

“Scribes, Pharisees, Hypocrites:” A Study in Hypokrisis

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“One day as he [Jesus] was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick” (NIV Luke 5:17).¹ Luke sets his observation very early in the Lord’s ministry, when the Savior had “returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee” (Luke 4:14). His power was manifest as he cast out devils, healed the sick, and cleansed lepers. As a result, “There went out a fame of him through all the region around about” (Luke 4:14), reaching as far south as Judea.

Luke connects Jesus’ healing power to the presence of a large gathering of Pharisees and teachers of the law intent on watching and hearing the Lord. Why does he link the two? It does show that the Lord’s healings had attracted the attention of a specific group of Jews and gathered them for a significant geographical area,² but was there more? The story he tells next is, indeed, one of healing but the subject is a paralyzed man. It did not involve the Pharisees and teachers of the law, or did it? Luke’s context suggests it did, for he points to this moment as the beginning of the antagonism that developed between the Lord and the Pharisees. That antagonism would eventually grow until, in response, certain among Pharisees would plot to kill the Lord.

A point needs to be made. Not all the Pharisees or even most became antagonistic toward the Lord. Some invited him to dine with them and others listened to his teachings.³ His gospel seems to have captured the hearts of many who became his disciples like Nichodemus and those who made up a large number of the members of the early church. (See John 3:1-3 and Acts 15:5). Most seem to have either tolerated or ignored him. Mark suggests that the Savior’s antagonists came mostly from Jerusalem (see Mark 7:1), and Luke adds that his enemies were those who suffered from covetousness (see Luke 16:14).

But why was there any antagonism at all? It was because some of those present were themselves suffering from a deadly malady. Indeed, all the Gospel writers show that some of the Pharisees were spiritually sick and needed healing. The record makes one wonder about the nature of their sickness, if the Lord ever tried to heal it, and, if so, what the result of his attempt was. This paper explores these questions.

Historical Background

What we know of the background of the scribes and Pharisees provides a number of clues about the nature of their malady. Though there is much we will never know due to the paucity of sources, we can piece together some of their motives and their basic objectives. Studying these provides an understanding of their ailment and how it came to be.

Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian who wrote in the late

first century A.D., preserved important information concerning Jewish religious groups in general and the Pharisees in particular. His writings reveal that the Pharisees were a reformist movement pushing in two areas: they attempted to relegate to themselves and their disciples a holiness belonging to the priesthood; and they tried to influence, and at times even force, society to live by their particular interpretation of the scriptures.⁴

The Pharisees had established themselves as an important part of the Jewish population some time before the early second century B.C.⁵ They courted the masses with such success that, “when they speak against the king or high priest, they immediately gain credence.”⁶ It would seem that almost from their inception they felt secure enough to say things against the leaders and attempt to influence public opinion. Their popularity gained them membership at times in the highest circles of priesthood and government.⁷ These people, from the emergence of the party, seem to have banded together for the specific purpose of influencing Jewish society as a whole.⁸ The early members were political activists and had a specific agenda that they promoted.⁹ They were able to convince many, even among the highest in society, that righteousness and conduct pleasing to God could come only as the people practiced the precepts of biblical law according the Pharisaical hermeneutics.¹⁰ They had been more or less successful in pushing their agenda, based on the tradition of the oral law, well over a hundred years before Christ.

Josephus also provides a small but clear window into the social agenda of these early Pharisees. He reveals their desire to have political influence in order to mandate their views over their rivals, especially the Sadducees, but also the Essenes. The latter particularly reviled them, calling them “seekers after smooth things” (*dôršē halaqôt*) because they would not give up city life (they seem to have been an urban movement) and live the far more demanding rule of the Essene community.¹¹

In their attempt to mold society according to their rules, the Pharisees seem to have run most directly headlong into the more socially elite Sadducees who rejected many of their views. Both factions were maneuvering within Jewish politics to get their interpretation of the scriptures translated into the everyday life of the people. But the Pharisees, more often than not, held sway with the general populace. At times, before the coming of the Romans, Josephus tells us, this party “had so much influence with their fellow-Jews that they could injure those whom they hated and help those to whom they were friendly.”¹² For the period between 76 and 69 B.C., they practically ran the government, the Jewish ruler commanding the people “to obey them.”¹³ Josephus states that, during this brief period, “the enjoyments of royal authority were theirs.”¹⁴

They were able to induce many of those in a mostly unresisting populace to follow their interpretation of the law of Moses. However, they overstepped the bounds of propriety in

some instances, even moving to execute some of their opponents. Because of this, they soon lost favor with the state, though not with the people. Some aristocrats left their cause at this time,¹⁵ but the Pharisees seem to have been able to court many of the common people through a show of care and sympathy. The vicious streak in their nature only seems to have come out against those whom they saw as a threat, and then only when they held sufficient power or influence to strike without fear of reprisal or of losing favor with the people.

The Nature of Pharisaism

Taking all that we can learn from Josephus and such sources as Philo Judaeus and the New Testament, we can say with some confidence that the Pharisees, though rooted in a religious tradition, were also a socio-political organization which grew in number to about 6,000 men at the time of Herod the Great. They had a social agenda based on their hermeneutics which they sought to incorporate into the very fabric of Jewish society.¹⁶

They were sensitive to the upheavals Jewish society had endured due to Greco-Roman pressures.¹⁷ They were able to build upon a deep yearning for stability. The challenge and success of the Pharisees came in interpreting Biblical pronouncements in such a way that they met current needs.

The center of their reforming movement, the top item on their social agenda, was to bring Israel back from Hellenistic influences to a rigorous keeping of the Law--but it was a keeping of the Law according to their interpretation. They resisted all other interpretations and insisted that such were detrimental to Torah and holiness. Only their way would bring salvation. The ground of their rationalization rested on their belief that they, and they alone, had found the way of correctly interpreting the written biblical text. In other words, they had discovered the correct principles of hermeneutics by which the law could be translated into the daily life of the Jew.

Note, however, that the Pharisees did not emphasize changing the individual. Though that might have been their goal, they aimed at reforming the community as a whole.¹⁸ The Pharisees would easily relate to the idea that "it takes a village," and so seek to change the individual by changing society.

However, their view of the ideal community did not go unopposed. As noted, other groups, especially the Sadducees, could not agree with them in some issues fundamental and crucial to the continuance of biblical Judaism.¹⁹ Each of these, Sadducees, Essenes, and Pharisees, was engaged in Biblical hermeneutics. They showed their distinct individuality not only through their conclusions but also by their methodology and basis of authority, and they competed at times ferociously for political and social influence.²⁰

Tithes and offerings, Sabbath observance, ritual purity, and eating restrictions made up the heart of the Pharisees' social agenda. Much of their understanding of how these should be done came from the "oral law" and the traditions of the elders, that is, of earlier scribes and teachers.²¹ They made these elements not only their specialty, but also their articles of faith. They do not seem to have been interested in the larger arena of civil law *per se*, nor in issues involving temple administration and worship.²²

That is not to say there was no competition between priest and Pharisee.²³ As noted above, the Pharisees sought to bring the purity and holiness of the temple and its priesthood to the layman.²⁴ It took a rather radical interpretation of the scriptures, on their part, in order to do this. The Pentateuchal law applied generally to the priesthood; thus, the majority of its provisions did not apply to the average person--or even to the priest himself except when he engaged in temple service. There, the priest had to avoid all defilement in order for his acts to be valid.²⁵ Some time in the second or third centuries B.C., a movement of laymen sought to transfer the ceremonial cleanliness and holiness of the active priest to themselves and from themselves to people in general. The Pharisees seem to have been a later development of this group.²⁶ They came close to advocating a "priesthood of all believers." Though the Pharisees never seem to have actually articulated this idea, they nonetheless gained authority by arrogating to themselves the priestly functions of guarding or interpreting the Law and showing others the way to holiness.²⁷

The Source of Pharisaic Influence

In brief, the Pharisees were primarily well-educated laymen who sought for religious authority among the people by mimicking, if not competing with, the priesthood. The opinion of the populace was all important, so the Pharisees continually tried to impress one another and the people at large. In this way, and perhaps unwittingly, they began and promulgated the practice of what the Book of Mormon calls priestcraft. Understanding that priestcraft was at play goes a long way in identifying the disease of which the Savior hoped to cure them, for here we have come to its breeding ground.

