

Matthew 23:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

Analysis

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat—the phrase *epi tēs Mōuseōs kathedras ekathisan* (ἐπὶ τῆς Μωϋσέως καθέδρας ἐκάθισαν) literally means they have seated themselves on Moses's chair. The *kathedra* (καθέδρα, chair/seat of authority) refers to the teaching office of interpreting Torah. Archaeological evidence confirms actual stone seats in synagogues where teachers sat to instruct.

Jesus acknowledges the Pharisees' legitimate teaching authority derived from Mosaic succession while simultaneously preparing to demolish their personal credibility. This paradox—valid office, corrupt officeholders—mirrors the distinction between God's Word rightly taught and those teachers' hypocritical lives. The verb tense (*ekathisan*, aorist) suggests they assumed this position themselves, perhaps hinting at self-appointment rather than divine calling.

Historical Context

After the Babylonian exile, scribes and Pharisees became the primary interpreters of Torah for the Jewish people. The 'seat of Moses' represented authoritative teaching passed down through oral tradition (later codified in the Mishnah). Synagogues often had physical seats positioned prominently for the Torah reader and teacher.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 – Confession and belief for salvation

Genesis 1:1 – Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus distinguish between respecting an office and following corrupt office-holders?
2. What does 'sitting in Moses's seat' reveal about claims to spiritual authority?
3. Can teaching authority be legitimate even when the teacher's life contradicts the message?

Interlinear Text

λέγων, Ἐπὶ τῆς Μωσέως καθέδρας ἐκάθισαν	οἱ
Saying	in
G3004	G3588
Moses	seat
G1909	G3475
seat	sit
G2515	G3588
G2523	
γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι	
The scribes	and
G1122	G3588
the Pharisees	
G2532	G5330

Additional Cross-References

Luke 20:46 (Parallel theme): Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts;

Mark 12:38 (Parallel theme): And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces,

Malachi 2:7 (Parallel theme): For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

Ezra 7:25 (Parallel theme): And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not.

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