

**M**UCH OF the professing Christian world today suffers from the mistaken notion that Christ came to do away with His Father's religion — the religion of the Old Testament. Nothing could be further from the truth! Jesus Himself said, "Think *not* that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill [fill to the brim]" (Matt. 5:17).

Christ plainly said that He did not come to do away with His Father's religion but to *complete* God's revelation. Then why are so many confused on this point? Why do some mistakenly preach that the Law was "done away"?

One of the major assumptions in this connection is that most theologians *assume* that the Pharisees and the other religionists of Jesus' day were the representatives and the exponents of the revelation given to Moses — God's Old Testament religion. But the Bible shows that the One who later became Jesus Christ was the Lord of the Old Testament: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1, 3; see also Eph. 3:9 and Heb. 1:2). Just where and when did the Pharisees get their practices which Jesus condemned?

### The Return From Babylon

Chronologically speaking, the last three authors of the Old Testament are Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi. These three men all worked among the Jewish community that had returned to Judaea after the Babylonian captivity. They were largely successful in bringing to the people an awareness of God's true religion. A body of priests (Aaron's descendants whom God had ordained to be the religious leaders) was set up to guide the people in matters of religion. This company of men was known in history as the "Great Assembly" or "Synagogue" (*Knesset Hagedolah*). Due to the work of this body throughout the period of Persian dominance the Jews were living for the most part in accordance with God's Law (Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, Jewish

**Just who were the Pharisees and where did their religious doctrines originate? In the Old Testament? If so, why did Christ so strenuously oppose their ideas? Is the Bible — both Old and New Testaments — a house divided? An examination of the period "between the Testaments" shows that while men may be divided — the Bible is not!**

by Ernest Martin and Harry Eisenberg



Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1894, Vol. I, pp. 406-407).

Because of this, God granted them special protection and privileges by a series of miracles, at the coming of Alexander the Great in 330 B. C. This is described in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XI, Chapter X, Parts 5-6.

### A New Way of Life

At his death, Alexander's empire was divided into four parts (Dan. 8:22). Judaea first passed under the rule of the Ptolemies of Egypt and, later, the Seleucidae of Syria. Both of these were Macedonian (Greek) dynasties and were great exponents of the pagan, Gentile way of life known as "Hellenism."

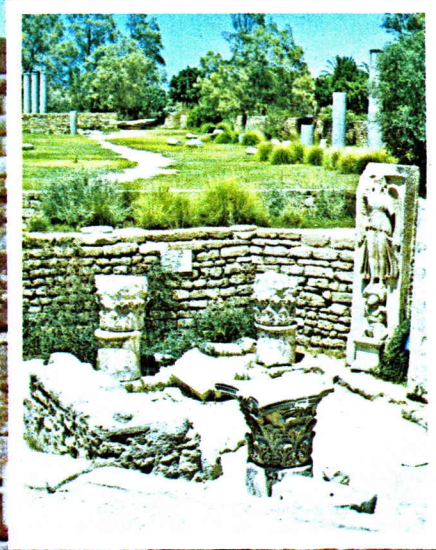
The basic philosophy behind Hellenism was this: Every man had the right to think for himself on any matter as long as there was not a real departure from the customs that were essentially Greek.

This philosophy — freedom of thought or individualism, which is *seemingly* altruistic in principle — resulted in myriads of confusing and contradictory beliefs among the Greeks in every phase of life. Every man was allowed his own ideas about the sciences, the arts, law and about *religion*. So varied were the opinions among the Greek scholars in the various fields of study that individuals took pride in contending with one another over who could present the greatest "wisdom" and "knowledge" on any particular subject.



During the Ptolemaic period, Hellenistic culture rapidly spread among the Jewish people. One reason why was the existence of numerous Greek cities in their midst, such as Gerasa (Jerash) pictured below. Another bastion of Hellenism was Ashkelon (see inset photo) on the Mediterranean coast.

Ambassador College Photos



# TESTAMENTS

With the encouragement of the rulers, Hellenism spread rapidly in the Ptolemaic Empire. Judaea was by no means exempt.

