

Sadducees Versus Pharisees

With the proper historical and cultural context in hand, we shall now turn our attention toward the two leading Jewish religious parties: the Sadducees and the Pharisees. These two religious groups held opposing interpretations for *בין הערביהם* (*byn ha-arabim*; between the evenings), for the day on which the Phasekh was eaten, and for the seven days of unleavened bread. The Sadducees reflected the Aristocratic view while the Pharisees carried on the Hasidic tradition.

In the 143rd Jewish Seleucid year (169/168 B.C.E., Nisan or spring reckoning) the Greek king of Syria, Antiochus IV, began his suppression of Judaea in an attempt to Hellenize the country. As part of this attempt, Antiochus IV forbade the Jews by threat of death from observing their national customs and sacred days.¹ This forced Hellenization policy pushed different groups into hiding and resulted in the Maccabean (Hasmonaean)² revolt, which began in the winter of 167/166 B.C.E. In 164 B.C.E. this revolt led to the subsequent defeat of the Syrians holding on to Jerusalem. Shortly thereafter the existence of the Sadducees and Pharisees is formally acknowledged by the records.

In the centuries following 70 C.E., the year when the Temple of Yahweh at Jerusalem was destroyed and the power of the Sadducees disappeared, the Mishnah and Tosefta represented most of the disputes between the Pharisees and Sadducees (especially the Boethusian branch) as mere concerns over interpretations of the laws of ritual purity, with only a few disagreements on civil and Sabbath laws.³ This presentation does not reflect the reality of the period prior to 70 C.E. During these earlier years the Sadducees remained a viable force and their differences with the Hasidim spread into every aspect of religious doctrine. At the core of this ongoing dispute was the struggle for political power and the issue over who had the right to interpret Scriptures.

The separation between Sadducees and Pharisees (who later became the Talmudists) stems back to the basic doctrines and philosophies of each group. Our effort in this chapter is twofold. First we shall examine the philosophy of religion for each group to determine how they arrived at their respective positions. Second, we shall examine the political struggle between the Sadducees and Pharisees and demonstrate how the Pharisees suppressed the Aristocratic views, including their understanding of how to observe the Festival of Phasekh and Unleavened Bread and the Festival of Pentecost.

¹ 1 Macc., 1:20–64; 2 Macc., 6:22–7:42; Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:5:4f.

² Variantly spelled Hasmonean.

³ PSSP, pp. 231–234.

The Sadducees

The Sadducees—Hebrew צָדוֹקִים (Tsadoqi), צָדוֹקִים (Tsadoqim), i.e., Zadokites; Greek Σαδδουκαῖοι (Saddukaioi)—were the conservative descendants, supporters, and sympathizers of the family of צָדוֹק (Zadok, Tsadoq), a Levitical high priest living in the days of King David. Zadok was appointed the first high priest over the newly built Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem in the days of King Solomon (963/962–924/923 B.C.E.).⁴ From Zadok descended all of the subsequent high priests of the Temple of Yahweh at Jerusalem until the Hasmonaeans usurped that position in the second century B.C.E.⁵ The conservative Sadducees advocated the Aristocratic Phasekh practice (System A).

Members of the conservative line of Levitical priests first appeared under the name “Sadducees” shortly after the death of Onias IV (162/161 B.C.E.), the last high priest of the Zadok line.⁶ J. Bradley Chance comments:

It was probably at this time, in order to distinguish themselves from the Hasidim, that the Zadokites and their non-priestly aristocratic allies began to be recognized by the appellation Sadducees.⁷

There seems little doubt that they received their title because of their support for the right of the Zadok family to control the Temple and to hold on to their traditional role as chief priests. Therefore, though not all Jewish priests of this period were Sadducees, “nearly all Sadducees, however, appear to have been priests, especially of the most powerful priestly families.”⁸ *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* reports:

The Sadducees did, indeed, FAVOR THE PRIESTS and accord them an elevated role in their interpretation of the law. By the time of Jesus they included the families who supplied the high priests, as well as other wealthy aristocrats of Jerusalem. Most members of the Sanhedrin, the central judicial authority of Jewish people, were Sadducees. . . . The Sadducees accepted only the written Torah and rejected all ‘oral

⁴ 1 Kings, 4:1–4; cf., 2 Sam., 8:17, 15:24–37; 1 Chron., 6:1–59. John Dam., 16, notes that the name Sadducees meant “the most just” and that they were derived “from a priest named Sadok.” צָדוֹק (Zadok, Tsadoq) in Hebrew means “just” (SEC, Heb. #6659); “was righteous, equitable . . . acted justly . . . was in the right . . . justified, cleared, himself or another.” (HEL, p. 218). Also see above Chap. XI, p. 184, n. 31.

