

Bible Special 06-08-22b

Let's pick up our study now. We have been looking in detail at the Pharisees. You can reach around and pat yourself on the back and congratulate yourself because you at this point know more about the Pharisees than almost anybody outside of a seminary.

Most people say, well, the Pharisees are the people who opposed Jesus. Well, why? Now you have some background. What is the nature of their interest in Jesus? What are the Pharisees famous for? What have they historically enjoyed as we come into the first century A.D.? They are the ones who control public opinion.

They are the ones who have the political influence and the power behind the scenes to make things happen. If somebody needs banishing, the Pharisees will see to it that they are banished. If somebody needs to be reinstated, they are the ones who can get them back in.

They are the string pullers. They are the real power when you get to the popular level. They have the support of the people and they try to maintain that by impressing the people.

So, when you see someone going down to the temple and dropping in money into the coffers and making long prayers in the street corner, why are they doing this? It is not just so that people will think they are holy in and of itself. This is a part of their larger agenda. This is part of maintaining that hold and that sway over the people.

The mystique that we are closer to God. We can find out from God what the future is going to be. We can tell this lady and her husband that they are going to be the next king and queen of the land.

This is the kind of thing that they, as a group, participate in. There are going to be some wonderful exceptions to that, some individual exceptions, but this is the group history, the group identity for the Pharisees. The best way to render their party name in English would be the partisans, the ones who are a party apart, the separatists.

So, they pride themselves on their skill in the law. They can justify what they do on scriptural grounds. They want to do a thing, they will pull a verse out of context and quote it and say, this is why this needs to happen.

There is another little episode that I want to just briefly touch on that Josephus mentions in his Antiquities of the Jews. This happens in a little minor revolt that took place in 6 AD. This would be in the childhood of the Lord Jesus.

He might have been about 10 years old at this time. There is a fellow named Judas from a city called Gamala. He is called Judas the Gaulanite, G-A-U-L-O-N-I-T-E.

Judas the Gaulanite. He is from Gamala. He tried to stir up a revolt.

His right hand man in this, he got a guy to help him. This guy's name is Sadduc, S-A-D-D-U-C, and he is a Pharisee. Josephus says that this little revolt in 6 AD with Judas and Sadduc eventually grows and turns into a fourth philosophy of the Jews.

In addition to the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Essenes, you have this fourth philosophy, almost like a fourth political party or a fourth denomination. This is the birth of what will come to be known as the Zealots. The Zealots are very similar to the Pharisees in that they filled the civil government with tumult and laid the foundation of future misery by this system of philosophy which we were before unacquainted with.

You might almost call it extreme Phariseism. The Pharisees oppose kings. They like to hold the power.

These guys take it a step further and say we're going to actively foment revolt and rebellion and we're going to throw off this false civil authority so that we can get back to a religious government. They are the classic non-separation of church and state, if you will. They want a religious government and they want it to be them.

This is the roots of the Zealots. The Zealots are a relatively young movement when Jesus recruits his disciples. And you wind up having a Zealot amongst them.

This is kind of remarkable. It's a new thing. It would be sort of like a Libertarian or something.

The Libertarian party is not that old. Or what was Ross Perot's party? The Green Party, whatever the heck it was. Something young, something new.

Something new, I can't even remember it. This fourth sect of Jewish philosophy, Judas the Galilean was the author. Judas is from Galilee, it turns out.

So in recent memory, there has been a revolting development, a development of revolt up in Galilee under this Judas. He stirred up this thing that is going to become the Zealots, which is going to be a real pain in the neck for Roman government and for the Jews who are trying to be collaborators and get alongers and pacifists and can't we all just compromise. Here's the Zealots fomenting rebellion, stirring up trouble.

And this is sourced in Galilee. Judas is from Galilee. So, Judas the Galilean was the author.

These men agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions. But they have an inviolable attachment to liberty. We want to be free, we don't want this outside government.

