

As we studied the Law in the OT and the NT, we came across several references by Jesus regarding the Pharisees and Sadducees along with the Scribes. We asked the question – who were these people? Today, we will start to answer that question.

## Scribes

### **From Harper's Bible Dictionary**

... one capable of reading and writing, usually with competence in some area such as law, economics, or the like.

### **From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia**

A **scribe** (or **scrivener**) is an ancient professional whose job involved learned reading and writing... This work usually involved secretarial and administrative duties such as taking of dictation and the keeping of business, judicial and historical records for kings, nobility, temples and cities. Later the profession developed into public servants, journalists, accountants and lawyers. However, present-day journalists and authors tend to be the closest to the ancient profession.

In the Bible, Jesus considers scribes to be among the particularly nefarious, along with the Pharisees.

## **Egyptian scribes**

The Egyptian scribe was an important profession, and a tradition of schooling scribes developed.

## **Historical scribes**

Some of the historical scribes are as follows:

1. Egyptian
2. Mesopotamian–Akkadian, Babylonian, Sumerian
3. Minoan–Linear B scribes from Crete; also Mycenae
4. Ugaritic–Ugaritic language, Ugarit; just prior to Amarna Letters
5. Akkadian–for Pharaohs(Egyptian), Mitanni, Alashiya; the time of the Amarna letters-1350 BC
6. Hittite–Hittite language from Bogazkoy and Kültepe; (1350 BC Amarna letters, and prior to 2500 BC)
7. Biblical
8. Renaissance

Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes I  
January 6, 2007

- 15 So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered judgment and justice to all his people.
- 16 Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder;
- 17 Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar were the priests; Seraiah was the scribe;
- 18 Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over both the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were chief ministers.

## 2 Samuel 20

- 23 And Joab was over all the army of Israel; Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites;
- 24 Adoram was in charge of revenue; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder;
- 25 Sheva was scribe; Zadok and Abiathar were the priests;
- 26 and Ira the Jairite was a chief minister under David.

## 1 Kings 4

- 1 So King Solomon was king over all Israel.
- 2 And these were his officials: Azariah the son of Zadok, the priest;
- 3 Elihoreph and Ahijah, the sons of Shisha, scribes; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud, the recorder;
- 4 Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, over the army; Zadok and Abiathar, the priests;
- 5 Azariah the son of Nathan, over the officers; Zabud the son of Nathan, a priest and the king's friend;
- 6 Ahishar, over the household; and Adoniram the son of Abda, over the labor force.

In these verses, scribe could also be translated “secretary”.

There are several more references to the scribes in the OT.

## Matthew 2

- 1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,
- 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."
- 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.
- 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

As a manager with EDS, I hardly ever would make a decision or attend a meeting without the presence of my secretary.

**Matthew 7**

- 28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching,
- 29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

The scribes knew the scriptures and would have been well qualified to teach what they say.

**Matthew 15**

- 1 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying,
- 2 "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

There were scribes with the Pharisees.

**Matthew 16**

- 21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

There were scribes with the chief priests and the elders.

**Matthew 23**

- 2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.
- 3 "Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.

## Pharisees

### **From Harper's Bible Dictionary**

... a group of specially observant and influential Jews, mainly in Palestine, from the second century BC to the first century AD.

... According to Josephus, the Pharisees were the group most influential with the people, were noted for their accurate and therefore authoritative interpretations of Jewish law, and had their own traditions and way of life to which they were faithful. ... They believed that the soul survives death and is punished or rewarded with another life.

At no time do we learn how one "joined" this group and what was required to stay in it.

The Pharisees were zealous observers of the law, prominent among the people and especially concerned with ritual purity, tithing food according to OT law, and correct observance of the Sabbath.

### **From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia**

The word **Pharisees** comes from the Hebrew *p'rushim*, from *perush* explanation, meaning "explainers" ("lefareish - to explain"). ... The Pharisees were, depending on the time, a political party, a social movement, and a school of thought among Jews that flourished during the Second Temple Era (536 BCE–70 CE). After the destruction of the Second Temple, the Pharisaic sect was re-established as Rabbinic Judaism — which ultimately produced normative, traditional Judaism, the basis for (*most*) all contemporary forms of Judaism... The relationship between the Pharisees and Rabbinic Judaism (exemplified by the Talmud) is so close that many do not distinguish between the two. Nevertheless, the social standing and beliefs of the Pharisees changed over time, as political and social conditions in Judea changed.