⁵ The high priesthood continued in the Levitical family of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, until the time of Eli, a descendant from Ithamar, the son of Aaron (Lev., 10:1f, 12, cf., 1 Kings, 2:27 with 2 Sam., 8:17; 1 Chron., 24:3). The conspiracy of Abiathar, the fourth in descent from Eli, led King Solomon to depose him (1 Kings, 1:7, 2:26f). The office thus returned to the house of Eleazar in the line of Zadok. It continued in that line until political intrigues in the time of the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes led to the deposition of Onias III. Thereafter the position of high priest became the patronage of the ruling power. The last high priest of the Zadok line was Onias IV (Onias Menelaus), who was executed in the year 162/161 B.C.E., Nisan reckoning.

⁶ For the history of Onias IV (Onias Menelaus) see Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:5:1–12:9:7, 20:10:3; cf., 2 Macc., 4:23–13:8; Meg. Taan., 11.

⁷ MDB, p. 785.

⁸ NBD, p. 1124.

Torah,' i.e. the traditional interpretations of the Torah accepted by the Pharisees that became the central importance in rabbinic Judaism. . . . The Sadducees represented in these ways a conservatism that limited both the acceptance of religious ideas not represented in the old sources and the interpretation of every aspect of life by reference to religion, which is precisely what the Pharisees most sought.⁹

The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* comments:

The Sadducees were the conservative priestly group, holding to THE OLDER DOCTRINES, and cherishing the highest regard for the sacrificial cult of the Temple.¹⁰

Emile Schürer, when comparing the conservative Sadducees with the liberal Hasidic (Pharisaic) system of oral laws, similarly concludes:

In this rejection of the Pharisaic legal tradition, the Sadducees represented an OLDER VIEWPOINT: they stood by the written Torah. For them, none of the subsequent development was binding. Their religious outlook was similarly VERY CONSERVATIVE.¹¹

In the first historical event to which they were associated, the Sadducees were connected with events during the *prostas*-ship (protector of the state) of the Hasmonaean high priest Jonathan (145/144–142/141 B.C.E.).¹² Though these supporters of the Zadok line would not have been happy that a Hasmonaean (Hasmonean) was holding the post of high priest, "they did work well with the Hasmonean leadership and thereby were able to maintain real political power through their control of the Sanhedrin."¹³ From the time of the priest-rulers John Hyrcanus, Aristobulus I, and Alexander Jannaeus, the Hasmonaeans depended upon the Sadducean religious party, which controlled the courts and local government.¹⁴ Alexander Jannaeus even warred for six years against the Pharisees.¹⁵ J. Bradley Chance adds:

Save for the exceptional period of the reign of Queen Alexandra (76–67 B.C.E.) when the Pharisees were given a prominent voice in the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees were the favorite party of the Hasmonean rulers and were permitted to maintain official authority over the Jews.¹⁶

⁹ EBD, p. 902.

¹⁰ EJ, 14, p. 621.

¹¹ HJP, 2, p. 411, cf., p. 413.

¹² Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:5:9, in context with 13:5:1–8.

¹³ MDB, p. 785.

¹⁴ HJP, 2, pp. 401f, 413.

¹⁵ Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:13:5 §376, cf., 13:15:5. HJP, 2, p. 401; MDB, p. 681.

¹⁶ MDB, p. 785.

Already suffering a setback by the pro-Pharisee position of Queen Alexandra,¹⁷ the power of the Sadducees began to wane further when they opposed Herod the Great's move toward the throne of Judaea. With the backing of full Roman recognition, Herod was able to seize power in Jerusalem in early 36 B.C.E.¹⁸ During the years of his drive for power, Herod rewarded those who supported him, including the Pharisees. He also assassinated those from the Pharisees, as well as the majority of the Sanhedrin and those from the Hasmonaean family, who opposed him.¹⁹

The minority party of the Sadducees was able to continue in positions of power during the reign of Herod because they had learned their lesson and had aligned themselves with Herod and the ruling authorities. Further, Herod still resented the majority of the Pharisees.²⁰ It was Herod the Great and the Romans who subsequently appointed the high priest and favored the loyalty of the Sadducees. In turn, the high priesthood during the Herodian period was predominantly represented by the Boethusian branch of the Sadducees.²¹ Nevertheless, the Sadducees were soon dealt two more severe blows:

First, the Romans ousted the family of Herod the Great from power over Jerusalem in 6 C.E.²² Though the Sadducees continued as high priests, civil and religious power gradually shifted toward the Pharisees, who enjoyed the support of the masses. This power shift is reflected in the changing composition of the Sanhedrin, which held control over the civil affairs of Judaea, and with the membership of the priesthood. In the days of the Hasmonaeans, the Sanhedrin and the priesthood were both dominated by the aristocratic Sadducees. During the Herodian period, on the other hand, the Pharisees began to share seats with them in the august body of the Sanhedrin; and in the last decades of the Temple a number of priests (though not the chief priests) were Pharisees.²³

Second, the authority of the Sadducees collapsed in 70 C.E. when the Romans destroyed the Temple of Yahweh at Jerusalem.²⁴ With the absence of the Temple, there was no longer any need for the Levitical priesthood, as required by the Torah of Moses. History played its strange hand and the Pharisees actually profited from the fall of the Jewish state.²⁵

Sadducean Philosophical Approach

The philosophical approach of the Sadducees was conservative. The anti-Hellenic Sadducees became allies with the Hasidim (Pharisees, Essenes) during the Jewish revolt against the Greek rulers of Syria. Yet these Sadducees "did not feel comfortable with the movement of the Hasidim, for this group

¹⁷ For her pro-Pharisee position see Jos., *Wars*, 1:5:1–4, *Antiq.*, 13:15:5–13:16:6.

