

SHA'UL/PAUL WAS ONE OF THE GOOD PHARISEES

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The Purpose of This Study

When you think of the word “Pharisee” what immediately comes to your mind? Probably nothing good. So why learn about the Pharisees?

It is the purpose of this brief study to accomplish several objectives in the mind of the reader. It is hoped that some of the pejorative and prejudicial views about the Pharisees that exists in the minds of many individuals will cease in light of biblical and historical facts. In light of a more balanced and informed view of the subject, it is hoped that one will have a better understanding and appreciation of the cultural and religious context in which our Savior Yeshua the Messiah, Paul and the other first century believers operated. And finally, it is hoped that the reader, upon realizing that there existed many good and non-hypocritical Pharisees (including the Apostle Paul himself), and that as they were the progenitors of modern rabbinic Judaism the reader will gain not only a more balanced but even a congenial attitude toward modern Judaism.

Brad Young in his book, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* says, “Unfortunately, the image of the Pharisee in modern usage is seldom if ever positive. Such a negative characterization of Pharisaism distorts our view of Judaism and the beginnings of Christianity. Little recognition is given to the Pharisees and their contribution to religious thought. For example, we Christian scholars accept the fact that the Pharisees built a foundation for later rabbinic Judaism but downplay their influence upon Christian theology. But the theology of [Yeshua] is Jewish and is built firmly upon the foundations of Pharisaic thought. The Pharisees’ strong beliefs, spanning from the doctrine of God to the resurrection of the dead, have influenced Christian belief in a much greater measure than is commonly recognized. Theologically, the early Christians were very close to the Pharisees.

“Today the negative opinions concerning the Pharisees have influenced the relationship between Christians and Jews. As Christians we tend to view modern Judaism as the final product of the ‘wicked Phariseism’ we read about in the New Testament. The poison of prejudice flows in two directions. First it flows in the direction of our perception of the Pharisees in the time of [Yeshua]. Second it flows toward our views of modern Judaism. In actuality, modern expressions of both the Jewish and the Christian faiths possess common roots in the rich spiritual contributions of the Pharisees during the Second Temple period (Young, p. 188)

Paul Affirms That He Was a Pharisee and the Son of a Pharisee

Paul declares in Acts 23:6— **Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee** [present, not past tense], **the son of a Pharisee...** Paul made this statement in approximately 60 CE, 26 years after his conversion to faith in Yeshua (Acts 9) which occurred around 34 CE and just six to eight years before his death. He had already written the epistles of First Corinthians and Galatians, and had probably already written Second Corinthians and Romans, as well, and he still considered himself a Pharisee! If the Pharisees were all self-righteous religious hypocrites and enemies of Yeshua, as we have been taught to believe, then why would Paul make the confession that he was a Pharisee if our view of the Pharisees and his view were the same? Obviously he viewed them from a different light than we do, else he couldn’t have so confidently affirmed his ties to that religious sect.

Some Background On the Jewish Religious Sect of the Pharisees

The Christian notion (prejudice) that Judaism in general and Phariseism in particular was monolithic in nature and evil and that all Pharisees were evil and religious hypocrites and that all were enemies of Yeshua does not square with the historical or biblical (Book of Acts) record. It is the point of this study to challenge this notion

from the historical and the biblical records.

Messianic Jewish Rabbi, Tim Hegg in his book, *The Letter Writer—Paul’s Background and Torah Perspective* says, “First we must put away the notion that there was a single, monolithic ‘1st Century Judaism.’ From extant historical and rabbinic, as well as biblical literature, it is evident that there were numbers of sects, or ‘Judaisms,’ each having ‘boundaries’ to define those ‘in’ the group and those ‘outside’ of it. Designations such as Pharisee, Sadducee, and Essene describe such groups of the 1st Century.” Hegg continues that these groups agreed on certain core beliefs of Judaism such as that there was only one true God, the Sabbath, prohibition against idolatry and the divine nature of the Torah and the belief in and practice of other Torah essentials. But the issues that separated these sects were significant and often contested (p. 50). Modern Christianity would be a good example of the state of Judaism at the time of Paul. Christianity is comprised of denominations all of which share common doctrinal ground, but with major doctrinal differences which divide them, as well.

What Were the Main Sects of Judaism That Existed During the First Century?

