

I. Frustration
(1-3)

a. The Anger (1-2)

1Chr 9:11; 2Chr
 31:13; Neh 11:11

b. The Arrest (3)

II. Multiplication
(4)

III. Interrogation
(5-22)

a. The Challenge
(5-12)

Mark 13:9-11 }
 Luke 12:8-12 }
 Luke 21:10-19 }

The resurrection of Jesus is the only event that could explain the boldness of Peter as compared to 50 days earlier }

b. The Conference
(13-17)

c. The Charge
(18-22)

Satan begins his campaign against the Church (ch 4-6)

¹And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the **Sadducees** came upon them, ²greatly **annoyed** because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

³And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.

⁴**But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.**

⁵On the next day their *rulers and elders and scribes* gathered together in Jerusalem,

⁶with **Annas** the high priest and **Caiaphas** and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family.

⁷And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, **"By what power or by what name did you do this?"**

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders,

⁹if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed,

¹⁰let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well.

¹¹This Jesus is the stone that was **rejected by you**, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.

¹²And **there is salvation in no one else**, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

¹³Now when they saw the **boldness** of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

¹⁴But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.

¹⁵But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another,

¹⁶saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and **we cannot deny it.**

¹⁷But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name."

¹⁸So they called them and charged them **not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.**

¹⁹But Peter and John answered them, **"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge,**

²⁰for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

Persecution is a normal part of being a Christian, but...

Opposition cannot stop the church!

The Sanhedrin; this was the highest court of the Jewish nation.

Luke 3:1-2
 John 18:12-14

Peter stands in the same place as Jesus did 50 days earlier:
 -**Luke 22:54-71**

Psalm 118:22
 Matt 21:42

"Uneducated" - men without technical training in the professional rabbinical schools
 -*John 7:15*

IV. Supplication
(23-30)

The believers recognize God's sovereignty in dealing with His enemies...

A. The Past (25-28):

*-David wrote of it
 -Psalm 2:1-2*

-Disciples witnessed it

B. The Present (29-30)

Their future preaching must be done in open violation of the highest court.

V. Demonstration
(31)

VI. Cooperation
(32-35) 2:44-45

*The Apostles still managed everything
 -Acts 6:1-6*

VII. Exemplification
(36-37)

²¹And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened.

²²For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

This man had been lame since birth...
 -Acts 3:2

δεσπότης - Lord, Master, Absolute Ruler

Who were these "friends?"
 -v. 31

²³When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

They addressed God with reverence and respect, recognizing his great power
 -Acts 1:14,24

²⁴And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, <- Psalm 146:6

²⁵who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? <- Jews

Romans ↑ Pilate; Sanhedrin ↓

Herod →

²⁶The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'

One of the keys to the success of the early church.

²⁷—for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,

²⁸to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. <- Acts 2:23

²⁹And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,

They prayed for boldness, not vindication
 -Rom 12:14-21

³⁰while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." <- Acts 3:16

³¹And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

The prayer is answered immediately

³²Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

Private property had not been abolished.

³³And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

³⁴There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold

However, they regarded their possessions as not for them alone but to be used for all as need required.

³⁵and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

³⁶Thus **Joseph**, who was also called by the apostles **Barnabas** (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,

Paul and Barnabas visited Cyprus on their first missionary journey
 -Acts 13:4

³⁷sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Persecution

Romans 8:12-17 (ESV)

¹²So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Captain of the Temple

I Chron 9:11 (ESV)

and Azariah the son of Hilkiah, son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, the chief officer of the house of God;

II Chron 31:13 (ESV)

while Jehiel, Azariah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath, and Benaiah were overseers assisting Conaniah and Shimei his brother, by the appointment of Hezekiah the king and Azariah the chief officer of the house of God.

Nehemiah 11:11 (ESV)

Seraiah the son of Hilkiah, son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, ruler of the house of God,

Saducees (and Pharisees)

Matthew 22:23-33 (ESV)

²³ The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, ²⁴ saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.' ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ So too the second and third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ After them all, the woman died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her."

²⁹ But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹ And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." ³³ And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

Acts 23:6-10 (ESV)

⁶ Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." ⁷ And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. ⁹ Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" ¹⁰ And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.

Acts 15:5 (ESV) - But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

Annas & Caiphas

Luke 3:1-2 (ESV)

¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

John 18:12-14 (ESV)

¹²So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

Jesus and Peter – 50 Days Earlier

Luke 22:54-71 (ESV)

⁵⁴Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. ⁵⁶Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." ⁵⁷But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." ⁵⁸And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." ⁵⁹And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." ⁶⁰But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the

rooster crowed. ⁶¹And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." ⁶²And he went out and wept bitterly.

⁶³Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him.

⁶⁴They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?"

⁶⁵And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him.

⁶⁶When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, ⁶⁷"If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, ⁶⁸and if I ask you, you will not answer. ⁶⁹But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." ⁷⁰So they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." ⁷¹Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips."

Holy Spirit Giving Words During Trials

Mark 13:9-11 (ESV)

⁹But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. ¹⁰And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. ¹¹And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

Luke 12:8-12 (ESV)

⁸And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, ⁹but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. ¹⁰And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. ¹¹And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, ¹²for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

Luke 21:10-19 (ESV)

¹⁰Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹²But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers[c] and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to

death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all for my name's sake. ¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your lives.

Peter's Response

Psalm 118:22 (ESV) - The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

Matthew 21:42 (ESV)

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

Conference

John 7:15 (ESV) - The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?"

Supplication

"Sovereign Lord" - Greek Word: δεσπότης - Transliterated Word: despôtês

Definition: lord, master:--

List of English Words and Number of Times Used: Lord (3), Master (3), masters (4).
—NASB Greek-Hebrew Dictionary

Acts 4:18 (ESV) - So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Acts 1:14, 24-26 (ESV)

¹⁴All these **with one accord** were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

²⁴And they prayed and said, "**You, Lord, who know the hearts of all**, show which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." ²⁶And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Psalm 146:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord his God,
⁶ who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them,
who keeps faith forever;

Psalm 2:1-2 (ESV)

- ¹ Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
² The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and against his anointed,

Acts 2:23 (ESV) - this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Romans 12:14-21 (ESV)

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited. ¹⁷Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Acts 3:16 (ESV) - And his name--by faith in his name--has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

Cooperation

Acts 2:44-45 (ESV)

⁴⁴And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Acts 4:4 (ESV)

⁴But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

Acts 6:1-6 (ESV)

¹Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ²And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ⁵And what they said pleased the whole

gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

Exemplification

Acts 13:4 (ESV) - So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Appendix – Encyclopedia Articles

SANHEDRIN (Greek συνέδριον, *synedrion*; Hebrew סְנֵדְרִין, *sanhedrin*). The supreme council in charge of Jewish affairs in Roman Palestine.

While the exact makeup and nature of the Jewish governing body in first-century Palestine is uncertain, the varying depictions of the Sanhedrin reveal a group consisting of priests and religious teachers who meet to decide on legal matters with religious, political, and social ramifications.

