

INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD OVERVIEW – PART 2 – RELIGIOUS CONTEXT – JEWISH IDENTITY GROUPS

Last week we covered **Jewish Religious Institutions:**

Anointed Roles / Temple / Sacrificial System / Feasts

This week: **Jewish Identity Groups**

IDENTITY GROUPS IN JESUS' TIME -- starting with a summary

SCRIBES – **Knowledge over Repentance** – **John 5:39-40**

You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.

PHARISEES – **Tradition over Scripture** – **Matt. 15:9**

But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.

SADDUCEES – **Denial of Key Aspects of Spiritual Truth** – **Acts 23:8**

For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

HERODIANS – **Politics over Righteousness** – **Mark 12:13; 3:6**

And they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him, in order to trap Him in a statement.

ELDERS – **Traditional Communal Authority centered around the synagogue** --

Decision-makers alongside chief priests and scribes – **Matt. 15:2**

Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?

SANHEDRIN – **Judicial Authority centered around the Temple and the Sacrificial System** --

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

ZEALOTS – **Revolution over Redemption** – **Luke 6:15**

Simon who was called the Zealot

ESSENES – **Isolation over Evangelism** – Dead Sea Scrolls

SAMARITANS -- **Mixture of Israelite ancestry and Pagan Influence** – **John 4**

combined with their **separate place of worship on Mount Gerizim** rather than in Jerusalem. Located between Judah (Jerusalem and Bethlehem) and Galilee (Nazareth and Capernaum). Capital city of Samaris

APPROACH to each group – 4 Topics:

- 1) **Historical Development** – Where did they come from?
 - 2) **Composition** – Who were their members?
 - 3) **Characteristics** – What were their identifying characteristics?
 - 4) **Impact in the Gospels and Interaction with Christ** – How were they significant?
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SCRIBES:

1. Historical Development of the Scribes

a. Origins (Post-Exilic Period)

The scribes emerge after the **Babylonian Exile (6th–5th century BC)**, when Israel no longer had a Davidic king and religious life became centered on the **Torah**.

- **Ezra the Scribe (Ezra 7:6, 10)** is the prototype:
 - A trained expert in the Law
 - Interpreter and teacher, not a prophet
- With prophecy disappearing after Malachi, scribes filled the role of:
 - **Preservers of Scripture**
 - **Teachers and interpreters of the Law**

This marks a shift from *prophetic authority* to *textual authority*.

b. Intertestamental Development

During the so-called 400 silent years, scribes grew in influence.

Key developments:

- The Torah became the **center of Jewish identity**
- Scribes systematized:
 - Oral traditions
 - Legal interpretations (halakhah)
- They increasingly shaped daily religious practice

By the 1st century, scribes were the **legal scholars of Judaism**, functioning much like theologians and jurists.

2. Composition of the Scribal Class

a. Social and Educational Makeup

Scribes were:

- **Highly educated**, literate in Hebrew and often Aramaic (and sometimes Greek)
- Trained through **long apprenticeships**
- Usually from respected families, though not necessarily aristocrats

They were not a priestly caste but **professional scholars**.

In the Gospels, scribes are most often linked with the **Pharisees** (e.g., **Mark 2:16**).

3. Identifying Characteristics of the Scribes

a. Authority Derived from Tradition

Scribes taught by citing earlier authorities:

“Rabbi so-and-so says...”

Their authority was:

- **Derivative**, not personal and inherent
- Rooted in tradition, precedent, and interpretation

This contrasts sharply with Jesus, who taught:

“*You have heard... but I say to you*” (Matthew 5)

b. Guardians of Oral Law

Scribes maintained both:

- **Written Torah**
- **Oral Torah** (later codified in the Mishnah)

Key traits:

- Detailed legal reasoning
- Emphasis on precision and boundary-keeping
- Development of *fences around the Law*

c. Moral and Spiritual Failures (as Critiqued by Jesus)

Jesus’ critique was not against learning per se but against distortions:

- **Legalism**: prioritizing rule-keeping over mercy (Matthew 23:23)
- **Hypocrisy**: teaching without practicing (Matthew 23:3)
- **Burdening others**: complex rules that oppressed the poor (Luke 11:46)
- **Spiritual blindness**: missing the Law’s purpose (John 5:39)

4. Impact of the Scribes in the Gospels

a. As Opponents of Jesus

They play a central role in:

- Accusations of blasphemy (Mark 14:53–65)
- Plotting Jesus’ death (Mark 11:18)

b. Condemned by Jesus for their hypocrisy and distortions and elitism

According to Jesus:-- They sought honorific titles (Matthew 23:1-12)

BEWARE OF HYPOCRITICAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS (SCRIBES & PHARISEES) --

HYPOCRITICAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS ELEVATE SELF AND SEEK NOTEREITY

I. (:2-7) BEWARE OF THE PHONINESS OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

A. (:2-4) Characterized by Hypocrisy

1. (:2) Positions of Religious Influence
2. (:3a) Practice of Religious Inconsistency –
Follow Their Legitimate Teaching but Reject Their Phony Example –
Discrepancy between their Words and Deeds
3. (:3b-4) Portrayal of Their Bad Behavior
 - a. (:3b) Hypocritical Behavior
“*for they say things, and do not do them.*”
 - b. (:4) Oppressive Behavior via Legalistic Burdens

B. (:5-7) Characterized by Seeking Praise from Others

1. (:5a) Motivation of Seeking Praise from Others
“But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men”

2. (:5b-7) Examples of Seeking Praise from Others
 - a. (:5b) Fancy Religious Dress
*“for they broaden their phylacteries,
and lengthen the tassels of their garments”*

 - b. (:6) Privileged Seats of Honor
*“And they love the place of honor at banquets,
and the chief seats in the synagogues,”*

 - c. (:7) Respectful Forms of Address
*“and respectful greetings in the market places,
and being called by men, Rabbi.”*

II. (:8-10) AVOID TITLES OF SPIRITUAL SUPERIORITY

That would detract from the preeminence of Christ

A.(:8) Avoid Being Called Rabbi (Teacher)

But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.

B. (:9) Avoid Being Called Father

And do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

Charles Swindoll: Just as we should reject being placed on a pedestal by others, we should resist placing others on a pedestal (**23:9**). Granting teachers and leaders the revered title “*Father*” can essentially cross the line from admiration and appreciation to exaltation and worship. The more we exalt a human to a position of unparalleled honor like that, the more we rob our heavenly Father of that unique position in our hearts and minds.

C. (:10) Avoid Being Called Leader

And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.

Donald Hagner: They are to avoid titles that would set them apart from, and above, others in the community of faith, not because the particular titles are reprehensible but because of the assumption of **superiority** and **elitism** that so often goes with them. The demeanor of the disciples is to be characterized above all by the virtues of **service** and **humility**. Christians of every era and every circumstance, especially those in leadership roles, must learn again that true greatness consists in service and that self-humbling now is the path to exaltation in the eschaton. Only by such a radical departure from the values and priorities of the world will Christians in authority be the disciples of the one Teacher and Lord.

- Expected respect in public spaces
- Functioned as religious elites

PHARISEES

1. Historical Development of the Pharisees

Origins (Hasmonean Period, 2nd century BC)

The Pharisees arose during the **Hasmonean era** (after the Maccabean Revolt, c. 150 BC), when Jewish identity was under threat from Hellenization.

- Their name likely comes from *perushim* (“the separated ones”)
- They separated themselves not from society, but from:
 - Ritual impurity
 - Compromise with pagan culture
- They were a **lay movement**, not priestly officials

Their original impulse was **faithful obedience to the Law** in everyday life.

2. Composition of the Pharisaic Movement

a. Social Makeup

Pharisees were:

- Predominantly **lay teachers**
- From middle or lower-middle classes
- Often tradesmen (e.g., Paul was a tentmaker)

They were not political rulers but **moral and religious influencers**.

b. Size and Influence

- Likely numbered **a few thousand at most**
- Disproportionate influence due to:
 - Popular support
 - Expertise in Torah
 - Role in synagogue life

Though not the ruling elite, they shaped **popular piety**.

c. Relationship to Other Jewish Groups

Scribes Many Pharisees were scribes

The Pharisees were the most **religiously influential** sect among the people.

