

Religious Law
Characteristics of
The Pharisees
The Sadducees
Jesus Brings
Change

Compiled By Dr. Harold Bollinger

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Forward

Of the various factions that emerged under the Hasmonean rule, three are of particular interest. They are the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes.

The Pharisees was the most important of the three. The main characteristics was a belief in the oral law that God gave to Moses at Sinai along with the Torah. The Pharisees also maintain that an after-life existed and that God punished the wicked and rewarded the righteous.

The Sadducees wanted to maintain the priestly cast, but were liberal in their willingness to incorporate Hellenism into their lives. The Sadducees rejected the idea of the oral law and insisted on a literal interpretation of the written law. They did not believe in an after-life. The main focus of Sadducees was associated with the Temple. The Sadducees disappeared around 70 A.D. after the Temple was destroyed.

The two parties served in the Great Sanhedrin, a kind of Jewish Supreme court made up of 71 members whose responsibility was to interpret civil and religious law.

The Essences, a third faction emerged out of disgust with the other two. They believed that the Pharisees and Sadducees had corrupted the temple. They moved out of Jerusalem and lived a monastic life in the desert, adopting strict dietary laws and a commitment to celibacy.

Chapter 1



Description of the Pharisees

Mark 3:6

At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to discuss plans for killing Jesus.

The Pharisees were a Jewish religious group that zealously followed the Old Testament laws, as well as their own religious traditions. They were highly respected in the community, but they hated Jesus because he challenged their proud attitudes and dishonorable motives.

The Herodians were a Jewish political party that hoped to restore Herod the Great's line to the throne. Jesus was a threat to them as well because he challenged their political ambitions.

The Pharisees and Herodians, normally enemies, joined forces against Jesus because he exposed them for what they were.

The Pharisees accused Jesus of breaking their law that said medical attention could be given to no one on the Sabbath except in matters of life and death. Ironically, the Pharisees themselves were breaking God's law by plotting murder.

Why the Pharisees came to see John the Baptist.

John 1:19

This was the testimony of John when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Temple assistants from Jerusalem to ask John whether he claimed to be the Messiah.

The priests and Levites were respected religious leaders in Jerusalem. Priests served in the temple, and Levites assisted them. The leaders that came to see John were Pharisees (John 1:24), a group that both John the Baptist and Jesus often denounced. Many of them outwardly obeyed God's laws to look pious, while inwardly their hearts were filled with pride and greed. The Pharisees believed that their own oral traditions were just as important as God's inspired Word.

These leaders came to see John the Baptist for several reasons:

- (1) Their duty as guardians of the faith caused them to want to investigate any new preaching (Deut. 13:1-5; Deut. 18:20-22).
- (2) They wanted to find out if John had the credentials of a prophet.
- (3) John had quite a following, and it was growing. They were probably jealous and wanted to see why this man was so popular.

Who the Pharisees thought John was

John 1:21-23

"Well then, who are you?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?"

"No," he replied.

"Are you the Prophet?"

"No."

"Then who are you? Tell us, so we can give an answer to those who sent us.
What do you have to say about yourself?"

John replied in the words of Isaiah:
"I am a voice shouting in the wilderness,
'Prepare a straight pathway for the Lord's coming!' "

In the Pharisees' minds, there were four options regarding John the Baptist's identity: he was

- (1) The prophet foretold by Moses (Deut. 18:15),
- (2) Elijah (Malachi 4:5),
- (3) The Messiah, or
- (4) A false prophet. John denied being the first three personages.

Instead he called himself, in the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, "A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the LORD' " (Isaiah 40:3).

The leaders kept pressing John to say who he was because people were expecting the Messiah to come (Luke 3:15). But John emphasized only *why* he had come—to prepare the way for the Messiah. The Pharisees missed the point. They wanted to know who John was, but John wanted them to know who Jesus was.

How they differed from Sadducees.

Matthew 3:7

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to be baptized, he denounced them. "You brood of snakes!" he exclaimed. "Who warned you to flee God's coming judgment?"

