

RELIGIOUS LEADERS – THEN & NOW

In Israel, at Christ's First Coming
In Christendom, Preceding Christ's Second Coming“

The record of events occurring in Israel at Christ's first coming is an account of that which can and did happen when the leadership — centrally, the Scribes and Pharisees, because of their prominence (the largest of the religious sects in Israel) — *NOT ONLY DIDN'T believe Moses BUT sought, above everything else, their own personal gain and well-being* (Matt. 21:33-39; John 5:46, 47).

As a result, *they took an entire nation DOWN with them. And, in so doing, they placed this nation under the condemnation of blood, extending all the way back to “righteous Abel” — covering man's entire 4,000-year history, even during the 2,500 years preceding the nation's existence* (Matt. 23:34, 35; 27:25).

And the end result of their actions was twofold:

1) *A nation continuing in its unclean state, with something new about to be added — contact with a dead body, that of their Messiah — producing an even further uncleanness, one from which they could NOT be cleansed for two days, 2,000 years* (Num. 19:11, 12, 19).

2) *The house of Israel (the nation) was to be left desolate, awaiting the one (Antichrist) who would bring about an EVEN further desolation* (Matt. 23:37-39; cf. Dan. 9:26, 27; John 5:43).

Thus, the actions of the Scribes and Pharisees at Christ's first coming *had far-reaching, negative ramifications — ramifications which would govern the course of Israeli history for the succeeding two millennia and end with the darkest hour in ALL of Jewish history.*

Israel *would be scattered among the nations and would find NO rest* (Lev. 26:32-39; Deut. 28:63-67). The entire two millennia *would, itself, be a troublous time* for the nation; but this period *would be climaxed by a time of unparalleled trouble*.

And the WHOLE of this period would be a time of shed blood, BUT NOT that seen in the antitype of Exodus chapter twelve. Israel's appropriation of the blood of the Paschal Lamb lies at the end of this time of trouble, NOT during this time.

During this time of trouble, lasting two millennia, *it would be Israeli blood itself which would be shed.*

All of the Israeli blood shed from Titus coming against Jerusalem with His Roman legions in 70 A.D. to Hitler's aspirations for a Jew-free Europe immediately preceding and during WWII, during the years 1939-1945, and beyond, *can be attributed to ONE climactic event — that resulting from Israel's religious leaders misleading an entire nation during the time Christ was on earth the first time.*

But the darkest day emanating out of that which occurred almost two millennia ago still lies in the future. It will occur within the framework of Daniel's unfulfilled Seventieth Week (Dan. 9:26b, 27; Rev. 6:1-18:24) — the final seven years of the preceding dispensation — when the desolated house is desolated even further. And this period will result in a time of such unparalleled trouble that, "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved" (Matt. 24:15-22).

The simple fact of the matter is that *God does NOT, He will NOT, take lightly the actions of religious leaders misleading the people in matters pertaining to His Son and His Son's coming kingdom.*

And it matters not whether reference is made to leadership in Israel during the past dispensation or to leadership in Christendom during the present dispensation. *God's perfect justice and righteousness surrounding His dealings with*

His people does NOT, it CANNOT, change from one dispensation to the next.

Dire consequences followed in the wake of religious leadership of this nature in the past, consequences which have lasted for an entire dispensation (the present dispensation, during which time the nation of Israel — having been misled by her religious leaders — is out of favor with God and is set aside).

And *dire consequences of an EQUALLY serious nature* will follow in the wake of religious leadership of this nature during the present time, consequences which will again last for an entire dispensation (the Messianic Era, during which time numerous Christians — having been misled by their religious leaders — will be out of favor with God and will be set aside).

“Ye Shut Up the Kingdom” — Past

The Scribes and Pharisees, those to whom the people of Israel looked for leadership in the spiritual life of the nation, *completely misled the Jewish people.* And, as a result, these fundamental religious leaders *heard words of condemnation from the lips of Christ UNLIKE anything He had ever said to anyone at any time within any other religious group in Israel.*

An entire chapter has been given over to this matter in Matthew's gospel (ch. 23). And, after stating the position which the Scribes and Pharisees occupied in Israel — sitting “in Moses' seat” (v. 2) — Christ called attention to that which they had done and were continuing to do (vv. 3-12).