Terminology

The label “Sanhedrin” is based on the Greek word συνέδριον (*synedrion*), which is a general word for “council” and can be used for local governing assemblies as well as for the high council in Jerusalem. The ancient sources apply a variety of Greek and Hebrew terms to describe Jewish governing bodies. None are used consistently or in a technical sense. In addition to *synedrion*, both the New Testament and Flavius Josephus apparently use the terms γερουσία (*gerousia*) (Acts 5:21), βουλή (*boulē*) (Mark 15:43; Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.331; *Antiquities* 20.10–14), and πρεσβυτέριον (*presbyterion*) (Luke 22:66) interchangeably to refer to more or less the same entity.

In biblical Hebrew, the various terms for an assembly or council include סֹד (sod) and עֵדָה (*edah*). Rabbinic texts prefer the term בֵּית דִּין (*beith din*, “house of judgment”), but also use כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוֹלָה (*keneseth haggedolah*, “the Great Assembly”) and חֵבֶר (*chever*, “association”) to refer to their governing assembly in charge of deciding Jewish legal matters. The history of the Sanhedrin is linked to the use of these terms in the Jewish sources of the Graeco-Roman period (Grabbe, “Sanhedrin,” 16–19). However, there are also some problems in establishing a direct link, at least, among some of them (Goodblatt, *Monarchic Principle*, 128). It should also be noted that the term *synedrion* is sometimes used by Luke and other authors of his time to refer specifically to the “courtroom” of the Jewish council (Sanders, *Jews*, 4–5). Hebrew סְנֵדְרִין (*sanhedrin*) is attested in rabbinic literature only and is a Greek loan word.

Biblical Significance

In Matthew 5:22, Jesus refers to a person’s accountability to the local judicial council. He also warns His disciples about being handed over to the courts or councils in Matt 10:17 (compare Mark 13:9). Most of the references to the Sanhedrin in the New Testament come in the context of trials, mainly the trial of Jesus in the Gospels and of the apostles in Acts. The Jewish religious leaders sought an opportunity to bring Jesus to trial (Mark 11:18). In John 11:45–53 their concerns appear to be based on fear of a popular uprising that will bring the wrath of Rome down on them. In these trial contexts, the purpose of the Sanhedrin appears to be maintaining order in internal Jewish affairs, keeping people in line to prevent deadly clashes with the Roman authorities. In Acts, Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin and commanded to stop teaching and healing in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:5–22). The council again questions the apostles, where it appears

the high priest presides over the Sanhedrin and the group consists of prominent leaders from both the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Acts 5:27–40). When the Apostle Paul is brought before the Sanhedrin, he exploits the mixed nature of the council by setting the two main groups against each other in theological debate (Acts 22:30–23:10).

The Composition of the Sanhedrin

The historical sources for the Sanhedrin consist of the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, the New Testament, and rabbinic literature. Unfortunately, the precise makeup and authority of the group or groups governing Jewish affairs in first-century Palestine are uncertain. The earliest evidence (Josephus and the New Testament) is inconsistent and vague in its depiction of the official authorities. Scholars have attempted to explain the variety in the evidence by postulating two or more official councils. The most common division is the theory of two Sanhedrins: a political one concerned with secular issues and a religious one concerned with issues of religious law. This division, however, is artificial and unlikely, based on a modern distinction between secular and religious facets of life. In ancient Jewish society, religion and politics were thoroughly woven into the fabric of Jewish daily life. There was no distinction between civil, criminal, and religious matters, and the same high council likely dealt with all of them.

Because the existence of the *gerousia* is better attested in contemporary Jewish sources and is therefore not generally questioned, scholars usually rely on these sources when attempting to determine the composition of the Sanhedrin. It was claimed that the *gerousia* was to some extent a Seleucid innovation established to “control” the powers of the high priest (Brutti, “Council of Elders,” 171–81). It has been suggested that this body was composed of “principal priests, the rich lay nobility, the great landowners and heads of clans,” and was headed by a high priest (Hengel, *Judaism*, I, 26); or, alternatively, that it was “a non-institutionalized oligarchy of ‘elders’ alongside the high priest” (Goodblatt, *Monarchic Principle*, 99).

The most common opinion is that the Judaeen Sanhedrin consisted of the elders of various sociopolitical Jewish classes, both priestly and nonpriestly. At least according to the New Testament and Josephus, the Sanhedrin was closely related to chief priests, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees, the latter being probably a minority (Mason, “Chief Priests,” 175–77).

The Role of the Sanhedrin

In rabbinic Judaism, the Sanhedrin was the official assembly of the rabbis who made decisions on matters of Jewish law. This later Sanhedrin was dominated by the ideological descendants of the first-century Pharisees and appears to have been placed in charge of Jewish internal affairs by Rome. The later rabbinic model of a group deciding matters of internal Jewish *halakhah* (religious law) has often been retrojected back on the first-century Sanhedrin. It was common for cities and people groups under Roman authority to have their own local councils to decide legislative and judicial matters. The assembly could be a regular permanent governing body in the city, or it could be an informal group that convened as needed. The Jerusalem Sanhedrin seems

to be the latter type, an ad hoc group of prominent religious leaders including priests and Pharisees. This council had wide-ranging influence on political, legal, judicial, and religious affairs.

The powers of the Judaeen Sanhedrin varied over the last centuries of Judaea. Three closely connected factors played an important role in determining these powers:

1. Whenever Judaea enjoyed a degree of national autonomy or even independence, native institutions—including those of the Sanhedrin—might include administrative and political powers as well as religious ones. However, during most of this period, Judaea was under the rule of foreign empires whose representatives would often live in Jerusalem and exert military and certain political powers. Under these circumstances, the members of the Sanhedrin enjoyed less authority. The same seems to have been especially true under the Herodian and Roman rulers. Hence, during most of the first century BC and up to the year AD 70, when the Jerusalem temple was destroyed, the members of the Sanhedrin had authority predominantly over religious matters only.
2. The Sanhedrin’s powers greatly depended on the actual authority exercised by the Jerusalem high priests, whose powers were conditioned by the political circumstances in which they lived. In a way, the fate of the Sanhedrin depended much on the position of the high priest. It is not surprising that New Testament authors and sometimes also Josephus (e.g., *Antiquities* 14.163–84) present the Sanhedrin as being chaired by the high priest.
3. The powers of the Sanhedrin, just as those of the high priests, extended over the entire Jerusalem temple community. This meant that the Palestinian Jews who lived outside the administrative borders of Judaea (e.g., Galilee, Transjordan) but who felt attached to the Jerusalem temple were subject to the religious jurisdiction of the high priest and his Sanhedrin (Babota, *Institution*, 43–44). Thus the extent of this jurisdiction varied over time as the extent of this Jewish temple community varied.