They say that God is to be their only ruler and lord. They also do not value dying any kind of death, nor indeed do they heed the deaths of their relations and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man lord. They will die for their belief.

Of course, the Pharisees believe in spirits and resurrection and so on. So they think, hey, dying a noble cause, it's okay. Well, this gets us down into New Testament days, into the time of

Christ, certainly.

There seems to be a connection with the Pharisees and the scribes. I think something like 22 times in the New Testament, the phrase scribes and Pharisees occurs. They seem to always be linked.

And they seem to, although they are separate, they seem to be very closely related. The scribes and Pharisees. This would be kind of like your senators and congressmen.

They're all up there in the Congress. In the Senate and the House of Representatives, you've got all of your representatives. You've got senators and you've got congressional representatives, but they're all part of that one branch of government.

Well, scribes and Pharisees seem to be a very similar thing. The scribes are sort of the professors who provide them the scriptural and traditional legal basis for their opinions. These are the scholars who come in with the documentation and the footnotes and write the stuff up in legalese.

They're sort of the lawyers. The ones who manipulate the law in the interest of the Pharisees. These are the corporate heavies and their lawyers, so to speak.

And this is important to understand when we see references to scribes. They are not identical, but they are the planet with its moon, so to speak. We talked before about the roots of the Pharisees in the Chassidim, the faithful ones.

These people are mentioned in 1 and 2 Maccabees. If you want to get the background on them, they are the ones who united with Mattathias and his sons and offered themselves willingly for the law. They were zealous for the law of Moses.

Back to the Bible is sort of their battle cry. They became fugitives. They organized an army.

They struck down sinners in anger and renegades in their wrath. The survivors of the wrath of the Maccabees of the Chassidim or the Chassidians had to go to the Gentiles to escape. They had to get clear out of Israel because these guys were waging a holy war on them.

Well, Pharisees, as I said, they believed that there are some things that are just fate. It's the will of God, Inshallah. It's just that's what happens.

The other things are directly cause and effect with what you choose, which is pretty close to the truth. Now, one of the few things we know about the Essenes, we know the most about the Pharisees. We know less about the Sadducees.

We know even less about the Essenes. We know practically nothing about the Zealots except that they wanted to throw off the government and were an offshoot of the Pharisees. But one thing we do know about the Essenes is they were Calvinists.

They were strict predestinationarianists. They didn't think anything was up to human will. It's all predestined.

The Pharisees were hugely popular with the people, and they cultivated that popularity, and they reinforced it by setting themselves apart as holy, glow-in-the-dark types. They highly valued oral tradition. They put it right up on a par with the Law of Moses, which, of course, reinforces their own power.

We've seen the analog in the modern day. And the Pharisees believed in an afterlife, and this is kind of interesting because the Old Testament, frankly, doesn't have a lot to say about the afterlife. You can go to the book of Daniel and Ezekiel, and you can document resurrection, but the nature of the afterlife, reward for the just and punishment for the wicked, is a bit vague in the Old Testament.

But they believed in an afterlife where the virtuous are rewarded and the evil are punished. And outside of a few clear passages like Daniel chapter 12, it's difficult to really make a strong case for that out of the Old Testament. Well, I've read you most of the excerpts from Josephus on the Pharisees.

When we come to the New Testament and the New Testament record, most of the time you find the Pharisees being talked about because they're opposing Jesus. He ran into conflict with them over things like the laws of hygiene and cleanliness. Your disciples eat with unwashed hands.

He said, you know, you wash the outside of the dish, and this issue of hygiene laws. What you can and can't do on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were picking him apart for healing on the Sabbath, harvesting on the Sabbath, and so on.

And the relation between religious faith, religious observance, and national government. Remember the whole thing, should we pay taxes or not? Of course, the Pharisees lean in the direction of, we don't like the king, we don't like civil government. And the extreme Pharisees, who become the zealots, actually make concerted violent efforts to get that government out of the way.

