

-Save This Page as a PDF-

Seven Woes on the Torah-Teachers and the Pharisees

Matthew 23:1-39; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47

Wednesday the thirteenth of Nisan

Seven woes on the Torah-Teachers and the Pharisees DIG: How would you recognize these Torah-Teachers and Pharisees walking down the street? How did they stumble common people? How did they pray? What was the problem with their phylacteries? What was the root of their sin? In what sense were these woes curses? Can you summarize each woe? Were the seven woes directed at all Israelites? What is the context? How and when was their house left desolate?

REFLECT: A haughty attitude can nullify any ministry that we might have, either inside or outside your place of worship. What's your attitude been like lately? Is it hindering or enhancing your bridge to others? Are you making your relationship with God more complicated than it needs to be? Are you consistently speaking words that are true and bring the blessings of ADONAI to those around us? Even while admitting our imperfections, is your inner life basically consistent with your outer behavior? Are you merely concerned with the letter of the Torah, or are you also focused on the spiritual intent of the Torah? How?

Because **the apostate religious leaders** recognized that **Messiah's** answers were so convincing that many were believing in **Him**, **no one dared to ask Him any more questions (Mattityahu 22:46; Mark 34b and 37).**

This is **Christ's** last public proclamation. After this **He** will be alone with **His apostles** and the cross. Here, **Messiah** talks to **His talmidim** and the masses about the Jewish religious leaders, giving a strong, straightforward teaching to those who knowingly rejected **Him**. Since this teaching takes place close to **His** last Passover, it represents **the Lord's** final indictment against some of the dysfunctional and contrary attitudes of some **Torah-teachers and Pharisees**. There would not be many questions but an avalanche of observations from **One** who can see the hearts of mankind. **The renegade Rabbi** went on the offensive.

Then Jesus said to the crowds in the Court of the Gentiles with **His apostles** also listening: **Beware of the Torah-teachers. They and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.** In the first-century synagogue there was a visible place of honor called **the seat of Moses** where the rabbi would teach from **the Torah**. **So** they should have commanded a certain amount of respect and attention. Somewhat surprisingly, **Yeshua** affirms **you must be careful to do everything they tell you.** That was to be expected and was commonly understood; however, He added an important forewarning. **But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach (Matthew 23:1-3).** Therefore, **Jesus** declared that **they** were **hypocrites**.

This verse must be the lens through which the following teaching is understood. The manner in which **Yeshua** addressed many of the traditional customs in the following verses has led some critics to conclude that **He** was attacking Judaism itself. But we must remember that **He** told the people **you must be careful to do everything the Torah-teachers and the Pharisees accurately tell you to do.** Obviously, the main problem addressed in this section is not any particular Jewish custom *per se*, but the hypocritical attitude of **the spiritual leaders** of **Isra'el**. We have seen, in fact that **Messiah** observed some of the very customs that **He** addressed, like wearing the fringes. This section is not a wholesale condemnation of every **Torah-teacher** or **Pharisee**. Many were very sincere and some of them, like **Nicodemus (John 3)**, even became believers!

Unfortunately, the vast majority were wicked. In a strong rabbinic hyperbole, **He** paints a picture of the common Jew being burdened by a huge load, while the religious leaders merely stood by and watched. **He** said: **They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them (Mattityahu 23:4).** They made **the Oral Law (to see link click [Ei - The Oral Law](#))** a burden to others while finding ways to get around it themselves.

Yeshua continued to expose **them**. **They** were self-righteous and self-seeking. **Their** very dress separated **them** from all others. **Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries, or tephillin, wide and the tassels on their garments long (Matthew 23:5).** This was the ancient custom of wearing **leather boxes** on both the arm and forehead to fulfill the biblical commandment of **the Sh'ma** passage in **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**. Within **the leather boxes**, tiny handwritten parchments with **the Sh'ma** passage and other parallel verses (**Deuteronomy 11:13-21; Exodus 13:1-16**). Israelites were directed to remember the commandments of **the Torah** by tying **them** in this way as a sign. Like everything else, **the Pharisees** problem was pride in making **their phylacteries** bigger than necessary and **their tassels** longer than necessary to show how