Because of these three variables, one cannot clearly define the history of the Sanhedrin with regard to its juridical status and powers (for some problems, see Goodblatt, *Monarchic Principle*, 129). It has even been suggested that “the Sanhedrin was not a regular political council at all, that it met only at the request of the High Priest” (Goodman, *Ruling Class*, 114). A more in-depth discussion of this possibility can be found in McLaren, *Power*, 213–23. It should also be stated that there existed also local bodies referred to as *gerousias* or *synedrions*, which had jurisdiction over certain cities or regions but in minor issues only (Grabbe, “Sanhedrin,” 17).

Therefore, during the Graeco-Roman period, it is likely that the role of the Sanhedrin was mainly limited to affairs that pertained to the Jerusalem temple community—in and outside Judaea—and its (religious) laws.

Selected Resources for Further Study

Babota, Vasile. *The Institution of the Hasmonean High Priesthood*. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 165. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

- Brown, Raymond E. *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*. New York: Doubleday, 1999.
- Brutti, Maria. “The Council of Elders during the pre-Hasmonean Period.” *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 3, no. 2 (2009): 171–81.
- Catchpole, David R. *The Trial of Jesus: A Study in the Gospels and Jewish Historiography from 1770 to the Present Day*. Leiden: Brill, 1971.
- Goodblatt, David. *The Monarchic Principle: Studies in Jewish Self-Government in Antiquity*. Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 38. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994.
- Goodman, Martin. *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt against Rome AD 66–70*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Grabbe, L. Lester. “Sanhedrin, Sanhedriyyot, or Mere Invention?” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 39, no. 1 (2008): 1–19.
- Hengel, Martin. *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*. Translated by John Bowden. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974.
- Hoening, Sidney B. *The Great Sanhedrin: A Study of the Origin, Development, Composition, and Functions of the Bet Din ha-Gadol during the Second Jewish Commonwealth*. Philadelphia: Dropsie College, 1953.
- Mantel, Hugo. *Studies in the History of the Sanhedrin*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961.
- Mason, Steve. “Chief Priests, Sadducees, Pharisees and Sanhedrin.” Pages 115–77 in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*. Vol. 4 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*. Edited by Richard Bauckham. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.
- McLaren, James S. *Power and Politics in Palestine: The Jews and the Governing of Their Land, 100 BC-AD 70*. JSNT Supplement 63. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991.
- Quint, Emanuel B., and Neil S. Hecht. *Jewish Jurisprudence: Its Sources and Modern Applications*. New York: Harwood Academic, 1980.
- Saldarini, Anthony J. *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*. Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988.
- Sanders, T. Jack. *The Jews in Luke-Acts*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987.

DOUGLAS MANGUM AND VASILE BABOTA¹

SADDUCEES (Σαδδουκαῖος, *Saddoukaios*). One of the three main Jewish schools of thought during the Hellenistic (Hasmonean) and Roman eras. Sadducean writings are no longer extant; reconstructions are dependent on meager textual evidence from outside the movement. The Scriptures possessed supreme authority for the Sadducees, to the

¹ Mangum, D., & Babota, V. (2016). [Sanhedrin](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

exclusion of oral traditions from former generations. The Sadducees denied the resurrection and the existence of fate.

Recent scholarship has questioned earlier assumptions that the Sadducees were of aristocratic or priestly status (Goodman, “Place of the Sadducees”). Current debates also center on whether the Sadducees had their own traditions of interpretation (Regev, *Sadducees*; Sanders, *Judaism*, 333–35). The dates of their origin and demise as a movement remain shrouded in mystery.

Tentative Interpretations of the Name and Origin

Name

Of the various explanations for the name “Sadducees,” none has garnered a consensus or is without philological problems. One proposal derives “Sadducee” from the name of the Zadokites. The high priest Zadok served during the reigns of David and Solomon, and after Israel’s return from exile the high priests were limited to his descendants (2 Sam 15:24, 27, 29, 35; 17:15; 19:11; 1 Kgs 1:39; 1 Chr 6; 9:10–13; Ezek 44:15). This approach assumes a close connection between the Sadducees and the priests. A second explanation proposes that the name is derived from the Hebrew adjective “just” or “righteous” (צַדִּיק, *tsaddiq*). In a third option, the name was originally an ambiguous, allusive designation like the Dead Sea Scrolls’ “Wicked Priest” or “Seekers of Smooth Things.” The potential origin of the name in the preceding centuries is of little or no value for understanding the first-century AD Sadducees (Goodman, “Place of the Sadducees,” 141; Saldarini, *Pharisees*, 225–26).

Origin

Josephus’ claim that the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes existed “from the most ancient times” (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.11) is too general to be of value for dating the origins of the groups. The Sadducees may have originated during the Hasmonean era. Josephus narrates John Hyrcanus’ departure from the Pharisees to the Sadducees, which may indicate the ascendance of the Sadducean party (Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.288–98).

The Sadducees may be a priestly group associated with the Zadokite name and lineage (Stemberger, “Sadducees,” 430–31; Baumbach, “Sadducees,” 179–80). If so, the high priestly tenure of Zadok’s descendants lasted until Jason (175–172 BC) was replaced by Menelaus (171–161 BC). At that point, Onias IV led the Zadokites in establishing a new temple at Leontopolis in Egypt (Grabbe, *Judaism*, 266–67, 277–81). These events may have precipitated the Sadducee movement.

Unfortunately, any confidence in a second-century BC Hasmonean origin depends on Josephus, who appears to be largely ignorant of the third century BC. The Sadducees may well have been in existence prior to the Hasmonean period (Goodman, “Place of the Sadducees,” 141; Beckwith, “Pre-History,” 35–39).

Others have proposed that the Sadducees emerged as a movement under Herod the Great. When Herod began to rule, he reportedly selected a high priest from the Leontopolis temple—Simon, son of Boethus (or Boethus himself)—and the Sadducees

may have emerged from this family (Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.320–22; 19.297–98). This claim, however, is questionable (Saldarini, *Pharisees*, 225–26).

The group may have changed over time. The first-century AD Sadducees may well have been quite different from those of the preceding centuries.

Sources

Detailed descriptions of the Sadducees’ history and beliefs are not available from antiquity. The primary sources—the New Testament, Josephus, and rabbinic (especially Tannaitic [pre-AD 220]) writings—are not particularly descriptive and are from the perspective of outsiders who were generally opposed to the Sadducees. Attempts to relate the Sadducees to the Dead Sea Scroll community have not proved persuasive. According to Philip Davies, “We have as yet no certain connection between any of the [Dead Sea] texts and any of the Jewish parties known to us from other sources” (Davies, “Sadducees,” 135).

