

Meeting Jesus: His Life & Times

Worksheet for Week 3

The Pharisees¹

These worksheets will provide you with some historical and geographical background that will help you to make more sense of the Gospels. The worksheet will also provide you with a structured set of daily Bible readings related to the Jesus' life and times. Most of our readings will be taken from the Gospel accounts. I'd suggest you begin by reading this worksheet and then move on to the daily Bible readings. If you have a study bible, you might look up a few cross-references to other passages.

Who were the Pharisees?

- The Pharisees existed for at least 150 years before Jesus. They probably were spiritual descendents of religious freedom fighters in the Maccabean revolt of 165BC.
- Pharisee means "the separated ones" for three probable reasons:
 1. They wanted to separate themselves from other people.
 2. They wanted to separate themselves so they could study the law.
 3. They wanted to separate themselves from pagan practices.
- The Pharisees were very influential, though not very numerous. There were perhaps 6,000 or so Pharisees during the time of Jesus' public ministry.

The Pharisees believed that:

1. There was one God, YHWH.
2. The Old Testament was their authority.
3. True worship was the study of law.
4. It was necessary to keep both the written and oral law.
5. They must keep the proper rituals (Sabbath, tithing, and purification).
6. There was life after death and there would be a resurrection of the body. The resurrection would be for all God's people at one time and at the end of the age, the coming of God's kingdom.
7. Demons and angels were real.
8. They should be missionaries to the Gentiles, to convert them to Judaism, though there never seemed to be much zeal for this work.
9. Individuals were responsible for how they lived.

In their activities, the Pharisees were the developers of the oral tradition. They taught that the way to God was through obedience to the law, and they changed Judaism from a religion of sacrifice to a religion of law. They were progressive thinkers and they often adapted the law to new situations. They violently opposed Jesus mainly because he wouldn't accept their teachings of the oral law. The Pharisees established and controlled the synagogues and exercised tremendous control over the people. They were admired by the people. They served as religious authorities for most Jews, and took several ceremonies from the Temple to the home. They emphasized ethical action (as opposed to theological action). They were legalistic and socially exclusive. They considered all non-Pharisees to be unclean. And, as Jesus often noted, they tended to be haughty and self-sufficient in their attitude.

The Pharisees were not some sort of "thought-police" snooping on everyone to make sure they kept the law. Their goal was to keep Israel as pure and holy as possible in order to inaugurate the arrival of God's kingdom.

When you think about the Pharisees, remember that the Apostle Paul was a Pharisee himself, and a zealous one at that!

¹ This material on the Pharisees was taken and adapted from the study guide to a series by N.T. Wright, *Jesus: The New Way*. The guide was prepared by Denise George and is copyrighted by the Christian History Institute.

Bible Readings for Week 3

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in these readings?

<p>Day 1 Matthew 1 & 2 The origin and infancy of Jesus the Messiah</p>	<p>Day 2 Matthew 3:1-4:22 Jesus begins his public ministry</p>
<p>Day 3 Matthew 4:23-7:29 The Sermon on the Mount</p>	<p>Day 4 Matthew 8 – 10 Jesus continues his ministry and mission in Galilee</p>
<p>Day 5 Matthew 11 – 13 Questioning of and opposition to Jesus grows</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>