

# ***"The Revelation of Righteous Judgment" Series***

## **PART 8**

### **"JUDGMENT AT THE HOUSE"**

(CONTINUED)

***I Peter 4:17... "For the time is come that JUDGMENT MUST BEGIN AT THE HOUSE OF GOD..."***

As we resume our studies on this subject, we would like to take our readers back to an important time in history. There is a wealth of wisdom and spiritual understanding wrapped up in this particular era; and we would do well to consider it now with the utmost care. It will give us an interesting depiction of events and conditions that are directly related to us today, and will provide the necessary perspective for this part of our message.

Imagine, if you will, that you have been transported back into the past. The time is surrounding the first century A.D.; that transitional period between two ages, as far as how men measure time is concerned. The place? The land of Judea, Jerusalem in particular. You have come to observe the religious atmosphere pervading the land. Hurry, now; take your seats! The show is about to begin!

As the curtain is raised, and we survey the geographical stage set before us, our attention is immediately drawn to the cast. There were three main religious groups headquartered in the holy land during this time: the Pharisees, the Saducees, and the Essenes. Of course, there were others (the Herodians, the Zealots, etc.); but these groups represented the three major schools of thought the religious mind had progressively evolved and separated into over the years.

The Pharisees were the largest group, and perhaps the most powerful. They were about six thousand strong, having the greatest influence over the common folk. Their membership was mostly composed of merchants and tradesmen---the working middle class. And they were very aggressive in the recruiting and conversion of the masses, Jew and Gentile alike. As Jesus said of them, they would "compass sea and land to make one proselyte". They were extremely missionary minded; seeking to influence all men to their brand of theology.

The Pharisees, through their wide influence, had largely changed Judaism from a religion focused on sacrifice to one on law. Their emphasis was on the Law, the Prophets, and "the traditions of the elders" (later compiled in printed form, and known as the Talmud).

Because they believed that the oral traditions handed down from the fathers (many of which had come into circulation during the Babylonian captivity, and had no doubt originated from Babylonian culture and doctrines, we might add) were just as important and authoritative as the written law, they had laws to dictate and control almost every avenue of men's lives. And since they believed that salvation was based solely on works of righteousness, and that righteousness came only through obedience to the law, they figured the more laws they had, the more righteous they could become. It would seem that they had it all figured out!

They were the progressive thinkers of their day; able to adapt their interpretation of the law to new situations in life; or, if need be, they had the power to create new laws, with which to govern. This is how they maintained their control over the multitudes. As long as they were able to convince men that the way to God was through legalism; and that the learned elders were God's only true authorized interpreters of the law, they could remain in a position of authority and leadership over them. This was the basis of their strength.

The name "Pharisee" literally means, "the Separated Ones". The title fit them well, seeing how they went to such great lengths to separate themselves from things which they considered unclean or defiled. They were extremely careful to abstain from external defilements; and had their special rituals, ceremonies, and lustrations for purification, in case they did happen to come in contact with something contaminated. To most, they probably seemed to be sincere in their practices; very pious and humble, ever seeking to attain a higher degree of holiness, and greatly concerned with the welfare of the common people. Why, on any given day, one might see them standing on street corners, or perhaps in the crowded market place, attired in their enlarged robes and broadened phylacteries, casting dust upon their heads, and offering loud and arduous prayers for the sake of the nation. And you can believe that they were extremely proud of the image they projected. You might call it, "humble pride"!

The Saducees were a different lot. It could be said that they were the party of the rich and the famous. Their sect was mainly comprised of the wealthier members of society, and of the high priesthood families. In fact, the letters of their name in the original (which means, "the Righteous Ones") seems to bear a great similarity to that of Zadok, the Davidic High Priest. And some actually made the assertion that they were natural descendants of his. No one knows whether this be true, or not; but at any rate, this was their claim. As the Pharisees presided over the synagogues, the Saducees controlled the Temple. They were in charge of offerings and sacrifices, and various other Temple duties (howbeit, not all priests were Saducees).