## Great Assembly No Longer in Authority

Within a score of years after the coming of the Greeks, the Great Assembly disappears from history as an organized body having religious control over the Jewish people. It is not known how the Greeks dismissed this authoritative religious body from its official capacity as teachers of the Law. But it is obvious that the authority of the Great Assembly was eroded and the Greek leaders forbade them to teach.

Without the religious guidance of the Great Assembly, many Jews began to

imbibe the Greek customs and ideas which were inundating the land.

“With the change from Persian to Greek rule [the Ptolemies were Greeks, remember], Hellenism made its influence felt, and came pouring like a flood into a country which had known nothing of it. There was no escape from its influence. It was present everywhere, in the street and the market, in the everyday life and all the phases of social intercourse” (R. Travers Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, Soncino Press, London, 1933, page 77).

Much of this Hellenistic influence came from the numerous Greek cities which were established under the Ptolemies. Most of these were on the Mediterranean seacoast or on the east side of Jordan.

With the Great Assembly removed from the scene and this new culture substituted for the Law of God, the Jews began to absorb many elements of Hellenism. The Jews had no one to guide them in understanding the Law except a few isolated teachers here and there who lacked the official authority of the Great Assembly.

After a few years of this influence, the people literally came to a state of religious confusion. Some endeavored to keep a form of the Scriptural teachings, but with Hellenism everywhere, it became almost impossible to adhere to the true form of the law of Moses. Almost everything the Greeks brought to the Jews was antagonistic to the laws of God, and, without the religious guidance of the Great Assembly, many of them began to tolerate these innovations and even, as time progressed, to take up many of the Greek ideas and customs themselves.

## 100 Years of Ptolemaic Rule

After a series of battles with the Syrians, Ptolemy I, the Greek king of Egypt, took firm control of Judaea in 301 B. C. His descendants retained that control for over *one hundred years*, until 198 B. C.

This one-hundred-year period of Greek-Egyptian domination is very important in the religious history of the Jews. This is the period in which many great and significant changes first began to take place in Jewish religious life.

“During the comparatively quiet rule of the Ptolemies, Greek ideas, customs and morality had been making peaceful conquests in Palestine” (Charles Foster Kent, *History of the Jewish People*, page 320).

There was little resistance to these inroads. We are informed by Dr. Jacob Lauterbach, a learned Jewish scholar, that Jewish tradition knows of no religious teacher who taught any form of religion from the death of Simon the Just (270 B. C.) until about the year 190 B. C. (Jacob Z. Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 1951, page 196).

“This would have been impossible,” Dr. Lauterbach says, “if there had been

any official activity of the teachers in those years" (*ibid.*).

But there was none. In fact, whole generations came and went, offering no great resistance to the new customs which were encouraged by the commercial and educational intercourse taking place between the Jews, Greeks and Hellenistic Egyptians. In fact, thousands of Jews migrated to Egypt during this period. By the end of the Ptolemaic period, there were over a million Jews in Egypt, out of a total population of about seven million.

A prime example of Hellenistic influence is the *pagan* concept of the immortality of the soul. This doctrine was widely publicized in the writings of the pagan Greek philosopher Plato.

### The Coming of the Seleucids

In 198 B.C. the Seleucid kingdom of Syria conquered Judaea and drove out the Egyptians. Like the Ptolemies, the Seleucids were also of Greek origin and equally Hellenistic in culture and outlook.

At first, conditions in Judaea were pretty much like what they had been under the Ptolemies. The Seleucid ruler, Antiochus II, was favorably inclined toward the Jews.

Conditions rapidly changed, however, with the coming to the throne in 175 B.C. of Antiochus Epiphanes.

Shortly after he ascended the throne, there was a contention among several of the priests in Jerusalem for the office of High Priest. Jason, the brother of the reigning High Priest, persuaded Antiochus to transfer the office to him, by offering a large sum of money to the King.

Jason was Hellenistically inclined and was followed in this by many of the people. "A passion for Greek costumes, Greek customs, and Greek names [Jason's Hebrew name was Joshua] seized the people. Large numbers were enrolled as citizens of Antioch [the capital of Syria]. Many even endeavored to conceal the fact that they had been circumcised. . . . To demonstrate that he had left all the traditions of his race behind, Jason sent a rich present for sacrifices in connection with the great festival at Tyre in honor of the god Hercules" (Kent, *History of*

*the Jewish People*, pp. 324-325).

