

## Jesus' View of the Bible: the Pharisees & Sadducees— who they were & Jesus response to their challenges

From Yvon Prehn

### What we're going to do today

- Look at Jesus comment on the sufficiency of the Scriptures for salvation
- Step back into history to understand
- Sadducees & Pharisees
- Detailed look at their beliefs (“rightly divide”)
- \*\*\*ALSO see the Bible as true secular history
- How Jesus reacted to their challenges
- What we can learn from it

### Jesus view: The sufficiency of Scriptures

- See the value of the Old Testament for salvation
- Same in the Old Testament as in the NT
- Old Testament looks ahead
- All about God, judgment, righteous living, coming Messiah known

### Story of Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16: "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' 25"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place

of torment.' "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' " 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' *He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'* "

### The situation for NT audience

- What they had: Moses and the Prophets
- How did they learn about it?
  - Synagogue for most
- Who did they learn from?
  - Teachers
  - Sadducees
  - Pharisees

### Synagogue

- Babylonian captivity (597 first deportation, temple destroyed, decree to return 538)
- Temple destroyed, no temple for 70 years, (rebuilt between 520-515)
- 2nd Temple rebuilt
- History key: Political power no longer tied to religious leadership
- Jews ruled by Persia, Alexander's successor, Egypt, Syria, briefly Maccabees, Rome
- Temple, no longer center for religious or political leadership
- Prophets silent (400 years)

### Synagogue developed

- A place to learn and study Scriptures
- 10 men and one could be formed
- Men and women involved though divided
- Fausset Bible encyclopedia:

"The teaching out of the law, which was read in a cycle, once through in three years. The prophets were similarly read as second lessons; the exposition or "word of exhortation" followed The psalms were selected to suit "the special times"; . . . Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday were the devotional days of the synagogue."

## Religious groups in NT

- Pharisees Hebrew perushim , "separated".
  - Began around time of 2nd temple
- Sadducees
  - Traced ancestry back to Zadok, high priest of Solomon's time
  - Died out after temple destruction
- Essenes
  - Communal and ascetic offshoot of Sadducees, 200 BC until about 70 AD
- Zealots
  - Political extremists 1st century died out at Masada 73 AD

## Pharisees & Sadducees

- Differences far greater than their belief or not in life after death
- Sadducees, key in NT history:
- Primarily political  
"Ananias. . . was appointed by the Roman legate Quirinius, served for ten years (6–15 AD), when at the age of 36 he was deposed by the procurator Gratus 'for imposing and executing capital sentences which had been forbidden by the imperial government.' Yet while having been officially removed from office, he remained as one of the nations most influential political and social individuals, aided greatly by the use of his five sons and his son-in-law as puppet High Priests, Caiaphas... till his assassination in 66 AD for advocating peace with Rome.

## Pharisees

- Teachers of the people, what they taught:

The fundamental principle all of the of the Pharisees, common to them with all orthodox modern Jews, is that by the side of the written law regarded as a summary of the principles and general laws of the Hebrew people there was an oral law to complete and to explain the written law, given to Moses on Mount Sinai and transmitted by him by word of mouth. The first portion of the Talmud, called the Mishna or "second law," contains this oral law. It is a digest of the Jewish

traditions and a compendium of the whole ritual law, ***and it came at length to be esteemed far above the sacred text.*** Smith's Bible Dictionary

## Did this because: According to historian Shaye Cohen:

- By the time three generations had passed after the destruction of the Second Temple, most Jews concluded that the Temple would not be rebuilt during their lives, nor in the foreseeable future.
- Jews were now confronted with difficult and far-reaching questions:
  - How to achieve atonement without the Temple?
  - How to live in the post-Temple, Romanized world?
  - How to connect present and past traditions?
- The Pharisees' vision of Jewish law as a means by which ordinary people could engage with the sacred in their daily lives provided them with a position from which to respond to all the challenges in a way meaningful to the vast majority of Jews.

Continues.....

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## Implications of his comments:

- Solomon's temple destroyed
- No sacrifices w/o temple
- People couldn't obey the law as it stood
- Choices: Look for Messiah, believe God
- Or change the Law to something manageable

## Their answer: the Oral Torah

The Pharisees believed that in addition to the written Torah recognized by both the Sadducees and Pharisees and believed to have been written by Moses, there exists another Torah, consisting of the corpus of oral laws and traditions transmitted by God to Moses orally,

and then memorized and passed down by Moses and his successors over the generations. The Oral Torah functioned to elaborate and explicate what was written, and the Pharisees asserted that the sacred scriptures were not complete on their own terms and could therefore not be understood.

### Therefore.....

The sages of the Talmud believed that the Oral law was simultaneously revealed to Moses at Sinai, and the product of debates among rabbis. Thus, one may conceive of the "Oral Torah" not as a fixed text but as an ongoing process of analysis and argument in which God is actively involved; it was this ongoing process that was revealed at Sinai, and by participating in this ongoing process rabbis and their students are actively participating in God's ongoing act of revelation.