The Jewish religious leaders were divided into several groups. Two of the most prominent groups were the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The Pharisees separated themselves from anything non-Jewish and carefully followed both the Old Testament laws and the oral traditions handed down through the centuries.

The Sadducees believed the Pentateuch alone (Genesis-Deuteronomy) to be God's Word. They were descended mainly from priestly nobility, while the Pharisees came from all classes of people.

The two groups disliked each other greatly, and both opposed Jesus. John the Baptist criticized the Pharisees for being legalistic and hypocritical, following the letter of the law while ignoring its true intent.

He criticized the Sadducees for using religion to advance their political position. For more information on these two groups, see the chart in Mark 2:16.

Matthew 16:1

One day the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus' claims by asking him to show them a miraculous sign from heaven.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were Jewish religious leaders of two different parties, and their views were diametrically opposed on many issues. The Pharisees carefully followed their religious rules and traditions, believing that this was the way to God.

They also believed in the authority of all Scripture and in the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees accepted only the books of Moses as Scripture and did not believe in life after death.

In Jesus, however, these two groups had a common enemy, and they joined forces to try to kill him.

The Pharisees and Sadducees demanded a sign *from heaven*. They tried to explain away Jesus' other miracles as sleight of hand, coincidence, or use of evil power, but they believed that only God could do a sign in the sky.

This, they were sure, would be a feat beyond Jesus' power. Although Jesus could have easily impressed them, he refused. He knew that even a miracle in the sky would not convince them he was the Messiah because they had already decided not to believe in him.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee.

John 3:1

After dark one evening, a Jewish religious leader named Nicodemus, a Pharisee.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the ruling council (called the Sanhedrin).

The Pharisees were a group of religious leaders whom Jesus and John the Baptist often criticized for being hypocrites.

Most Pharisees were intensely jealous of Jesus because he undermined their authority and challenged their views. But Nicodemus was searching, and he believed that Jesus had some answers.

A learned teacher himself, he came to Jesus to be taught. No matter how intelligent and well educated you are, you must come to Jesus with an open mind and heart so he can teach you the truth about God.

Nicodemus came to Jesus personally, although he could have sent one of his assistants.

He wanted to examine Jesus for himself to separate fact from rumor. Perhaps Nicodemus was afraid of what his peers, the Pharisees, would say about his visit, so he came after dark.

Later, when he understood that Jesus was truly the Messiah, he spoke up boldly in his defense (John 7:50-51). Like Nicodemus, we must examine Jesus for ourselves—others cannot do it for us. Then, if we believe he is who he says, we will want to speak up for him.

Their false righteousness

Matthew 5:20

"But I warn you—unless you obey God better than the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees do, you can't enter the Kingdom of Heaven at all!

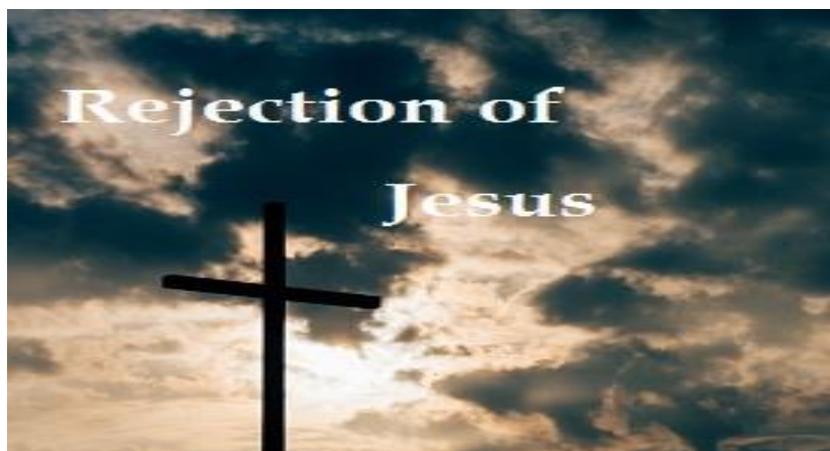
The Pharisees were too concerned about appearance.

