

The Attackers: Pharisee Intrigue: the Plot to Entrap Jesus, Matt 22:15; Pharisees & Herodians Knew Jesus Was Rightful Heir to David's Throne by Access to Public & Temple Genealogical Records; Introduction of Flattery: the Honorific *Didáskalos*

**Matthew 22:15** - Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said.

1. The Pharisees amounted to an NGO, a nongovernmental organization, associated with the Sanhedrin. Functioning much like a special interest group, their main objective was to oversee the maintenance of the Mosaic Law by the Jewish people. Like some NGOs today, this organization was religious but also political.
2. The word Pharisee means "separation" and those who were its members demanded purity of the Law which made them extremely legalistic. Legalistic people in order to attain their asserted perfection are doomed to become hypocrites. They wanted separation from those who did not adhere to the Law, but were willing to join forces with politicians in order to rid themselves of Jesus.
3. The true political party was the Herodians. This group wanted Herod Antipas to rule Judea free of Rome and to reign over an independent kingdom situated between Rome and Parthia.
4. Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great and ruled as tetrarch of the provinces of Galilee and Peraea \pe-rē'-a\ from 1. B.C.–A.D. 36. His father was an Idumaeon while his mother, Malthace, was a Samaritan. Although Herod Antipas ruled the Jews, he was not one himself.
5. Verse 15 reveals the Pharisees' strategy for approaching Jesus: they convened to devise a plot, the noun **συμβούλιον (*sumboúlion*)**: to meet for consultation and advice resulting in a decision.
6. The objective was to devise a trap, the aorist active subjunctive of the verb **παγιδεύω (*pagideúō*)**: to entrap; ensnare; entangle. It is an hapax legomenon made up of two words: (1) **παγίς (*pagís*)**: "a trap" and (2) **πήγνυμι (*pēgnumi*)**: "to construct": "to construct a trap."

7. The intent of the trap is revealed next by the prepositional phrase **ἐν (en)** plus the locative of sphere from the masculine noun **λόγος (lógos)**: “in His speech.”
8. This uncovers a conspiracy formulated by the Pharisees but which will include in its execution the Herodians.
9. It is apparent that the Herodians, who were not theologians, and the Pharisees had done their research and learned that Jesus was the rightful heir to the throne of David. This was provable by records kept not only by the Romans but also by the Jews.

**Genealogies and chronologies form the connecting link from early days to the end of the Biblical period. By means of genealogical records, God has given a connected history from Adam to Christ.**

**Genealogies also have lesser uses in the sacred record. God's blessings were often passed on in the family line and these genealogies express the covenant connections of ancient Israel. Military duty was by families. Certain offices such as the priesthood, the Levitical work, and the kingship, were hereditary, and genealogies trace the perpetuation of these offices. Also, land tenure in Israel was carried on chiefly through male descent.<sup>1</sup>**

10. The above information emphasizes the necessity of genealogical records in the Israelite culture and therefore the imperative of keeping meticulous family genealogies by each of the twelve tribes.
11. The following excerpts discuss the genealogy of Christ and the fact that His chart pedigree was preserved by a meticulous custom of record keeping in Jewish culture.
12. The first one we note serves as an introduction to the ones that will follow. It is from D. A. Carson's commentary on the Gospel of Matthew in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*:

**In Jesus' day Palestine was rife with messianic expectation. Not all of it was coherent, and many Jews expected two different "Messiahs." But Matthew's linking of "Christ" and "son of David" leaves no doubt of what he is claiming for Jesus. (p. 61)**

<sup>1</sup> R. L. Harris, "Genealogy," in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, gen ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 2:673.

Study has shown that genealogies in the Ancient Near East could serve widely diverse functions: economic, tribal, political, domestic, and others. (p. 62)

There is good evidence that records were kept at least till the end of the first century. Josephus refers to the “public registers” from which he extracts his genealogical information. Eusebius cites Hegesippus \hej-a-sip'-as\ to the effect that Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81–96) ordered all descendants of David slain. Nevertheless two of them when summoned, though admitting their Davidic descent, showed their calloused hands to prove they were but poor farmers. So they were let go. But the account shows that genealogical information was still available.<sup>2</sup> (p. 63)

13. Flavius Josephus is an important figure in Jewish history due to his two most famous histories, *Antiquities of the Jews* and *Wars of the Jews*.<sup>3</sup> In his brief autobiography, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, we find the following comments in its introductory paragraph:

The family from which I am derived is not an ignoble one, but has descended all along from the priests. I will accordingly set down my progenitors in order. ... as was I born to Matthias in the first year of the reign of Caius Caesar. Thus have I set down the genealogy of my family as I have found it described in the public records.<sup>4</sup>

14. Finally, this from Eusebius of Caesarea:<sup>5</sup>

Domitian ordered the execution of all who were in David’s line, and an old tradition alleges that some heretics accused the descendants of Jude—the brother of the Savior, humanly speaking—claiming that they were of David’s family and related to Christ himself.

Hegesippus<sup>6</sup> reports this as follows:

<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, gen ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1984), 8:61; 62; 63.

<sup>3</sup> “Josephus, Flavius. *Orig.* Joseph ben Matthias. c.37–100. Jewish historian, born Jerusalem. Studied Hebrew and Greek literature; joined Pharisee sect; took part in the Jewish revolt against Romans (66); surrendered finally to Vespasian; won his favor and accompanied him to Alexandria. Subsequently freed, and adopted name of Flavius; remained under patronage of Vespasian and his successors Titus and Domitian” (*Merriam-Webster’s Biographical Dictionary*, s.v.: “Josephus”).

