

“Was Jesus Actually a Pharisee?”

[I am] an Indian Christian, residing in southern India. I shall be grateful if you could help with a question. The other day I ran into the following quote from [“The Passion” From a Jewish Perspective](#):

“I would suggest that Jesus argued so much with the Pharisees because he was closest to them and it is not by chance that they are absent from the Gospel Passion narratives. Indeed, Jesus may even have been a Pharisee.”

Could you please let me know if Jesus was indeed a Pharisee, as suggested? Also, could you please let me know the things I need to know pertaining to the [other] question at hand? I thank you beforehand for your patience in helping me with my request.

Thanks for your letter. No; I don't think it likely that Jesus was a Pharisee. Consider the following:

1) Jesus is nowhere called a Pharisee in the New Testament. With as much talk of Pharisees as we find there, this would be a very strange omission indeed! There is simply no positive evidence to support this thesis.

2) The Pharisees are mentioned quite often in the Gospels during Passion Week (the week before Jesus' death).

3) The Pharisees are mentioned in John 18:3 as part of the group that came to arrest Jesus. It seems to me that this could be considered as evidence that the Pharisees are indeed mentioned in the passion narratives.

4) Consider how Jesus often speaks of the Pharisees. Read Matthew 23 and note how the Pharisees are spoken of by Jesus.

He says to His disciples, do what they tell you but not what they do (Matt. 23:2-3). He repeatedly calls them "hypocrites," etc.

5) Finally, in passages like Matt. 9:14 Jesus seems to be distinguished from the Pharisees. The passage says, "Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" If Jesus was a Pharisee, then why weren't His disciples fasting as well? Jesus seems to be distinguished from the Pharisees by the way the question is asked.

In all these ways (and others I've not mentioned) the New Testament gives repeated indications that Jesus was not a Pharisee.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

See also the Probe resources on the historical Jesus listed under related posts.

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