Matthew 9:11-12

The Pharisees were indignant. "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?" they asked his disciples.

When he heard this, Jesus replied, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do."

Chapter 2



Why the Pharisees couldn't accept Jesus.

Luke 6:2

But some Pharisees said, "You shouldn't be doing that! It's against the law to work by harvesting grain on the Sabbath."

In Jewish legal tradition, there were 39 categories of activities forbidden on the Sabbath—and harvesting was one of them.

The teachers of the law even went so far as to describe different methods of harvesting.

One method was to rub the heads of grain between the hands, as the disciples were doing here.

God's law said farmers were to leave the edges of their fields unplowed so travelers and the poor could eat from this bounty (Deut. 23:25), so the disciples were not guilty of stealing grain.

Neither were they breaking the Sabbath by doing their daily work on it. In fact, though they may have been violating the Pharisees' rules, they were not breaking any divine law.

The Pharisees thought their religious system had all the answers. They could not accept Jesus because he did not fit into their system. We could miss Christ for the same reason. Beware of thinking that you or your church has all the answers.

No religious system is big enough to contain Christ completely or to fulfill perfectly all his desires for the world.

Why the Pharisees were against Jesus

Matthew 9:34

But the Pharisees said, "He can cast out demons because he is empowered by the prince of demons."

In Matthew 9, the Pharisees accuse Jesus of four different sins: blasphemy, befriending outcasts, impiety, and serving Satan. Matthew shows how those who should have received him most gladly maligned Jesus.

Why did the Pharisees do this?

- (1) Jesus bypassed their religious authority.
- (2) He weakened their control over the people.
- (3) He challenged their cherished beliefs.
- (4) He exposed their insincere motives.

While the Pharisees questioned, debated, and dissected Jesus, people were being healed and lives changed right in front of them. Their skepticism was based not on insufficient evidence but on jealousy of Jesus' popularity.

The Pharisees accused Jesus of working on Sabbath.

Matthew 12:1-2

At about that time Jesus was walking through some grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, so they began breaking off heads of wheat and eating the grain.

Some Pharisees saw them do it and protested, "Your disciples shouldn't be doing that! It's against the law to work by harvesting grain on the Sabbath."

The Pharisees had established 39 categories of actions forbidden on the Sabbath, based on interpretations of God's law and on Jewish custom.

Harvesting was one of those forbidden actions. By picking wheat and rubbing it in their hands, the disciples were technically harvesting, according to the religious leaders.

Jesus and the disciples were picking grain because they were hungry, not because they wanted to harvest the grain for a profit. They were not working on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees, however, could not (and did not want to) see beyond their law's technicalities. They had no room for compassion, and they were determined to accuse Jesus of wrongdoing.

The Pharisees contrasted with sinners.

Luke 7:44

Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

Again Luke contrasts the Pharisees with sinners—and again the sinners come out ahead. Simon had committed several social errors in neglecting to wash Jesus' feet (a courtesy extended to guests because sandaled feet got very dirty), anoint his head with oil, and offer him the kiss of greeting.

Did Simon perhaps feel that he was too good to treat Jesus as an equal? The sinful woman, by contrast, lavished tears, expensive perfume, and kisses on her Savior.

In this story it is the grateful prostitute, and not the stingy religious leader, whose sins were forgiven. Although it is God's grace through faith that saves us, and not acts of love or generosity, this woman's act demonstrated her true faith, and Jesus honored her faith.

The Pharisees placed their laws above human need.

Matthew 12:10-12

He noticed a man with a deformed hand. The Pharisees asked Jesus, "Is it legal to work by healing on the Sabbath day?"

(They were, of course, hoping he would say yes, so they could bring charges

against him.)

And he answered, "If you had one sheep, and it fell into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn't you get to work and pull it out? Of course you would. And how much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Yes, it is right to do good on the Sabbath."

As they pointed to the man with the shriveled hand, the Pharisees tried to trick Jesus by asking him if it was legal to heal on the Sabbath.