<sup>4</sup> Flavius Josephus, “*The Life of Flavius Josephus*,” in *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, nd), 1.

<sup>5</sup> “Eusebius. Palestinian theologian, church historian, and scholar. Became bishop of Caesarea (c.313) and stood in favor with Emperor Constantine. Author of *Historia ecclesiastica*, history of the church down to 324” (*Biographical Dictionary*, s.v.: “Eusebius of Caesarea”).

<sup>6</sup> Hegesippus. 2d century A.D. Greek historian. Jewish convert to Christianity. Author of *The Memoirs*, a history of early Christian church” (*Biographical Dictionary*, s.v.: “Hegesippus”).

Still surviving of the Lord's family were the grandsons of Jude, who was said to be his brother according to the flesh, and they were informed on as being descendants of David. The *evocatus*<sup>7</sup> brought them before Domitian Caesar [Emperor: A.D. 81–96], who like Herod, was afraid of the coming of Christ. Domitian asked them if they were descended from David, and they admitted it. Then he asked them how much property and money they had, and they replied that they had only nine thousand denarii between them, half belonging to each. And this, they said, was not in the form of cash but the estimated value of only thirty-nine *plethra* [about twenty acres] of land, from which they paid taxes and supported themselves from their own labor.<sup>8</sup>

15. From these sources it becomes clear that all anyone had to do to verify Jesus' chart pedigree, was to consult either the public or temple genealogical records.
16. The Herodians were members of a political party that wanted to insure that Herod remained in power and thus had great interest in making sure there were no legitimate pretenders to the throne. Jesus was officially verified as such a threat and thus became a target.
17. The question posed by the Pharisees' disciples and the Herodians was designed to entrap the Lord. If they could force Jesus into choose between Himself and Tiberias they could charge the Lord with treason which was punishable by death.
18. People who are trying to set you up will often use flattery to get you off guard before they throw a curveball question that is designed to trap you. This is the tactic the Lord's opponents use to introduce their loaded question:

**Matthew 22:16** - And they [ the Pharisees ] sent their disciples [ star students ] to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for you are not partial to any." (NASB)

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<sup>7</sup> A veteran member of the Praetorian or Urban cohorts at Rome who had served his time but continued as a volunteer.

<sup>8</sup> Paul L. Maier, *Eusebius: The Church History* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), 108–109.

1. The men that approached the Lord were made up of two groups, (1) disciples and (2) Herodians. We have noted the latter already. The former are “scribes in training.”
2. Their appearance on the scene is interesting. The scribes originated in Jerusalem after the Jews return to Judea following the Babylonian captivity.
3. In order to reeducate the people about the mandates of the Mosaic Law, a group of Levites organized what were referred to as the סֹפְרִים (*sopherim*): the scholars.
4. Over time these men developed an oral law which evolved into an extremely officious set of regulations imposed on the people so that the spiritual life was overwhelmed by overemphasis on legalities.
5. The details of the oral law were so specific they required constant repetition so that each concept was facilitated in long-term memory. The scholars of each generation were constantly educating a younger corps of Levites to replace them – scribes in training.
6. By the first century A.D., these pupils were called disciples. In Matthew 22, several of them were dispatched along with the Herodians to see if they could somehow get the Lord to make a tactical mistake that would draw the attention of Roman authorities.
7. The Herodians’ involvement indicates the two groups conspired to develop a plan of entrapment. The strategy was designed to get Jesus to violate Roman law in hopes that Sejanus would try Him for treason.
8. They assumed flattery was the best way to approach Him. The reason for sending students instead of seasoned scribes becomes evident by their use of the honorific “Teacher” that prefaces the question posed in verse 16.
9. The rabbis taught that the scribes were superior to a person’s friend and father. These entries are contained in the fourth and fifth orders of the Talmud:

Order 4: *Nezikin*, tractate 9: 'Abhoth 4:12, *The Sayings of the Fathers*: "Let the honor of your friend border on the honor of your teacher, and the honor of your teacher on the fear of God."

Order 5: *Kodhashim*, tractate 7: *Kerithoth* 6:9: "The honor of your teacher must surpass the honor bestowed on your father; for the son and father are both in duty bound to honor the teacher."

10. These scribes became known by the title of רַבִּי (*rabbi*) or ῥαββί (*rhabbi*): "My Lord." In the first century, these rabbis, or scribes, were referred to as καθηγητής (*kathēgētēs*): "Teacher." This is a synonym of *didáskalos*.
11. In Matthew 23, the subjects of the Lord's address to the "crowds and His disciples" are the scribes and Pharisees. In that speech, Jesus berates both groups for hypocrisy (v. 4), ostentation (v. 5), and pomposity (vv. 6-7).
12. In verse 7, He concludes with the remark that these types loved "being called Rabbi by men." Again, these rabbis were referred to as *kathēgētēs*: teachers. In Matthew 23:10, Jesus helps us understand the greeting the school boys and Herodians gave Him in 22:16. In this context He commands His disciples in:
 

**Matthew 23:10** - "Do not be called leaders [ *kathēgētēs* ]; for One is your Leader [ *Kathēgētēs* ], that is, Christ."
13. Remember that *kathēgētēs* is a synonym for *didáskalos*.
14. The question posed to the Lord in Matthew 22:16 begins with the honorific Διδάσκαλος (*Didáskalos*): "Teacher." This was the customary title used to address the scribes, the experts in the Mosaic Law, who themselves were either Pharisees or supportive of the Pharisees.