spiritual they were.¹³⁰⁰

It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of **the tephillin** to **the Pharisees**. They were revered more highly than the Scriptures. The rabbis taught that it was more punishable to act against the Oral Law than against the Scripture. They said if a man were to say, “There is no such thing as **tephillin**,” thereby acting contrary to the words of Scripture, he is not to be treated as a rebel. But if he should say, “There are five divisions in **the tephillin** (instead of four in those for the forehead, as the rabbis taught), in order to adding to the words of **the Torah-Teachers**, he is guilty” (Tractate Sanhedrin 11.3). So with regard to **the Pharisees**, Jesus said: **They worship Me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules**. And to **them** directly He warned: **You have let go of the commands of God and are holding to the traditions of men** (Mark 7:7-8).

The rabbis also taught that **Moshe** had received instruction concerning them from **YHVH** on Mount Sinai. They said that **their phylacteries** were more sacred than the golden plate on the forehead of the high priest, since the name of **ADONAI** was written only once, while the writing inside **the tephillin**, **The Name** was written twenty-three times. In fact, **they** believed that the promised **Messiah** would wear **tephillin**.¹³⁰¹

The Pharisees would show **their** true colors by seeking public recognition and acclaim. **They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats**, benches up front facing the congregation, **in the synagogues; they love to walk around in flowing robes and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others** (Matthew 23:6-7; Mark 12:38-39). There’s nothing wrong with the term **rabbi**, pastor, or priest for that matter. **Rabbi** simply means **teacher**, and those leaders were the designated rabbis of the community. The problem was that they **loved** such greetings and titles.

It was easy to see how **they** might have been elevated, in **their** own eyes and the eyes of the Jewish community, beyond what **Ha’Shem** or **the Torah** intended. The mere knowledge of **the Torah** became an end to itself. **In this respect the testimonies of Onkelos, in his rendering of the oldest Targumim, or pharisaic commentaries of the Mishnah, and the two Talmuds, testified to the importance of the rabbi in Jewish culture**. It is said that there was a discussion in the “academy of heaven,” when **El-Shaddi** and **His** angels had different opinions in regard to a special point in **the Torah**. So a **rabbi**, famed for his knowledge of that subject was summoned up by the angel of

death to decide the matter between them! Without going into the details, it's clear that **the rabbi** enjoyed such an exalted position that it was assumed that **a teacher was to be cared for before one's father. The thought: We owed only our existence in this world to the latter, but to the former the life in the world to come (Tractate Bab. Mez. 2.11).**¹³⁰²

But that kind of power went to **their** heads and **they** felt justified in **devouring widows' houses (Mark 12:40a)**. People often left their entire fortunes to **the Temple**, and a good part of the money went to **the Torah-Teachers and the Pharisees**. This is how **their** scheme worked. **The Pharisees** convinced **widows** to give **their houses** to **the Temple**, and then took the proceeds of the sale for **themselves** with a healthy share going to **the Torah-Teachers** who were employed to write out wills and conveyances of property. Quite a racket. In order to close the sale, **the Pharisees** offered **lengthy prayers** in **the houses of the widows** and for them. Consequently, **they** bent **the widows** to **their** will. Our **Lord** calls these **prayers** pure deception. How could **they** be true **prayers** when offered as a means of committing crimes against those who **Ha'Shem** commanded **them** to protect (**Psalm 68:6 and 146:9; Jer 7:6; Zech 7:10; Malachi 3:5**)?¹³⁰³

And for a show make lengthy prayers (Mark 12:40b). There was no difficulty in recognizing **such a one**. Walking behind **him** in public, chances were very good that **he** would soon stop to say **his** prescribed **prayers**. If the fixed time for **them** had come, **he** would stop abruptly in the middle of the road, perhaps say one section of them, move on, stop, say another part, and so on. **He** left no doubt on anyone's mind in the market place or on the street corners, that **he** was very, very spiritual. There **he** would stand, draw **his** feet together, compose **his** body and clothes, then the world around **him** stopped. The workman would drop his tools, the laborer his load, if a man already had one foot in the stirrup, he would withdraw it. The time for **his prayers** had come, and nothing could interrupt or disturb **him**. **It was understood by all that the very greeting of a king, or the twisting of a snake around one's leg must be disregarded until his prayers were finished.** On entering a village, and again on leaving it, **he** needed to say one or two **prayers**. The same in passing through a fortress, in encountering any danger, in meeting with anything new, strange, beautiful or unexpected. And *the longer he prayed* the better. Each **prayer** mentioned and closed with a blessing of **the divine Name, blessed be He**. And *the more he prayed* the better. **The Pharisees** said there was special religious merit to be gained from this, and a hundred **prayers** said in one day was supposed to be the measure of great piety.¹³⁰⁴