Their Sabbath rules said that people could be helped on the Sabbath only if their lives were in danger. Jesus healed on the Sabbath several times, and none of those healings were in response to emergencies.

If Jesus had waited until another day, he would have been submitting to the Pharisees' authority, showing that their petty rules were equal to God's law. If he healed the man on the Sabbath, the Pharisees could claim that because Jesus broke their rules, his power was not from God.

But Jesus made it clear how ridiculous and petty their rules were. God is a God of people, not rules. The best time to reach out to someone is when he or she needs help.

The Pharisees placed their laws above human need. They were so concerned about Jesus' breaking one of their rules that they did not care about the man's shriveled hand.

What is your attitude toward others? If your convictions don't allow you to help certain people, your convictions may not be in tune with God's Word. Don't allow dogma to blind you to human need.

The Pharisees accused Jesus of being in league with Satan.

Matthew 12:24

But when the Pharisees heard about the miracle, they said, "No wonder he can cast out demons. He gets his power from Satan, the prince of demons."

The Pharisees asked Jesus for miracle.

Matthew 12:38-40

One day some teachers of religious law and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove that you are from God."

But Jesus replied, "Only an evil, faithless generation would ask for a miraculous sign; but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah.

For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so I, the Son of Man, will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

The Pharisees were asking for another miraculous sign, but they were not sincerely seeking to know Jesus. Jesus knew they had already seen enough miraculous proof to convince them that he was the Messiah if they would just open their hearts.

But they had already decided not to believe in him, and more miracles would not change that.

Many people have said, "If I could just see a real miracle, then I could really believe in God." But Jesus' response to the Pharisees applies to us. We have plenty of evidence—Jesus' birth, death, resurrection, and ascension, and centuries of his work in believers around the world.

Instead of looking for additional evidence or miracles, accept what God has already given and move forward. He may use your life as evidence to reach another person.

Jonah was a prophet sent to the Assyrian city of Nineveh (see the book of Jonah). Because Assyria was such a cruel and warlike nation, Jonah tried to run from his assignment and ended up spending three days in the belly of a huge fish.

When Jonah got out, he grudgingly went to Nineveh, preached God's message, and saw the city repent. By contrast, when Jesus came to his people, they refused to repent. Here Jesus is clearly saying that his resurrection will prove he is the Messiah.

Three days after his death Jesus will come back to life, just as Jonah was given a new chance at life after three days in the fish.

Matthew 16:1

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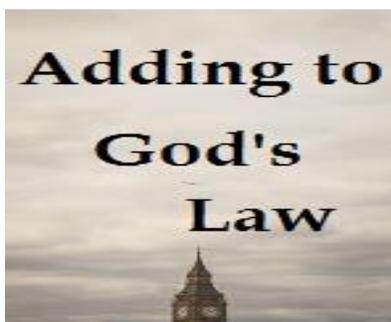
Mark 8:11

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had arrived, they came to argue with him. Testing him to see if he was from God, they demanded, "Give us a miraculous sign from heaven to prove yourself."

The Pharisees had tried to explain away Jesus' previous miracles by claiming they were done by luck, coincidence, or evil power. Here they demanded a sign from heaven—something only God could do. Jesus refused their demand because he knew that even this kind of miracle would not convince them.

They had already decided not to believe. Hearts can become so hard that even the most convincing facts and demonstrations will not change them.

Chapter 3



How the Pharisees added to God's law.

Matthew 15:1-2

Some Pharisees and teachers of religious law now arrived from Jerusalem to interview Jesus.

"Why do your disciples disobey our age-old traditions?" they demanded. "They ignore our tradition of ceremonial hand washing before they eat."

The Pharisees and teachers of the law came from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish authority, to scrutinize Jesus' activities.

Over the centuries since the Jews' return from Babylonian captivity, hundreds of religious traditions had been added to God's laws.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law considered them all equally important. Many traditions are not bad in themselves. Certain religious traditions can add richness and meaning to life. But we must not assume that because our traditions have been practiced for years they should be elevated to a sacred standing.

God's principles never change, and his law doesn't need additions. Traditions should help us understand God's laws better, not become laws themselves.