However, before exploring this idea, a note needs to be made. The Pharisees do not seem to have been alone in practicing priestcraft. We see in some of the recorded acts of the Sadducees some aspects of this practice. Further, it would be unfair to infer that all Pharisees practiced priestcraft or that they all came under the bane of the Lord. Many of the early members of the Church were converted from Pharisaism, Paul being an excellent example.²⁸ These became the backbone of the Church in Judea and through out all the Roman world during the first century. Even so, the New Testament record does suggest that some of the Pharisees imbibed a poison which killed their spiritual receptiveness to the Lord and his message.

The Book of Mormon states that priestcraft was rampant among the Jews and contributed greatly to their refusal to accept the Lord: "For should the mighty miracles be wrought among other nations, they would repent, and know that he be their God. But because of priestcrafts and iniquities, they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that he be crucified" (2 Nephi 10:4-5). Priestcraft occurs when "men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion" (2 Nephi 26:29). Some among the Jews labored for money and honors of men (2 Nephi 26:31) willing to use extortion, fraud, and deception to get what they wanted. The Lord's castigation of the Pharisees suggests that some were among this group: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer" (Matthew 23:14). He insisted they were

“full of extortion and excess” (v. 25), and as a result, would not be able to “escape the damnation of hell” (v. 33).²⁹

They could preach for worldly gain, and feel justified before God, because of their specific (if twisted) way of understanding what Judaism was and how to live it. Their interpretation entailed profound judgments concerning the meaning, shape, and practice of the biblical community and its place in the larger world.³⁰ Josephus clearly shows that being able to convince others of the soundness of their position was the source of their power. He states that they had “the reputation of excelling the rest of their nation in the observances of religion, and as exact exponents of their laws.”³¹ The Pharisees promoted that dual reputation, and especially that of understanding, or interpreting, the Law with the greatest accuracy.³² Indeed, Josephus reports that they were “considered the most accurate interpreters of the laws, and [as a consequence] hold the position of the leading sect.”³³ The force of the Greek phrase Josephus uses suggests that they prided themselves on exactness (*exakribazō*) of interpretation of the Law and of the traditions of the fathers.³⁴

Paul reinforces the idea. He says that he was tutored by “Gamaliel [the Pharisee], and taught according to the perfect manner [akribelian] of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God” (Acts 22:3). The word used by Josephus and Paul, *akribeia*, means accuracy, precision, and strictness, but also carries the connotation of “painful exactness.” However, the word does not suggest moral exactness; when applied to people, it carries the idea of being stingy, parsimonious, and covetous. This last vice (covetousness or avariciousness, Greek *philargyros*) Luke applied directly to the Pharisees (see Luke 16:14).

Defining the word through context (it is used seven times in Acts³⁵) suggests that the Pharisees were not the most rigorous of the sects (the Essenes probably best qualified for that) but, rather, were the most precise in their interpretation of the law and the traditions of the elders.

The reputation they cultivated as true interpreters of God’s word gives us a glimpse as to why others gave them the name of Pharisee.³⁶ The term Pharisee is generally believed to come from the Hebrew, *prš*, meaning to separate.³⁷ But separate from what? We have already seen that they did not separate from Jewish society and, as a consequence, brought on themselves the epithet “seekers of smooth things” from the fundamentalist Essenes. They did attempt to separate themselves from Hellenistic gentiles.³⁸ But was there more? It is clear that their separation dealt less with outer and more with inner matters. This required a unique understanding of God and his Law unknown in Babylonian or early Hellenistic Judaism.

Their position required a rather drastic interpretation of the Law--and it was hermeneutics at which the Pharisees excelled. In this regard, it is of note that the root *prš*, in addition to denoting separation, also means “to declare distinctly,” “to explain,” and “to translate.”³⁹ The name “Pharisee” seems to fit these scholars because, through their unique interpretation and application of the scriptures, they sought an inner separation of the Jewish people from the unholiness of the world around them. In reality, however, they made their proselytes even more unclean by appealing to the carnal mind that assured the people of holiness where there was none.

Thus, we see that by the Savior’s time, they needed to be healed. As will be shown below, the disease was a direct result of their hermeneutics and the practice of priestcraft which grew out of it.

The Disease of the Pharisees

Of what did the Savior need to heal them? In a word: hypocrisy. However, we must be careful to give it the full breadth of meaning associated with the biblical use of the term. Otherwise we may miss of what and why the Savior attempted to heal the scribes and Pharisees.

Hypocrisy, as the term is used today, means the deliberate affectation of more virtue than one actually has. A synonym is sanctimony, an outward show of holiness or devoutness. In our minds the word hypocrisy suggests the outward display of piety, goodness, or sincerity when one is, in reality, irreligious, corrupt, and insincere. Therefore, it connotes more than pretense or affectation, but the assumption of goodness and piety when one is neither good nor pious and does not want to be.⁴⁰ Thus, hypocrisy, in the modern sense, should be understood as a kind of purposeful, self-serving, and deceitful play-acting. This fits the ancient definition as far as it goes, but there is another aspect which we must include or else we will misunderstand the full depth of the Savior’s rancor against Pharisaical hypocrisy.

The word ‘hypocrisy’ has Greek roots. It is derived from the Greek noun *hypokrisis* which is itself derived from the verb *hypokrinomai*. Many dictionaries trace the English word to the Greek stage, and, in that setting, define it as acting out a part.⁴¹ But to impose this definition exclusively on biblical usage, especially the New Testament, misses important additional nuances.

In the classical world, *hypokrinomai* and related words were more closely associated with the dispensing of information than of acting. The word group to which it belongs had the sense of explaining, expounding, or interpreting. It described both declamation and dialogue.⁴² The related word, *hypokrisia*, stressed the idea of oral as opposed to written expression, and *hypokrino* meant “to separate” and “to interrogate,” the relationship of ideas being the separation of truth from error via questioning.⁴³

The word’s association with the stage was a later development, but, given its ancient context, it is not hard to see how that happened. It was the actor’s job to interpret the script of the playwright or poet, thus giving force or meaning to the written expression. The actor’s job was to make the written word come alive, as it were, through his interpretive presentation of the myth or story of which the chorus sang.⁴⁴

Examples of the use of the word in ancient Greece underscore the point that *hypokrisis*, in its original setting, was the provenance of the interpreter and expounder more than that of the actor. The Pythian priestess at Delphi acted as Apollo’s *hypocritēs* because she made the god’s will known to his devotees.⁴⁵ Aristotle used the word to denote the art of linguistic expression as opposed to the material power of persuasion. It was through gaining the craft of *hypokrisis* (oral expression) that one could put forth ideas with power.⁴⁶ Hypocrisy, then, was the art, not of selling an idea (that belonged to the rhetor), but of articulating it in a forceful, clear, and comprehensible way.

However, due to its association with the stage, the word *hypokrisis* did take on a metaphorical connotation. Some Greek thinkers began to apply the term to any kind of play-acting whether in the theater or not. A few saw life as a stage on which all were actors playing their part. Hellenized moralists and teachers used the term to emphasize the task of the mortal: he must play a part well--internalize it and make it his own.⁴⁷ In this sense, *hypokrisis* meant to practice an art, skill, or virtue.