- **Pharisees:** to be discussed below.
- **Sadducees:** Hegg states that the Sadducees were a recognizable group by 150 BCE and that they were the priestly aristocrats of the day. While they had a primary loyalty to the religion Israel, they were moderate Hellenists (Greek-thinking in their viewpoint) and were greatly influenced by the Greek environment in which they lived. Moreover, the Sadducees held only to the written Torah and rejected the oral traditions of the Jewish fathers which came to be known as the *Oral Torah*. Because the Pharisees believed in these traditions, at times almost placing them on the same level as the Written Torah, this placed the Sadducees at odds with them. Furthermore, the Sadducees had some very divergent theological differences from more traditional Judaism such as their denial of a resurrection and their belief that there was no afterlife. The Sadducees, because they were of priestly lineage, ministered in the Temple and were in control of the sacrificial system at the Temple. Because they manipulated the cost of worship, they gained much wealth from the people. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE this sect ceased to exist since everything that gave them definition and power was gone (Hegg, pp. 55-57).
- **Essenes:** The Essenes who lived in the separatist community of Qumran near the Dead Sea exerted little influence upon contemporary Jewish life and culture. As authors of the now famous Dead Sea Scrolls they have become one of the better known sects of the 1st Century. They were fundamentalists in their view of Torah and exclusivists. They not only maintained a community at the Dead Sea, but recent archeological excavations have discovered an area within the Old City of Jerusalem called the Essene Quarter where Essenes obviously lived. Additionally, they maintained communities in several other cities, as well, with about 4000 members total. The only reason we mention this group is that because of their presence in Jerusalem and because of some similar beliefs as to those of the first century Messianic believers it is quite possible there may have been some interaction between the two groups (Hegg, pp. 57-61).
- **Scribes:** Though the term “scribes and Pharisees” are often linked in the Gospels, they were two distinct groups, though integrally linked. Hegg says, “Being learned in the reading and writing of the language, a scribe was necessary for creating and copying legal documents as well as religious texts. The Pharisees, intent upon proving their *halachaha* [interpretations] from Scriptures, sought the help of the scribes and their vast knowledge of the sacred text....The scribes [were] the Jewish scholars who had a great influence on Judaism from the time of Ezra down to...the 1st Century CE. In this regard it should be kept in mind that the term “scribe” generally denoted an educated person in the Ancient Near East, and especially a scholar. At times the word “lawyer” is used and seems to be equivalent to “scribe” (Hegg, pp. 61-62).

Historical Overview of the Sect of the Pharisees

According to Ron Moseley (*Yeshua—A Guide to the Real Jesus of the Original Church*) “The Hebrew word for Pharisee is *perushim* meaning *separatist*. This title was undoubtedly born of the fact that the Pharisees did not associate with the *Am Ha-Eretz*, common people who did not tithe, were ritually impure, and knew nothing of the Law (John 7:49)....The members of this separatist society called one another *haber*, meaning *comrade*, and their teachers were called *hakhamim*, meaning *men of wisdom*...The exclusivity of these Jews gave rise to the accusation of being separatists. The Greek equivalent of *perushim* is *pharisaioi*, from which we get the English word *Pharisee* (p. 86).

Scholars generally believe that the sect of the Pharisees originated sometime during the Maccabee period during the 2nd Century BCE. Moseley says that there was a severe clash between the priestly Sadducees who embraced Hellenistic ideas and the other men of learning who opposed all Greek ideas and abominations. This battle resulted in a distinct division between the Pharisees who represented the common people and the priestly and aristocratic Sadducees. Josephus describes the Pharisees as “the most accurate interpreters of the laws” (Moseley, pp. 86-87).

The Influence of the Pharisees and Their Authority Upon Jewish Life

Moseley writes that “[t]he masses looked to the Pharisees for religious leadership because they studied both the Written and the Oral Law more than any other group. In the synagogues, the conduct of the prayers, as well as the reading and expounding of the Scriptures, was done by scribes who were Pharisees. The authority of the Pharisees can be seen in their ability to instruct even the high priest, who was a Sadducee. Up to the time of the Maccabean Revolt (175-135 BCE), the high priests were all of the family of Zadok. The more scholarly Pharisees, influenced by Ezra and the men of the Great Synagogue, demanded the submission of the high priests to their authority. Because of this, the high priest was compelled to take an oath the night before the Day of Atonement, to ensure that he would conduct the service in accordance with Pharisaic traditions. According to Josephus, the Pharisees were ‘able greatly to influence the masses of people. Whatever the people do about divine worship, prayers, and sacrifices, they perform according to their directions’” (Moseley, p. 92).