3. Identifying Characteristics of the Pharisees

a. Commitment to Torah (Written and Oral)

Pharisees believed God gave:

- **Written Torah**
- **Oral Torah** (interpretive tradition)

This allowed:

- Adaptation of the Law to new situations
- Practical daily obedience

Later Rabbinic Judaism would grow directly from this framework.

b. Core Doctrinal Beliefs

Distinctive Pharisaic beliefs included:

- Resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:8)
- Angels and spirits
- Divine providence alongside human responsibility
- Messianic hope (though varied)

Ironically, many of these align more closely with **Christian theology** than with Sadducean views.

c. Piety and Discipline

Pharisees were known for:

- Regular fasting (Luke 18:12)
- Tithing meticulously (Matthew 23:23)
- Sabbath observance
- Ritual purity practices

Their aim was not hypocrisy but **faithfulness**—though this often became distorted.

d. Boundary-Marking Practices

To protect the Law, Pharisees developed:

- “Fences around the Law”
- Detailed rules to avoid transgression

These fences, however:

- Sometimes overshadowed the Law’s intent
- Could burden ordinary people

4. Impact of The Pharisees in the Gospels

a. Frequent Interaction with Jesus

- Question Jesus’ authority (**Mark 2:7**)
- Debate Sabbath observance (**Mark 2:23–28**)
“*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath*” (**Mark 2:27**)
- Challenge purity practices and table fellowship (**Mark 7**)

Jesus’ eating with sinners undermined:

Pharisaic purity boundaries

Social divisions they believed protected holiness

These encounters are not trivial disputes but **interpretive battles over Torah’s meaning**.

b. Points of Conflict with Jesus Authority

“*You have heard... but I say to you*” (**Matthew 5**)

Pharisees: authority through tradition

Jesus: authority in himself

- Interpretation of the Law
- Prioritization of ritual over mercy
- External compliance over internal transformation

Jesus' Sharpest Critique (Matthew 23)

Jesus condemns them:

HYPOCRITICAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS DESERVE SEVERE DENUNCIATION FOR THEIR IMPACT OF DESTRUCTIVE CORRUPTION **7 WOES DIRECTED AGAINST THE HYPOCRISY OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS**

I. (:13) CORRUPTING THE ENTRANCE TO HEAVEN

Charles Swindoll: Rather than drawing others into God's kingdom life with the glorious message of forgiveness and hope, they intentionally resisted the truth themselves and stood in the way of others.

II. (:15) CORRUPTING THE PROCESS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Daniel Doriani: The teachers and Pharisees are zealous, but they do more harm than good. . . The first century was the heyday of evangelism by Jews, but because the Pharisees promoted a false religion, when they made converts, they were more proud, blind, and legalistic than the Pharisees themselves.

III. (:16-22) CORRUPTING INTEGRITY BY EVASIVE PRIORITIES OF ALLEGIANCE

(:16-17) Practicing Deceit by Prioritizing Gold over the Temple

(:18-19) Practicing Deceit by Prioritizing Offerings over the Altar

Our integrity must be based on our walk with God, not formulas we utter over our promises.

IV. (:23-24) CORRUPTING THE ESSENCE OF GODLINESS BY MAJORING ON THE MINORS WHEN IT COMES TO GOD'S RIGHTEOUS REQUIREMENTS

Stu Weber: Jesus' hyperbole in **verse 24** was humorous. His hearers would have chuckled at the picture of the Pharisees straining out a small insect (gnat) while swallowing a huge camel.

V. (:25-26) CORRUPTING THE PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION

A. (:25) Wrong Process = Only Cleansing the Externals

B. (:26) Right Process = Prioritize Cleansing the Heart

VI. (:27-28) CORRUPTING THE TESTIMONY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

A. (:27) False Facade

B. (:28) Internal Corruption

VII. (:29-36a) CORRUPTING THE TREATMENT OF GOD'S PROPHETS

(:36b) IMMINENCY OF CERTAIN JUDGMENT

“Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation.”

Importantly:

- Jesus acknowledges their teaching authority (**Matthew 23:2–3**)

Differences between scribes and Pharisees:

The scribes and Pharisees both held positions of religious authority and men could be included in both groups, but their emphases differed: **scribes were the scholars of the Law**, while **Pharisees were the practitioners and interpreters** who sought to apply it to every aspect of life.

Aspect	Scribes	Pharisees
Role	Scholars, teachers, and interpreters of the Law	Religious leaders and moral enforcers
Focus	The written Law (Torah)	The Law plus oral traditions
Authority Source	Knowledge of Scripture	Influence over daily religious life
Beliefs	Varied, but centered on Scripture	Believed in resurrection, angels, and traditions
Jesus' Critique	Hypocrisy and legalism	Hypocrisy and self-righteousness

SADDUCEES

1. Historical Development of the Sadducees

a. Origins (Priestly–Zadokite Roots)

The Sadducees likely trace their origins to the **Zadokite priesthood**, descending from **Zadok**, high priest under David and Solomon (1 Kings 2:35).