Other philosophers used the term to express a related but different idea. For them, the *hypokritēs* was the skilled master who, like the actor, was able to project whatever emotion the moment demanded while remaining inwardly unaffected. The orator-philosopher, for example, might be required to play the role of an angry person, which he must do perfectly, but his goal was to remain calm within and ever in control.⁴⁸ The true philosopher was to inculcate this *virtue*, for it allowed him to respond to the vicissitudes of life while still being shielded from its harmful effects.⁴⁹ In so doing, he remained his own man, ever in control of himself and the situation.⁵⁰ Note that the philosophical view presented *hypokrisis* as a virtue. It was a necessary tool in the shop of the philosopher which allowed him to respond to the need of the moment while still remaining in control of himself.

The negative aspects of the word--dissembling, sanctimony, the outward display of piety and goodness--did not come to dominate the Greek definition until long after the time of the Lord. In all classical usage, the term, by itself, never took on a negative moral tone. First and foremost it described oral expression and interpretation.⁵¹ When applied to acting off the stage, it most often carried the idea of practice. Therefore, "hypocrisy," standing alone, did not convey the idea of dissembling. Speakers and writers always supplied additional words to show whether the term was to be understood in a positive, negative, or neutral sense.⁵² It was only under the Byzantine emperors, and with direct Christian influence, that the word took on an independent and permanently negative meaning.⁵³

However, as early as the fifth century B.C., the word was taking on an insalubrious color. The idea of playing a role, even in a positive sense, laid the ground for a negative adaptation. Some Greeks saw the stage as a sham and the actor as a deceiver, or pretender. Others compared false philosophers to actors who, having their costumes stripped off, were seen as, at best, empty shells with no real life of their own and, at worst, projectors of virtues they actually spurned.⁵⁴ It was this side that Hellenized Jews picked up, amplified, and passed onto their Palestinian brothers. The use of *hypokrisis* among those of the diaspora as early as the second century B.C. shows it had already acquired quite a negative cast that included more than dissembling.⁵⁵

To appreciate its full meaning, we must understand that, although the word "hypocrite" is found in some English versions of both the Old and New Testaments, there is no actual Hebrew or Aramaic equivalent. Some translators of Hebrew in the second and first centuries B.C. did indeed use the Greek form in an attempt to communicate Hebrew ideas to Greek speaking Jews. However, a careful study of its use reveals that the translators used *hypokrisis* to convey the idea of moral sin--more specifically, as we shall see below, godlessness.

In the JKV Old Testament, we find the adjective or noun form of the word "hypocrite" used fourteen times.⁵⁶ In each case it translates the Hebrew *hānēf*. But the meaning of *hānēf* is far removed from the idea of play acting in either a positive (practice) or negative (dissembling) sense. It carries the idea of profaning or polluting, of being irreligious and even ruthless. The verb form of *hānēf* connotes most often the idea of polluting or corrupting, and the King James translators often interpreted it with that sense (e.g. see Numbers 35:33; Psalms 106:38; Isaiah 24:5; and Jeremiah 3:1).⁵⁷ That they did this suggests they understood the word "hypocrisy" quite broadly. However, unless we understand with the same breadth, we are in a position of misunderstanding its meaning when used in the scriptures.⁵⁸ A good example can be found in Job 15:34 where the KJV reads, "The congregation of hypocrites shall be desolate." The word translated "hypocrites" is the plural form of *hānēf*, and the passage can read, "The congregation of the godless shall be desolate." Verse 4 gives the context, saying that the wicked man "castest off fear [of the Lord] and restrainest prayer before God" (v. 4). Thus, the whole is a clear warning not only against dissembling but also its root apostasy.⁵⁹

The King James scholars followed a long tradition in translating *hānēf* with the word hypocrisy. First and second century A.D. translations of the Hebrew text into Greek had translated some occurrences of *hānēf* with the Greek *hypokritēs*. For example, twice in Theodotian's translation of Job (34:30; 36:13), later incorporated into the LXX, *hānēf* is translated that way.⁶⁰ Similar occurrences in the translations by Aquila and Symmachus⁶¹ suggest that Greek-speaking Jews understood *hypokrisis* in terms considerably stronger than the Greek metaphorical sense of "pretending" or "acting." It shows us that some Jews and Jewish Christians tied *hypokrisis* closely to the idea of pollution and profanation and took it in the direction of standing opposed to God; that is, of being apostate. The *hypokritēs* was an ungodly man and *hypokrisis* identified apostasy as the reason.

In short, the term *hypokrisis* emphasized a stance opposite God. The word's emphasis on apostasy adds a dimension not usually associated with hypocrisy. However, there is a close connection between dissembling and godlessness. Deceit and lying are part of the bag of tools the recreant soul uses as he tries to thwart God and deceive his people. So *hypokrisis* includes the idea of deception or duplicity but underscores an actual apostasy from God.

The apostasy of those Pharisees who came under the Lord's censure did not entail leaving the social or religious institutions of the Jews. Indeed, the Greek word *apostasia* carried the idea of standing apart, but in the sense of revolution or mutiny, not abandonment. The word expressed those occasions when one group of leaders with their agenda replaced another group with their agenda. In such cases, the institution was left essentially intact but under new leadership having their own program. As we have seen, the early Pharisees sought to take over the leadership of the Jewish people and impose their views on them. Those views consisted of the "oral law," that is, the traditions of men little based on the spirit of scripture. In this they left the intent of God's law and, thus, were in a state of apostasy.

Writings of the Lord's near contemporaries use the word to express acts opposed to God's will. Josephus uses it to

describe the deceitful role played by those who feign friendship that they might better betray the unwary and lead them away from righteousness.⁶² Philo views the hypocrite as one willing to do anything necessary to acquire possessions of another even using a malevolent kind of flattery. But, Philo insists, the hypocrite must be seen for what he is, an enemy full of falsehood and deceit who destroys all that is good.⁶³ For him hypocrisy stands contrary to truth and righteousness and is a greater evil than death itself.⁶⁴

Jewish use of the word emphasized not only the putting on of a righteous appearance to cover an evil intent, but also of apostasy against God, of opposition to his will or intent. Ironically, the hypocrite was not really acting, but rather showing his true self through his duplicities. Apostasy reveals itself, among other ways, in lying through the art of deceit, but the bad man is a bad man.⁶⁵ Therefore, dissembling was but one facet of the terrible sin of hypocrisy.

The Use of *hypokrisis* in the New Testament

The use of *hypokrisis* by the New Testament writers rests squarely on the Jewish understanding of the term.⁶⁶ Applying that definition gives us proper insight into the Savior's biting epithet, "scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites." No text survives (if there ever was one) which gives us the actual word the Savior used. But whatever the Savior called the scribes and Pharisees, it is unlikely, though not impossible, that he used the Greek *hypokritēs*.⁶⁷ This word was, however, chosen by the evangelists to express the Savior's thoughts. And whatever word he used, it carried, in addition to the idea of dissembling, that of opposition against God.

Jesus did not attack the Pharisees for merely simulating goodness. This is very apparent in those places where we have parallel accounts. For example, when the Pharisees and Herodians tried to catch the Lord in one of their traps, Mark 12:15 reads, "But he, knowing their hypocrisy (*hypokrisin*), said unto them, Why tempt ye me?"; Matthew 22:18 reads, "But Jesus perceived their wickedness [their malice (*ponērian*)], and said, Why tempt ye me?"; and Luke 20:23 reads, "But he perceived their craftiness (*panourgian*), and said unto them, Why tempt ye me?" We find another good example in Matthew 24:51 where the Savior warns that if a servant, due to the delay of his lord, shall smite his fellows and behave himself unseemly, then the lord "shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites," while Luke 12:46 says his portion shall be with the "unbelievers" [*apistōn*].