Mark 7:8-9

For you ignore God's specific laws and substitute your own traditions." Then he said, "You reject God's laws in order to hold on to your own traditions.

The Pharisees added hundreds of their own petty rules and regulations to God's holy laws, and then they tried to force people to follow these rules. These men claimed to know God's will in every detail of life.

There are still religious leaders today who add rules and regulations to God's Word, causing much confusion among believers. It is idolatry to claim that your interpretation of God's Word is as important as God's Word itself.

It is especially dangerous to set up unbiblical standards for *others* to follow. Instead, look to Christ for guidance about your own behavior, and let him lead others in the details of their lives.

Why the Pharisees joined Sadducees to fight Jesus

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The Pharisees stinginess

Luke 11:41

So give to the needy what you greedily possess, and you will be clean all over.

The Pharisees loved to think of themselves as “clean,” but their stinginess toward God and the poor proved that they were not as clean as they thought. How do you use the resources God has entrusted to you?

Are you generous in meeting the needs around you? Your generosity reveals much about the purity of your heart.

Pride made the Pharisees lose reason.

John 7:51

"Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?" he asked.

This passage offers additional insight into Nicodemus, the Pharisee who visited Jesus at night (John 3). Apparently Nicodemus had become a secret believer. Since most of the Pharisees hated Jesus and wanted to kill him, Nicodemus risked his reputation and high position when he spoke up for Jesus.

His statement was bold, and the Pharisees immediately became suspicious. After Jesus' death, Nicodemus brought spices for his body (John 19:39). That is the last time he is mentioned in Scripture.

Nicodemus confronted the Pharisees with their failure to keep their own laws. The Pharisees were losing ground—the temple guards came back impressed by Jesus (John 7:46), and one of the Pharisees' own, Nicodemus, was defending him.

With their hypocritical motives being exposed and their prestige slowly eroding, they began to move to protect themselves. Pride would interfere with their ability to reason, and soon they would become obsessed with getting rid of Jesus just to save face. What was good and right no longer mattered.

Jesus was unafraid to face the Pharisees

Luke 14:1-6

One Sabbath day Jesus was in the home of a leader of the Pharisees. The people were watching him closely, because there was a man there whose arms and legs were swollen.

Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in religious law, "Well, is it permitted in the law to heal people on the Sabbath day, or not?"

When they refused to answer, Jesus touched the sick man and healed him and sent him away.

Then he turned to them and asked, "Which of you doesn't work on the Sabbath? If your son or your cow falls into a pit, don't you proceed at once to get him

out?" Again they had no answer.

Earlier Jesus had been invited to a Pharisee's home for discussion (Luke 7:36). This time a prominent Pharisee invited Jesus to his home specifically to trap him into saying or doing something for which he could be arrested.

It may be surprising to see Jesus on the Pharisees' turf after he had denounced them so many times. But he was not afraid to face them, even though he knew that their purpose was to trick him into breaking their laws.

Luke, the physician, identifies this man's disease—he was suffering from *dropsy*, an abnormal accumulation of fluid in bodily tissues and cavities.

The Pharisees have a smug attitude toward sinners.

Luke 15:32

We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!" "

In Jesus' story, the older brother represented the Pharisees, who were angry and resentful that sinners were being welcomed into God's kingdom. After all, the Pharisees must have thought, we have sacrificed and done *so much* for God.

How easy it is to resent God's gracious forgiveness of others whom we consider to be far worse sinners than ourselves. But when our self-righteousness gets in the way of rejoicing when others come to Jesus, we are no better than the Pharisees.

The Pharisees love of money.

Luke 16:14

The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, naturally scoffed at all this.

Because the Pharisees loved money, they took exception to Jesus' teaching. We live in an age that measures people's worth by how much money they make. Do we laugh at Jesus' warnings against serving Money?

