

"Woe to You, Lawyers!"

by Wayne Goff

***"Then one of the lawyers answered and said to Him, 'Teacher, by saying these things You reproach us also.' And He said, 'Woe to you also, lawyers!...'"* Luke 11:45-46**

Perhaps the lawyer who saw himself in the rebukes of Jesus to the Pharisees imagined that Jesus would apologize and take back what He had said. If so, he was quite surprised to see Jesus turn His focus to lawyers like him with a critical eye!

You see, "**lawyers**" in Israel in Jesus' day were those men who made a life out of studying the Law of Moses! Israel was a religious-political system, so the constitution was the Old Testament. Lawyers should have known the law forwards and backwards, and most probably did, but they were loathe to make a personal application and try to live by that law!

Jesus begins His rebuke of lawyers by saying, *"For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers"* (v. 46). It is easy to expound greatly on what the law requires, while failing to do any of it yourself! (Matt. 23:2-4)

Secondly, lawyers gave lip service to the tombs of the very prophets their ancestors murdered! *"Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs"* (Lk. 11:47-48). It is easy to magnify those whose silent lips prevent the condemnation of their killers. *"Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them back to the LORD; and they testified against them, but they would not listen"* (2 Chron. 24:19). Tradition says that the prophet Isaiah was the one *"sawn in two"* (Heb. 11:37). Jeremiah's life was repeatedly threatened, and he was thrown into a muddy pit (Jer. 18:20-22). Ezekiel was a captive with other Jews in Babylon (Ezek. 1), testifying to his people as to why God brought them there. Elijah's life was threatened by wicked King Ahab, his wife Jezebel, and the nation of Israel (2 Kings 1ff).

While the lawyers of Jesus' day honored the fallen prophets, they would be the very ones guilty of crucifying Jesus, the Son of God, in their day!

When Stephen confronted the Jewish council in Acts 7, he said unashamedly, *"You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."* So they proved he was right by gnashing on him with their teeth, and stoning him to death! **Dead men tell no tales!**

Jesus foretold the truth that His generation would persecute and kill His apostles and prophets, and as a result *"...the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple"* (Lk. 11:50-51). Lawyers would be right in the middle of the carnage. The nation of Israel would suffer the ultimate fate -- **the national death penalty**. By 70 A.D., Israel was no more!

Finally, Jesus condemned the lawyers because they *"...have taken away the key of knowledge"* that prevented many from entering into heaven (Lk. 11:52). They just plain **lawyered** the truth to death! By the time they got through analyzing the Law of Moses, one would be hard pressed to define the meaning of the word **"is"**! Many lawyers today are *philosophical* descendants of those in Jesus' day!

The apostle Paul warned all teachers of the Law of God: *"Be not many teachers!"* It is a serious, solemn obligation. Listen carefully to those who teach you God's Word, analyze it in the light of the Scriptures, and prove the message to be true -- then obey it! Your eternal well-being depends upon it.