New Testament

The New Testament mentions the Sadducees 14 times on 8 different occasions. Matthew refers to the Sadducees the most among the Gospels (Matt 3:7; 16:1, 6, 11–12; 22:23, 34; compare Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27). In Matthew 3, John the Baptist rebukes the approaching Pharisees and Sadducees as a “brood of vipers” (Matt 3:7 ESV) and adds, “Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt 3:10 ESV). In Matthew 16:1 the Sadducees, again paired with the Pharisees, demand a heavenly sign (Matt 16:1–4). Jesus subsequently warns the disciples to be wary of the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt 16:5–12). In the synoptic tradition of Matt 22:23–34 / Mark 12:18–27 / Luke 20:27–40, a group of Sadducees question Jesus about the resurrection, a teaching that the Sadducees denied, according to the Gospel authors.

The book of Acts refers to the Sadducees in three passages (Acts 4:1; 5:17; 23:6–7); they number among the leaders of the people, and—in two of the passages—their rejection of the resurrection is prominent. These accounts need to be examined cautiously. In Acts 4:1, the Sadducees, along with the priests and the captain of the temple, arrest Peter and John. In this verse the Sadducees are a distinct group from the priests and the captain of the temple. Likewise, Acts 4:5–6 does not offer any indication that any of the priests were Sadducees. The Sadducees’ primary concern with Peter and John is their claim that the resurrection came through Jesus rather than in the teaching of a resurrection itself (Acts 4:2, 7). In Acts 5:17–18 the high priest and the Sadducees again arrest the apostles. Acts 5:17 does not identify the high priest as a Sadducee but simply states that Sadducees were with the high priest on this particular occasion. The final mention of the Sadducees, Acts 23:1–10, narrates Paul’s defense before the Jewish council. Paul takes advantage of the theological differences between the Pharisees and Sadducees regarding resurrection to aid in his defense.

Josephus

Josephus briefly mentions the Sadducees at six points in his writings. He lists the Sadducees as one of the three main Jewish schools of thought (Josephus, *Life*, 10–11;

Jewish War 2.119–66; *Antiquities* 13:171–73; 18.11–22) and refers to them in two other locations (*Antiquities* 13.293–98; 20.199–200). Saldarini maintains that “school of thought” is a better rendering than the more pejorative or potentially marginalizing “sect” for Josephus’ Greek term (αἵρεσις, *haireisis*), since the Sadducees represent a coherent, shared way of life (Saldarini, *Pharisees*, 123–27). The three schools, which existed side by side with their distinct interpretive traditions, represent only a portion of the vast diversity that existed under the broader umbrella of Judaism in this time period (Sanders, *Judaism*, 317).

Josephus reports that during his youth, he joined, for a time, each of the three major schools of Judaism—the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes (*Life* 10–11; see also *Jewish War* 2.119; *Antiquities* 13.171; 18.11), ultimately settling on the Pharisaic movement. Josephus does not appear to have extensive knowledge of the Sadducees; his comments on the movement are limited to contexts in which he compares the Sadducees to the other Jewish schools of thought (Stemberger, “Sadducees,” 428; Saldarini, *Pharisees*, 300). The brief descriptions of the Sadducees in Josephus are themselves telling; in the words of Baumbach, Josephus “was by no means without prejudice” (Baumbach, “Sadducees,” 173). He goes on, “In our attempt to represent the origin, history and essence of Sadduceeism through the writings of Josephus, it has been shown again and again how difficult such an undertaking is” (Baumbach, “Sadducees,” 186).

In *Antiquities* 18.11, Josephus claims that the three Jewish schools of thought existed “from the most ancient times”—perhaps as early as the Hasmoneans (*Antiquities* 13.288–98). In *Antiquities* 13.288–98 Josephus narrates events that took place when John Hyrcanus (135–104 BC) served as the high priest and political leader of Syria-Palestine. Hyrcanus, a member of the Pharisees, had invited their members to a banquet. At one point during the dinner, one of the Pharisees, Eleazar, requested that Hyrcanus give up the office of the high priest because his mother had been a captive under the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175–164 BC). The false accusation may have been an attempt to remove Hyrcanus’ religious authority and infuriated him (Regev, “Sadducees,” 34). Hyrcanus’ close friend Jonathan, a member of the Sadducees, took advantage of the situation and suggested that Eleazar’s viewpoint represented all the Pharisees. Hyrcanus demanded from the Pharisees a demonstration of their loyalty by punishing Eleazar with the death penalty. When the Pharisees refused (because their penal law interpretation was more lenient than the Sadducees’), Hyrcanus abandoned the Pharisee movement for the Sadducees. Thus, the Sadducees appear to have been active politically (VanderKam, *Introduction*, 28; Cohen, *From the Maccabees*, 144–45). On the other hand, since this is the only reference to the Sadducees prior to the Herodians, some have contended that the story is Josephus’ fabrication to explain the disgrace of the Pharisees under Hyrcanus (Stemberger, “Sadducees,” 430). These scholars would date the origin of the Sadducees neither to the third century BC (in view of Josephus’ ignorance of that century) nor to the second century BC Hasmoneans, but rather to the Herodian era.

Josephus describes the beliefs and behaviors of the Sadducees on various occasions (*Antiquities* 13.173, 297–98; 18.16–17; 20.199; *Jewish War* 2.164–66). He reports that

the Sadducees stressed free will and denied an afterlife: “The Sadducees, the second of the orders, do away with Fate altogether [compare *Antiquities* 13.171–73], and remove God beyond, not merely the commission, but the very sight, of evil. They maintain that man has the free choice of good or evil, and that it rests with each man’s will whether he follows the one or the other. As for persistence of the soul after death, penalties in the Underworld, and rewards, they will have none of them” (*Jewish War* 2.164–66, trans. Thackeray; Compare *Antiquities* 18.16).

In *Antiquities* 13.297; 18.16, Josephus states that the Sadducees, contrary to the position of the Pharisees, deemed valid only those regulations that were recorded in Scripture; the oral traditions handed down by former generations did not need to be observed (*Antiquities* 13.297). They may have accepted legal traditions of their own that were explicitly grounded in Moses’ law and the biblical witness (*Antiquities* 13.297; 18.16).

In terms of behavior, Josephus describes the Sadducees as, “even among themselves, rather boorish in their behavior, and in the intercourse with their peers are as rude as to aliens” (*Jewish War* 2.166, trans. Thackeray). He further accuses them of being “more heartless than any of the other Jews ... when they sit in judgment” (*Antiquities* 20.199; trans. Feldman, LCL).

While the Pharisees attracted the masses, according to Josephus, the Sadducees were only able to persuade a few rich families among the social elite (*Antiquities* 13.298; 18.17).

Rabbinic Literature

Rabbinic literature—the Mishnah (ca. AD 200), the Tosefta (ca. AD 250), the Jerusalem Talmud (ca. AD 400), and the Babylonian Talmud (ca. AD 500)—also refers to the Sadducees. The rabbinic authors descended from the Pharisaic movement and consequently describe the Sadducees very negatively, especially in comparison with the Pharisees (Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 262: “without religion or morality in later Talmudic literature”; Saldarini, *Pharisees*, 226–27, 299–300; Stemberger, “Sadducees,” 438–39). Rabbinic sources generally confuse the Sadducees with the Boethusians—an unknown priestly group likely emerging in the time of Herod the Great (Saldarini, *Pharisees*, 226–28; Goodman, “Place of the Sadducees,” 140). Tannaitic rabbinic materials (pre-AD 220) are of greater historical value than the later amoraic rabbinic materials (from the next few centuries) for historical reconstruction. Rabbinic materials that contrast the Sadducees with the Pharisees as distinct schools of thought are of greater value than those that talk about Sadducees alone, since the term could function as a generic designation for heretics (Goodman, “Place of the Sadducees,” 140).

