

## Authentic Purity

### Bible Glossary, People & Places

#### Pharisees

##### Sermon Reference

The Pharisees are mentioned as a Jewish sect during Jesus' ministry, emphasizing outward conformity to religious practices but neglecting inner purity.

##### Importance in the Bible

The Pharisees are important not only for understanding the social and religious context of Jesus' ministry but also for the enduring lessons they provide on the dangers of legalism and hypocrisy in religious life. Jesus' interactions with the Pharisees emphasize the transformative power of grace over the law and the importance of internal purity over external conformity.

##### Background Context

The Pharisees were a prominent religious group in Israel during the time of Christ, known for their strict adherence to the Law of Moses and the oral traditions. They were influential in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, and were considered experts in the law. Their name likely comes from the Hebrew term 'perushim', meaning 'separated ones', highlighting their commitment to religious purity and separation from what they deemed unclean or sinful activities.

The Pharisees' approach to religion was characterized by a meticulous observance of rituals and a great emphasis on the oral traditions which they believed to be equal to written Scripture. Their influence extended beyond the religious sphere; they also had considerable social and political influence in Judea. Often in conflict with other Jewish groups like the Sadducees, who held the priestly power and were more Hellenistic, the Pharisees maintained a closer relationship with the common people. Their power and influence meant that their interpretations of the Law pervaded everyday life.

Despite their religious devotion, Jesus criticized the Pharisees for their hypocrisy – focusing on the letter of the law while neglecting its spirit, and for being more concerned with their social status and appearances than with genuine spirituality. The Pharisees play a crucial role in the narrative of the Gospels as frequent antagonists of Jesus. They challenge him on various issues including the observance of the Sabbath, the nature of the Messiah, and the interpretation of the Law. Several instances in the Gospels portray confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees, such as the debate over the forgiveness of sins, the healing on the Sabbath, and discussions about purity. These interactions highlight the differing views on what it meant to live a life pleasing to God.

The teachings of the Pharisees provided a backdrop against which Jesus' message of inner transformation stood in stark contrast. The conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees culminates

in the Passion narrative, where their role in the events leading up to the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus is prominent. Throughout the New Testament, the term 'Pharisee' became synonymous with hypocrisy and legalism, and this group served as a warning against a religion that valued external compliance over a genuine relationship with God.

## Kidron Valley

### Sermon Reference

The Kidron Valley is mentioned as the location of tombs, specifically a Jewish cemetery with 150,000 ossuaries, and it overlooks the path from Temple Mount to the Mount of Olives.

### Importance in the Bible

The Kidron Valley serves as a geographical and metaphorical bridge between the earthly Jerusalem and the prophetic visions of redemption and restoration.

### Background Context

The Kidron Valley is a significant geographical feature that runs along the eastern side of Old Jerusalem, separating the Temple Mount from the Mount of Olives. It has been central in Jewish history and tradition for thousands of years. Its name in Hebrew, 'Emek Kidron', essentially means 'Valley of Kidron'. Throughout the Bible, the valley is mentioned in various contexts, often in association with kings and prophets.

This valley also served as a burial place, and by the time of Jesus, it had a significant number of tombs. The Kidron Valley holds considerable eschatological significance in Jewish and Christian thought. According to Jewish lore, the resurrection of the dead will begin in this valley once the Messiah sets foot on the Mount of Olives. This belief stems from the prophetic writings found in the Old Testament, such as Zechariah 14, which describes the Mount of Olives splitting in two and the presence of the Lord standing on the mountain, signifying a moment of divine intervention and the ushering in of the end times.

In the New Testament, the Kidron Valley is the place Jesus crosses with his disciples after the Last Supper on his way to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he is arrested, marking the beginning of his passion.