While all the people were listening, Jesus turned to His twelve talmidim and said:

These men will be punished most severely (Mark 12:40c and Luke 20:45-47). Prayer is always good. Even praying with zeal. But **their** actions didn't match up with what **the Torah** demanded: **Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow (Deuteronomy 27:19). They** were putting up a façade of spirituality and **Yeshua** held **them** accountable. Some had even used **lengthy prayers** as a means of profiting financially from the sales of **widow's houses**, as if **devouring them**.

The entire context of this section is about bad attitudes and the abuse of titles. **But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers.** With all due respect to earthly leaders, we ultimately have only one true **Father in heaven. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and He is in heaven. Nor are you to be called leaders, for you have one Leader, the Messiah (Matthew 23:8-10).** Yes, there is a proper place for spiritual **leaders** and even for the use of the terms honor and respect, but arrogance must be guarded against.

There are some who position themselves between you and **ADONAI**. There are some who suggest the only way to get to **the Lord** is through them. Some Bible teachers believe that they have the final say on the Word of **God**. There is the earthly father whom you seek approval. There is the spiritual master who will tell you what **YHVH** wants you to do. **Jesus'** message for all of this is to remove the middlemen. **You have one Leader, the Messiah.**

He's not saying that you don't need teachers, elders, or counselors. **He** is saying, however, that we are all brothers and sisters and have equal access to **the Father**. Simplify your faith by seeking **God** for yourself. No confusing ceremonies necessary. No mysterious rituals required. No elaborate channels of command or levels of access.

You have a Bible? You can study.

A heart? You can pray.

You have a mind? You can think.¹³⁰⁵

Those who are true disciples of **Christ** will prove their leadership abilities by serving others. **The greatest among you will be your servant. Yeshua** assures the crowd that **whoever exalts themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted (Mattityahu 23:11-12).** How contradictory to the belief system of the world. It is not enough to merely observe religious custom. We need to listen the still small voice of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**, and the words of **Jesus** to examine our attitudes as well.



Then **Jesus** then turned **His** attention directly to **the Pharisees themselves**. **Yeshua** prefaces each of **His** seven rebukes with an emotional **woe** (literally, *oy* in Hebrew). **They** were **curse**s in the sense that **they** were solemn warnings, as the expression of sorrow for **their** fate. Without **their** repentance, **God's** judgment would be the inevitable consequence for each one of **them**. These **woes** are directed to a limited group in the immediate context (There were obviously some sincere, godly **Pharisees** among the **hypocritical**). In addition, we must view **the Messiah** here, in the same way that we view the prophets of **Isra'el**, speaking as a concerned Jew to fellow Jews, not as an outsider with an anti-Jewish grudge.¹³⁰⁶

1. Woe to you, Torah-teachers and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of Heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to (Matthew 23:13-14). **Jesus** said just the opposite as **He** emphasized the simplicity of coming into **the Kingdom**, even stating that we must become like little children (see **Gg - The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven**). **Those** counterfeit **teachers** had polluted the pure message of the TaNaKh.

2. Woe to you, Torah-teachers and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert. This may sound strange to us today because Jews do not normally proselytize. But there is no doubt that the Judaism of the Second **Temple** period had an aggressive outreach campaign as part of the call to be a light to **the Gentile Nations (Isaiah 49:6)**. In addition to the number of **Gentiles** converted during the time when Rome ruled the world, we can add the Edomites. They were forcibly converted in the first century. This was the home community of the notorious Roman convert by the name of Herod the Great. He was therefore the ideal choice of the Romans for a leader who could supposedly relate to the Jewish community. **But the Pharisees** did not merely **succeed in** making converts to Judaism. No, they went further than that and also made **them** converts to **the Oral Law**, which actually led people *away from* the purity of **the Torah**. So in the

strongest terms, **Messiah** warned **them** that such converts were **twice as fit for Gehinnom as they** themselves **were** (**Mattityahu 23:15**).¹³⁰⁷

