

BGM BIBLE COLLEGE

NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lecture 02 By Pastor Munawar Khurshid

The Jewish Religion and Its Various Sects

Synagogues:

The institution of synagogues began during the *Silent Period*, with roots that trace back to the time of **Ezra**. Wherever ten Jewish men were present, they could establish a synagogue. While sacrifices and related ordinances were reserved solely for the Temple, the public reading of the Law and prayers were conducted within these synagogues. The Law was discussed therein, and questions were posed regarding its meaning, while **rabbis** instructed the people (cf. *Mark 1:21*). In many ways, the modern church is modelled after this structure.

The Sanhedrin:

The word *Sanhedrin* is of Greek origin and means “assembly” or “council.” Its origin goes back to *Numbers 16:11*, where God instructed **Moses** to appoint seventy elders. A mention of such a council is also found in *Deuteronomy 18:16*. Generally, wherever there were 120 families, a local Jewish court would be established. However, the highest of these courts was the **Great Sanhedrin**, consisting of **seventy members** and one **High Priest** as its president.

In the New Testament, this body is referred to as the *chief council* (cf. *John 18:12–14, 19–23; Matthew 26:57–68*). It was composed of **24 priests**, **24 elders**, and **22 scribes**. Even the apostles were brought before this council (cf. *Acts 4:1–12; 5:27–41; 6:12–7:1*). Under Roman rule, the Sanhedrin’s authority was limited. They were not permitted to pass a sentence of death without Roman approval.

Priests:

In former times, the office of the **priest** was established by divine appointment. However, by the time of the New Testament, this office had become politicized. Under Roman rule, the high priesthood was assigned at the will of the Roman authorities. Typically, the role was given to those who were favourable to Rome and served its interests. The **High Priest** held the greatest authority among the Jews, especially after the monarchy had ceased in Israel. Since the days of lost kingship, the High Priest had become the highest official in Jewish society.

Scribes (Sopherim):

The **scribes**, in the New Testament, were scholars and teachers of the Law. They interpreted and taught the Scriptures to the people. They were widely respected among the populace but stood in opposition to our Lord Jesus Christ. Continually, they sought to test Him and find fault in His words and actions (cf. *Matthew 22:35–36; Luke 10:25–26; Mark 12:28, 35*).

The Pharisees

The **Pharisees** are mentioned more than ninety-eight times in the New Testament. The word

Pharisee means “separated one.” They were zealous for their religion and were known for their strict adherence to tradition. They were extremely conservative in their practices.

According to the historian **Josephus**, there were over **6,000 members** of this sect during that time. Among the Jewish people, the Pharisees were held in high esteem, for they had dedicated themselves wholly to God and to the keeping of the Law.

Despite their outward piety, they stood in opposition to **our Lord Jesus Christ**, often challenging Him and accusing Him of transgressing their traditions (*cf. Matthew 12:1–2; 23:1–2; Luke 6:6–7; 12:1*).