The point is that when the Savior called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites, he put a different emphasis on the word than we usually do. Their sin was not primarily dissembling, of feigning piety and righteousness, though that certainly revealed a deeper illness. Rather, he was chiding them for an obstinate self-righteous conviction of their own goodness when they were actually apostate. To emphasize, Jesus did not castigate the scribes and Pharisees only for feigned righteousness. He attacked them because of their insistence that their standard of righteousness was correct when, in reality, it stood opposed to the will of God. Their perversion destroyed the very works of Jehovah and actually led people into unrighteousness.⁶⁸

This same idea holds true of Paul's use of the word.

When he castigates Peter and Barnabas in Galatians 2:13-14, for acting *tē hypokrisei*, he was not denouncing them for insincerity or dissembling, but for an irresponsible breach of good faith that resulted in a renunciation of the agreement made at the Jerusalem conference (see Acts 15:1-35). Such hypocrisy, Paul feared, would give the Judaizers ammunition for their cause and raise great havoc with the Church. It was not sanctimony that riled Paul, but actions which would give energy to apostasy.

When he spoke of the apostasy, Paul lamented that many would "depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:1-2). These verses show that he was not afraid that some would dissemble, but that, being seduced, certain apostates would seduce others in turn. Like the Jews before them, they would insist that their interpretation of the tenets of the kingdom were true, while in reality, they, even knowing better, propagated doctrines of devils that drove the apostasy forward.

The problem that led both Jew and Christian astray was a willingness to use, as a basis for interpretation and application of the scriptures, something other than God and his Spirit. In the case of some of the Jewish groups, this resulted in a self-inflicted spiritual myopia which set them against the Lord and created their apostate condition. When they recruited others to their view, the converts also became apostate. Therefore, the Lord could say, "Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Matthew 23:13). And further, the leaders were guilty of compassing "sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (v. 15).

In this way the Pharisees blind-sided their disciples who either could not or did not want to detect their false doctrine. These leaders were like unmarked graves which defiled those who innocently passed over them (see Luke 11:44). When the Sadducees and Pharisees came to John for baptism, he called them a generation (brood, *gennēmata*) of vipers which sit by the way, poisoning the unsuspecting with their pollution (see Matthew 3:7-8). He commanded them to repent. Only then would he baptize them. That repentance consists of leaving their apostasy and returning to God. This idea is clearly borne out in the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) where John asks them:

Why is it that ye receive not the preaching of him whom God hath sent? If ye receive not this in your hearts, ye receive not me; and if ye receive not me, ye receive not him of whom I am sent to bear record; and for your sins ye have no cloak. Repent, therefore, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance; And think not to say within yourselves, We are the children of Abraham, and we only have power to bring seed unto our father Abraham; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children into Abraham. (Matthew 3:34-36.)

John shows us that the Sadducees and Pharisees would not receive the teaching of "him whom God hath sent." Rather, they relied on their interpretation of the scriptures. They were sure that their doctrine, their understanding, their observance

of the law was correct. However, they stood in deep need of repentance which could only be demonstrated through proper works. Such arrogance on the part of this branch of the Jews was the foundation of their spiritual myopia and its accompanying apostasy.

In Chapter twelve of his work, Luke uses *hypokritēs* to identify such acute spiritual nearsightedness. He tells of the Lord castigating the people because “ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?” (Luke 12:54-58). The Pharisees, and others, are hypocrites because they can accurately interpret the weather but cannot see the signs of the times. Judgment day is coming and they cannot perceive it. Growing apostasy enhanced their spiritual myopia and threatened blindness.

Apostasy fostered growing blindness in other ways. They would unfetter a cow and lead it to water on the Sabbath, but, on the same day, they would not unleash a human from disability (see Luke 13:15-16). In the parable of the mote and the beam (see Matthew 7:3-5), the *hypokrisis* reveals itself in the blindness of one to his own faults, but not to those of his neighbor.

In Mark 7:5-9, the Lord defines *hypokrisis* and makes his point using Isaiah 29:13: “This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.”⁶⁹ The Pharisees’ problem, revealed in dissembling and other ways, was one of distance. Their claim of declaring God’s word when, in reality, they replaced it with the traditions of men, revealed the distance. The Savior points this out, saying:

Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. (Matthew 23:16-24.)

Here the Lord chides them because they not only deceive others but they also deceive themselves. Their position on oaths shows the extent of their blindness. They insisted that the specific is binding while the general is not: gold replaces

the whole temple; sacrifice, the whole altar; the throne of God, heaven. Jesus shows the general includes the specific and to swear by any binds one as though he swore by all.

The problem was one of moral responsibility. The scribes were showing the people a way out of keeping oaths and, thus, contributing to insincerity, out-right dishonesty, and apostasy. The Lord pushes his point by using the example of their attitude toward tithing in which they count out mint, dill, and aromatic seeds (cumin), but think nothing of taking profit at the expense of the widow or orphan. The Lord condemns them for showing such zeal in small things while neglecting the greater commandments and more difficult portions of the Law. Using hyperbole, he emphasizes their problem. They strain a mosaically unclean gnat from their water, but swallow, as it were, the mosaically unclean camel. The contrast for the reader is both amusing and telling.⁷⁰

By this means, the Lord shines a brilliant light on the difference between their outward proclamation and inward commitment to God. There is no question that they dissemble,⁷¹ but the true *hypokrisis* which allowed it was sin: failure to do God’s will. Some masked their godlessness behind a conscious pious appearance of outward conduct. Here we come close to our modern definition that emphasizes willful pretense. However, it would appear that others, due to their spiritual myopia bordering on blindness, were not conscious of pretending. They most sincerely believed that they were righteous, when in reality they were not. They truly believed that their externalism could save them; that appearance counted for more than intent. They derived all this from their hermeneutics.

The Lord insisted that apostasy expressed itself in whom the *hypokritēs* was trying to impress. In the case of the Pharisees, it was man rather than God. Because of this, they were led not to righteousness but to priestcraft. They sought to please the carnal mind. This is full-blown apostasy, for they had left the first commandment, replacing worship of God with that of man, and were attempting to lead the people and nation the same way. Furthermore, they broke the second, for they bowed down, as it were, before the precepts of men, revering tradition before God.

Luke reveals their hybris. This group of Pharisees set themselves up, in place of God, as their own standard. “Ye are they which justify yourselves before men” (Luke 16:15), the Lord castigated, because they “trusted in themselves that they were righteous” (Luke 18:9). They lit their way with lamps fueled with self-conceit and judged others by this standard. And by that self-made standard, this group actually came off quite well. They were not play acting. The whole point of Luke is that they felt completely true to their own standards. Because of their self-perceived rightness (in contrast to righteousness), they could not repent. Because they could not repent, they could not receive the Spirit and follow the Lord.

The Savior’s Attempt to Heal the Scribes and Pharisees

The opposite of hypocrisy, according to the Lord, is the simple, unassuming *practice* of doing God’s will. As I read the text, the Savior desired, at least initially, to heal the scribes and Pharisees. His method was to bring them from spiritual darkness and self-inflicted apostasy, based on incorrect interpretation of the law, into light. His task was to teach them

the correct interpretation of the law that they might practice righteousness. The third gospel reveals how he sought to do this.

Luke, the physician, concentrates on Jesus as healer. But the emphasis of his study is not on the effects of physical healing but on the spiritual. In some instances, he simply announces that Jesus healed. At other times, he goes into detail. Each expansion touches on some aspect of the Law and its application. In them we see how the Lord meant for the Law to be understood. And Luke shows a progression: healings that bring fame; healings that bring criticism; and finally, healings that bring deadly opposition.

The first detailed healing concerns a leper. The Mosaic law branded all lepers as unclean, and, therefore, unfit to reside in the camps and cities of Israel (see Leviticus 13-14). Therefore, the leper's lot was especially hard. He not only had to suffer the ravages of the disease, but he could not get comfort from those in society. Further, some imputed sin as the cause of the disease and refused any dealings with those afflicted.⁷² But the Lord did not shy away from the request of one victim. Without hesitation, the Lord healed him and then instructed him to "Go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them" (Luke 5:14). The Lord reinforced the Mosaic prescriptions--the former leper was to follow the Law precisely as it had been laid down (see Leviticus 14:1-32).