More specifically, the Pharisees were one of the successor groups of the Hasidim (the "pious"), an anti-Hellenic Jewish movement that formed in the time of the Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes (175–163 BCE). The first mention of the Pharisees is by the Jewish-Roman historian Josephus, in a description of the four "schools of thought" (that is, social groups or movements) into which the Jews were divided in the 1st century CE. The other schools were the Essenes, revolutionaries, and the Sadducees. The Essenes were apolitical; the revolutionaries, such as the Sicarii and the Zealots, emerged specifically to resist the Roman Empire. Other sects emerged at this time, such as the Christians in Judea and the Therapeutae in Egypt. The Sadducees and Pharisees began earlier, as political factions in the Hellenistic Hasmonean period of the Second Temple era. At no time did any of these sects constitute a majority; most Jews were non-sectarian. However, Josephus indicates that the Pharisees received the backing and goodwill of the common people. Nevertheless, these sects are emblematic of the different

responses of Jews to the political, economic, and cultural forces that characterized the Second Temple era.

For most of their history, Pharisees defined themselves in opposition to the Sadducees. Conflicts between the Sadducees and the Pharisees took place in the context of much broader conflicts among Jews in the Second Temple era that followed the Babylonian captivity of Judah.

- One conflict was class, between the wealthy and the poor.
- Another conflict was cultural, between those who favored hellenization and those who resisted it.
- A third was juridico-religious, between those who emphasized the importance of the Temple, and those who emphasized the importance of other Mosaic laws and prophetic values.
- A fourth, specifically religious, involved different interpretations of the Bible, and how to apply the Torah to Jewish life. ...

Fundamentally, Sadducees and Pharisees took clearly opposing positions concerning the third (*juridico-religious*) and fourth (*religious*) conflicts, but at different times were influenced by the other conflicts (*class and culture*). In general, whereas the Sadducees were conservative, aristocratic monarchists, the Pharisees were eclectic, popular, and more democratic.

## Background: the religion of ancient Israel

Although the Pharisees did not emerge until the Hasmonean period, their origins, like those of the Sadducees, may be traced to institutions that developed during the First Temple era.

In ancient Israel, as in most ancient Near Eastern societies, the institution of the priesthood was closely tied with the monarchy. According to the Tanakh (*the name for the Hebrew Bible – our OT*), after a period of decentralized and un-institutionalized political authority (described in the book of Judges), the Children of Israel demanded that God provide them with a king. At first, Samuel (who may be considered the last judge) anointed Saul of the tribe of Benjamin; later he anointed David of the tribe of Judah, and established the House of David as the definitive royal line.

The religious authority of the priests was centralized and institutionalized with the construction of (*the*) Temple in Jerusalem around 950 BCE. , and when the high priest Zadok anointed Solomon king. Priests during the First Temple Era (from around 950 BCE to 586 BCE) were limited to the Temple service and interpreting and teaching Torah; political power officially rested in the hands of a king who ruled, ideally, by divine right.

Unlike many other religions of the time, however, the Children of Israel had sacred texts (according to traditional Jews, revealed at Mt. Sinai; according to the documentary hypothesis, based on earlier literary and oral sources and later edited into the Torah, or Five Books of Moses) which contained moral stories and teachings, as well as laws, which provided all people with ways to worship their God in the course of their everyday lives. Prophets, inspired by God and by the values and teachings embodied in the sacred texts, however, often criticized the king, elites, or the masses and provided another potent political force.

Both the Temple and the Monarchy were destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, and most Jews were sent into exile.

## Pharisees in the Second Temple era

### The Persian period

In 539 BCE the Persians conquered Babylon and in 537 BCE, inaugurating the Persian period of Jewish history, Cyrus the Great allowed Jews to return to Judea and rebuild the Temple (completed in 515 BCE). He did not, however, allow the restoration of the monarchy, which left the priests as the dominant authority. Without the constraining power of the monarchy, the authority of the Temple was amplified. Around this time the Sadducee party emerged as the party of priests and allied elites; the name *Sadducee* comes from Zadok. Nevertheless, the Second Temple had been constructed under the auspices of a foreign power, and there were lingering questions about its legitimacy. This provided the condition for the development of various sects (including Josephus's "schools of thought"), each of which claimed exclusive authority to represent "Judaism," and typically shunned social intercourse, especially marriage, with members of other sects.

