The Developing Conflicts between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew’s Gospel: A Literary-Critical Study,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1987): 60-61.

⁸⁶ Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 165.

and crucified at the end. Jesus denounces the Pharisees along with the scribes calling them “hypocrites,” “blind guides,” and “blind fools” for their misconduct and evil behavior in religious roles (Matt 23). Moreover, Jesus severely engages in a polemic against the Pharisees’ lack of scriptural knowledge and their misunderstanding of God’s will, portraying them as “blind guides” (Matt 15:14; 23:16, 24) in Matthew’s account.⁸⁷ The denunciations are Jesus’ final words to the Pharisees. After this incident, the Pharisees disappear from the Matthean narrative with the exception of a brief description in Matthew 27:62-64. Matthew carries on with his account of the Pharisees’ plot to kill Jesus, which is arranged by the priests and the Jewish religious elders (Matt 26-27).

The main traits of the Matthean Pharisees. The controversies in Matthew 21:23-22:46 are a crescendo in which Jesus take on the Pharisees. The seven woe oracles that followed the controversies are all from the Pharisees’ merits and are premised on the pharisaic presuppositions (Matt 23:13-36).⁸⁸ The main traits of the Matthean Pharisees are derived from the controversies. Matthew often characterizes the Pharisees as impure. Additionally, Matthew accentuates the fact that the Pharisees are as ritually unclean as a brood of vipers (Lev 11:42). He, like Mark, portrays the Pharisees as being consistently negative and hostile to Jesus. Every appearance of the Pharisees in the narrative account became the occasion of their denunciation.⁸⁹ The denunciation becomes the polemical language that appears from the beginning in Matthew 2 and continues throughout the

⁸⁷ See the conflicts in Matt 9:10-13; 12:1-14; 15:1-20; 19:3-12; 22:34-40; 23:16-26. See also Matthias Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Kathleen Ess (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 357.

⁸⁸ Andrew R. Simmonds, “Woe to You... Hypocrites! Re-reading Matthew 23:13-36,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (2009): 349.

⁸⁹ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 122-23.

Gospel. It reaches a peak in the denouncement in Matthew 23. Table 3 summarizes the main traits of the Matthean Pharisees. Matthew intentionally underlines the Pharisees' hypocritical way of life and their misconduct in the religious arena. Matthew largely characterizes the Pharisees as "hypocrites" (nine times); "a brood of vipers" (three times); "blind guides" (three times); "blind men" (one time); "blind fools" (one time); "blind Pharisee" (one time).⁹⁰ Matthew places more frequent emphasis on the negative traits of the Pharisees. These negative traits share similarities concerning the hostility toward Jesus. Furthermore, Matthew depicts the Pharisees as evil and hypocritical blind guides and blind fools who have misled the crowds away from the kingdom of heaven.⁹¹ He gradually develops the hostility of the Pharisees toward Jesus in Galilee, in the Judean desert, and in the final destination at Jerusalem.

One of the distinctive traits of Pharisaiism rests on the Torah.⁹² The Pharisees are the scholar class of the Torah. Moreover, they are strict observers of the commandments of Torah as written in the Pentateuch, but also, they are observers of a whole compendium of oral laws that they have compiled. Since the oral laws are rooted in the Torah, they are regarded as equally binding with the written Torah.

The narrative analysis concerning the Pharisees in Matthew distinctly shows that the background setting of the text is the temple. Matthew's temple-centered motif is reinforced in Matthew 21 with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Matthew 21

⁹⁰ Janice Capel Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again* (Sheffield, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1994), 103; Mary Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 254:75.

⁹¹ Anthony J. Saldarini, "Reading Matthew without Anti-Semitism," in *The Gospel of Matthew in Current Study*, ed. David E. Aune (Cambridge Eerdmans, 2001), 168.

⁹² Rivkin, *A Hidden Revolution*, 179.

explicitly explains that the temple of God has been defiled and made into a den of robbers (Matt 21:12-13). Jesus clashes fiercely with the scribes and Pharisees and other Jewish leaders when He cleanses the temple of God. Jesus likewise points out their inadequacy as Jewish leaders in three parables, namely the parable of the two sons, the parable of the wicked tenants, and the parable of the wedding banquet.⁹³ Matthew 23 tersely marks Jesus' denunciation and challenge of some of the Pharisaic groups. Jesus lashes out at the scribes and Pharisees revealing their shortcomings and failures before God. The denouncements of the seven woe oracles evidently are the peak of Jesus' rebuttal against the scribes and Pharisees. After the text reached its climax with Jesus' denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus predicts the falls of the temple. The literary setting presents Jesus as the Messiah who is severely rejected by the scribes and Pharisees and other Jewish leaders and authorities.⁹⁴

A Summary of Some Prominent Findings

The portrayal of the Pharisees reflects their attitudes about the Jewish community, the Torah, their daily piety routine, as well as their encounters with Jesus. Additionally, the portrayal of the Pharisees from the past and through the New Testament are not a monolithic body of evidence, but each period has its own style, occasion, purpose, and implication. Nonetheless, one clear and distinct similarity of the Pharisees in the New Testament periods is found: each of the Synoptic Gospel and the Fourth

⁹³ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 832; Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 117.

⁹⁴ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet*, 311-30; David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Sheffield, UK: Almond Press, 1988), 137-38.

Gospel is critical of the Pharisees and portray them in their opposition to Jesus. Many passages in Matthew exhibit the negative perspectives and flaws of the Pharisees. Additionally, Matthew multiplies the Pharisees' flaws more than the Markan and Lukan materials.⁹⁵ A summary of the prominent findings are outlined.

Table 3. The Traits of Matthean Pharisees

Text	Traits (Greek)	Traits (English)⁹⁶
Matt 3:7	γεννήματα ἔχιδνῶν	“brood of vipers”
Matt 6:5	οἱ ὑποκριταί	“the hypocrites”
Matt 12:34	γεννήματα ἔχιδνῶν	“brood of vipers”
Matt 15:7	ὑποκριταί	“hypocrites”
Matt 15:14	τυφλοὶ εἰσιν ὁδηγοί	“blind guides”
Matt 22:18	ὑποκριταί	“hypocrites”
Matt 23:13	ὑποκριταί	“hypocrites”
Matt 23:15	ὑποκριταί	“hypocrites”
Matt 23:16	ὁδηγοὶ τυφλοὶ	“blind guides”
Matt 23:17	μωροὶ καὶ τυφλοὶ	“blind fools”
Matt 23:19	τυφλοὶ	“blind men”
Matt 23:23	ὑποκριταί	“hypocrites”
Matt 23:24	ὁδηγοὶ τυφλοὶ	“blind guides”
Matt 23:25	ὑποκριταί	“hypocrites”
Matt 23:26	Φαρισαῖε τυφλέ	“blind Pharisee”
Matt 23:27	ὑποκριταί	“hypocrites”
Matt 23:29	ὑποκριταί	“hypocrites”
Matt 23:33	γεννήματα ἔχιδνῶν	“brood of vipers”

⁹⁵ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 244.

⁹⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are derived from English Standard Version (ESV).

The Historical Perspective on the Portrayal of the Pharisees

The Pharisees appeared to play significant roles as religious as well as political advisers for the Hasmonean rulers who are both kings and priests. By the time Salome Alexandra (76-67 BCE) is on the throne, the Pharisees have become a more powerful group, since they are given authority. They begin to misuse their authority and exercise their power excessively. Thus, the Pharisees lose their purpose and become political opportunists. By the time of the Herodians, the Pharisees learn and practice the Torah and eager to build the holy Jewish community in the time of the Hellenistic period. The Pharisees have showed much enthusiasm and prepared the way for a universal priesthood and Torah centric education for the entire people. The Pharisees place more emphasis on the study of the Torah, interpretation, and the practice of the ritual purity during the reign of the Herodians. After the fall of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, they have shifted from a sacrifice temple-centered to daily ritual purity-centered form of religion. The practice of daily ritual purity is a visible sign of devoted Jews for building a holy Judaic community. After 70 CE, the Pharisees inaugurate a new form of inclusive religious society for the continuation of Judaism. They focus on performing loving, kind, and good deeds for the survival of the Pharisaic community.

The New Testament Perspective on the Portrayal of the Pharisees

The Pharisaic leaders have gained much power and authority both from their own community and from the civil government in the past. They likewise have demonstrated great influence both in religious as well as political life. Not only that, the Pharisees have become overwhelming “powerful” at the time of Jesus. The Pharisees

would not tolerate any interference to their authority and power. This intolerance would come to include a plot against Jesus Himself. They plot to kill Jesus in order to maintain their status in both the Pharisaic community and Romanic community. The New Testament portray the Pharisees as a group holding a high status in the community. The Pharisees desired respect: they love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues (Matt 23:6-7). Jesus denounces the Pharisees' appearance and behavior as "hypocritical."

Concluding Remarks on the Portrayal of the Pharisees

The Pharisees possess significant leadership as a group in Matthew, but their leadership is not exclusive. The Pharisees' role overlapped that of other groups. For instance, the scribes are accused of murdering prophets (Matt 23:29-39), the Sadducees' teachings are illogical, and flawed interpretations of Scripture (Matt 22:23-33). The chief priests are also leaders (Matt 21:45) and initiate ongoing opposition to Jesus (Matt 28:11-15).⁹⁷ Nonetheless, the Pharisees are distinguished by the fact that only they collaborate with all the other opponents of Jesus, namely the Sadducees, scribes, chief priests, and Herodians.

Matthew accumulates more materials on the Pharisees than the other Synoptic Gospels. Indeed, Matthew emphasizes more of the Pharisees' negative traits.⁹⁸ Every portrayal of the Pharisees in Matthew's narrative becomes the occasion of their

⁹⁷ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 127.

⁹⁸ As Ja asserts that though Matthew closely follows Mark's account, he spends more time on the Pharisees. Matthew makes it clear in his narrative that Mark's scribes or teachers/experts in the law are the Pharisees. More details, see Layang Seng Ja, *The Pharisees in Matthew 23 Reconsidered* (Carlisle, PA: Langham Monographs, 2018), 92. See also, Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 122.

denunciation and humiliation, and at no point Matthew attempts to counteract this impression. The repetitive portrayal of the Pharisees as Jewish religious leaders and teachers of the law are reinforced by many passages in Matthew. Matthew's condemnation of the Pharisees extends to encompass the Jewish people as a whole. In truth, they become either representative of the wickedness of the people or in some way responsible for it (Matt 23:32-4), yet in Matthew 23:36, Jesus predicts that blood-guilt would come upon this generation. Jesus likewise laments the whole city of Jerusalem.⁹⁹

The Pharisees play a prominent role in Jerusalem and the temple. Matthew focuses Jesus' denunciations on his narrative, especially in Matthew 23. Though the Pharisees stress the practice of a daily ritual purity after the fall of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, yet, as Jesus denounces, they are in a state of ritual impurity. Matthew presents more encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees than the other Synoptic Gospels. Each encounter gradually escalates into more severe conflicts leading to their plot to kill Jesus. Matthew's account of the Pharisees, in particular, their encounters with Jesus, and thus worthwhile for further research and exploration.

To summarize, a better understanding of the portrayal of the Pharisees in the past in order to comprehend an exegesis of Matthew 23, especially the polemical charge against them (i.e., the oracles of the seven woe), is essential for constructing a thorough analysis and for providing constructive criticisms for the next chapter. In the next chapter, we will specifically show that Matthew's portrayal of the Pharisees is closely associated with Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees in Matthew 23.

⁹⁹ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 86.

CHAPTER 4

JESUS' PRONOUNCEMENT OF THE SEVEN WOES AND JESUS' LAMENTATION IN MATTHEW 23

The Macroscopic View on the Setting and Literary Context of Matthew 23

Jesus' pronouncement about the teachings of the Jewish religious leaders¹ opens the final of Matthew's five great discourses in the Gospel of Matthew.² The symmetry between the first and last discourses is noteworthy, and they frame Jesus' public ministry in Matthew. In the first discourse, Jesus goes up the mountain to teach the law authoritatively (the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5-7), and He exposes false and hypocritical conducts and flawed practices regarding the law on Mount Olives in the final discourse (Matt 23-25). Matthew 23 is included in the final discourse of the five great discourses in the Gospel of Matthew. This final discourse extends all the way to Matthew 25:46. The collection of Jesus' teachings in this final discourse is commonly known as the *Olivet Discourse* (Matt 24-25) because it has been delivered on the Mount of Olives.

¹ The phrase "Jewish religious leaders," "Jewish leaders," "the scribes and Pharisees," and even "the Pharisees" are synonymous and used interchangeably.

² The literary structure of Matthew's discourses appears in many positions with different discourses and narrative fashions. For more information of the many different position on literacy structure see Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 40-7. We follow Dr. Pennington's Discourse-Narrative (DN) outline with main heading as "Revelation and Separation." DN 1 – In Word and Deed (4:23-9:38); DN 2 - As Master, So Disciples (10:1-12:50); DN3 – A New, Set-Apart People of God (13:1-17:27); DN 4 – Inside and Outside the New Community (18:1-20:34); ND5 – Judgment Now and in the Future (21:1-25:46). For more information, see Jonathan T. Pennington, "Analysis of Matthew Structure," unpublished class notes for 22600 (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall Semester, 2019), 7.

While the first great discourse opens with blessings (Greek μακάριοι οἱ in Matt 5:3–12), the last contains a series of seven woes (Greek οὐαὶ δὲ ὑμῶν in Matt 23:13–32). These two discourses are of similar length. Both sermons are associated with a mountain and Jesus takes the seated position of a teacher (Matt 5:2 and 24:3).³

The Macroscopic View on the Intended Audience and Purpose of Matthew 23

The intended audience and the purpose of Matthew 23 is visibly divided into three broad sections. Each section denotes the intended distinctive target audience that the Matthew wishes to address. In Matthew 23:1-12, Jesus warns the crowds and the disciples against the scribes and Pharisees. The primary purpose of the first section is to contrast the pride and the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders with the humility and servanthood required from Jesus' followers.⁴ In Matthew 23:13–36, Jesus pronounces seven woes to the Jewish religious leaders. The major thrust in the second section emphasizes the seven woes, which are fundamentally built upon the oracle of woes of the Old Testament prophets (such as Isa 5:8-24; Amos 5:18-20; Mic 2:1-4; Hab 2:6-20) and Jewish sectarian literature (*1 Enoch* 94:6-9; 95:5-7; 96:4-8; 99:11-15).⁵ Finally, Jesus expresses deep sorrow over Jerusalem, lamenting its immanent judgement in Matthew 23:37–39.⁶ Matthew's chief intention in this section, by incorporating a metaphor of a hen and her chick, is to reveal Jesus' lovingkindness and great concern to see the nation

³ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for A Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 453; Osborne, *Matthew*, 831.

⁴ Osborne, *Matthew*, 833.

⁵ Osborne, *Matthew*, 843.

⁶ Osborne, *Matthew*, 832.

of Jerusalem repent. The lamentation presented in this part is a Q passage, nearly in verbatim agreement with Luke 13:34-35.⁷ Jesus' lamentation can be divided into three segments: the lament itself (Matt 23:37), the absolute judgment (Matt 23:38), and a mixture of a severe warning and a calling for a repentance – an invitation to life (Matt 23:39).⁸

The Macroscopic View on the Structure of Literary of Matthew 23

Matthew structures its literary form in accordance with the pattern of repetition of contrast. One of the richest structural patterns in the Gospel of Matthew is the recurring contrast between Jesus and His opponents, specifically the Jewish religious leaders.⁹ Bauer states that this pattern of repetition of contrast has become the primary contrast between Jesus and His opponents, and other contrasts generally underscore this primary one.¹⁰ The contrast between Jesus and His opponents begins in Matthew 1:1-4:16, and continues in the pericope regarding the baptism of John (Matt 3:1-17).¹¹ This

⁷ Osborne, *Matthew*, 861.

⁸ See the detailed discussion of Jesus' lamentation in chapter 5.

⁹ David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Sheffield, UK: Almond Press, 1988), 65. Bauer asserts that other minor recurring contrasts include the dichotomy between those who approach Jesus in faith and those who approach Him without faith, and the differences Matthew emphasizes between the disciples and their opponents, and some elements of contrasts between Jesus and His disciples.

¹⁰ The other contrasts encompass acceptance of Jesus' point of view (such as following Him) or the acceptance of the point of view of His opponents. For more discussions, see Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, 65-71, 138.

¹¹ Matthew's readers first discover negative reaction to Jesus in Matthew 2, in the person of Herod. He acted out of envy and a desire to maintain authority and status. This motivation reflected his self-obsession and took lives for the sake of his own interests. Herod's fear, deception, and anger climax in his murder of innocent children (Matt 2:16b).

pericope presents a programmatic contrast between Jesus and the Pharisees and Sadducees. At the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 1:1-4:16), the lines are visibly drawn and the configuration of the contrast between Jesus and His opponents is clearly established. Matthew records Herod as Jesus' opponents in the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew. Herod fears for his status, authority and position and ends with killing many innocent children (Matt 2:16-18).¹² Matthew underlines the opposing characteristics set forth in his narrative account: righteousness and obedience in the case of Jesus, and disobedience and hypocrisy in the case of the opponents.¹³ Matthew presents Jesus as the obedient "Son of God." In contrast to this portrait of Jesus, Matthew presents the opponents of Jesus as those who disobey the will of God. The opponents' rejection and plotting to kill Jesus is a rejection of the purpose and the will of God. Matthew analyzes and expands the guilt of Jesus' opponents in terms of their moral failures in his narrative. The Jewish religious leaders are often described as "hypocrites."¹⁴ Matthew presents Jesus' charge of hypocrisy come to full expression in Matthew 23 (Matt 23:3, 4, 25-26, 27-28). Matthew presents Jesus as One whose words and actions are in total accord with the scribes and Pharisees "for they say, and do not" (Matt 23:3).

¹² Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew: Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 530; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 562. Some scriptural references include Matt 4:24-25; 7:28; 8:1; 9:8, 33-34, 36; 12:15; 13:2; 14:13, 34-36; 21:1-17, 46; 26:4-5; 27:20.

¹³ Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, 67.

¹⁴ The term "Hypocrite" or "Hypocrisy" is used almost exclusively a reference to Jesus' opponents, particularly the Jewish religious leaders: Matt 15:7; 22:18; 23:13-15, 23, 25, 27, 29. Bauer defines "hypocrisy" as a dichotomy between act and motive in Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, 68.

Matthew does not simply analyze the nature and severity of Jesus' opponents and what they are guilty of, but he indicates the basis of their wrongdoings (Matt 11:19b, 26-27). Their wrongdoings have made them blind to understand the true identity of Jesus, as well as the eschatological significance of the ministry of Jesus. The blindness of Jesus' opponents is seen repeatedly throughout the Gospel of Matthew in their stubbornness and refusal to repent (Matt 11:20-24; 12:38-42, 45). Jesus condemns His opponents, in particular the Jewish religious leaders, as being "blind guides" (Greek *οδηγοι τυφλοι*) who lead their followers into the pit with them (Matt 15:14; 23:16-17). Jesus' condemnation of the "blindness" of the Jewish religious leaders has a "denotive" value.¹⁵ Jesus' condemnation is further elaborated in Matthew 15:14 where the Pharisees are called "blind guides." The description "guide" assumes the Pharisees' role as "leaders, teachers, or exemplars."¹⁶ Jesus implies several times that the Pharisees are incapable of perceiving the right course and thus they are disqualified to guide others.¹⁷ The act of misleading the blind is condemned in the Old Testament (Lev 19:14; Deut 27:18). In short, the Jewish religious leaders are "blind" in several ways, having no true understanding of the will and purpose of God (Matt 5:34-36; 9:10-13; 12:9-14; 15:1-9; 23:16-22, 23-24, 25-28). Not only they are "blind," they are also flawed in their interpretation of the law. They invert the true interpretation of the law, which places the

¹⁵ Luke T. Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and Conventions of Ancient Rhetoric," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108, no. 3 (1989): 440.

¹⁶ Teaching is a prominent theme in Matthew 15 and 23. See Mary Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 254:81.

¹⁷ William R. G. Loader, *Jesus' Attitude Towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels*, WissUNT zum Neuen Testament Series, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 215; Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 81.

love of God and of neighbor at the center (Matt 5:43-48; 7:12; 22:34-40).¹⁸

Narrative Analysis of Matthew 23

Matthew's narrative analysis accentuates the setting in the temple in Jerusalem. Matthew's temple-centered motif is reinforced with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The temple-centered motif is emphasized from Matthew 21:12 to 24:1-2. Matthew 23 centers on a temple-centered motif: Jesus enters the temple, cleanses the temple, teaches in the temple, denounces the Pharisees in the temple, and finally He foretells the doom of the temple. The temple for Jewish people is a holy place. Matthew purposefully portrays Jesus' cleansing and purifying the temple (Matt 21:12-13), which has become unholy in the eyes of Jesus. The cleansing of the temple is followed by Jesus' denunciation of the seven woes. Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees has become the climax of Matthew 23. Matthew presents lengthy narrative of Jesus' harsh denunciation as compared to the other Synoptic Gospels.¹⁹ The denunciation targets a specific group – the Jewish religious leaders, chiefly the Pharisees. Jesus has fiercely confronted the Pharisees and other Jewish religious leaders. Jesus confronts and lashes out at the Pharisees, revealing at length their failures before God. Furthermore, Jesus points out their inadequacy as religious leaders in three parables: the parable of the two sons, the parable of the wicked tenants, and the parable of the wedding banquet.²⁰ Matthew 23 is

¹⁸ The Jewish religious leaders have misplaced priority. See Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, 71.

¹⁹ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 2:653.

²⁰ Osborne, *Matthew*, 832; Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 117.

distinct narrative and cannot be compared with anything else in other Matthew narratives.²¹ Matthew 23 ends with Jesus' lamentation, Jesus' predication of the destruction of Jerusalem temple, Jesus' prediction of His second coming and Jesus' prediction of the fall of the temple.

Structural Analysis of Matthew 23

Matthew 23 can be structurally divided into three main sections: Matthew 23:1-12; Matthew 23:13-36; Matthew 23:37-39.²² In first section, Jesus addresses the crowds and His disciples with extra concerns about the scribes and Pharisees. He urges the disciples to adopt a different model of leadership. Jesus addresses a warning against the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:1-12). The second section deals with a series of seven woes concerning the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:13-36). The primary focus of Matthew 23 is the oracle of the seven woes. The oracle of the seven woes concludes with the accusation that Israel's former rejection of its prophets will find its sad end in Jerusalem's impending rejection of Jesus and the future prophets whom He will send (Matt 23:29-36).²³ The final section relates the deep sorrow of Jesus and His lamentation

²¹ Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:653.

²² Matthew 23's three main structures are agreed by numerous Matthean scholars. For example: Donald Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), 158; Osborne, *Matthew*, 832; M. Eugene Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew-Mark," vol. 8 of *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1995), 8:429; M. Pickup, "Matthew and Mark's Pharisees," in *Quest of the Historical Pharisees*, ed. J. Neusner and B. D. Chilton (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 102; Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 121; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch and ed. Helmut Koester (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 92. Although Senior and Osborne have three sections of structure, they have adopted the second section from verses 13 to 36. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 853-85; John P. Meier, *Matthew*, New Testament Message (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Books, 1980), 261. Nonetheless, Garland proposes Matt 23:1-12, 13-28, and 29-39 as the main sections of Matthew 23 in David E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 52 (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 32-33.

²³ David L. Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*

over the city of Jerusalem (Matt 23:37-39). Turner highlights that Jesus laments over Jerusalem's fate yet holds out the hope that Israel's desolation will end when it finally acknowledges Jesus with the words of Psalm 118:26.²⁴ In this way, Matthew 23 prepares the reader for the passion narrative where Jesus is cruelly rejected by the Jewish religious leaders.²⁵ Within the literary setting, Matthew highlights Jesus as *the Messiah* (emphasis ours) who is severely rejected by the scribes and Pharisees and other Jewish religious leaders and authorities.²⁶

Discourse Analysis of Matthew 23

Matthew 23 is one of the prime central passages of the Gospel of Matthew places in the final discourse. In the overall flow of the Gospel of Matthew the discourse of Matthew 23 can be comprehended in two dimensions. The first dimension, as a final discourse. Matthew 23 connects well with Matthew 24-25 by Matthew 24-25 follows the pattern of Matthew 13 (cf. Matt 13:34-36), with public teaching (Matt 23) as well as private instructions (Matt 24-25).²⁷ Both the public and private discourses of Matthew 13

(Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 270; David L. Turner, "Jesus' Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today," in *To the Jews First*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 73-75.

²⁴ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 271, 326-27.

²⁵ W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 3:262.

²⁶ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 311-30; Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, 137-38.

²⁷ Some scholars perceive Matthew 23 as the initial part of the eschatological discourse. They are Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 535-56; Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for A Mixed Church under Persecution*, 453; Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1993), 263; Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew-Mark," 8:428-29; David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 343, 374; Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 445-47; Craig L. Blomberg,

possess a common theme, genre, and literary structural design, and thus there are differences between Matthew 23 and 24-25.²⁸ Several scholars consider Matthew 23 as the culmination of Jesus' confrontation with Jewish religious leaders that begins in Matthew 21:15.²⁹ The three clear connections between Matthew 23 and 24-25 are first, the persecution of Jesus' disciples (Matt 23:29-36; cf. Matt 24:9-13, 21-22; Matt 25:34-40); second, the desolation of the temple (Matt 23:38; cf. Matt 24:1-3, 15); third, the return of Jesus and His promise (Matt 23:39; cf. Matt 24:3, 30, 37, 39, 42, 44; Matt 25:6, 13, 19, 31).³⁰ To summarize, Matthew 23 serves as a key bridge or hinge that connects the preceding confrontational narrative with Matthew's preparing his readers for the following eschatological discourse.³¹

The second dimension, Matthew 23 introduces the initial section of the eschatological discourse of Matthew 24-25. Matthew 23 ends with the departure of Jesus from the temple (Matt 24:1), signifying the departure of the *Shekinah* in the Old Testament (Ezek 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23; 43:2).³² Jesus' disciples point out to Him

Matthew, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992), 22:25, 49, 338-39.

²⁸ The key differences include the target audience (cf. Matt 23:1, 13 with Matt 24:1-3), tone, content, and literary setting.

²⁹ David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 308; Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 271; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:654.

³⁰ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 271. The scriptural references showed in the third connection are mixture of the promises of Jesus' return and His return.

³¹ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Greek Testament Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 920; John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church, and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 159-60, 260-61; See more discussions in Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 23-32.

³² The presence of God has come to be known as "Shekinah." See also Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 272.

the buildings of the temple (Matt 24:1), but the response of Jesus is unexpected (Matt 24:2). He boldly predicts the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, that “there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down” (Matt 24:2). Matthew 24:2-3 stresses in the eschatological discourse of Matthew 23 that the judgment of Jerusalem is justified before it is predicted in Matthew 24-25.

Polemic Analysis of Matthew 23

While conflict between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders, who also becomes political-societal leaders, is central throughout Matthew’s plot,³³ the conflict intensifies significantly in the final discourse (see Matt 21-25).³⁴ The intensity of the Matthean controversy has become extraordinarily apparent when considering the probable source material for Matthew 23:1–39. Mark 12:38–40 may have formed the impetus for Matthew 23:1–39³⁵. If this is the case, Matthew develops a lengthy polemic of thirty-nine verses based on a mere three verses in Mark (see table 4).³⁶ Table 4 documents the distinct comparison that Jesus’ criticism in Matthew (23:1-24:2)³⁷ is much

³³ Kingsbury asserts that Jewish religious leaders are more central to Matthew’s plot than Jesus’ disciples as often the conflict forms the focus of the plot in Jack Dean Kingsbury, “The Developing Conflict between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew’s Gospel: A Literary-Critical Study,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1987): 57. In addition, Keener concurs and opines that this situation may be because the successors of the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees were the main Jewish opposition that the addressees faced in Syria-Palestine in Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 103.

³⁴ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 536; Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: Their Redaction, Form and Relevance for the Relationship between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism*, 264-266.

³⁵ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:266.

³⁶ Table 4 is extracted, modified, compiled, and extended from Francois P. Viljoen, “The Matthean Jesus’ Surprising Instruction to Obey the Teachers of the Law and Pharisees,” *HTS Theological Studies* 74, no. 1 (2018): 3.

³⁷ This extended polemical discourse is unique to the Gospel of Matthew, with only a few parallels (denotes as “//”): Matt 23:4 // Luke 11:46; Matt 23:6-7a // Mark 12:38-39 and Luke 20:46-47;

more intense and extensive than in the Gospel of Mark.

Luz and Viviano comment that with the seven woes and the unjust wholesale judgment about the Pharisees, Matthew 23 is “the unloveliest chapter in the Gospel of Matthew.”³⁸ In addition, Carter opines that Matthew 23 as the “bleakest spot” in the Gospel of Matthew.³⁹ Esler examines Matthew 23 in terms of social identity theory and concludes that it is one of the most extreme forms of intergroup conflict. He summarizes Matthew 23 as a challenging test which can be best comprehended in terms of an intergroup conflict between a branch of the Christ-movement and a Judean outsider group.⁴⁰ Numerous scholars agree that the Gospel of Matthew critically reflects specific intergroup tensions, underlying conflicts and concerns that fits well into the history of the complex Jewish-Christian relations of the first century.⁴¹

Matt 23:12 // Luke 14:11 and 19:14.

³⁸ Ulrich Luz, *The Synoptic Gospels* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1968), 96; Benedict T. Viviano, “Social World and Community Leadership: The Case of Matthew 23:1-12, 34,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 39 (1990): 3-4.

³⁹ Warren Carter, “Matthew 23:37-39,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 54, no. 1 (2000): 66.

⁴⁰ Philip F. Esler, “Intergroup Conflict and Matthew 23: Towards Responsible Historical Interpretation of a Challenging Text,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 45, no. 1 (2015): 39-59.

⁴¹ Paul Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 3; Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 12; Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for A New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 26; Daniel C. Harlow, “Early Judaism and Christianity,” in *Early Judaism: A Comprehensive Overview*, ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 391; David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 186; Francois P. Viljoen, “The Matthean Community within a Jewish Religious Society,” *HTS Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1-8.

Table 4. Matthew's Development of Mark's Polemic

Gospel of Mark 12:38-40⁴²	Gospel of Matthew 23:1-39
And in His teaching, He said, (12:38a)	Then Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples (23:1)
beware of the scribes, (12:38b)	So do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice (23:3)
who like to walk around in long robes (12:38c)	They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long (23:5)
and like greetings in the marketplaces. (12:38d)	and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others (23:7)
And have the best seats in the synagogues (12:39a)	and the best seats in the synagogues (23:6b)
and the places of honor at feasts, (12:39b)	and they love the place of honor at feasts (23:6a)
who devour widows' houses (12:40a)	-
and for a pretense make long prayers. (12:40b)	cf. Matthew 23:5
They will receive the greater condemnation (12:40c)	Series of seven woes (23:13-14, 15, 16-22, 23-24, 25-26, 27-28, 29-32, 23:33).

Synoptic Connections of Matthew 23

Numerous scholars share the view that Matthew 23 is largely “a collection of many different sources (Mark, Q, M materials) and represents many different strata of the traditions.⁴³ In actuality, Matthew 23 stands as a severe passage in any view of its

⁴² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are derived from English Standard Version (ESV).