Basic Tenets of Phariseism—Their Religious Tradition

“According to Josephus, the Pharisees were distinguished from the other sects in that they were the most rigidly observant and most skilled in interpreting the *Mishnah*, the Oral Law. The Pharisees believed that the Oral Law was the detailed explanation of how to keep those sections of the written Law, such as the feast, sacrifices, and disciplines, that are mentioned but not explained. According to tradition, the Oral Law was handed down from Moses to the elders and then to the people...” (Moseley, p. 89).

The best way to describe the Pharisees approach to keeping all of the 613 commandments of the Torah is scrupulous and fastidious (in the sense of demanding and meticulous), thus giving rise to the colloquial expression *pharisaical*. Moseley writes, “Rabbinic literature describes the special discipline which the Pharisees observed: (1) they re-tithed any doubtful fruit or product obtained from a non-Jew; (2) they kept themselves in ritual purity at all times; and (3) they were so cautious not to break even one of the 613 laws of the Torah that they arranged fences or hedges of protection around each law...To make sure they did not break even one of these [613 laws of Torah] by accident or ignorance, they created a ‘hedge’ around the laws. These hedges are called ‘traditions’ in the New Testament. The idea was to establish enough traditions around the law that an individual would have to break a tradition before he could go all the way to breaking an explicit provision of the law” (Moseley, p. 90). There were many of these “fences” regulating what types of activities were or were not permissible on the Sabbath, tithing and fast days. We see Yeshua himself addressing many of these “traditions” in the Gospels.

“Severe problems began to arise when the practice of establishing fences reached such a severe level that the Pharisees began determining a person’s orthodoxy by his respect for the fences. Based on Deuteronomy 17:9, where the priests, Levites, and the judges made decisions as to the interpretations of Scripture, they established new laws to fill in what they perceived to be gaps—issues of life that were not sufficiently covered by the Word of God. It was these new laws called *gezerah* (plural *gezerot*) to which [Yeshua] as well as many other Jews objected” (Moseley, 91).

Basic Tenets of Phariseism—Their Religious Theology

“The theology of the Pharisees differed from their Sadducean opponents concerning the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the existence of angels, divine providence, the free will of man, and the use of the Oral Law—among other things. Surprisingly, the Pharisees’ theology was actually more closely aligned with the New Testament teachings than any of the other Jewish groups of the first century. [Yeshua] probably held to the beliefs of the fundamentalist Pharisees, although not to all the ‘fences’ that were added. It was [Yeshua] who exhorted the disciple to do what the Pharisees taught, but not what they did, because, in His words, ‘they say and do not’ (Matthew 23:3) (Moseley, pp. 91-92).

The Duties of the Pharisees

The Pharisees played many vital roles in Jewish society. “A few of the jobs that Pharisees were thought to have done are: running most of the synagogues; controlling the schools and teaching in them; serving as scribes; going on missions to instruct Diaspora Jews; serving as magistrates; instructing the priests on how to offer sacrifices; regulating the paying of tithes and other Temple revenues; giving advice on all areas of Torah; and working secular jobs” (Moseley, p. 102).

The Community of the Pharisees

According to Moseley, the Pharisees drew strength from their *haburot*, the closed communities of like-minded men who encouraged one another in the exact fulfillment of the demands made on pious Israelites. Admission to these communities was strictly regulated. A candidate had to affirm his agreement with all of the detailed Pharisaic traditions, after which he entered a period of probation which lasted from 30 days to one year. Each of these communities was under the leadership of a scribe, who served as a professional authority in the interpretation of the Law. The communities had regularly scheduled weekly meetings, usually on the eve of the Sabbath. Study of Torah and a communal meal were regular parts of these gathering. Every aspect of Pharisee’s life, including his food, his clothing, and even the wall of his house, were under the regimen of the Law (Moseley, pp. 103-104).

The Pharisees and the Synagogue

“Since the Pharisees stressed the concept that God could be worshiped outside of the Temple area, the synagogue became the focal point of their activities. Originally the synagogue was intended to be solely a place for study of Torah, not an alternative to Temple worship. But the Pharisees, recognizing the need for more than their closed communities meetings, took their influence into the synagogues and forever changed their purpose. Man who did not join the closed communities nevertheless became followers of the Pharisees’ doctrines through their teachings of Torah in the synagogues (Moseley, p. 104).