One of the earliest of these competing sects, the Pharisees, had its origins in a relatively new group of authorities — scribes and sages. The end of the Babylonian Exile saw not only the construction of the Second Temple, but canonical selection of the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible, by the Sanhedrin.

Although the priests controlled the monarchy and the Temple, scribes and sages (who would later come to be addressed as *rabbi*, "my teacher") monopolized the study of the Torah, which was read publicly on market-days, a practice which was institutionalized after the return from the Babylonian exile as a replacement for the Biblical requirement of reading by the Monarch. These sages identified with the prophets (political and religious reformers active in the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, who came from other tribes than Levi), and developed and maintained an oral tradition, which they maintained originated at Mount Sinai alongside the Holy Writ. The rift between the priests and the sages developed during the Hellenistic period, when the Jews faced new political and cultural struggles.

## The Hellenistic period

The Hellenistic period of Jewish history began in 332 BCE when Alexander the Great conquered Persia.

Several languages were used, ... The Jews almost certainly spoke Aramaic among themselves. Greek was at least to some extent a trade language in the region, ...historian Shaye Cohen has observed that

All the Judaisms of the Hellenistic period, of both the diaspora and the land of Israel, were Hellenized, that is, were integral parts of the culture of the ancient world. Some varieties of Judaism were more hellenized than others, but none was an island unto itself. It is a mistake to imagine that the land of Palestine preserved a "pure" form of Judaism and that the diaspora was the home of adulterated or diluted forms of Judaism.

## The emergence of the Sadducees, Essenes, and Pharisees

The rift between the priests and the sages grew during the Hellenistic period, when the Jews faced new political and cultural struggles. Around this time the Sadducee party emerged as the party of the priests and allied elites (the name *Sadducee* comes from Zadok).

The Essenes may have emerged as a sect of dissident priests. They are believed to have rejected either the Seleucid appointed high priests, or the Hasmonean high priests, as illegitimate. Ultimately, they rejected the Second Temple, arguing that the Essene community was itself the new Temple, and that obedience to the law represented a new form of sacrifice.

The Pharisee ("separatist") party emerged largely out of the group of scribes and sages who harked back to Ezra and the Great Assembly. The meaning of the name is unclear; it may refer to their rejection of Hellenic culture or to their objection to the Hasmonean monopoly on power. ... One of the factors that distinguished the Pharisees from other groups prior to the destruction of the Temple was their belief that all Jews had to observe the purity laws (which applied to the Temple service) *outside* the Temple. The major difference, however, was the continued adherence of the Pharisees to the laws and traditions of the Jewish people in the face of assimilation. As Josephus noted, the Pharisees were considered the most expert and accurate expositors of Jewish law.

During the Hasmonean period, the Sadducees and Pharisees functioned primarily as political parties. Although the Pharisees had opposed the wars of expansion of the Hasmoneans and the forced conversions of the Idumeans, the political rift between them became wider when Pharisees demanded that the Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus choose between being king and being High Priest. In response, Alexander Jannai openly sided with the Sadducees by adopting their rites in the Temple. His actions caused a riot in the Temple and led to a brief civil war that ended with a bloody repression of the

Pharisees, although at his deathbed the king called for a reconciliation between the two parties. Alexander was succeeded by his widow, Salome Alexandra, whose brother was Shimon ben Shetach, a leading Pharisee. Upon her death her elder son, Hyrcanus, sought Pharisee support, and her younger son, Aristobulus, sought the support of the Sadducees. The conflict between Hyrcanus and Aristobulus culminated in a civil war that ended when the Roman general Pompey captured Jerusalem in 63 BCE and inaugurated the Roman period of Jewish history.

Josephus attests that Salome Alexandra was very favorably inclined toward the Pharisees and that their political influence grew tremendously under her reign, especially in the institution known as the Sanhedrin. Later texts like the Mishnah and the Talmud record a host of rulings ascribed to the Pharisees concerning sacrifices and other ritual practices in the Temple, torts, criminal law, and governance. The influence of the Pharisees over the lives of the common people remained strong and their rulings on Jewish law were deemed authoritative by many.