Rabbinic descriptions of more than 20 Sadducean halakhic/legal differences from the Pharisees may be more historically reliable in view of similar controversies in the Qumran Temple Scroll (Stemberger, “Sadducees,” 439; Regev, “Sadducees,” 33; “The Sadducees, the Pharisees,” 126–40). The differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, as noted by the Tannaitic rabbis, relate to the Sabbath laws, calendar observances, sacrificial practices, purity laws, and the penal system (*m. ‘Erub.* 6:2; *m. Parah* 3:7; *m. Nid.* 4:2; *m. Mak.* 1:6; *m. Yadayim* 4:6, 7; Lauterbach, “A Significant

Controversy”; Stemberger, “Sadducees,” 437–40; Regev, “Sadducees,” 33; Grabbe, *Judaism*, 486).

Social Context

Josephus suggests that the Sadducees enjoyed the support of only a small percentage of the population, and it is not clear whether the Sadducees or their supporters tended to be among the most “wealthy” (*Antiquities* 13.297) or “highest standing” (*Antiquities* 18.17) of the populace. Josephus elsewhere uses this phrasing (highest standing or first in rank; πρώτους τοῖς ἀξιώμασι, *prōtous tois axiōmasi*) to mean prestige or reputation, and thus the language of *Antiquities* 18.17 may refer to the reputation of the Sadducees’ doctrine and teaching rather than to their social rank. In *Antiquities* 13.298, the Sadducees are said to have the support of the “wealthy” or “well-off” (εὐποροί, *euporoi*) during the Hasmonean period, but the passage says nothing of whether the Sadducees were themselves wealthy and nothing about their social status in the first century AD. In his writings, Josephus identifies only two Sadducees: the high priest Ananus ben Ananus (*Antiquities* 20.199–200; see also Acts 5:17) and the Hasmonean priest-king John Hyrcanus. He never claims that any of the Jewish philosophies were limited to a particular social group (Goodman, “Place of the Sadducees,” 142).

The primary evidence does not demonstrate the popular view that the Sadducees were of priestly origin. Even if the Sadducees were named after the high priest Zadok, the group need not have descended from priests. Neither Josephus nor the rabbis link the Sadducees to the priesthood (even though Josephus was himself a priest). *Antiquities* 20.199–200 identifies Ananus ben Ananus, the high priest at the trial of James the brother of Jesus, as a Sadducee and more “heartless” than all the Jews in trials. The passage nevertheless does not assume that the high priests were Sadducees (Goodman, “Place of the Sadducees,” 143). Pharisaic teachings structured the prayers and sacrifices at Jerusalem, which argues against most priests being Sadducees (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.15, 17).

Sadducean Teaching

A reconstruction of Sadducean belief is difficult, but primary sources identify four potential teachings:

1. The soul ceases to exist at death with no bodily resurrection (Matt 22:23–33; Mark 12:18–27; Luke 20:27–40; Acts 23:6–8; *Jewish War* 2.165; *Antiquities* 18.16).
2. The written Scriptures take priority, and any supplemental or oral traditions may have been rejected (*Antiquities* 13.297–98; 18.16). Teachings had to be justified explicitly from the biblical text. Although most scholars view the Sadducees as adhering strictly to the written Scriptures, others have contended that the Sadducees did indeed have oral interpretive traditions of their own and that the Pharisees adhered closely to the written Scriptures as well (Regev, *Sadducees*; Newman, 223–24). Some scholars have speculated that Sadducean rejection of oral tradition was an attempt to preserve their status as aristocratic priests, which could explain the emphasis on this life rather than an afterlife (Grabbe, *Judaism*, 487; Stemberger, “Sadducees,” 442; Saldarini, *Pharisees*, 304).

3. Their emphasis was on human responsibility and free will. Consequently, they rejected fate (*Jewish War* 2.164–65; *Antiquities* 13.173). This emphasis may have been motivated by a desire to separate God from the origin of evil or from human evil (*Jewish War* 2.165; *Antiquities* 13.173).
4. According to Acts 23:8, the Sadducees did not believe in angels and spirits. This is likely an instance of hendiadys referring to a single group, angels. (The next clause describes how the Pharisees, for their part, affirmed “both” (τὰ ἀμφότερα, *ta amphotera*): resurrection and angels/spirits.) A number of passages in the Pentateuch, however, speak of angels (Daube, “On Acts 23,” 493). Bamberger finds the verse confusing and concludes that either it is written very loosely or is referring to an agent of revelation (Bamberger, “Sadducees”). Stemberger hypothesizes that the Sadducees rejected a later, intertestamental development of angelology (Stemberger, “Sadducees,” 441). Sanders suggests that they adhered to their own traditions, which were explicitly rooted in biblical exegesis (Sanders, *Judaism*, 333–35).

After AD 70

At the time Josephus wrote, near the end of the first century AD, he still referred to the Sadducees in the present tense (see his *Life*, published ca. AD 93). The silence of later sources does not prove that the Sadducees died out. Even rabbinic sources, which say relatively little about the Sadducees—or other Jewish groups, for that matter—do not claim that they ceased to exist (*m. Nid.* 4:2 [the daughters of the Sadducees]; *t. Nid.* 5:2–3 [Sadducean women]; *b. Nid.* 33b [Sadducean women]; *b. Šabb.* 108a [a Boethusian]). The loss of the temple was no hindrance to a group that stressed individual adherence to the written, biblical revelation (Goodman, “Place of the Sadducees,” 348–49; “Sadducees and Essenes after 70 CE,” 347–56).