The Saducees differed from the Pharisees, in that they only accepted the Torah as authoritative. They rejected all other writings, as well as the oral traditions; and therefore became the target of the Pharisee's scathing condemnation. They interpreted the Scriptures quite literally, and limited their applications to the subjects specifically addressed. They were certainly not looking for hidden meanings, or principles from the book of the Law, that might require more of them. They demanded that it be taken at face

value---no more, no less. And they mocked their rival sect for what they considered to be foolish and unnecessary restrictions on their lives.

You might say that they were the intellectuals and rationalists of their day. They did not believe in life after death, or in bodily resurrection. They rejected the idea of Divine providence, or Spiritual intervention; and they denied the idea of punishment or reward beyond the grave. They rejected the notion of angels or demons, and were more than a little skeptical of claims of supernatural phenomena. Furthermore, they contrasted drastically with the Pharisees, who accentuated the doctrine of predestination, and the absolute sovereignty of God; they believed in the absolute freedom of human will---and that men could do as they pleased without attracting God's attention, without invoking God's wrath. (This happened to be one of their greatest points of contention). Unless it was something strictly forbidden in the law, literally spelled out in black and white, they felt they were free to indulge in it. Theirs was an "eat, drink, and be merry" type of theology, which allowed for much excess.

This made their doctrine very appealing. In reality, they were actually more severe in their declaration and execution of judgment against law-breakers than were the Pharisees; howbeit they were much more liberal in their definition of law. This explains their freedom to openly pursue materialism, worldly pleasures, and self-gratification, without any sense of guilt or condemnation. At the same time, however, it left them wide open to the pervading, corrupting influence of Hellenism, and to Greek philosophy (to a great extent, they had already incorporated a large percentage of it into their way of thinking).

The Saducees were a proud party. They boasted of their refinement and nobility; their advantage over others, because of their assumed ancestry. They could be seen "strutting their stuff" around the Temple, and the gates of the city (where all the wise men and elders hung out); adorned with the finest of apparel, that they might be admired of men. Unlike the Pharisees, who invited all to become a part of their congregation (though they treated folks as unclean until they did), the Saducees only welcomed into their ranks those who were of a certain social status, who would represent them in an aristocratic, diplomatic, and prestigious way. Therefore, these "social snobs" had little association with the lower classes of men, unless it was absolutely necessary.

The third group we mentioned was the Essenes. As you are probably aware, there is no mention of them in the Gospels; however, the Jewish historian Josephus provides us with certain information about them, as well as do the writings of Philo and Pliny (if you should like to read more on them, Alfred Edersheim also makes some interesting observations of them in his classic work, "The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah"). While they had very little involvement with the city of Jerusalem itself, and absolutely no part in it's numerous religious activities (they considered the larger cities in particular to be centers of evil, and the priestcraft to be utterly corrupted), the fact that they were a fairly large group (about 4000 in number), and therefore had a notable influence among the people compels us to briefly describe their beliefs and customs.

The Essenes were basically a communal people. Some made their settlements among the smaller villages of Judea; though most dwelt in larger Essenic communities such as Qumran, where the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered. They were by nature clannish, very independent, and very private; hence the name, "the Outsiders", or "the Silent Ones" was given them. They were not dependent on either Jerusalem or the Temple to perform their religious duties; for they had their own non-Levitical priesthood. Nor did they trust the translations of the scribes and Pharisees; they had their own private set of manuscripts (which they were diligent in transcribing). They could function entirely "without the gate", so to speak, without relying at all on the main-stream ecclesiastical body of Judaism.

