



ROSE GUIDE TO THE GOSPELS

Side-by-Side Charts and Overviews



THE PHARISEES

Probably the largest and most well-known Jewish religious group was the Pharisees. They began forming sometime after the exile and were probably fully established under the Hasmonean dynasty.

The word *pharisee* comes from the Hebrew word *paras*, suggesting “one who is separate.” Remember that the Jews had been both removed from their homeland and controlled culturally and religiously by outside rulers. Their desire and need to protect their own identity, particularly as the chosen people of the one true God, became very important. The prophets in the Old Testament attested that the Jews’ acceptance of corrupt beliefs and sinful practices were the reasons God had sent them into exile. To prevent another horrifying exile experience, the Pharisees’ main goal was to make sure that Jews obeyed not only the Torah (the law of Moses), but also the traditional interpretations of the Torah that had been passed down orally through the years. These oral traditions would eventually find their way into what would be called the *Mishnah*. Doing or saying something contrary to this oral law was seen as the same as breaking God’s law and also considered an act against the religious leaders. The Pharisees believed that purity rules, originally just for the priests, should trickle down to the home, so that every Jew lived a holy and pure life.

Unlike those in the priesthood, Pharisees were not born into it. Most were laymen devoted to living a life of purity, as outlined by the sacred laws



The Pharisees Question Jesus by James Tissot

and traditions of Judaism. To ensure such faithfulness, they would sit under years of teaching. Eventually, some would even attain the expert status of a scribe, becoming teachers of the law themselves (rabbis).

The Pharisees appear to have had the most conflict with Jesus in the Gospels. Considering Jesus' association with known "sinners" and the "unclean," and that he taught as if he were an expert on God, such clashes with the Pharisees are not surprising. Yet some Pharisees were receptive to Jesus' words (Luke 14:1). The story of the Pharisee Nicodemus is one such example, even though Nicodemus was baffled by Jesus' words about being "born again" (John 3:1–21). Some Pharisees even became part of the Christian church (Acts 15:5).

While the Pharisees refused to adapt to the Greeks or Romans, they also worked to avoid direct conflict with the ruling powers. They were the only Jewish sect who survived after the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

THE SADDUCEES

While the Pharisees may have been the larger and more popular group, the Sadducees held the most power. The Sadducees occupied priestly positions centered in the temple and they dominated the Sanhedrin, the Jewish judicial council. The Sadducees' main focus was on keeping Judaism centered on the sacrificial system at the temple.

The Sadducees, like the Pharisees, were established as a group during the Hasmonean period. They consisted of priests and aristocratic men. The name *Sadducee* likely originates from the name *Zadok*, a Levite whose descendants Ezekiel prophesied would alone be high priests (Ezek. 44:10–16). Whether direct descendants or simply allies of Zadok's descendants (a source of debate among scholars), they were not particularly popular with the average Jewish person because of their extreme wealth, influence, and political involvement.

The Sadducees acknowledged *only* the Torah—the first five books of the Old Testament—as Scripture. They did not believe in any type of resurrection or immortality of the soul, a point Jesus contested using a section of the Torah (Ex. 3:6; Matt. 22:23–33). According to Acts 23:8, the Sadducees did not believe in angels or demons.

While the Sadducees' devotion to oral tradition and Scripture (other than the Torah) was weak, their punishments for infractions were severe, including death! In fact, it is in reaction to Jesus that they joined forces with the Pharisees, their usual opposition, to confront Jesus and eventually bring about his crucifixion (Matt. 16:1).

They were willing to allow outside rulers and cultures to maintain power as long as the temple sacrifices continued. With the destruction of the temple in AD 70, the Sadducees disappear from Jewish history.

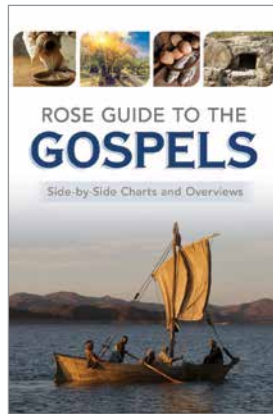
PHARISEES	SADDUCEES
From the Hebrew <i>paras</i> , suggesting "one who is separate."	Hebrew <i>seduqim</i> , "just/right ones"; originates from the name <i>Zadok</i> .
Established as a group during the Hasmonean dynasty.	Established as a group during the Hasmonean dynasty.
Laymen; could become rabbis and scribes.	Priests and aristocrats.
Popular with the average person.	Favored by the elite.
Centered in synagogues.	Centered in the temple and the Sanhedrin.
Main Goal: To obey the Torah and the traditional interpretations of the Torah.	Main Goal: To keep Judaism centered on the sacrificial system at the temple.
Accepted all the Hebrew Scriptures including the Torah, as well as oral law.	Accepted only the Torah.
Believed in resurrection, angels, and demons.	Did not believe in resurrection, angels, or demons.
Survived after the temple's destruction in AD 70 and developed as rabbinical authorities.	Disappeared from history after the temple's destruction in AD 70.

THE SANHEDRIN

Coming from the Greek word *synedrion*, a *sanhedrin* originally referred to a local ruling civic body, such as a court or council. By the time of Jesus, it referred to the highest Jewish judicial council, centered in Jerusalem.

In some respects, the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem mirrored Greek judicial structure: it was comprised mostly of aristocrats. However, it also contained uniquely Jewish concepts that stemmed from the Jewish monotheistic (one-God) beliefs at the heart of its members. The high priest oversaw the Sanhedrin. Its members included elderly aristocratic nobles, chief priests, and Sadducees (who often were also aristocrats), as well as Pharisees and scribes.

This supreme legislative, judicial, and executive body likely arose during Hasmonean rule. It was undermined and weakened by Herod the Great, but began rising again in power under successive proconsuls appointed by Rome. The Sanhedrin's decisions reached as far as capital punishment sentencing—though they could not enforce this apart from Roman cooperation. We see this play out in all four gospel accounts of Jesus' trial. After the Sanhedrin condemned Jesus, they handed him over to Pilate to make the final decision about Jesus' punishment (Matt. 26:57–68; Mark 14:53–65; Luke 22:66–23:2; John 11:47; 18:28–31).

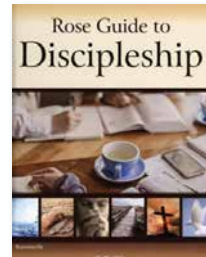


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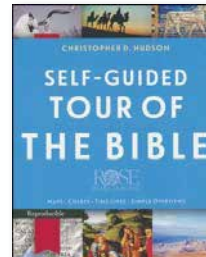


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