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The Political and Religious Structure in Jesus' Time

In looking at the political and religious structure at the time of Jesus, we could explore countless topics. In this article we look at topics of the structure of the Jewish sects, the practice of taxation and tithing, and the exercising of crucifixion as a means of execution and control.

Jewish Sects

Just as Christianity today is divided into different groups (Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, nondenominational evangelical churches), so too ancient Jewish religion had distinct groups or sects. In Jesus' time in Palestine, three groups were particularly influential. Josephus identifies these groups (he calls them "philosophies"): the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes.

We should make clear from the start that only a small minority of people actually belonged to these sects, but their strong influence on Jewish society is undeniable. The Pharisees were the largest of the three, consisting of about six thousand members during the time of Herod the Great (out of a total population of perhaps one million people in Palestine). These groups can be compared not only to Christian denominations but also to modern political parties. In ancient Judaism there was no sharp distinction between religion and politics. All three groups were concerned not only with religious behavior but also with the political issues of their day.

Sadducees

The name Sadducees most likely comes from the name Zadok, a priest who anointed David's son Solomon as king (see 1 Kings 1:32–40). The descendants of Zadok, the Zadokites, were recognized as the only legitimate priests by Ezekiel (see Ezekiel 44:9–31) and the author of the Book of Chronicles. It's likely that the Sadducees were Zadokites who supported the Hasmonean (descendants of the Maccabees) kings and priests. The Sadducees were apparently of the elite, wealthy class, and were closely allied with the high priestly families. Josephus says the Sadducees had a following among the rich only, while the Pharisees had a greater following among the common people. In the Acts of the Apostles, the Sadducees are associated with the high priest and the Jerusalem Temple (see 4:1–2, 5:17). Josephus names the high priest Ananus as a Sadducee.

In New Testament times, the high priest was appointed by King Herod, the client king of the Romans, then by Herod's son Archelaeus, and later directly by Roman rulers of Judea. With their connections with the high priestly families, the Sadducees were closely tied to Roman rule in Palestine.

Ancient Jews held a variety of different beliefs about the afterlife. Josephus says the Sadducees believed that the soul died along with the body; the Acts of the Apostles reports that "the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection or angels or spirits, while the Pharisees acknowledge all three" (23:8).

Members of the Sadducees tried to show that the belief in resurrection was not logical when they asked Jesus about a hypothetical case in which a woman had married seven men. In the life after

resurrection, whose wife would she be? (see Mark 12:18–27). Jesus answered them, “When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but they are like the angels in heaven” (12:25). In other words, the normal standards of marriage do not apply in the resurrected life.

According to Josephus, the Pharisees and Sadducees were often in conflict. The Pharisees taught many religious rules that were not directly in the Torah; the Sadducees rejected all laws that were not explicitly written in the Torah. Josephus also reports that the Sadducees were harsher in their legal judgments and punishments than were the Pharisees. The rabbinic literature often portrays the Pharisees and Sadducees disagreeing about matters of purity.

Pharisees

It appears that most members of the Pharisees were not priests. They had considerable influence in Israelite society—Josephus reports that at the beginning of the revolt against Rome in AD 66, the leading Pharisees met with the high priests and “men of power” in an attempt to resolve the crisis.

This political influence, however, was indirect. The Pharisees did not hold political offices but rather influenced such leaders as the Hasmonean Queen Salome Alexandra and later Herod the Great. Mark portrays the Pharisees as plotting with the “Herodians” to destroy Jesus (see Mark 3:6, 12:13). They did, however, serve on the council (“Sanhedrin”) that advised the high priest (see Acts of the Apostles 5:34, 23:6–9).

Origins of the Pharisees

Many scholars think the Pharisaic party evolved from a group known as the Hasideans, zealous supporters of the Torah who joined the Maccabean revolt: “Then they were joined by a group of Hasideans, valiant Israelites, all of them devout followers of the law” (1 Maccabees 2:42). The name Hasideans comes from the Hebrew hasid, meaning “pious” or “devout.”

Most scholars also believe the Pharisaic movement later developed into rabbinic Judaism. This Judaism, based on the Scriptures as interpreted by the Mishnah and Talmud, is the form of the Jewish faith that has survived into modern times. Thus careful study of early rabbinic documents, such as the Mishnah (ca. AD 200), allows us to gain some insights into the Pharisees’ teaching at the time of Jesus.

The Pharisees are often portrayed in the Gospels as hypocritical, concerned more with outward show than with sincere faith, “for they preach but they do not practice” (Matthew 23:3; see also 23:4– 5,25–28). Jesus contrasts the prayers of a self-righteous Pharisee with a humble tax collector; it is the tax collector who goes away justified by God (see Luke 18:9–14). It is not surprising that the Gospel writers tended to focus on negative aspects of the Pharisaic movement, as early Christians and Pharisees were in serious conflict over basic issues, such as the observance of Torah.

Josephus’s portrait is much more positive. He reports that the Pharisees avoided luxury and lived a simple lifestyle. In contrast to the Sadducees, they enjoyed support among the common people.

Pharisees and the Torah

The primary aim of the Pharisees was to apply the details of the Torah to everyday life. Many of the commandments of Torah are vague, and at times they are inconsistent or even contradictory. The Pharisees worked out practical methods to overcome these challenges.

They were well known for "traditions" that they taught as a supplement to, or as an interpretation of, the commandments of the Torah. The synoptic Gospels report that the Pharisees were meticulous about washing their hands and purifying themselves before eating (see Mark 7:3–4); they apparently applied some priestly purity laws to their own daily meals. Another tradition was the declaration of something as qorban— a dedication of a possession to the Temple that allowed a person to continue using it for himself and not sharing it with others (see 7:11).

Josephus reports that the Pharisees were lenient in their judgments about punishments, and we know that some of their traditions allowed Jews to observe the Torah in an easier and more practical manner. For example, strict biblical laws forbade carrying food from house to house on the Sabbath. The Pharasaic tradition of 'eruv allowed the construction of doorposts and lintels so that several houses could be joined together as one, and families could thus socialize on the Sabbath. The tradition of the prosbul allowed a debt to be collected by a community council, even during the seventh year, when, according to biblical law (see Deuteronomy 15:2), all debts were to be forgiven. This practice made it easier for farmers or craftsmen to get loans when the seventh year was approaching.

Pharisees and Early Christians

Although the Gospels often portray Jesus in conflict with the Pharisees (see Mark 2:23–28, 3:1–6), the relationship between the Pharisees and the early Christian movement was more complex. Followers of Jesus and the Pharisees (in contrast to the Sadducees) shared a belief in the resurrection of the dead and punishment and rewards in the afterlife. The Apostle Paul was a Pharisee (see Philippians 3:5, Acts of the Apostles 23:6). Pharisees were also part of the first church community at Jerusalem (see Acts of the Apostles 15:5). Besides Paul, other notable first-century Pharisees were Gamaliel, an influential member of the Sanhedrin who was "respected by all the people" (5:34), and the priest, general, and historian Josephus.

Essenes

Many scholars identify at least one branch of the Essenes with the community that lived in the desert wilderness at Qumran (although other scholars reject this connection). Qumran is the site on the northwestern end of the Dead Sea at which the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls were found. The Qumran community was governed by a strict hierarchy headed by priests; the so-called Teacher of Righteousness (often mentioned in the scrolls) was apparently the founder of the community.