The reason why the Savior told him what to do so is arresting. It was to be "a testimony unto them." To whom was the leper's healing to be a testimony? The object seems to be those at Jerusalem for that is where the ceremony of cleansing would have to be carried out. Of what did it testify? Certainly that the leper was fully healed and could enter back into society. But is that all? To the leper, it must have testified to the Savior's authenticity. Could it have done the same for those at Jerusalem? It surely showed the Lord was not performing tricks on a gullible public. It also proved that the Lord did not stand opposed to the law of Moses. Neither he nor those whom he healed were free from the demands of the Law; there was no competition between Jesus and Moses.

But there is another dimension of this healing that should be mentioned in light of Luke's next healing story. Many felt, as mentioned above, that leprosy was a divine curse for sin. If the disease were healed, the leper must have found forgiveness. If Jesus healed the leper, then Jesus was the means of that forgiveness.

In whatever manner the healing served as some kind of witness to those at Jerusalem, it and the report of many similar incidents, generated curiosity on the part of the Pharisaical element within Judaism. Many came even from Judea and Jerusalem and the Galilee to see and hear this new healing Rabbi.

The healing he did in the presence of these scribes and doctors of the law would prove pivotal to his ministry. In fact, it would put him on the short road to his death. So important is the incident that all three synoptic writers include it.⁷³ We will follow Luke's account, but draw insights from others.

Pharisees gathered around the Lord to learn more about him. On that very first meeting "the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick" (NIV Luke 5:17). This statement sets the stage on which Luke puts his pericope allowing us to see, as it were, the Lord's agenda. The Savior

structured part of the events in an attempt to reveal to the Pharisees and teachers of the law what and who he really was, if they had eyes to see. So Luke tells the story:

And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.

And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?

But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.

And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day. (Luke 5:18-26.)

It is interesting that in his attempt to reach the Pharisees, the Lord did not first heal the paralyzed man. Instead, he forgave his sins. His action caused quite a stir. Some of the scribes reasoned "in their hearts" (Mark 2:6) that he had committed blasphemy, that is, relegated to himself the prerogatives of Deity. Jesus was sensitive to their thoughts for, as Mark tells us, "Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves" (Mark 2:8).

One can appreciate the position of the Pharisees. Who can forgive sins but God alone? What they could not see was that divinity stood before them. The Son of God had to heal their myopia that they might "know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins." As proof, he turned to the paralyzed man and said, "Arise," and the man was instantly healed (Luke 5:24).

How could the Savior's act prove to the Pharisees that he held the power of God and could forgive sins? How does healing relate to proof that sin was forgiven? The bridge is made via the traditions associated with oral law. According to it, sin prevents miracles.⁷⁴ Divine wonders can only be performed by a justified person.⁷⁵ A person who is just cannot be guilty of blasphemy. According to the rationale of the Pharisees, since Jesus healed the man, the Lord had to be just, and, therefore, he could not be guilty of blasphemy. Since God alone can forgive sin, and the miracle proved the paralyzed man's sins were forgiven, then the Savior had to be divine.

Two additional points underscore the idea that this was the message Jesus wanted to give. First, the Lord's observers had accused him of blasphemy. Taking that term in its New Testament contexts, it is associated directly with those times when the Savior is accused of making himself equal with

Jehovah.⁷⁶ Though the charge is not leveled here, it cannot be far behind.

Second, it is at this juncture that Luke first records the Lord's applying the title "son of Man" to himself. The term was current in the Jewish culture of the first century A. D. and, though scholars are still unsure as to the full meaning of this title,⁷⁷ the term designated a supernatural figure who was to act as the viceregent of God at the close of the age.⁷⁸ The context in which Luke places it on the Savior's lips is revealing. It is not only at the moment when he has demonstrated his dual power to heal physical and spiritual illness, but also when his divinity has been proved.⁷⁹ The then-current definition of supernatural being and God's viceregent seems to fit much of the profile of the Savior. The title's implications should not have been lost on his hearers.

The result of the healing, and perhaps of the disclosure, was astonishment. Indeed, to translate literally, "bewilderment (*ekstasis*) took all, and they praised God and were filled with fear saying we have seen unexpected things (*paradoxa*) today."⁸⁰ Unexpected indeed. They had come to observe the new Rabbi, and found instead the Son of God. They praised God for the wonder of it all, but did they get the message? The next healing event suggests that at least some did not. But first, two observations.

First, the miracle underscored the vast difference between the new Rabbi's interpretation of the Law and that of the old Pharisees. Their doctrine let them quite contentedly leave the sinner shackled to his sin and, thus, the paralytic to his bed or the leper to his ostracism. Christ's doctrine did not. His action freed the believer from both constraints.⁸¹

Second, it is of note that in his attempt to heal the Pharisees by opening their eyes and revealing who he was, and thus leading them from darkness to light, he came onto their turf and used their traditions. He proved he was at least Jehovah's viceregent through the mechanism of their unique tradition, the oral law. This placed them in the position of having to accept him on the basis of their law, or reject him and, with the same stroke, their beloved law as well. The Savior's act placed them in the jaws of a vice he would continue to tighten.

Ironically, having used one of their traditions to establish his identity and authority, his task was now to pull the Pharisees away from that very heritage. Only then could he break the myopia of apostasy. To do so, he had to teach them the correct interpretation of the scriptures. In this way they would better understand the old covenant and be ready to accept the new.

Therefore, he seems to have deliberately chosen those areas which the Pharisees had placed under their own provenance as the point of attack. He challenged them concerning ceremonial cleanliness, Sabbath observance, and eating restrictions. He ate with publicans and known sinners, neither he nor his disciples did public fasts or made long prayers, and he was not particular about ceremonial washings before meals. When the Pharisees objected to this blatant mistreatment of what they held sacred, he told them a parable:

No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the

bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved. (Matthew 9:16-17).

His point is that the old fabric of their law with its off-base hermeneutics could not hold his powerful and correct interpretation. Their theological wine bottles could not withstand the pressure of his authentic teachings. In this way, he emphasized that his was not simply a new adaptation or modification of the law as was theirs. His was a radical and, he insisted, true interpretation. They must be willing to give up the old for the new.

His interpretation left temple holiness to the priests and the temple. His people were to be free. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me," he admonished, "for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30). His doctrine was sweet old wine, and, "No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for he saith, The old is better" (Luke 5:39). Indeed, his task was to bring them back to a correct interpretation of the old law, that they might, in its sweetness, find him as its creator and follow him into the new law.

There was stony resistance, however. On a certain Sabbath, the Savior and some of his disciples walked by a ripened grain field. Some took occasion to pluck wheat, winnow, and eat it. Some of the ubiquitous Pharisees saw this and objected. The act of winnowing, they insisted, was a direct violation of the law (see Luke 6:1-2). The Lord, in order to correct their misapplied prohibitions, sarcastically chided them saying, "Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungered, and they which were with him; How he went into the house of God and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone?" (Luke 6:3-4; see 1 Samuel 21:1-6). The inference is that they should know, if they properly interpreted this story, that genuine physical need, in this case hunger, even if it is not *en extremis*, supersedes a general rule.

Luke's next recorded healing after the paralytic is most revealing. The author once again highlights a moment when the Lord stepped on Pharisaical proscriptions of Sabbath observance. In a synagogue the Savior saw a man with a withered hand. The "Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him" (Luke 6:7), and Luke notes that the Lord "knew their thoughts" (Luke 6:8). To counter their machinations, the Savior appealed to their reputation as interpreters of the law: "Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?" (Luke 6:9). They knew the correct answer, but refused to respond. Mark says that the Lord "looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts" (Mark 3:5). That hardness would not let them yield to the spirit of the law. The Savior's question bathed this fact with clear light. He forced them to see that their traditions contradicted God's intended purpose of the Sabbath.