Of course, not everyone in Judaea went this far, but by and large, most people are inclined to follow their human leaders, at least to a certain extent.

About three years after Jason assumed office, Menelaus (Hebrew name *Onias*), a man most believe to have been of the tribe of Benjamin (not a descendant of Aaron and therefore not truly a priest) offered Antiochus a larger bribe than Jason, and he was named High Priest instead. Because of this, Jason fled beyond Jordan to the Ammonites for refuge. (See McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. I, pp. 271-272; and II Maccabees, Chapter 4).

Many of the Jews thought Jason had been unjustly deprived of becoming High Priest. Many of the people began to take sides — some for Jason, some for Menelaus. Fighting broke out between the two groups, both of whom were led by outright Hellenists.

Jason's forces won out and Menelaus fled to Antioch. There Antiochus became infuriated to learn that many of the Jews had taken sides against his appointed official or, in effect, against his government itself!

At that time Antiochus was planning to conquer Egypt. When that failed, due to the intervention of the Romans, he decided to take out his anger on the rebellious Jews at Jerusalem. He planned not only to subdue the Jews but to put an end to their religion once and for all.

Antiochus, feigning peace, proceeded to take the city. He polluted the Temple by burning swine's flesh on its altar, and erected a statue of Jupiter Olympus in the Holy Place. This had been prophesied by Daniel (Dan. 11:29-31). He plundered the Temple of all objects of value and then issued a decree forbidding the Jews to worship God or in any way to exercise their religion.

Despite the severity of this decree, there were many Hellenistically inclined Jews who nonetheless accepted it without protest. Many of these Hellenists were priests and Levites.

On the other hand, for many other Jews, the majority of whom may have

been only slightly interested in religion previously, this decree forbidding such basic practices as circumcision and requiring idol worship was simply too much.

### The Maccabean Revolt

In the small village of Modi'in, the head of a priestly family, Mattathias, and his five sons, stood up to oppose Antiochus and his decree. "If anyone be zealous for the laws of his country and for the worship of God, let him follow me," he proclaimed (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XII, Chapter VI, Part 2).

Thousands flocked to his banner and a full revolt was under way.

Just before his death, Mattathias made his third son, Judah (called Maccabee), general of their army. After a long series of battles with his forces greatly outnumbered, Judah defeated the Syrians and their Samaritan allies. In 165 B. C. he went up to Jerusalem and purified the Temple, restoring the true ritual of God.

Judah was killed in a later battle. Finally Simon, the last survivor of Mattathias' sons, was able to proclaim an independent nation with himself as High Priest.

The nation was now, at last, free of foreign domination. But the years of religious anarchy and Hellenistic influence had taken their toll. Dr. Lauterbach states: "During the seventy or eighty years of religious anarchy, many new practises had been gradually adopted by the people" (Lauterbach, page 205). The British scholar Travers Herford adds: "In the absence of authoritative guidance, the people had gone their own way; new customs had found a place among old religious usages . . . new ideas had been formed under the influence of Hellenism which had permeated the land for more than a century, and there had been no one to point out the danger which thereby threatened the religious life of the people" (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, pp. 64-65).

### The Sanhedrin

We are now at the point where the Pharisees first make their appearance in history, some time after the Maccabean



wars. But before we note this, we need to examine briefly the rise of the Sanhedrin, the body which they dominated during much of its existence.

While some sources would lead us to believe that the Sanhedrin was the direct successor to the Great Assembly, this was not the case. It was not until about 196 B. C. after a hiatus of some eighty years that the Sanhedrin was first established. This is shown by an ancient manuscript found today in a text called *Fragments of a Zadokite Work*. This text points to 196 B.C. as the year the Sanhedrin first met. This body is said to consist of "men of understanding from Aaron" (that is, priests), and "from Israel wise teachers" (that is, non-priestly teachers) (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, page 203).

This is significant! The writer mentions there were both priests and lay teachers in the new Sanhedrin. This was an innovation. Until this time only the priests, with their assistants, the Levites, were considered to have the authority to teach religion to the people.