⁴³ David R. Catchpole, *The Quest for Q* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1993), 256-79; James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S. Kloppenborg, *The Critical Edition of Q: A Synopsis Including the Gospel of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas, with English, German, and French Translations of Q and Thomas*, ed. Milton C. Moreland (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000); James McConkey Robinson, *The Sayings Gospel Q in Greek and English with Parallels from the Gospels of Mark and Thomas*, ed.

synoptic relationships and connections. Generally, assuming Markan priority, Mark 12:37-38 serves as the background setting for Matthew's composition. Matthew relies on Q, as does Luke, but Matthew's redaction at several points exceeds Luke's in exacerbating the acrimony of the breach between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders.⁴⁴ Luz specifically observes that Matthew 23 is a representative of what approaches a consensus among scholars favoring a Markan priority.⁴⁵ Several clauses in Matthew 23 also appeared in Luke 11:39-52. Matthew 23:37-39 is parallel to Luke 13:34-35. Matthew 23 is also a composition based on the warning against the scribes found in Mark 12:37-40 (cf., Matt 23:6-7). The seven woe oracles in Matthew 23 connects with Luke 11:39-48. However, the second and third woes (Matt 23:15-22), which are largely viewed as M material, seem to have no synoptic connections. Table 5 draws the synoptic connections as follows:⁴⁶

James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S. Kloppenborg (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002); Leslie Robert Keylock, "The Sayings of Jesus: Source (Q) in Recent Research. A Review Article," *Trinity Journal* 26, no. 1 (2005): 119-30.

⁴⁴ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 298-99.

⁴⁵ Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, 93-94.

⁴⁶ Table 5 is extracted, modified, compiled, and extended from Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:265, 283, 311-12; A. H. McNeile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices* (London: Macmillan, 1915), 329; John S. Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 100; Burton L. Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q & Christian Origins* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 260-61; Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 287-88; Robert J. Miller, *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1992), 249-300; Bernard Orchard, *A Synopsis of the Four Gospels in Greek Arranged according to the Two-Gospel Hypothesis* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 232-35.

Table 5. Synoptic Connections of Matthew 23

Matthew 23	Mark	Luke
23:1	12:37b-38a	20:45
23:2-3		
23:4		11:46
23:5		
23:6	12:38b-39	20:46c; 11:43a
23:7a	12:38c	20:46b; 11:43b
23:7b-10		
23:11 (=20:26)	cf. 9:35; 10:43	cf. 9:48b; 22:26
23:12		cf. 14:1; 18:14
23:13	12:40	20:47
23:14		11:52
23:15-22		
23:23		11:42
23:24		
23:25-26		11:39-41
23:27-28		11:44
23:29-31		11:47-48
23:32-33		
23:34-36		11:49-51
23:37-39		13:34-35

Distinctive Characteristics of Matthew 23

Hagner lengthily argues for a distinctive characteristic for Matthew 23, rather than it being treated as a part of the following Olivet discourse. It is undoubtedly no less the case that the solemn words of Matthew 23 form the framework of judgment in which the predictions and parables of Matthew 24-25 make reasonable sense. Despite the argument of many scholars as to whether Matthew 23 fits within the discourse of

Matthew 24-25, Syreeni remarks that “Matthew could have it both ways.”⁴⁷ Although each of the Matthean’ chapters have distinctive characteristics, Matthew 21 to 25 have an observable overall continuity and coherency. The core issue of the temple in Matthew 21 and Jesus’ criticisms towards the religious authorities in Matthew 22 leads unsurprisingly to the harsh terms of Jesus’ rebukes in Matthew 23. Garland positively affirms,

this discourse is not simply polemic that impugns rivals who compete to make converts to their way of thinking and doing (Matt 23:15). The language is that of a prophet who chastises a stubborn people (see Jer 23:1; Ezek 34:1-6, 7, 9, 10; Isa 10:5-19). Jesus has identified Himself as a prophet (Matt 13:57) and has been extolled as one by the crowds when He enters the city (Matt 21:11; see 21:46). He has acted like a prophet in the temple and linked His authority to that of John the Baptist, recognized as a prophet by everyone except the temple hierarchy (Matt 14:5-9; 21:23-26). Now, Jesus pronounces doom-laden woes like a prophet (Isa 5:8-23; Hab 2:6-20; Zech 11:17) and expresses the prophet’s characteristic outrage at injustice (Matt 23:23) and greed (Matt 23:25; Mic 6:8; Zech 7:9-10). This ironic command to fill up the measure of your fathers’ sins (Matt 23:32; Isa 8:9-10; Jer 7:21; Amos 4:4; Nah 3:14-15) and the concluding lament over the judgment that is to come on the city with its allusion to an apocalyptic visitation conforms to prophetic style. The accumulation of the sins of “this generation” (Matt 23:34) will result in the inevitable devastation of the temple (Matt 24:2).⁴⁸

Garland’s affirmation underscores the consistency and coherency of Matthew’s presentation, that Matthew 23 acts as a balancing point expressing God’s judgment on the Jewish religious leaders. Matthew 23 follows the more allusive acts and parables of judgment in Matthew 21-22 and set the stage for the severe predictive words of judgment in Matthew 24-25.⁴⁹ Hence, one of the clear distinct characteristics of Matthew 23 must be read in the light of both what it precedes and what it follows. The “woe” oracles on the

⁴⁷ Kari Syreeni, *The Making of the Sermon on the Mount: A Procedural Analysis of Matthew’s Redactoral Activity* (Finland: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia), 1987, 94-96. Garland and Blomberg agree on Syreeni’s view. See also Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 234; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 22:338.

⁴⁸ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 228.

⁴⁹ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 228.

temple have already been dramatically enacted (Matt 21:1-22). The Jewish religious leaders have been exposed as hypocrites (Matt 21:23-27). This phenomenon leads to the conclusion that the “woe” oracles Jesus has pronounced is indeed ominous.⁵⁰

The Microscopic View on the Literary Analysis of Matthew 23:1-12

The final discourse (Matt 21:1-25:46) prepares Matthew’s readers for the final events of Jesus life – Jesus’ passion and resurrection. Matthew essentially follows Mark 11-12 on the beginning events of Passion Week (21:1-22:46) with some significant redactional changes and additions. The debate as to whether Matthew 23 belongs to the narrative material⁵¹ or with the discourse material,⁵² Osborne discerns that Matthew 23 has clear literary structure, tying it to Matthew 19:1-22:46 (guilt and judgment) as well as to Matthew 24:1-25:46. In addition, Matthew 24:1-25:46 functions like Matthew 5 on the “Sermon on the Mount,” with the woe oracles in Matthew 23 balancing the beatitudes in Matthew 5.⁵³ Matthew 23:1-25:46 and the Sermon on the Mount have a certain symmetry. The negative tone and the seven woe oracles offer an indictment against the Jewish religious leaders, whose constant opposition is a distinct feature of Matthew 19-22. They serve as an introduction to Matthew 24-25. Matthew 23 is the evidence for the

⁵⁰ Alistair I. Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen? A Study of Jesus as Judge in Matthew 21-25* (Waynesboro, VA: Paternoster, 2004), 103-4.

⁵¹ See Carson, Gniska, Davies and Allison, Nolland, Witherington, Turner, France, primarily due to the different tone and audiences of Matt 23:1 (the crowds and disciples) and Matt 24:3 (the disciples alone) in Osborne, *Matthew*, 699, 831-32.

⁵² See Gundry, Blomberg, Keener, since Matt 13:36 also has a shift from crowds to disciples in Osborne, *Matthew*, 699.

⁵³ Osborne, *Matthew*, 699, 831.

courtroom setting of its literary analysis. Matthew 24-25 serves as the verdict for the nations' – including the Jewish religious leaders' – rejection of the Messiah. Therefore, Osborne concludes that first, the final discourse contains a two-part literary structure: Matthew 23 and Matthew 24-25.⁵⁴ Second, Matthew 23 acts as a transition, both concluding Matthew 19-22 and introducing Matthew 24-25.⁵⁵

The Setting, Literary Context and Structure, and Main Trust of Matthew 23:1-12

The setting. Matthew 23:1-12 informs its readers that Jesus has been opposed by the scribes and Pharisees and that they accused Him of His inadequacy as a teacher. Jesus shows their hypocrisy and pride and contrasts that with the humility God demands from His people.

The literary context and structure. The polemical discourse of Matthew 23:1-12 is unique with three parallels: Matthew 23:4 with Luke 11:46 (a Q text), Matthew 23:6-7a with Mark 12:38-39 (and Luke 20:46-47, thus a triple tradition text), and Matthew 23:12 with Luke 14:11; 18:14 (a Q text).⁵⁶ It is unmistakably clear that Matthew 23:1-12 is Matthew's polemic against Judaism in 70 CE situation. Matthew 23:1-12 is a diatribe against Judaism, a stern warning for the leadership in Jewish community.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Osborne, *Matthew*, 699, 831-32.

⁵⁵ Osborne states Matt 19-22 indicts the Jewish religious leaders for their opposition, whereas Matt 24-25 provides the evidence for the verdict against the nation and its leaders in the Olivet Discourse in Osborne, *Matthew*, 831.

⁵⁶ Osborne, *Matthew*, 833.

⁵⁷ Viviano, "Social World and Community Leadership: The Case of Matthew 23:1-12, 34," 3-21; Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, 110-11; Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28*

The main thrust. Matthew 23:1-12 addresses the crowds about the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus specifically speaks to the crowds who have heard how the Jewish religious leaders have challenged Him, and now He refutes these challenges and wisely emerges as a victor (Matt 22:22, 33, 34, 46). Jesus' profile is that of a wise and superior teacher, in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees who propose to be the ultimate interpreters and teachers of the law.⁵⁸ Jesus informs the crowds what the scribes and Pharisees do (Matt 23:1-7), and then proceeds to underline what His disciples should do instead (Matt 23:8-12). Jesus initially tackles the hypocritical conduct of the scribes and the Pharisees (Matt 23:1-7), contrasted to Jesus' opening words of blessings and wise instructions on the Sermon of the Mount (Matt 5:1-2). Jesus' opening words in Matthew 23 has formed the preliminary denunciations of the Pharisees and stern polemic to follow. Jesus' rebuttal to the scribes and Pharisees is twofold: First, Jesus criticizes the hypocritical teaching and conduct of the Jewish religious leaders (Matt 23:2-4). Second Jesus shows their desires for public acclaim and acknowledgement (Matt 23:5-7).⁵⁹

The Microscopic View on the Literary Analysis of Matthew 23:13-36

Verses thirteen through thirty-six form the centerpiece of Jesus' major discourse in Matthew 23. The seven woe oracles level against the scribes and Pharisees.

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:429; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 537. The applications of the oracles of the seven woes for church leaders are discussed in chapter 5.

⁵⁸ Viljoen, "The Matthean Jesus' Surprising Instruction to Obey the Teachers of the Law and Pharisees," 3.

⁵⁹ Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew*, Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament, ed. Mikeal Parsons and Charles H. Talbert (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 256; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:264.

These seven woes are the most remarkable Jesus' pronouncement, not only because of whom who pronounces it, but also because of His identity and authority. The oracle of woes from Jesus are coupled with the threat of divine judgment and a promise of life upon repentance.⁶⁰ Jesus' pronouncements of the woes against the scribes and Pharisees begins in Matthew 23:3 the fact that they have not lived up to what they have taught. The seven woe oracles are negative mirror images of the "blessings" of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:3-12).⁶¹ And the actions described are a failure to exhibit the congruency of "hearing" and "doing" the Word of God (Matt 7:24-27).

The Setting, Literary Context and Structure, and Main Trust of Matthew 23:13-36

The setting. Matthew 23:13-36 fundamentally builds and expands from 23:11-12. The hypocrisy that is stated in 23:3 has become the heart of Jesus' discourse. In reality, the discourse continues with the basics of Jesus' charge in Matthew 23:3b. The seven woe oracles set the stage for the divine judgment that is coming, while the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24-25) informs what form that judgment will bring.⁶²

The literary context and structure. The structure and literary form of Matthew 23:13-36 are heavily focused on the seven woe oracles.⁶³ The seven woe oracles are parallel with the six woes of Luke 11:37-54, but the order and wording are

⁶⁰ Moreover, the pronouncement of the seven woes conveys a significant sense of "calling for repentance" to highlight the importance for an invitation to life." See chapter 5 for detailed discussions.

⁶¹ Talbert, *Matthew*, 258; Viljoen, "The Matthean Jesus' Surprising Instruction to Obey the Teachers of the Law and Pharisees," 5.

⁶² Osborne, *Matthew*, 842.

⁶³ Cf. Isa 5:8-23 and Luke 11:42-52 each with its series of six woe oracles.

interestingly different.⁶⁴ Additionally, the wording and length of each woe is so strikingly different that any attempt to reconstruct a so-called “Q original” is doomed to failure (“woe” on a different occasion, cf. Luke 6:24-26).⁶⁵ The seven woe oracles (Greek *ὄαι*) against the scribes and Pharisees serve as a reverse of the blessings (Greek *μακάριοι*) that Jesus utters to the crowd and His disciples (Matt 5:3-12).⁶⁶

The main thrust. The seven woe oracles in Matthew 23:13-36 closely relate to the religious sins of the scribes and Pharisees, specifically on the basis of “hypocrisy” (found in all the woes except the third woe) of knowing the Scripture but twisting it to their own ends.⁶⁷ Matthew 23:13-36 purposefully serves as a denunciation of the sins of the Jewish religious leaders who have brought about God’s severe impending judgment on the nation.

The Microscopic View on the Literary Analysis of Matthew 23:37-39

Matthew 23 concludes with deep sorrow and lament as Jesus addresses Jerusalem. The deep sorrow and lament flow right out of the preceding immediate context. Matthew 23 has a clear organized structure: First, Jesus is concerned with the conduct, teaching, and the authority of the scribes and the Pharisees. Second, Jesus

⁶⁴ Matthew’s first (23:13) = Luke’s sixth (Luke 11:52); Matthew’s fourth (23:23) = Luke’s first (Luke 11:42); Matthew’s fifth (23:25-26) = Luke’s introduction (Luke 11:39-41); Matthew’s sixth (23:27) = Luke’s third (Luke 11:44); Matthew’s seventh (23:29) = Luke’s fifth (Luke 11:47).

⁶⁵ Osborne, *Matthew*, 846.

⁶⁶ Talbert, *Matthew*, 258; Viljoen, “The Matthean Jesus’ Surprising Instruction to Obey the Teachers of the Law and Pharisees,” 5.

⁶⁷ Osborne positively remarks that the seven woes as judgment prophecies utilize *הוֹי* (transliterated *HŌY*), followed by a series of participles describing the transgression and judgment levied by God in Osborne, *Matthew*, 843.

denounces the Jewish religious leaders for their hypocrisy and sin. Third, Jesus extends His judgment to the whole nation. Jesus adopts a well-known image of God's love for His people, protecting them under His wings (Ps 17:8; 46:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4). Converted Gentiles are also brought under the protecting wings of God's presence (Ruth 2:12). Jesus' lamentation in verse 37 demonstrates His efforts to love and care for Jerusalem.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Jerusalem is unwilling (Greek *καὶ οὐκ ἠθέλησατε*) to receive God's lovingkindness (Matt 23:37). In the past, Jerusalem has forsaken God, and God therefore has forsaken the city. Indeed, God has withdrawn His awesome divine presence from His people. Now Jerusalem forsakes Jesus, and the city and the temple will therefore be forsaken.

The Setting, Literary Context and Structure, and Main Trust of Matthew 23:37-39

The setting. Jesus addresses the city of Jerusalem with deep sorrow, lamenting its immanent judgment. Jesus employs a metaphor of a hen and her chicks revealing His tender love and concern for His people over Jerusalem. The final segment of Matthew 23 concludes with the pronouncement of a distressing judgment over the temple of God (Matt 24:1-2).

The literary context and structure. The lamentation in Matthew 23:37-39 is a Q passage, agreeing nearly in verbatim with Luke 13:34-35 (but in a slightly different place in Luke). A majority of the scholars agree that Matthew is likely the more original

⁶⁸ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 106.

setting.⁶⁹ The structural and literary form of this final portion in Matthew 23 consists of three natural segments: first, the lament itself (Matt 23:37). Second, the certainty of judgment (Matt 23:38). Third, a promise and warning (Matt 23:39).

The main thrust. The cry of “Jerusalem” is repeated twice to convey a strong sense of mourning and deep sorrow. The repetition intensifies the emotion of grief that Jesus feels. The city of Jerusalem, instead of being a place of worship, has become a city of violence against God’s *own* (emphasis ours) prophets. The tender mercy and love of God has been sternly rejected by the unwillingness of His *own* (emphasis ours) people (Matt 23:37b). Hence, the result of the refusal and the unwillingness of God’s *own* people (emphasis ours) is that Jerusalem has become a desolate house (Matt 23:38). God has forsaken and abandoned Jerusalem, and its land will be devastated and laid waste. Nevertheless, even in the midst of the certainty of God’s judgment upon Jerusalem, God’s mercy and grace still shine forth, for God has spoken of the certainty of hope for the future – the repentance and invitation to life. Jesus promises to return as the royal Messiah to bless the nation.

Finding, Analysis, and Discussion of the Oracles of the Seven Woes in Matthew 23

The oracle of the seven woes, often promising judgment on those who disobey covenant obligations, are deeply rooted in biblical prophetic speech and in numerous Jewish sectarian literatures. Therefore, it is of no surprise that the pronouncements of the seven woes attributed to Jesus in Matthew 23 are entirely biblical, authentic, and genuinely Jewish. According to Turner, biblical Deuteronomism contains not only the

⁶⁹ Osborne, *Matthew*, 861.

promise of blessing for those who love and obey the commandments of God, but also the sober warning of judgment for those who break the covenant, i.e., disobey the commandments of God.⁷⁰ Thus, Matthew 5-7 is convincingly cohering with the former, as does Matthew 23 with the latter. Both beatitudes and woes in Matthew 5 and 23 respectively, the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28 and 27 respectively, are a perceived part of the important messages about obedience and disobedience from the mouthpiece of God's prophets. In addition, the seven woe oracles of Matthew 23 are in a literary form and a theological content consistent with the biblical message. The following discussions deepen the analysis of the seven woe oracles in terms of the authenticity of Jesus' pronouncement, the Pharisaic hypocrisy, and the parallels of the woe oracles between Matthew and Luke.

The Authenticity of Jesus' Pronouncement of the Seven Woes in Matthew 23

The authenticity of Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woes is evaluated from four perspectives: First, the word itself (i.e., the Word of God); Second, the pronouncer – Jesus Himself; Third, the Pharisaic traditions and practices; Fourth, the polemical language. *First perspective:* The significant negative cast of Matthew 23 has eventually led some to argue that Jesus, the pronouncer of the woe oracles, could not have intended to denounce a series of seven woes to the scribes and Pharisees.⁷¹ Nonetheless, such

⁷⁰ Covenant keeper and covenant broker. See Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 285.

⁷¹ Esler opines that Matthew 23 is the product of the evangelist, Matthew, and not of the historical Jesus. He regards the polemic as untypical of the historical Jesus in Elser, "Intergroup Conflict and Matthew 23: Towards Responsible Historical Interpretation of a Challenging Text," 39-59; Kümmel remarks that the zealous polemic in Matthew 23 distorts the reality and spirit of Jesus in W. G. Kümmel, "Die Weherufe über die Schriftgelehrten und Pharisäer (Matthäus 23,13-36)," in ed. W. P. Eckert, *Antijudaismus in Neuen*

arguments could hardly stand without believing and embracing that the Bible *is* (emphasis ours) the Word of God. The Word of God is inspired, infallible, authoritative, sufficient, and inerrant. God's word is "perfect, reviving the soul" (Ps 19:7) because God Himself is perfect. Moreover, the Word of God is completely trustworthy and reliable (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:19-21). Matthew does not invent the words in Matthew 23, particularly those of the seven woes (Matt 23:13-36). Conversely, he is fully inspired by the Holy Spirit and has recorded what Jesus utters during His ministry. A recent study clearly indicates that the Pharisaic materials in Matthews 23 are traditional and authentic, and that they are not invented by Matthew after the events of 70 CE.⁷² Moreover, Garland considers that the pronouncement of the seven woes in Matthew 23 is composed for the Matthean community with a certain aim in mind.⁷³ He continues to affirm that the composition of Matthew 23 broadly serves for two main purposes: First, to clarify the problem of Israel's rejection of Jesus and God's rejection of Israel in the disastrous war with Rome. Second, Matthew urges his community to learn a lesson what has happened in the past. Matthew also exhorts Christian leaders to avoid the same judgment and denouncement the Pharisees have fallen under.⁷⁴ Johnson, Davies and Allison have provided an illuminating chart of every critical comment Jesus expresses in Matthew 23 that visibly shows many parallels in ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman literature.⁷⁵

Testament? Kaiser Verlag, München (1967): 146-47 in Viljoen, "The Matthean Jesus' Surprising Instruction to Obey the Teachers of the Law and Pharisees," 2.

⁷² Layang Seng Ja, *The Pharisees in Matthew 23 Reconsidered* (Carlisle, PA: Langham Monographs, 2018), 93-94, 114-30.

⁷³ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 214.

⁷⁴ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 215.

⁷⁵ Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and Conventions of Ancient

Additionally, the hypocrisy of many Pharisees has been extensively discussed in *b. Sotah* 22b, *y. Ber.* 9:5, and 4QpNah. Osborne observes that the hypocrisy of the Pharisees would neither have startled original readers as being overly critical, nor would it have been taken as an invective against all Pharisees.⁷⁶ Albright and Mann comment,

this chapter does not deny at all that there were many, probably most, Pharisees who were devout, God-fearing men, devoted to Israel, its religion, and its Lord. Nevertheless, the chapter stands as clear warning that there are varieties of impiety and idolatry which are not confined to those who fashion graven images.⁷⁷

Hauerwas agrees with Albright's and Mann's comments that this is the result of Jesus "unrelenting concern for holiness" that has made Him "the sworn enemy of hypocrisy."⁷⁸

Second perspective: Matthew 23 renews the emphasis on Jesus as God's prophet.⁷⁹ Though Jesus is considered the "rejected" prophet, He retains His position as the "Prophet of God" in Matthew (Matt 13:57; 16:14; 21:11, 26, 46).⁸⁰ Jesus, as the "rejected" prophet should not be denied that He Himself has denounced the Pharisees with the seven woes.⁸¹ Jesus' message to His social-political and religious Jewish

Rhetoric," 419-41; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:258-60.

⁷⁶ Osborne, *Matthew*, 831-32.

⁷⁷ W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew: The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, KS: Doubleday, 1971), 26:283.

⁷⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 195.

⁷⁹ Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen? A Study of Jesus as Judge in Matthew 21-25*, 99-100.

⁸⁰ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 151, 156. Turner affirms that Jesus own words have already identified Him as prophet (Matt 13:58). See also Turner, "Jesus' Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today," 66-77.

⁸¹ Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew: Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 447; David L. Turner, "Jesus' Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today," in *To the Jews First*, ed. Darrell L.

contemporaries is therefore of great importance. Matthew is persistently making notes about the frequency with which Jesus makes references to the prophets (Matt 23:29, 30, 31, 34, 37). Alistair remarks that “Jesus speaks of the leaders’ opposition to the prophets as a veiled way of rebuking their opposition of His own prophetic ministry.”⁸² Hence, the scriptural references pointing to the prophets reinforce the argument that Jesus is God’s prophet and is exercising a “prophetic” ministry.

Third perspective: Some claim that Jesus’ attacks on the Pharisees in Matthew 23 is only an invention to fit the needs of His community. However, Beare affirms, with many others, views Matthew 23 as a “masterpiece of vituperation,” which reflects the fierce controversies between the church and formative Judaism after the 70 CE destruction of the temple.⁸³ The literary analysis of Matthew 23 affirms that most of the traditions, customs, and practices described in the text are the Pharisaic traditions and practices before the fall of the temple. The pronouncement of the seven woe oracles by Jesus are very much based on Pharisaic traditions and customs at the time of Jesus, rather than being a later fiction. One of the chief reasons for this assertion is that the traditional practices of the Pharisees found in Matthew 23 does not appear after 70 CE.⁸⁴ Moreover, these traditional practices are considered the most notable Pharisaic traditions dating

Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 77.

⁸² Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen? A Study of Jesus as Judge in Matthew 21-25*, 99.

⁸³ Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew: Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 452, 447.

⁸⁴ The traditions, customs and practices are already existed before the time of Jesus. In addition, these traditional practices were considered the most notable Pharisaic traditions dating before 70 CE. These traditions, customs, and practices are the flourishing of the Pharisees’ *halakha* (Moses’ seat); tithing and oaths attached to the temple; no agreed rules about wearing phylacteries and tassels; utensil cleaning; and making proselytes observe the religious traditions and customs of pre-70 Pharisaism. More information sees Ja, *The Pharisees in Matthew 23 Reconsidered*, 114-130.

before 70 CE. The Mishnah documents three hundred and sixteen disputes between the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel before 70 CE; six clear disagreements over the Pharisaic traditions and practices are found in Matthew 23.⁸⁵ Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woe oracles is predominantly interrelated with the Shammaic traditions and practices. This pronouncement strongly suggests that Jesus' attacks mostly against the Shammaites and not the Hillelites. Additionally, Jesus' pronouncement evidently indicates that the Pharisees in Matthew 23 reflect the time of Jesus, because most of the Shammai have already perished. To summarize, the claims that Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woe oracles is an invention and a later fiction are certainly not true. Matthew 23 is not a fictional piece born out of the post-70 CE period. The traditional materials that have been discussed in Matthew 23 are clearly based on the Pharisaic traditions and practices at the time of Jesus, dating before 70 CE.⁸⁶ Matthew's compilation in Matthew 23 is about the real situation during the time of Jesus is more reasonable.

Fourth perspective: It is commonly believed that Matthew 23 is part of Matthew's polemic against Judaism in his post 70 CE situation. In addition, the use of polemical language in Matthew 23 does not originate in post-70 CE, rather than it is Jewish traditional rhetoric for dealing with opponents and adversaries. Jesus denounces the Pharisees as "hypocrites, blind guides, and a brood of vipers," is common among different sects in the early first century; these pronouncements are known as the

⁸⁵ Ja, *The Pharisees in Matthew 23 Reconsidered*, 114-130.

⁸⁶ The Pharisaic traditions discussed here include the "Seat of Moses, Phylacteries, Tassels, Proselytes, Oaths and Vows, Utensils Cleaning, Tithing, and the use of Polemical Language" in Ja, *The Pharisees in Matthew 23 Reconsidered*, 114-130, 165.

“language of sectarianism.”⁸⁷ Moreover, the “language of sectarianism” is merely a rhetoric language of ancient polemic.⁸⁸ It is primary a rhetorical tool used to respond to opponents.⁸⁹ Similar denunciations are found in the Old Testament, addressing Jewish leaders’ and false prophets, their failures and sins, who regularly have misused their roles and misconducted their behavior.⁹⁰ The stern and even harsh rhetorical polemical tradition flourished in the Old Testament. Some biblical references include those found in Isaiah (5:8-10, 11-14, 18-24; 10:1-3; 28:1-4; 29:1-4, 15-21; 30:1-3; 31:1-4), Amos (5:18-20; 6:1-7), and Micah 2:1-4.⁹¹ Several biblical references specifically address the sin hypocrisy are Isaiah 29:1-2, 7, 10, 13-15, 20-21. Thus, the Old Testament prophets likewise expose their evil deeds and predict a harsh judgment against Yahweh.⁹² The idea of dealing politely with opponents, especially who are deemed to be the adversary of God, is a modern phenomenon alien to the ancient Mediterranean world.⁹³ In contrast, the

⁸⁷ J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 16. In addition, Johnson’s survey concludes that “the use of this language is everywhere in the fragmented Judaism of the first century. Readers today hear the New Testament’s polemic as inappropriate only because the other voices are silent. Historical imagination can restore them” in Johnson, “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic,” 441.

⁸⁸ Johnson, “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic,” 419-41.

⁸⁹ Overman, *Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community*, 17.

⁹⁰ Overman, *Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community*, 17; Turner, “Jesus’ Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today,” 72.

⁹¹ Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 1:327.

⁹² Turner, “Jesus’ Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today,” 73.

⁹³ John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 3:338-39.

use of such polemical language to address one's opponents is wholly a customary tradition in the Jewish context.⁹⁴ Johnson positively agrees that the use of polemical language is a "philosophical tradition" or "sectarian language."⁹⁵ Besides, if the polemical language of Matthew 23 is rather typical of ancient times in general and of Second Temple Jewish disputes in particular, considerate is reasonable that Matthew should not be viewed as a Christian critic of the Jewish people.⁹⁶ Georgi argues persuasively that Matthew is not attacking Jews as an ethnic group or the religion of Judaism from the stance of a Gentile outsider who is advocating a supersessionist religion.⁹⁷ Matthew undoubtedly presents Jesus' criticisms with the Jewish religious leaders as a thoroughly Jewish prophetic critique of the Jerusalem religious establishment that has called for a return to the values of the Torah.⁹⁸ As a result, the oracle of the seven woes in Matthew 23 are wholly common and entirely not anti-Judaic. Jesus follows the rhetorical tradition when He denounces the Pharisees who purposefully perverted core biblical commandments. Therefore, Matthew 23 perceptibly reflects only a growing

⁹⁴ Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 16-17.

⁹⁵ Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 3:429.

⁹⁶ Several scholars have pointed out with examples of similar rhetoric from Second Temple literature, especially Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and Conventions of Ancient Rhetoric," 419-41; Anthony J. Saldarini, "Boundaries and Polemics in the Gospel of Matthew," *Biblical Interpretation* 3, no. 3 (1995): 239-65; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:258-62; J. Andrew Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel according to Matthew* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 324-26; Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community*, 19-23.

⁹⁷ Dieter Georgi, "The Early Church: Internal Jewish Migration or New Religion?" *The Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 1 (1995): 35-68.

⁹⁸ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 274. The term "Torah" and "Mosaic law" are used interchangeably without any significant different.

opposition to Pharisaism within the Matthean community and is certainly not Matthew's invention. Matthew 23 fits well into the setting and historical background of Palestine before 70 CE in the Jewish contexts.⁹⁹ Matthew positively emphasizes the failures of the Pharisees by highlighting Jesus' pronouncements.¹⁰⁰ The seven woe oracles are written in continuity, not only with the stern rebuke of the biblical prophets, but also with the criticisms of the Second Temple sectarians.¹⁰¹ Concisely, Matthew 23 is thoroughly biblical and genuinely Jewish. The oracle of the seven woes in Matthew 23 are in literary form and theological content consistent with the whole Bible. Carson concludes,

to read Matthew 23 as little more than Matthew's pique about AD 85 is not only without adequate historical and literary justification, but also fails dismally to understand the historical Jesus, who not only taught His followers to love their enemies... but proclaimed that He came not to bring peace but a sword (Matt 10:34) and presented Himself as eschatological judge (e.g., Matt 7:21-23; 25:31-46).¹⁰²

Matthew's core intention is to speak to the church of his days, yet this does not mean that he creates the materials.¹⁰³ Davies and Allison rightfully assert that a "contemporary application of Matthew 23 should target the church; for all the vices here attributed to the scribes and Pharisees have attached themselves to Christians, and in abundance."¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 274.

¹⁰⁰ Ja, *The Pharisees in Matthew 23 Reconsidered*, 130.

¹⁰¹ Turner, "Jesus' Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today," 72-73; Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 274.