The Pharisees Were Evangelistic

Moseley writes that the Pharisees engaged in aggressive and effective evangelism for three hundred years, especially during the time of [Yeshua]. This is implied by such New Testament phrases as ‘You travel over land and sea to win a single convert’ (Mt. 23:15), and ‘Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in’ (Lk. 14:23). During the time period of the second century B.C. to 37 B.C. Judaism spread by means of religious conversion to all parts of the known world, and the Pharisees were at the forefront of this evangelistic push. During the first century B.C. Hillel set, as his main principle, the bringing of men closer to the Torah. In opposition to Shammai, Hillel consented to the admission of proselytes...It is said that some in the Shammai school considered Gentile converts to be a leprosy in Israel. It was to this group that Yeshua referred when He said that they imposed heavy and grievous burdens on others, in contrast to His burden, which, He said, was light (Mt. 23:4; 11:30) (Moseley, pp. 125-126). Like the Hillel school of Phariseim Yeshua definitely taught his disciples to evangelize. Likewise, Paul, as a Pharisee of the school of Hillel was evangelistic to the core!

Seven Types of Pharisees—Five Bad and Two Good

There were good and bad things about the Pharisees. In Matthew 23 Yeshua denounces some of the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and pronounces upon them a succession of seven woes (*woes* means *overwhelming sorrow, grief or warning of impending calamity*). Yeshua was not the only one of that time period who condemned the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. In rabbinic literature, the sages list seven plagues of the Pharisees. It is also important to note, however, that in both the rabbinic literature and the words of Yeshua there were some things said about the Pharisees that were good and commendable (*ibid* p. 105)

Moseley states that the *Jerusalem Talmud* describes seven kinds of Pharisees, five of which were hypocrites, and two of which were good. The two good types are described as follows: (a) the God-fearing Pharisee, who was truly righteous, like Job and (b) the God-loving Pharisee, who had a true affection for God, like Abraham (Moseley, p. 105-106).

“Both the New Testament and other Jewish literature describe various Pharisees who seem to have been

sincere, honest, and godly. There were certainly those to whom Isaiah 29:13 applied, those who drew near to God with their lips, while their hearts were far from Him. But there were also those, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who believed in [Yeshua] and endeavoured to follow Him (John 7:50;19:39; Mark 15:43 [Acts 15:5]). In Acts 5 we find Gamaliel, the teacher of Paul, arguing for tolerance toward the [Messianic believers in Yeshua]. On at least one occasion, some Pharisees warned Yeshua of an attempt on His life, and others are seen showing hospitality to the Lord (Luke 13:31; 7:36; 11:37; 14:1).

“As ideally conceived, Pharisaism was a good thing. There can be no doubt that the Pharisees were the fundamentalists among the normative Judaism of the first century. Josephus wrote, ‘The Pharisees are esteemed most skillful in the exact interpretation of their laws.’ This explains why, after the wars of A.D. 66-73 and A.D. 135, when other Jewish sects disappeared, the Pharisees continued, eventually formulating what is known today as Rabbinic Judaism (Moseley, p. 106-197).

Four Degrees For the Pharisees

There were four degrees, or levels, for those desiring to formally participate in Pharisaic philosophy. Anyone could join the society, including women and slaves, provided they were willing to fulfill all of the obligations. The requirements for each successive level became more stringent and a candidate would be accepted to the next level upon fulfilling the requirements of the previous level. Though there were only a few thousand formal members within the ranks of the Pharisees, there were literally millions of Jews who followed their doctrines including the Essenes and the early Messianic believers. (Moseley, p. 112).

Yeshua’s View of the Pharisees

“It was common practice for Jewish leaders to criticize those who did not live what they taught. For example...it was common for the School of Hillel to refer to the School of Shammai [the two main ‘denominations’ within Phariseism] with such biting epithets as ‘the first born of Satan,’ ‘the synagogue of Satan,’ or, as [Yeshua] said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan’ (Mark 8:33; John 8:44; Rev. 2:9, 13). The *Talmud* describes the hypocrites among the Pharisees as being ‘sore spots’ or ‘plagues of the Pharisaic party.’ We know that many Pharisees served God faithfully out of genuine devotion (John 3:1; 19:38-39; Acts. 5:34; 23:6-8). Therefore, when [Yeshua] charges the Pharisees with hypocrisy, this must not be viewed as a summary dismissal of the entire movement. Later, when Christianity left Judaism and became a predominantly Gentile religion, the word *Pharisee* took on a negative connotation to those who did not realize that not all Pharisees were hypocrites. In fact, our Lord Himself, being a believer in the entirety of the Word of God, would have allied Himself with this group more than any other of His day. Like those fundamentalists who seem to be the most critical of other fundamentalist, so [Yeshua] was only pointing out the error within his own group” (Moseley, pp. 95-96).