This would not have been permitted while the Great Assembly, the successor of Ezra, was in authority. This is clearly shown from the writings of Malachi, who was contemporary with Ezra, Nehemiah and the early days of the Great Assembly. "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he [the priest] is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts" (Mal. 2:7). The law of Moses, which God had directly commanded him, clearly enjoined that the priests and Levites were to perform the functions of teachers, not just any layman who would presume to do so. (See Deut. 18:1-7; 33:10 and also Ezek. 44:23.)

#### Lay Teachers Reject Sole Authority of Priests to Teach

Why this radical change? Again we must briefly go back to the period of religious anarchy when the Egyptian Ptolemies ruled Judaea.

Both the Ptolemies and the later Seleucid rulers looked upon the High Priest as the head of the Jewish nation. In turn, it was the High Priest, with his assistants (other priests) who dealt with the Hellenist rulers on behalf of the nation.

Outstanding among these were Joseph, the son of Tobias, and his son Hyrcanus. In order to be successful diplomats at the Hellenistic court in Alexandria, they felt it necessary to adopt Greek ways. And these they brought back with them to Judaea. Thus, it was the priests, the ones who should have been teaching the people God's Law, who became the chief proponents of Hellenism.

From 206 to 196 B. C. a series of battles between the rival Hellenistic kings of Syria and Egypt devastated many parts of Judaea. Some blamed Hellenism for this trouble and began to seek to return to the laws of their fathers. But to whom could they turn?

The priests as a whole had become thoroughly Hellenized. In fact, different priests were taking sides in the wars and were even raising up armies to help either the Syrians or the Egyptians. The only ones who had studied God's Word and remained committed to it in any form were a few laymen and some minor priests. These sat in the new Sanhedrin.

#### What Was God's Way?

Prior to and during the Maccabean revolt, the outwardly Hellenistic priests and their followers supported Antiochus Epiphanes. The lay teachers and the Sanhedrin as a whole supported the Maccabees. Religiously speaking, the major result of the Maccabean victory was the *total discrediting of Hellenism* in Judaea. The High Priesthood was given to the Hasmonean (Maccabean) family itself, which descended from minor priests. No one was an outright Hellenist any longer. Many were desirous of following God's way. But whatever religious unity there might have been was short-lived.

The question basically was one of determining just what was God's way. There was, of course, the written Bible (the Old Testament). But how were the people to apply its teachings to the various problems and events that arise in daily life? The Jews, remember, had just emerged from a period where the teaching and practice of God's Law had been forbidden. And this had been preceded by an era of some eighty years during which Hellenism had made great inroads into the daily lives of the

people; and all this while there had been no organized body directing religious life.

Hundreds of years before, Ezra and those priests and Levites assisting him had "... read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and [had given] the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (Neh. 8:8). Through the ages, God's servants have been responsible to show the people (with His guidance) how His Law applied in various situations in their lives. This was never the prerogative of anyone who wanted to choose "the ministry," "the priesthood" or "the rabbinate" for a vocation, but only those whom God specifically chose. And in ancient Israel, under the Old Covenant, God chose the priests, primarily, with the Levites to assist them, for this purpose of teaching.

#### The Pharisees Come on the Scene

Following the Maccabean victory there were many priests who were ready and willing to resume their ancient, God-given role as teachers and expounders of the Law. But there were also the lay teachers who had come to sit in the Sanhedrin and had made a notable contribution to the Maccabean cause at a time when many priests were outright Hellenists and supporters of Antiochus Epiphanes. Lauterbach says that the lay teachers "refused to recognize the authority of the priests as a class, and, inasmuch as many of the priests had proven unfaithful guardians of the Law, they would not entrust to them the regulation of the religious life of the people" (Lauterbach, page 209). It was these lay teachers who organized themselves into the party of the Pharisees.

Although many of the priests had indeed become Hellenized, this did not necessarily give the lay teachers the right to usurp some of the priests' God-given authority. But, sadly they insisted on following the way that seemed right to them (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). However, two wrongs did not make a right in that day any more than they do today.

What these two wrongs did result in will be shown in the next installment. Watch for it in an upcoming issue of TOMORROW'S WORLD. □





# BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

The century and a half prior to Christ's coming was one of religious turmoil. More than anything else, the history of this period shows the need for a change in the human heart. This is precisely what Christ came to offer.