3. Woe to you. In highly ironic language, **Jesus** called **them blind guides!** Those who prided **themselves** in being spiritual **guides** to the common people were, in fact, spiritually **blind**. **Christ** gave several real life examples of their groping around in the dark. The practice of taking an oath was very common in the first century. **In fact, it is so important that an entire Tractate of the Talmud is devoted to the details of taking an oath (Tractate Shevout).** There is nothing inherently wrong with taking an **oath**. It was a common practice and could be beneficial in establishing an agreement. If **anyone** needed to validate **their** promises, **they** could **swear** by something or someone greater than **themselves**. In this case, some of **the Pharisees** solidified **their** word by **swearing by the Temple**. This was a strong oath, but there was a way to get around it. **You say, “If anyone swears by the Temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the Temple is bound to fulfill that oath” (Matthew 23:16).** **They** were always looking to gain an advantage for **themselves**.

These were mere word games, and **Yeshua** rebuked such absurdity as coming from **blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the Temple that makes the gold sacred?** In the same way, **you also say, “If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.”** The whole twisted logic was both theologically and logically preposterous. **You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred (Matthew 23:17-19)?** It makes no sense that **the offering** is regarded as more important than the holy **altar** on which it is presented.

The Lord went on to point out, to **swear by the altar** was to **swear by everything on it**. To **swear by the Temple** was to **swear by the One who dwells in it**, namely **ADONAI Himself**. And to **swear** in the name of **heaven**, was to **swear by God’s throne and by the One who sits on it**. In fact, since **God** is **the Creator** of everything, to **swear by** anything at all involves **Ha’Shem** (**Mattityahu 23:20-22**).¹³⁰⁸

4. Woe to you, Torah-teachers and Pharisees, you hypocrites! Next, **Messiah** exposes some of **their** misplaced priorities. **It was so important that an entire tractate of the Talmud is devoted to such details (Tractate Ma’aser).** The title Ma’aser is reflected by the word **tenth**, so the amount cannot be questioned. The Israelites were required to give ten percent their earnings to the worship of **YHVH** and the upkeep of **the Temple**. **The Pharisees** strongly believed in and applied the entire **Torah**;

therefore, it was not surprising that **they** were known for **their** meticulous tithing (**Genesis 14:18-20; Deuteronomy 14:22-29**). **They** even tithed right down to the smallest **spices**. **You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the Torah - justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.** In the last analysis, what good is it if we keep track of the small stuff if we neglect the big stuff? **You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel (Matthew 23:23-24)**. Because insects were not kosher, **they** strained **their** soup to make sure it was pure. But for the main course **they** dined on the equally unkosher **camel**! The warning was clear: Don't get sidetracked by the lesser important commandments to the neglect the more important ones.¹³⁰⁹

5. Woe to you, Torah-teachers and Pharisees, you hypocrites! They were overly concerned with external appearances. While keeping a kosher kitchen, **they** were quite careful. **You clean the outside of the cup and dish.** The word kosher itself implies cleanliness, both ritually and literally. **This was so important that there is an entire tractate dedicated to utensils and dietary laws (Tractate Kelim).** **They** kept a kosher kitchen, **but** unkosher actions had crept **inside their** lives. **They are full of greed and self-indulgence.** The obvious violations of the spirit of **the Torah** lead **Christ** to call such a one a **blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean (Mattityahu 23:25-26).**

6. Woe to you, Torah-teachers and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs. Continuing with the same theme, **the Lord** switched the illustration from the kitchen to the cemetery. **Whitewashing** was common in **Isra'el** around the Passover when this dialogue took place. Pesach and the feast of Unleavened Bread is a time when great emphasis is placed on cleaning (**Exodus 12:1-30**). The home must be thoroughly cleansed of all leaven and replaced with kosher products. Utensils are either switched or boiled to be made kosher. In order not to compromise the ritual purity of the season, it was especially important to take care of any areas that might be a problem. A cemetery was a good example. As unlikely as it might be, if someone accidentally brushed up against **a tomb** it would make them ritually unclean because of the dead body inside. To avoid this possibility, it was customary to clearly mark all **tombs** with a fresh coat of **whitewash**. There was nothing sinful with their attempt to be careful not to defile themselves. **But** then **Messiah** pointed out a problem, as **He** described most of **the Pharisees** with an analogy. **They** looked **beautiful on the outside but on the inside they were full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.** Recognizable by **their** very garb, eighteen garments were supposed to complete **his** elegant attire. The material, the color and the cut distinguished the wearer. But, the appearance on **the outside** was much