Moseley points out that Yeshua, for example, pointed out that the scribes and the Pharisees sit in “Moses’ Seat,” which was a position of religious authority. He also said that people should observe what the Pharisees taught them (Mt. 23:2-3), He warned, however, “but do not do according to their works: for they say, and do not do” (*ibid* p. 105). Phariseism was the only Jewish religious sect to which Yeshua gave his endorsement (Moseley, p. 124).

Young adds, “Many scholars and Bible students fail to understand the essence of [Yeshua’s] controversial ministry. [Yeshua’s] conflict with his contemporaries was not so much over the doctrines of the Pharisees, with which he was for the most part in agreement, but primarily over the understanding of his mission. He did sharply criticize hypocrites—that is, people who say the right things but do not practice what they teach (Mt. 23:1-3) (Young, p.100).

It must be noted that in light of the fact that the high priest and his power base were all Sadducees and not Pharisees (with whom the Sadducees were incompatible theologically), it was the Sadducees headed by their leader, Caiaphas, the high priest, who condemned Yeshua to death, and not the Pharisees, with whom Yeshua would have had much in common theologically (Young, p. 228).

To strengthen his assertion that the Pharisees were actually the “good guys” vis-à-vis Yeshua and his followers Young shows how it was politically expedient for the Sadducees being friends and political allies of the the Roman authorities to collaborate with the Romans against any political usurpers. Yeshua himself was viewed as a political threat to Roman rule in the area which if overthrown would result in the unseating of the Sadducees

from their place of power and prestige as the Temple leaders. Young goes on to show how the Sadducees actually aided Romans in apprehending Yeshua, while the Pharisees attempted to warn him of the dangers and keep him out of harm's way (Lk. 13:31). Again it was the Sadducees who went after Peter and John (Acts 5:17) while Gamaliel, the chief Pharisee of the day attempts to save them (Acts 5:36-38) (Young, pp. 230-231).

Indeed, we would not be fair to the subject if we did not point out that Paul, as a Pharisee, was legally responsible for the death of Stephen in Acts 7:58, that Paul persecuted the early church prior to his conversion. But why did he do this? Because as a zealous Torah-loving and Torah-obedient Pharisee he was operating under the mistaken and slanderous idea that Stephen and his Messianic friends were speaking blasphemous words against Moses, God, the Temple and the Torah (Law) (Acts 6:11,13). They viewed the followers of Yeshua as possible destroyers of the Temple and the Torah of Moses (v. 14). Of course nothing could have been further from the truth, but Paul and his Pharisee friends did not know this. Had Paul known the truth about the early first century Messianic believers, that there were in no way intent on destroying the temple or changing the laws or customs of the Torah he would have had no cause to persecute them.

Was Yeshua a Pharisee?

Young says, that in theology, Yeshua was close to the Pharisees (Young, p. 40). Moseley confirms this viewpoint. "The teachings of [Yeshua] had more in common with the teachings of the Pharisees, especially the school of Hillel, than any other group of His time. In fact, there are many similarities between the Lord and Hillel himself, who was some thirty years older than [Yeshua]" (Moseley, p. 107). Moseley then goes on to explain how Yeshua's famous statement known as the *Golden Rule* (Mt. 7:12) was almost a direct quote from a similar statement by Hillel.

"Some scholars believe that in His contentions with the Pharisees, [Yeshua] was simply taking the side of the school of Hillel against the school of Shamai." Examples of this can be found in Matthew 15:1-3 and Luke 11:37 (about washing of the hands and cleansing the outside of the cup); Matthew 15:4 about consecrating all of one's possessions to the Temple while leaving one's aging parents in poverty. Other divisive issues that Yeshua took a side on were the paying of the tithes of mint, anise, and cumin (Mt. 23:23 and Lk. 11:42), the money-changers in the Temple and the permissibility of divorce (Moseley, p. 108).