Parable of Pharisee and tax collector

Luke 18:11-14

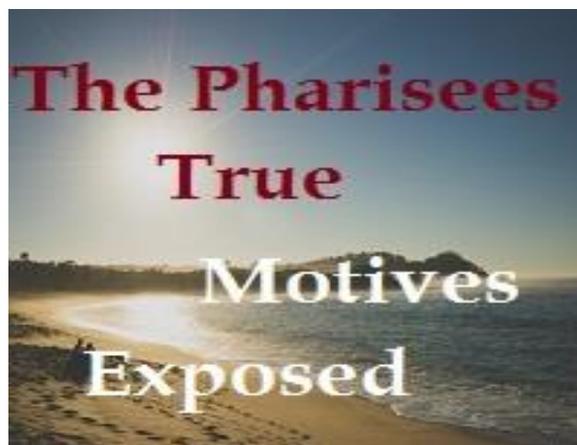
The proud Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector over there! For I never cheat, I don't sin, I don't commit adultery, I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.'

I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For the proud will be humbled, but the humble will be honored."

The Pharisee did not go to the temple to pray to God but to announce to all within earshot how good he was. The tax collector went recognizing his sin and begging for mercy. Self-righteousness is dangerous. It leads to pride, causes a person to despise others, and prevents him or her from learning anything from God. The tax collector's prayer should be our prayer because we all need God's mercy every day.

Chapter 4



The Pharisees true motives exposed

Matthew 21:23-27

When Jesus returned to the Temple and began teaching, the leading priests and other leaders came up to him. They demanded, "By whose authority did you drive out the merchants from the Temple? Who gave you such authority?"

"I'll tell you who gave me the authority to do these things if you answer one question," Jesus replied. "Did John's baptism come from heaven or was it merely human?"

They talked it over among themselves. "If we say it was from heaven, he will ask why we didn't believe him. But if we say it was merely human, we'll be mobbed, because the people think he was a prophet." So they finally replied, "We don't know."

And Jesus responded, "Then I won't answer your question either."

The Pharisees demanded to know where Jesus got his authority. If Jesus said his authority came from God, they would accuse him of blasphemy.

If he said that he was acting on his own authority, the crowds would be convinced that the Pharisees had the greater authority.

But Jesus answered them with a seemingly unrelated question that exposed their real motives. They didn't really want an answer to their question; they only wanted to trap him. Jesus showed that the Pharisees wanted the truth only if it supported their own views and causes.

Mark 12:38-40

Here are some of the other things he taught them at this time: "Beware of these teachers of religious law! For they love to parade in flowing robes and to have everyone bow to them as they walk in the marketplaces.

And how they love the seats of honor in the synagogues and at banquets.

But they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property, and then, to cover up the kind of people they really are, they make long prayers in public.

Because of this, their punishment will be the greater."

Jesus again exposed the religious leaders' impure motives. The teachers of the law received no pay, so they depended on the hospitality extended by devout Jews. Some of them used this custom to exploit people, cheating the poor out of everything they had and taking advantage of the rich.

Through their pious actions they hoped to gain status, recognition, and respect.

Jesus warned against trying to make a good impression. These teachers of the law were religious hypocrites who had no love for God. True followers of Christ are not distinguished by showy spirituality.

Reading the Bible, praying in public, or following church rituals can be phony if the motive for doing them is to be noticed or honored. Let your actions be consistent with your beliefs. Live for Christ, even when no one is looking.

The punishment for these teachers of the law would be especially severe because as teachers they were responsible for shaping the faith of the people. But they saddled people with petty rules while they lived greedily and deceitfully. Their behavior oppressed and misled the very people they were supposed to lead.

The Pharisees opposed Rome's occupation.

Matthew 22:15-17

Then the Pharisees met together to think of a way to trap Jesus into saying something for which they could accuse him.

They decided to send some of their disciples, along with the supporters of Herod, to ask him this question: "Teacher, we know how honest you are. You teach about the way of God regardless of the consequences. You are impartial and don't play favorites.

Now tell us what you think about this: Is it right to pay taxes to the Roman government or not?"

The Pharisees, a religious group, opposed the Roman occupation of Palestine. The Herodians, a political party, supported Herod Antipas and the policies instituted by Rome.

