

## EMPTY RELIGION (Mk. 12:18-27)

On the Wednesday before Calvary, the Pharisees and the Herodians had quizzed Jesus regarding the payment of monetary tributes to Caesar. Failing in their attempts to smear Him, the Sadducees were the next to try, **Mk. 12:19** Master, Moses wrote unto us [*in Dt. 25:5,6*], If a man's brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. **20** Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. **21** And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. **22** And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also. **23** In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife.

Now, this was a ridiculous question coming from the Sadducees because they didn't believe in resurrection, - the Pharisees did, but the Sadducees didn't. The Pharisees believed in two resurrections, - (i) they believed in an earthly resurrection of the nation of Israel, as in Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones, ch. 37, (ii) the second resurrection they believed in related to how the Messiah would emerge as a conqueror and victor like David, a Son of David ... and like David who defeated Goliath to become the champion of Israel, the Messiah would also follow in a similar pattern to resurrect Israel as a triumphant nation in the last days. During this time, the Jews who believe in God would be raised from the dead, which is the second resurrection. They used portions of Scripture, mainly from the Psalms and the Prophets.

The problem with the Sadducees though, was that they didn't recognise the Psalms and the Prophets for they only read the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, the *Torah*. The Sadducees were a small sect within Judaism and they not only rejected resurrection, but also the supernatural, the existence of angels, and life after death. Whereas the Pharisees used *all* the Old Testament *plus* the oral *plus* the written traditions of the rabbis, the Sadducees were strictly Genesis-Exodus-Leviticus-Numbers-Deuteronomy *only* ... nothing else! They were *ultra*-literalist. If they did not consider a teaching to be taught in the first five books, they would not accept it, and they prided themselves on being the true guardians of Judaism. Also, they were the wealthy influential class who ruled the temple. ... So, this is the 'heavy mob' moving in on Jesus, and they are hoping to discredit Him in front of all the people.

By the way, they had no problem paying taxes to Caesar for they 'cosied up' to the Romans. Understandably, this set a distance between them and the rest of the Jews. They ceased to be after 70 AD.

So, they didn't believe in either the resurrection or life after death ... because they didn't believe such subjects were taught in the first five books. Nevertheless, since they knew Jesus spoke about the resurrection, they concocted a ridiculous scenario to make Him appear stupid ... They called Him 'Teacher' (v.19, διδάσκαλος), but they were being sarcastic. ... They used the two verses in Deut. 25 as their basis for discussion, **Dt. 25:5** *If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother [unmarried] shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother [ 'levir' ... 'levirate' ] unto her.* **6** *And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel.* ... The purpose was to perpetuate the family name (e.g. Ruth and Boaz).

Using this, the Sadducees (who didn't believe in resurrection) were drawing on what the Pharisees taught (who *did* believe in resurrection), and particularly, the Pharisees believed you would be married in Heaven to the one you are married to now, on earth. ... *However*, what if, - *hypothetically*, a woman was married *seven* times ... which of her husbands would she be married to in Heaven?! ... They were mocking the doctrine of resurrection, using Dt. 25 (which was a doctrine taught by the Pharisees, and by Jesus). ... These were an obnoxious lot!

Without pandering to their silliness, Jesus confronted them with a straightforward question, **24** *Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? ... What?! Nobody speaks to the Sadducees like that!* ... And the people listening swung round from looking at Jesus to looking at the Sadducees, to looking at Jesus, to looking again at the Sadducees ... He told them in no uncertain terms, "You don't know the Scriptures! ... You are ignorant of the Law of Moses!" ... **Do ye not therefore err**, - the word is *πλανιάω*, from which we get 'planet' - they were 'on a different planet' because of their stubborn and blind ignorance!

... And not only were they ignorant of the Scriptures, they were *also* ignorant of the power of the *God* of the Scriptures! ... For example, they ignored the future resurrection heralded by Enoch, - mentioned in Gen. 5, - quoted by Jude, **14** *And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints* ... And also, when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, He said to him, **Ex. 3:6** *I am the God of thy father [Amram], the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.* ... Amram, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all alive ... and yet, the Sadducees denied the resurrection!