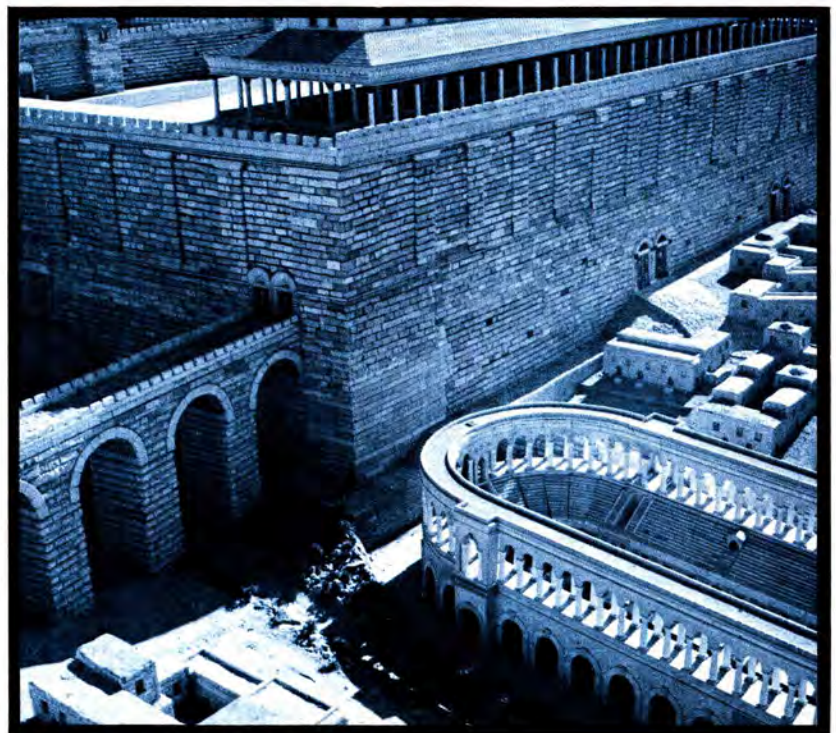
by Ernest Martin and Harry Eisenberg

## Part II

**I**N THE LAST INSTALLMENT we saw how a majority of people were weaned away from their observance of God's laws by the pressures of the Hellenistic culture. Under the rule of the Egyptian Ptolemies, they became interested in the education and culture of the surrounding nations.

Later, under the domination of a cruel Seleucid Syrian king, the Jews revolted against Syria. The revolt was successful, and Hellenism, as a culture of which the Syrians were great exponents, was now discredited.

The priests (those descended from Aaron), many of whom had been leading Hellenists, were looked upon with distrust by many. Now laymen were beginning to make their voices heard in



Top: Floor of ancient synagogue uncovered at Beth-Alpha, Israel. Mosaic shows the 12 signs of the zodiac of pagan astrology. It is illustrative of the influence of Greek culture in Israel of the intertestamental period. Above: Graeco-Roman amphitheater was located in the shadows of the Temple Mount. Hellenism influenced cultural and religious life of many in Judaea.

*Ambassador College Photo*



religious disputes. This was the rise of the Pharisees. It was a layman's party, though some priests also belonged to it.

### The Sadducees

No one questioned the right of the priests to officiate in the Temple. But the priests pointed to Deuteronomy 17:8-13 as giving them, and not the lay teachers, the authority to teach and to decide questions pertaining to religion. They and their supporters organized themselves into the party of the Sadducees (name taken from Zadok, the High Priest in Solomon's day).

The priests as a whole were wealthy. This and their previous support of Hellenism caused the people to mistrust them by and large. Josephus tells us, "The Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII, x, 6).

### Lay Teachers Justify the People's Errors

And yet the main reason for the popularity of the Pharisees and the rejection of the Sadducees was neither the tainted past nor the wealth of the priests. It was in the teachings of the Pharisees themselves.

During the period of religious anarchy under Hellenistic rule, the continuity of official teachers of the law had been broken. Hellenism had made its inroads.

Consequently, when the Maccabean War came to an end, and some teachers did think of returning to God's Law, it was found that "many new customs and practices for which there were no precedents in the traditions of the fathers, and not the slightest indication in the Book of the Law, were observed by the people and considered by them as a part of their religious laws and practices" (Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, p. 195).