different that the spiritual reality within. **He** declared: **In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness**, far from **the Torah (Matthew 23:27-28)**. Even though we are sinners, we need to continually strive to have our outer behavior match up with our inner lives. Paul encouraged the believers in Philippi **to discern what is best** so that they could **be pure and blameless for the day Christ (Philippians 1:10)**.

7. Woe to you, Torah-teachers and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. The seventh and final **woe** spoke to the ultimate hypocritical behavior of **the Pharisees** as a whole. This has always been a common practice in Jewish history. You can still see this today as you walk through **Jerusalem**. It is a respected custom for Jews to honor their religious **ancestors**. Many of **the prophets** who came to **Isra'el** were ultimately appreciated, even if **their** message wasn't fully received at first. **Jewish tradition says that Isaiah was sawed in half by King Manasseh (Tractate Yevamot 49b), Jeremiah** was thrown into a cistern (**Jeremiah 38:1-13**). Yet the generation that **Christ** lived in was denying that **they** had the same attitude as **their ancestors**. Indeed, **they** said: **If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets**. So in true prophetic fashion, **Messiah** used **their** own words to connect **them** to the ungodly behavior of the past.¹³¹⁰ **So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started (Mattityahu 23:29-32)!**

Yeshua Messiah then condemned the specific Jewish generation that rejected Him. At the culmination of **His** teaching about **them**, **the maverick Rabbi** held nothing back, saying: **You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to Gei-Hinnom?** Regardless of what any previous generation did, **Jesus'** generation was guilty of the same behavior as their **descendants**. **Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and Torah-teachers. Some of them you will kill**, having **the Lord's** followers **executed on stakes as criminals**. Clearly this is a reference to those Jewish religious leaders who handed over righteous believers to the Romans for an agonizing death on the cross. In addition, they would authorize Jewish authorities to **flog them in your synagogues**. That was an acceptable **Torah** practice as punishment for what **they** believed to be heretics or criminals. **They** will be so consumed with opposing **the Truth** that **they** will **pursue** believers **from town to town. And so upon that specific generation will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the Temple and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come on this**

generation (Mt 23:33-36).

Three days earlier, as **Jesus** entered **Jerusalem** as **the Messiah**, **He** saw the **City** and **wept over it (Luke 19:41)**. Now, as if it were the last time to receive **Him**, **Christ** cried out to the holy **City: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you**. With such a horrific reception, we might expect **Yeshua** to rain **down burning sulfur** as **the LORD** did **on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24)**. On the contrary, **He** spoke tenderly in the first person: **How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings (Matthew 23:37a)**. Whether it was **the Angel of the LORD** who appeared to Abraham (**Genesis 12:1-3**), or the message of repentance to **Micah (Micah 7:8-20)**, **Messiah's** desire has always been to gather **His** people together for blessing. But **He** realized that **His** time of teaching was finished.

God's compassion for **Isra'el** is so beautiful yet forceful, **but [they] refused (Mattityahu 23:37b)**! Jewish history is filled with many mysteries. Why have so many tragic events taken place? Or in the words of the Passover Guide (Hebrew: *Haggadah*), why is it that "in every generation there are those who rise up against us?" **Christ's** answer is not meant to be to simplistic, but it does show us part of the answer from **His** perspective. It is not that **ADONAI** has abandoned **Isra'el**, but that **Isra'el** has far too often abandoned **ADONAI**. From **YHVH's** point of view, it is not that **He** has judged **her** so severely, but that **Isra'el** has removed **herself** from **the LORD's** protective grace in this sinful world.