¹⁸ SJC, chaps. xvi–xx.

¹⁹ Jos., *Wars*, 1:18:1–5, *Antiq.*, 14:9:1–5, 14:16:2–15:3:7.

²⁰ SHDL, p. 61.

²¹ For the evidence of the Boethusian Sadducees and their high priests during the Herodian period see below Chap. XV, pp. 236f, 240f.

²² Jos., *Wars*, 2:7:3–2:8:1, *Antiq.*, 17:13:1–18:1:1, 18:2:1.

²³ HJP, 2, pp. 213, 235, 405, & n. 7 on p. 405.

²⁴ HJP, 2, pp. 402, 414; EJ, 14, p. 622; EBD, p. 902; NBD, p. 1124; CBTEL, 9, p. 241; DB, p. 579.

²⁵ HJP, 2, pp. 402, 414.

refused to look only to the Zadokites for religious guidance and for proper interpretation of the Torah.²⁶ The issue of who had the right to interpret Scriptures—the aristocratic priests or the middle-class scribes—was at the heart of the disagreements between these two major Jewish factions.²⁷ Further, the Levitical Sadducees were expecting a messiah to come from the ranks of the Levites, while the Pharisees sought the messiah from the seed of David.²⁸ These political realities became the source of much resentment on both sides.

The authority of the Sadducees to be the rulers, judges, priests, and high priest in the theocracy came by means of the Torah. Therefore, they insisted upon a strict observance of the letter of the Torah because they knew that it required a literal interpretation for them to stay in power.²⁹ The reinterpretaive methods used by the rabbis, on the other hand, were a direct threat. For the Sadducees, the real problem with the oral laws was that most were not even inferred by Scriptures. They were simply the inventions and traditions of men.

Yet the Aristocratic Sadducees went even further. They also believed that if a doctrine or religious practice could not be explicitly found in the Torah it should not be followed at all. Josippon (953 C.E.) notes that both the early Sadducees and their Aristocratic brothers, the Samaritans, did not observe any tradition or exposition save the Torah of Moses.³⁰ For instance, the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection of the dead.³¹ Their reasoning held that, even if one were to argue that the resurrection is inferred, it was not directly taught by the Torah.³² As a result, all oral traditions and laws were condemned and the teachings of the Pharisees were ridiculed as “heresies.” As Nathan Ausubel notes:

The Sadducees were implacably opposed to the “alien” beliefs expressed by the Pharisees. They denounced them as being in violation of the teachings of Moses, for nowhere in the Torah, they averred—and correctly so—was there any authority for them.³³

Josephus also writes:

The Sadducees hold that life perishes along with the body. They own no observance of any sort apart from the Torah; in fact, they reckon it a virtue to dispute

²⁶ MDB, p. 785.

²⁷ SHDL, pp. 57f.

²⁸ SHDL, pp. 58–62.

²⁹ SHDL, pp. 56f, “They dared not go beyond the four corners of the Pentateuch if they did not wish to risk losing their position. It was only because they kept rigorously to the old traditions that they maintained their position as the secular judges, invested with the full authority of deciding the Law. They were also protected by the ministrations in the Temple, for the whole service lay in their hands, and this, of course, gave them the additional authoritative position in the life of the commonwealth, which could not be disputed by any layman.”

³⁰ Josippon, 4:6.

³¹ That the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection see Luke, 20:27–40; Mark, 12:18–27; Matt., 22:23–33; Jos., *Antiq.*, 18:1:4; *Wars*, 2:8:14; B. Sanh., 90b.

³² CBTEL, 9, p. 236.

³³ BJK, p. 385.

with the teachers of the path of wisdom that they pursue. There are but few men to whom this doctrine has been made known, but these are men of the highest standing.³⁴

This school, as a result, carried on the understandings of Scriptures passed down through the ancient Levitical Zadok priesthood. M'Clintock and Strong state:

The Sadducees were the aristocratic and conservative priestly party, WHO CLUNG TO THEIR ANCIENT PREROGATIVES AND RESISTED EVERY INNOVATION which the ever-shifting circumstances of the commonwealth demanded.³⁵

The doctrines of the Sadducees, as a result, reflected the ancient traditions and order of the Levitical priesthood as opposed to the “alien” innovations of the Pharisees. This fact suggests that the Sadducees also observed a more ancient form of the practices used by the priests for the celebration of the Festival of Phasekh and Unleavened Bread (System A).