¹⁰² D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:470.

¹⁰³ Osborne, *Matthew*, 832.

¹⁰⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:262.

Parallels between the Oracles of the Seven Woes in Matthew and Luke

The oracles of the seven woes of Matthew 23:13-36 parallels the six in Luke 11:42-52. Nonetheless, Jesus' pronouncements of the seven woes in the Matthean account are sharper, harsher, and more extensive than the Lukan account.¹⁰⁵ A comprehensive view on the parallelisms of the woe oracles is documented in table 6. Luke's second and fourth woe oracles to the Pharisees and lawyers (Luke 11:43 and 11:46 respectively) run parallel to Jesus' oracles (Matt 23:6-7 and 23:4 respectively). Luke's third woe oracle (Luke 11:44) has no direct parallel in Matthew 23's woe oracles.

Table 6. Parallels between the Woe Oracles in Matthew 23:13-36 and Luke 11:42-52

Parallel	Matthew	Luke
Shut the kingdom of heaven	23:13	11:52
Lead proselytes to hell	23:15	
Teach falsely on swears	23:16-22	
Tithe meticulous while being merciless	23:23-24	11:42
Conduct ritual cleanness yet unclean hearts	23:25-26	11:39-40
Possess external self-righteousness yet wicked interior	23:27-28	
Participate in the sins of their ancestors	23:29-32	11:47-48

¹⁰⁵ Viljoen, "The Matthean Jesus' Surprising Instruction to Obey the Teachers of the Law and Pharisees," 6.

Relationship between Matthew 5-7 and Matthew 23

Several critical analyses exemplify the plausible relationships between Matthew 5-7 and Matthew 23. Wright observes the first and last blocks of Jesus' teaching (Matt 5-7 contains 111 verses, Matt 23-25 contains 136 verses), each of which is substantially longer than the three intervening teaching blocks (Matt 10:1-42; 13:1-52; 18:1-35) emphasizes on a repeated phrase in each section.¹⁰⁶ The repeated phrases in Matthew 5-7 and Matthew 23 primarily refer to the word – “Blessed are the...” (Matt 5:3-12) and “Woe to you...” (Matt 23:13-29). The larger units of the first and last blocks of Jesus' teaching can be referred to the parable of the houses on rock and sand in Matthew 7:24-27. This parable seems to foreshadow the parables of judgement in Matthew 25:1-12, 14-30, 31-46.¹⁰⁷

The ninefold blessings and sevenfold woes not for direct Pentateuchal correspondence, but for the more generalized pattern of blessings and curses in the renewal of the covenant summarized in Deuteronomy 27-30.¹⁰⁸ The fivefold division

¹⁰⁶ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992), 387-88. Wright's observation is based integrating Lohr's chiasmic analysis which focuses attention on the climatic thirteenth chapter of the Kingdom parables in Charles H. Lohr, “Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew,” *The Catholic Biblically Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1961): 403-35.

¹⁰⁷ Wright comments that the language of the “great house which is to fall” prepares the readers for Matthew 24 in Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 387.

¹⁰⁸ Bacon's Pentateuchal Theory proposed that the Gospel of Matthew is composed of five main sections as a counterpart to the five-part Torah. The main divisions of Bacon's proposal are as follows: Preamble (1:1-2:23); Book 1 (3:1-7:29); Book 2 (8:1-11:1); Book 3 (11:2-13:53); Book 4 (13:54-19:1a); Book 5 (19:1b-26:2); Epilogue (26:3-28:20). The strength of this hypothesis resides in the fivefold refrain that concludes each main section of discourse. However, Wright argues that it is somewhat strained and distorted in which various elements being found in the “wrong” corresponding in Bacon's proposal. The most serious weakness of this kind is the description of the baptism and temptation narratives in recollection of the Exodus, appearing in Bacon's proposed “first book,” which he designates as corresponding to Genesis. More information sees B. W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (London: Henry Holt, 1930), 187-89; Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 387.

lends itself to a “Pentateuchal” reading in which the Deuteronomistic blessings and cursings are mainly dependent on Israel’s response to the protagonist.

An Exegesis of Matthew 23

On the whole, Jesus begins warning His disciples (Matt 23:1-12; cf. Mark 12:38-39; Luke 20:45-46) addressing the inconsistencies of the Jewish religious leaders (Matt 23:1-7) and enjoins His own community to be different (Matt 23:8-12). Jesus warns His disciples not to follow the Jewish leaders’ examples (Matt 23:3b). Matthew first portrays Jesus’ condemnation against the Pharisaic traditions and practices in Matthew 23:1-3.

Matthew 23:1-3a

By addressing its target audience, this following discourse is intended for the crowd and Jesus’ disciples (Matt 23:1). Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for the role they play in the Jewish religious community. The adverb “Then” (Greek τότε) suggests a direct connection with Matthew 22, where the Pharisees are undoubtedly present.¹⁰⁹ Jesus begins engaging with the crowds and His disciples in verse 1.¹¹⁰ The words “to the disciples” (Greek τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ) only appear in Matthew 23:1 and Luke 20:45. Matthew mentions of “the crowds” (Greek τοῖς ὄχλοις) is to enhance the public nature of Jesus’ criticisms to His disciples and His denunciation of the Jewish religious leaders.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:658.

¹¹⁰ Matt 23:1 corresponds to Mark 12:37b-38a and Luke 20:45.

¹¹¹ Turner, *Israel’s Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 288-89. Mark has Jesus’ teaching in the temple, where a larger group than just the disciples was evidently present (Mark 12:35). Luke has all the people listening to Jesus (Luke 20:45).

Jesus recognizes and declares the Pharisees' position and authority when He first speaks to the crowds and His disciples (Matt 23:1-3a) with surprising words that seem to endorse the role of His opponents, the scribes and Pharisees (cf. Matt 5:20; 12:38; 15:1).¹¹² In light of Jesus' clear recognition of the Pharisees' authority and their capacity as official Mosaic law interpreters,¹¹³ He strictly warns His disciples not to follow their examples.

Roth asserts that the Pharisees' sitting on the seat of Moses is a symbol of the Pharisees' intellectual arrogance.¹¹⁴ According to Jewish and Christian literary sources, the "Seat of Moses" is literally a symbol of Jewish legal authority confers upon teachers of Jewish law. It expresses itself in the form of "special seats for them in a conspicuous place at the head of the congregation in the synagogue."¹¹⁵ Some scholars perceive that the "Seat of Moses" should be understood literally rather than metaphorically.¹¹⁶

¹¹² On Matthew's portrayal of the Pharisees see, Robert A. Wild, "The Encounter between Pharisaic and Christian Judaism: Some Early Gospel Evidence," *Novum Testamentum* 27, no. 2 (1985): 105-24; Steve Mason, "Pharisaic Dominance before 70 CE and the Gospels' Hypocrisy Charge (Matt 23:2-3)," *Harvard Theological Review* 83, no. 4 (1990): 363-81; Benedict T. Viviano, "The Pharisees in Matthew 23," *The Bible Today* 27 (1989): 38-44.

¹¹³ The aorist verb of "sit" (Greek *ἐκάθισαν*) has been understood as gnomic, illustrating the generic state of affair in A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1934), 836-37, 866; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1996), 562; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 923.

¹¹⁴ Roth says that the "origin, purpose and metamorphosis of the "Chair of Moses" is in origin, not a ceremonial seat, but a stand in the form of a chair, in which the Scroll of the Law is placed; hence to "sit in the Chair of Moses" is a symbol of intellectual arrogance. Additionally, the "Chair of Moses" continues in use with much the same object in the Roman community, whose origin certainly goes back before this time, and in the "Orphan Colon" of Jews in China, down to a relatively recent date," in Cecil Roth, "The 'Chair of Moses' and Its Survivals," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 81 (1949): 110.

¹¹⁵ I. Revov, "The Seat of Moses," *Israel Exploration Journal* 5, no. 4 (1955): 262-63. Revov cites Bacher that the "Seat of Moses" is originally referred to the chair of the *Chief Justice* in W. Bacher, "Le siege de Moise," *Revue des etudes juives*, 34, (1897): 299-301.

¹¹⁶ Scholars who consider the "Seat of Moses" literally include Newport, Hagner, Albright, Mann, and Rabbinowitz. Hagner undoubtedly remarks that the "Seat of Moses" must do more with an actual chair in the synagogue in which only an authorized person expounded the Torah to the congregation in Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:659. Additionally, Albright and Mann agree that "'Moses' seat which is the literal

Conversely, scholars such as Keener, Powell, Davies and Allison, and Senior critically evaluate that the “Seat of Moses” should be comprehended metaphorically. They recognize that the “Seat of Moses” imposes an idea of the Pharisees’ prime role as the interpreters of Mosaic law.¹¹⁷ Rahmani interestingly assesses that the “Seat of Moses” is a chair on which the Torah Scroll is placed and none should sit on this chair during the synagogue service.¹¹⁸ Rahmani’s assessment is unlikely due to the outcome of archaeological discovery of a stone chair in a synagogue setting before 70 CE on the Greek island of Delos.¹¹⁹ The accuracy of the reference of the “Seat of Moses,” whether a reference to the actual seat or to an authority, is uncertain. Nonetheless, the “Seat of Moses” is predominantly used as a main reference to address the Mosaic law either by the ones devoted to study the law of Moses, or by the ones who control it.¹²⁰ The chief

translation and is the name given to the seat in the Synagogue,” in Albright and Mann, *Matthew: The Anchor Bible*, 26:278. See also Noel S. Rabbinowitz, “Matthew 23:2-4: Does Jesus Recognize the Authority of the Pharisees and Does He Endorse Their Halakah?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46, no. 3 (2003): 423-47.

¹¹⁷ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 541; Mark Allan Powell, “Do and Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2-7),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 3 (1995): 419-35. Powell does not consider that the “Seat of Moses” refers to the Pharisees’ role as authoritative teachers, rather it is Jesus’ acknowledgement of the Pharisees’ control of the Torah Scroll in the synagogues and their powerful social and religious position in an illiterate world. Both Davies and Allison assert that “the name Moses connotes authority; and the image of Moses sitting on Sinai is well known in ancient Judaism,” in Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:268. In addition, Senior assumes that “the Seat of Moses” refers to the authority of the teacher whose interpretation of the tradition provided a link to Moses, the lawgiver and teacher par excellence,” in Donald Senior, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 257.

¹¹⁸ L. Y. Rahmani, “Stone Synagogue Chairs: Their Identification, Use and Significance,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 40, no. 2/3 (1990): 192-214.

¹¹⁹ Anders Runesson, “The Origins of the Synagogue in Past and Present Research – Some Comments on Definitions, Theories, and Sources,” *Studia Theologica* 57 (2003): 60-76; A. Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue: A Socio-Historical Study* (Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001), 189-90.

¹²⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:268; Powell, “Do and Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2-7),” 419-35; Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 85. See also Kenneth G. C. Newport, “A Note on the ‘Seat of Moses’ (Matthew 23:2),” *Andrews University Seminary*

reason for the Pharisees' having such power over controlling the "Seat of Moses" or Mosaic law is their faithful commitment to diligently studying the Mosaic law. Josephus speaks about the Pharisees' domination of religion and social norms in the Jewish community before 70 CE. He, likewise, acknowledges Samaias and Pollion, the Pharisees, as influential Pharisaic leaders in Herod the Great's early days.¹²¹ He continues saying that the Pharisees have been dominating schools with the masses following their lead in all religious aspects of life. Josephus emphasizes that even the Sadducees are required to submit to the authority of the Pharisees in order to retain their power and status in the Jewish community.¹²² Moreover, Carson and France convincingly comment that Matthew 23:2-3a is irony or sarcasm, follow by Jesus' true intent in 23:3b-4.¹²³

Matthew 23:3a consists of three imperatives: "do" (Greek ποιήσατε), "observe" (Greek τηρεῖτε), and "do not" (Greek μὴ ποιεῖτε). Luz contends for the permissive or concessive force for the first two Greek imperatives, "do and observe" (Greek ποιήσατε καὶ τηρεῖτε), but places main emphasis on Jesus' prohibition, "do not" (Greek μὴ ποιεῖτε) for following the Pharisees' examples.¹²⁴ To summarize, although the Pharisees play such an important role in both social and religious aspects, Jesus says "so

Studies 28, no. 1 (1990): 53-58.

¹²¹ F. Josephus, *The Jewish Antiques: Books 12-14: Loeb Classical Library*, trans. R. Marcus (London: William Heinemann, 1961), 14: 171-74. See also, F. Josephus, *The Life against Apion: Loeb Classical Library*, trans. H. S. T. J. Thackeray (London: William Heinemann, 1926), 10-12.

¹²² Josephus, *The Life against Apion: Loeb Classical Library*, 38; Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 143.

¹²³ Carson, *Matthew*, 8:473-74; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 860.

¹²⁴ Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, 101. Turner paraphrases Luz's analysis in this view as "Go ahead and do what they say if you want, but never follow their example," in Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 314n8.

do and observe whatever they tell you” (Greek πάντα οὖν ὅσα ἐὰν εἴπωσιν ὑμῖν). Matthew 23:3a precisely acknowledges the reality of the situation regarding the teaching of Mosaic law. Matthew rightly portrays the Pharisees as those who read the Scripture and then model in word and deed that which is contrary to the Mosaic law. The Pharisees often quote the Scripture to Jesus while Jesus challenges their understanding of Scripture. They eventually do not understand the words that they have proclaimed and often misinterpreted the meaning of the Mosaic law. What they “say,” (the Mosaic law) is correct and must be obeyed. However, the Pharisees’ deeds, which include both interpretation and action, are not to be followed.¹²⁵ The Pharisees do not follow the Mosaic law in that their practices do not match what they have said; they merely gain as much controls as possible over the Mosaic law – the “Seat of Moses.”¹²⁶ Therefore, the notion of the “Seat of Moses” is best understood as Jesus’ mere acknowledgement of the Pharisees’ position and status as the ones who liked to control and gain access to the Mosaic law in an illiterate community.¹²⁷

Matthew 23:3b-12

Specific Pharisaic inconsistencies are equally addressed in Matthew 23:4-7. The imagery of heavy burdens being loaded on people’s shoulders (Matt 23:4; cf. Luke 11:46) alludes to the Pharisaic traditions (Matt 15:3-9). The heavy burdens of the

¹²⁵ Powell, “Do and Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2-7),” 423-24.

¹²⁶ The Pharisees’ teaching should be followed in principle because of their authoritative position, but their example is inconsistent with their teaching and must not be imitated (cf. Rom 2:21-24) in Noel S. Rabbinowitz, “Matthew 23:2-4: Does Jesus Recognize the Authority of the Pharisees and Does He Endorse Their Halakah?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46, no. 3 (2003): 423-47.

¹²⁷ Powell, “Do and- Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2-7),” 419-35.

Pharisaic traditions are contrasted with the light load of Jesus (Matt 11:30; cf. Acts 15:10, 28; 1 John 5:3).¹²⁸ Thus, Jesus' first charge of hypocrisy against the Pharisees is that they lay heavy burdens on others (Matt 23:3b-4). A clear distinction between Matthew's and Luke's account about this first charge of Jesus is noticeable. First, Matthew mentions with more detail the Pharisees' tying up burdens that are heavy and hard to carry (Matt 23:4), while Luke speaks of lawyers (Greek νομικοῖς) loading the people with burdens that are hard to carry (Luke 11:46). Second, Matthew asserts that the Jewish religious leaders are not willing to lift a finger to bear burdens, while Luke uses a stronger language, accusing the lawyers of unwillingness even to *touch* (Greek προσψαυετε, emphasis ours) the burdens with one finger. In addition, Luke 11:46 is considered a woe oracle.¹²⁹ Third, Matthew uses the third person, while in Luke this verse is a direct accusation in the second person.¹³⁰ Though some slight differences occur in narrating the first Jesus' criticism concerning the Pharisees, some common grounds are evident. First, Matthew and Luke use Q material. Second, they rightly point out that the Jewish religious leaders impose heavy burdens on others but do not carry them. Third, Jesus' accusation is the reason (Greek ὅτι) for the pronouncement of woe, especially in Luke 11:46.

Jesus denounces the Pharisees with a charge of hypocrisy after He has apparently acknowledged their role as the ones who teach and control the Mosaic law. Jesus sternly denounces the Pharisees that “for they preach, but do not practice” (Greek

¹²⁸ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 315.

¹²⁹ Turner considers Luke 11:46 is a woe oracle because this text is introduced by ὅτι from Καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς νομικοῖς οὐαί, ὅτι in Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 289.

¹³⁰ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 289-90.

τα εργα αυτων μη ποιειτε) in verse 3b. This pronouncement has eventually become one of the main pronouncements made by Jesus. They have evidently failed to practice piety; their hypocrisy points to their pretense of piety.¹³¹ Jesus continues His stern pronouncement in the following verse (i.e., verse 4), and He rebukes the Pharisees for hypocrisy, for “tying up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and laying them on people’s shoulders” (Greek εσμεύουσιν δὲ φορτία βαρέα καὶ δυσβαστακτα). The action of “lay them on people’s shoulders” is literally translated as “lay the burden of the commandments on other people’s shoulders.” This clause addresses the Pharisees emphasis on the traditions of the fathers (oral traditions) as a complement to and enhancement of the Mosaic law.¹³² In opposition to this view, Gundry argues that the action of laying heavy burdens does not refer to the Pharisees’ traditions and interpretation of the Mosaic law, but rather to the Pharisees’ attempt to win public respect, interest, and to gain honor to be called “my Great One.”¹³³ Gundry’s interpretation seems doubtful, as Matthew explains further that the Pharisees tie up heavy burdens on others and love the best seats (Matt 23:4-7). Moreover, Newport supports Matthew’s explanation that tying up heavy burdens symbolizes the practice of the Pharisees in placing upon the people numerous *halakhic* formulations.¹³⁴ Josephus

¹³¹ Powell, “Do and Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2-7),” 423; Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*, 145.

¹³² Newport comments that the Pharisees’ excessive emphasis on traditions and practices of the law has laid heavy burdens others in Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 1995), 127; Ja, *The Pharisees in Matthew 23 Reconsidered*, 101.

¹³³ Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 455-56.

¹³⁴ Newport, *The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23*, 127.

specifies that the Pharisees rigidly observe “regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded in the laws of Moses.”¹³⁵ In short, Jesus contrasts the Pharisaic preoccupation with relatively trivial specific acts and their neglect of the central virtues that enable and animate acts of obedience to the Mosaic law (Matt 23:23; cf. Matt 5:21-22, 27-28; 9:13; 12:7; 15:1-20).¹³⁶

Jesus makes a second charge of hypocrisy against the Pharisees concerning their garnering of men’s applause by ostentatious means. These charges in Matthew 23:5a are further illustrated in Matthew 23:5b-7, arranged in three pairs. Table 7 sketches out the three pairs of illustrations accordingly:

Table 7. Three Pairs Illustration of Matthew 23:5-7

Pair	Illustration	Scripture Reference
One	Love of phylacteries & tassels	Matt 23:5b
Two	Love of places of honor	Matt 23:6
Three	Love of public greetings (“Rabbi”)	Matt 23:7

¹³⁵ F. Josephus, *The Jewish Antiques: Books 12-14: Loeb Classical Library*, 13: 297-98. Josephus clearly mentions that the Pharisees’ focus on such traditions and practices flourish more popularly in Palestine from the time of Salome Alexandra. More detail discussions see J. Neusner, “Pharisaic Law in New Testament Times,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 24 (1971): 331-40.

¹³⁶ See also Turner, *Israel’s Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 314-15 for the Pharisees refuse to help people keeping their rules.

First pair: Matthew 23:5a explicitly describes the first illustration of the motives of the Pharisees for their doing of good deeds: they want to be noticed by people. Even their phylacteries¹³⁷ and prayer shawls are designed for that purpose (cf. Matt 6:1, 5, 16). Wearing the phylactery and tassels¹³⁸ are the traditions and practices of the Pharisees. Wearing the phylactery (Exod 13:9, 16; Deut 6:4-9; 11:18) and tassels on the corner of the garment (Matt 9:20; 14:36; Mark 6:56; Luke 8:44; cf. Num 15:37-39; Deut 22:12) are commandments from God for all Jewish men. The wearing of tassels is specifically based upon the commandment from Numbers 15:37-41, making it compulsory for the Jews to place tassels on the four corners of their robe to remember God's commandments (Num 15:38-39; Deut 22:12).¹³⁹

Second pair: The Pharisees love of honor, the best seats in the synagogues, position, and showing off (Matt 23:5-6).¹⁴⁰ Seeking prominent places at public functions is the second illustration of the concern of these Jewish religious leaders for prestige (Matt 23:6; cf. 11:43; 14:7-11; 20:46; James 2:1-4). One noticeable difference concerning the use of verbs in Matthew 23:6 is Matthew speaks of the "love" (Greek φιλοῦσι) of public prominence, whereas Mark 12:38b-39 and Luke 20:46 merely assert the Jewish religious leaders "like or want" (Greek θελόντων) prominence. Luke 11:43 speaks of the Jewish religious leaders' "love" (Greek ἀγαπᾶτε) for prominence. Hence, Jesus harshly

¹³⁷ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1068. Hereafter it is referred as "BDAG." Phylacteries are small leather boxes which contain Torah portions that men wear on the arm and the forehead. See Exod 13:9, 16; Deut 6:18; 11:18.

¹³⁸ BDAG, 564. Tassels are fringes on one's garment.

¹³⁹ Bruner, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28*, 2:435.

¹⁴⁰ Matt 23:6 is paralleled with Mark 12:38b-39 and Luke 43a; 20:46c.

rebukes the Pharisees for their vanity. They misinterpret the Mosaic law to make it burdensome for others (Matt 23:4) and glorify themselves (Matt 23:5-7).¹⁴¹ Loving honorable places and respectful titles are true both for secular (places at the dinner table and the marketplace) and religious life (Luke 14:7-11).¹⁴² Thus, Jesus harshly denounces the Pharisees for excessive loving the place of honor at feasts, best seats, and being called “rabbi” (Matt 23:6-7).¹⁴³

Third pair: The third pair illustrates their preoccupation with their love of public greetings. They use “rabbi” as an expression of personal esteem (Matt 23:7; cf. Matt 26:49). Jesus condemns the Pharisees for loving the greeting of “rabbi” in the marketplace (Greek $\rho\alpha\beta\beta\iota$; Matt 23:7).¹⁴⁴ The use of “rabbi” in the Gospels is historically plausible as a respectful greeting, but as a title describing an ordained civil-religious leader it would be anachronistic.¹⁴⁵ In Jesus’ time, the title “rabbi” is a highly respected greeting that defines one as “my great one or master or my teacher” (cf. John 1:38). After the events of 70 CE, during the transition from Pharisaism to Rabbinic Judaism and the

¹⁴¹ Powell, “Do and Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2-7),” 432.

¹⁴² France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 862.

¹⁴³ Bruner, in addition, asserts that Jesus advises His listeners refrains to take the most honorable places (Matt 18:1-5; 19:27; 20:9-16, 20-28) in Bruner, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28*, 2:435.

¹⁴⁴ Matthew 23:7a states greetings in the marketplace. Matthew highlights first of feast, then synagogues and marketplaces, while Mark and Luke have marketplace first, followed by synagogues and feasts (Mark 12:38c and Luke 11:43b, 20:46b).

¹⁴⁵ Research studies that probe this question are Hershel Shanks, “Origins of the Title ‘Rabbi,’” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 59, no. 2 (1968): 152-57; S. Zeitlin, “The Title Rabbi in the Gospels Is Anachronistic,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 59, no. 2 (1968): 158-60; Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Epigraphical Rabbis,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 72, no. 1 (1981): 1-17; James Donaldson, “The Title Rabbi in the Gospels: Some Reflections on the Evidence of the Synoptics,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 63, no. 4 (1973): 287-91; Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Jesus as Rabbi in the Fourth Gospel,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 8 (1998): 97-128.

emergence of the academy at Jabneh (Jamnia), in the second century CE, the word “rabbi” is used to describe an “official who functioned as a religious, civil, and educational leader.”¹⁴⁶ Besides that, the word “rabbi” is also used to address the teacher of the Mosaic law.¹⁴⁷ France concludes that Matthew translates both “rabbi” and “rabboni” into Greek as “teacher” (Greek διδασκαλος). Therefore, the terms “rabbi” and “teacher” are synonyms.¹⁴⁸ However, Newport and Hagner agree that, though both terms “rabbi” and “teacher” are identical, they are applied as an unofficial title for the teachers of the Mosaic law and honorific teachers in Jesus’ days.¹⁴⁹ Flusser affirms that the title “rabbi” is popular and widely used for scholars and teachers of the law.¹⁵⁰ The genuine piety which is acceptable by God has nothing to do with a boastful attitude or the seeking honor and glory for oneself. The Pharisees practice pretentious piety which is unacceptable by God. Their attitude for own honor and glory is visibly abusing and mistreating God’s honor and glory. Jesus demands humility for a pious life. He has demonstrated His humility by His sacrificial love on the cross for sinners. Hence, Jesus warns His disciples that they should not be like the Jewish religious leaders in desiring

¹⁴⁶ The word “Rabbi” is found fifteen times in the New Testament. The scriptural references are Matt 23:7-8; 26:25, 49; Mark 9:5; 11:21; 14:45; John 1:38, 49; 3:2, 26; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8. Additionally, Jesus was called “Rabbi” twice in Matthew (26:25, 49) by Judas (cf. Mark 14:45). Jesus is also greeted “Rabbi” by Peter (Mark 9:5; 11:21); by two of John’s disciples – Andrew and possibly Philip (John 1:38); by Nathanael (John 1:49); by Nicodemus (John 3:2); by unnamed disciples (John 4:31; 9:2; 11:8); by the multitude (John 6:25). John the Baptist is also called “Rabbi” by his disciples (John 3:26). More information sees Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Epigraphical Rabbis,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 72, no. 1 (1981): 1-17; Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Jesus as Rabbi in the Fourth Gospel,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 8 (1998): 97-128.

¹⁴⁷ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 862-63.

¹⁴⁸ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 927.

¹⁴⁹ Newport, *The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23*, 90-95; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:660.

¹⁵⁰ David Flusser, *Jesus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press and the Hebrew University, 1998), 32.

honorific titles of personal esteem (Matt 23:8-10).

Jesus turns from denouncing the Jewish religious leaders' false piety to commanding genuine piety for His disciples (Matt 23:8-10). Jesus prompts three prohibitions, each followed by a reason. Table 8 presents the three prohibitions with the reason for each.

Table 8. Three Prohibitions with Reason in Matthew 23:8-10

Prohibition	Reason	Scripture Reference
Not to be called "Rabbi"	For you have one teacher, and you are all brothers	Matt 23:8
Not to be called "father" upon the earth	For you have one Father, who is in heaven	Matt 23:9
Not to be called "instructors"	For you have one instructor, the Christ	Matt 23:10

Jesus has strictly forbidden His disciples the ostentatious use of honorific titles, "rabbi," father" (2 Kgs 2:12; 5:13; 6:21; 13:14; Acts 7:2; 22:1), and "instructor."¹⁵¹ The specific warning against being called "rabbi" continues warning against honorific positions in the community. The primary goal of disciple of a rabbi is to become a rabbi himself at the end of his course of study.¹⁵² Jesus is the ultimate "Teacher," and He holds

¹⁵¹ The title "instructor" (Greek *καθηγηται*) can be translated as "master" or "tutor." See further Bruce W. Winter, "The Messiah as the Tutor: The Meaning of *καθηγητης* in Matthew 23:10," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42.1 (1991): 152-57.

¹⁵² Michael J. Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 116-24.

the ultimately authority within the community of disciple. Jesus teaches His disciples about the struggle for authoritative teaching positions among His followers.¹⁵³

The honorific title, “father,” should be reserved exclusively for the heavenly Father and Jesus Himself for no human being is worthy of such honor. Rather, Jesus teaches His disciples to form an egalitarian family whose members view one another as brothers and sisters (cf. Matt 18:1-5; 20:25-28). The use of the term “father” as a title of honor, respect, and authority has deep roots in ancient Judaism (e.g., 2 Kgs 2:12; 6:21), its specific reference to the Maccabean martyr Razis as “father of his people” (2 Macc 14:37). Its later use is also denoting the head of a rabbinic court.¹⁵⁴ The oral expression “father of the synagogue” is used in rabbinic times of an individual holding a place of honor and leadership within the synagogue affairs.¹⁵⁵ Jesus warns His disciples against elevating religious leaders to a place where they usurp the authority due to God alone. No human leaders can usurp God – the Father’s preeminence.

The third honorific title, “teacher,” is a word occurring in Greek literature (not in the LXX) to designate, especially a private tutor. A private tutor signifies an individual authority as an instructor has over a student.¹⁵⁶ Robertson says *καθηγητης* can also be rendered as “master.”¹⁵⁷ Therefore, Jesus warns His disciples not to seek out personal

¹⁵³ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 748.

¹⁵⁴ Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 404-6.

¹⁵⁵ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 749. Wilkins observes that the motif of the heavenly “Father” appears throughout the Old Testament such as Deut 14:1; 32:6; Ps 103:13; Jer 3:4; 31:9; Hos 11:1.

¹⁵⁶ Bruce W. Winter, “The Messiah As the Tutor: The Meaning of *καθηγητης* Matthew 23:10,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 42, no. 1 (1991): 152-57.

¹⁵⁷ Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*,

authority as “master” over other disciples. Jesus alone is “Master,” and He alone has personal authority to guide His disciples (Matt 28:18, 20). In addition, Jesus possesses the authoritative act of the qualified “Master,” for He is the *author* of the Mosaic law.¹⁵⁸

Jesus’ teaching on the servanthood principle is narrated in Matthew 23:11-12. Jesus particularly affirms the importance of servanthood service with His teaching regarding “who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”¹⁵⁹ in Matthew 23:11 (cf. Matt 18:4; Mark 9:35; Luke 9:48). The comparative adjective “greatest” (Greek *μεῖζων*) in Matthew 23:11 is a superlative.¹⁶⁰ This superlative is a common element in Matthew 18:4 and 23:11. The prime focus of Matthew 23:11 is shared by several passages that contrast Jesus’ disciples desire for status with Jesus’ antithetical stress on service (Matt 20:26-27; Mark 9:35, 10:43; Luke 9:48, 22:26). Matthew 23:12 is a continuation of 23:11. It is similar to Luke 14:11 and 18:14.¹⁶¹ Nonetheless, both Lukan’s texts are nearly identical and vary only slightly from Matthew 23:11’s wording. The chief principle of the servanthood service in the kingdom of heaven is rooted in humility. God will exalt one

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¹⁵⁸ Samuel Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher: Didactic Authority and Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism, and the Matthean Community* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994), 210-12; Bruce W. Winter, “The Messiah as the Tutor: The Meaning of *καθηγητης* in Matthew 23:10,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 42.1 (1991): 157-58.

¹⁵⁹ The phrase “kingdom of heaven” is a prominent theme in Matthew’s writing. Pennington rightly defines that Matthew’s choice depicts “kingdom of heaven” is to emphasize that “God’s kingdom is not like earthly kingdoms, stands over against them, and will eschatologically replace them (on earth)” in Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 321. More information about Matthean “kingdom of heaven,” see Pennington’s *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, especially 279-330, 331-348.

¹⁶⁰ See Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, 299-300 for further information.