Normally these two groups were bitter enemies, but here they united against Jesus. Thinking they had a foolproof plan to corner him, together their representatives asked Jesus about paying Roman taxes.

If Jesus agreed that it was right to pay taxes to Caesar, the Pharisees would say he was opposed to God, the only King they recognized. If Jesus said the taxes should not be paid, the Herodians would hand him over to Herod on the charge of rebellion.

In this case the Pharisees were not motivated by love for God's laws, and the Herodians were not motivated by love for Roman justice. Jesus' answer exposed their evil motives and embarrassed them both.

The Jews were required to pay taxes to support the Roman government.

They hated this taxation because the money went directly into Caesar's treasury, where some of it went to support the pagan temples and decadent life-style of the Roman aristocracy.

Caesar's image on the coins was a constant reminder of Israel's subjection to Rome.

The Pharisees tried to prioritize God's laws.

Matthew 22:35-40

One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the Law of Moses?"

Jesus replied, "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.'

This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

The Pharisees, who had classified over 600 laws, often tried to distinguish the more important from the less important. So one of them, an “expert in the law,” asked Jesus to identify the most important law. Jesus quoted from Deut. 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

By fulfilling these two commands, a person keeps all the others. They summarize the Ten Commandments and the other Old Testament moral laws.

The Pharisees misunderstandings about the Messiah

Matthew 22:41-45

Then, surrounded by the Pharisees, Jesus asked them a question: [42] "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They replied, "He is the son of David."

Jesus responded, "Then why does David, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, call him Lord? For David said,

'The Lord said to my Lord,
Sit in honor at my right hand
Until I humble your enemies beneath your feet.'

Since David called him Lord, how can he be his son at the same time?"

The Pharisees loved their position more than God.

Matthew 23:5-7

"Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear extra-long tassels on their robes.

And how they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the most prominent seats in the synagogue! They enjoy the attention they get on the streets, and they enjoy being called 'Rabbi.'

The Pharisees supported a religion of deeds.

Matthew 23:15

Yes, how terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. For you cross-land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn him into twice the son of hell as you yourselves are.

The Pharisees' converts were attracted to Pharisees, not to God. By getting caught up in the details of their additional laws and regulations, they completely missed God, to whom the laws pointed.

A religion of deeds puts pressure on people to surpass others in what they know and do. Thus, a hypocritical teacher was likely to have students who were even more hypocritical. We must make sure we are not creating Pharisees by emphasizing outward obedience at the expense of inner renewal.

The Pharisees took precautions in guarding Jesus' tomb.

Matthew 27:66

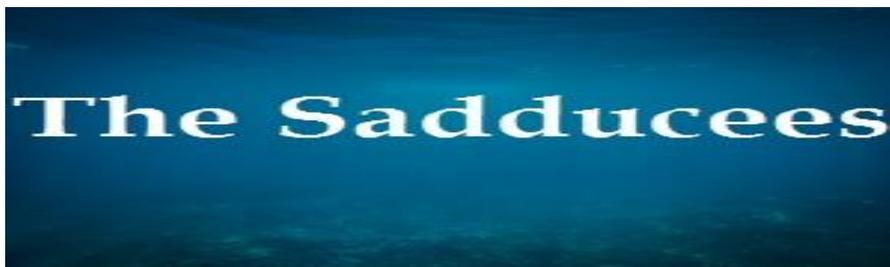
So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.

The Pharisees were so afraid of Jesus' predictions about his resurrection that they made sure the tomb was thoroughly sealed and guarded. Because the tomb was hewn out of rock in the side of a hill, there was only one entrance.

Stringing a cord across the stone that was rolled over the entrance sealed the tomb.

The cord was sealed at each end with clay. But the religious leaders took a further precaution, asking that guards be placed at the tomb's entrance.

Chapter 5



How the Sadducees differed from Pharisees.

Matthew 3:7

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to be baptized, he denounced them. "You brood of snakes!" he exclaimed. "Who warned you to flee God's coming judgment?"