The valley, with its tombs and ossuaries, serves as a visual reminder of mortality and the transient nature of life. In the context of Christian thought, it underscores themes of resurrection, judgment, and hope for eternal life. The presence of tombs also highlights the Jewish practices and beliefs surrounding death and the afterlife during Jesus' time. Today, the Kidron Valley continues to be a place of archaeological and religious interest. It is a tangible connection to the biblical narrative, offering insights into the historical context of the events that unfolded in its vicinity.

## Mikvahs

### Sermon Reference

Mikvahs are ritual baths used for ceremonial purification before entering the temple.

### Importance in the Bible

Mikvahs are important as they provide a historical and cultural understanding of the Jewish practices on purity and the ritualistic preparations for worship, which form a backdrop for the teachings of Jesus on authentic purity that transcends outward observances.

### Background Context

Mikvahs, or Jewish ritual baths, were an integral part of ancient Jewish religious life and are still used in contemporary Judaism. They were specially constructed pools or baths that used 'living water' – meaning natural, flowing or spring water – to achieve ritual purity. The concept of ritual purity was central to the Jewish faith, especially in the context of approaching God in the Temple, participating in feasts, or after encountering sources of impurity such as death or certain illnesses.

The use of a mikvah was also required for converts to Judaism as part of the initiation process. The design and use of mikvahs are detailed in the Jewish oral Torah and codified in the Mishnah, the first major work of Jewish rabbinic literature. A proper mikvah required a certain volume of water and was subject to other specific requirements to ensure its religious suitability. Individuals would immerse themselves fully in the mikvah, often as part of a religious rite, to symbolize a spiritual cleansing and renewal.

In the context of the Temple, this was a prerequisite for priests and worshippers to enter the holy precincts in a state of purity. The New Testament alludes to the concept of ritual bathing, albeit indirectly. John the Baptist's ministry of baptism in the Jordan River can be seen as an extension or adaptation of the mikvah practice – a call to repentance and purification in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus' own baptism by John also connects to this tradition, while the Christian sacrament of baptism evolved from these roots into a rite symbolizing death to sin and new life in Christ.

Archaeologically, numerous mikvahs have been found throughout Israel, including in proximity to the remains of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. These findings provide insight into the daily religious practices of ancient Jews and illuminate the context of the discussions on purity found in the Gospels. The use of mikvahs underscores the importance of ritual purity in Jewish thought and how such practices shaped the religious landscape into which Jesus was born and ministered.

## Absalom

### Sermon Reference

Absalom's tomb is not far from the Kidron Valley and his story serves as a caution against internal impurity and the destructive consequences of unchecked bitterness and rebellion.

## Importance in the Bible

Absalom's story is a powerful illustration of the perils of pride, the corrosive effects of unforgiveness, and the contrasting outcomes of inner and outer purity.

## Background Context

Absalom, the third son of King David, is a tragic figure in the Old Testament and symbolizes the dangers of pride, ambition, and familial discord. His story is recounted primarily in the Second Book of Samuel.

Absalom was noted for his striking appearance and charisma, which he leveraged to win the hearts of the people of Israel. However, his relationship with his father, King David, became strained after David's inaction following the rape of Absalom's sister, Tamar, by their half-brother Amnon. Absalom harbored deep-seated anger and resentment, leading him to orchestrate the death of Amnon two years later. Following Amnon's death, Absalom fled and was eventually allowed to return to Jerusalem but was not permitted to see his father's face for two more years. These events further deepened Absalom's bitterness and resentment, culminating in a rebellion against David.

Absalom's revolt was characterized by strategic manipulation of public opinion and the exploitation of David's weaknesses. Absalom declared himself king in Hebron and garnered significant support, forcing David to flee Jerusalem. Despite his initial successes, Absalom's rebellion ultimately failed when he was killed in the Battle of Ephraim Wood.

The story of Absalom is a complex narrative of justice, vengeance, and the consequences of sin, both individual and familial. It illustrates the destructive power of unresolved anger and bitterness and the chaos that can ensue when these emotions drive one to betrayal and rebellion.

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