Jesus continued to explain some of the immediate results of **His** rejection by the Sanhedrin (see **Lg - The Great Sanhedrin**) and the nation. In the strongest terms, **He** declared: **Look, God is abandoning your house to you, leaving it desolate (Matthew 23:38 CJB)**. **Ha'Shem** was not announcing the destruction of **their** personal homes, but upon the great **house of Jerusalem, the Holy Temple**. This would have been more clearly understood in the original Hebrew, which **He** undoubtedly spoke to **the Pharisees**. The glorious **Temple** in **Jerusalem** was called **the Holy House** (Hebrew: *Beit-Ha'Mikdash*). In fact, this way of referring to **the Temple** was so ingrained in their culture, it was often simply referred to as **the House** (Hebrew: *Ha-Beit*). And that **House** was indeed left **desolate** when the Romans armies destroyed **the Temple** (see **Mt - The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on Tisha B'Av in 70 AD**). It is important to remember that this judgment was specific to that particular Jewish generation that rejected **Jesus**. They were the eyewitnesses to **the life of Christ** and who personally rejected **His** offer of national salvation.

It would be extremely sad if this section ended with the previous sentence, but there is a beautiful promise in the midst of that troubling time. **The Messiah** would be separated from **His** people by **His** impending death, but would be reunited with **Him** again. **He** ends by telling the crowd: **For I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of ADONAI" (Matthew 23:39)**. This famous phrase is part of the Hallel **Psalms 113-118**, specifically **118:26**, which were chanted at several major Jewish holidays, including Passover (Hebrew: *Pesach*) and Booths (Hebrew: *Sukkot*). Our **Lord** made this statement just two days before the entire Jewish community would be chanting the Hallel at their Passover Seder meals! It would have been a great blessing to welcome **Yeshua** as King **Messiah** at Passover, but it would have to wait for a later generation (see **Revelation [Ev](#) - The Basis for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ**).

Despite the national rejection at *Pesach*, *Sukkot* foreshadows **Christ's** acceptance. *Sukkot* will be the only feast celebrated during the thousand-year messianic Kingdom (**Zechariah 14:16-19**). Today, both Jewish and Gentile believers can rejoice in the fact that *Pesach* perfectly prefigures **Messiah's** death, and *Sukkot* is a sign of **His** return. It was no coincidence that **Jesus** died specifically on **the fifteenth of Nisan**, the very day of Passover! Thus, it seems that **His** return, as symbolized by *Sukkot*, is guaranteed.¹³¹¹

In 1915 Pastor William Barton started to publish a series articles. Using the archaic language of an ancient storyteller, he wrote his parables under the pen name of Safed the Sage. And for the next fifteen years he shared the wisdom of Safed and his enduring spouse Keturah. It was a genre he enjoyed. By the early 1920s, Safed was said to have a following of at least three million. Turning an ordinary event into an illustration of a spiritual truth was always a keynote of Barton's ministry.

Now it came to pass as I traveled that I came to a certain place where there was an Inn, and I entered and Lodged there. And in the Inn was one Bath Tub, and every Saturday night each Guest bathed themselves in it. And I watched them as they Furtively Hastened through the halls, clad in Bathrobes or in something less, and they were not Naked, yet did they hasten as if ashamed.

And in time it came about that I Obtained Entrance into the Bathroom, just as Another Man was Leaving it. And he wore a Ragged Bathrobe, and a Smile that said, Behold, I am clean.

And I entered, and the Water still was Running from the Tub, and Gurgling as it ran.

And I looked within the Tub, and saw there was a Ridge on the inside of it, which marked the Level of the Water at the time of the last Occupant had taken a bath. And I didn't liked

it.

Then I had a conversation with my soul, and my soul said to me, Doest thou well to be Wroth with the man who last Bathed? Behold the Ridge around the tub. Is it not evidence that he hath had a bath? Yea, doth it not show that he Needed one? Yea, furthermore, doth it not prove that the bath Wrought Well for him, and that by the Measure of whatever thou seest on the Sides of the tub, and what hath run down the pipe, the man is Cleaner than when he entered? Lovest thou not truth, and the evidence thereof? And is not Cleanliness a Virtue wherein thou shouldst Rejoice?

And I said, Yes, I rejoice in the Truth, but the Evidence gives me no Pleasure; and I Love Virtue, and Cleanliness is a virtue, yet I would rather he had given me other proof of his Cleanliness, or given me none at all.

Then I considered within myself, and I meditated on what had happened. And I realized that there are many who practice their virtues in such a way that they make virtue unlovely.

Yes, there are those who serve **the Lord** as if the devil were in them.¹³¹²