- Their name is commonly linked to *Zadok* (*Ṣādōq* → *Ṣaddûqîm*)
- They saw themselves as the legitimate heirs of Temple authority
- Their identity was tied to **Jerusalem and the Temple**

Unlike the Pharisees, they did not arise as a reform movement among the people but as an **elite, priestly group**.

b. Development during the Second Temple Period

During the **Hasmonean period (2nd–1st century BC)**:

- The priesthood became politicized
- High priests were often appointed for political reasons
- Sadducees aligned themselves with ruling powers to preserve influence

Under Roman rule:

- They collaborated with Roman authorities to maintain Temple control
- Stability and order were paramount concerns

Their power depended on the **Temple's continued operation**.

2. Composition of the Sadducean Group

a. Social and Economic Status

Sadducees were:

- Wealthy
- Aristocratic
- Concentrated in Jerusalem
- Drawn from high-priestly families

They represented a **small minority** but wielded disproportionate power.

b. Institutional Power

Sadducees dominated:

- The **Temple hierarchy**
- The **Sanhedrin** (especially the high priesthood)

Even when Pharisees had popular support, Sadducees controlled official institutions.

3. Identifying Characteristics of the Sadducees

a. Scriptural Authority: Written Torah Only

Sadducees accepted:

- **Only the written Torah (Pentateuch)** as authoritative
- Rejected oral tradition

As a result, they denied doctrines not explicit in the **Pentateuch**.

Key Theological Positions

According to the New Testament (**Acts 23:8**), Sadducees denied:

- Resurrection of the dead
- Angels and spirits
- An afterlife judgment

Their theology focused on:

- This-worldly religion
- Covenant faithfulness expressed through Temple worship

b. Temple-Centered Religion

Sadducean faith was:

- Sacrificial
- Ritual
- Institutional

Without the Temple, their religious identity would collapse—which it did after AD 70.

c. Political Pragmatism

They were:

- Conservative in theology
- Pragmatic in politics
- Willing to compromise with Rome

This explains their fear of Jesus as a destabilizing figure (**John 11:48**).

4. Impact of The Sadducees in the Gospels

a. Limited but Strategic Appearances

Unlike Pharisees, Sadducees appear less frequently in the Gospels but in **key moments**:

- Debates about resurrection (**Matthew 22:23–33**)

- Temple controversies
- Jesus' trial

They emerge when **Temple authority or core theology is threatened.**

b. Conflict with Jesus

1) Resurrection Debate

The Sadducees challenge Jesus with a hypothetical about levirate marriage (**Matthew 22**).

Jesus responds by:

- Rebuking their ignorance of Scripture and God's power
- Arguing resurrection from the Torah itself (**Exodus 3:6**)

This is significant: Jesus defeats them **on their own textual ground.**

2) Temple Action

Jesus' cleansing of the Temple (Mark 11:15–18):

- Directly attacks Sadducean economic control
- Disrupts sacrificial commerce
- Threatens their authority and income

This likely precipitated their decision to act against him.

HERODIANS

1. Historical Development of the Herodians

a. Origins in the Herodian Dynasty

The Herodians were **not a religious sect** like the Pharisees or Sadducees, but a **political faction** aligned with the **Herodian royal house.**

- Rooted in the reign of **Herod the Great (37–4 BC)**
- Herod was:
 - An Idumean (Edomite), not ethnically Jewish
 - Installed by Rome
 - Nominally Jewish but culturally Hellenized

The Herodians supported:

- Herod's legitimacy as king
- Continued Roman patronage

b. Continuation after Herod the Great

The Herodians likely supported:

- Herod Antipas during Jesus' ministry
- The preservation of Herodian rule over direct Roman governance

Their political identity evolved with changing rulers but remained **pro-Herodian and pro-Roman.**

2. Composition of the Herodians

a. Social and Political Makeup

The Herodians consisted of:

- Court officials

- Political advisors
- Wealthy landowners
- Urban elites

They were:

- Socially influential
- Politically connected
- Economically advantaged

Unlike Pharisees, they had **little grassroots religious following**.