¹⁶¹ Luke 14:11 and 18:14 form a “reason” (Greek *ὅτι*) clause that support previous statements.

who humbles himself, and he shall be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 23:11-12).

An Exegesis of the Oracles of the Seven Woes (Matthew 23:13-36)

Matthew 23:13-36 is the heart of Matthew 23, the seven woes narrative unfolded. Jesus makes His seven woes' pronouncements between verses 13 to 36, which are followed by His deep lamentation and His prophecy that the temple will be destroyed. He promises to return as a blessing to the nation (Matt 23:37-39). The series of seven woe oracles are distinctive, each beginning with an identical introductory formula found in Matthew 23:13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29. The word "woes" (Greek Οὐαί) in Matthew 23 undoubtedly signifies Jesus' extreme displeasure with the Jewish religious leaders. Nevertheless, in Matthew 23:2-3a there may be a note of appreciation. Jesus approves of the Pharisees' authoritative role for the Torah (Matt 23:2-3). However, the Pharisees are not consistent in practice and fail in the way that they respond to what the Torah proclaims.

Three pairs of woes. The seven woe oracles of Matthew 23:13-36 can be grouped into three pairs followed by a climatic concluding woe. Table 9 summarizes the three pairs of the woe oracles.¹⁶² The first pair of woes particularly concerns the entering of the kingdom (Matt 23:13-15). The second pair of woes highlights specific legal rulings

¹⁶² Table 9 is extracted, compiled, modified, and summarized from David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 231; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 867-69; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:282; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 22:343; David L. Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 272-73; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 932 prefers a 2-3-2 arrangement with initial and concluding pairs bracketing the middle three.

and matters (Matt 23:16-24). The third pair of woes addresses the matter of the Pharisaic neglect of internal matters (Matt 23:25-28). Last of all, the climatic seventh woe accuses the Jewish religious leaders of bringing Israel's historic rejection to its sad climax (Matt 23:29-36).

Interestingly, Jesus' pronouncement of being "blind guides" (Greek *οδηγοι τυφλοι*) upon the Jewish religious leaders has become one of the essential clauses in the seven woe oracles. For instance, the seven woe oracles, except the third, addresses the scribes and Pharisees as "blind guides" (Matt 23:16). Moreover, the fourth woe tackles the Jewish religious leaders for not emphasizing the weightier matters (Matt 23:23c); it concludes with a second denunciation of the Jewish religious leaders as "blind guides" (Matt 23:24; cf. Matt 23:16).¹⁶³ The seven woe oracles, indeed, follow a pattern of reasoning in its pronouncements. The first two woes follow a pattern of simple pronouncement by reason, but the others develop the reason in a variety of ways. The sixth woe specifically develops the reason by illustrating with the metaphor of whitewashed tombs as a picture of external righteousness that hides internal sin (Matt 23:28). The seventh woe and final woe likewise develops the reason more fully by portraying the Jewish religious leaders' violent treatment of Jesus and His disciples as the culmination of Israel's history of rejecting its own prophets (Matt 23:31-36).¹⁶⁴ Jesus does not simply pronounce the woe, but He also provides the valid reason in His pronouncement. Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woe oracles should not be turned out

¹⁶³ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 867-69; Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 272-73.

¹⁶⁴ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 867-69; Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 272-73.

void as His reasons of argument have well supported His pronouncements.

Table 9. Three Pairs of Woes of Matthew 23:13-36

Three Pairs of Woes	Woe #	Matthew
The First Pair: Entering the Kingdom of God <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Jewish leaders prevented access to God • The Jewish leaders made proselytes for hell¹⁶⁵ 	First Second	23:13 23:15
The Second Pair: Legal Rulings and Matters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Jewish leaders misled the people concerning oaths • The Jewish leaders neglected the weightier matters of the Torah 	Third Fourth	23:16-22 23:23-24
The Third Pair: Outward versus Inward Matters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Jewish leaders cleaned only the outside of the cup • The Jewish leaders were like whitewashed tombs 	Fifth Sixth	23:25-26 23:27-28
The Climatic Conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Jewish leaders culminated a history of rejecting the prophets 	Seventh	23:29-36

First woe (Matt 23:13). With no additional transition except the particle “but” (Greek δὲ), Jesus turns from warning His disciples to sternly denouncing the Jewish religious leaders, particularly the Pharisees.¹⁶⁶ Matthew 23:13 is considered the foremost woe oracle, which is similar to Luke 11:52. The series of the seven prophetic denunciations of the Pharisees as “hypocrites” are commenced here (Matt 23:13, 15, 16,

¹⁶⁵ Can be rendered as “Gehenna,” (Greek γέεννης).

¹⁶⁶ Majority of this content is viewed specifically as Q material by source critics.

23, 25, 27, 29; cf. Matt 11:21; 18:7; 24:19; 26:24). The first denunciation is the most serious of Jesus' accusations against the teachers of the law and Pharisees. Jesus rebukes the lawyers, not the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees (Luke 11:52); while the Matthean Jesus denounces the Jewish religious leaders who "shut up" (Greek κλείετε) the kingdom of heaven for people (Matt 23:13). Matthew 23:13 consists of more additional details than Luke 11:52.¹⁶⁷ The additional details are the designation of the Jewish religious leaders as hypocrites, signifying that Matthew's version is more severe than Luke's.¹⁶⁸

Jesus openly denounces the Pharisees by misusing their role in preventing others from entering the kingdom of heaven. The Pharisees have ultimately misused their role in religion by shutting the door to heaven. The Pharisees confidently claim to open the door to God, but in reality, they keep people out of the kingdom of heaven. They, ironically, are "not leaders but misleaders"¹⁶⁹ preventing others who are so inclined from doing so.¹⁷⁰ Garland acknowledges that "these masters of the Torah, who sit on Moses' seat, obstruct God's will and side-track his law with their contravening traditions, precedents and pettifogging rules;" additionally, "their teaching fogged the simple and central truths of the law with casuistry."¹⁷¹ The Pharisees have failed to recognize the true identity of Jesus as the ultimate key for entering the kingdom of heaven and have caused

¹⁶⁷ Matthew 23:13 contains approximately twenty-five words, whereas Luke 11:52 has seventeen.

¹⁶⁸ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 293.

¹⁶⁹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:285.

¹⁷⁰ τοὺς εἰσερχομένους is rendered as conative, implying that the Pharisees have prevented those who are attempting to enter from entering the kingdom of heaven in Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, 534-35.

¹⁷¹ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 127.

others from entering it.¹⁷² Jesus' pronouncement of the first woe significantly shows that the Pharisees' authoritative role in Jewish social-religion domain is a great failure. Nolland agrees on this failure of the Pharisees, "for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in."¹⁷³ This failure likewise is much more a reflection of the opposition of Jewish religious leaders at the time of the Matthean community after 70 CE. The clause "nor allow those who would enter to go in" (Greek οὐδὲ τοὺς εἰσερχομένους ἀφίετε εἰσελθεῖν) implies the Pharisees' public influential role and their critical stance in the Jewish social-religion domain (Matt 23:13b). In addition, Newport comments that the Pharisees are not the key to the kingdom of heaven, but they are evidently the guardians of the Mosaic law. The Pharisees' authoritative role in teaching the Mosaic law could either prevent or permit people to follow Jesus.¹⁷⁴ In sum, the Pharisees' behaviors and decisions have greatly affected spiritual condition of others in the Jewish context.

Jesus acknowledges that the Jewish religious leaders "occupy Moses' seat," meaning that they have inherited the administration of the law of God (Matt 23:2).¹⁷⁵ One of the key Pharisaic thoughts about entering the kingdom of heaven is through the observance of the law. Maccoby writes,

in Pharisaic thinking, the kingdom of God had two meaning: it meant the present kingdom or reign of God, or it could mean the future reign of God over the whole world in the Messianic Age. It is possible to discern in Jesus' frequent use of the

¹⁷² Newport, *The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23*, 134.

¹⁷³ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 933.

¹⁷⁴ Newport, *The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23*, 134.

¹⁷⁵ Roger Amos, *Hypocrites or Heroes? The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Pharisees in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 52.

same expression the same twofold meaning...¹⁷⁶

Hagner ably concludes that Jesus' denunciation is that "their teaching and practice are false and thus mislead others... their teaching of [the] Torah should have been the key... that opened the door for others to enjoy the rule of God."¹⁷⁷ Keener amusingly asserts that they are like "a porter abusing authority to keep welcome guests out."¹⁷⁸ The Pharisees are locking the gates to keep out the very people whom they are supposed to usher into the kingdom of heaven (Matt 23:13). The verb "shut" (Greek κλείετε) conveys an important concept of the use of a key. Amos states that "it is probably no coincidence that the somewhat different Lucan parallel with Matthew (Luke 11:52; Matt 23:13)."¹⁷⁹ This locking is performed in the sight of those seeking to gain access into the kingdom of heaven. Because of their action, they are likewise effectively locking themselves out of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 12:22-37). Hanger rightly recognizes the emphasis of the noun "hypocrite" in the context as referring to the deception of others, not self-deception.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, the act of hypocrisy leads others to ruin, because it excludes others who wish to enter the kingdom of heaven.¹⁸¹

Matthew 23:14. It is plausible that Matthew 23:14 is an inauthentic verse in the Gospel of Matthew. This verse has widely been interpolated from Mark 12:40 and

¹⁷⁶ Hyam Maccoby, *Jesus the Pharisees* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 121.

¹⁷⁷ Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:668.

¹⁷⁸ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 547.

¹⁷⁹ Luke 11:52 implies a concept of preventing ordinary people from understanding the truth of God's word in Amos, *Hypocrites or Heroes? The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Pharisees in the New Testament*, 53.

¹⁸⁰ Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:668. See also Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 641-47.

¹⁸¹ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 227.

Luke 20:47.¹⁸² Additionally, the wording in this verse is nearly identical to Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47 with several cognate words associated with it.¹⁸³

Second woe (Matt 23:15). The second woe largely builds on the theme of the first. In general, the first two woe oracles deal with the common matter of preventing access to the kingdom of heaven, but the second pair of woes¹⁸⁴ addresses specific legal rulings and matters (Matt 23:16-24). The Jewish leaders' efforts to convert others (cf. Acts 2:11; 6:5; 13:43) are tragically ironic. Whether these efforts should be viewed as a project to convert Gentiles to Judaism or to convert fellow Jews to Pharisaism, or both, is unclear. The Pharisees extensively argue that "God-fearing" Gentiles (cf. Acts 10:2, 22, 35; 13:16, 26, 43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7) must become full converts to Judaism and diligently observe the Pharisaic tradition.¹⁸⁵ The pivotal issue here is that Jesus does not dispute the Pharisees' role and authority, but He criticizes their attitudes towards the Gentiles, who desire to be the children of God. The Pharisees have placed unnecessary extra burdens on the Gentiles that are difficult to bear.¹⁸⁶ In actuality, they do more harm than good to others.¹⁸⁷ The unnecessary burdens might also refer to extra ritual

¹⁸² Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 50; Roger L. Omanson, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 41.

¹⁸³ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 294.

¹⁸⁴ See Table 7. "Three Pair of Woes of Matthew 23:13-36" for more discussions.

¹⁸⁵ Scot McKnight, *A Light among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 106-8.

¹⁸⁶ D. Instone-Brewer, *Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 2A:31.

¹⁸⁷ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 547.

obligations imposed on Jews. Much of the purity ritual is practiced in the temple rather than at home, whereas the Pharisees have urged that it should be practiced there too. In the light of this fact, Jesus denounces the Pharisees because of their evil attitudes in imposing unnecessary burdens on others. The pronouncement of the second woe suggests that He is exercising His authority as the Judge if *no repentance* come through it (emphasis ours).¹⁸⁸

Milikowsky lengthily discusses the term “hell” (Greek *γέεννης*). Matthew uses the term seven times in his gospel, two of which are found in Matthew 23. He asserts that Matthew uses this term to refer to the final destination of the wicked after the general resurrection and the great day of judgment.¹⁸⁹ Jesus severely denounces the Pharisees in the context of a solemn vow. He is critical of the Jewish religious leaders because of what they have done to the proselytes.¹⁹⁰ The Pharisees have misused their role in making few proselytes to become sons of hell rather than sons of the kingdom.

Third woe (Matt 23:16-22). The third woe oracle fundamentally attacks the Pharisees’ hair-splitting distinctions concerning oaths and vows. The third woe specifically consists of a critique of the Jewish religious leaders’ casuistic approach to oaths (Matt 23:17-22; cf. Matt 5:33-37). This woe is the most extensively developed of

¹⁸⁸ Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen? A Study of Jesus as Judge in Matthew 21-25*, 105.

¹⁸⁹ C. Milikowsky, “Which Gehenna? Retribution and Eschatology in the Synoptic Gospels and in Early Jewish Text,” *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988): 244.

¹⁹⁰ According to Nolland, a proselyte “is a resident alien in Israel. Since the resident alien is expected to live in accord with the Mosaic law, the term means “covert to Judaism,” which for males would include having themselves circumcised” in Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 933. Exodus 14:28 states that any “stranger” who have desired to keep the Passover should be circumcised. Some Scripture references to foreigners joining the Israelites include Ruth 2:11-12, Isa 14:1; 56:3, 6.

the seven. It exclusively comprises of, first, a pronouncement of woe (Matt 23:16a); second, the reason for woe: two facile distinctions in oaths (Matt 23:16b, 18); third, two rhetorical questions that expose the distinctions respectively; fourth, three concluding positive remarks on oaths (Matt 23:20-22).¹⁹¹

The Old Testament passages show that people have used oaths and vows judicially and socially to prove their sincerity. Nonetheless, using the name of God in an oath is only allowed when one must fulfill the requirements of its justice and righteousness. Apart from that, taking the name of the LORD in vain by use of an oath is strictly forbidden (Exod 20:7, 16; Deut 5:11, 20; 6:13; 10:20; Num 30:3).¹⁹² Warnings against false or excessive swearing are common in Jewish society. The Temple Scroll legalizes the use of some vows, but it orders the public to keep its vows.¹⁹³ As a result, Jesus is not denouncing the Pharisees for taking oaths and vows. The core issue of the Jesus' pronouncement of the woe is their hair-splitting about the preciseness of the wording. Garland rightly concludes that the Pharisees think that "the Temple gold and the altar gift were binding as part of an oath because they related to the term *Korban* (consecrating or offering), while the Temple and the altar, though holy objects, are illegitimate substitutes in an oath formula."¹⁹⁴ Thus, the Pharisees' viewpoint about oaths is certainly misleading and unbiblical.

The sarcastic expression of Jesus "blind guides" (Greek ὄδηγοὶ τυφλοὶ) in

¹⁹¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:289. It is probably that an intricate chiasmic symmetry occurs here.

¹⁹² Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 152.

¹⁹³ Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 152.

¹⁹⁴ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 23, 135; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:669.

Matthew 23:16 is repeated in Matthew 23:24 (cf. Matt 15:14). Two clear distinctions are exposed as loopholes because of empty distinctions: first, the temple and the gold within it (Matt 23:16-17); second, the altar and what is offered on it.¹⁹⁵ Casuistry in oaths is condemned as an evasion of duty before God (cf. Matt 15:4-6), Jesus has strongly rejected empty casuistry, and He has taught that all oaths are valid (Matt 23:20-22).¹⁹⁶ One may not lessen one's obligation to be true to one's word by facile distinctions, because such oaths profane God's name.¹⁹⁷ Jesus considers all oaths valid. It is best not to use an oath at all but by honestly saying "yes" or "no" (Matt 5:34-37).

Also, the third woe purposefully accentuates the matter of holiness. Jesus condemns the use of temple objects which are often used as ground for non-compliance with oath-taking. The Pharisees evaluate the validity of oaths based on the relative holiness of the sanctuary, altar, gift, and gold upon which they are sworn. The Pharisees demonstrate their failure to recognize that God is the only source of holiness and good (Matt 23:20-22).¹⁹⁸ Chilton writes,

throughout [Matthew], the essential stance of Matthew 23:16-22, which portrays the Temple as the source of sanctification, rather than as an object of sacrificial activity, is clearly maintained. Jesus is consistently portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels as construing purity in terms of what the worshiper willingly does in respect of God's presence in the Temple, rather than as characteristic of or inherent within objects.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Don B. Garlington, "Oath-Taking in the Community of the New Age (Matthew 5:33-37)," *Trinity Journal* 16, no. 2 (1995): 139-70; Jo-Ann A. Brant, "Infelicitous Oaths in the Gospel of Matthew," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 63 (1996): 3-20. See further Akio Ito, "The Question of the Authenticity of the Ban on Swearing (Matthew 5:33-37)," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 43 (1991): 5-13; D. C. Duling, "[Do not Swear . . .] by Jerusalem Because It Is the City of the Great King' (Matthew 5:35)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991): 291-309.

¹⁹⁶ Although Jesus has denied the need for any oaths in Matt 5:33-37.

¹⁹⁷ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 549.

¹⁹⁸ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 103.

¹⁹⁹ B. Chilton, "[ὡς] φραγέλλιον ἐκ σχοινίων (John 2:15)," in *Templum Amicitiae, Essays on the*

The pronouncement in verse 20 regarding the altar is heightened by the pronouncement in verse 21, which significantly points out that the temple is the dwelling place of God. Matthew draws three prominent conclusions from the preceding two examples in Matthew 23:20-22: first, no valid distinction exists between the altar and what is offered on it (Matt 23:20; cf. Matt 23:18); second, no distinction exists between the temple and the one who dwells in it (Matt 23:21; cf. Matt 23:16); third, no distinction exists between heaven, the throne of God, and God who sits on it (Matt 23:22; cf. Matt 5:34). Thus, sincerity and wholehearted dedication matter, especially with oaths taking as Israelites consider what they have said followed by their appropriate actions.

Fourth woe (Matt 23:23-24). The fourth woe seems to be a Q text and finds a parallel in Luke 11:42. Matthew's and Luke's pronouncement of woe differ: Luke merely addresses the "neglect of justice and the love of God" (Greek *παρέρχεσθε τὴν κρίσιν καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην τοῦ θεοῦ*), but Matthew speaks of "neglecting the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Greek *ἀφήκατε τὰ βαρύτερα τοῦ νόμου, τὴν κρίσιν καὶ τὸ ἔλεος καὶ τὴν πίστιν*).²⁰⁰ Therefore, Matthew's pronouncement of woe is more emphatic and severe than Luke's.

The focus of the fourth woe is Jesus' criticism about the practice of the Pharisees' tithing. Tithing is Israelites' way of fulfilling the requirement of the law of Moses according to Leviticus 27:30 and Deuteronomy 14:22-23. Keener comments that

Second Temple, ed. W. Horbury, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 48*, (Sheffield, UK: *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press/Sheffield Academic Press*, 1991), 343.

²⁰⁰ BDAG, 156. Matthew uses a strong verb which denotes "abandoning." Matthew's focuses on the abandonment, not mere "neglect" as in Luke. Luke uses *παρέρχεσθε* whereas Matthew uses *ἀφήκατε*. Thus, Matthew's version of this verse is more emphatic and severe than Luke's.

ancient Jewish society is an agrarian society, and they have given one-tenth of their produce for the care of the Levites and priests, the landless and the poor every third year (Num 18:21-29).²⁰¹ Jesus denounces the fourth woe on the Pharisees, not because of their failure to fulfill elements of the Mosaic law,²⁰² but because they have their priorities entirely out of keeping with Jesus' priorities (i.e., the misplaced priority), which He declares to be "the weightier matters of the law" (Greek ἀφήκατε τὰ βαρύτερα τοῦ νόμου, τὴν κρίσιν καὶ τὸ ἔλεος καὶ τὴν πίστιν).²⁰³ France confidently asserts that the Pharisees emphasize "the *halakhic* matter of weightier versus lighter matter."²⁰⁴ The Pharisees not only have observed all religious duties regarding agricultural taboos and rules, but they have persistently practiced tithing even to the minutest amounts of mint, dill and cumin (Matt 23:23-24), which are herbs²⁰⁵ used for cooking.²⁰⁶ Jesus in this fourth woe addresses the Pharisees who have embraced and fulfilled the smallest biblical requirements, but neglected the greater commandments of justice, mercy, and faithfulness. In short, the Pharisees are focusing more upon the tithe of the minutiae while ignoring the greater commands to show mercy, to be just and to be faithful. Jesus' words

²⁰¹ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 550.

²⁰² As the activity of tithing crops undoubtedly is found in Lev 27:30. Hagner explains that the Old Testament laws have proper crops in view, and eventually exempts certain garden herbs from tithing. Hagner continues defending that even in the light of the literature, Jesus is willing to accept their scrupulous behavior, if they do not neglect other important aspects of the Torah in Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:670; Ja, *The Pharisees in Matthew 23 Reconsidered*, 109-10.

²⁰³ Matt 23:23-24; cf. Luke 11:42. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are derived from English Standard Version (ESV).

²⁰⁴ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 872; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:670.

²⁰⁵ Herbs are generally viewed as a crop (cf. Lev 27:30; Deut 14:22-23). See Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 550.

²⁰⁶ Neusner, "Pharisaic Law in New Testament Times," 331.

echo Isaiah 6:6 and Micah 6:6-8.²⁰⁷ Jesus uses a hyperbolic metaphor to describe the Pharisees' scrupulously straining out gnats (tithing herbs) but swallowing camels (i.e., omitting the "weightier matter"). This may involve a pun, since the Aramaic word for "gnat" sounds like "camel."²⁰⁸ Matthew 23:24 implies the inconsistency of the Jewish religious leaders since both gnats and camels are unclean and not to be eaten (Lev 11:4, 23, 41). In a word, Jesus' prime concern is that religious rituals should be practiced in the love, justice, and mercy of God towards others. Jesus' teaching prioritizes the central values, which supports specific legal obligations (cf. Hosea 6:6; Matt 9:13; 12:7; Mic 6:8; Zech 7:9-10).

Fifth woe (Matt 23:25-26). The fifth woe is evidently a Q text connected to Luke 11:39-41. The word order and terminology for the utensils vary considerably between Matthew's and Luke's version. Nevertheless, Matthew and Luke accentuate the Pharisees' error of cleansing the outside of the utensils, not the inside. The key difference is that Matthew uses the plural verb to explain the inner presence of "greed and self-indulgence" (Greek γέμουσιν ἐξ ἀρπαγῆς καὶ ἀκρασίας) whereas Luke uses the singular verb to describe the inner presence of "greed and wickedness" (Greek γέμει ἀρπαγῆς καὶ πονηρίας). The verb "self-indulgence" (Greek ἀκρασίας) is narrower and stronger than Luke's "wickedness" (Greek πονηρίας).²⁰⁹ Matthew's text conveys a harsher attack on the

²⁰⁷ Turner, "Jesus' Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today," 70.

²⁰⁸ Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 175-76.

²⁰⁹ BDAG, 38. The verb "self-indulgence" (Greek ἀκρασίας) implies the absence of self-control, even of a sexual kind (cf. 1 Cor 7:25).

Jewish religious leaders and lacks the note of social justice found in Luke's.²¹⁰

Jesus focuses on the core issue of purity in the fifth woe. The chief focus in this fifth woe is to stress the Pharisees' obsession with outer purity and their neglect of inner purity (i.e., the interpretation of misplaced priority).²¹¹ Jesus uses the example of cleaning utensils for further explanation. Matthew portrays the Jewish religious leaders as those who have cleaned the outside of tableware but neglected the inside (Matt 23:25-26; cf. Luke 11:39-41).²¹² Jesus' critique is of those whose external focus has caused them to neglect the internal matters. Pursuing a purity of life is indeed a significant driving force in the life of the Pharisees. Though the prime significance of this woe is probably metaphorical,²¹³ Keener affirms that the Mishnah²¹⁴ discusses those practices "which distinguish between inner and outer parts of vessels with respect to cleanness."²¹⁵

²¹⁰ Turner rightly observes that Matthew's woe concludes with the harsh singular address "blind Pharisees" and the command to cleanse the inside of the utensil first in order that the outside might also be clean. Whereas Luke's text concludes by addressing the Pharisees as foolish people who do not realize that God made the inside as well as the outside of the cup (Luke 11:40) in Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 295.

²¹¹ Turner, "Jesus' Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today," 70.

²¹² Garland perceives that a legal dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees is in view here, but the arguments for a metaphorical understanding seem to be more plausible. For more information see Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 141-50. See also Blomberg, *Matthew, 22:347*; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:296-99.

²¹³ Jesus is not disputing an existing Pharisaic tradition in Matt 26:26. He is using the washing of tableware metaphorically. See Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 552; Blomberg, *Matthew, 22:347*; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:296-99. Borg's understanding of the social structure of Palestine is a particular with respect to the quest for holiness in Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 5 (New York: Edwin Mellen Press 1984), 66-87. Borg coined the phrase "Politics of Holiness" in his writing.

²¹⁴ The Mishnah or Mishna is the first major written collection of the Jewish oral traditions known as the Oral Torah. It is also the first major work of rabbinic literature.

²¹⁵ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 55. In addition, Keener cites *m.Kelim* 25:1-9; *Para* 12:8; *Tohar* 8:7.

Sixth woe (Matt 23:27-28). The sixth woe is closely connected to Luke 11:44 but does not share the same vocabulary. Luke's text plainly pronounces woe on those who walk unknowingly over unmarked graves, evidently thereby incurring ritual impurity.²¹⁶ Matthew's text compares the hypocritical Pharisees to whitewashed tombs that are clean on the outside but not the inside (Matt 23:27). Matthew adopts the tomb analogy as an image of the inconsistency between the external righteous appearance of the Pharisees and their wickedness in the inner man.²¹⁷

The sixth woe possesses a strong verbal continuation from the fifth: inward piety as opposed to mere outward piety, thus signifying that the subject matter is similar.²¹⁸ The sixth woe denunciation bears a similarity to Luke 11:44. Both passages refer to the same custom but appear to use it in somewhat different ways.²¹⁹ Jesus illustrates the issue of purity from the fifth woe (Matt 23:25-26) with the practice of whitewashing a tomb: it may be clean on the outside but is unclean on the inside. He turns from the tableware washing metaphor to the macabre simile of tombs (cf. Luke 11:44; Acts 23:3).²²⁰ According to the biblical law, dead bodies, human bones, and graves are unclean. Anyone who has touched them has to undergo a rigorous purification

²¹⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1117. On corpse impurity, see Num 19:11-22; Lev 21:1-3.

²¹⁷ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 296.

²¹⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:299-300; Ja, *The Pharisees in Matthew 23 Reconsidered*, 111.

²¹⁹ Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus*, 128.

²²⁰ J. D. M. Derrett, "Receptacles and Tombs (Matthew 23:24-30)," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77 (1986): 255-66 in Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 322. See also Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 152-57.

ritual (Num 6:6-7; 19:11-22; Lev 21:1-11).²²¹ Moreover, tombs are beautifully adorned on the outside, but inside contain bones and decaying corpses, which are ritually defiling according to biblical and Pharisaic tradition.²²² Comparably, the Jewish religious leaders appear to others as righteous, but their hearts are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Jesus demands that the obedience of the law *must* (emphasis ours) emanate from the heart (Matt 5:8, 20, 22, 28; 6:1; 7:22-23; 12:34; 13:41; 15:7-9, 19; 18:35; 22:37; 24:12, 48).²²³

Saldarini and Marshall share a common viewpoint that the Pharisees have evidently extended traditional observances of the priestly purity to non-priests, and to their utensils using. The Pharisees, as Jesus illustrates, are like a whitewashed tomb (Matt 23:27-28). France witnesses that Jesus uses the vivid imagery of Ezekiel 13:10-16 to denounce the Pharisees. The imagery of “whitewashing”²²⁴ of Ezekiel 13:10-16 is the language that the prophets have used to attack the failure of their leaders in the Old Testament.²²⁵ The similar imagery is repeated by Jesus. The concern of ritual purity is at the heart of those who desire to live a pious life in Jesus’ time.²²⁶ The pivotal point of

²²¹ France positively notes that the Mosaic law is very strict about undergoing the purification ritual of touching a dead body. For more information, see France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 875.

²²² On corpse impurity, see Num 6:6-8; 19:11-12. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 152-57.

²²³ Samuel Tobias Lachs, “On Matthew 23:27-28,” *Harvard Theological Review* 68, no. 3 (1975): 385-88; Turner, *Israel’s Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 323.

²²⁴ The practice of “whitewashing” (tombs) is a common maintenance practice to make decaying things look things better. It is also a practice that flourished especially after the success of rabbinic Judaism after 70 CE. In addition, the practice of “whitewashing” is not new in Jesus’ time as apostle Paul has clearly mentioned a “whitewashed wall” in Acts 23:3. More information on the practice of “whitewashing,” see D. Instone-Brewer, *Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 2A:208

²²⁵ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 876.

²²⁶ Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community*, 135; Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 46.

Jesus is not rebuking the Pharisees' fear of uncleanness, but their overwhelming attitude of "showing-off". Additionally, Jesus denounces the Pharisees on the issue of their *over-emphasis* (emphasis ours) of the outer purity (i.e., an obsession with cleaning the cup and plate) by neglecting the inner purity. Jesus sternly opposes the Pharisees excess on the outer purity while being full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.²²⁷ The inner purity has higher precedence over the outer purity.²²⁸ Jesus regularly teaches on the *inner purity* is what all counts prior to the outer purity (emphasis ours). In fact, this teaching is found throughout the Bible; the root cause of all unrighteousness, hypocrisy, iniquity, wickedness, and evilness is inward impurity (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Prov 4:23; 16:2; Jer 17:9; Matt 15:16-20; Gal 5:19-21; cf. Matt 5:8.) Hence, only focusing on outer purity is identical to furnishing a rotten corpse with a whitewashed tomb.

Seventh woe (Matt 23:29-32). Matthew 23:29-32 is related well to the vocabulary and phraseology of Luke 11:47-48. Matthew's Jesus issues a harsher condemnation of the Jewish religious leaders than Luke's. Matthew and Luke both addresses "build" but use different words for the tombs of the prophets.²²⁹ The seventh woe is apparently intended as the climax of the series of seven woe oracles. Jesus pronounces the seventh woe to address the root of the problems in the first six woes.²³⁰

²²⁷ Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 134; Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 323.

²²⁸ Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 134; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:672.

²²⁹ Matthew uses τάρφους, while Luke uses μνημεῖα.

²³⁰ Davies, Allison, and Turner share a common view that if the Jewish religious leaders have listened to the prophets whom God has sent, they would not have had to face the consequences announced by the prophets. See Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:299-300; Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 323. See also Turner, "Jesus' Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today," 74-76.

Jesus boldly points out that the Jewish religious leaders' denial of complicity in their ancestor's murder of the prophets unwittingly implicates them in guilty of crimes murder (Matt 23:31-33; cf. Luke 11:47-48).²³¹ The simile of tombs in Matthew 23:27 directly links the sixth woe to the seventh. The tombs picture in Matthew 23:29 are closely related to the prophets murdered by the leaders' ancestors. The Jewish leaders beautify the tombs while claiming that they would have had no part with their ancestors in killing the occupants of the tombs.

The critical pronouncement in this seventh woe is emphasizing on “the descendants of the prophets versus descendants of those who have killed them.”²³² The key issue of the seventh woe is the Pharisees' rejection of God's prophets in the past.²³³ The Pharisees' admission that they are the descendants (Greek υἱοί) of murderers implies inherited character traits, not merely physical descent (Matt 23:31).²³⁴ They are not “fellows” of the prophets but of those who have murdered the prophets. Matthew portrays the Jewish religious leaders as hypocritically “protesting too much” in their attempt to disassociate themselves from their ancestors. This protest only exacerbates their guilt and

²³¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:299-300; Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 323.