They were very ascetic in their beliefs; even more so than the Pharisees. For instance, if someone should desire to join their group, he would have to endure a long probationary period, along with numerous ritualistic baptisms. Upon initiation into the first of three degrees for the novice, he must first surrender all his earthly belongings; then he would be given three items, which served as symbols of purity: a spade, with which to dig a pit to cover his excrement; an apron, to gird himself with while bathing; and a white robe, which was to be worn at all other times. All other (bare) necessities were supplied by the community. He was withdrawn from society, secluded from contact with the outside world, and diligently trained in the strict ways of Essenism. Since every meal was considered a sacrifice, the only food he could ever partake of, from the day of his initiation, to the day of his death, was that which was prepared by their priests. And since marriage was looked down upon as an obstacle in the pathway to higher spirituality, most even took vows of celibacy (by the way, only men could be members of this elitist club; women were considered inferior creatures, and thereby excluded). Finally, upon graduation, he was made to take terrible vows of secrecy (even at peril of death should he break them), before he was fully admitted into the fraternity. This explains why so little is known today about the details of their beliefs. The entire cult, and its unusual activities, were completely shrouded in mystery. They were expressly forbidden to discuss religious matters with those who were not of their persuasion.

While they did bare an obvious similarity to the separatist mentality of Pharisaism, there was a major difference in their motives. Both originated from a desire for purity; however, while the Pharisee denied himself for the sake of merit, the Essene did so for the sake of spiritual liberation, and the quest for supernatural power. Just the opposite of the Saducees, Essenic belief was that the entire material world, and everything of substance, including their own bodies, was evil; therefore, they reasoned, the more they abstained from it, and deprived themselves of physical pleasures, the greater contact they had from the spirit world. (This belief, and others stemming from it, later became known as "Gnosticism").

Because of this attitude, they were fascinated, and heavily involved with the phenomena of prophecy, prediction, and of Angelology (the study of, and communication with spirits). This, in turn, made them believe they had special access to so-called "esoteric" knowledge, which, according to them, only the initiated could understand. Furthermore,

they claimed to possess magical powers, as well as mystic wisdom concerning secret remedies of plants and stones for the healing of both soul and body. Kind of spooky, huh!

It is apparent from this information, and other we have available to us, that Essenic thought was greatly affected by Eastern Oriental teachings. And, as one might expect, because of their infatuation with what we might call, "end-time prophetic negativism", their general outlook on the natural world was one of gloom and doom. Since they viewed it as intrinsically evil, they looked forward to the day of it's destruction (at which time the spirit world would be released from it's prisonhouse).

We could cite many more characteristics of these three most prominent groups, but we believe what we have mentioned creates a clear enough picture. Certainly diversity existed between them; of this there can be no doubt. At the same time, however, certain tendencies were common among them, creating a peculiar bond of unity. The expressions of these tendencies were different, all right; but the tendencies themselves were basically the same. The point we are making is this: when viewed together, the fundamental teachings of their belief systems establish a clearly defined pattern; form a foundational base for all world religions; and touch facets of the entire spectrum of natural religious thought in every generation, past or present. Likewise, while it is true there were vast differences between them, as far as their associational origins and philosophical influences were concerned, it was also obvious that they all shared the same "headmaster": ADAM! He it was that formulated these doctrinal disputations, as well as every other line of irrational, theological reasoning known to man at that time, or since. They were all but the personification and expression of the Adamic nature; different shades of the religious mind of the "man of sin"...in other words, THEY COLLECTIVELY REPRESENTED ADAM IN 3-D!

When Jesus walked this earth in the days of His flesh, He grew up right in the midst of these religious organizations. They pressed upon Him on every side (much like the various sects and denominations of our day do us), vying for His allegiance, seeking His vote of approval. And even though there may have been some things He could agree with in each group, things that were worthy of commendation, He did not join Himself to any one of them! We do not read where He became a member of "the First Church of the Pharisee"; that He placed His "letter" in "the Greater Saducean Institute of Higher Learning and Development"; or that He was initiated into the fraternal order of the local "Essenic Lodge"! He knew what was in man, the true origin of their esteemed organizations, and recognized the spirit they were of. He Who was born of God kept Himself, and that wicked one, that old "man of sin", touched Him not (I John 5:18)! He refused to become identified with their party spirit, to be distracted from His purpose! He had one thing in mind, and that was remaining submissive to the Father, to be led of Him in all His ways! Hallelujah!

