“WOE TO YOU” PART 1

6 “Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own— 9 “Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm! 12 “Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity! 15 “Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink—you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness! 19 Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Habakkuk 2

• This is a digest of the woes the prophet Habakkuk pronounced upon the Chaldeans, and incidentally, also upon Israel. Another such list can be found in Isaiah 5. What is a “woe,” and what are Habakkuk’s purposes in using them?

13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. 15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. Matthew 23:13-15

• What would you advise someone to do, who wanted to enter the kingdom of heaven?
• How did the scribes and Pharisees advise such people?
• What was the basic reason why the scribes and Pharisees were such unfruitful witnesses?
• Why were their proselytes so useless?
• Can you name one of their bad proselytes who is written about in the New Testament?

16 “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’ 17 You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? 18 And you say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.’ 19 You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? 20 So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. 21 And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. 22 And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it. Matthew 23:16-22

• What conclusions might you make about a religious system or institution that develops a theology such as the one being discussed in this passage?
• What harm might it do to its leaders, and to its followers?

“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Matthew 5:33-35

• What is the Lord’s teaching on oaths?
You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year. Deut. 14:22

23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! Matthew 23:23-24

• What did the Lord find wanting in the tithing practices of the scribes and Pharisees?

“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:6-8

And the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.” Zechariah 7:8-10

• What was the Old Testament answer to the religious practices of the scribes and Pharisees?
• Any thoughts about why they were so far off the mark?

19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. Romans 3:19-25

• Can you define “the gospel” in as few words as possible?