²³² Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 554.

²³³ Turner has compiled the historic rejection of the prophets recorded in the Second Temple Literature. For more information, see Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 323; Turner, “Jesus' Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today,” 74-76.

²³⁴ The Pharisees have witnessed themselves that they are the “sons” (Greek υἱοί) of those who have apparently murdered the prophets (Matt 23:31) requires careful analysis. The metaphorical use of sons (Greek υἱοί) is a *Hebraism* (cf. Matt 8:12; 9:15; 12:27; 13:38; 23:15; Mark 3:17, 28; Luke 16:8; 20:34, 36; John 12:36; 17:12; Acts 4:36; 13:10; Eph 2:2-3; Col 3:6; 1 Thess 5:5; 2 Thess 2:3). See also the detail discussion of “sons” (Greek υἱοί) in BDAG, 1024-25; Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 323-34n51.

manifests their spiritual blindness.

According to the Jewish tradition, the Jews have clearly admitted that their ancestors have apparently killed the righteous prophets.²³⁵ The Jewish religious leaders have built memorial tombs for those that their ancestors have rejected and killed. Jesus pronounces the seventh woe upon the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who have honored the prophets by caring for their tombs yet have repeated their ancestors' crime against the prophets God has sent to them.²³⁶

Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for their violent history and urges them to realize their heritage of brutality. Thus, He denounces the Pharisees by ensuing a stern statement "Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers" (Matt 23:32).²³⁷ The verb in Matthew 23:32 is in an ironic imperative form and should be considered one of the aspects of Matthew's characteristic motif of biblical fulfillment.²³⁸ Jesus' utterance is tantamount to a command issued to crucify Him. Jesus' impending crucifixion is the culmination of a historical pattern of rejected prophets.²³⁹ The Jewish religious leaders is to underline the

²³⁵ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 554.

²³⁶ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 554; Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 323.

²³⁷ The Old Testament references: 1 Kgs 18:27; Isa 6:9; 8:9-10; 29:9; Jer 7:21; 23:28; 44:25-26; Ezek 3:27; Amos 4:4-5. The New Testament reference is Rev 22:11.

²³⁸ Matt 23:32 is an ironic imperative because the Pharisees have challenged to do wrong and amounted to a threat of consequences if the command is obeyed (cf. 1 Kgs 2:22; 18:27; 22:15; Judg 10:14; Job 38:3; 40:10; Isa 6:9; 8:9-10; 29:9; 47:12; Jer 7:21; 23:28; 44:25; Lam 4:21; Ezek 3:27; 20:39; Amos 4:4-5; 5:5; Nah 3:14-15; Rev 22:11). See Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 948, 1198.

²³⁹ Turner outlines the motif of sin coming to its full measure is found elsewhere in the Bible. For example, Gen 15:16; 2 Kgs 21:10-15; Dan 8:23; 9:24 in Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 324n53. For more information about "Jesus as the Ultimate Rejected Prophet," see Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 151-175; Turner, "Jesus' Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today," 66-77.

certainty of impending judgment. Jesus' epithets in Matthew 23:33 recalls Matthew 3:7 and 12:34. The "judgment of hell" recalls Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15. Jesus' illustration is parallel to the Pharisees' rejection of His ministry (Matt 10:41-42; 25:35-45). The Pharisees are not the spiritual successors of the prophets, but they are the descendants of those who have killed the prophets even though they have distanced themselves from the persecution of the prophets.²⁴⁰ The murder of Jesus brings horrible judgment because it is the ultimate atrocity in an atrocious sequence that have begun when Cain has murdered Abel (Gen 4:8-16; cf. Heb 11:4; 1 John 3:12). Jesus reaffirms that the wicked generation that has rejected Him and will kill Him (Matt 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 24:34) will bear the brunt of the woes He has pronounced.²⁴¹ As a consequence, the murderers of Jesus will eventually reap their ancestors' severe judgments if they follow in their footsteps (Matt 23:36-24:2).²⁴²

Matthew 23:32-33. These two verses have no direct synoptic connections with other Synoptic Gospels.²⁴³ These verses serve two purposes: first, they bring Israel's history of prophetic rejection to its sad climax; second, they bring Jesus' woe pronouncement to its climax.

Matthew 23:34-36. Matthew 23:34-36 is closely related to Luke 11:49-51 and

²⁴⁰ G. Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 52-53.

²⁴¹ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 324-25; Turner, "Jesus' Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today," 75-77.

²⁴² Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 554; A. Runesson, "Purity, Holiness, and the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew's Narrative World," in *Purity, Holiness, and Identity in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Memory of Susan Baber*, ed. C. S. Ehrlich, A. Runesson, and E. Schuller (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 171.

²⁴³ See section "Synoptic Connections in Matthew 23 above."

therefore rooted in Q material. Matthew's and Luke's words of choice and expressions are varied: in Matthew, Jesus says "I send" prophets, wise men, and scribes "to you" (Greek *πρὸς ὑμᾶς*), while in Luke, Jesus says the wisdom of God will send prophets and apostles "to them" (Greek *εἰς αὐτοὺς*).²⁴⁴

Jesus emphatically says, "I send you prophets, wise men and scribes....," that in making this statement He joins His voice to that of the God who inspired the Old Testament prophets. Matthew 23:34-35 is found in Jeremiah 7:25-29.²⁴⁵

Two Concluding Remarks (Matt 23:13-36)

Two prominent concluding remarks can be drawn from the oracles of the seven woes (Matt 23:13-36). First, it is evidently clear from the entire gospel narratives that Jesus does not regard the whole of Pharisaism as totally corrupt.²⁴⁶ Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woe oracles commonly addresses only the negative behavior of the Pharisees.²⁴⁷ Jesus severely denounces the Pharisees' misconduct in replacing God's core commandments with their dubious and excessive traditions, customs, and practices. The Pharisees have intensely abused their control and authority as interpreters of the Mosaic

²⁴⁴ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1120-22 provides a useful discussion of this unusual expression. Cf. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 172-74.

²⁴⁵ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 836.

²⁴⁶ Jesus' words in Matthew 23 should not be understood as a blanket condemnation of *all* Pharisees (*emphasis mine*), but rather of those who fit the categories Jesus went on to describe. As Theissen and Merz point out that there is an ambivalence in the relationship between the Pharisees and Jesus, so that as well as fierce invective we found the Pharisees warned Jesus concerning Herod Antipas (Luke 13:31), and the Pharisees were inviting Jesus to meals (Luke 7:36-50; 11:37; 14:1-24) in G. Theissen and A. Merz, *The Historical Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1998), 230.

²⁴⁷ David Flusser, *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Mod Books, 1993), 30.

law and have seriously rejected what Jesus has already proclaimed. The Mosaic law demands inner purity, but they exacted outward purity and an outwardly pious life. Jesus stresses more on inner purity rather than outer purity (Matt 15:11).²⁴⁸ Second, Jesus' emphasis is not merely restricted to the outward ritual observances of the Pharisees, but also the love of justice, mercy, and faithfulness is what God desires.²⁴⁹ Jesus stresses the core biblical message of the Mosaic law, that the Mosaic law must be interpreted and practiced in alignment with the first and greatest commandment and another like unto it – love for God and love for neighbor (Matt 22:36-40; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27; Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18).

Jesus' Two Final Pronouncements (Matt 23:37-39)

Matthew 23:37-39 is closely linked to Luke 13:34-35.²⁵⁰ Luke's text is found in Luke's travel narrative. Although Matthew's and Luke's versions are derived from Q, they differ in narrative contexts.²⁵¹ Several minor differences are perceptible between the Matthean and Lukan lamentation over Jerusalem,²⁵² but they do not significantly affect

²⁴⁸ Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 15.

²⁴⁹ Flusser, *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity*, 24; Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 97.

²⁵⁰ Matt 23:37-39 will be discussed in a greater detail in chapter 5.

²⁵¹ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 949; Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel according to Matthew*, 323. On the Lukan text, see Francis D. Weinert, "Luke, the Temple and Jesus' Saying about Jerusalem's Abandoned House (Luke 13:34-35)," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 68-76.

²⁵² Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 50-51. See also Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 298. Several obvious differences include: (1). Matt 23:37 has the present infinitive ἐπισυναγαγεῖν where Luke 13:34 uses the aorist ἐπισυνάξει. (2). The simile of the hen gathering chicks is expressed by ἐπισυνάγει Matt 23:37, but this verb is elided in Luke 13:34. The chicks in Luke 13:34 are νοσσιᾶν, a feminine accusative singular of νοσσία, "brood," whereas Matt 23:37 uses the neuter accusative plural νοσσία of νοσσιον, which denotes "young bird" or "birdling." (3). Matthew expresses Israel's house as "your house is left to you desolate"

the meaning in a noticeable manner. The Matthean lamentation is more severe than the Lukan. In addition, Matthew 23:39 is in nearly identical with Luke 13:35.

The literary setting of Matthew stresses the temple context, and this chapter contains the climax of Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees. It is in the temple setting that Jesus pronounces the seven woe oracles and His rejection by the Pharisees; the desolation²⁵³ of the temple is the consequence. The closing section of Matthew 23 ends with Jesus' two final pronouncements: Jesus' first pronouncement of the oracle of the seven woes immediately turns into a deep and sorrowful lament. Jesus' lamentation comes as much from grief as from anger.²⁵⁴ Jesus undoubtedly breaks down in tears as He laments over the city of Jerusalem. It is the voice of the *Prophet* (Jesus Himself, emphasis ours) speaking God's word, only now He is weeping the Father's tears.²⁵⁵ Jesus predicts that blood-guilt will come upon this generation, and He laments for the whole city of Jerusalem.²⁵⁶ Jesus predicts that the temple at Jerusalem will be destroyed because of the Pharisees' hypocrisy, misconduct behavior, and Jerusalem's rejection of God's prophets. Consequently, Jerusalem will face desolation and abandonment in the near

(Greek ἀφίεται ὑμῖν ὁ οἶκος ὑμῶν ἔρημος) in Matt 23:38, but Luke has omitted "desolate."

²⁵³ The word "desolation" of the house can also refer to anything from a royal palace (Jer 22:5) to Israel as God's house (Jer 12:7), but in the context of Jesus' teachings. The immediate context in Matthew can only mean the destruction of the temple (Matt 24:15) in Meier, *Matthew*, 274; Gregory Baum, *The Jews and the Gospel: A Re-examination of the New Testament* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Company, 1961), 54. See also Jer 12:7; Matt 21:13. See also Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 559.

²⁵⁴ Turner, "Jesus' Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today," 72.

²⁵⁵ Michael Card, *Matthew: The Gospel of Identity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 206.

²⁵⁶ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 86.

future.²⁵⁷

Jesus' second pronouncement is His prediction that His glorious return will be God's blessing to the nation: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matt 23:39). Although the city of Jerusalem will become a desolate city, it will become a blessed and joyous city.²⁵⁸ Hence, the desolation of the city of Jerusalem is not the final word; there is a hope for an invitation to life.

²⁵⁷ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 323; Turner, "Jesus' Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today," 74-76; Ja, *The Pharisees in Matthew 23 Reconsidered*, 114; Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, 229.

²⁵⁸ Newport, *The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23*, 153; Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 328.

CHAPTER 5
ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION:
AN OVERALL ASSESSMENT

**What Initiated the Pronouncement of
the Oracles of the Seven Woes?**

In Matthew 23, Jesus gives a final scathing denunciation to the Pharisees as a stern warning to His disciples and the crowds (Matt 23:1). Jesus warns His disciples and the crowds about the Pharisees' culpability and alerts them not to follow their example (Matt 23:1-12). He personally pronounces a series of woes to the Pharisees for two reasons: First, the Jewish religious leaders are the most influential leaders among the Israelites because they are in the villages throughout Israel. They often have participated closely in the life of the synagogue.¹ The Jewish religious leaders, particularly the Pharisees, have been Jesus' most vocal opponents throughout His ministry because Jesus has often undercut their oral law and threatened their authoritative pronouncements, as well as their esteem among the Israelites.²

The pronouncement of the seven woes is not initiated from an empty vacuum. Several plausible initiators for the pronouncement of the seven woes are found in Matthew's writings. And the primary initiator of the pronouncement of the seven woes

¹ Michael J. Wilkins, "Matthew," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1:25.

² Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 744.

are the sins, transgressions, and misconduct of the Jewish religious leaders, particularly, the Pharisees. In the context, Matthew arranges the Pharisees' sins and transgressions in accordance with two main themes: First, the Pharisees' rejection of God's prophets, including Jesus Himself. Second, the Pharisees' failure to bear fruit worthy for repentance.³

The Pharisees' Rejection of God's Prophets

Schreiner specifically notes that the Jewish religious leaders have rejected *all* (emphasis ours) of God's prophets, including Jesus Himself – the Son of God, the Messiah – with the result that “the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah” would come upon them (Matt 23:34-35).⁴

The Pharisees' rejection of John the Baptist. Matthew records the first appearance of the Pharisees is the rejection of God's prophet – John the Baptist. John's preaching denotes their rejection of God, and thus renders them liable to God's condemnation and judgment. John labels them, “You brood of vipers!” (Greek γεννηματα εχιδνων) clearly identifying that they are ripe for God's condemnation and judgment (Matt 3:7, 10). Interestingly, John's use of this label prefigures Jesus' own denunciation

³ The phrase “bearing fruit worthy for repentance” denotes the Pharisees' “insufficient righteousness” (Matt 3:8; cf. Matt 5:20). Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are derived from English Standard Version (ESV).

⁴ Additionally, Schreiner links Abel and Zechariah through righteous blood being shed, which reveals Matthew's awareness of the larger story line of the Hebrew Bible in Patrick Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe: The First Gospel and Its Portrait of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 231. In essence, Matthew is saying that the blood speaks from “cover to cover,” from Genesis through Chronicles in H. G. L. Peels, “The Blood ‘from Abel to Zechariah’ (Matthew 23:35; Luke 11:50f.) and the Canon of the Old Testament,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 113, no. 4 (2001): 583-601.

of the Pharisees (Matt 12:34, 36-37; cf. Matt 23:33).⁵

The Pharisees' rejection of God's prophets (Matt 23:29-39). The charge that Israel has rejected its own prophets (Matt 23:29-31) is perhaps the most serious accusation found in Matthew 23. The plausible reason is the rejection addresses the root cause of the other problems confronted there.⁶ Jesus' imperative "Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers" (Greek πληρώσατε τὸ μέτρον τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν, Matt 23:32) conveys an important message about the inevitability of the Pharisees' conforming to their ancestral nature of murdering God's prophets. However, the Pharisees' denial (Matt 23:30) and activities that promulgate their innocence (Matt 23:29) are merely a façade covering their failure to recognize and receive God's prophets. The Pharisees have acknowledged that their ancestor's involvement that they largely have inherited their fathers' murderous nature.⁷ Garland infers that the Pharisees ought to be responsible for Jesus' crucifixion.⁸ Indeed, the Pharisees are portrayed as representative of a faithless generation. Blood guiltiness has come upon them and upon this generation (Matt 23:36).

⁵ Mary Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 254:108-9.

⁶ David L. Turner, "Jesus' Denunciation of the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23, and Witness to Religious Jews Today," in *To the Jews First*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 74. For more information see, David L. Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 117-266. Turner has provided a comprehensive discussion of the rejection of the prophets in Matthew, ranges from John the Baptist, Jesus as the ultimate rejected prophet, Jesus' disciples as future rejected prophets, the parable of the wicked tenant farmers (Matt 21:33-46), and Jesus before Pilate: The "Blood Libel" (Matt 27:11-26).

⁷ Matt 5:11-12 explains that those responsible for the persecution of God's prophets will also be responsible for the persecution of Jesus' followers (Matt 23:34). See Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 12; David E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 52 (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 177; Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 109; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 1:328.

⁸ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 177.

Matthew 23:37-39 confirms that the sins and transgressions of the Pharisees is not theirs exclusively, but that they also belong to the city of Jerusalem (Matt 23:37).⁹ Jesus' stern warning is overlaid with deep sorrow for the city of Jerusalem, which rejected Him.

The Pharisees' rejection of Jesus. Jesus' response to the request for a sign with an indictment of this generation demonstrates the failure of the Pharisees to recognize the identity of Jesus (Matt 12:39 and 16:4), and their rejection. Matthew reinforces the Pharisees' request for a sign in Matthew 16:1-4. Here the denunciation of the sign seeking generation echoes the Old Testament indictments of the wilderness generation who despite God's gift of manna, tested Him in the wilderness. Jesus uses an example of the Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10:1-10; 2 Chr 9:1-9). The Queen of Sheba follows the wisdom of the King Solomon, but "this generation" is unwilling to listen to Jesus. Consequently, the failure of "this generation," especially the Pharisees, to recognize Jesus causes them to reject Him, arrest Him and finally plot to kill Him. The Pharisees clearly demonstrate that they are the faithless Israel,¹⁰ alongside the previous generations who have similarly rejected God's prophets in the Old Testament, some with an intention to kill the prophets of God (2 Chr 36:16; Jer 2:21; 3:20; Ezek 6:9; Zech 7:12; cf. Matt 5:12; 23:30-31, 34, 37).¹¹ In the context of Matthew 23, verse 37 restates the

⁹ Matthias Konradt, *Israel, Kirche und die Völker im Matthäusevangelium* (WUNT 215, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 396 in Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 110. Konradt agrees that all Jerusalem is responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. See also R. T. France, *Evangelist and Teacher* (Exeter, NH: Paternoster Press, 1989), 218.

¹⁰ Matthew uses the adjective "adulterous" (Greek *μοιχαλῖς*), not found in either of the Synoptic parallels, echoes the indictment by the Old Testament God's prophets of personified Israel as an "adulterous wife" (Hos 1-3; Jer 3:6-10; cf. Jer 9:2; Ezek 16:32). Thus, Jesus' charge of adultery is tantamount to an accusation of faithfulness and apostasy. More information sees Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 1:354; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:188; Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 106-7.

¹¹ Note that in Matt 12:39 (although not Matt 16:4 or the Lukan parallel), Jonah is described as

Jewish religious leaders' rejection of Jesus. It essentially repeats crucial thematic and linguistic material from Matthew 23:34, where the Pharisees are cursed for the killing of God's prophets sent to them. The context clearly marks that it is the political and religious elite, not the whole Jerusalem city that rejects Jesus.¹² Jerusalem is the center of political and religious power; but for Jesus, it is an unresponsive and hostile city, becoming the source of murder for the Son of God. Twice Jerusalem is called the "holy city" (Matt 4:5; 27:53), set apart for God's service. Paradoxically its rejection of Jesus comes to expression in crucifixion; it resists the purpose of God, yet the will of God must (Greek δεῖ) be done (Matt 16:21).¹³

Three parables illustrate the Pharisees' rejection of God's prophets. Jesus' explicit charges of rejection and murder against the Jewish religious leaders, particularly the Pharisees in Matthew 23:29-39, are supported by implicit accusations in three parables (Matt 21:28-22:14). The three parables are, first, the parable of the two sons (Matt 21:28-32); second, the parable of the wicked tenants (Matt 21:33-46); third, the parable of the wedding banquet (Matt 22:1-14).

The parable of the two sons (Matt 21:18-32) aims to explore the failure of the second son to respond to his father, like the Pharisees (Matt 21:23, 45). The parable of the wicked tenants (Matt 21:33-36) allegorizes the behavior attributed to the chief priest and Pharisees in the Gospel of Matthew. The Pharisees are being criticized for their

a God's prophet in Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 107.

¹² Matt 23:37 asserts the rejection contrasts with God's constant favor now displayed by Jesus ("how often I would have...") in Warren Carter, "Matthew 23:37-39," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 54, no. 1 (2000): 67.

¹³ Jesus Himself "must" (Greek δεῖ) go to Jerusalem and suffer many things... (Matt 16:21) denotes the will of God for Jesus. See also Carter, "Matthew 23:37-39," 67.

failure to produce “fruit” (Matt 3:8-10; 12:33). The tenants’ mistreatment of the slaves visibly reflects Israel’s persecution of God’s prophets. Moreover, the murder (Greek ἀπέκτειναν) of the landlord’s son by the tenants (Matt 21:39) corresponds to the crucifixion of Jesus.¹⁴ The parable of the wedding banquet (Matt 22:1-14) conveys a clear message of the Pharisees’ rejection. They are originally invited to enter the kingdom, but they have failed to fulfill its demands (as the guests refused to attend the wedding banquet). Moreover, they have abused, and all together killed the messengers of the kingdom allegorizing the Pharisees’ plot to kill Jesus. These three parables evidently make clear that the Pharisees insist in their rejection of God’s prophet, even the Son of God – Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus exposes the Pharisees’ sins and transgressions, and denounces the Pharisees with seven woes that their behavior will result in God’s judgment if no repentance follows.

The Pharisees’ Failure of Bearing Fruit Worthy for Repentance

The culpability of the Pharisees is not only their rejection of God’s prophets,¹⁵ but also their failure of bearing fruit worthy for repentance. The Pharisees’ culpability is distinctly demonstrated from their first appearance in the Gospel of Matthew where John urges them to “bear fruit worthy for repentance” (Matt 3:8),¹⁶ because failure to do so

¹⁴ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 111-12.

¹⁵ Schreiner notes that the Jewish religious leaders have rejected all (emphasis ours) of God’s prophets, including Jesus Himself so that “the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah” might come on them (Matt 23:34-35). See Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe: The First Gospel and Its Portrait of Jesus*, 231.

¹⁶ ESV is “bear fruit keeping with repentance” (Matt 3:8).

will make them vulnerable to condemnation (Matt 3:10).¹⁷ Matthew restates that God’s judgment is contingent on their bearing fruit (Matt 7:19; cf. Matt 13:24-30).¹⁸ Jesus uses a similar imagery of “planting and uprooting” (Matt 15:13) to illustrate the devastation that will be wreaked on those who have not found favor with God (Matt 13:29). Jesus echoes John the Baptist’s stern warning about the root in Matthew 3:10 and clarifies that the production of “worthy fruit” is contingent on being planted by God.¹⁹ The Pharisees are known by their “fruit,” as they speak blasphemy against Jesus (Matt 12:33-34).²⁰

The Pharisees’ insufficient righteousness. The righteousness of the Pharisees is insufficient in three ways. First, they do not give sufficient attention to the depths of the Torah. The Pharisees perceive God’s righteousness, at least in practice, as something external. Therefore, Jesus severely rebukes them for missing the most important parts of the law (Matt 23:23). Jesus denounces the Pharisees as whitewashed tombs: they look good on the outside, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones (Mat. 23:27). In addition, the Pharisees’ rule-keeping is hollow. They have not given sufficient attention to the most important parts of the Torah. They also have the tendency to elevate human traditions to a position of law-like status, violating the Torah in the process (Matt 15:5–9).

¹⁷ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 113.

¹⁸ Matthew employs a similar imagery in the parable of the “wheat and tares,” where the wheat is gathered into the barn after the tares have been burned (Matt 13:24-30) in Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 114.

¹⁹ The theme of “planting” is found in a variety of biblical and post biblical Jewish literature such as Isa 60:21; 61:3; Jer 2:21; 11:17; 24:6; 31:27; 32:41; 42:10; 1QS VIII; Jub 1:16; 7:34; 21:24; 1 Enoch 10:16; 84:6; 9:2 in Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 114n106.

²⁰ Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:350. See also Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:184 where Harrington comments that if Pharisees recognize that Jesus’ exorcism of the demon is good “fruit,” then they must admit that Jesus as the “tree” that bears “good fruit” is also “good” indeed.

Second, the Pharisees' righteousness is insufficient because they miss the one who fulfill all righteousness – Jesus Christ. They not only miss the true character of the righteousness required in the Torah, but they also miss the role of Jesus in relation to the law itself (Matt 5:19).

Third, the Pharisees have demonstrated insufficient righteousness worthy for repentance (Matt 5:19-20).²¹ The exclusion of the Pharisees from the kingdom of heaven is explicitly confirmed in Matthew 23:13. Several scholars agree that the Pharisees are not only pursuing and advocating an insufficient righteousness, but they are also taking steps to inhibit the practice of righteousness demanded by Jesus.²² Thus, Jesus' denouncement of the Pharisees has put them in direct opposition to the standard of righteousness set by Jesus. Moreover, their standard of righteousness has evidently failed to bear fruit worthy for repentance.

The Pharisees' complicity in opposition to Jesus. The Pharisees' complicity is obvious in that it leads to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Matthew clearly indicates the Pharisees' plan to arrest Jesus (Matt 21:46), their plot to entrap Him (Matt 22:15),²³ and

²¹ The Pharisees' insufficient righteousness is evidently seen in their attempt to obstruct Jesus' table fellowship with sinners (Matt 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32) and Jesus' healing on the Sabbath (Matt 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11). In addition, Powell argues for Matt 23:2- that the Pharisees' teaching is counted alongside their practice. Thus, they are judged for what they say as much as what they do in Mark Allan Powell, "Do and Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2-7)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 3 (1995): 431-33.

²² Scot McKnight, "A Loyal Critic: Matthew's Polemic with Judaism in Theological Perspective," in *Anti Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith*, ed. Craig A. Evans/Donald Alfred Hagner (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 65; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 188; Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 115.

²³ Marshall observes that the Pharisees conspire to bring about Jesus' destruction foreshadows the plot of the chief priests and elders of the people (Matt 26:3-5) in Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 116.

their accusation of Him throughout the Gospel of Matthew. In short, the Pharisees conspire to destroy Jesus (Matt 12:14; cf. Mark 3:6). The charge of murder is likewise levelled against the Pharisees (Matt 23:34-35). Their complicity is implied by the two allegorical representations: First, as wicked tenants who kill the landowner's son (Matt 21:39); second, as murderers in the parable of the wedding banquet (Matt 22:6).²⁴ The Pharisees' opposition to Jesus is not trivial; they pose a mortal threat to Jesus, which contributes to the hostility that culminates in Jesus' crucifixion.²⁵ The Pharisaic conspiracy against Jesus is evidenced in many of Jesus' ministries.²⁶ Jesus exposes their sins and wicked motives and pronounces woes to them about their unscrupulous behavior.²⁷ Their underhandedness and misconduct have evidently proven they are fruitless worthy for repentance. Besides, the Pharisees' opposition to Jesus is not merely limited to trivial and ineffective bickering; they accuse Jesus of being a deceiver. This accusation likewise extends to demon possession, that Jesus' colluded with Beelzebul (Matt 12:22-32; Mark 3:20-30; Luke 11:14-23; 12:10). The Pharisees have completely

²⁴ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 188; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:302. Harrington observes that Matthew's redactional alteration of Mark's order so that the son is thrown out and then killed was influenced by Jesus' crucifixion outside the walls of Jerusalem (Matt 27:33). See also Heb 13:12 on "Jesus suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His own blood."

²⁵ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 116.

²⁶ Doyle states that the Pharisees' portrayal in Matt 12:14 forms a contrast with that of God's servant in the Isaiah quotation (Matt 12:18-21) in Brian Rod Doyle, "A Concern of the Evangelist: Pharisees in Matthew 12," *Australian Biblical Review* 34 (1986): 17-34. The incidents and discourse of Matthew 12 are presenting the Pharisaic opponents against Jesus in Brian Rod Doyle, "Matthew's Intention As Discerned by His Scripture," *Revue Biblique (1946-), Janvier* 95, no. 1 (1988), 43-44. See also Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:243.

²⁷ Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988), 117. Moreover, Kingsbury considers the diabolic temptations to anticipate later encounters with the Jewish religious leaders and their affinity with Satan in Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Developing Conflict between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew's Gospel: A Literary Critical Study," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1987): 66, 72-73.

failed to recognize that Jesus' power and authority is from God.²⁸ So, Jesus pronounces the woes to the Pharisees for their evil behavior. The pronouncement of the woes seals the indictment of their sins against Jesus. In sum, they bear no fruits worthy for repentance.

The Pharisees' hypocrisy. One of the biggest reasons for the Pharisees' incapability of bearing fruit is their hypocrisy. In general, the original word "hypocrite" is derived from the Greco-Roman's perspective, which describes someone who gives an answer, interprets an oracle, mimics another person, or acts a part in a drama.²⁹ The word "hypocrite" also expresses an "actor" which takes on a particular negative connotation in the Septuagint.³⁰ In the postbiblical Jewish literature, the word "hypocrite" connotes "insincerity behavior."³¹ In the ancient Greek Hellenistic-Jewish usage, the word "hypocrite" means "wickedness." The Septuagint (LXX) uses "hypocrite" in Job 34:30 and 36:13 to convey the meaning of "godless" (Job 8:13; 15:34; Isa 33:14; Prov 11:9), and "lawless" (Isa 9:16; 10:6; 32:6; 33:14).³² In the Old Testament, the charge of

²⁸ Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for A New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 107, 179; Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 117.

²⁹ Additionally, the word "hypocrite" does not originate from the Hebrew Bible. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1038. Hereafter referred as "BDAG." See also, Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon with a Supplement*, rev. Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 1885-86; G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, ed., *Theologica Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-67), 8: 559-71.

³⁰ Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, ed., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990-93), 3:403.

³¹ Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Press, 1971), 484-85.

³² R. H. Smith, "Hypocrite," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 352.

hypocrisy is found in Jeremiah 23:2 and Ezekiel 34:2-8, comparing the leaders of Israel to shepherds who feed themselves and scatter the flocks. The condemnation of the sin of hypocrisy is also found in Second Temple Jewish literature. Psalms of Solomon 4:19-20 presents a withering critique of hypocritical religious and political leaders, focusing on the wish that “crows would peck out their eyes and the corpses would not be buried,”³³ Additionally, Psalms of Solomon 4:5-6 condemns high government officials and religious leaders who “give the impression” of piety while their hearts are far from God. One of the popular Qumran texts, such as 1QS 4:10, highlights the righteous and the deceitful man (including the sin of hypocrisy), who will be eternally rewarded and eternally punished, respectively. Apocryphal writings such as 2 Macc 5:25, 2 Macc 6:21-28, 4 Macc 6:15-23, and Sir 32:15 plainly outline the sin of hypocrisy. One of the famous rabbinic literature, b. Sotah 41b and 42a affirms that the hypocritical man will go to hell and will never dwell in the divine presence of God, even among the Pharisees. The rabbinic literature is more sensitive to the sin of hypocrisy than the other Second Temple Jewish literatures.

The usage of “hypocrite” (Greek ὑποκριταί) is significant in the Synoptic Gospels. The word “hypocrite” conveys the meaning “to pretend” or “one who pretends to be other than he really is” – “pretender” (Matt 6:16).³⁴ At a glance, hypocrisy is

³³ James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, KS: Doubleday, 1985), 2:640-42, 655-56.

³⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, ed. Rondal B. Smith and Karen A. Munson (New York: Unite Bible Societies, 1988), 766-67. Hanger rightly recognizes the emphasis of the noun “hypocrite” in the context refers to the deception of others, not self-deception in Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:668. See also Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for A Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 641-47.

featured much more prominently as an accusation and a character trait in Matthew than in Mark. Matthew specifically uses this word (both as a noun and as a verb) almost three times more frequently than Luke and seven times more frequently than Mark.³⁵ Statistics alone reveal that the charge of hypocrisy is a Matthean concern.³⁶ In the pericope on paying tribute to Caesar (Matt 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26), all three Synoptic Gospels adopt “hypocrite” in different places and in different ways. For instance, the word “hypocrite” can be expressed as follows: “Who pretended to be sincere” (Luke 20:20; cf. Luke 12:1); “hypocrisy” (Mark 12:15); “cunning” (Luke 20:23); “wickedness” (Matt 22:18). Matthew asserts that Jesus condemns His opponents as “hypocrites” (Matt 22:18). The Synoptic Gospels in varied ways render their verdict that Jesus’ opponents approach Him under false pretense, flattering Him and seeking only to trap Him, and ultimately planning a plot to kill Him.

