

Introduction

The *Encounters with Jesus* series looks at the transforming nature of these interactions. You could not meet Jesus without being challenged, and in many cases transformed altogether.

During the final week of Jesus' ministry, a crisis developed with the religious authorities. The tension between Jesus and the religious authorities increased when Jesus tried to stop the money lenders and the merchants from operating in the Temple. (**Luke 19:45-46**) The religious authorities demanded an explanation of his actions, and He responded with a question **Luke 20:3** they did not dare to answer and a parable about wicked tenants who beat and killed their landlord's son. The authorities knew the parable was spoken against them, and they sent agents to try to catch Jesus speaking against the Roman government so that they could have him arrested and condemned for sedition.

Luke presents these encounters with Jesus as hostile questions designed to trap Jesus into saying something that the priestly authorities could use against him.

- Luke 20:1-8** Questioned by the Chief Priests and Scribes with the Elders
By what authority...?
- Luke 20:9-19** Parable of the Wicked Vine-growers
- Luke 20:20-26** Questioned by the Chief Priests and Scribes
Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?
- Luke 20:27-39** Questioned by some of the Sadducees
The resurrection
- Luke 20:40** Silence

Luke 20:41-44 Jesus questions His questioners
Is the Messiah David's son?

Luke 20:45-21:4 Jesus' public warning to His disciples.

Who were the Sadducees?

Actually we don't know a great deal about them since none of their own writings survive, only those of their opponents.

The most reliable information about the Sadducees is found in three bodies of ancient literature: the writings of Flavius Josephus *The Jewish War* (written ca. A.D. 75), *Antiquities of the Jews* (ca. A.D. 94), and *Life* (ca. A.D. 101);

The Sadducees hold that the soul perishes along with the body.

(Antiquities 18:16).

Second, the New Testament, particularly the Synoptic Gospels and Acts (ca. A.D. 65-90; Matt. 3:7; 16:1-12; 22:23-34; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-38);

The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

(Acts 23:8)

Third, the Rabbinic Compilations (ca. A.D. 200 and later; **Mishnah**, Ber. 9:5; Erub. 6:2; Par. 3:3, 7; Nidd. 4:2; Yad. 4:6-8).

Two observations about these sources should be made.

First, with the possible exception of Josephus' *War*, all these sources are decidedly hostile towards the Sadducees.

Second, many of the rabbinic references, especially those found in the

Talmud and later works, are of doubtful historical reliability. Thus, our knowledge of the Sadducees is severely limited and one-sided.

What we do know is that they were Jews, of a particular persuasion. In religion the Sadducees are marked for their conservatism. They denied the permanent validity of any but the written laws of the Pentateuch. They rejected the later doctrines of the soul and its after-life, the resurrection, rewards and punishment, angels and demons. They believed that there was no fate, men having a free choice of good and evil, prosperity and adversity being the outcome of their own course of action.

The basic issue separating Pharisees and Sadducees was purity. The Pharisees kept Kosher homes, were concerned with ritual purity, and were admired by the multitudes for their piety.

There are four theories of the origin of the Sadducees.

1. They were mainly a political party, derived ultimately from the Judaeen Hellenists.
2. They were a religious party, and that some of the scribes in the Gospels were Sadducee scribes.
3. They were originally a rural aristocratic body, as opposed to the urban Pharisees.
4. They were originally state officials.

More recently, many scholars have argued that the Sadducees were essentially a loose confederation of wealthy and powerful men (this would

include members of the priestly aristocracy) who took a secular-pragmatic, rather than a religious-ideological, stance with regard to the nation and its laws.

The Sadducees now raise an objection to Jesus' teach of the resurrection and cite Moses (the Torah) as their authority.

Reference to Levirate Marriage (Luke 20:28)

"'Teacher,' they said, 'Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother.' " (20:28)

The basis for the Sadducees' trick question, rests on the practice of levirate marriage (from Latin *levir*, "husband's brother"). The Sadducees are referring to the passage in Deuteronomy:

"If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her" (Deuteronomy 25:5).

This law afforded the protection of a husband for the widow and provided for the deceased husband a sort of after-life in that his name is carried on after him by his widow's children by his brother.

A couple of examples of levirate marriage are found in the Bible.

First, the relationship between Judah, his son Onan, and Tamar, his widowed daughter-in-law (Genesis 38:8-26).

And second, the story of the Moabite widow Ruth, her mother-in-law Naomi and her kinsman-redeemer Boaz (See the entire but short Book of Ruth.)

Was levirate marriage practiced in Jesus' day? Though it was allowed, apparently it was only found occasionally among the wealthy classes -- the classes that favoured the Sadducees. The school of Rabbi Shammai permitted levirate marriage in certain cases where the school of Rabbi Hillel did not. Apparently two leading Jerusalem families, members of which officiated as high priests, were descended from such levirate marriages -- perhaps even the High Priest Caiaphas himself. If this is the case -- Jesus stood to offend the high priest in the same way the question about taxes earlier had placed him in danger of offending the Roman authorities.

Laying the Trap (20:29-33)

Now the Sadducees' puzzle for Jesus to solve, perhaps their favourite question to silence those who believed in the resurrection:

"Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died too. Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" (20:29-33)

To us this may seem a trivial exercise -- like how many angels can stand on the head of a pin -- but to the Sadducees this was serious attempt to discredit Jesus. Whose wife will she be at the resurrection -- if there is a resurrection?

They are arguing against the resurrection by trying to show up problems and inconsistencies with an opposing view. Jesus' response to this question as recorded in Matthew's gospel is very revealing. **(22:29-34)**

29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God.

30 "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

31 "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God:

32 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.

34 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together.

Notice how Jesus uses the Scriptures that the Sadducees claimed to observe. All three Synoptic Gospels record the recognition of some of the scribes at the insightful way Jesus had answered the question.

Marrying is Temporal, Not Eternal (20:34-36a)

"Jesus replied, 'The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage and they can no longer die..' " (20:34-36a)

Jesus is contrasting the current age with , "the age to come" -- seen by Jews as the Messianic age.