The Results of the Lord's Attempt to Heal the Pharisees

Their stony hearts were the target of his next act, one that

would either break them into contrition or compact them into impenetrable hardness; he healed the man. Their reaction seems instantaneous: "And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus" (Luke 6:11), meaning "how they might destroy him" (Mark 3:6). Luke's use of the word "madness" is most telling. The Lord's actions drove these people into a mindless fury.⁸² In doing so, it intensified their self-imposed myopia into blindness.

John understood this. He tells the story of a man born blind whom the Lord healed on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees were incensed by what they considered yet another breach in the etiquette of the Sabbath. In response the Savior said, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9:39-41). Their sin was that they did indeed see, but refused to believe their own eyes. Thus, each one was "made blind" through rebellion, truly a *hypokritēs*.

Two items suggest that the Pharisees understood the Lord's teachings and knew who he was. John testified that "the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (John 1:5). Indeed, the light "was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:10-11). The irony, John points out, is that the world did not even recognize its very creator when he came, but it was the world that did not recognize him, not the Jews. They knew him, but did not receive him.

Second, the Savior's most telling parables were directed at these self-made enemies, not to mask his point, but to put it forth with such clarity that they could not misinterpret. And again the gospel writers show that it worked. For example, one day at the temple, the Savior told his audience the parable of the wicked husbandman who slew the master's servants and killed his son. Matthew records, "And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them" (Matthew 21:45). It made them angry, "But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet" (Matthew 21:46). Even in their anger, they refused to upset their power base.

The antagonism continued to grow with the Pharisees continually using their interpretation of the law in an attempt to discredit the Savior. In turn, he used his skill as interpreter not only to ward off their blows but also to clearly teach his truths. They put him to the test with such issues as taxation (Matthew 22:15-22), divorce (Matthew 19:3-9), and the greatest commandment (Mark 12:28-34). Even the Sadducees got into the act asking a question dealing with resurrection (Mark 12:18-27). In each instance he bested them at their game by playing it better than they did. He continually proved his hermeneutics were consistent with the whole of the scriptures and with the intent of God. They could neither best nor discount him.

At times he turned the tables by pushing them in the game of interpretation to their discredit. Two examples will illustrate the point. The first comes from Mark 7:5-16. On

this occasion certain of the Pharisees asked, "Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." This group based their interpretation of cleanliness on traditions of men, not on the Spirit of God; therefore, it took them far afield. Indeed, they had laid "aside the commandment of God, . . . [and] hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." Theirs was not a simple matter of misinterpretation or misunderstanding. They perfectly understood the meaning of the scriptures, but supplanted it with the philosophies of men which appealed to the carnal mind. The Lord then pointed out exactly how they did this:

For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. (Mark 7:10-13.)

Here we see priestcraft at its worst. The carnal mind seeks to get around the requirements of God while remaining guiltless. This branch of the Pharisees provided the way through their hermeneutics. Clearly they were guilty of breaking the law and teaching others to do the same, but the eye of their conscience had been blinded with the hot iron of priestcraft, and they felt resentment toward the Lord, not remorse.

The Savior was not afraid to discredit them in front of the very people who were their religious support. To these he said, "Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand: There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 7:15). His attack destroyed one of the pillars of Pharisaism. At the same time it left others undermined and about to fall. He was bringing the oral law down.

The second example comes out of Matthew 22:41-45. Here the Lord actually turned the tables. He was the one who posed the question "while the Pharisees were gathered together." He inquired, "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?"

The text suggests the Savior did not intend to force some recognition between himself and the son of David, or to puzzle or silence his enemies. It was meant to force them to revise the Messianic preconceptions which lay at the foundation of their refusal to accept him.⁸³ Those whom he addressed were well aware of the Messiah oracle (Psalms 110). From this the

Pharisees taught of a future ruled by a Davidic king and presided over by themselves.

Their interpretation, however, caused them to emphasize the wrong aspect of their king's rule. The Savior forced them to re-look at their conclusions. He hinted that they had placed too much importance on the Messiah's sonship. Yes, the Messiah was the son of David, but he was not *merely* the son of David. In essence, the Lord was asking them to rethink their conclusions in light of the whole of scripture. The Pharisees had begun at the wrong end. They had emphasized the material and political; the result was secularity. The Savior forced them to start at the correct end. They were to consider the Messiah's Lordship. Starting there, they would see that the spiritual aspect eclipsed the paternal. Christ was the Lord of David in spiritual matters, where it really mattered, and they should focus on his divine, not his secular, rule.⁸⁴

They resisted his push for a readjustment in their thinking. The result was that "no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions" (Matthew 22:46). He proved himself truly the best at the game they had made their own, but his skill did not bring respect or acceptance. Instead, it acted as a bellows which fanned their madness into a white-hot fury.

Even as they raged, however, he made sure that they understood that killing him would not, as they so fondly hoped, end the battle:

Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. (Matthew 23:34-39.)

In the past, God sent prophets and messengers whom Israel killed, and by doing so she brought upon herself God's wrath

and destruction. Now, the Savior warned, she was about to do the same thing again. This time, the consequences would take away her nation and temple, neither to return until the last days.

In his final confrontation with this very bitter and hardened group of Pharisees, the Lord revealed the depth of their apostasy and its consequences. It had resulted in a spiritual blindness so profound they could not see hell gaping open wide her jaws to receive them, nor even the closer destruction of their nation and temple. But what they should have seen, and did, was the truth revealed by their Messiah. Sadly in seeing and not responding, in loving the praise of men more than the honor of God, they became fully blind and refused to let the Savior heal them of their affliction. That blindness will only be lifted by the blaze of glory associated with the second coming. Then they will see again through the healing tears of sorrow and repentance (see D&C 45:52-53).

Summary

The Pharisees suffered from a very deadly form of spiritual cancer: *hypokrisis*. The word, as used by the New Testament writers, denoted more than dissembling. For them, it pointed to pollution, profanation, and godlessness. The term placed stress on the idea of standing apart from Jehovah and his purposes. Therefore, *hypokrisis* described apostasy. The *hypokrisis* of the Lord's adversaries consisted in the jarring contradiction between God's intent and their practice.

His attempt to heal them bought an immediate reaction: madness. The Savior did not back off. Instead, he heightened the push. The Lord showed them who he was in ways which they could not misunderstand except through self-inflicted blindness. They knew that "this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him" (John 11:47-48). As a result they would lose both their nation and position. So they plotted to kill him.

Their blindness came neither by ignorance nor innocence. It was most deliberate. When they chose darkness rather than light, Jesus became a sorrowful but very active partner in their ever increasing insensitivity. He provided an instrument to fully blind them: searing light. He understood full well the irony of their move and voiced the prophetic lament: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Luke 13:34-35). Only when hypocrisy is gone, will they see. And when they see, they will see God.

Endnotes

1. The KJV reads differently than the NIV stating, "and the power of the Lord was present to heal them." The reason for the different readings is due to a discrepancy in the Greek manuscripts. The majority read, "and the power of the Lord was there to heal them" (*autous*), but some read, "and the power of the Lord was there for him" (*auton*) to heal," and a few read, "and the power of the Lord was there to heal all" (*pantas*). The Greek is ambiguous, but the best reading seems to be, "and the power

of the Lord was with him [Jesus] to heal,” taking the *auton* as an accusative of *iasthai* giving the sense that “the power of God was present to the effect or intent that he should heal.” W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 1:496.

Throughout this paper, unless noted otherwise, Greek definitions come from Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, William F. Arndt and F. Wilber Gingrich, trans. and ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979); and Henry G. Liddell and Robert G. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968). The style of the Greek transliterations is taken from Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 47.