A hypocrite pretends sincere religious interest and zeal for God. Hypocritical people speak one way but act another (Matt 23:3; cf. Rom 2:21-24). They honor God outwardly, perhaps with their lips, but their hearts are far from God (Matt 15:7-8). One of the greatest condemnations of religious fraud is noticed in Isaiah 29:13.³⁷ Jesus condemns the Jewish religious leaders because they combine pious words and traditional rulings with disguised hearts far from God (Isa 29:14; Matt 15:7-9, 11-20).³⁸ Garland’s

³⁵ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 117.

³⁶ Smith, “Hypocrite,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 352.

³⁷ Other relevant Old Testament passages of hypocrisy are Isa 48:1-2; 58:1-5; Jer 3:10; 7:4-11; 12:2; Ezek 33:30-33; Mic 3:11; Mal 1:6-14; Ps 50:16-23; 78:36-37.

³⁸ Jesus applied Matt 15:7-9 to certain Pharisees and scribes who insisted on the ritual washing of hands before meals but dishonored their parents by the fraudulent claim that what might have been given to the parents had already been promised to God (Matt 15:5). In addition, Turner clarifies that “the practice of ritual washing of hands made the fundamental error of viewing defilement as coming to humans from

discussions on hypocrisy show that the Pharisees' hypocrisy emanates from their false interpretation of the law.³⁹ The Jewish religious leaders are neglecting the weightier matters of the law (Matt 23:23c) with additional Pharisaic practices. They have eventually neglected the greatest commandments of the biblical laws, which are about justice, mercy, and faithfulness. They are blind, without the true understanding of the Mosaic law and of the ministry of Jesus.

The closer English word “fraud” or “imposter” seems to capture the meaning of “hypocrisy.” This meaning reflects Jesus’ charges to the Jewish religious leaders, in particular, the Pharisees in Matthew 23, and most other uses in Jewish-Greek literature and the New Testament.⁴⁰ It is also regularly used of teachers and leaders who are inauthentic, manifesting an inconsistency between “doing and saying,” whether consciously or unconsciously. The sense of being false or misleading in the interpretation of the law is the predominant meaning used in Matthew 23. The charge of hypocrisy against the Pharisees in Matthew 23 is not new. Jesus’ pronouncement of hypocrisy in Matthew 23 repeats the sorrowful history found not only in the Jewish Greek and Second Temple Jewish literature, but also in the prophetic woe oracles in the Old Testament. Matthew 23 has contributed to the terrible equation that can be applied to the Pharisees: “Pharisees = Hypocrite.”⁴¹ Thus, the condemnation of “hypocrisy” in Matthew 23 is unique in the way that it is pronounced by the last prophet – the Son of God, Jesus Christ,

external sources rather than coming from humans due to an internal problem, an evil heart (Matt 15:11-20)” in Turner, *Israel’s Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 282.

³⁹ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 91-117.

⁴⁰ Smith, “Hypocrite,” 353.

⁴¹ Smith, “Hypocrite,” 353.

whom the Israelites have strongly rejected.⁴² The nature of the charge of hypocrisy is correspondent to the past literatures discussed here.

In the Matthean context, Matthew describes hypocrites as making an outward show of piety in almsgiving, prayer and fasting (Matt 6:2-6, 16-18); they do not act from pious motives but desire rather to be seen and praised by others. Thus, here Jesus sternly condemns the Pharisees of pursuing ostentatious piety from the same ulterior motives (Matt 23:5). The Pharisees may satisfy all the commandments prescribed in the Mosaic law, but they subvert it in their desire to be seen by others. Garland persuasively claims that the Pharisees do not merely demonstrate ostentatious piety, but they fail to obey what the law precisely requires (e.g., Matt 23:6-7).⁴³ Another remarkable example of the ostentatious piety of the Pharisees' is their approach to tithing (Matt 23:23). Jesus harshly denounces them because their tithing is not accompanied by a similar concern for the weightier matters of the law – justice, mercy, and faithfulness.⁴⁴ Jesus denounces the Pharisees with the seven woes, not because they keep their tradition (“these you ought to have done”) nor because they have failed to tithe after the manner of their teaching, but because they do so at the expense of the other commandments of God (Matt 15:1-9). Hence, the Pharisees' scrupulous exterior masks a casual attitude to the most important

⁴² Jesus is considered the last prophet. The charge that Israel has rejected its own prophets (Matt 23:29-31) is peradventure the most serious accusation found in Matthew 23, since it addresses the root cause of the other problems confronted there. The Israelites had rejected its prophets throughout the history, and that rejection would have reached its horrible culmination in the rejection of its Messiah (Matt 23:32) and His messengers (Matt 23:34). For more discussions on this issue, see Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 117-175.

⁴³ Garland rightfully perceives that the Pharisees flaw in the interpretation of the Mosaic law. See Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 56.

⁴⁴ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 119.

aspects of the Mosaic law. A similar interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy is also found in Matthew 7:5; 22:16; 23:25-26. Outwardly, the hypocritical Pharisees honor God merely with their lips but their hearts are far from God (*their inner disposition*, emphasis ours). Matthew 23:25-26 purposefully criticizes the face value of the Pharisees as a reprimand, that they are more concerned with the outward cleanliness of vessels but have neglected the more important matter of their own inner cleanliness.⁴⁵ The interpretation of Pharisaic hypocrisy as a discrepancy between outward appearance and the inner disposition is similar to the use of the charge in Mark.⁴⁶ Jesus recognizes their insincerity and charges them with “hypocrisy.”⁴⁷ Saldarini correctly remarks that some of the woes provide the strongest evidence for interpreting the Pharisaic hypocrisy in terms of a *distinction between inner attitudes and outward behavior* (emphasis ours).⁴⁸ The Pharisees’ priority for the outside of the cup is analogous to their preoccupation with their own outward “cleanliness” (outward appearance) at the expense of their inner purity (inner disposition). The Pharisees appear pious but are greedy and self-indulgent. Hence, Jesus’ pronouncement of the woes in Matthew 23:25-26 recalls His teaching about the inner source of defilement (Matt 15:19-20). In short, Matthean interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy rests on the Pharisees’ discrepancy between their outward appearance

⁴⁵ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 142.

⁴⁶ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 48, 65.

⁴⁷ M. Pickup, “Matthew and Mark’s Pharisees,” in *Quest of the Historical Pharisees*, ed. J. Neusner and B. D. Chilton (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 107; Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 119.

⁴⁸ Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community*, 49. See also Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 142.

and inward state.⁴⁹

Confrontations. The confrontations of Jesus with the Jewish religious leaders are narrated beginning with Matthew 21:12. The centerpiece of Matthew 23 documents the oracles of the seven woes condemning the Pharisees (Matt 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29). The polemic is standard; it attests bitter conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus has confronted and constantly disputed with the chief priests and scribes (Matt 21:12-17); with the chief priests and elders of the people (Matt 21:23-22:14; according to Matt 21:45, which also include the Pharisees); with the disciples of some Pharisees (Matt 22:15-22); with some of the Sadducees (Matt 22:23-33); and with a Pharisaic lawyer (Matt 22:34-36).⁵⁰ These confrontations obviously encompass the questions by the Jewish religious leaders (Matt 21:16, 23; 22:17, 28, 36), and the responses by Jesus that include several scriptural quotations (Matt 21:16, 33, 42; 22:32, 37, 39, 44), parables (Matt 21:28-30, 33-39; 22:1-14), and counterquestions (Matt 21:16, 25, 28, 31, 40, 42; 22:18, 20, 42, 43, 45).⁵¹ Matthew documents prominent instances of conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees and presents the source of the tensions in order to determine the root of the confrontations. Table 10 documents the root of the confrontations and the remarks concerning the significant insights of the confrontations.

⁴⁹ Matthew 23:27-28 also explains the Pharisees' discrepancy between outward appearance and inward state.

⁵⁰ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 269.

⁵¹ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 270.

Table 10. The Root of Confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees

Root 1: The Pharisees have misinterpreted the Mosaic law	
Instance 1.1:	The question about divorce (Matt 19:3-9)
Insights 1.1:	This instance highlights the difference between the Pharisees' understanding of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and Jesus' interpretation of it. For the Pharisees, divorce is commanded in the Mosaic law; for Jesus, divorce is a concession to the hardness of heart exemplified by the Pharisees (Matt 19:8). The Pharisees are shown to be unreceptive to God's will as outlined in the Mosaic law. ⁵²
Instance 1.2:	The question about David's son (Matt 22:41-45)
Insights 1.2:	The Pharisees have not considered all the law properly and their stance cannot be reconciled with Psalm 110:1. The Pharisees are no match for Jesus' interpretive prowess. They are unable to meet Jesus' challenge to defend their opinion and are completely defeated (Matt 22:46).
Instance 1.3:	The plucking of grain on the Sabbath (Matt 12:1-8)
Insights 1.3:	The Pharisees have misread the Mosaic law (cf. Matt 9:13). The Pharisees' failure to comprehend the Mosaic law lies at the root of their mistake: the false accusations against those engaged in Jesus' ministry. ⁵³ Jesus has shown to the Pharisees that He is not only a superior interpreter of the law, but the Son of Man who is the Lord of the Sabbath.
Instance 1.4:	The healing on the Sabbath (Matt 12:9-14)
Insights 1.4:	Jesus condemns the methods and outcomes of the Pharisaic interpretation in that they eventually do not recognize the implications of their flawed interpretation. ⁵⁴ The Pharisees are defeated by Jesus' interpretive prowess. Jesus adopts the role of their teacher and stops debating with them.

⁵² Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 88-89.

⁵³ Boris Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: Their Redaction, Form and Relevance for the Relationship between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 80; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch and ed. Helmut Koester (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 181-82.

⁵⁴ The Pharisees insist not to accept Jesus' teaching from Matt 12:6-8 which denotes the hardness of heart in Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 94.

Table 10 continued

Instance 1.5:	The hand-washing and Pharisaic tradition (Matt 15:1-20)
Insights 1.5:	The context clearly denotes the issue of defilement that becomes a source of tension between Jesus and the Pharisees (Matt 15:12). ⁵⁵ In actuality, the Pharisees uphold <i>their</i> (emphasis mine) tradition, but transgress the commandment of God. They teach others to avoid defilement, but their teaching is potentially defiling its proponents. Moreover, they adopt the role of guide to the blind while they are blind and equally in need of guidance. Matthew portrays them as incapable of fulfilling their duty as teachers of the law. Jesus and the Pharisees teach the law of God, but they have different understandings in the interpretation of what the law of God has revealed.
Instance 1.6:	The question about payment of taxes to Caesar (Matt 22:15-22)
Insights 1.6:	The Pharisees fail to test Jesus. Their teaching, argumentation, and interpretation of the Mosaic law is flawed. Jesus again proves His superiority to the Pharisees by demonstrating extraordinary perceptiveness so that they are unable to conceal their wickedness (Matt 22:18, Greek γνοῦς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὴν πονηρίαν αὐτῶν).
Root 2: The Pharisees have misplaced the priority	
Instance 2.1:	The question about the greatest commandment (Matt 22:34-40)
Insights 2.1:	The Pharisees do not prioritize the love of God and neighbor but emphasize different commandments (Matt 23:23; cf. Matt 22:37-38). They have accentuated the miniature biblical requirements, and neglected the greatest commandment of justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Jesus and the Pharisees prioritize different aspects of the Mosaic law. However, Jesus' standpoint is authoritative and definitive.

⁵⁵ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 114-15.

Table 10 continued

Root 3: The Pharisees have failed to recognize the true identity of Jesus and His ministry	
Instance 3.1:	The question about eating with tax-collectors and sinners (Matt 9:10-13)
Insights 3.1:	The Pharisees have failed to recognize Jesus' role as a "physician" who ministers to those in need and makes them "well." The quotation from Hosea 6:6 aligns Jesus' purpose for "mercy and not sacrifice." ⁵⁶ Indeed, they are also incapable of acknowledging Jesus' mission – His reason for coming. The Pharisees have failed to value the significance of Jesus' ministry as the One whom the Father has sent to minister to sinners.
Instance 3.2:	The question about fasting (Matt 9:14-18)
Insights 3.2:	The Pharisees display a different form of piety from Jesus' disciples in that they have not recognized the company of Jesus as an occasion for joy. ⁵⁷ The Pharisees' attempt to impose fasting on the ministry of Jesus is folly as they have not acknowledged the new situation occasioned by the presence of Jesus. ⁵⁸ The pericope reveals the Pharisees' deficient recognition of Jesus and His purpose.
Instance 3.3:	The "Beelzebul" controversies (Matt 9:32-34; 12:22-37)

⁵⁶ David Hill, "On the Use and Meaning of Hosea VI. 6 in Matthew's Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 24, no. 1 (1977): 110-11; Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: Their Redaction, Form and Relevance for the Relationship between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism*, 80.

⁵⁷ Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: Their Redaction, Form and Relevance for the Relationship between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism*, 86.

⁵⁸ Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 100.

Table 10 continued

Insights 3.3:	The crowds respond with amazement and affirmation of Jesus' power and authority (Matt 9:33; 12:23). The crowd is on the verge of correctly deducing Jesus' identity from His ministry. ⁵⁹ However, the Pharisees deliberately counter the crowd's assessment by stating that Jesus exorcising power originated from "Beelzebul" (Matt 12:24). The Pharisees fail to recognize the divine source of Jesus' power in contrast to the crowd, who glorify God (Matt 9:8). The Pharisees are incapable of recognizing the divine authority of Jesus. Indeed, they express not only opposition to Jesus and the presence of God in His ministry, but also a divergence from the popular reception of Jesus. These two pericopes indict their extraordinary blindness. ⁶⁰
Instance 3.4:	The requests for sign (Matt 12:38-42; 16:1-4)
Insights 3.4:	Matthew's two pericopes of their request for a sign (Matt 12:38-42; 16:1-4) demonstrate the Pharisees' failure recognizing the true identity of Jesus and His ministry. The sign of Jonah (Matt 12:38-42) implies the death and resurrection of Jesus. The clause "no sign will be given..." suggests a refusal. Jesus' refusal of their request foreshadows the Jewish rejection of Jesus' death and resurrection. ⁶¹ A further remark on the Pharisees' inability to perceive signs is found in Matthew 16:2-3. They have already witnessed several indications that through Jesus' ministry, the kingdom of heaven has come to them (Matt 9:33; 12:22). ⁶² They refuse to accept that Jesus has proven the heavenly origin of His ministry. ⁶³

⁵⁹ The crowds consider the possibility that Jesus is the "Son of David," with whom they associate acts of healing (cf. Matt 9:27; 15:22; 20:30-31). In addition, the crowd's conjecture is supported by the identification of Jesus as the "Son of David," and the association of this title with the Messiah in Matt 1:1. See Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch and ed. Helmut Koester (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 50; Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 101.

⁶⁰ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 480; Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew*, 1:343-44; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:187.

⁶¹ Numerous commentators agree that the sign request and refusal denote rejection of Jesus. See Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: Their Redaction, Form and Relevance for the Relationship between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism*, 141-42; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:352; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:188.

⁶² The centrality of the kingdom's arrival to Jesus' miracles is advocated by Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:187.

⁶³ The Pharisees' response to Jesus' explanation that He casts out demons by the Spirit of God

In conclusion, numerous encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees normally take the form of a conflict between Jesus' teaching and behavior and the Pharisees' own interpretation of the Mosaic law. Matthew often demonstrates the Pharisees' knowledge of the Mosaic law; yet they lack the ability to interpret it as Jesus does. The analysis shows that the root of the confrontations originates with the Pharisees. The roots of the confrontations can be concluded and categorized as follows: First, the Pharisees have misinterpreted the Mosaic law; second, the Pharisees have a misplaced priority; third, the Pharisees failed to recognize the true identity of Jesus – the Messiah, as well as Jesus' ministry. Although they know the Scripture (e.g., Matt 2:6) from the beginning of the Matthew's account, they have failed to act accordingly.⁶⁴ Nolland rightly observes that these confrontations have reached a point of impasse, where no further conversation is possible (Matt 22:46), Matthew 23 ensues.⁶⁵

The Significance of the Pronouncement of the Seven Woes (Matthew 23:13-36): An Overall Assessment

Jesus is not only speaking to the crowds and His disciples about the Pharisees (Matt 23:1-12), but also, He is pronouncing a series of seven woes to the Pharisees. Jesus specifically exposes the "hidden" spiritual problem of the Jewish religious leaders, especially the Pharisees. Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woes is a brutal denunciation

is to request further evidence of the origin of Jesus' ministry (Matt 12:25-29).

⁶⁴ Carter, "Matthew 23:37-39," 66.

⁶⁵ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Greek Testament Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 920. In addition, Nolland asserts that the theme of judgement on the temple began and ended three closely linked sections: Matt 21:12-46; 22:1-45; 23:1-39. Harrington takes Matt 21:32-39 as a final warning in Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:329-30.

of the most widely respected spiritual leaders of Israel in Jesus' day. The Pharisees' prime spiritual problem, as Jesus says, is the guilt of religious hypocrisy. He sternly rebukes their hypocrisy, which much of Israel has fallen into (Matt 23:13-36). Jesus specifically catalogues the chief sins that they have committed. Nonetheless, He is not losing His temper in Matthew 23. He is not simply topping off after years, after weeks and months of frustration with the Pharisees. Jesus is not just making a shotgun blast of criticism that has not thought through (e.g., Matt 23:3). Indeed, Jesus is making a very nuanced criticism of the Pharisees. The following section discusses several significances of the oracles of the seven woes:

First, the Woe Itself Is Significant

Jesus is the Messiah, and the Son of God; He Himself pronounces the seven woes. He likewise values what He has pronounced to the Pharisees. Seven times He pronounces woes (Matt 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29); seven times He calls them hypocrites (Matt 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29); three times He calls them blind (Matt 23:17, 19, 26); and twice He calls them blind guides (Matt 23:16, 24); once He calls them fools (Matt 23:17); He calls them the brood of vipers once (Matt 23:33). Jesus' pronouncement here is measured. Jesus' word is strong and significant.

Jesus' pronouncement in Matthew 23 is just as much a compassionate lamentation (Matt 23:37-39) over the spiritual deadness of the Jewish religious leaders of Israel's people as they are a denunciation of the sins and transgressions of the Pharisees. The context of the pronouncements of the seven woes takes place in Jesus' final public ministry. Jesus brings a withering critique against the ministry and the lives of these who are the key spiritual leaders – the Jewish religious leaders in Israel in His day. Matthew

records what Jesus is speaking in the last few days of His public ministry before He is crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem (Matt 23). Thus, these final words – the oracles of the seven woes – are very important words and possess a great significant value.

Second, the Woes Expose the Depth of Sin

The woes expose the sins and transgressions of the Pharisees, which are often hidden and blinded by self and others. At the beginning of the Gospel, the theme of hypocrisy is sounded (Matt 23:3). Nevertheless, Jesus ends the denunciation of the Pharisees with another theme – “murder” (Matt 23:31). The pronouncement of woes goes from bad to worse. Jesus sees deep into their hearts, including their secret sins. Thus, the pronouncement of the seven woes plays a significant role, in this context, exposing not only sins, but also the hidden sins, revealing the actual motivation within their hearts. Jesus strictly prohibits an outward holiness without an inward sincerity to God and to others. He sees the superficial, external religious practice which looks good externally but corrupts internally. Their spiritual hypocrisy is the chief culprit, which has essentially blinded the Pharisees. The hypocritical behavior decimates their relationship with God and causes a stumbling block for others to embrace the Gospel of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, Jesus pronounces woes against them. He purposefully pronounces the seven woes in order to name their sins and transgressions, which the Pharisees have willfully committed. In a nutshell, Jesus uncovers their hearts, unfolds the secret sins of the Pharisees and calls them to repentance. Jesus is confronting wicked Jewish religious leaders, not because He hates them, but because He desires them to turn from their sins and be saved.

Third, the Woes Tell the Truth

For the entire three years of Jesus' public ministry, Jesus has been contending with the Jewish religious leaders, especially the Pharisees. They have been challenging Him; Jesus has been responding to them; Jesus finally goes on the offensive as it is in Matthew 22 and challenges them with several questions, which they are not able to answer. The Pharisees have been dogged and consistent in their opposition to Jesus' ministry, but Jesus faithfully tells them what they need to hear, not what they want to hear. We are reminded again that the Jesus of the Gospel, the Jesus of the Bible, the real Jesus, is not the limp-wristed, effeminate Jesus of modern imagination. Jesus will tell the truth, even when it hurts, and He will tell it right to their faces. Thus, Jesus tells the truth of the secret sin of man which the human eye cannot see. The pronouncement of the seven woes tells the truth that sinners can cry to God for repentance and plead for salvation.

Fourth, the Woes Cast a Shadow of Hope

The significance of Jesus' pronouncement of the woes is, in reality, a measure of His spiritual hope for the woeful condition of the Pharisees. That spiritual hope is wholly for the salvation of the Pharisees. The strength of Jesus' pronouncement critically reflects His hope that if He can separate the Pharisees from the sin of their hearts, if He can show them the depth of their sin, and if He can sternly warn them about the eternal damnation, they may yet be drawn by the Holy Spirit into a saving relationship with Him. Although the pronouncement of the woes is not pleasant to hear, it provides hope. Jesus' lamentation in Matthew 23:37-39 is clear evidence of the woeful condition of the Pharisees. Matthew 23:39 is best understood as *not an ultimate condemnation (or a final*

judgment), but *a promise of salvation and redemption of life* (emphasis ours): The Messiah will come if His people repent (cf. Acts 3:19-20).⁶⁶ Jesus desires that the Pharisees (including the entire nation) can be brought into a saving relationship with Himself.

Fifth, the Pronouncement of Woes Extends to Lamentation

The pronouncement of the seven woes does not stop in Matthew 23:36 (Matt 13-36), but it extends into Jesus' lamentation over the city of Jerusalem (Matt 23:37-39). In reality, Jesus' lamentation essentially underscores the entire woe oracles. The ultimate purpose of Jesus' pronouncement of the oracles of the seven woes are not merely for criticism condemnation, and judgment, but most importantly it decisively calls for repentance and an invitation to life. The pronouncement possesses a redemptive purpose, that the Jerusalem nation be called and returned to God. The woeful condition of the Pharisees has never prevented Jesus from abandoning them to eternal damnation. Conversely, He graciously laments over them and calls them for repentance and promises them a greater blessing if they repent. Jesus concludes His speech by announcing that "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matt 23:39b). The same words are cited in Matthew 21:9 at Jesus' entrance to Jerusalem, shouted by those identifying Him as the messianic Son of David. Jesus identifies Himself with God's Messiah, Israel's Savior, the "Coming One," who will once again return to His people after a time of great judgment. The oracles of the seven woes will never be "complete" without Jesus'

⁶⁶ W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 3:324. Cf. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:330.

lamentation. The woeful condition of the Pharisees can be restored through Jesus' lamentation and His promise to return and to bless the nation (if they repent). The pronouncement of the seven woes is only complete with Jesus' lamentation over Jerusalem.

The Significance of Jesus' Lamentation over Jerusalem (Matt 23:37-39): An Overall Assessment

Matthew 23:37-39 changes the tone from a stern denunciation to a deep lamentation. That being said, the element of lamentation is not entirely lacking in Matthew 23:13-36. Wilkins rightly observes that Jesus' tone now combines the denunciation of the seven woes with a compassionate lament.⁶⁷ Jesus turns from a pronouncement of the seven woes upon the Jewish religious leaders to a deep and sorrowful lamentation over the city of Jerusalem. He delivers what is simultaneously a gracious response and a terrifying warning in verses 37-39. Jesus' response to the sins and transgressions of the Pharisees is both a word of grace and a word of judgment.

The conclusion of the chapter in Matthew 23:37-39 considers Jesus own grief-stricken groaning over Israel as He expresses His heart for those who have turned their hearts against Him. These three verses are Jesus' final public address. The rest of Matthew will be taken up with the passion itself, and with the private instruction of His disciples, both before and after the crucifixion. Hendriksen rightly states,

Christ's final public address fittingly closes with a moving lament, in which are revealed both His solemn tenderness and the severity of divine judgment on all who have answered such marvelous compassion with contempt.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 757.

⁶⁸ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, New Testament

Jesus' final public words utter His unspeakable sadness at Jerusalem's resistance to Jesus' words and deeds (Matt 23:37-39; cf. Luke 13:34-35). Jesus' unspeakable sadness is palpable. His double address to "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem" (Greek Ἱερουσαλήμ Ἱερουσαλήμ)⁶⁹ adds solemnity to the occasion and echoes several biblical patterns in the Old Testament (Matt 23:37a; cf. Gen 22:11; 46:2; Exod 3:4; 1 Sam 3:4, 10).⁷⁰ Matthew arranges the final three verses in Matthew 23 as follows: Jesus laments Jerusalem's unresponsiveness (Matt 23:37); Jesus announces judgment (Matt 23:38); Jesus declares salvation in the near future (Matt 23:39).⁷¹ Jesus' lament comprises of four segments: First, a heartwarming address (Matt 23:37a; cf. Jer 13:27); second, a striking exclamation describing the clash of Jesus' will with that of Jerusalem's children (Matt 23:37b); third, an ominous warning of divine abandonment (Matt 23:38); fourth, a bittersweet promise that God's abandonment will cease only when Jerusalem genuinely understands Psalm 118:26.⁷²

The opening heartwarming address has been described as "the climax of Jesus'

Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 839.

⁶⁹ The term "Jerusalem" (Greek Ἱερουσαλήμ) refers to "the inhabitants of Jerusalem... represented especially by the religious leadership. By extension, the lament may also point to Jerusalem as representative of the Jewish nation" in Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:680. In addition, Carson says that there is a change in the number (verb form) from singular to plural here which may indicate a "move from the abstraction of the city to the concrete reality of people" in D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:486. In addition, Carter casts an interesting view about the city of Jerusalem that Matthew 23:37 speaks of the destiny of city and the Jewish religious leaders which has been intertwined since the Gospel's beginning. Matthew 2, the magi come to Jerusalem asking, "Where is the One born King of the Jews?" The repeated "king," used for Herod and Jesus in vv. 2-3, throws the two together. The magi's subversive question threatens the Roman king Herod. He is "troubled and all Jerusalem with him" (Matt 2:3) in Carter, "Matthew 23:37-39," 66.

⁷⁰ Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 326-27.

⁷¹ Carter, "Matthew 23:37-39," 66, 68. Carter likewise affirms that verses 38-39 do not utter final judgment on all Jews for all time. Verse 39 is about salvation after punishment, not judgment.

⁷² Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 326.

public ministry to Israel” (Matthew 23:37; cf. Jer 13:27).⁷³ Indeed, Jesus’ heartwarming lament is a concluding remark to the intense denunciation of the Jewish religious leaders. This heartwarming lament is filled with divine compassion (cf. Matt 9:36; 11:28; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27, 33; 20:34), and Jesus’ words may be compared to other biblical laments (2 Sam 1:17-27; 18:33; 19:4; Rom 9:1-5; Rev 18:10, 16, 18-19).⁷⁴ Jesus’ lamentation shows His obvious love and compassion for the Israelites and for Jerusalem despite the ongoing hostile environment from the opponents. Jesus’ lamentation explicitly pictures the heart of God. Jesus does not delight in the destruction of sinners (i.e., the Pharisees), but He delights when they turn from their sin and flee to Him for grace and salvation. The following section discusses the significance of Jesus’ lamentation.

First, Jesus’ Lamentation Reveals the Love of God for Jerusalem

After the stinging condemnation of the Pharisees (Matt 23:13-36), Jesus pours out His grief over Israel’s spiritual hard-heartedness. He speaks to Jerusalem, not excluding the rest of Israel, but speaking of Jerusalem as the very heart and center of that nation. He likewise speaks of Jerusalem as the symbol of the spirit and attitude of all God’s people in Israel at that time. Jesus repeats the name, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,” indicating the intensity of His emotion. In addition, the repeated name of “Jerusalem” also denotes a token of Jesus’ pathos and an incomparable proof of His love for

⁷³ David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 232.

⁷⁴ Michael J. Cook, “Jewish Appraisals of Paul’s Influence: A Critique and Defense,” *Proceedings of the Center for Jewish-Christian Learning 4* (1989): 21-28. Cook comments that Jesus’ laments are echoed by the apostle Paul (cf. Rom 9:1-5; 10:1; 11:16-24) in Michael J. Cook, *Modern Jews Engage the New Testament* (Woodstock, NY: Jewish Lights, 2008), 163-75. See also Michael J. Cook, “Paul’s Argument in Romans 9-11,” *Review Expositor* 103 (2006): 91-111.

Jerusalem and its people (Matt 23:37). He does not mind using endearment to win rebels to His love. Although Jerusalem is rejecting Him, Jesus is baring His heart as He utters His love by using a glorious picture of the hen gathering in her chicks (Matt 23:37). However, note the wringing words at the end of verse 37: “You were not willing!”

Second, Jesus’ Lamentation Signifies the Motherly Care to Call for Repentance

The feminine image of the hen and chicks strikingly portrays divine nurture and protection, which the Jewish religious have severely refused and rejected.⁷⁵ Appealing to this imagery, Jesus graciously offers His motherly care to Jerusalem’s children gives a warning of the disaster coming upon them because they have rejected Him in the same way that they have rejected all of God’s prophets.

Jesus’ lamenting over Jerusalem is fitting. Judaism never forgets the biblical picture of God’s special love for Israel.⁷⁶ Jesus demonstrates His special concern and care for Israel (Matt 10:5-6; 15:24-26). Jesus’ gathering His people under His wings recalls the image of God’s sheltering His people under His wings (Exod 19:4; Deut 32:11; Ps 17:8; 36:7; 63:7; 91:4). Moreover, the concept of shelter under God’s wings evokes images of the refuge God offers and provides for his people who are in danger in the Old Testament.⁷⁷ It is also a Rabbinic phrase that refers to “the conversion of a Gentile as

⁷⁵ This imagery can be seen in Exod 19:4; Deut 32:10-11; Ruth 2:12; Pss 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:1-4; Isa 31:5 in Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel*, 327n60.

⁷⁶ C. G. Montefiore, and Herbert M. J. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York: Schocken, 1974), 58-85.

⁷⁷ See Deut 32:11; Ruth 2:12; Pss 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4. Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:320n58.

coming under the wings of the Shekinah.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, this concept is an expression for being in the presence and protection of God. Like a mother who sees her children straying so far from what she taught them, Jesus deeply grieves over how God’s children have strayed so far from His presence.⁷⁹ The motherly care and love imagery of Jerusalem as the mother of children is found in Isaiah 54:1-3; 62:1-5. Both texts speak of Jerusalem’s desolation turning to blessing and joy because of God’s grace. Nonetheless, they were not willing (Greek οὐκ ἠθελήσατε). The outcome of their rejection of God is that their “house” (Greek οἶκος) is left to them desolate (Matt 23:38).⁸⁰ Their nation, their city, their temple will be left to them “desolate” (Greek ἔρημος).⁸¹ Jesus’ use of the Israel’s “house” is an expression used for the temple in the Old Testament (1 Kgs 9:7-8; Isa 64:10-11; cf. John 12:7).⁸² Jesus in this context makes clear that His departure means

⁷⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:320.