Selected Resources for Further Study

- Bamberger, Bernard J. “The Sadducees and the Belief in Angels.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82 (1963): 433–35.
- Baumbach, Günther. “The Sadducees in Josephus.” Pages 173–95 in *Josephus, the Bible, and History*. Edited by Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989.
- Beckwith, Roger T. “The Pre-History and Relationships of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes: A Tentative Reconstruction.” *Revue de Qumran* 11 (1982): 3–46.
- Cohen, Shaye J. D. *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*. Edited by Wayne A. Meeks. Library of Early Christianity. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1989.
- Daube, David. “On Acts 23: Sadducees and Angels.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990): 493–97.
- Davies, Philip R. “Sadducees in the Dead Sea Scrolls.” Pages 127–38 in *Sects and Scrolls: Essays on Qumran and Related Topics*. South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 134. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996.
- Goodman, Martin. “The Place of the Sadducees in First-Century Judaism.” Pages 139–52 in *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of Ed*

- Parish Sanders*. Edited by Fabian E. Udoh, with Susannah Heschel, Mark Chancey, and Gregory Tatum. *Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity* 16. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008.
- . “Sadducees and Essenes after 70 CE.” Pages 347–56 in *Crossing the Boundaries: Festschrift for Michael Goulder*. Edited by Stanley E. Porter, Paul Joyce, and David E. Orton. Leiden: Brill, 1994.
- Grabbe, Lester L. *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian: The Persian and Greek Periods*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992.
- Josephus. *Jewish War*. Translated by Henry St. John Thackeray. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930.
- Lauterbach, Jacob Z. “A Significant Controversy between the Sadducees and the Pharisees.” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 4 (1927): 173–205.
- Newman, Hillel. Review of Eyal Regev, *The Sadducees and Their Halakhah*. *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 9 (2006): 222–27.
- Regev, Eyal. “Sadducees.” *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*. Vol. 5. Nashville: Abingdon, 2009.
- . *The Sadducees and Their Halakhah: Religion and Society in the Second Temple Period*. Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2005.
- . “The Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Sacred: Meaning and Ideology in the Halakhic Controversies Between the Sadducees and Pharisees.” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 9 (2006): 127–40.
- Saldarini, Anthony J. *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Sanders, E. P. *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies*. London: SCM, 1990.
- . *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BC–66 CE*. London: SCM, 1992.
- Stemberger, Günter. “The Sadducees—Their History and Doctrines.” *The Early Roman Period*. Vol. 3 of *The Cambridge History of Judaism*. Edited by William Horbury, W. D. Davies, and John Sturdy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Tcherikover, Victor. *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1959.
- VanderKam, James C. *An Introduction to Early Judaism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

A. ANDREW DAS²

PHARISEES (Φαρισαῖος, *Phariseios*). Members of a Jewish party that exercised strict piety according to Mosaic law. The Pharisees were a sect within early Judaism, becoming active around 150 BC and enduring as a distinct party until being subsumed into the Rabbinic movement around AD 135.

Introduction

² Das, A. A. (2016). [Sadducees](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Although the origin of the Pharisees is disputed (they may date as far back as the period of resettlement in Palestine following Babylonian exile), the group appears to have become the primary voice of Judaism following the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70. The Pharisees developed a tradition of strict interpretation of the Mosaic law, developing an extensive set of oral extensions of the law designed to maintain religious identity and purity.

The origin of the term “Pharisee” comes from the Aramaic word פְּרִישֵׁי (*prsh*), which means “to separate,” “divide,” or “distinguish.” Greenspoon asserts that the sect emerged from the Hasidim, a group of strictly devout separatists known as the “righteous” or “pious” (see Greenspoon, *Between Alexander and Antioch*, 343). The Pharisees kept themselves apart both socially and theologically from aristocratic sympathizers with Hellenism and the uneducated commoners. Some were so committed to separation from Hellenism that they were willing to take up arms in defense of their beliefs, even against fellow Jews.

Understanding the Pharisees

Even though a substantial amount of information about the sect is available from the New Testament and other first- and second-century AD literature, any conclusions reached about the Pharisees are tentative for the following reasons:

1. The nature and value of the early sources concerning the sect are debated.
2. Pharisaism likely consisted of diverse elements of beliefs and practices at any one time, thus confounding a one-dimensional understanding of the group.
3. The sect likely changed in form and function over time; as a result, the immediate historical context of the occasion within which the Pharisees are being viewed must be considered.

New Testament Sources

The New Testament—especially the Gospels—provides the majority of information regarding the Pharisees. Viewed as a collective witness of the time of Jesus, the Gospels demonstrate common features of the Pharisaic sect as well as each writer’s individual perspectives on that sect.

Mark

Mark’s Gospel offers the briefest treatment of the Pharisees, and the available information predominately consists of a quick series of questions early in his account:

- Mark 2:16—Some of the scribes of the Pharisees ask the disciples why Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners, insinuating that Pharisees would not do so.
- Mark 2:18—People come to Jesus and ask Him why the disciples of John the Baptizer and those of the Pharisees fast, while His disciples do not.
- Mark 2:23–24—The Pharisees ask Jesus why His disciples break the Pharisaic rules of Sabbath-keeping by plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath.

Mark later provides a more extended treatment of the Pharisees and their practices. The Pharisees and their scribes approach Jesus and ask Him why the disciples eat bread without first washing their hands (Mark 7:5). In framing the episode, Mark notes that “all the Jews,” not just the Pharisees, practice ritual hand-washing (Mark 7:3). He explains that the Pharisees observe a great many “traditions of the elders” (τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, *tēn paradosin tōn presbyterōn*), including ritual purification between visiting the marketplace and eating, and washing cups, pots, and other eating instruments (Mark 7:4). In response (Mark 7:6–13), Jesus chastises the Pharisees by distinguishing their observance of the “traditions of men” (τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, *tēn paradosin tōn anthrōpōn*) from the “commandment of God” (τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ, *tēn entolēn tou theou*; Mark 7:8). He frames His condemnation in a contrast between internal and external piety.

The Pharisees then pose a set of challenges to Jesus, hoping to entrap Him in His speech. These challenges come at the midpoint of Mark’s Gospel, just as Jesus begins to anticipate His passion.

- They demand a sign from heaven (Mark 8:11).
- They question the lawfulness of divorce (Mark 10:2).
- They (accompanied by Herodians) ask Jesus whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar (Mark 12:13–14).

It is unusual that Mark records the Pharisees interacting with the Herodians (Mark 3:6; 8:15; 12:13) because the Pharisees were generally completely opposed to the accommodating nature of the Herodian court. This element of Mark’s account may suggest that the Pharisees were not a unified body, but were comprised of diverse elements—some of whom actually cooperated with the Herodians.

Matthew

Matthew’s account is unique in that he presents a disdain for the Pharisees. Matthew includes much of Mark’s treatment of the Pharisees in his Gospel and expands on it. For example, in the account of John the Baptist’s ministry, Matthew is the only Gospel writer to record John’s words to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came for baptism: “Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee the coming wrath?” (Matt 3:7). Jesus’ words near the conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel reflect this language: “Serpents, brood of vipers, how are you to flee the judgment of Hell?” (Matt 23:33). In Matthew’s Gospel, it appears that the beliefs and practices of some of the Pharisees serve as a foil to reveal the genuine righteousness of Jesus.

Though He admits that the Pharisees are pious, Jesus recasts true righteousness as an inward disposition opposed to the merely external form of righteousness. For example, in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1–7:29), Jesus warns His would-be followers that His true disciples must demonstrate righteousness that exceeds even that of the Pharisees (Matt 5:20), suggesting that formal piety lacks the force of genuine internal righteousness. The Pharisees object to Jesus’ stance and are indignant (Matt 15:1–20, especially 15:12). Jesus instructs His followers to do as the Pharisees say, but not as they do (Matt 23:2–3).