2. Both Luke and Mark place this event fairly early in the Lord’s ministry, though Mark suggests it took place after the call of the Twelve. Luke uses the word *nomodidaskalos* (translated in the KJV as “doctors of the law”) to describe those who had joined the Pharisees to observe the Savior. The Greek means, literally, “teachers of the law.” Luke uses the term again in Acts 5:34 and Paul uses it in I Timothy 1:7. Just how the *nomodidaskalos* differed from the *grammateus* (scribes) is not known, however, it may be that the scribes’ primary job was that of secretary or clerk while that of the doctors was teaching. All of them, however, belonged to the same theological circle.

Greek transliteration follow the style found in Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 47.
3. Simon, the Pharisee, invited the Savior to his home and all suggests that, at least initially, it was in good faith (See Luke 7:36-41) and the Lord even dined with a chief of the Pharisees (Luke 14:1). It was a group of Pharisees that warned him that Herod was out to kill him. (See Luke 13:31.
4. Ellis Rivkin, *The Hidden Revolution* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 216-222.
5. For theories on their background see Rivkin, *Revolution*, 25-28; Leo Baeck, *The Pharisees and other Essays* (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), 5-12; Louis Finkelstein, *The Pharisees*, 2 vols., (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962), 1:73-81; Jacob Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 2-23.
6. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 13.288.
7. Josephus states that Hyrcanus, the high priest, was, for a time, a member of that group. *Ibid.*, 13.5.289.
8. Rivkin, *Revolution*, 22-23.
9. For a good discussion of the whole movement see Neusner, *Politics to Piety*, 36-58.
10. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13.5.289 where John Hyrcanus I, the High Priest (134-104 B.C.), states that their interpretation of the law revealed the true path of righteousness. Because of this ability, many Jews followed their way. See S. Safrai and M. Stern, ed., *The Jewish People in the First Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 384.

11. The evidence, though circumstantial, that the “seekers after smooth things” (spoken of in *4QpNah* 3-4.1.2, 7; 2.2, 4; 3.3,6-7; *4QpIsa* 23.2.10; and *1QH* 2:15, 32) were the Pharisees seems reasonable. See G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Pelican Books, 1987), 31-32; David Noel Freedman, et. al. ed., *The AnchorBible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. “Pharisees.”
12. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13.5.401-402.
13. *Ibid.*, 408.
14. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 1.111.
15. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13.5.408-414.
16. Safrai, *The Jewish People*, 384.
17. For a study on Greek influence on the Jews see Martin Hengel, *The "Hellenization" of Judaea in the first century after Christ* (London : SCM Press ; Philadelphia : Trinity Press International, 1989). The book covers the period from 589 B.C. to A.D. 210.
18. Their emphasis lay in controlling state powers and imposing their interpretation on the people as opposed to working from the masses up. That is not to say they did not actively recruit people to their way, but, it appears, that the quicker way was to win political power and work from the top down. See Rivkin, *Revolution*, 22-27.
19. Freedman, *Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Pharisees.”
20. G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 2d ed. (Middlesex, England: Penquin Books, 1975), 35.
21. The tractate *Aboth* 1.1 gives the Pharisees conceptual chain of descent of the oral law. First Moses received the law from God and shared it with Joshua. They in turn shared it with the “pairs” who the Pharisees believed stood at the head of the Rabbinical sages. The ‘pairs’ then passed the law on to others until it came to those who composed the Great Synagogue which, according to the Pharisees, was formed just after Judah returned from captivity. By 300 B.C. it was entrusted to the “teachers of the law” who passed it from generation to generation until A.D. 200. See Herbert Danby, trans., *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University press,1977), 446 with notes 1-3.
22. Freedman, *Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Pharisees.” It is true that the later Rabbi’s attempted to preserve what they could of temple ritual and regulation in the Mishnah, but that was not the focus of the Pharisees at the time of Herod. That is not to say that they did not concern themselves with temple matters. See Safrai, *The Jewish People* 396-97. There were certain rituals they wanted performed according to their interpretation, but the administration and daily work of the temple they left the Sadducees to worry about.
23. A number of priests, even high priests, did belong to the order of Pharisees, but most were Sadducees. It is important not to exaggerate the antagonism between these two parties. That which bound them as Jews was far greater than that which separated them as parties.
24. Safrai, *The Jewish People*, 396.

25. According to *Yoma* 1.1, the high priest had to separate himself from his family for seven days before the day of Atonement and stay in the hall of the presidents of the Sanhedrin. This isolation served as his sanctification and gave him the necessary holiness.
26. Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. "Pharisaïos."
27. Malachi was very express saying that the priest should guard sacred knowledge, and the people should seek the word of God from him because "he is the messenger of the Lord" (Malachi 2:7).
28. Acts 15:5 suggests a number of converts were made from the Pharisees.
29. The Pharisees and scribes sinned in two ways. First, they robbed or plundered the defenseless. The word used by Matthew is *harpagē* which stresses greediness and rapacity. Their second sin dealt was a total lack of self-control (Matthew uses the word *akrasia*) manifesting itself in extreme self-indulgence and intemperance. The latter was the energy which fueled the former.
30. Freedman, *Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Pharisees."
31. Josephus, *Wars*, 1.110.
32. Safrai, *The Jewish People*, 394.
33. Josephus, *Wars*, 2.162.
34. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 17.41. For Greek transliteration style see endnote 2.
35. Acts 18:25 (*akribos*); 22:3 (*akribeian*); 26:5 (*akribestatēn*); and 18:26; 23:15, 20; 24:22 (all use *akribesteron*).
36. The name seems to have been initially applied by their detractors. The Pharisees preferred being called *havrim*, "companions." Some scholars argue that the Hebrew *perushim* does not come from the root for "separate" but from "Persian." Though the case is not as strong as that denoting separation, it cannot be disproved. If the term is associated with Persia, then the nickname would designate those who were willing to introduce foreign (specifically Iranian) doctrines into Judaism. On this see George A. Buttrick, et. al., ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols., (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1962), s.v. "Pharisees."
37. All Hebrew translations, unless noted otherwise, come from Francis Brown, et. al., ed., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, n.d.), s.v. "Prš."
38. However, the degree of separation must not be over exaggerated. On this see Hengel, "Hellenization" of Judaea in the first century after Christ, 53-56.
39. Ibid.
40. *Webster's New Dictionary of Synonyms*, 1985, s.v. "hypocrisy."

41. For example see *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1973, s.v. "hypocrisy," which ties the word directly to acting on the stage.
42. See, e.g., Homer, *Odyssey* 19.535, 555; Aristophanes. *Vespae*, 53; Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.91.6; Plutarch, *Caesar*, 43. For discussion see Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, s.v. "Hypokrinomai."
43. See Liddell, *Lexicon*, s.v. "hypokrinō."
44. See Herodotus, *Histories*, 5.62-64.
45. See, e.g., Pindar, *fragmenta*, 235 where he speaks of the *delphēnos hypokrisis*. For the word's association with the oracle, see Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.49, 90, and for the priestess acting as interpreter see Herodotus, *Histories*, 6.21-22; 7.140-142.
46. Aristotle, *Rhetorica*, 3.4.
47. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, s.v., "Hypokrinomai."
48. See e.g., Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, 4.25.55, and Stobaeus, *Eclogae*, 1.550.15-17.
49. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, s.v. "Hypokrinomai."
50. In this regard see Cicero, *de Officiis*, 1.28.97, and *Tusculanae Disputationes*, 4.25.55.
51. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, s.v. "Hypokrinomai."
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. See especially Lucian, *Icaromenippus*, 29.
55. Most uses of *hypokrisis* cast it in a favorable light. However, the idea of playing a role, even in a positive sense, laid the ground for a negative adaptation. Some Greeks saw the stage as a sham and the actor as a deceiver, or pretender. Others compared false philosophers to actors who, having their costumes stripped off, were seen as, at best, empty shells with no real life of their own and, at worst, projectors of virtues they actually spurned. See Lucian, *Icaromenippus*, 29. Thus, an element of unreality clung to the word which allowed it to take on the positive cast of pretending and the negative cast of deceiving. From there, it was only a short step to the nuance of "pretext," "pretense," and "dissembling." We see this fully developed in Appian, *Roman History*, 7.19.83; 9.61.319; and 12.14.48.
- 56.. The KJV has the word hypocrisy, hypocrite, or hypocritical in Job 8:13; 13:16; 15:34; 17:8; 20:5; 27:8; 34:30; 36:13; Psalms 35:16; Proverbs 11:9; Isaiah 9:17; 10:6; 32:6; 33:14.
57. Buttrick, *Interpreter's Dictionary*, s.v. "Hypocrisy."
58. The Old Testament committee that translated the King James Version had little overlap with its counterpart working on the New Testament. Some feel that this means the opinion of the Old Testament committee would not necessarily reflect that of the New.