The community seems to have begun when a group of priests left Jerusalem because of a dispute with the Temple priesthood. They disagreed with the interpretation of Torah practiced by the Jerusalem priests, and especially with interpretation of laws of purity. It is likely that the Qumran community members, with their belief that only a Zadokite should be high priest, rejected the non-Zadokite Hasmonean high priests. The community further disagreed with the Hasmonean adoption of a solar calendar in place of the old lunar one. This dispute was important, as knowing the precise date was essential for keeping the festivals mandated in the Torah.

The Dead Sea Scrolls include many copies of biblical books, commentaries on Scripture, hymns, prayers, and rules for governing the community. One scroll, the "War Scroll," describes a final battle at the end of history in which the Sons of Light (the Qumran community), aided by God, will destroy the powers of darkness (the forces of the community's Jewish opponents as well as Gentiles).

With their withdrawal into the wilderness, their strict lifestyle, and their emphasis on God's coming judgment, the members of the Qumran community are similar to John the Baptist, who preached his apocalyptic message of repentance in the Judean desert. Some scholars, in fact, speculate that John was once a member of the Qumran community.

The Gospel writers associate Isaiah's prophecy "A voice of one crying out in the desert: / 'Prepare the way of the Lord, / make straight his paths'" (Mark 1:3, see Isaiah 40:3) with John the Baptist; the Qumran community applied this same prophecy to their own group.

The Essenes thought of themselves as the only faithful remnant of Israel; they believed their community replaced the Temple as the site of the true, uncorrupted worship of God.

Samaritans

Samaritans are inhabitants of Samaria, a district in central Palestine, between Galilee and Judea. After the split of Israel into the northern and southern kingdoms after the death of King Solomon, Samaria formed part of the northern kingdom of Israel (see 1 Kings, chapters 11–12). Its capital was the city of Samaria, constructed by King Omri and his son Ahab in the ninth century (see 16:24). At this time the people were simply known as Israelites.

The city of Samaria was conquered by the Assyrians in 721 BC, and many of its leading citizens were deported. The Assyrian king settled colonists from Babylon and other cities in the region of Samaria (see 2 Kings 17:24). The religious rites of the colonists (including worship of the Babylonian god Marduk) were mixed with the worship of the Lord (see 17: 29–33). According to the biblical record, Samaritans in Jesus' time were descendants of these colonists. The Samaritans themselves, however, claimed direct descent from the Israelite tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. It is after the Babylonian Exile that the people are called Samaritans.

From the time of the return of the Judean exiles from the Babylonian Exile, tensions between Jews and Samaritans arose. The major dispute involved the proper worship of the Lord. The Samaritans were opposed to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple (see Ezra 4:1–4, Nehemiah 2:18–20), favoring their holy place built on Mount Gerizim in Samaria. The dispute is reflected in the words of the Samaritan woman to Jesus: "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain [Mount Gerizim]; but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem" (John 4:20). In addition, Samaritans accepted only the first five books, the Pentateuch, of the Old Testament as their Scriptures. Their version of the Pentateuch differs slightly from other ancient Hebrew versions. The most striking difference is the addition of a commandment to build an altar at Mount Gerizim (see Exodus 20:17). Samaritans shared with Jews the expectations of a Messiah (see John 4:25); Samaritans focused especially on the prophecy that God would raise up another prophet like Moses (see Deuteronomy 18:18).

At times the conflict between Jews and Samaritans turned violent. The Hasmonean King John Hyrcanus destroyed the holy place at Gerizim in 128 BC; Samaritans massacred some Jewish pilgrims in AD 52.

Jews in the time of Jesus thus despised Samaritans as foreigners who worshipped the Lord in the wrong way. Jesus seemed to have had some wariness of the Samaritans as well. He warned his disciples, "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town" (Matthew 10:5). Yet in other ways, Jesus, as a first-century Jew, had a remarkable openness to Samaritans. His Parable of the Good Samaritan contrasts a priest and Levite who ignore a man in need with a Samaritan who stops to help (see Luke 10:25–37, see also 17:11–19). This parable would have deeply offended Jesus' Jewish listeners. Most striking is Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well (see John 4:4–42).

The early followers of Jesus continued his openness. Philip (a member of the first church in Jerusalem), Peter, and John preached about Jesus in Samaria. As a result many Samaritans accepted the Gospel and were baptized (see Acts of the Apostles 8:5–25).

Taxes and Tithing

The old saying "The only sure things in life are death and taxes" held true for biblical societies also, where the populace was taxed by both government and religious authorities. Taxes were paid in three ways: as money, as a percentage of crops or animals, or as forced labor.

Taxes in Old Testament Times

In ancient Israel, government tax collection was unsystematic, varying from king to king. Taxes were levied in order to pay tribute to foreign kings (see 2 Kings 15:20, 23:35); Solomon employed forced labor in building the Temple and other building projects (see 1 Kings 5:27–32, 9:15–-22). Samuel warned the people that a king would make them slaves and take 10 percent of their crops, vineyards, and flocks (see 8:15–17), but it is unclear to what extent the kings actually did these things. Taxes were also collected to maintain the priests and the Temple (see 2 Kings 12:5).

Taxes in First-Century Palestine

The exact percentage of income that was taken in taxes by the Roman government in Jesus' time is not clear. One scholarly estimate puts it at around 12.5 percent. We know that shortly after the Maccabean revolt, a Syrian king referred to his right to collect "the third of the grain and the half of the fruit of the trees" (1 Maccabees 10:30).

In addition to a tax on crops, the Herodian government also collected a "head tax." Every male over fourteen and every female over twelve in a family was assessed a tax of one denarius (approximately the daily wage of a laborer). A census would be taken in order to register each family for tax purposes (see Luke 2:1). This is the tax discussed by Jesus and the Pharisees when Jesus concluded, "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God" (Mark 12:17).

Besides these direct taxes, the Romans charged many indirect taxes, such as road tolls and port fees. The Roman military stationed in Palestine also had the legal right to force the native population to help them carry supplies for up to one mile; this right is reflected in Jesus' teaching, "Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles" (Matthew 5:41). Roman soldiers exercised this right when they forced Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross when Jesus became too weak to carry it (see Mark 15:21).

The government regulated economic activity in other ways. Fishermen, for example, could not merely go out and fish in Palestinian lakes; rather, they had to obtain a contract from a tax collector, who might lend them money to buy boats and nets, in return for a percentage of their profits. This tax collector, in turn, had contracted with a chief tax collector who had been appointed by King Herod. Because his office was in the fishing village of Capernaum, Jesus' disciple Matthew was most likely a contractor of fishing rights (see Matthew 9:9, Mark 2:14).

Religious Taxes or Tithes

The tithes collected by Jewish religious leaders were also a kind of tax. Tithes were 10 percent of a worker's produce, including both crops and flocks (see Leviticus 27:30–33). There were two main tithes. One tithe was to be taken to Jerusalem during the festival times, or sold, and the money spent in Jerusalem (see Deuteronomy 14:22–29). Every third year, however, this tithe was put into a community storehouse, where people, including the "alien, orphan, and widow," could come and "eat their fill" (Deuteronomy 14:28–29). Another tithe was used to support the priests and Levites, who did not work their own land. This tithe was given to the Levites who, in turn, would give a tithe of this tithe to the priests (see Numbers 18:21–32). This seems to have been a tithe on crops, not on animals.

Additionally, the people gave a firstfruits offering from their crops or herds, which was brought either in kind or as a money payment to the Temple during the pilgrimage festivals (see Numbers 18:15–19). The Torah also requires other offerings, such as a wave offering (see 18:11) and a sin offering (see Leviticus 4:27–28). Tobit explains how he faithfully paid these various tithes and offerings (see 1:6–8).