In the extended discourse that follows, Matthew records Jesus’ condemnation of Pharisaic practices, including:

- Public demonstrations of piety, such as wearing phylacteries and fringed garments (Matt 23:5)
- Claiming seats of honor in public settings (Matt 23:6)
- Claiming titles of distinction (Matt 23:7)

In Matthew 23:8–12, Jesus rebuts these practices by offering a different model of piety; He follows this by a series of “woe” statements to the Pharisees in which He:

- Condemns their practices of recruitment (Matt 23:15), oath-making (Matt 23:16), and tithing (Matt 23:23)
- Criticizes their emphases on trivial matters of the Law while ignoring more weighty aspects (Matt 23:23–24)
- Accuses them of presenting the outward appearances of holiness while being consumed with inward vainglory (Matt 23:25–28).

In his account, Matthew pairs the Pharisees with various other groups, including:

- The Sadducees (Matt 3:7; 16:1, 6, 11–12)
- The scribes (Matt 12:38; 15:1; and Matt 23:1–39)
- The chief priests (Matt 21:45; 27:62)

As in Mark, the Pharisees—in combination with different groups—challenge Jesus by demanding signs as a means of testing Him (Matt 12:38; 16:1).

Luke

Although Luke’s Gospel shares much material with Matthew and Mark, he provides a number of unique accounts of the Pharisees—many of which provide a slightly less decisive view of the Pharisees. The Pharisees first appear in Luke 5:17–26 during the healing of the paralytic, when Jesus uses the physical healing of the paralytic to demonstrate His authority in forgiving sins. The scribes and Pharisees respond with charges of blasphemy (Luke 5:21). However, Luke also notes that the entire assembly is awed by the healing of the paralytic (Luke 5:26).

Luke includes several accounts of Jesus interacting with Pharisees and using them as negative examples in His teaching. In Luke 7:36, Jesus dines with a Pharisee. When a sinful woman anoints His feet, Jesus offers a parable in which He contrasts the gratitude and hospitality of the woman with that of His host (the Pharisee; Luke 7:37–50). When Jesus dines at the home of a Pharisee another time, the meal serves as a channel through which He offers a corrective to Pharisaic rules governing the Sabbath. This establishes a series of contrasts between the Pharisees and their antitheses: tax collectors and sinners. Jesus portrays this contrast by comparing the prayers of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:10–14), and in His parables of “lost things” (Luke 15:1–32). In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the dutiful son seems to exemplify the pious Pharisees, whereas the prodigal son represents the repentant sinner.

Jesus’ encounters with the Pharisees provide insights into the nature of some of their members. Luke records that they rejected the baptism of John (Luke 7:29–30). He also characterizes them as “lovers of money” (Luke 16:14). At the same time, however, at least some of the Pharisees seemed to have been curious about Jesus: they ask Him when the kingdom of God is to be expected (Luke 17:20), and some of them even warn Jesus of Herod’s plot to seize Him (Luke 13:31).

John

John’s Gospel shares few points of contact with the first three in terms of the Pharisees. In John 3:1, John introduces Nicodemus, a “ruler of the Jews” (John 3:1) who comes to Jesus when it is dark and addresses Him as “teacher” or “rabbi” (ῥαββί, *rhabbi*; John 3:2). He seems to be speaking for a larger group of people, acknowledging that Jesus’ signs do authenticate Him as one sent by God. The questions Nicodemus asks do not seem to be tests or traps, but reflect a genuine desire to learn more (John 3:4, 9). Later verses indicate that Nicodemus remained at least somewhat sympathetic to Jesus, urging the religious officials to give Him a fair hearing (John 7:50–51). These deliberations demonstrate a developing division among the people (including the officers sent by the Pharisees to arrest Jesus) over the issue of Jesus (John 7:43–48). Later, John relates that even some of the authorities become advocates of Jesus, but were reluctant to proclaim their opinions publicly for fear of being excommunicated by the Pharisees (John 12:42–43).

Nicodemus appears to be a standout among the Pharisees, even attending to the crucified body of Jesus (John 19:39). Although some Pharisees at large refer to Jesus as “teacher” or “rabbi” (ῥαββί, *rhabbi*; John 8:4), this ascription appears more sarcastic than genuine, as evidenced by John’s report that their inquiry was part of an attempt to entrap Him (John 8:6). John records a scene where a woman accused of adultery is brought before Jesus, followed by an account of the healing of a young blind man (John 9:1–41); together, these accounts serve as extended narratives in which the Pharisees figure prominently. Although Jesus seems to draw a growing number of loyalists from the sect (John 9:16), the majority view of the Pharisees is antithetical to Jesus, indicating opposition to His claims of authority.

Acts

Although it is an extension of Luke’s Gospel narrative, Acts provides a unique perspective by providing information about the Pharisees during the dawn of the church age. In Acts 5:34, Gamaliel—a respected scribe of the Pharisees—settles a commotion prompted by the preaching of Peter and the apostles by inviting the providence of God to determine the apostles’ fate (Acts 5:34–39). This account demonstrates a positive characteristic of the Pharisees: in their high view of divine providence, they maintain that God cares deeply enough about His people to ensure that His will is accomplished. Acts 15:5 indicates that some of the Pharisees were becoming followers of Jesus, but maintained that Gentile Christians must be circumcised and observe the Law of Moses. Paul later capitalizes on his doctrinal sympathies and identification with the Pharisees by setting them against the Sadducees (Acts 23:6–10). Amid these proceedings, Luke notes

that Pharisees were in part defined by their belief in bodily resurrection, angels, and spirits (Acts 23:8). Later accounts record Paul’s involvement with the Pharisees (which Paul calls “the strictest party of our religion,” Acts 26:5).

The only other explicit mention of the Pharisees by name in the New Testament comes in Phil 3:5, where Paul asserts his status as a Pharisee.

Josephus

Josephus is the most significant Jewish source for a study of Pharisaism. Noting that he himself “lived as a Pharisee” beginning at age 19 (see *Life* 1:12), Josephus lists the Pharisees as one of three primary sects of Judaism (the other two being the Sadducees and Essenes; *Life* 1:10; *Antiquities* 13:171–72; 18:11; *Jewish War* 2:119). He reports that the Pharisees rose to power during the reign of the Hasmonean prince, John Hyrcanus (135–105 BC). Hyrcanus seemed to have some sort of relationship with the Pharisees, but broke with them when a dinner guest named Eleazar confronted Hyrcanus concerning his usurping of the high priesthood. When the Pharisees failed to respond to Eleazar’s accusations in ways he expected, Hyrcanus became opposed to them, abolishing their decrees and banning their practices of religious piety (*Antiquities* 13:296). However, the large base of popular support was with the Pharisees (*Antiquities* 13:298). Within a generation, the Pharisees emerged as the dominant ruling political and religious party under the reign of Queen Alexandra Salome (76–67 BC; *Antiquities* 13:401–10; compare *Jewish War* 1:110–12). Although the Pharisees’ political party seemed to have lapsed under Herod, they nevertheless retained some degree of influence within the Sanhedrin and a great deal of influence among the populace. Josephus records that, at one point, there were 6,000 Pharisees (*Antiquities* 17:42).