### Sound familiar?

- "Did God really say?"
- Infallibility of the Church to interpret
- Joseph Smith
- Jesus Seminar

### Modern day applications

Jacob Neusner has explained "The schools of the Pharisees and rabbis were and are holy because there men achieve sainthood through study of Torah and imitation of the conduct of the masters."

- This approach constitutes Rabbinic Judaism today.
- Keep this in mind when witnessing.
- Few Jews know their Bibles well.
- Always more appealing if we as humans can decide what the Bible "really" teaches rather than obeying it

### Review/ summary: Views of Scripture

- Sadducees, in theory
  - STRICT interpretation, Scripture ONLY
  - For this life only
- Pharisees
- Scripture PLUS Oral tradition, Talmud, Mishna= oral law

- Scripture PLUS their commentaries
- Kept building rules, regulations
- Eternal consequences

### How this worked out: The interpretation of the law of retribution (lex talionis):

And a man, when he maims his fellow, as he has done, so shall be done to him. A fracture for a fracture, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth—as he gives a wound in a man, so shall be given in him. (Leviticus 24:19-20)

Most [Pharisees](#) understood this to mean that the value of an eye was to be sought by the perpetrator rather than actually removing his eye too. In the Sadducees' view the law was to be taken literally.

### Also disagree on traditions

- Sadducees opposed the Pharisaic idea of the [eruv](#), the merging of several private precincts into one in order to admit of the carrying of food and vessels from one house to another on the Sabbath.
- Note: helps us see why Jesus teaching so different.
- He spoke with authority
- He did not argue over traditions.

### In practice, in society

Sadducees

Political leaders; Rome's appointees & puppets

Wealthy, upper class

Amoral, argumentative, nasty (Josephus)

If no afterlife; no judgment

### Pharisees

- Of the people, often admired, moral
- Teachers, primarily of Oral Torah
- Piled on rules, regulations
- Afterlife, judgment important

## What happened when they encountered Jesus

Matt 12: 1At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. 2When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." 3He answered, "**Haven't you read** what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. **5Or haven't you read** in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? 6I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. **7If you had known what these words mean**, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. 8For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

## Jesus challenged them in the rabbinic manner

Matt 12: 9Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, 10and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "**Is it lawful** to heal on the Sabbath?" 11He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? 12How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! **Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.**" 13Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. 14But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

## Interaction with Sadducees

Matt 22: 23That same day, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. 24"Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. 25Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. 26The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. 27Finally, the woman died. 28Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were

married to her?" 29Jesus replied, "**You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.** 30At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. 31But about the resurrection of the dead— have you not read what God said to you, 32'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

## Jesus response overall

- Spoke specifically to their background— challenged on prior handling of Scriptures
- Pharisees, those who knew the Scriptures:
  - "Have you not read?"
- Sadducees, who did not read the Bible
  - "You are in error because you don't know the Scriptures or the power of God!"
- In both he answers with Scripture

## Jesus as example –our response

- Recognize there are people who will distort the Bible to support an unbiblical viewpoint for many reasons.
- How they do this:
- Come up with viewpoint
- Quote verses out of context to support it
- Create a straw man and make fun of it
- That viewpoint is deeply felt
- Sometimes good motives
- Do then as Jesus did

## Additional applications

- The Bible is much more than other books, but it is not less
- You cannot take any book, pull passages out of it and use them to support your theories.
- Don't be intimidated by Bible quoting
- Learn it well enough to know when things are pulled out of context

## DO NOT "proof text" without context yourself

Use a tool like Thompson Chain Reference Bible, Naves, any online concordance

## Insights

- Pharisees wanted to be the “separated” ones  
But they wanted to do it their way, with their comments and writing
- The way to real separation (being set apart for God’s use) is what Jesus prayed for us concerning his word
- John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.
- Sanctify=hagiatio (set apart for sacred use or make holy)

## A great example we can use

- Paul often used the SAME process as Pharisees
- Would go to a Synagogue
- Would read the Scripture
- Instead of commentary on the Oral Torah
- He preached Jesus!

## Typical of his procedure

From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, . . . On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. 15 After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak."

16 Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! 17 The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country, 18 he endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert. . . . After removing Saul, he made David their king. 23 "From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. . . . 26 "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. 27 The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. 28 Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. 29 When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the

dead, 31 and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people. Acts 13: 32 "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers 33 he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: " 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father 34 The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: " 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.' 35 So it is stated elsewhere:

" 'You will not let your Holy One see decay.' 36 "For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. 37 But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay. 38 "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39 Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. . . . 42 As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath.

## Astounding applications

- Paul did what he’s always done
- But he used his background, skills, training for the purposes of God
- \*\*\*What has God given you? Trained you in?
- Pray He will use it to preach Jesus!

## Group Questions

Ice-breaker: What is your favorite free-time activity?

- Group project: What is a situation, a place, a philosophy that you can go to and can share Jesus?
- Where/ what is it?
- Who is it for?
- What would you do?
- How would you make the connections?
- Brainstorm a plan—don’t aim for perfection, just create a possibility!