**THE PHARISEES**

**“An Anatomy”**

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**General Comments from Josephus on the Pharisees**

**(Ant 13:171-173 JOE)** 171 At this time there were three sects among the Jews, who had different opinions concerning human actions: the one was called the sect of the Pharisees, another the sect of the Sadducees, and the other the sect of the Essenes. 172 Now for the Pharisees, {b} they say that some actions, but not all, are the work of fate, and some of them are in our own power, and that they are liable to fate, but are not caused by fate. But the sect of the Essenes affirm, that fate governs all things, and that nothing befalls men but what is according to its determination. 173 And for the Sadducees, they take away fate, and say there is no such thing, and that the events of human affairs are not at its disposal; but they suppose that all our actions are in our own power, so that we are ourselves the causes of what is good, and receive what is evil from our own folly. However, I have given a more exact account of these opinions in the second book of the Jewish War.

**(Ant 18:12-15 JOE)**12 Now, for the Pharisees, they live lowly, and despise delicacies in diet; and they follow the conduct of reason, and what that prescribes to them as good for them, they do; and they think they ought earnestly to strive to observe reason's dictates for practice. They also pay a respect to such as are in years; nor are they so bold as to oppose them in anything which they have introduced;

13 and, when they determine that all things are done by fate, they do not take away the freedom from men of acting as they think fit; since their notion is, that it has pleased God to make a temperament whereby what he wills is done, but so that the will of man can act virtuously or viciously.

14 They also believe that souls have an immortal rigor in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and live again;

15 on account of which doctrines, they are able greatly to persuade the body of the people; and whatever they do about divine worship, prayers, and sacrifices, they perform them according to their direction; insomuch that the cities give great attestations to them on account of their entire virtuous conduct, both in the actions of their lives and their discourses also.

**The history of the Pharisees and Sadducees**

**Pharisees and Sages**: Although Sages are never called “Pharisees” in rabbinic lit. they shared similar beliefs. Two people were known as Pharisees, The Apostle Paul and Josephus. Paul’s teacher Gamaliel and his Son Simon are called Pharisees in Josephus and the N.T. only.[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. **Gamaliel, a teacher of the law.**
   * (Act 5:34 NIV) 34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel,a a teacher of the law,b who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while.
2. **Simon, Son of Gamaliel’s**
   * Josephus, Life 1:191191 This Simon was of the city of Jerusalem, and of a very noble family, of the sect of the Pharisees, which are supposed to excel others in the accurate knowledge of the laws of their country
3. **Josephus speaking of himself**
   * (Lif 1:12 JOE)12 and continued with him three years. {c} So when I had accomplished my desires, I returned back to the city, being now nineteen years old, and began to conduct myself according to the rules of the sect of the Pharisees, which is of kin to the sect of the Stoics, as the Greeks call them.
4. **The Apostle Paul**
   * (Phi 3:5 NIV)5 circumciseda on the eighth day, of the people of Israel,b of the tribe of Benjamin,c a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;d
   * (Act 23:6 NIV)6 Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadduceesa and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers,b I am a Pharisee,c the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead."d

**John Hyrcanus I Breaks from the Pharisees:**

**(Ant 13:288-296** **JOE)** 288 However, this prosperous state of affairs moved the Jews to envy Hyrcanus; but they that were the worst disposed to him were the Pharisees, {b} who were one of the sects of the Jews, as we have informed you already. These have so great a power over the multitude, that when they say anything against the king, or against the high priest, they are presently believed.

289 Now Hyrcanus was a disciple of theirs, and greatly beloved by them. And when he once invited them to a feast, and entertained them very kindly, when he saw them in a good humour, he began to say to them, that they knew he was desirous to be a righteous man, and to do all things whereby he might please God, which was the profession of the Pharisees also. {c}

290 However, he desired, that if they observed him offending in any point, and going out of the right way, they would call him back and correct him. On which occasion they attested to his being entirely virtuous; with which commendation he was well pleased. But still there was one of his guests there, whose name was Eleazar,

291 a man of an ill temper, and delighting in seditious practices. This man said, ``Since you desire to know the truth, if you will be righteous in earnest, lay down the high priesthood, and content yourself with the civil government of the people.''

292 And when he desired to know for what cause he ought to lay down the high priesthood, the other replied, ``We have heard it from old men, that your mother had been a captive under the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes.'' This story was false, and Hyrcanus was provoked against him; and all the Pharisees had a very great indignation against him.

293 Now there was one Jonathan, a very great friend of Hyrcanus, but of the sect of the Sadducees, whose notions are quite contrary to those of the Pharisees. He told Hyrcanus that Eleazar had cast such a reproach upon him, according to the common sentiments of all the Pharisees, and that this would be made manifest if he would but ask them the question, ``What punishment they thought this man deserved?''