Not only did Jesus refrain from them, but accurately described them, when He called them, "Scribes, Pharisees...HYPOCRITES"! The Greek word He used here, "hupokrites", means, "an actor under an assumed character (stage-player); i.e. a dissembler". It comes from another word, which means, "to decide (speak or act) under a feigned part; i.e.

deceit, condemnation". And this word can be broken down to its two root words, the first meaning, "under, placed beneath, inferior condition, or position, covertly"; while the other word means, "to distinguish, i.e. decide, by implying to think, try, condemn, conclude, sentence, or punish". Simply put, a hypocrite is one who sets himself up to appear one way, when in reality he is just the opposite. His motive is to cause others to believe he is like the one he pretends to be, while passing judgment on those who do not live up to his standards or expectations. And this, dear friends, is how Jesus viewed the religious leaders of His day. He saw beyond the acting, through the charade, through the feigned appearance of their vain religiosity, and behind the veil! He looked straight through the superficial show, through the theatrical "make-up" ...and knew exactly who He was addressing! He was not at all deceived by them! (How very characteristic this all is of the carnal mind---whose judgments are rendered from an inferior position or condition in the soul...and pretends to be something that it is not! It is an actor, for sure...an impostor, a deceiver, attempting to play the part of the Spirit, by "sitting in the temple of God"; judging others by a standard that it does not live up to itself! It is, in the truest sense of the word, a hypocrite)!

As we said, these three ideological groups were actually three dimensions of that "old man" Adam, as he proudly performed in his highly acclaimed "broad way" production (Matt. 7:13)! And though there appeared to be three casts in the show, the truth is, there was actually only one character...and he played all the parts! Oh, there were those who went through the motions, alright; but he was the one "pulling the strings"...and it was his voice quoting all the lines! They were merely his puppets! This was religious Adam at his best; parading across the stage of humanity, displayed in full array for all the world to see! However, we do not hesitate to declare unto you that regardless of the outfit, or the way that he appeared in them at the first, he still remained THE ENEMY OF CHRIST! Time proved this to be so! His nature did not change, just because of his image! He was, and is, and ever will be, ANTICHRIST...the chief among hypocrites!

### **MODERN MANIFESTATIONS**

As we examine history, it seems that both the Saducees and Essenes were disbanded, and brought to their tragic ends during the invasion and massacre of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.; and, as far as records show, they ceased to function as identifiable groups after that. The scribes and Pharisees, on the other hand, managed to survive that holocaust---only to encounter much more persecution and bloodshed in the days following. Since then, they have suffered unmercifully at the hands of their adversaries throughout the present age, because of their blasphemy, and their role in the crucifixion of our Lord. Obviously, they received the greater condemnation. However, it almost goes without saying that all three of these groups are still among us today, as we see with the eyes of the Spirit. Their "ghosts" still haunt us today! The tragedy of it all is that they are not just found in modern Judaism, or in far-removed religions around the globe...but under the very banner of Christianity!

Need we mention the similarities between the Pharisees of old, with their false humility and "holier-than-thou" attitudes, their religious taboos and unending lists of extrabiblical

laws (which had absolutely nothing to do with godliness and morality, but merely satisfied the flesh), their sad countenances and mourning garments, their innumerable fables and traditions of men (which were not based on the truth of God's Word, but on the vain imaginations of the babylonish carnal mind), and certain groups found right within the church today?

Or is it difficult to see the spirit of Saduceeism at work today, in its many forms and disguises...which constantly strives to justify it's fleshly appetites and indulgences under the guise of religion...openly flaunting its excesses, while mocking and ridiculing those who believe in maintaining any standard of morality? Who hasn't been confronted, yea, assaulted, with this "in your face" attitude of open defiance; this blatant disrespect for the "old landmarks"; this casting off of all restraints; this deliberate, intentional, and rebellious "anything goes" attitude against modesty and decency that is prevalent in the church today?

We would add further: is it not obvious that the glitter and glamour, the elaborate trappings, the impressive edifices, the grand ceremonies of pomp and pride, the fleshly talent shows, the special clerical garb, and the prestigious titles, also belong to this spirit? Pray tell, what part does any of this have with "the simplicity that is in Christ"? Where does He fit in?