3. Identifying Characteristics of the Herodians

a. Political Loyalty over Theological Purity

The defining trait of the Herodians was **political pragmatism**.

They valued:

- Stability
- Power
- Favor with Rome

They tolerated:

- Roman taxation
- Pagan imagery
- Hellenistic customs

b. Support of Roman Taxation

The Herodians supported paying taxes to Caesar:

- Their power depended on Roman approval
- Taxation funded Herodian rule

This stance placed them at odds with:

- Zealots (anti-Roman)
- Many common Jews

c. Opposition to Messianic Movements

Any popular messianic figure:

- Threatened Roman order
- Endangered Herodian authority

Jesus, with growing crowds and “kingdom” language, represented a political risk.

4. Impact of The Herodians in the Gospels

a. Alliance with the Pharisees

In **Mark 3:6**, after Jesus heals on the Sabbath:

“The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.”

This alliance is striking because:

- Pharisees opposed Herodian Hellenism
- Herodians opposed Pharisaic religious rigor

Their cooperation signals that Jesus threatened **both religious and political systems**.

b. The Tax Question Trap

In **Mark 12:13–17**, Pharisees and Herodians jointly ask:

“*Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?*”

This is a political trap:

- Saying “yes” alienates the people
- Saying “no” invites Roman arrest

Jesus’ reply:

“**Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s**”

This:

- Avoids sedition
- Undermines Herodian claims by subordinating Caesar to God
- Redefines true allegiance

c. Theological Significance

The Herodians embody:

- The temptation to **secure peace through compromise**
- The danger of equating God’s purposes with political power
- A false messianic hope rooted in human rulers

Jesus exposes their worldview by refusing both rebellion and collaboration.

ELDERS

Unlike sects (Pharisees, Sadducees) or political factions (Herodians), the elders represent **traditional communal authority**, making them a key—though often overlooked—group in the Gospel narrative.

1. Historical Development of the Elders

a. Old Testament Foundations

The concept of elders (*Heb. z^eqēnîm*) is one of the **oldest leadership structures in Israel**.

- Elders appear as early as **Exodus 3:16; 18:12**
- They functioned as:
 - Clan leaders
 - Judges
 - Representatives of the people
- In **Numbers 11:16–17**, elders share Moses’ leadership burden

Thus, elders predate monarchy, priesthood, and later sectarian movements.

b. Post-Exilic and Second Temple Development

After the exile:

- Israel lacked a king
- Authority rested with:
 - Priests
 - Scribes
 - Elders

During the Second Temple period:

- Elders became **aristocratic lay leaders**
- They represented families, wealth, and local prestige

- Their authority was customary rather than doctrinal

By the 1st century, elders formed one of the **three pillars of leadership**:
chief priests, scribes, and elders

2. Composition of the Elders

a. Social and Economic Status

Elders were typically:

- Older men (though “elder” denotes status more than age)
- Heads of prominent families
- Wealthy landowners or patrons
- Influential in local and Jerusalem governance

They were **lay leaders**, not priests or professional scholars.

b. Institutional Roles

Elders served:

- In local councils
- As representatives to higher authorities
- On the **Sanhedrin**

They provided **social legitimacy** and political continuity.

3. Identifying Characteristics of the Elders

a. Authority Rooted in Tradition and Status

Elders derived authority from:

- Lineage
- Wealth
- Community recognition
- Longevity of influence

Their power was **customary and social**, not theological innovation.

b. Conservatism and Stability

Elders prioritized:

- Social order
- Preservation of tradition
- Avoidance of unrest

They were wary of:

- Popular movements
- Charismatic teachers
- Messianic claimants

c. Pragmatic Leadership

Operating under Roman rule, elders:

- Sought accommodation
- Feared reprisals for unrest
- Valued compromise over confrontation

This made them resistant to Jesus’ disruptive ministry.

4. The Impact of the Elders in the Gospels

a. Collective Authority Figures

The Gospels often mention elders collectively:

“*the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders*”

They appear as:

- Representatives of “the people”
- Decision-makers alongside priests and scribes

b. Role in Questioning Jesus’ Authority

In **Mark 11:27–33**, elders join chief priests and scribes in challenging Jesus:

“By what authority are you doing these things?”