In short, the people had adopted many customs and ideas which were in truth clearly pagan. The best example of these is the belief in the immortality of the soul already mentioned.

"The difficulty was to find a sanction in the Torah [the Law] for the

new customs and practices which had established themselves in the community . . ." (Herford, *Talmud and Apocrypha*, Soncino Press, London, 1933, p. 66). The teachers should have shown the people they were sinning (Isa. 58:1). Instead they chose to justify them. This should not seem strange. It was done in Jeremiah's day (Jer. 23:21-22) and in Isaiah's (Isa. 30:10).

### Pagan Customs Called Jewish!

And yet the Scripture plainly states: "Learn not the way of the heathen" (Jer. 10:2). Consequently, the teachers taught that the new customs the people had adopted were not really pagan — they were actually Jewish!

They reasoned this: "It is hardly possible that foreign customs and non-Jewish laws should have met with such universal acceptance. The total absence of objection on the part of the people to such customs vouched for their Jewish origin, in the opinion of the teachers" (Lauterbach, p. 211).

These teachers told the people that it simply was not possible for them, being Jews, to have inherited any heathen custom or practice.

They furthermore taught that since the customs were "Jewish," then they must have been taught by Moses himself.

(This is no different from today, when churchgoers by the millions assume that the original apostles observed Sunday, Easter, Christmas and the like.)

"Accordingly, the teachers themselves came to believe that such generally recognized laws and practices must have been old traditional laws and practices adopted by the fathers and transmitted to the following generations in addition to the Written Law. Such a belief would naturally free the teachers from the necessity of finding scriptural proof for all the new practices" (*ibid.*).

In other words they claimed that these customs, since they were not *written* in the Old Testament, must have been handed down *orally* from Moses — by word of mouth.

Actually, these traditional laws — these oral laws — were not from Moses nor any of the prophets. There is not a single reference in the Scripture that Moses gave the Israelites any oral or traditional laws that were to be trans-

mitted to posterity along with the written Word. The Bible states just the opposite. It plainly says that Moses wrote the *whole* Law in a book. Notice:

"And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were *finished* . . ." (Deut. 31:24).

There is no such thing as an "oral law of Moses."

### Oral Law Gains Acceptance

The theory of the "oral law" was accepted only gradually — a matter of a few years, rather than months.

"The theory of an authoritative traditional law (which might be taught independently of the Scriptures) was altogether too new to be unhesitatingly accepted . . . the theory was too startling and novel to be unconditionally accepted" (Lauterbach, p. 211).

The greatest opposition to the so-called "oral law" came from the priests who, as a whole, declared that the Scripture was the only necessary code of laws to obey.

"This apparently simple solution offered by the priestly group in the Sanhedrin did not find favor with the lay members of that body" (*ibid.*, p. 209). And, with the passage of time, the lay teachers ultimately came to constitute the majority of representatives in the Sanhedrin. These Pharisaic lay teachers succeeded in convincing the people that they were right and that the priests were wrong.

Some of the people's fears concerning the priestly Sadducees were apparently valid, however. Many of the priests did become worldly minded and they found worldly politics far more interesting than religion. The Sadducees eventually adopted the belief that there was no resurrection and that angels did not exist (Acts 23:8). This was probably a result of the influence of the Greek Epicurean philosophy. It taught that there was no future life of any kind and that man should therefore seek as many physical pleasures in this life as possible, since that was all there was.

### New Laws of the Pharisees

Many of the Pharisees came to believe that they were doing was God's will.

"It is certain that they [the Pharisees]

regarded themselves as the successors of the prophets, and not merely in fact but by right" (Herford, p. 71).

Based on this claimed authority, they adopted a method of teaching what they believed to be laws of God, without any initial reference to the Scripture for authority.

"Finding no convincing proof for such laws in the Bible, they taught them independently of scriptural proof, i.e., in the *Mishnah*-form" (Lauterbach, p. 229).

*Mishnah*-form was the name given for laying down laws to be observed, apart from Scripture. This is not to say *Mishnah*-form avoided Scripture altogether. But it was only *after* a law had already been accepted that the Scriptures might be checked for corroboration.

Editor's Note: In the previous installment — September issue, page 22, column 1 — "Antiochus II" should read Antiochus III.