294 for that he might depend upon it, that the reproach was not laid on him with their approbation, if they were for punishing him as his crime deserved. So the Pharisees replied, that he deserved stripes and bonds, but that it did not seem right to punish reproaches with death; and indeed the Pharisees, even upon other occasions, are not apt to be severe in punishments.

295 At this gentle sentence, Hyrcanus was very angry, and thought that this man reproached him by their approbation. It was this Jonathan who chiefly irritated him, and influenced him so far,

296 that he made him leave the party of the Pharisees, and abolish the decrees they had imposed on the people, and to punish those who observed them. From this source arose that hatred which he and his sons met with from the multitude:

**Alexander Janneus and the Pharisees**

**Disregard for their ceremony of a Libation offering from the oral tradition**

**Ant 13:372-373 JOE** 372 As to Alexander, his own people were seditious against him; for at a festival which was then celebrated, when he stood upon the altar, and was going to sacrifice, the nation rose upon him, and pelted him with citrons [which they then had in their hands, because] the law of the Jews, required that at the feast of tabernacles, everyone should have branches of the palm tree and citron tree; which thing we have elsewhere related. They also reviled him, as derived from a captive, {g} and so unworthy of his dignity and of sacrificing.

373 At this he was in a rage, and slew of them about six thousand of them. He also built a partition wall of wood around the altar and the temple, as far as that partition within which it was only lawful for the priests to enter; and by this means he obstructed the multitude from coming at him.

**Mishnah Sukkoh 4:9** For one time one [priest] poured out the water on his feet. And all the people stoned him with their citrons.

**Crucified over 800 and sent 8,000 fleeing the Nation**

**Jwr 1:97 JOE**  97 Nay, his rage was grown so extravagant, that his barbarity proceeded to the degree of impiety; for when he had ordered eight hundred to be hung upon crosses in the midst of the city, he had the throats of their wives and children cut before their eyes; and these executions he saw as he was drinking and lying down with his concubines.

**Ant 13:380 JOE** 380 and when he had shut up the most powerful of them in the city of Bethoma, he besieged them therein; and when he had taken the city, and gotten the men into his power, he brought them to Jerusalem, and did one of the most barbarous actions in the world to them; for as he was feasting with his concubines, in the sight of all the city, he ordered about eight hundred of them to be crucified; and while they were living, he ordered the throats of their children and wives to be cut before their eyes.

**Encouraging his wife to reconcile with them at his death bed:**

**(Ant 13:398-406 JOE)** 398 After this, King Alexander, although he fell into a distemper by hard drinking, and had a quartan ague which held him three years, yet would not stop going out with his army, till he was quite spent with the labours he had undergone, and died in the bounds of Ragaba, a fortress beyond Jordan.

399 But when his queen saw that he was ready to die, and had no longer any hopes of surviving, she came to him weeping and lamenting, and bewailed herself and her sons on the desolate condition they should be left in; and said to him, ``To whom do you thus leave me and my children, who are destitute of all other supports, and this when you know how much ill will your nation bears to you?''

400 But he gave her the following advice:--That she need but follow what he would suggest to her in order to retain the kingdom securely, with her children: that she should conceal his death from the soldiers till she should have taken that place;

401 after this she should go in triumph, as upon a victory, to Jerusalem, and put some of her authority into the hands of the Pharisees; for that they would commend her for the honour she had done them, and would reconcile the nation to her; for he told her they had great authority among the Jews, both to do harm to such as they hated, and to bring advantages to those to whom they were friendly disposed;

402 for that they are then believed best of all by the multitude when they speak any severe things against others, though it be only out of envy at them. And he said, that it was by their means that he had incurred the displeasure of the nation, whom indeed he had injured.

403 ``Do, therefore,'' said he, ``when you are come to Jerusalem, send for the leading men among them, and show them my body, and with great appearance of sincerity, give them permission to use it as they themselves please, whether they will dishonour the dead body by refusing it burial, as having severely suffered by my means, or whether in their anger they will offer any other injury to that body. Promise them, also, that you will do nothing without them in the affairs of the kingdom.

404 If you do but say this to them, I shall have the honour of a more glorious funeral from them than you could have made for me: and when it is in their power to abuse my dead body, they will do it no injury at all, and you will rule in safety.'' {d} So when he had given his wife this advice, he died, after he had reigned twenty-seven years, and lived fifty years within one.

405 So Alexandra, when she had taken the fortress, acted as her husband had suggested to her, and spoke to the Pharisees, and put all things into their power, both as to the dead body, and as to the affairs of the kingdom, and thereby pacified their anger against Alexander, and made them bear goodwill and friendship to him;

406 who then came among the multitude, and made speeches to them, and laid before them the actions of Alexander, and told them that they had lost a righteous king; and by the commendation they gave him, they brought them to grieve, and to be in heaviness for him, so that he had a funeral more splendid than had any of the kings before him.