It must be noted that Paul was also a Pharisee of the school of Hillel being trained at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts. 23:31) who was the grandson of Hillel and the leader of the Pharisaic school that his grandfather had founded.

Paul Within First Century Judaism

- **The Use of Scripture:** Hegg writes, "As a Pharisee, Paul would have held the Tanach [Old Testament] as the definitive basis for what he knew of God and how he was to live righteously before Him. He would have followed in the general tradition of the Pharisee to base arguments upon specific texts from the Tanach, and to argue from these texts as a starting point. The fact that the Pharisees considered the biblical text as the foundation for their beliefs and arguments explains why they are so often coupled with the scribes" (Hegg, p. 62).

"The centrality of Scripture is likewise the pattern of confrontation between Yeshua and the Pharisees in the Gospels, in which dialog begins by addressing a particular text or phrase from the Torah.

"This same characteristic is found in Paul's writings. Throughout the epistles (and particularly in Romans) he anticipates the argument of his detractors, and answers them from Scripture. Paul quotes directly from the Tanach 105 times in his epistles, a number which would be much larger if allusions and verbal parallels to the Tanach were counted. At almost every turn Paul bases his arguments and exhortations on the written record of the Scriptures" (Hegg, p. 63). Hegg continues that this method of biblical interpretation was a particular mark of Phariseism (*ibid*).

- **The Use of Tradition:** "But does Paul also give value to tradition as was characteristic among the Pharisees? While he followed his Saviour in doing away with traditions that stood contrary to the written Torah, we do see in Paul's letters a recognition of the value of tradition and even the necessity of it within the community of faith. Note Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 2:15: **Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you**" We see similar

language in 2 Thes. 2:15 and 3:6 (Hegg, pp. 63-64).

- **Belief In the Resurrection:** Hegg states, Paul the Pharisee likewise fully affirms the doctrine of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 5). Perhaps often taken for granted, Hegg writes, that all pious Jews of the first century believed in the resurrection, but of course, this was not the case. It is noteworthy that the Pharisees were known for holding this doctrine, a characteristic which would hardly be an identifier if the belief in the resurrection was common to all. There is a very real sense, then, the teaching of Paul and the other Apostles affirming the doctrine of bodily resurrection shows a general alignment with Phariseism (Hegg, pp. 64-65).
- **Belief in Divine Providence:** Paul is no stranger to the belief in divine providence, a doctrine known among the Pharisees. Paul teaches that God causes events to work together for the good of those called to faith. He not only believes that God chooses those He will save but that He also gives grace to them from all eternity. Even the lives of the unrighteous are within the providence of God as far as Paul is concerned as in the case of Paul's description of God's hardening the heart of Pharaoh. If one of the hallmarks of Pharisaism was belief in the divine ordering of all things, Paul shows himself to be similarly aligned (Hegg, p. 66).

Conclusion

Maybe now we have a better understanding of and a greater appreciation for Paul when he confessed before the Sanhedrin, **Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee** [present, not past tense], **the son of a Pharisee...** (Acts 23:6).

APPENDIX:

List of Encounters Between Yeshua and the Pharisees and Sadducees As They Examine His Claims of Messiahship

The Pharisees Examination of Yeshua's Messianic Claims to Ascertain If He Truly Was the Messiah Or Not:

- **The Issue At the Center of Many of Yeshua's Encounters With the Jews (Especially the Pharisees) Was His Messiahship. Mt. 16:1-20** (especially vv. 123-20) is an example of this. See also **Mt. 22:41-46; Lk. 17:20-23.**
- **The Pharisees Officially Examine and Test Yeshua and His Messianic Claims: Mt. 22:34-46** "Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting [*Strong's* #3985, a poor (biased perhaps?) translation, *tempt* can also mean *examine, test, prove*) him, and saying,..." (v. 35, *KJV*). See also **Mt. 16:1; 19:3** where the same word is used along with the same poor (biased?) English translation occurs. Related examples of the Pharisees examining Yeshua include: **Lk. 5:17-26**
- **Official Questioning of Yeshua: Jn. 7:25-53** The issue here is whether Yeshua was the Messiah or not. The Jews were not seeking to arrest him as some English Bible chapter subheadings suggest, but to merely question him to ascertain if he truly was the Messiah or not.
- **Healing the Sick and Casting Out Demons: Mt. 9:34** It was expected by the Jews that Messiah, when he came, would have power to cast out demons and to heal the sick—these miraculous powers would be proof that he was indeed the heaven-sent Messiah, so not surprisingly their was great controversy and debate among the Jews as to whether Yeshua's miracles were legitimate and proof of his Messiahship or not. See also **Mt. 12:24; Jn. 9:13-34; Jn. 11:46-47.**
- **Questions About the Torah-Law: Mt. 12:1-8** The Pharisees were constantly examining Yeshua's relationship to the Torah and his knowledge of the Torah. The Jews had believed for hundreds of years that when Messiah would come he would be the ultimate Torah-teacher, and an expert on Torah who would answer all the unanswerable questions and settle all the debates among legal scholars once and for all that had arisen over interpretations of the Torah. So it was logical that the Pharisees and Scribes (biblical lawyers), the Torah experts of the day, would be constantly pounding Yeshua with questions about legal interpretations as well as his opinions on various aspects of the Torah. To prove that he was the Messiah they had to follow him about, listen to his teachings, and hear his answers to difficult questions. This was part of the process by