Sometimes "affirmation" of a new law was forced from Scriptures totally unrelated to the particular subject.

The word *Mishnah* is related to the Hebrew root meaning "second" and "study." *Mishnah*-form was the *second* form that the Pharisees adopted for "study" as opposed to the original form of properly expounding the Scriptures, which was called *Midrash*-form. This older, original form was known as "teaching after the manner of Moses" (*Talmud*, Temurah 156, *Yebamoth* 72b).

*Midrash*-form is based on deducing laws, teachings, legends, etc., from the Scripture. As time went on it too became perverted. "Whenever there was the remotest possibility of doing so, they would seek by means of new hermeneutical rules [rules pertaining to Biblical interpretation] to find in the words of the Torah support for these traditional laws" (Lauterbach, p. 212).

Thus the Pharisees were able to "find" the traditions they were now approving of by twisted interpretations of Scripture. In doing this they still claimed to be using the *Midrash*-form.

Ezra is said to have taught in *Midrash*-form when he, and his helpers

"read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (Neh. 8:8).

There was, however, one major point which Ezra was aware of, but which the Pharisees missed. It is this: God, in the Bible, never contradicts Himself. Malachi, a contemporary of Ezra was inspired to write: "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6). But many of the traditional laws the Pharisees approved of did contradict Scripture. What's more, many of them even contradicted one another.

With the introduction of the new *Mishnah*-form, Scripture came to be less relied on than before. New laws, which were not even necessarily traditional, could be enacted.

The Pharisees found the *Mishnah*-form to be an important weapon in their conflict with the Sadducees. Laws that were accepted after being handed down in the *Mishnah*-form tended to enhance the authority of the Pharisees, since it was *solely* on their authority that the law was accepted.

The very first individual of whom we have any record who began to teach new commandments in the *Mishnah*-form, apart from the scriptural basis, was Jose ben Joezer of Zareda.

Jose laid down three new commandments. The first concerned the eating of a certain locust; the second, the blood of slaughtered animals; and the third, the touching of a dead body. In doing this he became known as "Jose the Permitter" (*Talmud*, Abodah Zarah 37b).

"Furthermore, Jose is called 'the Permitter,' evidently because in all three decisions he permits things that were formerly considered forbidden" (Lauterbach, p. 219).

These new laws of Jose were not customs the people had inherited from Hellenism. "It is therefore evident that these Halakot [rules] . . . were not older traditional laws transmitted by Jose as a mere witness, but Jose's own teachings. He was the one who 'permitted' and he deserved the name [the Permitter]" (*ibid.*, p. 218).

These commandments of themselves

were not earth-shaking violations, but they did set a precedent! Eventually others began to set down all sorts of new laws. These are what Jesus called "the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7).

### The Prosbul of Hillel

Many others ultimately followed in the steps of Jose. If the majority of Pharisees agreed on a new decision, it was accepted as the Word of God — even if Scripture taught just the opposite.

Of the myriad of new laws laid down, perhaps the best example and the best known is the Prosbul of Hillel.

Hillel the Old headed a Pharisaiic school in the days of Herod. He was noted for his gentleness and was greatly beloved among the people, but his decisions, nonetheless, were not always in keeping with the Word of God.

For example, "All private loans are automatically remitted at the end of the Sabbatical Year (Deut. 15:2) and hence it became difficult to obtain loans immediately before the onset of that year. In order to avoid hardship and encourage lending, Hillel instituted the *Prosbul* [Greek: "for the court"], which is a declaration made before a court of law by the creditor, and signed by witnesses, stating that all debts due him are given over to the court for collection. Since the remission of loans during the seventh year applies only to individuals but not to public loans, the effect of the Prosbul is to render the individual's loan public, and it is therefore not remitted" (Werblowsky and Wigoder, *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, art. "Prosbul," p. 312).

Hillel's motive was apparently quite practical. And yet the Bible clearly states: "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD [Eternal] against thee, and it be sin unto thee" (Deut. 15:9).

Rather, God says: "Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when you givest unto him: because that for this thing the Eternal thy

God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto" (verse 10).

It was because of rules like the Prosbul that Christ told the Pharisees, "Thus have you made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition" (Matt. 15:6).