Further still: can we possibly deny the association between the Saducees, with their pessimistic skepticism, and those among us who are always attempting to question and explain away any form of supernatural activity by scientific or natural means?

Or what of the extremes of Essenism? Is it not evidenced in the world today, shewing itself alive after it's passion by many undeniable proofs? Consider the vast numbers of secret societies, clans, and clubs today, many of them professing to be Christian based (all the while compelling their members to submit to, and swear by satanically-inspired initiation rites); or think about some of the so-called "Christian" cults around, which teach repressive, even self-destructive forms of denial and bodily mortification, in order to attain higher spiritual status...and all done in the name of Jesus!

It seems nowadays that everywhere you look, strange new doctrines are springing up...and many of them are tainted with New Age, Eastern mystical philosophies. Teachings, which promote such self- deifying confessions as "I AM GOD", or that encourage transcendental meditation as a means of contacting our "higher selves", are infiltrating churches across the land at an alarming rate. And, sad to say, many are being accepted, even propagated by some professing the high calling of sonship! And what about the current emphasis in some circles on acquiring spiritual power? Was this not the motivation behind Essenism? (To hear some speakers, it would seem that the "gifts" are more important than the Giver)! Beloved, these things ought not to be!

It has been our observation that every work of the flesh, in one form or another, can be associated with these three religious ideologies. But the most outstanding features of Adam's three dimensions could be briefly summed up in three words: pride, prejudice,

and personal interest. Regardless of the extreme, the emphasis is always on the importance of self, how one's self appears in the eyes of others, and what might be in one's best self-interest (even when it takes on the appearance of self-denial). Yea, great sacrifices and humanitarian efforts may even be employed with rigor; but the motive is revealed in the words of Jesus, when He said, "they do all their works for to be seen of men" (we would add here that one of the chief characteristics of the "beast" nature is that it is always trying to leave it's "mark" on those around it, that is, to impress others with it's great image)! It is just Adam's way of "sanctifying" SELF-CENTEREDNESS!

### **THE HEART OF THE MATTER**

It does not require a keen sense of discernment to recognize that these are, one and all, twentieth- century expressions of the ancient spirit of the Pharisee, the Saducee, and the Essene. Even a child should be able to make this most obvious connection. And it is all well and good that we can identify these characteristics around us. Knowing that these manifestations are under the judgment of God, destined for a swift and sure dissolution at the coming and appearance of our Lord, it is important that we see them for what they are, that we be not entangled in them. However, it is one thing to discern them without, in the organizations and institutions of men; and it is one thing to "come out from among them, and be ye separate"; but quite another to recognize them in ourselves! This, dear friend, is where our greatest trouble lies...not so much in the systems of religion; and not so much in our neighbor; but in the deep, inner regions of our own being!

As you know, when Jesus first strode upon this earth, and began proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom throughout Jerusalem, He encountered a great amount of conflict from the religious leaders of His day. Strange, isn't it, that the greatest source of His conflicts came not from the "common folk", the unconverted masses, but from the very ones who should have immediately recognized Him and supported Him! Perhaps they would have...if He would have played by their rules, and promoted their cause! But because He would not, wherever Jesus went, whatever He said, or whatever He did, they were never far behind; they were there, to criticize, condemn, and to find fault with Him in general. As we have already pointed out, the Pharisees and Saducees were mortal enemies (kind of like the "Hatfields and McCoys" of the first century); but they were willing to lay aside their differences, in order to attack Christ. They were so desperate to catch Him in His words, to trip Him up, to prove to the masses that He was not who He claimed to be, they were willing to team up together (at least, for a season) in order to do so. But why was it that they so vehemently opposed Him? And why were they so threatened by His very existence? Weren't they working toward the same objective? The answer is because the light of truth that emanated from His innermost Being exposed them before the multitudes...and, by way of contrast, revealed their true nature to those who had been under their power! He pointed out, in no uncertain terms, their numerous contradictions, their foolish and unlearned reasonings, their insane insistence for symbolism over substance, their senseless near- sightedness in issues of insignificance! He declared that they were "blind guides"...which "strained at gnats, and swallowed camels"; and that they "made the word of God of no effect through their traditions"! He made them look stupid in the eyes of the people! This is the reason they hated Him! They had worked long and

hard at subduing the minds of their subjects; and they simply were not going to passively surrender their authority over to Him!