Jesus doesn't say anything about activist politics. Jesus never goes and pickets the slave market. He never goes down and marches around the Roman procurator's office, or the Roman governor's mansion, or anything else, saying, boo on Romans, go away Romans, bad Romans, this is God's land.

Me and my disciples are here to set up the gate. Jesus doesn't do any of that. And the Pharisees, they're very interested in politics, they're interested in government.

So, they are skeptical in the extreme about his identity as the Messiah. Claims, either by himself or others, that he is the Messiah. They're down on that idea.

When he casts out demons, it's the Pharisees who say, he's doing this by the power of Beelzebub. He's not of God, he's not from God. They flat out reject any idea that he's the Son of God.

And of course, they've got the scribes, digging through the law to find scriptures to document this kind of thing. They are part of the plot to kill Jesus, which is not surprising. They do a lot of plotting and scheming and working behind the scenes to make things happen.

You find a modern argument that, oh, the anti-Semitic idea that the Jews put Jesus on the cross is just nonsense. It was a Roman, you know, crucifixion is a Roman thing. He ran afoul of the Romans, and so on.

Well, this is just naivete. This is lack of knowledge of the Pharisees, who knew how to pull the strings, who had some Romans in their pockets, who could manipulate the environment to make things happen, so that some people wound up better off and other people wound up worse off. That's what they do.

That's what they've been doing for a couple of centuries. Jesus and John the Baptist both have some pretty harsh things to say about the Pharisees. Brood of vipers.

It's pretty tough to come up with a more, you know, people always want to talk about the gentle Jesus and, you know, you're not like Jesus. Jesus didn't call anybody names. Jesus didn't make any strong arguments.

And they conveniently forget Jesus whipping all the people out of the temple who were changing money in there, and Jesus calling people broods of vipers, and whitewashed tombstones, and so on. But brood of vipers was a horrible insult. I mean, everyone who knew the serpent was associated with Satan in the Old Testament.

To call somebody a bunch of snakes is basically to say, And that's the kind of language Jesus and John the Baptist both used to describe the Pharisees. Brood of vipers. But there's also some description of the Pharisees in the New Testament that's not so negative.

At one point, the Pharisees send a warning to Jesus, telling him that Herod wants to kill him. Now, the motivation for this may be somewhat obscure, but that's in Luke. Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, is a Pharisee.

The Apostles in Acts are released upon the advice of Gamaliel, who is the Apostle Paul's teacher, and who is the head Pharisee, the prominent, revered elder amongst the Pharisees. In Acts 15, you find out that some of the Pharisees joined the early church, and became Christians. So, Paul, of course, points out that he is a Pharisee of the Pharisees.

They are mentioned, as I said, some 22 times in connection with the scribes. They are also mentioned several times with the Sadducees. The Pharisees and the Sadducees, but much less often.

Doctrinally, they believed in the resurrection of the dead. They believed in angels. They believed in spirits, human spirits.

And, of course, all these things are affirmed by the early Christian church as well. There is a plethora of scriptures in the Gospels and Acts, referring to the Pharisees. I've got maybe three dozen listed here, but you can use any concordance and find those.

The thing that is interesting is that, although they are not mentioned in the Old Testament, they are also not mentioned in the Apocrypha. The books of Maccabees and so on, Tobit, Esdras, Enoch, and a lot of these others, they are not mentioned by name. When you do find a belief in the afterlife, or a description of angels or spirits, some people want to try to connect this with the Pharisees, but it's just an assumption.

We don't really know for sure. So, that's the Pharisees. Hopefully, you've got a reasonably good mental picture of who this group is, and how they operate, what their history is, kind of where they came from, and what they're doing in the time of Christ.

Now, I want to take a look at the Sadducees. We know much less about the Sadducees, because we have no extant writings by the Sadducees. Josephus had been a Pharisee, so we've got quite a lot of information from him.

The New Testament has a lot of references, 35 or 40 references to the Pharisees. We don't know near as much about the Sadducees. All of the information we have is written by somebody else, and in some cases, somebody we can figure might even be an antagonist, like Josephus.