At the same time, Josephus notes that the Pharisees were “affectionate to each other and cultivate harmonious relations with the community,” while the Sadducees, despite the antiquity of their practices, suffered from being argumentative and “are, even among themselves, rather boorish in their behavior, and in their intercourse with their peers are as rude as to aliens.”³⁶ The Hasidim gave the opinion that these priests were “haughty.”³⁷ Eusebius states that they were “cruel in their judgments beyond all the Jews.”³⁸

An allusion to the Sadducees of the Hasmonaean period is found in the work entitled Psalms of the Pharisees (also called the Psalms of Solomon).³⁹ In this text the aristocratic priests are labeled as “sinners,” who are severe in judgment, yet themselves full of sin, lust, and hypocrisy; they are men pleasers and full of evil desires.⁴⁰ Their aristocratic, arrogant, and boorish manner of life left them unpopular among the general populace. This fault was exacerbated by their continual slide into petty self-interest. For that reason, as time progressed, their power and popularity faded while the star of the more liberal Pharisees became brighter.

The Pharisees

System B originated among the early Hasidim but became dominant as a religious practice because of the political power of their spiritual descendants, the

³⁴ Jos., *Antiq.*, 18:1:4.

³⁵ CBTEL, 9, p. 235.

³⁶ Jos., *Wars*, 2:8:14.

³⁷ B. Shab., 62b.

³⁸ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 2:23:21.

³⁹ JE, 10, p. 632; OTP, 2, p. 642. The text has been attributed by some to the Pharisees and by others to the Essenes, but in either case it would be a Hasidic view.

⁴⁰ Cf., Ps. Sol., 1:1–8, 4:1–10, 8:8.

Pharisees.⁴¹ From Pharisaism derived what is now called Orthodox Judaism.⁴² Their conflict with the Sadducees was in force from the time of the Hasmonaean revolt. J. Bradley Chance writes:

The group later known as the PHARISEES was the spiritual descendant of the Hasidim and, hence, the perpetual conflict between the Pharisees and Sadducees finds its roots in the nascent period of these groups.⁴³

Other divisions of the Hasidim never became more than minority parties and never carried the same political clout. They developed into such groups as the Essenes, Qumran Covenanteers, and Therapeutae.⁴⁴ The Zealots (also called the Sicarii)⁴⁵ were the fourth major Jewish philosophy in existence during the first century C.E.⁴⁶ They were classed by Hippolytus as a branch of the Essenes.⁴⁷ The last Zealot stronghold, Masada, fell in May of 73 C.E.⁴⁸ Josephus writes of them:

This school agrees in all other respects with the opinions of the Pharisees, except that they have a passion for liberty that is almost unconquerable.⁴⁹

Hippolytus interestingly also classes the Pharisees as an Essene sect.⁵⁰ Since the Pharisees were derived from the Hasidim, this association indicates that those referred to as Hasidim by the Pharisees of the first century C.E. were by others called Essenes.

The name “Pharisee” is derived from **פְּרִישָׁה** (*pharis*), i.e., “to separate” from others.⁵¹ The Jewish scribes (lawyers), who were teachers of Jewish law, “belonged mainly to the party of the Pharisees, but as a body were distinct from them.”⁵² Emile Schürer notes:

⁴¹ HJP, 2, pp. 397–401, 413; ADB, 4, p. 349; SCO, pp. 23f; MDB, pp. 680f; EBD, pp. 465, 824; NBD, pp. 505, 981; CBTEL, 9, p. 73.

⁴² CBTEL, 8, p. 70, “To state the doctrines and statutes of the Pharisees is to give a history of orthodox Judaism; since Pharisaism was after the return from the Babylonian captivity, and is to the present day, the national faith of the orthodox Jews, developing itself with and adapting itself to the ever-shifting circumstances of the nation.”

⁴³ MDB, p. 785.

⁴⁴ HJP, 2, pp. 413, 562–597; SCO, p. 22; MDB, p. 263; EBD, pp. 351, 465; NBD, pp. 505, 981; CBTEL, 8, p. 73.

⁴⁵ Hippolytus, *Ref. Her.*, 9:21, “being denominated (by some) Zelotae, but by others Sicarii.”

⁴⁶ The Zealot movement, though originally not designated under that name (MDB, p. 1082; JQR, 60, p. 187), was founded by Judas of Galilee, with the assistance of a Pharisee named Saddok, in 6 C.E. when they led a revolt against the Romans at the time of the Roman registration of property for taxes (Acts, 5:37; Jos., *Wars*, 2:8:1, 2:17:8f, *Antiq.*, 18:1:6, 20:5:2). They became a religious party with the revolt against Rome in 66 C.E. Menahem, the son of this Judas, held Masada during the war against Rome (Jos., *War*, 2:17:8f). It was Eleazar, the son of Yair and descendant of Judas of Galilee, who led the Sicarii (Zealots) at Masada before its final fall (Jos., *Wars*, 2:17:9, 7:8:1). Also see HJP, 1, pp. 381f, & n. 129, 2, pp. 598–606; EJ, 16, pp. 947–950; JE, 12, pp. 639–643.

⁴⁷ Hippolytus, *Ref. Her.*, 9:21.

⁴⁸ Jos., *Wars*, 7:8:1–7:9:2.

