

## Pharisees

The Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes are the three most critical Jewish movement groups around the era of Jesus and the New Testament. According to *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical context* by Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald. These three groups appear to have emerged or at least been active, during the Hasmonean era, especially under the reign of the leadership of Jonathan (p.217). Numerous groups evolved; some created social unrest. Some challenged the Roman Empire with disastrous results, some due to religious disagreements, others were peasants' rebellion due to high taxes or lack of market for their produce.

**Origin:** There's a possibility that their name goes back to the Hebrew word (*paras*), meaning separation, from all that is considered impurity or all pagan practices. They stood for purity and a correct understanding of the Torah. It is believed they came from the Hasideans. They had a Deuteronomistic mindset and wanted the people like the priest to know and keep the Law. Because they thought that was the only way God would bless the nation. The scribes mostly came from this group as ones who studied the Law and obedience to the commandments.

**Influence:** Josephus portrays the Pharisees as the most influential of the three groups. They were popular among the people. They were the most significant opponents of Jesus in the New Testament. Gamaliel and the apostle Paul stand out as the two most prominent individual personalities from this group. This group had a reputation as an accurate interpreter of the Law. Josephus referred to them as the experts of the Law. And Paul stated they were the strictest

sect of the Law. This can be seen in their opposition to Jesus' activities on the sabbath. Not even healings were allowed, Matthew 12:9-14, Mark 3:1-6.

**Doctrines and practices:** As opposed to the Essenes who withdrew from the community, they emphasized holiness within the community, were known for their virtuous conduct and established worship, prayers, and sacrifices. Their Halakah (legal regulations of the Law, both oral and written, emerged from post-biblical Judaism. Viewed by the rabbis as more critical than the Haggadah or narrative traditions), guided the people in the pursuit of holiness in everyday life. The Sadducees rejected their customs and beliefs. The Pharisees believed in divine providence. Also, that individual held the ability to do what was right or wrong was within the capacity of every person, so that fate cooperated with human free will. The Sadducees rejected fate entirely; they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and the afterlife in which people would be rewarded or punished according to actions in this life. The Sadducees believed the soul perished at death. The Pharisees did not align themselves with the politics of their time. The teachings of the Pharisees are found in the Mishnah. They stand between the Sadducees and the Essenes. While some scholars believe they were very trivial in some of their application of the Law, some, like Dr. Shellrude, thought they were a good set of people who were zealous for God and meant well. It is believed that their belief is generally seen to have formed the basis for rabbinic Judaism.