The first mention of them, by the way, the name Sadducees, as near as anybody can tell, the origin of that name, the Pharisees are the peres, the ones who breach apart, who break apart, who separate. Sadducee apparently comes from the name Zadok. Remember, Zadok was the high priest way back in the days of David, Solomon, when you first get the temple underway.

You had Zadok. And so these are the sons of Zadok, the Zadokies. Josephus says, As for the Sadducees, they take away fate, and say there is no such thing.

No such thing as fate. The events of human affairs are not at its disposal. Not at fate's disposal.

All our actions are in our own power. We are ourselves the cause of what is good, and we receive what is evil from our own folly. Life is what you make it.

It's all on you. You can be Norman Vincent Peale, power of positive thinking, Dale Carnegie, how to win friends and influence people, the power of visualization. Make it happen.

Tony Robbins. It's all up to you. And of course, this kind of makes sense because they don't believe in resurrection.

Life is what you do between now and your last heartbeat. So, it's all up to you. You're going to

make your rewards.

You're going to make your punishments. It's all in this life. That's the Sadducees' view.

Josephus says, the sect of the Sadducees' notions are quite contrary to those of the Pharisees. And way back in the days, I won't go into all the history. If you want to read about the history in the days of Hyrcanus, John Hyrcanus, and some of those others in the century or two BC, you'll find that the Sadducees crop up, and they're on the other side of the equation.

But the Sadducees, here's the bottom line. What do you want to know about the Sadducees? What do you want to remember about the Sadducees? They are connected to the priesthood. They're not called sons of Zadok for nothing.

They are tied up with the priest. Now, how do we know this? Well, among other things, we have the testimony of the book of Acts. In Acts 5.17, it says, Then the high priest and all his associates, Acts 5.17 tells us, all the associates of the high priest were members of the party of the Sadducees.

You've got the lawyers, who are the scholars, who are the legal team, who pull up the scriptures to bolster the Pharisees. You've got the Sadducees, who have got the priesthood in their grasp and in their pocket. They either are the priest or they're in real close cahoots with the priest.

And this is the liturgy, the ritual side, the operation of the temple. If you want to get in down at the temple, who do you think is running the tables of the money changers? Come down and buy a sacrifice. You'll make your life better.

You make it happen. It's up to you. You buy the sacrifice, you'll get good karma.

You'll get good luck. You'll have great blessing. Whatever you want to call it.

Buy this stuff from us and you'll be all set. Come down and make things. We have the power of your fate in our hands because we control the keys to God's blessing down here at the temple.

So there's this odd sort of love-hate relationship between the Pharisees and the Sadducees because one of them's got the Scriptures and the political power. The other has got the priesthood and the mystical power. You find these two things kind of in a real unholy combination all in one in the Catholic Church because for many centuries in a lot of countries, they had both.

They were the Pharisees and the Sadducees all rolled up into one little pointed hat. But in the days of Jesus in Jerusalem, you've got these two in tension and sometimes it's in their common interest to unite and get rid of a thing because the whole religious establishment is at stake. But you've got the priesthood on one side which is not necessarily Levites anymore.

Remember it's devolved down through the Hasmoneans and the Maccabees and so on and they're not strictly Levites. And so this has become its own little power grid over here. And

they've got the money coming in through the temple.

They've got the finances. And the Pharisees may have the hearts of the people, but the Sadducees have got their wallets and their future faith. How's your life going to turn out? Well, you can watch that Pharisee pray on the street corner all you want, but if you want your life to turn out well, you better come down here and buy something.

Drop something in the plate and get the ritual side squared away. So Acts 5.17 is a key scripture because it tells us specifically this. And what we find is that the 14 New Testament references to the Sadducees lead us to the following conclusion.

I won't give you all 14 of them again, but we can look this up in a concordance. But generally when you find the Sadducees mentioned in Matthew, the Gospel of Matthew, they're mentioned along with the Pharisees. And you find that they have united sort of in an unusual manner.