⁴⁹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 18:1:6.

⁵⁰ Hippolytus, *Ref. Her.*, 9:23.

⁵¹ SEC, Heb. #6567; HJP, 2, pp. 396–398; PSSP, pp. 220f; NBD, p. 981; MDB, p. 680; EBD, pp. 823f. John Dam., 15, states that the name Pharisee “is interpreted as meaning ‘those who are set apart.’”

⁵² NBD, p. 1151; cf. Acts, 23:9.

From the priestly circles emerged the Sadducean party, and from those of the Torah scholars came the party of the Pharisees, the lay experts in religious matters.⁵³

The evidence that the Sadducees were largely from the priestly ranks also reinforces the fact that, unlike their Hasidic brothers, the Pharisees drew their support largely from the Jewish scribes and scholars who had come to reject aristocratic Zadok authority.⁵⁴ In their anti-Zadok conviction the Pharisees differed from the other Hasidic groups. For example, the Qumran Covenanteers, whose views on many religious issues parallel that of the Pharisees, opposed the Hasmonaean line of priests and supported the Zadok line.⁵⁵ Yet for the Pharisees, the Zadok priesthood had become discredited through the apostasy of some of its leaders, especially when they attempted to forcibly Hellenize Judaea in the mid-second century B.C.E.

Originally the Pharisees were small in number. As time progressed they became the most politically and religiously dominant force in Judaism. The Pharisee movement had grown out of the Hasidic belief system constructed by earlier phil-Hellenic priests, like Simeon II and his son Onias III, whose family also represented the Hellenizing branch of the priestly families. Therefore, the Pharisees, like the early Hasidim, accepted Hellenic philosophical approaches to religious issues but resented complete Hellenization as paganizing.

The Pharisees, along with the Sadducees, are first mentioned as a viable religious group in the time of the Hasmonaean leader Jonathan. The events fall within the time frame from Jonathan's confirmation as high priest and his placement as *prostas* (protector of the state) by Demetrius II in the 167th Jewish Seleucid year (145/144 B.C.E.) until Jonathan's death in the 170th Jewish Seleucid year (142/141 B.C.E.).⁵⁶ Josephus writes:

Now at this time there were three schools of thought among the Jews, which held different opinions concerning human affairs; the first being that of the Pharisees, the second that of the Sadducees, and the third that of the Essenes.⁵⁷

The appearance of both the Pharisees and the Essenes at this time (145–142 B.C.E.) reflects the disintegration of the Hasidim into rival factions shortly after the outbreak of the Hasmonaean revolt against Antiochus IV in the winter of 167/166 B.C.E.

After the Hasmonaean victory against the Greek rulers of Syria, the Pharisees, by gaining the support of the masses, gradually rose to power. They were finally given the right to religiously rule Judaea during the reign of Queen Alexandra of Judaea (76/75–68/67 B.C.E.).⁵⁸ A faction of the Pharisees

⁵³ HJP, 2, p. 388.

⁵⁴ HJP, 2, p. 413, "A largely lay section of the Hasidim followed their principles to their conclusion and became 'Pharisees'."

⁵⁵ For the support of the Zadok line of priests at Qumran see CR, 5, cf., 1, 6, 9; MR, 1; LF, 3.

⁵⁶ See 1 Macc. 11:18–13:41; Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:4:9–13:6:7.

⁵⁷ Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:5:9.

⁵⁸ Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:15:5–13:16:5; *Wars*, 1:5:1f.

(Pollio and his disciple Samaias, and most of their disciples) later openly supported Herod the Great against the Hasmonaeans and the Sadducees.⁵⁹ The Essenes were also held in favor by Herod.⁶⁰ Then, after the demise of Archelaus as king of Judaea in 6 C.E., the Pharisees, with the support of the masses, became the chief religious power over their country.⁶¹

Pharisaic Philosophical Approach

The Pharisees were the “strictest sect” in the Jewish religion.⁶² They believed in the traditions of their Hasidic forefathers, called the *halakoth* or oral laws. To be a Pharisee was to be “instructed according to the exactness of the ancestral (oral) law,”⁶³ and they would pride themselves on “the exact interpretation of the (oral) law of their fathers.”⁶⁴ The oral laws were provided by the scribes and later formed the regulations of the Mishnah. These traditions of their fathers were designed to “build a fence around the Torah,” i.e., to protect the laws and commandments of Scriptures. The Pharisees gave these oral laws equal authority with the Scriptures, and in practice made the oral laws greater than scriptural law.⁶⁵ The Mishnah, for example, states:

Greater stringency applies to (the observance of) the words of the scribes than to (the observance of) the words of the (written) Torah. If (for example) a man said, “There is no obligation to wear phylacteries,” so that he transgresses the words of the Torah, he is not culpable; (but if he said), “There should be in them five partitions,” so that he adds to the words of the Scribes, he is culpable.⁶⁶

Contrary to the Sadducean position, the Pharisees believed that the rabbis had the power through interpretation and traditions to alter the laws of Scriptures to fit newer circumstances. Whereas the Sadducees were the conservatives, the Pharisees placed an emphasis “on doctrinal and legal renewal and readaptation by means of biblical exegesis.”⁶⁷ Josephus writes:

. . . the Pharisees had passed on to the people CERTAIN REGULATIONS HANDED DOWN BY FORMER GENERATIONS AND NOT RECORDED IN THE LAWS OF MOSES, for which reason they are rejected by the Sadducean group, who hold that only those regulations should be considered valid which are

⁵⁹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 14:9:4, 15:1:1, 15:10:4.

