

Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, and the Sanhedrin: What were they and how did they operate at the time of Christ's ministry?

	Pharisee	Sadducee	Scribe	Sanhedrin
Meaning of the Name	Name denotes Separatists	Name is likely derived from a High Priest in Solomon's time	Title of court officials often referred to as lawyers	Jewish Senate and highest court – sometimes refers to lower, local courts as well
Who/What	Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders	“Old, High Priestly” families; the Jewish Aristocracy – held most of the power	Mostly Pharisees, but they could come from any background if they were willing to put forth the effort to study the law and become a scholar: they would develop the “law” and apply it to the circumstances of the times: thus creating “traditions”	Highest Jewish court in <i>BOTH</i> civil and ecclesiastical matters – majority were Pharisees
How Many	Larger party of non-aristocratic families	Lesser party, but old power	As teachers of the law, they were probably very numerous*	71 aristocratic members drawn from Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders
Main Beliefs	Immortality, resurrection, existence of angels and spirits, upheld oral tradition as equal to written law	Opposed Pharisee's main tenants: taught complete freedom of the will in moral action	The law needed to be interpreted and applied to current circumstance	During Christ's time, the Pharisees held the greatest influence over its views

Cont.	Pharisee	Sadducee	Scribe	Sanhedrin
Prominent Practices	Strict obedience to the Law – reduced religion to an observance of ceremonial rules; encouraged self-sufficiency and spiritual pride. Taught avoidance of gentiles	Held to the “letter” of Mosaic revelation and denied all ancient tradition	Preached in synagogues and temples; usually with their pupils at their feet – largely unpaid, they often combined their work with other callings	Held court over any and all affairs of the state – Rome removed their ability to judge cases involving life and death 40 years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem
Issue w/ Christ	Took great offense that Christ would claim authority – they always deferred their authority to the temple, the synagogue or the law	Offended at Christ’s cleansing of the temple and opposed preaching of Apostles because they taught resurrection	As a class they acted in determined opposition to Christ because he disregarded the “traditions of the Elders”	The Pharisees and Sadducees opposed one another often bickering over the slightest difference of opinion of the law, but found it very convenient to ally themselves in opposition to Christ
Relation w/Rome	They did not like having gentiles ruling over them and looked forward to the promise of a victorious King	Their influence helped spread Greek culture	Did not appreciate that Rome could over-rule their decisions, though in practice it was rare*	In Christ’s day their jurisdiction was limited to Judea alone, but they swayed other local courts by their influence: any case could be pulled and heard by simple Roman decree
*Notations			Assumed from the text, but not clearly defined in the scriptures	