The Torah does give options for a poor person's offering. If a person could not afford an animal, he could offer two birds; if he could not afford two birds, he could offer flour (see Leviticus 5:7–10; see also 12:8, 14:21–22).

Finally, the Temple tax, required annually of every adult Jewish male, was used for the general needs of the Temple. In Jesus' time the Temple tax was a half shekel (or two drachmas), approximately the cost of two days' wages for a laborer. Jesus refers to this tax in his discussion with Peter (see Matthew 17:24–27). This tax was collected not only in Palestine but also in Jewish communities throughout the Diaspora.

The Tax Collection System in Jesus' Time

Neither the Roman emperors nor the Hellenistic kings who ruled over Palestine collected taxes directly; rather, they operated through the client-patron system. Patrons were typically members of the elite class who had wealth or power and thus could offer protection or other benefits to a client in return for the client's loyalty, goods, or services. "Brokers" were people in the middle who would put patrons in touch with clients. Even rulers like King Herod were essentially clients of the Roman emperor, governing with the emperor's approval.

At the top of this patronage system, the Roman emperor demanded a certain amount of tribute tax from his client King Herod. Herod in turn contracted with members of the elite who were designated as "chief tax collectors." At times the high priest was also involved in guaranteeing the delivery of a certain amount of taxes to the Romans. These chief tax collectors, in turn, hired a number of local tax collectors (brokers) who brought in the actual revenue. The tax collectors mentioned in the Gospels are all local Jews (see Mark 2:15; Luke 18:10–14, 19:1–10).

The right to collect taxes in a certain area (village or district) was auctioned off to the highest bidder. The chief tax collector contracted with the local tax collectors to bring in a certain amount of money; anything over that amount was kept by the local tax collector.

The local tax collectors were among the most despised members of the Jewish communities for several reasons: (1) they earned money by collecting other people's money, which was considered dishonorable in itself; (2) they had a reputation for dishonesty (the tax collector Zacchaeus promises Jesus he will repay four times over anything he has extorted [see Luke 19:8]); (3) they were actively cooperating with the Romans who were occupying the land of Israel; and (4) they were grouped together with prostitutes (see Matthew 21:31) and sinners (see Mark 2:16) as the dregs of society.

Some farmers who were forced from their land by their inability to pay their debts formed gangs of outlaws who survived by raids on the wealthy elite. The "criminals" crucified on either side of Jesus (see Luke 23:33) and Barabbas, the prisoner who was released instead of Jesus (see 23:18–25), were possibly outlaws of this type. They were popular among the people as "Robin Hoods" who resisted Roman elites and their clients; this may have been one factor in the crowd's decision to release Barabbas instead of Jesus (see 23:25).

Jesus himself taught his followers to pay their taxes (see Matthew 17:25–27 [Temple tax], Mark 12:13–17 [Roman tax]), as did Paul (see Romans 13:6–7).

Crucifixion

Most people today associate crucifixion with Jesus' death. The cross on which Jesus died has become a major symbol of Christianity.

In the ancient world, however, crucifixion was used as a punishment in many societies. Living victims of this punishment were nailed or tied to crosses, trees, or stakes. Sometimes the dead bodies of criminals were treated in this way. The cruel practice was found among the Persians, Greeks, Romans, and other peoples. Jesus was just one of thousands of people killed by crucifixion in the ancient world.

In the Roman method of crucifixion, the victim was tied or nailed to a wooden cross. The victim often remained alive for several days, all the while enduring terrible pain. The actual cause of death was often asphyxiation; when the victim no longer had the strength to hold up his body, he would slump down and his breathing would be cut off. The Gospels report the Roman custom of breaking the victim's legs (ensuring that the victim could no longer hold up his body) in order to speed up death. Jesus' legs were not broken, as he was already dead when the Roman soldiers came (see John 19:31–33).

The purpose of crucifixion was twofold—to torture the victim as long as possible before death, as a cruel punishment, and to serve as a warning to others. Therefore crucifixions often took place in public places, such as the crossroads of busy highways, on hilltops, and even in theaters. Often rebels who revolted against a government were publicly crucified to deter others. Six thousand slaves were crucified along the Appian Way, a major highway leading into Rome, after the slave revolt led by Spartacus was crushed.

The Roman practice also shamed and humiliated the victim in every way. The victim was often tortured first and then stripped naked before crucifixion. The Gospels record how the Roman

soldiers tortured Jesus, mocked him, and then stripped off his clothes before crucifying him (see Mark 15:15–20).

In Roman society, the penalty was reserved mainly for criminals, rebels, and slaves; the Roman statesman Cicero simply calls it the "slaves' punishment." Cicero also writes that Roman citizens should not even spend time thinking about crucifixion, as it was such a degrading and unworthy way of dying.

Another Roman practice was to attach to the top of the cross a sign indicating the alleged crime of the victim. The inscription on Jesus' cross read, "Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews," written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek (John 19:19–20). This refers to the fact that Jesus was crucified as the Messiah, one who claimed to be the king sent by God to rule over the Jewish People. Today you might see "INRI" at the top of a crucifix: these letters represent the Latin translation of the inscription Iesous Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum ("Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews").

Crucifixion in the Roman Empire was thus understood as a great source of shame, a punishment given only to the lowest criminals and slaves. So when the early Christians taught that their Lord and Savior had been crucified, most people must have thought the Christians were crazy for worshipping a man who had been shamed in this way. The Apostle Paul writes, "We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23). It was a stumbling block for most Jews, because a common Jewish expectation of the Messiah is that he would be a great king who would drive out the Roman oppressors—it was inconceivable that God's chosen Messiah would be crucified. The Gentiles too would have had a difficult time believing that any kind of savior or honored religious figure would be crucified.

The followers of Jesus, however, transformed the negative and shameful connotations of the cross into a life-giving teaching. Jesus himself insisted that his follower "must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:34–35). Thus the cross symbolizes the followers' willingness to accept the hardships involved in following Jesus, but this acceptance leads to saving one's life. Paul similarly taught that it is through death that our new life is attained: "We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

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The Roman World of Jesus: An Overview

The Roman World of Jesus: An Overview

The Hellenistic/Roman world of Jesus is a fascinating one, but unfortunately, more often than not, it is largely ignored by students of the New Testament and Christian Origins. It is important to become familiar with the political, social, cultural, and religious ideas and realities of this wider Mediterranean context. Even Judaism, as particular and different as it was from other religions of the time, can only properly be understood as set against this broad background. This is even more the case in trying to come to an understanding of Jesus as a Jew in Palestine in his time, but also a subject of the mighty Roman Empire. We can take several approaches here. There is the political point of view that emphasizes the arena of struggling empires that waged war until one military dictatorship, the Roman Empire, gained control over the lands that border the Mediterranean Sea. There is the economic point of view that examines a vast system of business and finance dominated by international trade, an enforced system of taxation, and large bodies of slave labor. There is the sociological approach that looks at the pluralistic assortment of ethnic peoples, high government officials, merchants, small business people, slaves and minorities. This world has its literature, sculpture, philosophy, art, and architecture from the civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Rome, Greece, and Canaan (the area settled by the ancient Hebrews, called Palestine by the Romans). Finally, this ancient Mediterranean world gave rise to a diverse and often, from the modern western point of view, exotic religious life. It is impossible in an introduction such as this to study all of these facets of ancient Mediterranean civilization in detail, but it is important to gain some knowledge of the civilization in order to bring the New Testament–as a collection of books of particular times and of particular places–to life.