which the Pharisees determined if one was the legitimate Messiah or not, for before and after the time of Yeshua many had come claiming to be the long-awaited Messiah. See also **Mt. 19:3-12; 22:34-46; Lk. 6:1-11; 14:3.**

- **Evil Pharisees Want to Destroy What They Think to Be a False Messiah:** There were evil Pharisees in every crowd who, along with the Sadducees and Sadducean High Priest sought to destroy Yeshua . **Matthew 12:14** says, “Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy [*put out of the way entirely, abolish, put an end to, render useless*] him.” Naturally, if some of the Pharisees believed that he was a false messiah and a false teacher, it would be natural for them to want to put an end to his career somehow in order to prevent his deceiving and subverting the people. See also **Lk. 6:11.**
- **Signs and Wonders: Mt. 12:38** Again, Messiah, when he came, was expected to work signs and miracles, so part of the Pharisees examination of his claims to Messiahship would be to observe his working signs and miracles to ascertain if he was the real thing or not. See also **Mt. 16:1.**
- **Traditions of the Elders: Mt. 15:1-20** Based on YHWH’s instructions in the Torah (Deut. 17:8-13), the Jewish leaders were able to formulate legal rulings regarding matters not specified in the written law. These legal rulings became known as the *Oral Torah, Oral Law* or the *Traditions of the Elders*. There was great debate among various Jewish religious factions as to the validity and legitimacy of some of these traditions. The Pharisees subscribed scrupulously to the *Traditions of the Elders* found in the *Oral Torah* while the Sadducees did not. This gave rise to much controversy and debate between these two main Jewish religious sects. Naturally, when Messiah would come he would settle this debate as to who was right and as to whether these traditions were legally valid or not. Naturally, the Pharisees would want to question Yeshua on this controversial issue to find out where he stood.
- **Questions About the Pressing Social Issues of the Day: Mt. 22:15-22** Since Messiah would be a king over Israel it was only natural that the Pharisees would ask him questions over political issues of the day such as paying taxes to the hated Romans.
- **The Sadducees (“Chief Priests) Question Yeshua: Mt. 21:12-27** (especially vv. 15 and 23). The Sadducees who controlled the Temple were threatened by Yeshua’s authority, boldness and popularity with the common people (who had no great love for the greedy, power-hungry, and quisling [collaborating with the Roman enemy]) Sadducees, and perceived him as a threat to the stability of their power-base. So it was only natural that they would want to investigate this potential rival to see what he was all about.
- **Certain Pharisees Invited Yeshua to Dine With Them (to get a first hand look at this potential Messiah): Lk. 7:36; 11:37**
- **There Were Pharisees Who Believed Yeshua Was the Messiah:** Jn. 12:42; Acts 15:5; Jn. 3:1-2

List of Scriptures Showing the Sadducees (and Evil Pharisees) to Be the Enemies of Yeshua and the Gospel

- **Mt. 2:4; 16:21; 20:18; 21:18; 26:3-4; 26:14, 59; 27:1-10, 12, 20, 41, 62; Jn. 11:48-57; Mk. 8:31; 10:33; 11:18; 14:1, 10, 43; Jn. 18:3; 19:15; Acts 4:1; 5:17-18; 9:14, 21 (referring to Paul); 23:14; 25:15; 26:10-12** (This is not a complete list of the actions of the Sadducees, but the reader this should be sufficient to give the reader a good idea of the motives of their evil motives.)