In like manner, at the point of our conversion, when the Spirit of Christ first enters into "the holy city" of our hearts, there are many religious spirits that rise up within us; spirits that oppose His presence; spirits we may never have perceived there before. It matters not whether we have received prior religious training, or indoctrination, or influence in our lives; whether we were raised in church, or in atheistic surroundings; these inclinations emerge naturally, from the Adamic nature, which is common among men...and they are invariably hostile toward "all that is called God, or that is worshipped"! You see, the reason for their hostility is that, up until this time, these "religious leaders" reigned unchallenged, governing and controlling us with biases and feelings, with false convictions or foolish lusts; but when Christ came on the scene, they knew their authority was threatened, and their motives were likely to be revealed! This explains their aggressive internal campaign against Him, their efforts to thwart His plans! They did not want to be exposed in the light of the Spirit!

As was His way in the days of His flesh, Christ still teaches us daily in the temple. Not in a natural temple, of course; but in the inner sanctuary of our spirits. This is where He conveys His righteous judgments to us, and reveals the wisdom of the ages. But have you ever sensed these conspiring, ill-intentioned spirits lurking in the shadows...whispering, as it were, between themselves, and seeking opportunities to discredit and override the voice of the indwelling Son of God? We have. Let Him speak a word to us, giving us guidance or instruction...and these "wicked counselors" make their opinions known! Let us need a word from Him, and if He should tarry in replying, they will seek to influence us to their line of reasoning first! They will give us a million and one reasons why we should follow their advice, why we should think or act in accordance with their state of mind.

In matters of judgment, we all know only too well how these religious attitudes can affect us, and cause us to form false conclusions about others, if we are not yielded to the Spirit. Of Jesus it was said that "the government shall be upon His shoulder". We know that this can be taken different ways, but we find no problem in reading this to mean that He was totally led of the Spirit; that the mind of the Spirit rested "upon His shoulder", that is, within His head; and that the "government", or Kingdom of God had complete control over the thoughts and intents of His heart. He never passed an unfair judgment on anyone, never judged anything by the sight of the eye, or the hearing of the ear. His judgments were always according to truth, because He judged nothing "of Himself, but what the Father showed Him". Amen? But we have been in the company of some who were so given over to this "external judgmental mentality", that the moment they met an individual, it was obvious that the "Adamic Sanhedrin" had convened upon their "shoulders", and called a meeting to order! You could see it in their eyes! They immediately began to "size" the person up, looking them over, seeing if they measured up to their standards or expectations! You could almost hear the voices in their heads, finding faults, testifying against them, and making their judgments accordingly. Just as the Sanhedrin of old sent out ambassadors to examine John the baptist, even so does "the

Sanhedrin of the soul" dispatch it's witnesses, to gather information through the senses. But what an ugly thing this is! Allow us to say that this is not righteous judgment; nor is it the way of the Spirit! At best, it is a false weight and balance, an abomination in the eyes of the Lord (not to mention, highly inaccurate). The thing that has grieved our hearts the most, though, is not that we have seen others do this, but that we have been guilty of this ourselves! We have entertained these "false witnesses" in the courtroom of our minds...only to discover how wrong we were!

On any given issue requiring judgment, we can expect to hear from these three "blind guides". The voice of the Pharisee will give his pessimistic opinion; the voice of the Saducee will counter it with some good liberal advice. And the voice of the Essene will usually come up with something really off- the-wall! What confusion this makes! But, O, beloved, we must see the error in giving credence and honor to these critics and judges of the psyche! They are unworthy of our attention, even for a moment!