⁷⁹ Carolyn Blevins, “Under My Wings, Jesus’ Motherly Love: Matthew 23:37-39,” *Review and Expositor* 104 (2007): 365-66.

⁸⁰ The word “house” (Greek οἶκος) indicates (1) the temple (Matt 21:13). See Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:122n65. (2) The city of Jerusalem as the capital (cf. Jer 12:7; 22:5 in the Septuagint (LXX)) although the word “house” does not always distinguish between “the temple and the capital) in Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:322. (3) The nation or the people as a whole. Carson comments that it is not necessary to choose one of these for “all three are closely allied and rise and fall together” in Carson, *Matthew*, 8:487. Wilson asserts that the word “house” suggests an echo of the Old Testament references to the temple. Particularly familiar is the play on “house” in 2 Sam 7, though numerous other references could be cited in Alistair I. Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen? A Study of Jesus as Judge in Matthew 21-25* (Waynesboro, VA: Paternoster, 2004), 223.

⁸¹ The word “desolate” (Greek ἔρημος) means “a place abandoned, empty, desolate” in BDAG, 308. It is also found frequently in the LXX. One striking example is found in Hag 1:9, which speaks of the desolation of the temple (cf. Zech 7:8-14) in Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen? A Study of Jesus as Judge in Matthew 21-25*, 223.

⁸² Wilkins, *Matthew*, 758. Keener asserts that the temple is “left” (cf. Matt 24:2) “desolate” (Matt 24:15) should be viewed in the light of Matt 24:1-3, 15 because Matthew connects the two discrete units (Matt 23:30-39 and Matt 24:1-3, 15) of tradition purposefully in Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 559.

the loss of God's presence.⁸³ He proclaims that the razing of the temple and the ruin of the entire people is part of God's judgment and His desertion of Israel. Nevertheless, the primarily desolation about which Jesus is speaking is the loss of His presence and His absence due to the unbelief to His people.

Like a mother caring for and loving her children, Jesus weeps over the disastrous choices His wayward children have made and the destruction they will incur. Jesus' warm invitation to be gathered under His wings⁸⁴ has deep resonance with Israel's longed for gathering of their scattered nation. Jerusalem's children have not only turned away from Jesus and rejected Him but have also turned from their own most cherished hope. Using the image of a mother hen's wings,⁸⁵ Jesus expresses unconditional love toward those who are in the process of rejecting Him and the eternal One who has sent Him. The grieving Jesus desires His children to return to His protective care. The painful truth is that they chose not to come under His wing. The result is that they have no option but to be desolate, a desolation they brought on themselves by their choices.

⁸³ The presence of God in the temple makes the temple a place to serve as a place of intercession, as a place of mediation, as a place of devotion. But without the presence of God, those instruments are nothing. See also Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen? A Study of Jesus as Judge in Matthew 21-25*, 223.

⁸⁴ Wings are a shelter, a safe place under times of stress. Wings gives support. Few images describe God's relationship to His children more powerfully than the image of them being supported by His strong wings. See Deut 32:11-12a; Ps 57:1; 61:4 in Blevins, "Under My Wings, Jesus' Motherly Love: Matthew 23:37-39," 371.

⁸⁵ A striking literary parallel to the imagery of the hen and the chicks is *5 Ezra* (2 Esdras) 1:30-40. However, *5 Ezra* has typically been seen as a second-century Christian addition to the Jewish work of *4 Ezra* (3-14). Evans and Stanton argue that the influence seems to be from the canonical tradition to *5 Ezra* rather than vice versa in Craig A. Evans, *Noncanonical Writings New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), 10-11 and G. N. Stanton, "5 Ezra and Matthean Christianity in the Second Century," in *A Gospel for A New People*, ed. G. N. Stanton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 256-77.

Third, Jesus' Lamentation Itself Is Significant

The One who pronounces the woes and denounces the Pharisees as hypocrites, laments (Matt 23:13-29). Jesus *Himself* (emphasis ours) laments for the Israelites (and over the city of Jerusalem) expressing His heart – His broken heart of what He has just condemned (Matt 23:13-36, 37-39). Indeed, Jesus' words in Matthew 23:37 represent a *true lament* (emphasis ours).⁸⁶ Jesus' love for Jerusalem gives way to the brokenhearted pain of the Pharisees' rejection (cf. Rev 11:8; 17:6 for direct address of Jerusalem, e.g., Jer 13:27).⁸⁷ Although the length of Jesus' lamentation (Matt 23:37-39) is significantly shorter (only three verses) than His pronouncement (Matt 23:13-36) of woes, it unfolds the heart of God – that the Son of God, the Messiah, He *Himself* (emphasis ours), not the prophets of God in the Old Testament, laments. Therefore, Jesus' lamentation is valued and significant because it is God *Himself* (emphasis ours) who pours out His heart and laments over the Israelites and the city of Jerusalem

Fourth, Jesus' Lamentation Restores a Relationship

One of the purposes of Jesus' lamentation is restoring the relationship between God and the Israelites. This relationship begins with an invitation to life offering a saving relationship, calling Jerusalem to return to God for repentance. The Israelites are already familiar with a hen gathering her chicks (Matt 23:37), which often speaks of God's compassion and love, not rejection, damnation, and abandonment. The God-Israelite

⁸⁶ Gregory Baum, *The Jews and the Gospel: A Re-examination of the New Testament* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Company, 1961), 54.

⁸⁷ Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 558.

relationship would be clearly restored based on the promise that Jesus says, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matt 23:39b) if they would repent.⁸⁸

Fifth, Jesus’ Lamentation Completes and Concludes the Core Message in Matthew 23

Some scholars take Matthew 23:39 as merely stressing the certainty of God’s judgment,⁸⁹ but the image of the hen gathering her chicks (Matt 23:37) convincingly speaks of God’s compassion, not rejection.⁹⁰ In addition, Davies and Allison strongly believe that Matthew 23:39 is best comprehended, not as an ultimate pronouncement which leads to the Pharisees’ eternal damnation, but rather as a calling for repentance and a promise of redemption.⁹¹ Numerous scholars agree that this biblical theme follows a pattern: repentance after sin and judgment brings grace and redemption (Matt 23:39; cf. Ezek 36:33; Amos 9:8-12).⁹² Matthew 23:39 is a glimmer of hope for deliverance and an invitation to life if Israel acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah (cf. Ps 118:26; Rom 11),⁹³

⁸⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:324.

⁸⁹ Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, 177; John P. Meier, *Matthew*, New Testament Message 3 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Books, 1980), 274-75.

⁹⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:323-24; Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel*, 232-33; Turner, *Israel’s Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 327.

⁹¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:324-25. They continue to argue that without the three verses, Matt 37-39, Matthew 23 would issue nothing but judgment, with no tinge of regret. The conclusions in Matthew 23 disclose that the woes are uttered in sadness, that the indignation is righteous. The image of Jesus as a mother hen lamenting her loss, indicating the compassionate Jesus’ words in Matt 11:28-30.

⁹² Stanton argues that Matt 23:39 does teach the prospect of Israel’s future faith in Jesus and views this teaching as similar to the Deuteronomistic pattern of sin, exile, and return found in the Bible, as well as in the Second Temple literature (e.g., Tob 13:6; Jub 1:15-18) in Stanton, *A Gospel for A New People: Studies in Matthew*, 247-55. See also Mark A. Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel: A Reconsideration of the Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 15-63.

⁹³ Bruner, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:835-37. Bruner’s view is apparently in harmony with that of apostle Paul in Romans 11. Jesus will return to deliver

and welcomes the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Then they will surely receive the blessings that have been promised.⁹⁴ Therefore, Matthew 23:37-39 is not a grim epitaph detailing Israel's final abandonment by God, but it is an offering a mercy of hope and a promise of life. Jesus, as "the blessed coming One," vindicates a certainty to His future coming to judge and rule as the Son of Man (Matt 23:39; cf. Matt 21:9).⁹⁵ The tension between the will of Jesus and Jerusalem is resolved by Jerusalem's willingness to change, not by Jesus' despotic exercise of brute force.⁹⁶ Matthew 23:39 amounts to a messianic interpretation of a common prophetic tradition exemplified in Isaiah 52:6-10 (cf. Isa 52:1-10; Jer 31:31-40; Ezek 36:16-38; Amos 9:8-12; Zech 12:10-13:1). Matthew 23:39 is to be considered as a "prophetic change of heart," expecting the Jewish return to Jesus in the near future.⁹⁷

Israel when the words from Ps 118:26 speaks without adequate understanding in Matt 21:9 – utters in "sincere repentance."

⁹⁴ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 558-59; Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel*, 232-33; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 949; Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for A Mixed Church under Persecution*, 434; Bruner, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28*, 2:835-37; Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 328.

⁹⁵ Matthew spells out on the coming of Jesus and His future role, see Matt 7:21-23; 10:23; 13:37-43; 16:27-28; 19:28; 20:21; 24:5, 27, 30, 37, 39, 42, 44, 50; 25:31; 26:64 in Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 329n71.

⁹⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:322-23; D. C. Allison, "Matt. 23:39 = Luke 13:35b As A Conditional Prophecy," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 18 (1983): 75-84; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 952-53; Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 329;

⁹⁷ Allison, "Matt. 23:39 = Luke 13:35b As A Conditional Prophecy," 75-84; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 953.

The Final Overall Assessment: Some Concluding Remarks

In light of the whole of our discussions, this section offers the final overall assessment of the three purposes outlined in chapter 1, under the heading “The Purpose of the Study.” This final overall assessment also serves as the final concluding remarks of this study. They are presented in the following manner:

The Significance of the Seven Woes and Laments in Matthew 23

The primary purpose of this study aims to discuss the significance of the seven woes and laments in Matthew 23. The significance of the seven woes and laments conveys two core messages: First, a severity of warning (Matt 23:13-36; cf. 23:1-12). Second, an invitation to life – redemption and salvation (Matt 23:37-39). To be specific, the core message for the severity of warning chiefly originates from Jesus’ pronouncement of the seven woes (Matt 23:13-36; cf. Matt 23:1-12). Meanwhile, the core message calls for an invitation to life – repentance, redemption, or salvation in mind, derives from Jesus’ lamentation (Matt 23:37-39). The consequences and implications to the chapters before and after Matthew 23 (Matthew 24-25) are entirely interconnected and interrelated to the severity warning (and of future judgment to some degree). In addition, Jesus’ lamentation, though only in three verses⁹⁸, is significant for an invitation to life (Matt 23:37-39). The oracles of the seven woes do not end and are not complete without Jesus’ lamentation (Matt 23:37-39). Each woe possesses its severity of warning for future judgment (eschatological perspective if disobedience follows) if a sinner refuses to return to God. Each woe also casts an initial light of hope for an invitation to

⁹⁸ As compared to twenty-four verses of the oracles of the seven woes (Matt 23:13-36).

life (redemptive perspective if obedience follows) when the sinner responds to the divine calling of God. Missing either one of these is undoubtedly leaves a hole in Matthew 23.

The two core messages provide a better understanding to grasp the comprehensive flow of thought in Matthew 23. The two core messages help to accurately clarifying Matthean context, especially within Matthew 23, and the chapters before and after Matthew 23. In addition, the two core messages facilitate a better textual exposition and interpretation to the Greek text, in particularly when dealing with the exegesis of the seven woes and laments in Matthew 23. Therefore, understanding the comprehensive flow of thought, with the help of the two core messages, is significant in order to rightly divide the Word of truth (2 Tim 2:15).

In summary, the oracles of the seven woes specifically speaks of God's stern warning and the future judgment, but Jesus' lamentation purposefully speaks of repentance, hope, and an invitation to life (see Figure 1). Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woes is not merely an exercise of spite against the Pharisees. Rather, as seems evident in Matthew 23:37, His lament comes from at least as much grief as anger. Jesus' lamentation acknowledges the woeful state of the Jewish religious leaders after the destruction of the first temple (cf. Lam 5:16; cf. 1:4, 6, 8, 19; 2:6-7, 9, 14, 20; 4:13, 16; 5:7). Jesus announces the woeful state of the Pharisees prior to the destruction of the second temple, again due to the sin of the Jewish religious leaders.⁹⁹ In conclusion, the pronouncement of seven woes and the lamentation speaks from the heart of Jesus for the Israelites. Jesus' affection and compassion are visibly demonstrated in both the

⁹⁹ Turner observes that the anguish of the book of Lamentations may best captures the mood of Matthew 23. See Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 280-81.

pronouncement of seven woes and in His lamentation. Missing either one of will lead to an incomplete conclusion and incomprehensive flow of thought. Therefore, the comprehensive flow of thought in Matthew 23 *must* (emphasis ours) consists of Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woes *and* (emphasis ours) Jesus' lamentation in order that the comprehensive flow of thought in Matthew 23 is well established. The core message of Matthew 23 cannot merely remain as a stern warning and/or a future judgment (if disobedience continues), but it embraces both redemption and salvation (if obedience follows). And the message of Matthew 23 is only completed and concluded by Jesus' lamentation.

<p>A severity of warning (Matt 23:13-36)</p>	<p>An invitation to life (Matt 23:37-39)</p>
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Figure 1. Two Core Messages for A Comprehensive Flow of Thought in Matthew 23

The Significance of Jesus' Pronouncement of the Seven Woes and Jesus' Lamentation in Matthew 23

The secondary purpose of this study intends to evaluate the difference and common significance (or the intersection point of significance) between and within the Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woes (Matt 23:13-36), in addition to Jesus' lamentation in Matthew 23 (Matt 23:37-39). The oracles of the seven woes and the

lamentation are clearly distinct from one another, but they are inseparable. They evidently share some common attributes and overlap in some ways, but they are unique in their nature. They interact with one another to serve a different purpose.¹⁰⁰ They, indeed, share two common points of significance (two intersection points of significance): First, “the woe and lament itself is significant;” second, “the lament completes and concludes the core message in Matthew 23.” The oracles of the seven woes ultimately extend its core message to Jesus’ lamentation in Matthew 23. The oracles of the seven woes cannot be complete and conclude by itself without Jesus’ lamentation over the city of Jerusalem (Matt 23:37-39). The entire message of Matthew 23 is only completed and concluded by Jesus’ lamentation as it shines forth the hope for the Israelites (including the Pharisees) to return to their God. Figure 2 depicts the difference and common significance (or the intersection point of significance) between and within the seven woes and laments in Matthew 23.

¹⁰⁰ Though a Semitic term, the Greek sense of “woe” conveys a sense lamentation (“Alas”) rather than a threat (cf. Matt 24:19) in A. W. Argyle, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 174. Nonetheless, lamentations often functioned as a creative prophetic way of sounding impending judgment (Matt 18:7; Isa 15:5; 16:11; Jer. 48:36; 51:8; Rev 8:13; 18:2); the word “woe” functions in Matthew 23 as a direct pronouncement of warning and judgment, as in the pronouncements against self-satisfied sinners in Isaiah 5:18-23 as commented in K. C. Hanson, “How Honorable! How Shameful! A Cultural Analysis of Matthew’s Makarisms and Reproaches,” *Semeia* 68 (1997): 81-111.

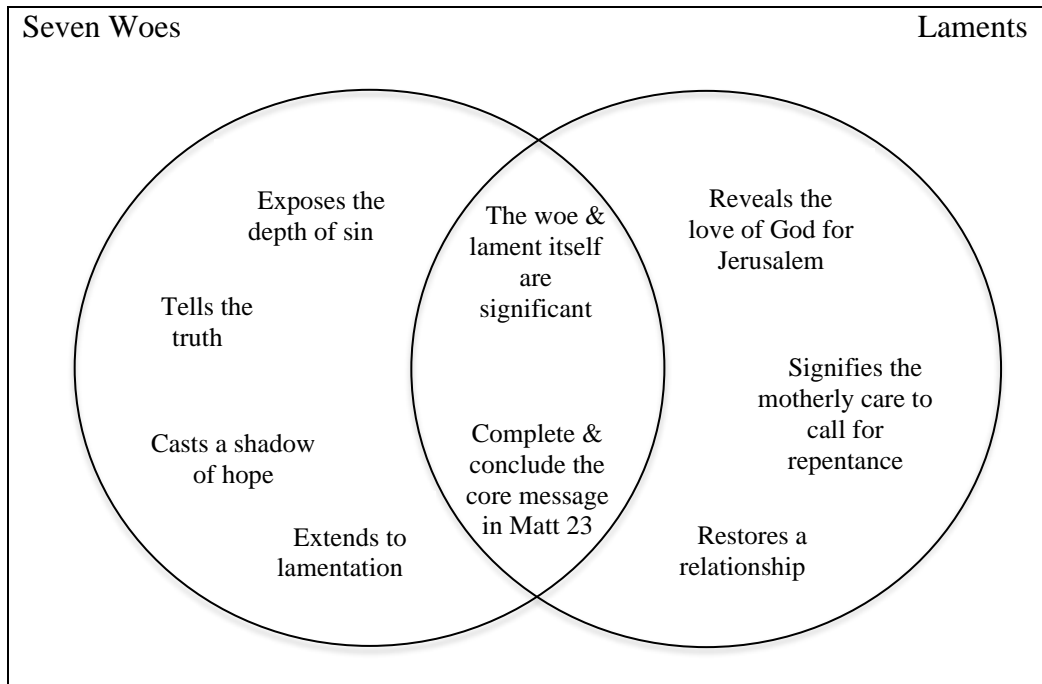


Figure 2. The Significance of the Seven Woes and Laments in Matthew 23

The Matthean Interpretation of the Pharisaic Hypocrisy in Matthew 23

The third purpose of this study is to observe more closely the Matthean interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy throughout the entire Gospel of Matthew. This final purpose seeks to reconsider the Matthean interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy in the entire Matthean context (Matt 23:13-36; cf. Matt 5:48; 19:21; 22:37-40). In general, the way Matthew uses “hypocrite” in the Gospel of Matthew varies from the generic definition of “hypocrite.”¹⁰¹ Therefore, a consistent Matthean interpretation of the

¹⁰¹ The generic definition of the word “hypocrite” is overwhelming in the literature as “pretender or actor,” contrasting words and actions. Some of the references include Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 766-67. Hanger rightly recognizes the

Pharisaic hypocrisy is essential. The scribes and Pharisees are labeled “hypocrites” in verses 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, and 29. This vocative accentuation returns in Matthew 23:2-7 and assists in framing the staccato introduction to each of the woe oracles. Jesus in Matthew constantly criticizes the discrepancy between hearts and lips (Matt 15:7), between hearing and doing (Matt 7:24-27), between saying and doing (Matt 23:3; cf., Matt 21:28-32). Matthew explicitly uses the term *hypocrites* fourteen times in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; 24:51).¹⁰² Except for one (Matt 23:16), all of the seven pronouncements of the woe oracles in Matthew 23 directly describe the scribes and Pharisees as “hypocrites.”¹⁰³ In the Matthean context, Matthew arranges “hypocrisy” alongside “lawlessness” (Matt 7:23; 13:41; 23:28; 24:12) as opposed to the “virtues of righteousness” (Matt 5:6, 20; 6:1, 33),¹⁰⁴ “perfection” (Matt 5:48; 19:21), and “wholeness” (Matt 22:37-40).¹⁰⁵ These latter terms speak of integrity and soundness, while “hypocrisy” depicts a splintering, a division, an inconsistency between the inner and outer person, between hearts and lips,

emphasis of the noun “hypocrite” in the context refers to the deception of others, not self-deception in Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:668. See also Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 641-47.

¹⁰² Isaiah 29:13, which is cited in Matthew 15:7-9 is considered the most important prophetic text on hypocrisy for Matthew in Turner, *Israel’s Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 281, 318. The abstract noun “hypocrisy” appears once (Matt 23:28) in Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 92n20.

¹⁰³ Turner, *Israel’s Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 281, 318n28.

¹⁰⁴ Pennington rightly defines “true righteousness” as “whole-person behavior,” which is the great enemy of “hypocrisy” in Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*, 92.

¹⁰⁵ Wesley G. Olmstead, *Matthew 1-14: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 111; Robinson states that “be perfect” expresses a single Aramaic term that Jesus used as “whole” or “complete” in John A. T. Robinson, *Can We Trust the New Testament?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 32. See also Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 205.

and between words and deeds.¹⁰⁶ Matthew clearly describes hypocrisy as religious fraud, a basic discrepancy or inconsistency between one's outwardly godly behavior and one's inner evil thoughts or motives.¹⁰⁷ The Pharisees are hypocrites because their heart motive is far from their actual action – they are not unified in heart and action. Hence, the Matthean interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy is beyond the common definition of “hypocrisy” – “a person who says one thing but acts differently.”¹⁰⁸ Pennington affirms that the Pharisees as “they actually do the right things, but they are not the right kind of people because their hearts are wrong.”¹⁰⁹ The Pharisaic hypocrisy presents an outward appearance – plays a role – to which *the Pharisees' inward disposition does not correspond accordingly* (emphasis ours, see Figure 3). Therefore, the Matthean interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy should be nuanced so that what the Pharisees do and what they say is not merely on the surface, but most importantly what they do and say does not reflect their *inner selves (the inward state, emphasis ours)*. The concept of

¹⁰⁶ Smith, “Hypocrite,” 353.

¹⁰⁷ Smith, “Hypocrite,” 353.

¹⁰⁸ Pennington agrees the term “hypocrite” does convey “says one thing but acts differently.” However, this is not the only kind of hypocrisy that Jesus is addressing to the Pharisees. It is, indeed, not the only hypocrisy that Matthew is interpreting the Pharisaic hypocrisy in his context. For more explanation, see Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*, 79-80, 82-86.

¹⁰⁹ Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*, 79. See also Michael Joseph Brown, “Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew,” in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, ed. Brian K. Blount, Cain Hope Felder, Clarice J. Martin, and Emerson B. Powery (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 92-93. In addition, Hendriksen comments that Greek word τέλειος also signifies “mature, full-grown, of full age” (1 Cor 14:20; Eph 4:13; Col 1:28; 4:12; cf. Heb 5:14 – “solid food is for full-grown man”) in malice babes. The concept of “wholeness, completeness” appears frequently in the Paul's writing to denote a “full grown” and “spiritual perfect – without any defect and filled with positive goodness” of a believer in Christ. The full-grown man is the one who has reached “the mature of the stature of the fullness in Christ” (cf. Col 4:12) in William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 176n156.

“doubleness” concisely defines the Pharisaic hypocrisy in the Matthean context.¹¹⁰ The concept of “doubleness” refers to actions and the inner’s heart, not merely focusing of words and actions.¹¹¹ In sum, the Matthean interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy is firmly grounded on the Pharisees’ discrepancy between their outward appearance and inward selves.¹¹² Matthew speaks louder about the consistency between the outward godliness and the inward evilness of the Pharisees in the Matthean context than Mark and Luke.

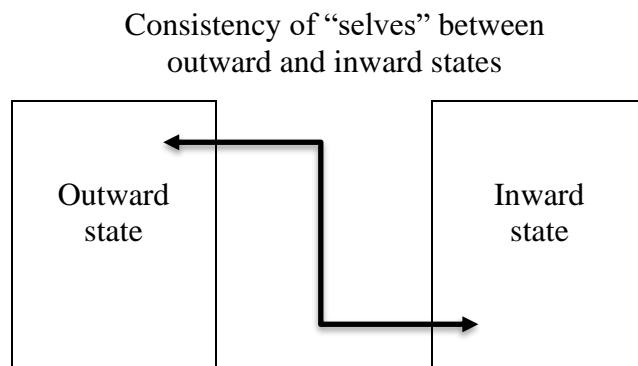


Figure 3. The Matthean Interpretation of the Pharisaic Hypocrisy in Matthew 23

¹¹⁰ Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*, 92.

¹¹¹ Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*, 92.

¹¹² Matthew 23:27-28 also explains the Pharisees’ discrepancy between outward appearance and inward selves.

Application for Church Leaders: Twelve Prominent Lessons for Christ-like Church Leaders Jesus Desires

Many of the pronouncements of the woes that Jesus lodges against the Pharisees can also be lodged against today's Christians. Jesus' pronouncement is specifically true and applicable for church leaders because they are foremost in the ministry to believers, as well as the non-believers. As a consequence, the oracles of the seven woes serves as a mirror reflecting what sins that Christians (church pastors and church leaders in particular) may have committed. In addition, the oracles of the seven woes also reminds church leaders what areas to avoid while serving God. Fischer writes,

as I have grown to understand the gospel and learn more of God's grace, I have also become conscious of a corresponding struggle with pride and self-righteousness. Like anyone, I want to be well thought of. I am often conscious, as I am even now, of picking my words carefully, like walking through a minefield of impressions, so as to appear honest while stopping short of the naked truth that might implicate me more than I am willing. It is a problem that the Pharisees of Jesus' day sought to overcome by concealing themselves behind a whitewashed religious veneer.¹¹³

Matthew 23 richly outlines the warnings and woes that Jesus pronounces on the Pharisees in order for church leaders to learn from their errors. Numerous positive lessons can be derived and errors to avoid from Matthew 23. Table 11 summarizes the lessons learned from the errors and proposes twelve prominent lessons to help church leaders set a positive trajectory for becoming the Christ-like church leaders that Jesus desires.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ John Fischer, *12 Steps for the Recovering Pharisees (like me)*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2000), 1. In addition, Fischer adopts a recovery model somewhat tongue in cheek to help people to unmask the intoxication of spiritual pride and prejudice that lures believers away from genuine discipleship to Jesus.

¹¹⁴ Table 11 is extracted, modified, compiled, summarized, and extended from France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 858-885; Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, 791-841; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 761-67; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 3:282-325; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 540-559; Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, 168-177; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company,

Christ-like Church Leaders Should Live by Example (Matt 23:2-4)

Jesus publicly criticizes the Pharisees, providing a public challenge to their honor that invites their retaliation.¹¹⁵ Thus, church leaders should live the example of what they teach (Matt 23:2-4). Jesus emphasizes more the Pharisees' behavior than their teachings (Matt 23:2-4; cf. Rom 2:21). Church leaders can teach what is right but not live accordingly, and thus falling short of the glory of God. They are not only setting a poor example before the flocks of God but also becoming a stumble block to them. In fact, the good example of the church leaders speaks louder than what they teach. Besides, the Pharisaic ethic emphasizes being as lenient or strict with others as one is with oneself, but in practice the moral authority of a teacher often lends itself to abuse. Jesus also accuses the Pharisees of being too strict with others while being too lenient with themselves (cf. Matt 5:18-20; 11:28-30; 15:1-20; Luke 11:46).¹¹⁶ The prime error that the Pharisees commit is abusing the authority of the Torah. They likewise highly demand legalistic performance from the people for popular piety for personal glory. Church leaders should live out by example by the grace of God to gain God's favor rather than man's favor. Christ-like leaders should not try to maintain control of other people's lives through the burden of legalistic expectations.¹¹⁷

1992), 569-592.

¹¹⁵ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1992), 141.

¹¹⁶ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 455.

¹¹⁷ For a contrast between such "burden" and Jesus' "yoke," see Matt 11:28-30. France observes that the "binding" here in terms of prohibitive legislation in Matt 16:19; 18:18; if so, the image of "tying" burdens to a person does double duty, a rhetorical strategy not uncharacteristic of Jesus in R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 324.

Christ-like Church Leaders Should Not Seek Respect and Honor (Matt 23:5)

Among practices to be noticed by the public (cf. Matt 6:1), Jesus includes the broadening¹¹⁸ of phylacteries. The phylacteries are to be worn to glorify God, but the Pharisees draw attention from their community to seek for their own glory and honor.¹¹⁹ Jesus purposefully points out that pretentious display of piety misrepresenting God's authority. Christ-like leadership earns respect and honor by the daily, long-term development of personal godliness and spiritual integrity, not in artificial and ostentatious displays of piety. Church leaders also earn respect through their personal prayer and devotional lives, self-control (one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), service as a God's servant (Matt 23:11) within and outside of the church. They should not demand respect and honor by manipulation.

Christ-like Church Leaders Should Not Seek Honored Treatment (Matt 23:6)

Jesus sternly critiques the Pharisees' practice of seeking "the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues" (Matt 23:6). This practice contradicts a dependence on God to exalt when He wills (cf. Matt 20:16). Horsely witnesses that the Jewish religious leaders rank themselves high socially, being part of the educated elite.¹²⁰ Additionally, seating by rank the customary practice at banquets (Luke 14:7-11), and

¹¹⁸ The concept of "broadening" refers to broadening the leather strap that attaches the box to the head or hand, or to wearing them more frequently than during the designated morning and evening times for prayers, is debated in T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 230.

¹¹⁹ Joseph Bonsirven, *Palestinian Judaism in the Time of Jesus Christ* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 61.

¹²⁰ Richard A. Horsley, *Galilee: History, Politics, People* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 233-35.

other events (1 Cor 14:29-30). Prominent elders sit on the raised platform with the Torah scroll, facing the congregation.¹²¹ Church leaders should seek for God's glory alone rather than man's glory. The honored treatment serves as a strong temptation for church leaders evaluating their hearts' motive before God. This temptation can ruin church leaders for the ministry of God if their hearts are not right with God. They can even be set aside from service in the kingdom of heaven and set apart from receiving the heavenly reward of God.

Christ-like Church Leaders Should Not Seek Honorary Titles (Matt 23:7-10)

Matthew's community is aware of the honor accorded the Pharisaic leadership.¹²² The Pharisaic leaders has misused and manipulated the honorary titles to usurp God's honor and authority. Thus, Jesus' warning is specifically directed against three titles that can stifle His discipleship: Rabbi, Father, and Master. Church leaders should avoid academic arrogance as teachers of the Bible; they should avoid religious elitism in shepherding God's flocks; they should avoid authoritarian dominance into the fullness of Jesus discipleship. In addition, church leaders are to wear lightly any titles because each title points to some aspect of God's relationship with His people. The practice of overemphasis the use of honorary titles produces arrogance and cockiness (cf. 1 Cor 8:1). On the contrary, church leaders should develop the habit of honoring each title. They should use it to bless the flocks of God with an intention to draw them into a

¹²¹ Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 543.

¹²² W. D. Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 134-35.

closer intimate relationship with God.

Christ-like Church Leaders Should Follow the New Leadership Model (Matt 23:11-12)

Jesus concludes His warnings by proposing a new leadership to His disciples – “the servanthood leadership” (Matt 23:11-12). This new leadership empowers others to do God’s will to advance the kingdom of heaven. The servant of God will find himself elevated to the servanthood leadership level by God alone. Church leaders should avoid promoting themselves to positions of authority with intention to acclaim and exalt themselves for their own glory and honor. Jesus emphasizes the model of humility in this new leadership as *He has humiliated (emptied) Himself* (emphasis ours) by taking the form of a *servant* (emphasis ours) and sacrificing His life on the cross for sinners (Phil 2:8).

Christ-like Church Leaders Should Lead People to the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 23:13-15)

Jesus pronounces the first woe to the Pharisees by condemning them for “shutting” off the kingdom of heaven. He uses an image of an authoritative *majordomo* (Matt 16:19; Isa 22:22; Rev 3:7) or perhaps a porter abusing authority to keep unwelcome guests out.¹²³ This imagery alludes to the hindering of the would-be followers of Jesus Christ.¹²⁴ Therefore, Jesus accuses them of being “blind leaders of the blind” (Matt 23:16, 24; cf. 23:17, 19; 15:14; Luke 6:39). In the second woe, Jesus denounces the Pharisees

¹²³ Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 547.