Even so, the fact that the Old Testament committee chose hypocrisy to translate *hânêf* suggests that the English word did have a connotation at the time which was broader than that today.

59. Now *hânêf* can include the idea of dealing falsely with another and also flattery, but even that idea adds a dimension not usually associated with our understanding of hypocrisy. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) stays true to the Hebrew text by dropping the word “hypocrite” altogether and translating the Hebrew with the more accurate “godless.” Just why the King James translators used *hypokrisis* to translate *hânêf* we do not know, but they did not get it from the Septuagint (LXX), the Old Testament anciently translated into Greek. There *hânêf* is translated by various Greek words meaning “godless,” “lawless,” “treacherous,” and “worthless,” but never as *hypokrisis*. For example, Job 8:13; 15:34; 27:8; Proverbs 11:9; and Isaiah 33:14 translate *hânêf* with *asebēs* (ungodly); Job 17:8 and 20:5 uses *paránomos* (lawless); Isaiah 9:17 and 10:6 uses *anomós* (lawless); Job 13:16 uses *dólós* (fraud or deceit), and Isaiah 32:6 uses *mataios* (worthless or foolish). Of interest is that in Job 20:5 *asebēs* is translated as “wickedness” and *paranomos* as “hypocrite.” We do find the word *hypokrisis* as a translation of *hânêf* in Job 34:30 and 36:13. But the text was corrupted early, and Origen used Theodotian’s translation to fill the hole so we cannot be sure what the original Greek text was. Also the LXX of Psalms 35:16 (34:16 there) uses no word that can be translated “hypocrites.” Now *hânêf* can include the idea of dealing falsely with another and also flattery, but even that idea is still a long way from our understanding of hypocrisy. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) stays true to the Hebrew text by dropping the word “hypocrite” altogether and translating the Hebrew with the more accurate “godless.” The correctness of the RSV position is born out when a comparison is made between *hânêf* and the words with which it is paired in familiar parallelism. For example Isaiah 9:17 has it parallel to evildoer (*râ’a’*), 33:14 with sinners (*chattâ*) while Job 20:5 makes it parallel with the wicked (*râshâ*). Proverbs 11:9 supplies righteous (*tsaddîyq*) as the antonym in antithetical parallelism. The LXX uses three words to translate *hânêf*, *anomós* (godless or lawless) and *ponēros* (wicked, Job 20:5) and *asebēs* (godless or impious, Isaiah 33:14). For a more complete discussion see Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Dictionary*, s.v. “hypocrisy.”
60. Theodotian lived in the second century A.D. Little known of his life, but he was either an Ebionite Christian or a Jewish proselyte. He translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. His version has so much in common with the LXX that Origen used it to fill in the many gaps he found there. He also placed in the Hexapla. For more information see, Frank L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1983, s.v., “Theodotian.”
61. Aquila was a native of Sinope in Pontus and active between A.D. 117 to 138. Converted to Christianity until a fallout over his love for astrology, he became a Jewish proselyte and studied under Rabbis who taught him his exegetical methodology. He translated the Old Testament into Greek to replace the LXX which the Christians had adopted. His version was extremely literal even to the point of obscuring the sense of a passage at times. Still his fidelity to the Hebrew has been vouchsafed by early Christian Scholars. Symmachus lived in the late second century. Little is known about his life but he seems to have been either an Ebionite Christian or a Jewish proselyte. He made a translation of the Old Testament into Greek which was placed in Origen’s Hexapla. His desire was to create a highly readable text rather than stay with verbal accuracy. As a result, his work is highly interpretive. (See Cross, *Oxford Dictionary*,

s.v., “Aquila,” and “Symmachus.”)

62. Josephus, *Wars*, 1.318, 471 and 516.
63. Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues*, 48.
64. Philo, *On Joseph*, 68.
65. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, s.v. “*Hypokrinomai*.”
66. This statement based on the use of the word by Josephus and Philo and the argument presented below.
67. Some caution must be used here since the Savior grew up in a bi-lingual if not tri-lingual milieu. Many Greek loan words show up in the Talmud and, even though this work is late, it evidences that a number of Greek words were becoming common among the Aramaic speaking Jews. On this see Hengel, “*Hellenization of Judaea in the first century after Christ*,” 7-18. However, even if the Savior did use the Greek word, the context shows the epithet did not convey the more positive meaning it yet carried among the Greeks, but was used with a much harsher intent.
68. Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Dictionary*, s.v. “Hypocrisy.”
69. The verse quoted by Luke is that of the LXX, but the reading is close enough to the Hebrew so that the meaning is not changed.
70. Alexander B. Bruce, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d., reprint 1980), 1:282-83.
71. Luke 20:20 actually uses *hypokrisis* in the sense of play acting. According to that Gospel, the chief priests “sent forth spies, which should feign themselves (*hypokrinomenous heautous*) just men, that they might take hold of his words.” Note how Luke follows the more classical use of *hypokrisis* by letting his reader know that the pretense had evil intent. These Jews really were dissembling, but the pretending (*hypokrinomenous*) was that they were righteous when they were not. Given Luke’s Greek background, it is not at all surprising he would use the term in the classical way.
72. The basis for the tie between sin and illness grew out of Exodus 20:5. The Qumran community really pushed the idea; see *1QapGen*. 20:16-29. However, mitigating against this was the whole book of Job, Jeremiah 31:29-30, and Ezekiel 18:1-4. Even so, the belief still held especially for certain sins. For discussion see Henry Branscomb, “Son Thy Sins Are Forgiven,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 53 (1934), 53-60; Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, vol. 3 of *New International Biblical Commentary*, W. Ward Gasque, ed. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 91.
73. Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26.
74. The idea that sin precluded the miraculous can be seen in *Aboth* 5.8 and *Ber.* 4., 20a; compare 3 Nephi 8:1.
75. *1QapGen* 20:16-29, but that humans could forgive sin see *4QPrNab* 1-3.4.
76. Matthew 26:63-65; Mark 14:61-65; John 10:32-36.

77. James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Christianity and Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), for the concept of Messianism in earliest Judaism see pp. 79-115, on the term “son of man” see pp. 130-144.
78. For discussion see M. D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark* (London: SPCK, 1967), 81-93.
79. Luke spoke previously of the Lord’s power (*dynamis*) to heal. Here Luke focuses on his authority (*exousia*) to do so.
80. Luke’s use of *paradoxos* is arresting. The word can be translated by “wonderful,” “strange,” “remarkable,” but it should never lose the sense of that which is contrary to opinion or that which is unexpected. The English word “paradoxical” gets at the sense, a seemingly inconsistent or absurd statement which may be true.
81. John Noland, *World Bible Commentary* (Dallas: Word Book, 1989), 236.
82. The word *anoia* suggests stupidity, folly, and even goes so far as insanity. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, s.v. “noys.”
83. Marcus Dods, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1980), 1:277.
84. *Ibid.*, 278.