The Political Scene

The New Testament is a product of the Hellenistic world (Greek *Hellas,* “Greece”), a world that came into being as a consequence of the conquests of Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.E). When Philip II of Macedonia (northern Greece) was assassinated in

336, his brilliant and ambitious son, Alexander, only 20 years old, consolidated his power and then launched a campaign east-ward. He gained mastery over the far-flung Persian Empire that extended from western Asia Minor (modern Turkey) to India, and included Egypt. Alexander's first major victory over the Persian king and general Darius III took place at Issus in southeastern Asia Minor in 333 B.C.E.. The young commander then moved down the eastern Mediterranean coast, overcame resistance at Tyre and Gaza (332), induced submission of the Jews of Palestine and was welcomed in Egypt as a conquering hero. There he founded the city of Alexandria, destined to become one of the greatest cities of Hellenistic civilization. Then he moved further eastward, decisively defeated the armies of Darius at Gaugamele, and took possession of the wealth of the eastern cities. According to Josephus, the 1st century C.E. Jewish historian, Alexander took control of Jerusalem and entered the Temple there as part of his sweep of Palestine. When Darius was murdered by the Persian princes, Alexander proclaimed himself "King of Asia" and quickly accustomed himself to the divine honors paid an oriental monarch. When he advanced into India in 326, his weary army refused to follow him. Alexander returned to Mesopotamia, settled in Babylon, and began to consolidate his huge empire. But he was not to enjoy it for long, for in the summer of 323 B.C.E. he died of a fever. In thirteen years this amazing young man had become master of the whole eastern Mediterranean world. Alexander was a brilliant military strategist, but there was more to his dream than military conquest. He had been tutored by Aristotle and saw himself as the apostle and emissary of the classical Greek culture. Attached to his general staff were historians, ethnographers, geographers, botanists, zoologists, mineralogists, and hydrographers. His vision was "one world" (*oicumene),* or one great "world city" (Greek *cosmopolis*). Alexander's conquests spread Hellenism in a vast colonizing wave throughout the Near East and created, if not politically, at least economically and culturally, a single world stretching from Gibraltar to the Punjab in India with Greek (*koine*) a lingua franca.

The extent to which Alexander went in his attempt to create a "single world" can be illustrated by two points. First, he married Persians, including Statira, the daughter of Darius III, then he induced eighty of his officers to marry local women. In the spring of 324 B.C.E. during a "feast of fraternization" he gave gifts to 10,000 of his men for marrying Persian women. Second, he built a network of almost thirty Greek cities throughout the empire, a building program that was expanded by later Hellenistic rulers. These became enclaves of Greek culture. Here gymnasia, baths, and theaters

were built. The upper classes spoke *koine* Greek, wore Greek dress, absorbed Greek learning, adopted Greek customs, and took part in Greek athletics. Palestine, the land of the ancient Hebrews, or Israelites (now known as “Jews,” from the word *Judah*), was no exception to this phenomenon. Furthermore, the process of Hellenization continued through the beginning of the Roman Empire (27 B.C.E.) and beyond, for the Romans perpetuated Greek culture.

Despite the cultural revolution, the Hellenization of the East was limited. The urban nature of the phenomenon meant that traditional cultures in non-urban regions continued much as before. Indeed, while Hellenization continued in the cities, there occurred a revival of Eastern ways, both spiritually and materially, so that eventually the West began to experience the impact of the East.

The death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C.E. led to a bitter political power struggle among his Macedonian generals. In 301 three distinct Hellenistic empires emerged: (1) Macedonia and parts of Greece; (2) the Seleucid Empire (“Syria”) from western Asia Minor to Mesopotamia, established by Seleucus; and (3) the Ptolemaic Empire in Egypt and the North African coast, along with some islands in the Mediterranean, established by Ptolemy. There was constant probing of the balance of power between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids in border areas. Following their historical fate as inhabitants of a buffer zone, the Jews were controlled first by the Ptolemies and then, after 198 B.C.E., by the Seleucids. The Jews soon found that the Hellenizing policies of the Seleucids, especially Antiochus IV, were intolerable. As a result, they revolted in 167 B.C.E.; they gained their independence gradually, and established an independent monarchy. But there was a new power over the horizon with which the Jewish people would have to contend, and which would ultimately end their independence in 63 B.C.E: the power of Rome.

Roman history can be divided into three major periods: (1) the monarchy, traditionally founded in connection with the legend of Romulus and Remus (753 B.C.E.), (2) the Roman Republic, established in 509 B.C.E.; and (3) the Roman Empire, which sought to bring peace and order to the faltering Republic in 27 B.C.E., and which lasted until its western lands began to fall to Germanic invaders from the north in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries C.E.

During the later period of the Roman Republic Rome gained control over the Hellenistic empires surrounding the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Although Rome was

unable to extend her control as far eastward as the Persians and the Greeks had, the western part of the empire eventually took in Spain, Gaul (modern France), southern Germany, and southern Britain. Each of the Hellenistic empires was subdivided into Roman provinces in the second and first centuries B.C.E. The formation of Syria as a Roman province brought Palestine under Roman control in 63 [B.C.E.].

The vast extension of Roman power over the whole Mediterranean region put an immense strain on the Roman Republic. New tax revenues and interest created an expanded economy, a higher standard of living, and a new wealthy class at Rome. But it also brought political corruption, social dislocation, and moral decline. Political bribery was common; abused slaves on the countryside plantations revolted and were often joined by the oppressed poor. Traditional Roman respect for family gave way to childless marriages, divorce, adultery, prostitution, and pederasty. Exploits abroad created instability at home; a highly centralized, stronger role seemed necessary, and eventually the Romans looked more and more to the military.

A series of strong leaders emerged in the first century B.C.E., among them Pompey, Julius Caesar, Antony, and Octavian. By 42 B.C.E. the armies of Octavian and Antony had decisively defeated those of Caesar's murderers, leaving Italy and the West in the control of Octavian, and the East as far as the Euphrates in the control of Antony. In 31 B.C.E. Octavian's defeat of Antony's forces at the battle of Actium, followed by the subsequent suicides of Antony and Cleopatra in Egypt, meant that Octavian was in a position to assume great power. Upon his return to Rome, he was made *Imperator,* or supreme commander of the army; the Senate conferred upon him the additional titles *Augustus,* the August, and *Princeps,* the first of the Senate. Thus the Roman Empire was born in 27 B.C.E., and Octavian, called Caesar Augustus, was its first emperor.

Augustus was a wise ruler. He secured the borders of the empire and built roads. The result was a new era of peace and stability (the *pax Romana).* He reorganized the provinces to achieve a more just administration, instituted tax reform, developed a civil service, and engaged in many public works projects, especially in Rome. It was during his reign that Jesus of Nazareth was born.

Not all of Augustus' successors, however, were as capable. Tiberius (14-37 C.E.), though experienced, was unpopular and spent his last eleven years in a life of debauchery on the island of Capri; one of his infamous appointees was the prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate. Tiberius was followed by his grandnephew and the great-

grandson of Augustus, Gaius Caligula (37-41 C.E.) who became absorbed with power, demanded that he be addressed as a god, and proposed that his horse be made a consul (he rewarded this animal with a marble stall and a purple blanket!). He also drained the treasury to pay for his dissolute life and reckless building activities, and he fomented a crisis among the Jews by demanding that statues of himself be set up in the Temple at Jerusalem. The crisis was averted only when he was assassinated by his private Praetorian Guard. Fortunately, his uncle and successor, Claudius (41-54 C.E.), though considered weak in body and mind by his relatives, turned out to be a competent ruler. When Claudius was poisoned by his fourth wife Agrippina, Nero (54-68 C.E.), who was Agrippina's son by a previous marriage, became emperor. Though at first the empire ran smoothly under the direction of the philosopher Seneca, Nero took control and things began to deteriorate. He poisoned Claudius' son, executed his own wife, and arranged for the assassination of his mother. There were other murders. In 64 C.E. a great fire devastated Rome, and Nero found his scapegoat in the Christians. Tradition has it that Peter and Paul were martyred by Nero. Finally, matters got so bad that military commanders seized several provinces and Nero fled the royal palace. Upon hearing that the Senate had condemned him to death *in absentia*, the last of the Augustan family rulers committed suicide in 68 C.E.

Widespread unrest in the empire and chaos at home led to a quick succession of emperors: Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, each military commanders vying for power as the next Emperor. In 69 C.E., Vespasian, a seasoned commander who had been dispatched to Palestine to crush a full-scale Jewish revolt that had broken out (66-70 C.E.) was popularly acclaimed emperor. Vespasian provided a decade of peace and prosperity for the empire (69-79 C.E.) reminiscent of the Augustan era. Similarly Vespasian's son and successor, Titus, who had concluded the war with the Jews, reigned wisely for two years (79-81 C.E.). But a second son of Vespasian, Domitian (81-96 C.E.), was a tyrant of the first order. He relied on informers, had his enemies murdered, and laid a heavy tax on the people of the empire, especially the Jews. Enamored with his own divinity, he also persecuted the Christians, and it is his reign that provides the backdrop for the most anti-Roman book in the New Testament, the book of Revelation. The following Flavian emperors, as they are called, were some of Rome's best: Nerva (96-98 C.E.), Trajan (98-117 C.E.), Hadrian (117-138 C.E.), Antonius Plus (138-161 C.E.), and the Stoic philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180 C.E.).

This brief sketch of the Roman emperors cannot offer a detailed understanding of the period; it can, however, depict the general flavor and tenor of the times, and especially some of the difficulties faced by Jews and Christians.

The Cultural Scene

We have noted that Hellenization was primarily an urban phenomenon. In the cities of the Greco-Roman period, Greek ideas were disseminated, Greek dress was fashionable, and the externals of Greek civilization–baths, theaters, amphitheaters, hippodromes, fountains, aqueducts, arches, and the like–were highly visible. A new cosmopolitanism emerged in which any city might become a center for the interchange of ideas from all over the world. This was extremely important for the rise of early Christianity. Though it emerged from the Galilean countryside and perpetuated many ideas from its rural and Jewish origins, it moved quickly to the cities of the empire where its beliefs were gradually recast with the mold of Hellenistic thought. In such places its ranks were filled largely, though not exclusively, with believers of low status who nonetheless produced a substantial literature in the Greek language.

What was daily life in the Greco-Roman world like? Generally speaking, safe travel became possible as it had never been possible before, but with it came the spread of disease. Physicians and healers of all sorts were in great demand. There were many advantages of city life, but at the same time the problem of feeding the increasing urban populations was never adequately solved and famine was an ever-recurring possibility. War was prevalent until the Augustan peace in 27 B.C.E.; thereafter it was confined largely to securing the frontiers–an exception being the wars with the Jews in 66-70 C.E. The practice of enslaving conquered populations was common, and slaves made up a sizable proportion of the population, especially in Rome. It should be realized that though slaves were often abused on some of the plantations, loyal slaves were sometimes given their freedom while those who became secretaries, domestics, tutors, or financial overseers could occasionally accumulate enough money to purchase freedom. The emperor's slaves held especially influential and powerful positions in government. Still, slaves were chattel and their legal rights were limited. There were no great political movements to abolish the institution. It is not surprising, then, that the image of the master and the slave occurs frequently in the New Testament. Below the slave on the social ladder were the free poor who could barely subsist from day to day. The vast wealth of the empire was controlled by a few

aristocrats, who often gained honor and status with their public works and philanthropic deeds, but the gap between rich and poor remained great.

Finally, the shift from older, established, local cultures to new, changing, international environments meant for the urban dweller social dislocation. The loss of a sense of belonging to a natural and continuing community must have been a common experience. It is clear that for the vast majority of people the traditional religious systems of ancient Greece and Rome held little meaning. These religions were formalistic and unemotional, and their function had become largely political. The people longed for some form of physical or spiritual healing, some pertinent philosophy of life, some religious peace and harmony within. It is no surprise that with the revitalization of the East much of the populace was attracted to the somewhat more exotic and emotional religious movements of the orient, as well as popular religious philosophies and local religions which shared some of the same features. We will now briefly review some of these intellectual currents and religious movements, as far as possible calling attention to matters that are important for understanding particular parts of the New Testament.

Popular Philosophy

There were a number of philosophies of the Hellenistic Age that were quite popular and that functioned as religions for many who held them. Part of the common stock of much Hellenistic thinking about the world was derived from Platonic “dualism.” Plato (d. 347 B.C.E.) presented the view that the transient material world we perceive through the senses is only a shadow of the true reality, that is, the eternal world of abstract ideas known through reason.

Plato also believed that the transient, material body was a prison of the divine, immortal soul, and that the good and just man disciplines the body and its emotions, allowing the reasonable side of the soul to achieve virtue, which is knowledge. This philosophical dualism–especially its view that this world is transient–is reflected at points in the New Testament, especially when the earthly realm is described as a shadow of the heavenly realm (for example in the letter to the Hebrews). It also influenced such religious movements which stressed that human origins and destinies lie in a higher world, or that this world is evil, for example, Gnosticism (see below). Early forms of such religious movements provide some of the environment of early Christian writings, especially the gospel of John and the writings of Paul.

Another popular philosophy of the period was Stoicism. Stoicism took its name from the Greek word *stoa,* "a painted portico" where the founder of Stoicism, Zeno (ca. 336-263 B.C.E.), taught in Athens. The Stoics believed that the world was ordered by a divine Reason, the *Logos* (a Greek term for "word," "reason"). *Logos* was associated with fire, and capable of being identified with God, or Zeus. They also believed that a spark or seed of the *Logos* dwelt within human beings, and that a person could find a place in the world by obeying the spark or seed within. This orientation tended toward world affirmation and the denial of evil; all is according to Reason. The Stoic philosophy sought to teach a person to attain happiness by maintaining inner peace and contentment in a world full of troubles. To be in harmony with Nature meant self-sufficiency, tranquility, suppression of emotion, and freedom from external constraints and material things. The ethical orientation of Stoicism emphasized the importance of the will and a certain detachment from property, wealth, suffering, and sickness. This led to a cosmopolitan egalitarianism, a focus on the natural and innate rights of all people, including slaves and women, and Stoics often formed brotherhoods stressing these great ethical themes.

The founder of Stoicism, Zeno, was a follower of Crates who, in turn, was a disciple of Diogenes, the first to call himself "dog," from which the philosophical movement called Cynicism derives (from the Greek word *kyon,*"dog"). The Cynics were counter-culture street preachers who attempted to convert people from the quest for fame, fortune, and pleasure to a life of austere virtue as the path to true freedom and happiness. Many Cynics restricted their diets, begged for food, wore short cloaks, carried only a wallet and staff, rejected social institutions such as marriage and the state, and believed that such a practical moral philosophy was "according to nature." This stress on ethics and right living was gradually absorbed into the more moderate and philosophically reflective Stoicism of the lecture hall, but the Cynic way of life was revived as an ideal among first-century Stoics who wished to appeal to the masses. Thus, later Stoics like the ex-slave Epictetus (late first, early second century C.E.) and emperor Marcus Aurelius (ruled 161-180 C.E.) highlighted the ethical life. Though there is no evidence to suggest that Epictetus was in direct contact with early Christians–in fact he made unfavorable comments about them–there are nonetheless many parallels between Cynic-Stoic lifestyles and those of early Christians, most visible in austerity and apostolic mission. The Cynic-Stoic style of argumentation and the habit of listing virtues and vices are also characteristic of the apostle Paul (Rom l:16ff.; cf. also James 2:14ff.).

Another philosopher whose views were influential in the Hellenistic Age was Epicurus (ca. 342-270 B.C.E.). Epicurus' critics denounced him as lewd, fraudulent, and uneducated. These estimates, as well as the charge of atheism, were denied by Epicurus. He preached that one should not fear the gods, as religion so frequently taught, and that true happiness lies in the individual's attempt to avoid pain and find pleasure in this world.

In the larger Hellenistic world the ideas, beliefs, and sometimes the lifestyle of religious-philosophical leaders were often perpetuated in the "schools." As early as the sixth century, the followers of Pythagoras gathered around him in southern Italy to form a tightly-knit brotherhood or association. Many such schools were formed in Athens, the most famous being Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum, Epicurus' Garden, and Zeno's open-air Stoa. The school tradition was also highly prevalent among the Jewish Pharisaic teachers, though its ultimate origins probably lay in the prophetic guilds of the Ancient Near East.

Religions and Religious Movements

If the Stoic view that everything was ordered according to Reason led to divine providence, there were also those who believed that the plan of the universe was mysteriously difficult to fathom. The early Greeks had come to believe that each person had his or her own "Fortune," "Chance," or "Destiny," deified as the goddess *Tyche* (Latin *Fortuna).* A somewhat more deterministic and less kindly view was called "Fate" (Greek *Heimarmene).* It was influenced by Babylonian conceptions about the impersonal, fixed order of the stars and planets (who were also deified as gods, goddesses, and demons; in the New Testament, cf. Gal 4:8-10; Col 2:8). Hence the view arose that one's fortune or destiny was determined by the position of the stars at birth; by a knowledge of the stars, or astrology (Greek *aster,* "star"), one could learn about his or her fate. The study of astrology was extremely widespread in the Hellenistic world, affecting almost every religion or religious philosophy. The most obvious reference to astrology in the New Testament is the star of the Magi (Matt 2:1-12, 16).

Mention of the Magi leads to one of the areas where astrology was highly visible, namely, magic (Greek *magus,* a word borrowed from the Persians referring originally to the priests who practiced it). For those who believed in it, magic was an attempt to gain some control over the mysterious powers that determined one's fate, and

especially to provide protection against demonic powers (associated with stars) who brought about war, famine, disease, and family problems. To know the correct formula, and to recite it correctly, was a primitive “scientific” way of dealing with life’s evil tragedies. The New Testament mentions a certain Simon from Samaria who practiced magic and attempted to buy Peter’s powers (Acts 8:9-24); some details of gospel healing stories can be best understood in connection with magic.

Still another type of religion in the Hellenistic world is the “mystery religion.” Mystery religions seem to have originated in different countries but the gods or goddesses of one religion were often identified with those of another because they had similar characteristics. These religions are called “mystery religions” because they stress secret initiations. Our knowledge of these initiations is incomplete. But there were also public celebrations that displayed great pageantry, usually involving the recital or reenactment of a myth to celebrate the death and resurrection of a hero or heroine corresponding to the death and rebirth of vegetation during the cycle of the agricultural year. There was also a sacred meal connected with the ritual. Though by modern standards many of these religions had bizarre qualities, they did promise the initiates immortality, mystical communion with their Deity, and membership in a close-knit community. Examples of such mystery religions could be found in Greece (the Eleusinian Mysteries at Eleusis, not far from Athens; the religion of Dionysus or Bacchus, god of wine and the vintage harvest); Asia Minor (Cybele, the Great Mother, and her consort Attis, whose priests were castrated in imitation of Attis, driven mad by the jealous Cybele); Syria-Palestine (the Adonis fertility cult); Persia (the religion of Mithras, god of light and patron of the soldier); and Egypt (the religion of Isis and Osiris). Though the mysteries had sacred shrines in these regions, many of them spread to other parts of the empire, including Rome. There is no clearly direct influence of the mysteries on early Christianity, but they shared a common environment and many non-Christians would have perceived Christians as members of an oriental Jewish mystery cult.

A widespread religious movement which surfaced in the Roman Empire was Gnosticism. The term *Gnosticism* comes from the Greek word *gnosis,* meaning “knowledge,” that is, revealed religious knowledge necessary for salvation. Gnosticism was not a single religion but a diversified and complex religious phenomenon both independent of, and interacting with, Judaism and early Christianity. Discoveries in modern times (the Mandaean literature, the Manichaean papyri, the Nag Hammadi

texts) combined with the previously known Hermetic literature have convinced scholars that it was pre-Christian and originated in the East. There is still no consensus, however, on whether its essential ideas were current at the time of the rise of early Christianity. This is of particular interest since the myth of the Gnostic Redeemer, which some scholars believe influenced the way many early Christians understood the meaning of Jesus, can be documented with absolute certainty only in later Gnostic texts. Yet, some form of early Gnosticism was probably in the air and it seems likely that on occasion New Testament writers were influenced by it or attempted to counter it.

Basic to the Gnostic view is the perception that the world is an evil place, and that the only possible means of liberation from it is gnosis–secretly revealed knowledge about God, the world, and the origin, condition, and destiny of humankind. The Gnostic Theodotus once summarized the content of *gnosis* as: “Who we were, what we have become; Where we were, whither we were thrown; Whither we are hastening, from what we are redeemed; What birth is, and what is rebirth?”

Gnostic myths show that the evil world was not created by the good God, but by a second, inferior Deity, and that the true self, the divine self seen as a spark of light, is trapped in an alien body with all of its sensual passions. This body-spirit dualism is expressed in another way, that the evil powers attempt to keep the true self in a state of sleep or drunkenness in order to hold the creation of the evil world together. To know the myths–to have *gnosis*–is to have salvation.

In general, Gnostics believed that *gnosis* can be taught or that it can be transmitted through a secret ritual, but ultimately it comes from above as a “call,” or by a Gnostic Redeemer who descends from the world of light, disguises himself in human form without becoming bodily, teaches *gnosis,* and returns or re-ascends. It is precisely the origin of this myth that is debated. Did it exist in New Testament times? Undoubtedly the possibilities for such mythical thinking were current in Mediterranean antiquity whether we label them “Gnostic” or not. However the Gnostic gains his *gnosis,* he learns that this world and this body are not his true home, that he has been “thrown” into an alien world. Often he totally renounces the body and its passions (asceticism) or, knowing that the world is not his true place and cannot really affect him, he allows himself the utmost freedom (libertinism). Either way, he experiences rebirth and becomes part of the privileged few.

It is clear that the problem of the origin of evil in Gnosticism differs from that found in Genesis, though the Genesis account is sometimes used to interpret that myth. Similarly, the reluctance of Gnostics to think of a Redeemer who can literally take human flesh, suffer, and die conflicts with the view of those early Christians who persisted in believing that Jesus of Nazareth was a god incarnate in the flesh. This latter belief became orthodox. But it must be recalled that this orthodoxy and its literature were only gradually accepted; until they were accepted, Gnostics, Gnostic Jews, and Gnostic Christians continued to exist side by side with other types of Jews and Christians in the period of the early Christian movement.

Gods and Saviors

The Greco-Roman world did not lack gods and goddesses. These are the deities of myth, who dwell in the heavens or in some mythical mountain to the north, and who are associated with the rhythms of the seasons. Occasionally these eternal, immortal gods are said to descend, or are sent from heaven to earth, for some important redemptive mission on behalf of humankind. Occasionally they can be identified with historical figures, for example, the identification of the Gnostic Redeemer with Christ in certain Gnostic circles. Essentially they are gods, not human beings.

But there were also human figures known from history and legend who were believed to be so endowed with divinity as to perform superhuman feats, to be “supermen.” They could be offspring of divine-human unions, but what is most characteristic of them is their wisdom and special powers, including their ability to work miracles. Usually they were considered to be the great benefactors of humankind. In this category were all manner of kings, emperors, military conquerors, politicians, philosophers, physicians and healers, poets, and athletes. The notion of emperor worship, for example, was an adaptation of eastern beliefs about the divinity of the king or pharaoh. But western conquerors fostered such ideas on their marches eastward; in the eastern provinces the Roman emperor was often believed to be divine. At home, the Greeks and Romans cautiously tolerated such views as a means to political unity and stability, but in fact discouraged them. When Roman emperors claimed divine prerogatives, they encountered stiff opposition, though it was customary to pay worthy emperors divine homage after they died. Also, majestic titles were often bestowed on the emperor (or demanded by some!) such as “Lord,” “God,” “Son of God,” and “Savior.” Titles of this sort were also given to Jesus.

Especially widespread was the notion of a hero or philosopher who was venerated for his ability to perform miracles or for his great wisdom, or both. Some modern scholars have called such a figure the “divine man.” These tremendous abilities were believed to be a manifestation of deity, even if the figure was not an immortal god. Yet, it may be that there was also a special class of “divine men” who, it was believed, were rewarded with the status of immortality at death. One of the most famous was the itinerant Pythagorean philosopher Apollonius of Tyana (Asia Minor) who was said to have been sired by the Egyptian God Proteus, and to have gathered followers, taught, helped the poor, healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out demons, and appeared to his followers after death to discourse on immortality. He lived through most of the first Christian century, and shortly after 217 CE a “Life” of him was written by Philostratus. There is no evidence that Philostratus drew on the gospels; thus, the lives of famous heroes raise the question whether there were any literary prototypes for the New Testament “gospel.”

This article, with very minor modifications, was written by Dennis Duling of Canisius College and was published in his 2nd edition of Norman Perrin and Dennis Duling, *The New Testament: An Introduction* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,1982), pp. 4-35, now out of print. This excellent work, revised, expanded, and continually improved, is now published by Wadsworth and is in its 4th edition with Duling as the sole author.

Sanhedrin

Ancient Jewish History: The Sanhedrin (by Shira Schoenberg)

https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-sanhedrin

The ancient Jewish court system was called the Sanhedrin. The Great Sanhedrin was the supreme religious body in the Land of Israel during the time of the Holy Temple. There were also smaller religious Sanhedrins in every town in the Land of Israel, as well as a civil political-democratic Sanhedrin. These Sanhedrins existed until the abolishment of the rabbinic patriarchate in about 425 C.E.

The earliest record of a Sanhedrin is by Josephus who wrote of a political Sanhedrin convened by the Romans in 57 B.C.E. Hellenistic sources generally depict the Sanhedrin as a political and judicial council headed by the country's ruler.

Tannaitic sources describe the Great Sanhedrin as a religious assembly of 71 sages who met in the Chamber of Hewn Stones in the Temple in Jerusalem. The Great Sanhedrin met daily during the daytime, and did not meet on the Sabbath, festivals or festival eves. It was the final authority on Jewish law and any scholar who went against its decisions was put to death as a *zaken mamre* (rebellious elder). The Sanhedrin was led by a president called the *nasi* (lit. "prince") and a vice president called the *av bet din* (lit. "father of the court"). The other 69 sages sat in a semicircle facing the leaders. It is unclear whether the leaders included the high priest.

The Sanhedrin judged accused lawbreakers, but could not initiate arrests. It required a minimum of two witnesses to convict a suspect. There were no attorneys. Instead, the accusing witness stated the offense in the presence of the accused and the accused could call witnesses on his own behalf. The court questioned the accused, the accusers and the defense witnesses.

The Great Sanhedrin dealt with religious and ritualistic Temple matters, criminal matters appertaining to the secular court, proceedings in connection with the discovery of a corpse, trials of adulterous wives, tithes, preparation of Torah Scrolls for the king and the Temple, drawing up the calendar and the solving of difficulties relating to ritual law.

In about 30 C.E., the Great Sanhedrin lost its authority to inflict capital punishment. After the Temple was destroyed, so was the Great Sanhedrin. A Sanhedrin in Yavneh took over many of its functions, under the authority of Rabban Gamliel. The rabbis in the Sanhedrin served as judges and attracted students who came to learn their oral traditions and scriptural interpretations. From Yavneh, the Sanhedrin moved to different cities in the Galilee, eventually ending up in Tiberias.

Local Sanhedrins consisted of different numbers of sages, depending on the nature of the offenses it dealt with. For example, only a Sanhedrin of 71 could judge a whole tribe, a false prophet or the high priest. There were Sanhedrins of 23 for capital cases and of three scholars to deal with civil or lesser criminal cases.

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SADDUCEES

Matt. 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and **Sadducees** coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Matt. 16:1 The Pharisees and **Sadducees** came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven.

Matt. 16:6 And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and [a]beware of the [1]leaven of the [b]Pharisees and **Sadducees**."

Matt. 16:11 "How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But [a]beware of the [1]leaven of the [b]Pharisees and **Sadducees**." **12** Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the [a]Pharisees and **Sadducees**.

Matt. 22:23 [a]On that day *some* [b]**Sadducees** (who say [c]there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him,

Matt. 22:34 [a]But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced [b]the **Sadducees**, they gathered themselves together.

Mark 12:18 [a]*Some* **Sadducees** (who say that there is no resurrection) *came to Jesus, and *began* questioning Him, saying,

Luke 20:27 [a]Now there came to Him some of the [b]**Sadducees** (who say that there is no resurrection),

Acts 4:1 As they were speaking to the people, the priests and [a]the captain of the temple *guard* and [b]the **Sadducees** [c]came up to them,

Acts 5:17 But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is [a]the sect of [b]the **Sadducees**), and they were filled with jealousy.

Acts 23:6 But perceiving that one group were [a]**Sadducees** and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in [b]the [1]Council, "[c]Brethren, [d]I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for [e]the hope and resurrection of the dead!" **7** As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and **Sadducees**, and the assembly was divided. **8** For [a]the **Sadducees** say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

SCRIBES (see https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jesus/Scribes-and-Pharisees)
Scribe (s*opher)* https://www.britannica.com/topic/sofer
copiers and interpreters of the law, teachers of the law, doctors of the law

Some are PHARISEES and some are not:
Mark 2:16 When [a]**the scribes of the Pharisees** saw that He was eating with **the** sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, "[b]Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and [1]sinners?"

According to the New Testament they sat in the Sanhedrin (Matt 16:21).
"Jesus came into conflict with the Scribes often because He and His disciples did not observe their traditions. Mark 7 describes an example of Jesus and His followers not observing traditional rules in relation to the Sabbath and cleanness. In Matt. 23, where Jesus pronounces his woes upon the Scribes and Pharisees, He repeated His prophetic curse upon them, "*Woe to you*" eight times because of their arrogance, hypocrisy, self-seeking ambition and scrupulous observances." (https://www.bible-history.com/Scribes/)

Matt. 2:4 Gathering together all the chief priests and **scribes** of the people, he inquired of them where the [1]Messiah was to be born.

Matt. 5:20 "For I say to you that unless your [a]righteousness surpasses *that* of the **scribes** and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 7:29 for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their **scribes**.

Matt. 8:19 [a]Then a **scribe** came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go."

Matt. 9:3 And some of the **scribes** said [1]to themselves, "This *fellow* [a]blasphemes."

Matt. 12:38 Then some of the **scribes** and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, [a]we want to see a [1]sign from You."

Matt. 13:52 And [1]Jesus said to them, "Therefore every **scribe** who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

Matt. 15:1 [a]Then some Pharisees and **scribes** *came to Jesus [b]from Jerusalem and said,

Matt. 16:21 [a]From that time [1]Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and [b]suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and **scribes**, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

Matt. 17:10 And His disciples asked Him, "Why then do the **scribes** say that [a]Elijah must come first?"

Matt. 20:18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man [a]will be [1]delivered to the chief priests and **scribes**, and they will condemn Him to death,

Matt. 21:15 But when the chief priests and the **scribes** saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the [a]Son of David," they became indignant

Matt. 23:2 saying: "[a]The **scribes** and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;

Matt. 23:13 "[a]But woe to you, **scribes** and Pharisees, hypocrites, [b]because you shut off the kingdom of heaven [1]from [2]people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. **14** ["[1]Woe to you, **scribes** and Pharisees, hypocrites, because [a]you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.]

Matt. 23:15 "Woe to you, **scribes** and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one [1][a]proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of [2][b]hell as yourselves.

Matt. 23:23 "[a]Woe to you, **scribes** and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and [1]cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

Matt. 23:25 "Woe to you, **scribes** and Pharisees, hypocrites! For [a]you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full [1]of robbery and self-indulgence.

Matt. 23:27 "[a]Woe to you, **scribes** and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

Matt. 23:29 "[a]Woe to you, **scribes** and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,

Matt. 23:34 "[a]Therefore, behold, [b]I am sending you prophets and wise men and **scribes**; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will [c]scourge in your synagogues, and [d]persecute from city to city,

Matt. 26:57 [a]Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to [b]Caiaphas, the high priest, where the **scribes** and the elders were gathered together.

Matt. 27:41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the **scribes** and elders, were mocking *Him* and saying,

Mark 1:22 [a]They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as the **scribes**.

Mark 2:6 But some of the **scribes** were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts,

Mark 2:16 When [a]the **scribes** of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, "[b]Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and [1]sinners?"

Mark 3:22 The **scribes** who came down [a]from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by [1b]Beelzebul," and "[c]He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons."

Mark 7:1 [a]The Pharisees and some of the **scribes** gathered around Him when they had come [b]from Jerusalem,

Mark 7:5 The Pharisees and the **scribes** *asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the [a]tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with [b]impure hands?"

Mark 8:31 [a]And He began to teach them that [b]the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the **scribes**, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Mark 9:11 They asked Him, saying, "*Why is it* that the **scribes** say that [a]Elijah must come first?"

Mark 9:14 [a]When they came *back* to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and *some* **scribes** arguing with them.

Mark 10:33 *saying,* "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and [a]the Son of Man will be [1]delivered to the chief priests and the **scribes**; and they will condemn Him to death and will [2]hand Him over to the Gentiles.

Mark 11:18 The chief priests and the **scribes** heard *this,* and [a]*began* seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for [b]the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.

Mark 11:27 They *came again to Jerusalem. [a]And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the **scribes** and the elders *came to Him,

Mark 12:28 [a]One of the **scribes** came and heard them arguing, and [b]recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the [1]foremost of all?"

Mark 12:32 The **scribe** said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that [a]HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM;

Mark 12:35 [a]And Jesus *began* to say, as He [b]taught in the temple, "How *is it that* the **scribes** say that [1]the Christ is the [c]son of David?

Mark 12:38 [a]In His teaching He was saying: "Beware of the **scribes** who like to walk around in long robes, and *like* [b]respectful greetings in the market places,

Mark 14:1 [a]Now [b]the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the **scribes** [c]were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill *Him;*

Mark 14:43 [a]Immediately while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, *came up [1]accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, *who were* from the chief priests and the **scribes** and the elders.

Mark 14:53 [a]They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the **scribes** *gathered together.

Mark 15:1 [a]Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and **scribes** and the whole [1b]Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate.

Mark 15:31 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the **scribes**, were mocking *Him* among themselves and saying, "[a]He saved others; [1]He cannot save Himself.

Luke 5:21 The **scribes** and the Pharisees [a]began to reason, saying, "[b]Who is this *man* who speaks blasphemies? [c]Who can forgive sins, but God alone?"

Luke 5:30 [a]The Pharisees and their **scribes** *began* grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and [1]sinners?"

Luke 6:7 The **scribes** and the Pharisees [a]were watching Him closely *to see* if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find *reason* to accuse Him.

Luke 9:22 [a]saying, "[b]The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and **scribes**, and be killed and be raised up on the third day."

Luke 11:53 When He left there, the **scribes** and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects,

Luke 15:2 Both the Pharisees and the **scribes** *began* to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and [a]eats with them."

Luke 19:47 And [a]He was teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the **scribes** and the leading men among the people [b]were trying to destroy Him,

Luke 20:1 [a]On one of the days while [b]He was teaching the people in the temple and [c]preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the **scribes** with the elders [d]confronted *Him,*

Luke 20:19 The **scribes** and the chief priests [a]tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them.

Luke 20:39 Some of the **scribes** answered and said, "Teacher, You have spoken well."

Luke 20:46 "Beware of the **scribes**, [a]who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets,

Luke 22:2 The chief priests and the **scribes** [a]were seeking how they might put Him to death; for they were afraid of the people.

Luke 22:66 [a]When it was day, [b]the [1]Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and **scribes**, and they led Him away to their [c]council *chamber,* saying,

Luke 23:10 And the chief priests and the **scribes** were standing there, accusing Him vehemently.

John 8:3 The **scribes** and the Pharisees *brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center *of the court,*

Acts 4:5 On the next day, their [a]rulers and elders and **scribes** were gathered together in Jerusalem;

Acts 6:12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the **scribes**, and they [a]came up to him and dragged him away and brought him [1]before [b]the [2]Council.

Acts 23:9 And there occurred a great uproar; and some of [a]the **scribes** of the Pharisaic party stood up and *began* to argue heatedly, saying, "[b]We find nothing wrong with this man; [c]suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"

1Cor. 1:20 [a]Where is the wise man? Where is the **scribe**? Where is the debater of [b]this age? Has not God [c]made foolish the wisdom of [d]the world?