⁶⁰ Jos., *Antiq.*, 15:10:4f.

⁶¹ See below pp. 204–208.

⁶² Acts, 26:5.

⁶³ Acts, 22:3.

⁶⁴ Jos., *Antiq.*, 17:2:4; cf., Jos., *Life*, 38, “the sect of the Pharisees, who have the reputation of being unrivaled experts in their country’s laws”; Jos., *Wars*, 2:8:14, “the Pharisees who are considered the most accurate interpreters of the laws.”

⁶⁵ Ab., 1:1–5; TNTB, p. 149; MDB, p. 681; SNY, chap. xiii.

⁶⁶ Sanh., 11:3.

⁶⁷ HJP, 2, p. 413, & n. 41.

written down and that those traditions which had been handed down by the fathers need not be observed.⁶⁸

The book by M'Clintock and Strong notes:

. . . the Pharisees, were the liberals, the representatives of the people—their principle being so to develop and MODIFY THE MOSAIC LAW AS TO ADAPT IT TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE TIME, and to make the people at large realize that they were “a people of priests, a holy nation.”⁶⁹

The very mood of the Hasidic/Pharisaic movement, therefore, was “innovation in religion” in order to adapt it to the new age in which they lived. The Hasidim who formed the Pharisees, as James Brooks notes, “were middle-class ‘laymen’ who were committed to obeying the Law as it was interpreted by the SCRIBES. The scribes were scholars who were primarily concerned with interpreting and applying the written Law to everyday affairs. The purpose of this was to make the Mosaic Law relevant to changing situations.”⁷⁰

The Pharisees believed that, because of the presumed antiquity of these oral laws, it gave their scholars the right to govern. As J. Neusner points out, the Pharisee branch of the Hasidim “claimed the right to rule all the Jews by virtue of their possessing the ‘Oral Torah’ of Moses. . . . In their own setting, however, the Pharisees were much like any other Hellenistic philosophical school or sect.”⁷¹ With their newly found power emerging in the mid-first century B.C.E., the Pharisees began to bring these traditions (oral laws) to bear on the Jewish state.

Sadducees Versus Pharisees

The liberal interpretations of the Pharisees (unlike the more narrow and conservative views of the Sadducees) were well-received by the masses. Eventually, this acceptance gave them political power far exceeding that of the Sadducees, despite Sadducean control of the Temple. As a result, after Herodian power over Jerusalem had been set aside, whenever a difference arose over issues that could be controlled outside the Temple, the Sadducees were forced to give way to the Pharisees. Josephus, himself a Pharisee, for example, writes in some detail of “the school of Sadducees, who hold opinions opposed to those of the Pharisees.” He explains:

And concerning these matters the two parties came to have controversies and serious differences, the Sadducees having the confidence of the wealthy alone but no following among the populace, while the Pharisees have the support of the masses.⁷²

⁶⁸ Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:10:6.

⁶⁹ CBTEL, 9, p. 235.

⁷⁰ MDB, p. 681.

⁷¹ FPP, p. 11; HJP, 2, p. 389, n. 20.

⁷² Jos., *Antiq.*, 13:10:6.

Josephus adds that in his time (in the latter half of the first century C.E.) the Sadducees had surrendered all but the Temple to the Pharisees:

They (the Sadducees) accomplish practically nothing, however, for whenever they assume some office, THOUGH THEY SUBMIT UNWILLINGLY AND PERFORCE, YET SUBMIT THEY DO TO THE FORMULAS OF THE PHARISEES, since otherwise the masses would not tolerate them.⁷³

Sadducean fear of the Pharisees is expressed in a quote found in the Babylonian Talmud, where a Sadducee is reported to have told his son, "My son, although we are Sadducees, we are afraid of the Pharisees."⁷⁴ The wives of the Sadducees even followed the Pharisaic rulings with respect to the laws of menstruation.⁷⁵

It is true that the Pharisaic religious party from the beginning of the first century C.E. gradually became the most important in Judaea by wielding the most political muscle. In the due course of time, one branch of the Pharisees, the Hillelic School, became the most dominant in all Judaism.⁷⁶ Yet it is also true that those belonging to the party of the Pharisees represented only a small number of the overall Jewish population in Judaea. Josephus, for example, only counted "over 6,000" Pharisees in the time of Herod the Great.⁷⁷ Most of the Jewish people of the first century C.E. and the following few centuries, though favoring the Pharisees among the parties contesting for power over the governing of the Jewish people, were not, strictly speaking, Pharisees. As Moshe Davis notes, "Evidently, 'the multitude' were the majority and they were not Pharisees."⁷⁸ The general population of Jews, for example, were much more in favor of magic, charms, and amulets. Erwin R. Goodenough describes this form of Judaism during this early period as follows:

The picture we have got of this Judaism is that of a group still intensely loyal to Iao Sabaoth [Yahu of hosts], a group which buried its dead and built its synagogues with a marked sense that it was a peculiar people in the eyes of God, but which accepted the best of paganism (including its most potent charms) as focusing in, finding its meaning in, the supreme Iao Sabaoth. In contrast to this, the Judaism of the rabbis was a Judaism which rejected all of the pagan religious world (all that it could), and said not, like Philo and these magicians, that the true supreme God of pagan formulation was best understood as

⁷³ Jos., *Antiq.*, 18:1:4.

⁷⁴ B. Yom., 19b.

⁷⁵ B. Nidd., 33b.

⁷⁶ Ab., 1:12, 2:8; B. Erub., 13b; J. Ber., 1:7, 3b; and see comments in EJ, 4, pp. 740f. Also see ECJ, 1.2, pp. 20-25, 42, n. 71; EJ, 4, pp. 737-741.

⁷⁷ Jos., *Antiq.*, 17:2:4 §42.

⁷⁸ IIRC, p. 78.

the God of the Jews, but that any approach to God except the rabbinical Jewish one was blasphemous. Theirs was the method of exclusion, not inclusion. The Judaism of the rabbis won out in the early Middle Ages, to such an extent that the rabbis made men forget that such a Judaism as here has come to light ever existed.⁷⁹

Moshe Davis also writes:

If there was any such thing, then, as an “orthodox Judaism,” it must have been that which is now almost unknown to us, the religion of the average “people of the land.”⁸⁰

Long before the Hillelic branch of the Pharisees had gained a stranglehold on Judaism in general, the Pharisees underwent a long struggle against numerous other Jewish groups who did not follow their party line. Nevertheless, during the first century C.E., the power of the Pharisees was focused on the state level in Judaea and stretched out its hand as a guiding force to the numerous Jewish synagogues spread throughout the world. It was on this level that they had the support of the masses for controlling state and local religious functions.

Any formal power that the Sadducees might have had, which would have enabled them to push aside the dominance of the Pharisees, began to perish in the early first century C.E., sometime after 6 C.E., when Judaea became a Roman province.⁸¹ With the power of the Herodian throne absent from Jerusalem, the authority of the Pharisees quickly increased. As Emile Schürer points out, “The price which the Sadducees had to pay to ensure their supremacy in this later period was admittedly a high one: in the performance of their official functions they had to accommodate themselves to popular Pharisaic views.”⁸²

By the time of the messiah’s death in 30 C.E.,⁸³ the Sadducees were under the domination of the Pharisees with regard to all public priestly services, such as the sacrifices in the court of the Temple and the date of Phasekh.⁸⁴ It was at that time that the messiah referred to the Pharisees as sitting in “the seat of Moses.”⁸⁵ Shortly before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. the power of the

⁷⁹ JSGRP, 2, p. 295.

⁸⁰ IIRC, p. 81.

⁸¹ Jos., *Wars*, 2:7:3–2:8:1, 2:9:1, *Antiq.*, 17:13:1–3, 5.

⁸² HJP, 2, p. 414.

⁸³ The date of the messiah’s death is derived from the fact that (1) he was murdered during the 10-year procuratorship of Pontius Pilate over Judaea (Jos., *Antiq.*, 18:2:2, 18:4:2, 18:6:5), i.e., between the fall of 26 C.E. until the fall of 36 C.E., and (2) he was murdered on the fifth day of the week, being the 14th of Abib. The 14th of Abib in those years occurred on the fifth day of the week only in the year 30 C.E. For proof of the date of the messiah’s death see FSDY, 2, and also see CMHA.

⁸⁴ For example, at the time of the messiah’s death in 30 C.E., it is clear that the high priests Annas and Caiaphas (Jos., *Antiq.*, 18:2:2, 18:4:3; Matt., 26:57; John, 11:49, 18:13; Luke, 3:1–3; Acts, 4:6) were observing the Pharisaic customs of Phasekh (e.g., John, 2:13, 6:4, 18:28; and see FSDY, 3).

⁸⁵ Matt., 23:1–3.