Hillel saw that the poor were unable to obtain needed loans and was trying to remedy the situation, but he was not doing it God's way! God says: "Trust in the Eternal with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

There were many such instances where the Pharisees enacted many new laws, based solely on their own human reasoning in an attempt to make what they thought would be a better way of life. Yet God tells us: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12; 16:25).

#### Cause and Effect

The Pharisees' error was a classic one. Seeing wrong situations, but relying solely on themselves, they attempted to treat the *effect* rather than the *cause*.

Notice the case of Hillel's Prosbul. God plainly tells us that the *cause* of the problem was in the *hearts* of the people (Deut. 15:9).

Today too many see the problems besetting mankind. Governments have their solutions and the revolutionary activists have theirs. But all attempt to treat *only the effects* of the problems. None gets at the *real cause* — which is to be found for the most part in carnal human nature with its greed and pride.

Today, God is treating the cause of man's ills in some individuals. He is presently changing the hearts of a few. "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them an heart of flesh" (Ezek. 11:19).

God's Law as revealed throughout all of Scripture is indicative of God's *character*. It is a giving, serving, sharing, concern for the other person as well as the self, and can be summed up by the word LOVE — love first of all toward God and then towards fellowman.

God's Law shows us exactly how He

would live if He were a human being. And this is precisely what Jesus did when He emptied Himself of His divinity and took on human flesh — He never once broke a single law of God.

The rise of Pharisaism in the period between the Testaments represented an attempt on the part of these people to keep the Law. But they lacked a clear understanding of their own human nature as revealed in the Scriptures. Notice God's deeply felt near-lament in Deuteronomy 5:29: "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever"!

But "such an heart" was not in them at that time. They had only the human nature that we all naturally possess — the heart that is "...deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9.)

Joshua told his generation, "...Ye cannot serve the Lord..." (Joshua 24:19). To do so simply was not in their nature — nor is it in ours.

But man was not left without hope. There was a promise of better things to come. "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live" (Deut. 30:6).

The Pharisees as well as the other sects of the period wanted to serve God and keep His commandments. They had, as the Apostle Paul (who well knew) put it, "...a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom. 10:2).

Not aware of the necessity for a change in their own human nature, they found it necessary to change God's Law. Not that this was done outwardly, but rather by forced interpretations, rationalizations, attempted codifications of laws that are all-encompassing, and new laws that were not admitted always to be new.

By changing the Law, they made it of "none effect." That is, it did not have the effect that God's laws should have on those who keep them.

Inasmuch as the Pharisees did keep *some* of the laws correctly *some* of the time, it did have *some* good effects. But

the overall results that come by living in total harmony with the laws the Creator set in motion simply were lacking. Pharisaic society did not abound with the love of God. You could never convince the Sadducees (with whom they often disputed) that it was otherwise. Nor could you convince the Romans. Nor could you convince the unlearned Jews of that day, whom many of the Pharisees thumbed their noses at with the epithet *am-ba-aretz* ("people of the land" — the term is used in a derogatory sense throughout the Pharisaic writings).

Pharisaic society was filled with strife. When Alexander Jannaeus, one of the Maccabean kings, ruled, the Pharisees were virtually at *war* with him and there was much bloodshed.

The Talmud itself is a record of the Pharisees striving among themselves, one with another in religious *debates*, each one trying to convince the others of the correctness of *his* particular idea, rather than all working harmoniously to seek *God's* will.

Today, professing Christianity is treading down the same well-worn path the Pharisees mistakingly took. Where is the sect that has not attempted to read its own ideas into the Bible which it professes to obey? And where is the denomination that is truly bearing the fruits of God's Spirit — love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance? Indeed which one even knows what true love is?

Don't *you* follow the crowd. *Don't* be led down the garden path into religious deception by any who would warp, distort and twist the scripture to their own destruction. As you peruse the pages of your TOMORROW'S WORLD magazine, we encourage you to search the scriptures daily *whether these things be so* (Acts 17:11). But by the same token we also ask that you apply the same criterion to *all* who claim to represent God! Remember, "...if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

As you continue to prayerfully study your Bible and this magazine of Biblical understanding, you will find new vistas of truth continually opening before your very eyes! □