

“YE SHUT UP THE KINGDOM”

ACTIONS OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS AT CHRIST’S FIRST COMING
ACTIONS OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS AT CHRIST’S SECOND COMING

By Arlen L. Chirwood

“But woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of the heavens against [‘in the presence of’] men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Matt. 23:13).

At the time of Christ’s first coming, 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* Christ 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 were doing, along with their self-exalting ways (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 (v. 13). 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 to “the heir” of the vineyard.

And, resultingly, they had no interest in the proffered kingdom. They were not going to enter this kingdom, and they, throughout the course of Christ’s

ministry, had done *all within their power* to prevent anyone else in Israel from entering as well.

Christ, continuing to call attention to their actions, then pronounced one “woe” after another upon the Scribes and Pharisees, referring to them 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 anything beyond the letter and, thus, couldn’t teach the true content of these Scriptures at all.

These were the fundamental religious scholars of that day, the ones 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 *could have, and 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 this valley* with them.

Not Peculiar to Israel Alone

And this is not something peculiar to Israel relative to the message surrounding 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 surrounding the kingdom of the heavens immediately preceding Christ’s return (*cf.* Matt. 13:3-33; Rev. 2, 3).

The leadership in Christendom today will have no more to do with the message surrounding the

kingdom of the heavens, 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 in the fundamental segment as well. This can be seen in *all of Christendom*, as it was seen among *all of Israel’s religious leaders* (the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians together) two millenniums ago.

This was that which the entirety of Israel’s religious leadership (fundamental and liberal alike) 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 (fundamental and liberal alike) has *in common* immediately preceding Christ’s return today.

The 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 Pharisees were condemned *for closing the door to the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel*. And it would have been for the same reason had it been the Sadducees or the Herodians who had been condemned after this fashion by Christ.

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.

Condemnation, after this fashion, will not result from fundamentalism, legalism, liberalism, or political ambitions within the present kingdom (*i.e.*, in the kingdom ruled by Satan and his angels from the heavens through the Gentile nations on earth [Dan. 10:12-20; Eph. 3:9-11; 6:12-17]). None of these things 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 to Christians*.

Sons of Gehenna

Christ, at the very first part of His condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees for their having misled the people relative to the proffered kingdom, referred to their making proselytes and to that which they, in reality, had done in the process:

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell [Gk., *huion Geennes*, ‘son of Gehenna’] than yourselves” (Matt. 23:15; cf. v. 33).

“Sonship” in relation to *Gehenna* rather than “sonship” in relation to *the kingdom of the heavens* is that which is in view. “Sonship” implies *rulership*. Only “sons” can rule within God’s kingdom (cf. Ex. 4:22, 23; Job 1:6; 2:1; Ezek. 28:14; Matt. 3:17; 4:3, 6, 8; Rom. 8:19-23). That’s the way it has always been, that’s the way it presently exists, and that’s the way it will always continue to exist.

At Christ’s first coming, a kingdom was in the offing; and only “sons” could rule within this kingdom. But the Scribes and Pharisees had “shut up” the proffered kingdom (v. 13), and now *only one thing could remain* — an association of “sons,” an association with *regality* (having to do with the very reason for man’s creation in the beginning or his salvation following the fall), with *Gehenna* rather than with *the kingdom*.

The reference concerning the Scribes and Pharisees making proselytes would not pertain to a proselyte of the gate (the conversion of a Gentile) but to a proselyte from among the Jewish people to the Pharisaical way of life within the nation. And the thought behind a proselyte becoming twofold more *a son of Gehenna* than the Scribes and Pharisees themselves lies in the fact that converts of this nature often became more dogmatic than their proselytizers.

The Scribes and Pharisees themselves, insofar as sonship and the kingdom which had been offered to Israel were concerned, were themselves *sons of Gehenna*; but their proselytes were viewed in an even

more condemnatory fashion in this respect. The Pharisees had misled them in relation to the proffered kingdom, as they had done the nation itself; and, apparently because of their dogmatism, proselytes found themselves in an even worse state than that of their Pharisaical proselytizers.

Gehenna was the place of refuse for the city of Jerusalem, located outside the city walls in a valley south of the city. “Sonship” in relationship to this place graphically pictured exactly where the Scribes and Pharisees would lead a proselyte, or where they had led the nation of Israel, relative to the proffered kingdom. *Sonship*, which was supposed to have been realized in *the proffered kingdom*, could now be realized only in relation to *Gehenna*.

Gehenna, located south of the city, was set on the opposite side of the city from the place God is seen in Scripture. God is always seen at a point north of the earth or of anything on the earth (Lev. 1:11; Job 26:7; Ps. 75:6, 7). And, beyond that, *Gehenna* was a *place of refuse in a valley* rather than a *place associated with God’s glory and a mountain* (signifying a *kingdom* [cf. Isa. 2:2-4; Dan. 2:34, 35, 44, 45]).

Thus, the expression, “sons of Gehenna,” could only picture *one thing*. It could only describe the state in which those who had been called to occupy positions in *the kingdom* would find themselves following their refusal. They, in relation to “sonship” (implying *rulership*), would find themselves in a *place of refuse*, not only *removed from the kingdom, the mountain*, but in a *valley* as well. *Gehenna* was a place diametrically opposed to that which they could have had, the place to which they had been called (cf. Gen. 19:27, 30).

Israel Then, Christendom Today

That’s where the fundamental religious leadership in Israel had led an entire nation, with the more liberal Sadducees at times being seen with them. And that is the exact same place where the fundamental or liberal leadership in Christendom today can be seen leading the people in a counterpart to that of Israel’s

religious leadership at the time of Christ’s first coming.

Any attempt to ignore, to do away with, or to shut up the proclamation of the message surrounding the kingdom of the heavens to Christians today by Christendom’s religious leaders can only meet with the same dire consequences as it did in Israel with their religious leaders. And the end result, insofar as *sonship and the kingdom* are concerned, can only be seen associated with a corresponding place outside the heavenly Jerusalem as was seen outside the earthly Jerusalem — *a place of refuse outside the walls* of the heavenly Jerusalem, located on *the south side* of the city (cf. Rev. 22:14, 15).

(Note that *Gehenna* is being referenced in a metaphorical respect in the former usage [with the Scribes and Pharisees, taking the people down with them], which must be the case with the latter as well [as it would apply to religious leaders in Christendom today, taking the people down with them]. *Gehenna*, as “outer darkness,” is used in an antithetical sense to describe *the place* which will be occupied by the unfaithful during the Millennium as opposed to the place which will be occupied by the faithful.

The usage of both was seen in connection with Israel and the offer of the kingdom of the heavens in the gospel accounts. However, once the kingdom was taken from Israel [that facet of the kingdom offered to Israel, *the heavenly sphere of the kingdom* (Matt. 21:43)] a new entity was called into existence to be the recipient of that taken from Israel [I Peter 2:9-11]. And now, exactly as in the past offer of the kingdom to Israel, thoughts surrounding the usage of *Gehenna* and *outer darkness* could only apply to the present recipients of this offer — to Christians.

For additional information on that to which *Gehenna* points in relation to both the earthly and heavenly Jerusalems in the preceding respect, see the author’s book, MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM, Chapter XII.)

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