Sadducees over matters inside the Temple itself was also finally surrendered to the Pharisees. This detail is demonstrated by the victory of the Pharisees in the matter of the *omer* wave offering during the Pentecost season—a purely priestly function inside the Temple. A Talmudic Scholiast, for example, claims that the rule—namely, that from the eighth day of Nisan until the *moad* celebration of Phasekh all mourning was forbidden⁸⁶—found in the Megillath Taanith (composed in 68 C.E.)⁸⁷ marked the recent triumph of the Pharisees over the Sadducees in a controversy regarding the date of Pentecost.⁸⁸

Elsewhere, after giving a general statement of the beliefs of the Pharisees, Josephus, who was writing in 93/94 C.E.,⁸⁹ well after the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 C.E., adds:

Because of these views they (the Pharisees) are, as a matter of fact, extremely influential among the townsfolk; and all prayers (vows) AND SACRED RITES OF DIVINE WORSHIP are performed according to their exposition.⁹⁰

This statement clearly demonstrates that the Aristocratic system, with regard to “sacred rites of divine worship,” which includes the Festival of Phasekh and Unleavened Bread and the Festival of Pentecost, were suppressed by the Pharisees during the first century C.E. During the first two-thirds of this century the Sadducees still controlled the Temple. Therefore, during the time of the messiah, even though there was a great dispute among the old priestly line and the upstart Pharisees, the Pharisees had gained the command of popular opinion and the Sadducees were forced to submit to the

⁸⁶ Meg. Taan., 1.

⁸⁷ MTS, pp. 3f, “the last event chronicled in our Megillah is one which took place on the 17th of Adar, 66 C.E.” The Talmud places its composition a few years before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. (MTS, pp. 3f, 112–115; B. R.Sh., 18b). The Pharisaic Zealots overthrew the Sadducee high priest in Nov. of 67 C.E., allowing for the first *omer* wave offering to be made according to the Pharisaic method in the spring of 68 C.E. The year 68 C.E. for the composition of the Megillath Taanith, therefore, is in full accord with these events. For the date of the Megillath Taanith and the date of the Pharisaic victory with regards to the issue of Pentecost see below Chap. XVI, pp. 254ff.

⁸⁸ MTS, p. 75. Pentecost is severally called the Festival of **תַּשְׁבָּח** (Shabuath), the Festival of Harvest, and the Festival of Firstfruits (Exod., 23:16, 34:22; Num., 28:26; Deut., 16:10; Lev., 23:5–17; cf., LXX at Lev., 23:16, and Jos., *Antiq.*, 3:1:6, *Wars*, 2:3:1). It was one of the three great *khagi* of Scriptures (Exod., 23:14–17; Deut., 16:16). Its date was determined by the instructions in Lev., 23:4–22, in relationship with the Phasekh. In Lev., 23:15f, we read, “And you shall number for you from the day after the Sabbath, from the day you bring in the wave sheaf offering, seven complete Sabbaths they shall be, until the day after the seventh Sabbath, you shall number 50 days.” Lev., 23:11, states that the sheaf was waved on the day after the Sabbath during the festival of Phasekh. Those of the Aristocratic schools understood this literally and for them the 50-day count begins on the day after the weekly Sabbath that falls during the seven days of unleavened bread and fulfills seven complete weeks. Therefore the festival always falls on the day after the seventh Sabbath, on the first day of the week. The Pharisees, however, interpreted “Sabbath” as the first day of Phasekh, which was also a “day of rest.” For them, the festival always falls on the 51st day from the first day of Phasekh (Sifra, *Emor* Perek, 12 §232:1–3; B. Men., 65a–66a; NBD, p. 964; EJ, 14, p. 1319). The early Christian assemblies, who followed System A, also counted Pentecost in the same manner as the Sadducees (ACC, 2, pp. 1157–1161; NBD, p. 964).

⁸⁹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 20:12:1 §267, “the thirteenth year of the reign of Domitian Caesar.”

⁹⁰ Jos., *Antiq.*, 18:1:3.

religious formulas of the Pharisees with regard to the observance of Phasekh and other sacred days.⁹¹

After the destruction of the Temple of Yahweh in 70 C.E., the Sadducees as a political and religious party ceased, leaving the innovative Pharisees in command.⁹² Pharisaic ability to adapt to new situations enabled them to survive the devastation of their country and centuries of persecution. Today, "Almost all forms of modern Judaism trace their lineage through the Pharisees."⁹³ The survival of the sect of the Pharisees as the dominant religious party is the reason why all Orthodox Judaism today practices the System B Phasekh. Unfortunately, this fact has also led to the false assumption, held by many today, that System B was the only arrangement for the Festival of Phasekh and Unleavened Bread.

Conclusion

The evidence so far demonstrates two fundamentally different approaches to the doctrinal issues of Scriptures. The Sadducees represented the conservative priests and their allies who saw it in their interest to abide by the letter of the Torah of Moses. Without a literal interpretation of the written Torah their very status as an aristocracy was jeopardized.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, being the liberals, represented the scholars who were from the layman and scribe classes. It was in their interest to remain in favor with the Jewish masses. Their authority rested upon their claim that there existed an oral law handed down by the traditions of their fathers. This oral law permitted them to interpret the Torah of Moses in light of ever-changing circumstances and, at the same time, offer the people a structured way to piety. In the eyes of the Pharisees, the interpreters were not the arrogant and self-serving Zadok priests but their own pious rabbinical scholars. Toward the end of this struggle, the Sadducees fell under the control of the Pharisees and then into insignificance.

⁹¹ For this reason, during the time of the messiah, the national Jewish Phasekh practices were those of the Pharisees.

⁹² See above n. 24.

⁹³ EBD, p. 824.