Josephus’ description of the Pharisees focuses on their strict devotion and the refined skill they had in the Law (*Antiquities* 17:41; *Jewish War* 2:162; *Life* 1:191). He records their primary traits, indicating that they:

- despised delicacies in diet (*Antiquities* 18:12)
- followed reason—possibly an allusion to the pragmatic nature of their political-religious posture (*Antiquities* 18:12; *Life* 1:191–92)
- honored their elders (*Antiquities* 18:12; *Life* 1:191–92)
- held in tension both a divine fatalism and human agency (*Antiquities* 18:13; *Jewish War* 2:162–63)
- believed in the immortality of the soul
- believed in punishments and rewards in the afterlife (*Antiquities* 18:14; *Jewish War* 2:163)

Josephus also notes that the masses of commoners accepted many of these doctrines (*Antiquities* 18:15), so much so that even the Sadducees were subject to the Pharisees in some measure (*Antiquities* 18:17). He further characterizes the sect, in contrast to the Sadducees, as fraternal, peaceable, and civic-minded (*Jewish War* 2:166), noting especially how some of the Pharisees tried to diffuse an insurrection of Jews (*Jewish War* 2:411).

Additional Jewish texts may allude to the Pharisees, but the value of these texts is disputed:

- The rabbinic writings
- The Dead Sea Scrolls
- 1 Maccabees
- Psalms of Solomon
- The Lives of the Prophets
- The Scroll of Fasting
- Pseudo-Philo and 4 Ezra

Recent Scholarship

Modern scholarship concerning the Pharisees can be roughly divided into three primary eras.

First Era

The first era follows Saldarini’s sociological approach to understanding the history and function of Pharisaism (*Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees*). Geiger suggested that Pharisaism consisted of two schools of thought (*Sadducäer und Pharisäer*, 11–54):

1. The conservative school of Rabbi Shammai, which sought to preserve ancient models of piety consistent with the Sadducean commitment to Torah in its written form.
2. The liberal school of Rabbi Hillel, which sought to enliven Judaism by accommodating the Law to changing social and political circumstances.

Geiger’s conclusion has been influential since the mid-19th century, and has been widely perpetuated in various forms. For example, Wellhausen, in the tradition of the “history of religions” approach (*Religionsgeschichte*), argued that first-century Christianity was an inevitable response to the degenerating legalism of the Pharisees (*Pharisees and Sadducees*). Voices within this period largely emphasized the negative portraits of the Pharisees in the New Testament writings.

Second Era

The second era sought to correct the seemingly anti-Semitic tone of interpretation. For example:

- Lauterbach followed Geiger’s analysis of the conservative-liberal factions within Pharisaism, arguing that the group was a progressive lay movement arising in opposition to the accommodating tendencies of the Sadducean priestly aristocracy (*Rabbinic Essays*).
- Ginzberg noted that the differences between the two factions of Pharisaism were less concerned with commitments to the written Torah, and more focused on audience: whereas Sadducean and Shammaite interpretations of the Law were targeted toward the urban aristocracy, the more conservative Pharisaic tendencies were in the direction of the uneducated agrarian class. In this way, different

interpretations addressed different constituencies (*Religion of the Pharisees*, 88–108).

- Finkelstein maintained the distinctiveness of the conservative and liberal elements of Judaism, but argued that the Pharisees were largely associated with the emerging class of urban commoners, while the Sadducees maintained a relationship with the rural patricians (*Pharisees*).
- Baeck, writing during the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany amid the 1930s, suggested that the Pharisaic movement should be understood as a populist movement committed to piety as a means of resisting the encroachments of a hostile culture (*Pharisees*). Those empathetic with the persecuted German Jews were supportive of Baeck’s argument.

Herford and Moore supported and expanded upon Lauterbach’s proposition:

- Herford argued against Wellhausen, asserting that an abiding commitment to the ancient ethical code of the Old Testament prophetic tradition was at the heart of Judaism. He maintained that a religious vitality can be clearly discerned in this movement of Pharisaism (*Pharisees*).
- Moore summarized several of the major themes of Jewish thought, employing the Puritans of the 15th and 16th centuries as an approximate analog to ancient Pharisaism (*Judaism*).

Third Era

The third era in Pharisaic studies dawned during the latter part of the 20th century when Rivkin (*Defining the Pharisees*) and Neusner (*Rabbinic Traditions*) advanced the discussion by employing historical-critical methods of interpreting early sources. Through these methods, they reoriented the debate by noting the various layers of tradition within the rabbinic literature. Though Neusner and Rivkin employed similar methods, their conclusions were fundamentally opposed:

- Rivkin concluded that Pharisaism revolutionized Judaism by institutionalizing it.
- Neusner concluded Pharisaism did the exact opposite: it diffused the cultural center of Judaistic experience (which, prior to AD 70, was the temple) into the arena of domestic life. He viewed the home as the center of Pharisaic religious experience, and argued that the primary rabbinic emphases on food, sex, and marriage reflect the remaining realm of religious control for an increasingly powerless people.

Selected Resources for Further Study

Baeck, L. “The Pharisees.” *The Pharisees and Other Essays*. New York: Schocken Books, 1966.

Baumgarten, A.I. *The Flourishing of Jewish Sects in the Maccabean Era: An Interpretation*. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 55. Leiden: Brill, 1997.

Finkelstein, L. *The Pharisees*. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1938.

- Geiger, A. “Sadducäer und Pharisäer.” *Jüdische Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und Leben* 2 (1863): 11–54.
- Ginzburg, L. “The Religion of the Pharisees.” *Students, Scholars and Saints*. Philadelphia: 1928.
- Grabbe, L. *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian, Vol. 2: The Roman Period*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.
- Greenspoon, L. “Between Alexander and Antioch.” *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*. Edited by Michael D. Coogan. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Hengel, M. *Judaism and Hellenism, Vol. 1*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974.
- Herford, R.T. *The Pharisees*. New York: Macmillan, 1924.
- Jeremias, J. *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969.
- Lauterbach, J.Z. *Rabbinic Essays*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1951.
- Moore, G.F. *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*. 3 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927.
- Neusner, J. *Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees*. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1971.
- Rivkin, E. “Defining the Pharisees: The Tannaitic Sources.” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 40 (1969): 205–49.
- Saldarini, A.J. *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach*. Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988.
- Schürer, E. *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, Second Division, Vol. 2*. Translated by S. Taylor and P. Christie. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998.
- Wellhausen, J. *The Pharisees and the Sadducees: An Examination of Internal Jewish History*. Translated by M. Biddle. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2001.

BRADLEY T. JOHNSON³

³ Johnson, B. T. (2016). [Pharisees](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.