**Reconciliation with Pharisees complete**

**(Jwr 1:110-113 JOE)**110 And now the Pharisees joined themselves to her, to assist her in the government. These are a certain sect of the Jews that appear more religious than others, and seem to interpret the laws more accurately.

111 Now Alexandra listened to them to an extraordinary degree, as being herself a

woman of great piety toward God. But these Pharisees artfully insinuated \

themselves into her favour by little and little, and became themselves the real

administrators of the public affairs: they banished and reduced whom they

pleased; they bound and loosed [men] at their pleasure; {a} and, to say all at once,

they had the enjoyment of the royal authority, while the expenses and the

difficulties of it belonged to Alexandra.112 She was a **sagacious woman** (Like a Sage) in the management of great affairs, and intent always upon gathering soldiers together; so that she increased the army the one half, and procured a great body of foreign troops, till her own nation became not only very powerful at home, but terrible also to foreign potentates, while she governed other people, and the Pharisees governed her.

113 Accordingly they themselves slew Diogenes, a person of note, and one that had been a friend to Alexander; and accused him as having assisted the king with his advice, for crucifying the eight hundred men [before mentioned]. They also prevailed with Alexandra to put to death the rest of those who had irritated him against them. Now, she was so superstitious as to comply with their desires, and accordingly they slew whom they pleased themselves.

**Jesus, the Babylonian Talmud and the Pharisees Sotah 22b**

AND THE PLAGUE OF PHARISEES etc. Our Rabbis have taught: **There are seven types of Pharisees:** the shikmi Pharisee, the nikpi Pharisee, the kizai Pharisee, the 'pestle' Pharisee, the Pharisee [who constantly exclaims] 'What is my duty that I may perform it?', the Pharisee from love [of God] and the Pharisee from fear. The shikmi Pharisee — he is one who performs the action of Shechem.[4](http://www.come-and-hear.com/sotah/sotah_22.html#22b_4)  The nikpi Pharisee — he is one who knocks his feet together.[5](http://www.come-and-hear.com/sotah/sotah_22.html#22b_5)  The kizai Pharisee — R. Nahman b. Isaac said: He is one who makes his blood to flow against walls.[6](http://www.come-and-hear.com/sotah/sotah_22.html#22b_6)  The 'pestle' Pharisee — Rabbah b. Shila said: [His head] is bowed like [a pestle in] a mortar. The Pharisee [who constantly exclaims] 'What is my duty that I may perform it?' — but that is a virtue! — Nay, what he says is, 'What further duty is for me that I may perform it?'[7](http://www.come-and-hear.com/sotah/sotah_22.html#22b_7)  The Pharisee from love and the Pharisee from fear — Abaye and Raba said to the tanna [who was reciting this passage], Do not mention 'the Pharisee from love[8](http://www.come-and-hear.com/sotah/sotah_22.html#22b_8)  and the Pharisee from fear'; for Rab Judah has said in the name of Rab: A man should always engage himself in Torah and the commandments even though it be not for their own sake,[9](http://www.come-and-hear.com/sotah/sotah_22.html#22b_9)  because from [engaging in them] not for their own sake, he will come [to engage in them] for their own sake. R. Nahman b. Isaac said: What is hidden is hidden, and what is revealed is revealed; the Great Tribunal will exact punishment from those who rub themselves against the walls.[10](http://www.come-and-hear.com/sotah/sotah_22.html#22b_10)

**Pharisees as White Washed Tombs:**

**Babylonian Talmud Sotah 22b** King Jannai[11](http://www.come-and-hear.com/sotah/sotah_22.html#22b_11)  said to his wife', 'Fear not the Pharisees and the non-Pharisees but the **hypocrites (Painted ones in Greek translated κεκονιαμένοις)** who ape the Pharisees; because their deeds are the deeds of Zimri[12](http://www.come-and-hear.com/sotah/sotah_22.html#22b_12)  but they expect a reward like Phineas'.[13](http://www.come-and-hear.com/sotah/sotah_22.html#22b_13)

**1QHa 4:6-8 (DSS)**“And they lead thy people astray, for they utter smooth speeches to them. False teachers, they lead astray, and blindly they are heading for a fall, for their works are done in deceit.”

**(Mat 23:27-28 ESV)** 27 a"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like **bwhitewashed tombs (τάφοις κεκονιαμένοις),** which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and call uncleanness.

28 So you also aoutwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of bhypocrisy and lawlessness.

1. David Flusser, *The Sage from Galilee* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), pg. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)