Matthew 16:1

One day the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus' claims by asking him to show them a miraculous sign from heaven.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were Jewish religious leaders of two different parties, and their views were diametrically opposed on many issues. The Pharisees carefully followed their religious rules and traditions, believing that this was the way to God.

They also believed in the authority of all Scripture and in the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees accepted only the books of Moses as Scripture and did not believe in life after death. In Jesus, however, these two groups had a common enemy, and they joined forces to try to kill him. For more information on the Pharisees and Sadducees, see the charts in Matthew 3:7 and Mark 2:16.

The Pharisees and Sadducees demanded a sign *from heaven*. They tried to explain away Jesus' other miracles as sleight of hand, coincidence, or use of evil power, but they believed that only God could do a sign in the sky.

This, they were sure, would be a feat beyond Jesus' power. Although Jesus could have easily impressed them, he refused. He knew that even a miracle in the sky would not convince them he was the Messiah because they had already decided not to believe in him.

The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection.

Matthew 22:23

That same day some Sadducees stepped forward—a group of Jews who say there is no resurrection after death. They posed this question:

After the Pharisees and Herodians had failed to trap Jesus, the Sadducees smugly stepped in to try. They did not believe in the resurrection because the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy) has no direct teaching on it.

The Pharisees had never been able to come up with a convincing argument from the Pentateuch for the resurrection, and the Sadducees thought they had trapped Jesus for sure. But Jesus was about to show them otherwise (see Matthew 22:31-32 for Jesus' answer).

The Sadducees asked Jesus about eternity.

Matthew 22:29-30

Jesus replied, "Your problem is that you don't know the Scriptures, and you don't know the power of God. For when the dead rise, they won't be married. They will be like the angels in heaven.

The Sadducees asked Jesus what marriage would be like in heaven. Jesus said it was more important to understand God's power than know what heaven will be like.

In every generation and culture, ideas of eternal life tend to be based on images and experiences of present life. Jesus answered that these faulty ideas are caused by ignorance of God's Word.

We must not make up our own ideas about eternity and heaven by thinking of it and God in human terms. We should concentrate more on our relationship with God than about what heaven will look like. Eventually we will find out, and it will be far beyond our greatest expectations.

The Sadducees tested Jesus with a question.

Luke 20:37-38

But now, as to whether the dead will be raised—even Moses proved this when he wrote about the burning bush. Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, he referred to the Lord as 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'

So he is the God of the living, not the dead. They are all alive to him."

The Sadducees came to Jesus with a trick question. Not believing in the resurrection, they wanted Jesus to say something they could refute.

Even so, Jesus did not ignore or belittle their question. He answered it, and then he went beyond it to the real issue.

When people ask you tough religious questions—"How can a loving God allow people to starve?" "If God knows what I'm going to do, do I have any free choice?"—follow Jesus' example. First answer the question to the best of your ability; then look for the real issue—hurt over a personal tragedy, for example, or difficulty in making a decision.

Often the spoken question is only a test, not of your ability to answer hard questions, but of your willingness to listen and care.

The Sadducees felt threatened by Peter and John.

Acts 4:2-3

They were very disturbed that Peter and John were claiming, on the authority of Jesus, that there is a resurrection of the dead.

They arrested them and, since it was already evening, jailed them until morning.

Peter and John spoke to the people during the afternoon prayer time. The Sadducees moved in quickly to investigate. Because they did not believe in the resurrection, they were understandably disturbed with what the apostles were saying.

Peter and John were refuting one of their fundamental beliefs and thus threatening their authority as religious teachers.

Even though the nation was under Roman rule, the Sadducees had almost unlimited power over the temple grounds. Thus they were able to arrest Peter and John for no other reason than teaching something that contradicted their beliefs.

Not often will sharing the gospel send us to jail as it did Peter. Still, we run risks in trying to win others to Christ. We might be willing to face a night in jail if it would bring 5,000 people to Christ, but shouldn't we also be willing to suffer for the sake of even one?

What do you risk in witnessing—rejection, persecution? Whatever the risks, realize that nothing done for God is ever wasted.

References:

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Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print

