

“Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus but the Pharisees and the scribes began to complain ...”

To understand these passages, one must first recognize that charges against the “scribes,” “chief priests,” and “Pharisees” are all connected, as they are references to various leaders of the Jewish community at the time of Jesus.

In most instances where the Gospels refer to the Pharisees, they are described as being among Jesus’ strongest and most tenacious opponents. Their vision and program for what Judaism should be differed significantly from Jesus’ view. These differences may have led to heated exchanges on both sides. However, the negative depictions of the Pharisees throughout the New Testament, including the passages above, likely date from a generation later. (See below)

The fact is the Pharisees were a diverse group, not all of whom deserve such sweeping negative characterization. After the destruction of the Temple, they were the group who helped the Jewish community transition its form of worship to practices in the home and later in synagogues, with rabbis as their primary religious leaders. Many had positive qualities and some were sympathetic to Jesus, including *Nicodemus* “who went cautiously to Jesus at night and asked him respectful questions about his teachings” (John 3:1-9) and *Joseph of Arimathea*, who made sure that Jesus had a proper burial (Mark 15:43, 45-6).

One reason for the negative depictions may well be the time the Gospels were written. Many do not realize that they were authored decades after Jesus’ death, which occurred in about 30 AD/CE. Luke’s Gospel was written more than 40 years later, therefore, these texts are more likely to reflect the friction between the Jewish leaders and the *followers of Jesus* rather than a conflict with *Jesus himself*.

The three main points to be made here are: 1) It was not the whole Jewish leadership who rejected Jesus and wanted him killed, 2) the historic context adds a dimension to why these words were written and 3) To make a connection between these ancient leaders and modern-day Jews is an enormous leap.

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