It's kind of like the Democrats and the Republicans getting together because they don't like bin Laden or they used to be united and not liking Saddam or something. But you want to look up and see if there's a blue moon in the sky because the Pharisees and the Sadducees are both doing something where they're normally these mortal enemies. The Sadducees believe that there's no resurrection.

Remember their little trick question to Jesus, the woman who has marriage to several brothers and so on. They don't believe in angels. They don't believe in spirits.

They don't believe in an immaterial world. It's all material. That's why they're the heavy wallet brigade.

They're the ones who grab the money. Jesus warns against the teaching of the Sadducees. And the Sadducees seem to have been enemies of the early church.

They were enemies of Peter and John and Paul. And you find this in Acts, of course. Acts chapter 4, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.

Notice, the priests, captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees. They're all mentioned together. Acts 5, 17-40, the high priest and all his associates, members of the party of the Sadducees were filled with jealousy and did this, that, and the other.

Acts chapter 23, 6-9, the Sadducees say there's no resurrection. There are neither angels or spirits. That's that thing where Paul sets the Pharisees and the Sadducees against each other and sort of disappears into confusion.

So, once you recognize on the basis of Acts chapter 5 that the chief priests are in cahoots with the Sadducees, now you get a lot more information from Scripture because Jesus comes out

and says that he is going to suffer death at the hands of the chief priests. This is with the willing knowledge and support of the Sadducees. The high priest Caiaphas is one of the instigators in the plot to kill Jesus.

The chief priests also wanted to kill Lazarus. Jesus raised him from the dead. That's interfering with people coming down and engaging in ritual sacrifice, dropping off their money at the temple.

Don't be starting a sect that draws a lot of people away. We're going to lose money. They are the ones who paid Judas Iscariot, the 30 pieces of silver, to betray Jesus.

They are the ones who sent the temple guards to capture Jesus in Gethsemane. In the Gospel of John, we're going to see that it appears that the chief priests themselves were present at the arrest. They are the ones who looked for false evidence to convict Jesus in the Sanhedrin.

They are the ones who voted to put Jesus to death. Paul, the Pharisee, was heading over to Damascus with the blessing and under the authority of the chief priests. The Sadducees and the Pharisees got together trying to put down this nascent Christianity.

They appear to have been loyal to Rome. Go ahead and have the Romans in place because this provides a nice stable structure in which we can fleece the people and keep our priestly power. They are the ones who plotted to kill Paul when he came down where? To the temple, paying the vow and so on.

So, this is going to be very helpful. Just remember this for future reference. There's so much more I could tell you, but here's the essentials.

When we talk about the Pharisees, we're talking about those who have got their tendrils and their tentacles into government. They're behind the scenes pulling strings. They are the ones who can have an in with Pilate and with Herod and can influence public policy because they're into politics.

They are the ones who value tradition along with Scripture. They are the ones who consider themselves to be on holy ground and that they are just and right in doing this. And they're sort of implementing God's kingdom behind the scenes is how they justify themselves.

Sadducees are not on the law, Scripture, tradition side. They are on the ritual, priestly, temple side. This is, by the way, why the roots of Rabbinic Judaism, which has come down to the present day, are strictly in the Pharisaic side.

The rabbis are the descendants of the Pharisees because when the temple gets destroyed in 70 A.D., the Sadducees disappear. There is no priesthood. The power base and the whole center of their power disappears with the destruction of the temple.

And the Sadducees disappear from history. By 100 A.D., they're just gone. And it is the

Pharisees who wind up putting together the Mishnah, Talmud, and are the roots of Rabbinic Judaism that we have in the present day.

So I hope this will be helpful as we go through the Gospel of John and any other time that you're looking at New Testament environment to understand particularly those two and their relationship to the priests and to the government. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the warning that it gives us that even as these groups fell into error, we as individuals can do the same. May God the Holy Spirit impress these truths on our hearts and give us insight so that we can judge ourselves to see if we are in the faith. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.