¹²⁴ Meier, *Matthew*, 268-69.

for their leading the converts to be doubly damned. In actuality, the Pharisees are doing more harm than good, leading people away from the kingdom of heaven. Church leaders, as God's entrusted leaders, are supposed to lead the people to the kingdom of heaven. They act as a signpost to the doorway to the kingdom of heaven. Church leaders within the kingdom of heaven are to point people, not to themselves, not to the church, but to *God Himself* (emphasis ours). Moreover, church leaders should also take God's calling seriously because people's response to the Gospel they proclaim have eternal consequences.

Christ-like Church Leaders Should Honor God (Matt 23:16-22)

In the third woe, Jesus condemns the Pharisees of abusing God's name, especially in the making of oaths. The act of abusing of God's name profanes and dishonors God. Although the Pharisees endeavor to distinguish which oath phrases are actually binding, Jesus rejects such casuistry.¹²⁵ Jesus sternly attacks against them for the profanation of God's name because any surrogate oath represents God's name.¹²⁶ Furthermore, any breach of truthfulness in oaths demands judgment. Hence, church leaders should honor God's name in every part of their ministry. Any dishonoring behavior certainly ruins their ministry and brings shame to God's name.

¹²⁵ E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to Mishnah: Five Studies* (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 55, 90-91.

¹²⁶ Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 549.

**Christ-like Church Leaders Should
Prioritize the Weightier over the Lighter
(Matt 23:23-24)**

The fourth woe focuses on the Pharisees' priority (i.e., the misplaced priority), which He declares to be "the weightier matters of the law." For instance, they major more upon the tithing of the minutiae while ignoring the greater commands to show mercy, to be just and to be faithful. Church leaders should prioritize the most important issues versus the least important in accordance with the teaching of the Scripture. Although the Pharisees have been faithful to God's law, they have neglected the law's broader principles (such as tithing in Matt 23:23).¹²⁷ They have evidently insisted that they have kept the biblical law, but in reality, neglected its basic requirements (Deut 10:12-13; Mic 6:8), a neglect that is inexcusable.¹²⁸ Jesus portrays the Pharisees as being more scrupulous than the Pharisaic legal ruling required.¹²⁹ For instance, Pharisaic legal experts decided that any organism smaller than a lentil (such as "gnat") is exempt from the requirement of the tithing.¹³⁰ In the Matthean context, *Jesus Himself* (emphasis ours) teaches much about the "weightier" matters (Matt 22:36; 23:5, 17, 19). In other places He emphasizes true justice (Matt 5:22; 23:23), mercy (Matt 9:13), and faithfulness (Matt

¹²⁷ Hugo Odeberg, *Pharisaism and Christianity*, trans. J. M. Moe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 43.

¹²⁸ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Weightier and Lighter Matters of the Law: Moses, Jesus and Paul," in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation: Studies in Honor of Merrill C. Tenney Presented by His Former Student*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 176-92.

¹²⁹ Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 552.

¹³⁰ Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to Mishnah: Five Studies*, 32. The Pharisees are inconsistent. They concern themselves with purity issues as trifling as a gnat but do not mind swallowing a camel whole. Gnats appear in ancient illustrations as the prototypically smallest of creatures; by contrast, camels are explicitly unclean under biblical law (Lev 11:4). In fact, camels are the largest land animal in Palestine (Matt 19:24). See also Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 552.

8:10).¹³¹ Therefore, to understand what the really important issues are doctrinally, ecclesiastically, spirituality, and relationally with God and with man is to devote plenty of time in prayer seeking God's will and to be fully immersed the Word of God. The important matter often counts for eternity.

Christ-like Church Leaders Should Examine Heart Motive (Matt 23:25-26)

In the fifth woe, Jesus denounces the Pharisees by rebuking their failure to examine their greediness and self-indulgent motives in ministry. Church leaders are called by God to advance the kingdom of heaven, not to promote their own interests and fame. God's ministry can be manipulated ministry if church leaders are self-absorbed. Church leaders are easily tempted to draw attention to themselves instead of to God alone. Therefore, Jesus examines church leaders' motives before their actions. Every action is the reflection of the heart. Christ-like leaders avoid any "unclean" motives, such as self-centeredness, self-service, and self-promotion in God's ministry. They should persistently plead to God in order to create a clean heart (with a pure motive) and to renew a right spirit within us (Ps 51:10).

Christ-like Church Leaders Should be Consistent Inside Out (Matt 23:27-28)

The focal point in the sixth woe is similar to the fifth but concentrates on forming an exterior leadership identity that is phony. In the Matthean context, he accentuates on an incidental effect of the marking in Matthew 23:27-28. Whitewash is a

¹³¹ Kaiser, "The Weightier and Lighter Matters of the Law: Moses, Jesus and Paul," 176-92. See also Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*, 84.

beautifying agent used to cover a tomb's corruption (an image in Ezek 13:10-12).¹³² The Pharisees' outward appearance (cf. Matt 23:5, 28) merely provides a veneer for the impurity, and thus the *lawlessness of their hearts* (emphasis ours). The charge of Jesus in the sixth woe visibly marks a severe offense and brings shame to the Pharisees' community. Hence, church leaders' outward appearance should be consistent with the inward state (heart) in order to show total obedience to the Word of God. Any flaws and impurity in the inward state (heart), no matter what is done to beautify it, will one day be manifested before God when He judges.

Christ-like Church Leaders Should Avoid Prophet-Murderer Position (Matt 23:29-32)

The seventh woe severely unmasks the Pharisaic hypocritical act of those who honor the prophets by caring for their tombs yet killing the prophets whom God has sent.¹³³ This Pharisaic hypocrisy proves that spiritually they are not the "descendants of the prophets," but rather than they are the "descendants of those who kill them – murderers." The descendants who walk in their ancestors' ways will also reap their ancestors' judgment (Exod 20:5).¹³⁴ Christ-like church leaders, in particular church pastors and teachers, should function as God's prophets to proclaim the Gospel of Christ.

¹³² Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 5 (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), 113-14; Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 466.

¹³³ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 146.

¹³⁴ Fenton comments that the Semitic language describes a person as being another's son if the person is like the other in John C. Fenton, *Saint Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 376. See also Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 554.

Their chief responsibility is becoming the mouthpiece of God, preaching the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ to win (or save) the lost souls. They should preach the Word of God, in season and out of season, reproofing, rebuking, exhorting, and teaching with complete patience with intention to save the lost souls (2 Tim 4:2). Church leaders should altogether avoid standing in a “prophet-murderer” position to preach, but in essence, drawing the lost souls away from the presence of God.¹³⁵ They are, in actual fact, leading people closer to the gates of hell rather than to the kingdom of heaven. Church leaders are either “God’s prophets” – saving souls (through the Gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit) or “murderers” of souls –killing souls (drawing souls away from God).

Christ-like Church Leaders Should be Wholly Accountable to God (Matt 23:33-36)

Matthew 23:33-36 records a concluding remark to Jesus’ pronouncement of the seven woes. Jesus’ final invective against the Pharisees calls them into full accountability for what they have done to others and to themselves. God entrusted the Pharisees with the privilege to lead the people accountable for stricter condemnation if they do them away from God’s will (James 3:1). Therefore, church leaders bear a higher responsibility for what they do to the church of God and the people of God. Hence,

¹³⁵ The phrase “prophet-murderer” position signifies a double-faced church leader. To be specific, a double-faced church leader acts one way pretended as a “God’s prophet,” and then in a contrary manner, he acts as a God’s prophet (i.e., “murderer of souls”) – to draw the lost souls away from God (cf. Matt 23:29-32; cf. Luke 11:49-51; 13:34-35). Just as the Pharisees (Jewish religious leaders) have murdered God’s spokespeople in the past (Matt 23:29-31), and thus they have done to Jesus (Matt 23:32) and His followers (Matt 23:34). Keener comments that “whatever judgments past generations might have suffered, the final expression of guilt had been saved up for climactic murder of this generation – the execution of Jesus (Matt 23:32-36; 27:25) in Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 555.

Christ-like church leaders should be prayerfully seeking God before making any decision. Besides, church leaders should edify the people of God (Rom 14:19; 15:2; 2 Cor 13:10; Eph 4:11-12), but not become a stumbling block (Matt 18:5-7; Rom 14:13; 1 Cor 8:9) to the church of God. As the apostle Paul exhorts, “So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). One day church leaders will be standing before the just God to be wholly accountable to God.

Table 11. Twelve Prominent Lessons for Christ-like Church Leaders

Context	Lessons	Scripture
First Warning	Christ-like church leaders should live by example	Matt 23:2-4
Second Warning	Christ-like church leaders should not seek respect and honor	Matt 23:5
Third Warning	Christ-like church leaders should not seek honored treatment	Matt 23:6
Fourth Warning	Christ-like church leaders should not seek honorary titles	Matt 23:7-10
New Leadership Model	Christ-like church leaders should follow the new leadership model	Matt 23:11-12
First & Second Woes	Christ-like church leaders should lead people to the kingdom of heaven	Matt 23:13-15
Third Woe	Christ-like church leaders should honor God	Matt 23:16-22
Fourth Woe	Christ-like church leaders should prioritize the weightier over the lighter	Matt 23:23-24
Fifth Woe	Christ-like church leaders should examine heart motive	Matt 23:25-26
Sixth Woe	Christ-like church leaders should be consistent inside out	Matt 23:27-28

Table 11 continued

Context	Lessons	Scripture
Seventh Woe	Christ-like church leaders should avoid prophet-murderer position	Matt 23:29-32
Concluding Remark	Christ-like church leaders should be wholly accountable to God	Matt 23:33-36

The Final Word: Integrity in God’s Ministry

In the twenty-first century, the church is encountering a critical image problem – the “hypocritical image.” The hypocritical image has affected many facets in God’s ministry. Moreover, it has also twisted and even distorted the essence of the Gospel message. Something may have gone wrong with the church’s integrity. This phenomenon has resulted in a poor image, more broadly in the church of God but specifically in God’s ministry.

The Dilemma

The church of God is facing an integrity crisis. The lack of integrity among church leaders has become one of the most critical issues in the twenty-first century. Wiersbe writes, “We are facing an integrity crisis. Not only is the conduct of the church in question, but so is the very character of the church.”¹³⁶ Additionally, he continues saying that the integrity crisis involves the whole church – the Bride of Christ (Eph 5:25-27).¹³⁷ Thus, there is an increasing need for integrity in the church of God. The final word

¹³⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Integrity Crisis* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 17.

¹³⁷ Wiersbe, *The Integrity Crisis*, 18.

for Christ-like church leaders is that Jesus desires is “Integrity in God’s Ministry.”

While all sin grieves God, the lack of integrity is especially heinous in God’s ministry. It not only weakens and destroys the ministry, but it pollutes the image God paints of His relationship with the church leaders and His church. Moreover, it ruins the relationship with God and with man (both believers and unbelievers). It likewise influences, hinders, and even stumbles unbelievers in drawing closer to the kingdom of heaven and in believing that Christ is the only Savior of the world. Integrity matters in God’s ministry and His church because it involves the very nature of the church in the world today. The diagnosis is painful, and the remedy is slow and costly. Nonetheless, Christ-like church leaders should be strong and courageous (cf. Josh 1:9) to face the integrity crisis honestly and to do what needs to be done for the glory of God and for the edification of His church.

The Significance of Living with Integrity in God’s Ministry

The Jewish religious leaders are not the original nor the last hypocrites. The Bible constantly denounces the practice of hypocrisy (e.g., Gen 4:3-16).¹³⁸ The prophet Amos harshly condemns the sin of hypocrisy (Amos 5:21-24), which is displeasing God in worship. Numerous Old Testament passages, indeed, echo Amos’ concern about hypocrisy (cf. Isa 1:11, 13-15, 16-18; Jer 11:19-20; Mic 6:6-8). In the New Testament passage, the apostle Paul warns about hypocrisy at the very end of the age (1 Tim 4:1-2).

¹³⁸ The sin of hypocrite is one of sins Cain has committed. Cain is a hypocrite in a way when he pretended to worship God while showing off his skill as a farmer. When Cain’s hypocrisy is revealed in contrast to his brother Abel’s faithfulness, Cain becomes bitter and resentful and murder Abel (Gen 4:5-8) in John MacArthur, *The Power of Integrity: Building A Life Without Compromise* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997), 104-5.

The Synoptic Gospels clearly reveal the sin of hypocrisy. Jesus denounces the Pharisees and His pronouncements of the seven woes visibly mark the importance of “integrity” in God’s ministry.¹³⁹ Jesus demands that His followers, especially His church leaders, live by integrity. The matter of integrity which is extremely significant in God’s ministry. When integrity is absent in the church leaders, the church of God is an awful place for worship. The threat and danger of hypocrisy should therefore motivate the Christ-like church leaders to have an even greater resolve to live with complete integrity to honor and glorify God.

The Matthean Context of “Integrity”

In the Matthean context, Jesus frequently emphasizes on the “perfectness” and “wholeness, completeness” of the Jewish religious leaders, particularly the scribes and Pharisees. Matthew begins the concept of “wholeness” beginning with the Sermon of the Mount (Matt 5-7), especially – “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48). Thus, Christ-like church leaders Jesus desires focuses on “perfectness” or “perfection” (Greek τέλειος) accentuates on “singleness” or “wholehearted dedication,” as well as “wholeness” and “completeness (Matt 5:48; 19:21; 22:37-40).¹⁴⁰ In the Matthean context, the word “perfect” literally denotes “brought to

¹³⁹ MacArthur asserts that false righteousness Jesus demands in practice should match what is really in the hearts and minds who practice it in order to show an evidence of “integrity” in MacArthur, *The Power of Integrity: Building A Life Without Compromise*, 105.

¹⁴⁰ Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*, 80, 82. The adjective τέλειος, two (Matt 5:48; 19:21) out of twenty occurrences of τέλειος in the Gospel of Matthew. Since in τέλειος Matthew is always redactional, it carries theological significance despite occurring only two times in Moisés Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 4:474.

completion, full-grown, lacking nothing” (Matt 5:48; 19:21).¹⁴¹ In addition, In the Matthean context again, Carson rightly observes that Jesus demands, τέλειος, which refers to “holiness, perfection.” Matthew is emphasizing transparent purity and unaffected holiness, utterly precluding all religious hypocrisy, all spiritual sham, all paraded righteousness, and all ostentatiously performed religious duties.¹⁴²

Jesus’ pronouncement of the seven woes (Matt 23:13-36), except one (Matt 23:16), sternly rebukes the Pharisees as “hypocrites.”¹⁴³ Matthew arranges “hypocrisy” alongside “lawlessness” (Matt 7:23; 13:41; 23:28; 24:12) as opposed to the “virtues of righteousness” (Matt 5:6, 20; 6:1, 33), “perfection” (Matt 5:48; 19:21), and “wholeness” (Matt 22:37-40). The virtues of righteousness, such as “perfection, wholeness or completeness, and wholehearted” essentially address a person’s integrity.¹⁴⁴ Pennington convincingly argues that τέλειος focuses on the virtues of the “inner person as opposed to outward behavior.”¹⁴⁵ In addition, Hartin asserts that τέλειος is “wholehearted dedication,

¹⁴¹ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, 317. Additionally, Hendriksen comments that Greek word τέλειος also signifies “mature, full-grown” (1 Cor 2:6; 3:1) with respect to knowledge of the way of salvation. The apostle Paul uses τέλειος to convey “perfect” (Rom 12:2); “the total, wholeness” as contrasted with that which is “in part” (1 Cor 13:9) in Hendriksen, *Exposition of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 176n156.

¹⁴² D. A. Carson, *The Sermon of the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1982), 54.

¹⁴³ Turner, *Israel’s Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23*, 281, 318n28; Smith, “Hypocrite,” 353.

¹⁴⁴ Smith, “Hypocrite,” 353. Smith clarifies that “hypocrisy” depicts a splintering, a division, an inconsistency between the inner and outer person, between hearts and lips, and between words and deeds. “Integrity” is the opposite virtue of “hypocrisy.”

¹⁴⁵ Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*, 80. He positively observes that the understanding of τέλειος corresponds to Jesus’ warnings against hypocrisy, which consists of, not so much in a discrepancy between saying and doing but *between behavior and the heart* (emphasis ours). In addition, Pennington asserts that Matthew 6:1-21 highlights “the internal, whole person theme by defining hypocrisy and lesser righteousness in terms of living for the external only and not the internal.” Pennington also provides a lengthy discussion of instances of τέλειος, 75-85. See also Pamment defines τέλειος as “total, single,” in Margaret Pamment, “Singleness and

which is manifested in obedience to God's will" (cf. Matt 22:37-40).¹⁴⁶ The Pharisaic hypocrisy is not solely restricted to the appearance of what they do and what they say, but more importantly what they do and say does not reflect their *inner selves (the inward state, emphasis ours)*. The Pharisees show a basic discrepancy between outwardly godly behavior and inner evil motives.¹⁴⁷ The Pharisaic words and deeds are a division, which imply an inconsistency state between the outward and inward. In sum, Jesus' pronouncements of the seven woes largely deal with the Pharisaic hypocrisy as religious frauds with, evil hearts and minds motives, in addition to their words and deeds.

The Diagnosis

The enemy of "hypocrisy" is "integrity." Indeed, the very opposite essence of "hypocrisy" is "integrity." The true spirit of "integrity" is "perfectness, wholeness, completeness, and wholehearted dedication" in obedience to God's will (Matt 5:48; 19:21).¹⁴⁸ Integrity matters in the eyes of Jesus as shown in the Sermon on the Mount and in His discourse with the Pharisees (e.g., Matt 23). Hence, Jesus' final word for Christ-like church leaders is "integrity." Additionally, the effective cure and powerful remedy for church leaders' hypocrisy is likewise "integrity."¹⁴⁹

Matthew's Attitude to the Torah," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 17 (1983): 73-86.

¹⁴⁶ Patrick J. Hartin, *A Spirituality of Perfection: Faith in Action in the Letter of James* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 26.

¹⁴⁷ Smith, "Hypocrite," 353. Moreover, Smith plainly describes the Pharisaic hypocrisy as a splintering, a division between the inner and outer person, inconsistent between hearts and lips, and between words and deeds.

¹⁴⁸ The word "perfect" (Greek *τελειος*) can be rendered as "wholeness," emphasizing on the integrity between the outward behavior and inward disposition in Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*, 80, 83-85; Hartin, *A Spirituality of Perfection: Faith in Action in the Letter of James*, 26.

¹⁴⁹ The term "Integrity," encompasses both physical integrity (outward behavior) and spiritual

The Cure

The primary woeful condition of the Pharisees lies in their hypocrisy. The Pharisaic hypocrisy prevented themselves and others from entering the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, the effective cure for hypocrisy is to live with integrity. Integrity is one of the best remedies to heal spiritual hypocrisy. Church leaders who are equipped to with integrity capable to rescue a church from integrity crisis. Besides, “integrity” is also one of chief requirements for godliness in God’s ministry (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). Table 12 summarizes three integrity issues with seven essential checkpoints. It includes first, deepening a true reverence for God *Himself* (emphasis ours); second, developing a genuine love for neighbor; third, putting sin to death daily.

First, deepening a true reverence for God Himself (emphasis ours). The Bible is full of admonitions about pursuing a reverence for God. Reverence is the place where joy and fear are held together. It is certainly not the fear of trembling and despair, but the kind that “fearing God” cultivates awe and respect when contemplating God’s holiness, nearness, grace, and power. This kind of fear is the “beginning of wisdom” (Prov 1:7; 9:10). Christ-like church leaders are called for reverence to honor and glorify God. They should develop a capacity for deep joy in the same measure to revere God (cf. James 4:10). We outline three checks of a true reverence for God. They include, first, a true reverence of God is departing from evil. Second, a true reverence of God is obedience to the Word of God. Third, a true reverence is practicing honestly in God’s ministry.

First check: A true reverence of God is paying close attention to God’s

integrity (inner thoughts/minds and hearts issues).

holiness (Isa 6:3; 1 Pet 1:15-16). The true reverence of God should result in departing from evil (Job 28:28; Prov 1:1; 3:7; 8:13; 16:6). Christ-like church leaders are prohibited from claiming on the one hand to fear God, but on the other hand holding onto sin. The true reverence of God eventually reveals the true nature of sin (unlike the Pharisees who are blind about God and sin). Christ-like church leaders should begin to see how horrible sin is and how foul it must smell to the holy God. The contrast between the sweet smell of fellowship with God and the stench of sin will make church leaders depart from sin and walk in God's ways. Departing from evil gives spiritual and physical healing and health to the navel. Sin always has its dreadful spiritual effects, and it corrupts the relationship with God and with man. Departing from evil through true confession brings spiritual life and health. In short, the fruit of true reverence of God is admiring God's holiness and willingness to depart from evil.

Second check: A true reverence of God starts in the heart and manifests itself in the actions. Desiring what is right at the beginning driving Christ-like church leaders to the right direction and walking in the right path with God. All behavior arises from the human heart – desires, inclinations, intentions, and motives. Moreover, all actions are the reflections of what is in the heart. The foremost place to reverence God is the heart (unlike the Pharisees who have evil inner motives). The fruit of a right motive expresses itself in obedient actions in accordance with the Word of God (1 Sam 12:24).

Third check: A true reverence for God Himself¹⁵⁰ leads to honest practices (cf. Lev 25:17; Prov 11:3; 12:22; 21:3; 1 Pet 3:16) in God's ministry. Dishonesty practices

¹⁵⁰ We place an emphasis here that our reverence should be toward "God alone," and not anything, or anyone, or any visible or invisible objects.

are accountable to God and to man. An honest Christ-like church leader should pursue the honor and glorify of God alone (unlike the Pharisees who pursue self-praise and self-glorification). God visits any deceitful and cunning ministry before Him for He is just (cf. Exod 20:5; Deut 5:9), and His justice is an indispensable part of God's character. Without His justice, sin (dishonest ministry) will run unchecked. Dishonest ministry brings more harm than good. It stumbles people and brings shame to the glory of God. Where there is a deep reverence for God, there will be integrity before Him. The fruit of reverence of God is living honestly and practicing honesty in God's ministry.

Second, developing a genuine love for neighbor. A genuine love here is "love without hypocrisy" (cf. Rom 12:9a). A genuine love is a sincere and fervent love that is completely *without hypocrisy* (emphasis ours) and untainted by self-centeredness. Christian love is pure, guileless, and unaffected. Why does it matter? External lip-love not accompanied by internal heart-love is a hypocritical love (cf. Matt 15:7; 1 John 3:18-19). Indeed, it is not a "love" if it is done in hypocrisy. Jesus condemns the Pharisees for making the outside appearance looks better than the inside, craving the reward of men's approval and praise. The Pharisees are hiding internal sin (secret sin) by putting up a moral, external front to beautify their piety (Matt 23:25, 27). Hypocritical love is a kind of falsehood, concealment, deceitful, and misleading love. It is the opposite of loving the truth. To attack hypocritical love is to develop a genuine love (without hypocrisy, emphasis ours) for the people of God. Christ-like church leaders should develop a genuine love for their neighbors. To love someone is not difficult, but to have a "genuine" love for a neighbor requires grace from God. Church leaders are easily tempted to have a hypocritical love for the people of God. Thus, integrity matters in

loving one's neighbor. It demonstrates the genuine love first from the internal state (heart), then flows out into the external appearance (action). A key principle of loving neighbor is cultivating "genuine" love for the people of God. John exhorts that "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We underline two checks for a genuine love for neighbor. They are, first, a genuine love is constantly aiming to please God, not man (Gal 1:10; cf. Matt 6:1-5). Second, a genuine love is constantly aiming for a sacrificial love for a neighbor (John 15:13).

First check, Christ-like church leaders should always be reminded that the prime motive for loving neighbors is to please God not man. When the Father in heaven sees such a love, He will bestow His heavenly blessings and rewards upon those who seek to please Him. Whatever ministry is involved, the chief end of serving God and man is predominantly to please God. God *Himself* (emphasis ours) must be the supreme *One* in all ministries that Christ-like church leaders engage in.

Second check, a genuine love is constantly aiming for a sacrificial love for one's neighbor (John 15:13).¹⁵¹ John says, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). This sacrificial love has been first demonstrated by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who died for us on the cross by laying down His life for us (John 3:16; 10:11, 17-18; 1 John 3:16). There is no greater love than the sacrificial love. In fact, sacrificial love cannot be a hypocritical love because a genuine love comes words with actions and living out in truth (1 John 3:18-19). Christ-like church leaders should ceaselessly show the genuine love (i.e., the sacrificial

¹⁵¹ Unlike the "love and care" showed by the Pharisees in Matthew 23, the sacrificial love aims for unselfish devotion for God and neighbor.

love) for their neighbors (1 John 3:16). They should likewise focus on what they can give in loving (unselfish devotion) their neighbors, even their own lives (cf. Ps 78:72; 1 Thess 2:8).

Third, putting sin to death daily. Christ-like church leaders must never make a mistake of thinking to limit partially in dealing with their sins. The apostle Paul ranges through the manifestation of sin in private (Col 3:5), everyday public life (Col 3:8), and church life (Col 3:9-11).¹⁵² Jesus' pronouncement of the seven woes unmasks the sins and transgressions of the Pharisees for they have deceived themselves in not seeing their own sins. Sin evidently leads not to lasting pleasure, but to holy divine displeasure. Moreover, sin results in a hardening of one's heart or turning one's heart from the holy presence of God. Thus, how powerfully this unmasking of self-deceit, which helps the believers, especially Christ-like church leaders to unmask sin lurking in the hidden corners of their hearts. Christ-like church leaders should acknowledge the danger of being hardened by sin's deceitfulness, of provoking God's discipline, of forfeiting their peace and strength in Christ. The wickedness of sin grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30), wounds Jesus Christ afresh (Heb 6:6), and takes away the usefulness to serve God for His glory. Jesus exhorts and demands that His disciples to deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Him (emphasis ours; Matt 16:24; cf. Matt 10:38; Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:23; 14:27). The demand of Jesus calls for self-denial, which signifies self-crucifixion, that is, putting sin to death.¹⁵³ Besides, the apostle Paul persistently urges

¹⁵² The term "one another" here denotes the "church fellowship."

¹⁵³ Owen refers it as "mortification of sin – the indwelling sin." For more information see, John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh and London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850-1855), 6:52-53.

Christian to put sin to death (Col 3:5, 1-17) in order that Christ, not sin, dominates in the new life in Jesus Christ (Col 3:1-4). We recommend two checks of putting sin to death: First, increases the hatred of the old man's sin. Second, the aim of denying self and putting sin to death in order to conform to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29-30).

First check, increases the hatred of the old man's sin. This hatred is particularly obvious for a born again Christian where the Holy Spirit grieves when we sin, pushing us to the mercy seat of Christ, pleading for His grace for repentance. Christ-like church leaders should often, week by week, year by year, increase the hatred of their own sins. In addition, they should sustain a constant longing to be delivered from the dominion, power, and vigor of their indwelling sin by the power of the Holy Spirit. They should also be eager to focus upon the sufficiency of Christ to kill their remaining sin.¹⁵⁴ Christ-like church leaders should never repeat the mistake of the Pharisees who purposefully harden their hearts not admitting own sins when Jesus rebukes.

Second check, the aim of denying self and putting sin to death is to conform to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29-30). The ultimate purpose of God's salvation is to transform our lives so that we can conform to the image of Christ. This conformity is a progressive sanctification for a born again Christian who will experience putting sin to death daily when he is walking in the light of Christ. Therefore, Christ-like church leaders, by the power of the Holy Spirit working within them, should gradually transform their lives and conform their lives to the image of Christ. They will admire the holiness of

¹⁵⁴ Owen urges that if a Christian is interested in killing remaining sin, then it will most certainly be killing him. The choice for Christian is very stark in killing remaining sin. The Christian is either addicted to sin or it is mortification of sin by the Holy Spirit. Mortification in killing the remaining sin means that "things that are most valuable to [Christian] may have to go..." in Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 6:62.

God and praying earnestly to live for a holy life. If Christ-like church leaders are not becoming holy, then Christ is not in them, and their profession of faith (from the very beginning) is empty. Christ-like church leaders *must* (emphasis ours) find strength in Christ through the divine work of the Holy Spirit for putting sin to death daily. When Christ-like church leaders conform to the image of Christ's pattern, their lives are consistent¹⁵⁵ with the One who calls them. They will be able to demonstrate integrity in God's ministry by bearing more of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Their ministry will certainly shine with humiliation, even in the midst of suffering and persecution. Additionally, they will be faithfully bearing the cross of Christ and follow Him. In conclusion, integrity is the key to glorify God and His ministry. This final word ends with one equation for "Integrity in God's Ministry." Table 12 describes the elements of the equation. It comprises "Three Integrity Issues + Seven Checkpoints = One Big Idea." The "One Big Idea" undoubtedly is "To glorify God."

¹⁵⁵ The word "consistent" here implies "integrity in essence."

Table 12. Integrity in God's Ministry

No.	Three Integrity Issues	Seven Checkpoints (Yes/No?)
# 1	Deepening a reverence for God Himself	Do I depart from evil? Do I show obedience in the Word of God? Do I lead myself to an honest ministry practice?
# 2	Developing a genuine love for neighbor	Do I aim to please God not man? Do I aim for a sacrificial love for neighbor?
# 3	Putting sin to death daily	Do I show more hatred for my old man's sin? Do I gradually conform to the image of Christ?
One Big Idea: To Glorify God		
Integrity in God's Ministry = Three Integrity Issues + Seven Checkpoints = To Glorify God		

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ABSTRACT

A STUDY ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS' PRONOUNCEMENT OF THE SEVEN WOES AND LAMENTS IN MATTHEW 23

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Matthean commentators have often conducted extensive textual, linguistic, and grammatical analysis about the oracles of the seven woes in Matthew 23. Moreover, we have discovered that the majority of the Matthean scholars offer thorough theological interpretation and careful exegesis along with the Greek text in Matthew 23. Nevertheless, much of the theological analysis and discussions are far too brief to highlight the significance of the comprehensive flow of thought between the oracles of the seven woes and Jesus' lamentation in Matthew 23. They often overemphasize the individual woes, and thus their discussions underline little comprehensive flow of thought in Matthew 23. Neither commentators' nor scholars' discussions are adequately satisfying in addressing the significance of the seven woes and laments in Matthew 23. The interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy is inconsistent with the entire Matthean

context (cf. Matt 5:48; 19:21; 22:37-40; 23:13-36). For this specific reason, particular attention, and careful research upon the oracles of the seven woes, Jesus' lamentation, and reconsideration of the Matthean interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy is essential. Hence, the purpose of this study, primarily, is to discuss the significance of the seven woes and laments in Matthew 23 which conveys two core messages: First, a severity of warning (Matt 23:13-36; cf. 23:1-12); second, an invitation to life – redemption and salvation (Matt 23:37-39). Secondly, we hope to perform a scrupulous examination to evaluate the difference and common significance (or the intersection point of significance) between and within the oracles of the seven woes and laments. Thirdly, we are committed to observe a closer Matthean interpretation of the Pharisaic hypocrisy in Matthew 23.

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