This reveals:

- Their concern with legitimacy
- Fear of unauthorized leadership

c. Representatives of Established Society

The elders symbolize:

- Communal authority
- Social respectability
- Tradition-bound leadership

Jesus’ association with sinners and the poor undercut their values.

Guardians of the Status Quo

They feared:

- Loss of influence
- Roman retaliation
- Social upheaval

Jesus’ popularity threatened their carefully balanced power.

SANHEDRIN

1. Historical Development of the Sanhedrin

Formation in the Second Temple Period

By the **Hellenistic period (3rd–2nd century BC)**:

- A formal council of elders existed in Jerusalem
- Greek sources use the term *synedrion* (“assembly/council”)

During the **Hasmonean period**:

- The Sanhedrin functioned as the highest Jewish court
- Authority fluctuated depending on political rulers

Under Roman rule:

- The Sanhedrin retained **religious and limited civil authority**
- Capital punishment required Roman approval (John 18:31)

Thus, the Sanhedrin operated under **Roman oversight**, not full sovereignty.

2. Composition of the Sanhedrin

a. Membership Structure

The Sanhedrin traditionally consisted of **71 members**:

- The **high priest** as presiding officer
- **Chief priests** (largely Sadducees)
- **Elders** (aristocratic lay leaders)
- **Scribes** (often Pharisees)

This composition brought together **competing theological groups** within one governing body.

b. Social and Political Status

Members were:

- Male
- Elite
- Jerusalem-centered
- Socially powerful

They represented **established authority**, not grassroots religion.

3. Identifying Characteristics of the Sanhedrin

a. Supreme Judicial Authority

The Sanhedrin functioned as:

- Highest court for religious law
- Arbiter of doctrinal disputes
- Supervisor of Temple affairs

It judged cases of:

- Blasphemy
- False prophecy
- Temple violation

The Sanhedrin's authority was inseparable from:

- The Temple
- The sacrificial system
- The high priesthood

Threats to the Temple were perceived as threats to national stability.

B. Political Pragmatism

Operating under Rome, the Sanhedrin:

- Balanced Jewish law with Roman expectations
- Prioritized order over prophetic disruption
- Feared Roman intervention (John 11:48)

This pragmatism shaped their response to Jesus.

C. Conservatism and Self-Preservation

While theologically diverse, the Sanhedrin was unified by:

- Protection of institutional authority
- Maintenance of the status quo

Messianic movements were seen as dangerous.

4. The Impact of the Sanhedrin in the Gospels

a. Early Scrutiny of Jesus

The Sanhedrin:

- Sends delegations to investigate Jesus (John 1:19)
- Monitors his teaching and miracles
- Evaluates his conformity to Jewish law

Their concern grows as Jesus' popularity increases.

b. The Turning Point: Temple Action

Jesus' cleansing of the Temple (Mark 11:15–18):

- Challenges Sanhedrin authority
- Attacks priestly economic control
- Publicly critiques Temple leadership

From this point, the Sanhedrin seeks his death.

Jesus vs. All Leadership Models

Human Leadership

Derived authority
Institutional power
Tradition-bound
Political survival
External conformity

Jesus

Inherent authority
Servant authority
Fulfillment-oriented
Kingdom faithfulness
Internal transformation

How These Groups Function Together

1. Three Axes of Authority

Jewish leadership was not monolithic but divided across **three overlapping axes**:

- **Religious–Interpretive**: Scribes, Pharisees
- **Institutional–Cultic**: Sadducees, Chief Priests
- **Social–Political**: Elders, Herodians

The **Sanhedrin** sat at the intersection of all three.

2. Why They United Against Jesus

These groups disagreed deeply with one another, yet united because Jesus:

- Claimed **authority apart from tradition** (threat to scribes/Pharisees)
- Challenged the **Temple system** (threat to Sadducees/priests)
- Drew popular allegiance (threat to elders)
- Spoke of a “kingdom” (threat to Herodians/Rome)

Jesus disrupted **every source of legitimacy at once**.

3. Narrative and Theological Irony

Leadership Structure

Irony in the Gospels

Scribes	Experts in Scripture miss its fulfillment
Pharisees	Defenders of holiness reject the Holy One
Sadducees	Deniers of resurrection condemn the risen Christ
Elders	Guardians of tradition reject God’s new work
Herodians	Defenders of earthly power confront true kingship
Sanhedrin	Judges of Israel judged by their verdict
