

Historical Backgrounds of NT

Jewish Factions

The pendulum swings

- Ancient Jews fell to idolatry.
- First Century Jews revered the Law, but mixed it with human traditions that proved just as fatal as idolatry.
- The case may be made that they turned human traditions and pride into idolatry.

I. Pharisees

Pharisee – separated?

- Separatists - avoid heathen, publicans, sinners, and indifferent Jewish multitudes.
 - John 7:49 (Is.65:5)
- NT, Josephus, and rabbinic literature depict Pharisees as most concerned with accurate interpretation of Law.

Pharisees emphasize 'Law and tradition'

1. Knowing that law must be interpreted and applied, Pharisees gave divine authority to the interpretation and application of the law.
2. "It is more culpable to teach against the ordinances of the scribes than against the Torah itself" (Sanhedrin II.3).

Pharisee vs Sadducee

1. Sadducees argued that priests were to give authoritative application of Law, but their instructions were not Law.
2. Pharisees said the Law had been given to all Israel, not just priests, and therefore all who were competent could interpret it.

Pharisee and Scribes

- Scribes were not identical with Pharisees, but they go together
 - Official scholars of the Law (Ezr.7:6)

“A scholar class dedicated to the supremacy of the twofold Law, the Written and the Unwritten” –Rivkin

- Copyists of Law; regarded themselves as its preservers & protectors

The Great Synagogue (1/3)

- Members of the **Great Synagogue**, or the **Great Assembly**, are designated in the Mishnah as those representatives of the Law who occupied a place in the chain of tradition between the Prophets and the earliest scholars known by name.
- Paraphrased: "Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi received from the Prophets; and the men of the Great Synagogue received from Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi."

The Great Synagogue (2/3)

- Members of the Great Synagogue taught:

“Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the law’ (Aboth 1.1).

- Oral law was finally reduced to writing: Mishnah; Talmud.
- Actually replaces Word with human tradition. Dt.4:2

The Great Synagogue (3/3)

- Divine Name was not pronounced except in connection w. temple service (benediction, Nu.6:24-26).
- For Pharisees, this was a fence around the Law – avoided taking Name in vain (Ex.20:7).
- Yet, Mk.7 – disobedient to His Law (Mt.5:20). Feigned respect.

Sabbath day's journey

- “The rules for the sabbath are like mountains hanging by air, for Scripture is scanty and the rules many” –Hagigah 1:8
- Ex.16:29, *his own place . . .* (forbids travel on Sabbath)
- They could stretch this distance by depositing possessions w/in the 2000 cubit distance from home...
- Sabbath rules . . . [Mt.23:23-24]

Applications of Law are binding when . . .

- ...backed by Torah itself by means of oral law (tradition of elders, Mk.7:3,5) – equally authoritative w. written law
- Cf. Dt.17:8-11
- Pharisees believed nation as a whole was a priestly people – same rules of ritual purity intended for priests in Lev. apply to them
- No wonder they show concern for foods

Jesus and Pharisees agreed on many particulars...

- He embraced authority of Law, Mk.1: 40-45; 14:12; etc.
- He enjoyed friendly contacts with Pharisees – Mk.12:28-34

Jesus and Pharisees disagreed often

- He associated with sinners, Mk.2:15-17
- He did not keep Sabbath priorities of Pharisees, Mk.2:23-3:6
- He neglected ritual purity, Mk.7:1-23
- He differed with Pharisees over divorce, Mk.10:2-9

After AD 70

- 'Pharisee' and 'Scribe' drop out of common usage; replaced by 'rabbi' whose approach to Law was the same.
- There is less emphasis on parties or factions in Judaism.
- Spiritual leaders who survived destruction of Jerusalem gathered at Jamnia to study Law.
- Synagogue became foundation of Judaism.

Modern Revival of Issues: SCENI

1. Some ridicule biblical authority, forced conclusions, and even deny plain teachings. E.g.: hell.
2. Evil influence (Mt.23:15)

I. Pharisees

II. Sadducees

Sadducees: related to Hebrew 'to be righteous'

- Usually connected with Zadok (2 Sm. 8:17; 1 K.2:35).
- Not all Sadducees were priests.
- Some members of Qumran community were priests of the Zadokite line.
- Sadduceean high priests controlled temple, Ac.4:1; 5:17.

Sadducees: nasty and arrogant

(Jn.11)

- Rejected OT concepts (Ac.23:6-8) AND oral law of Pharisees
- Held their own traditions, but did not make them equal with Law
- They objected to unwritten traditions, because they preferred to have the freedom to interpret the Scriptures as **they** wished

Josephus: they hated traditions of Pharisees, accepting only 'written law'

- Because of this expression and because Jesus limited Himself to Pentateuch in debating them, 'church fathers' concluded that Sadducees accepted only the Law of Moses as Scripture
- Josephus most likely meant they opposed unwritten traditions
- Talmud: Sadducees were attacked from other books of Bible and used them in their replies

Sadducees – Pharisees debate over the calendar, Lv.23:15-16

- **Sadducees:** 'Sabbath' meant weekly Sabbath, and so the feast of Weeks always fell on a Sunday.
- **Pharisees:** 'Sabbath' was first day of Passover, so feast of Weeks could actually come on any day.

Sadducees – resurrection,

Mt.22:23-33

- Pharisees proved resurrection from Exodus 15:1 – ‘will sing’ (fut.), Rab. Meir.
- Sadducees rejected concept of immortal soul & resurrection, Ac.4:1-3; 23:6-8.
- Jesus: Ex.3:6 –
 - Quotes God Himself
 - Threefold repetition: He is God **only** of **the living**
 - In this context, **Abraham, Isaac, Jacob**

Sadducees – God and man

- Sadducees picture God and humans as independent and distant, both in this life and the next.
- Rewards for righteousness were **in this life**, so they were keen on wealth and influence as evidence of divine blessing.
- After AD 70, Sadducees disappear from history.

I. Pharisees

II. Pharisees

III. Politics Makes
Strange Bedfellows

Jesus upset both Pharisees and Sadducees

- Pharisees: Mt.23:23, 25, challenged traditions, exposed hypocrisy
- Sadducees: Mt.21:12-13, entered their Temple, exposed their racket, embarrassed them before multitudes
 - Both sects envied Him, Mt.27:18
 - Cooperated to kill Him, Jn.18:3

So What?

1. No denominations in NT times . . . but variety of false teachers. Mt.24:5
2. These attacked Christians. Ep.5:6; 1 Tim.6:20
3. Christians had to exercise caution. Ac.17:11; 1 Jn.4:1-6; 2 Jn.9-11
 - Peter and Barnabas? Gal.2
 - Apostates making apostates – 2 Pt.2

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4. Christians could not believe everything they heard. Col.2:4-18
5. Christian's only defense: Jn.17; Ac.20