They didn't believe the Bible ... They didn't even believe what it said about the resurrection as contained in its first five books! ... And then Jesus followed up with a scathing attack on their unbelief ... **25** For when they shall rise from the dead [*the Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection*], they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels [*they didn't believe in angels*] which are in heaven [*and they didn't believe in Heaven either*]. ... Jesus stood none of their nonsense! There is no marriage in Heaven, He told them ... On earth, whether you are married two or twenty-two times, in Heaven it won't matter for there is no marriage, - in that way, we shall be like the angels, who don't marry (He is not saying we shall be angels, but He is simply saying just as there is no marriage among them, there will be no marriage among the redeemed either). ... These Sadducees were spiritually ignorant, spiritually blind, and spiritually dead!

Why *is* there no marriage in Heaven? In Heaven we shall be complete, ... but we are not there yet ... and that is why after the Lord made the first man He said, **Gen. 2:18** *It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.* ... Man *wasn't* complete, and that is why God considered he needed a woman, so marriage is only for this life.

So, God is not spending His time working out the ridiculous scenario the Sadducees presented ... and it showed up their profound Biblical ignorance. They knew nothing of God. They worked in the temple, and they were religious, but their religion was a religion of darkness which offered no hope to the dead or to their loved ones left behind.

Religion is dangerous when it is built upon the premise of man's imaginations. It is empty ... Religion is futile if it is not founded upon the sovereignty of the living and eternal God. When religion emerges out of the fallen human mind and heart, it has no understanding of the Almighty and it inevitably leads away from Him. ... The final words of Jesus to these men were, **Mk. 12:27** *ye therefore do greatly err* ... You are greatly mistaken! You have gone astray! ... And the Sadducees had nothing further to say, and they simply faded away. There is a frightening verse in Genesis, **Gen. 6:3** *My spirit shall not always strive with man.* ... These men were standing in the very presence of God, Jesus Christ, and they taunted Him with their arrogant unbelief ... God's Word warns, **Gal. 6:7** *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

Consider what these Sadducees were rejecting. Firstly, they were rejecting the resurrection, - they were choosing death over life. For them, life ended at the

grave ... What a sad philosophy of religion! This life was as good as it gets ... There was nothing beyond the grave. Their religion, - their beliefs, - even though it was in the ornate surroundings of the temple, - were empty and fruitless. What was the point of them performing all their sacrifices and offerings? It was thoroughly a waste of time if this life was all there was.

Secondly, - leading on from the first, - none of the enjoyments and pleasures of Heaven awaited them. If there was no resurrection, there would be no glorious after-life. They would not enter Heaven because they did not believe there was such a place, even though the first five books of Moses spoke about it. They were not going to be reunited with their loved ones because they believed they would all waste away in a grave. Their futile existence resulted in everlasting nothingness ... and that was as good as their future would get!

Thirdly, it is not only the 'whats' they were rejecting but they were also dismissing and turning down the Saviour standing in front of them. ... Isn't it sad when people meet Jesus, - through a Gospel message, through reading God's Word, - but they reject Him? ... The Sadducees had the opportunity, in no less a place than the temple ... but a religious building doesn't save you, religious practices don't save you, nor does religion ... and neither even does talking about Jesus. Salvation only comes when you invite Him into your life as Saviour and Lord ... but that is what these foolish, obstinate, arrogant people were not prepared to do.

I'm sure you have heard the child's question, "Why were they called the Sadducees? ... The answer ... Because they *are* 'sad-you-see'". ... They met the Saviour. He graciously gave them His time and attention, - at such a traumatic and busy stage in His life, as He approached the cross, - and they threw the opportunity away. ... Reject Jesus and you reject all He has to offer, and you will have eternity to regret it. ... Some people talk as if God *owes* us our salvation, but He owes us nothing. What Jesus did for us in coming to this world and dying on the cross is more than we could fathom, and it is more than we deserved, but because of His grace He took the punishment of our sins upon His own body that we should be saved ...

He paid the debt He did not owe,  
I owed the debt I could not pay ...  
He paid that debt at Calvary,  
He cleansed my soul and set me free.  
One day He's coming back for me  
To live with Him eternally ...  
Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay.