

Religious Leaders of Jesus' Day

1. Pharisees

- **References:** Matthew 5:20, Matthew 23:1-36, Luke 6:2, Luke 7:36-47
- **Description:** Strict group of religious Jews, who advocated obedience to the most minute portions of the Jewish law and traditions. Very influential in the synagogues.
- **Agreement with Jesus:** Respect for the law, belief in the resurrection of the dead, committed to obeying God's will.
- **Disagreement with Jesus:** Rejected Jesus's claim to be the Messiah because he did not follow all their traditions and associated with notoriously wicked people.
- **Comments:** The Pharisees were the strict rule-keepers of the day. They believed that honoring God meant carefully obeying every detail of the law and the traditions built around it. Highly respected in the synagogues and deeply committed to religious discipline. They loved God's law, but they began to value their traditional ways of following the law rather than the heart of God behind the law.

2. Sadducees

- **References:** Matthew 3:7, Matthew 16:11-12, Mark 12:18
- **Description:** Wealthy upper class Jewish priestly party. Rejected the authority of the Bible beyond the five books of Moses. Profiting from Business in the temple. They, along with the Pharisees, were one of the two major parties of the Jewish High Council.
- **Agreement with Jesus:** Showed great respect for the five books of Moses, as well as the sanctity of the Temple.
- **Disagreement with Jesus:** Denied the resurrection of the dead. Thought the Temple could also be used as a place to transact business.
- **Comments:** Wealthy religious elite who controlled much of the temple system. They were politically connected and focused on maintaining order and influence. They only accepted the first five books of the Bible as authoritative (Torah or Pentateuch). Did not believe in the resurrection of the dead (Heaven). They mainly wanted to protect the religious system (or more importantly, their position within it).

3. Teachers of the Law

- **References:** Matthew 7:29, Mark 2:6, Mark 2:16
- **Description:** Professional interpreters of the law and especially emphasized the traditions. Many teachers of religious law were also Pharisees.
- **Agreement with Jesus:** Respect for the law. Committed to obeying God.
- **Disagreement with Jesus:** Denied Jesus' authority to reinterpret the law. Rejected Jesus as Messiah because he did not obey all of their traditions.
- **Comments:** Professional experts in Scripture. Their job was to study, interpret, and teach the law to the people. Many of them were also Pharisees. Considered the theological authorities of their day. The problem was that while they knew the

Scriptures extremely well, they failed to recognize Jesus as the One the Scriptures were pointing to.

4. Supporters of Herod

- **References:** Matthew 22:16, Mark 3:6, Mark 12:13
- **Description:** A Jewish political party of King Herod's supporters.
- **Agreement with Jesus:** Unknown. In the Gospels they tried to trap Jesus with questions and plotted to kill him.
- **Disagreement with Jesus:** Afraid of Jesus causing political instability. They saw Jesus as a threat to their political future at a time when they were trying to regain from Rome some of their lost political power.
- **Comments:** This was more of a political group that supported King Herod. Remember, Jerusalem was under Roman rule so these guys wanted to maintain peace with Rome. Because if Rome got angry due to extra drama in Israel, then Rome could have taken away all freedom and liberty. Anyone who threatened that balance of power, especially someone attracting large crowds like Jesus, was seen as dangerous.

5. Zealots

- **References:** Luke 6:15, Acts 1:14
- **Description:** A fiercely dedicated group of Jewish patriots determined to end Roman rule in Israel.
- **Agreement with Jesus:** Concerned about the future of Israel. Believed in the Messiah but did not recognize Jesus as the one sent by God.
- **Disagreement with Jesus:** Believed that the Messiah must be a political leader who would deliver Israel from Roman occupation.
- **Comments:** The Zealots were Jewish nationalists who believed Israel should overthrow Roman rule. They expected the Messiah to be a political leader who would lead a revolution against Rome. Their "hope for salvation" was tied to political freedom rather than spiritual redemption.