He then pronounced a “woe” on the Scribes and Pharisees, giving *the reason* for that “woe” and for seven more which would follow.

Israel's religious leaders *had closed the door to the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to the nation.* They were NOT

about to relinquish their position “in Moses’ seat” *to the Heir of the vineyard* (vv. 2, 13).

(Israel’s religious leaders *KNEW* Christ’s true identity — *God’s firstborn Son, the One in possession of the rights of the firstborn, the Heir* — and *THIS* is the reason *WHY* they “slew Him” [Matt. 21:38ff].)

Israel’s religious leaders had NO interest in the proffered kingdom. They were NOT going to enter this kingdom, and they, through the course of Christ’s ministry, had done all within their power to prevent anyone else in Israel from entering as well.

Then Christ continued with one “woe” after another, referring to the Scribes and Pharisees, among other things, as “hypocrites,” “blind guides,” “fools,” those likened to “whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and all uncleanness,” “the children of them which killed the prophets,” and a “generation of vipers” (vv. 14ff).

This was Christ’s analysis at His first coming, near the termination of His ministry, of the fundamental religious leadership in Israel. They held to and taught the very letter of Scripture; *BUT*, in the process, they *DIDN’T* understand the spiritual content of the letter and, thus, *COULDN’T* teach the true content of these Scriptures at all.

THESE were the fundamental religious leaders of that day, the ones supposedly learned in the Scriptures. THESE were the ones to whom the people looked for spiritual leadership. THESE were the ones controlling the religious life of the nation.

THESE also were the ones who should have taken the nation to the mountaintop in its spiritual life.

BUT, instead of ascending the mountain and taking the nation with them, they had descended into the lowest valley; and, through their control over the spiritual life of the people, they had taken the nation down into the valley with them.

“Ye Shut Up the Kingdom” — Present

And *THIS* is *NOT* something peculiar to Israel relative to the message pertaining to the kingdom of the heavens at Christ’s first coming. *EXACTLY the SAME thing was prophesied to happen, and is happening, in Christendom relative to the message concerning the kingdom of the heavens immediately preceding Christ’s return (cf. Matt. 13:3-33; Rev. 2, 3).*

The leadership in Christendom *will have NO more* to do with the message pertaining to the kingdom of the heavens today, immediately preceding Christ’s return, than would the leadership in Israel at the time of Christ’s first coming.

And THIS ISN’T something seen just in the liberal segment of Christendom BUT equally in the fundamental segment as well. THIS can be seen among ALL of Christendom’s religious leaders, as it was seen among ALL of Israel’s religious leaders (the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians together) two millennia ago.

This was THAT which the entirety of Israel’s religious leadership had in common when Christ was on earth the first time, and it is also THAT which the entirety of the Church’s religious leadership has in common immediately preceding Christ’s return today.

The Scribes and Pharisees *were NOT* condemned for their adherence to the letter of the law, or for their legalism; *NOR*, if it had been the Sadducees, would they have been condemned for their liberalism; *NOR*, if it had been the Herodians, would they have been condemned for their political ambitions within Herod’s kingdom.

Rather, the Scribes and Pharisees were condemned *for closing the door to the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel.*

And the Sadducees and Herodians *would have experienced the SAME condemnation had they been the ones who had closed this door.*

And, bringing all of this down into Christendom, *the religious leaders of today who are misleading the people relative to the proffered kingdom of the heavens will be condemned for EXACTLY the SAME reason Christ condemned the religious leaders in Israel 2,000 years ago.*

Condemnation, after this fashion, *will NOT* result from fundamentalism, legalism, liberalism, or political ambitions within the present kingdom under Satan.

NONE of these things, unless indirectly, even enters into the matter in relation to that which is in view. Rather, condemnation will result from *their having closed the door to the offer of the kingdom of the heavens — the coming kingdom under Christ — to Christians.*