

Verses 37-54 of this chapter find the Lord in conflict with the Pharisees and lawyers (or teachers of the law). The lawyers were also Pharisees.

The sect of the Pharisees began around 200 years before Christ and ended as a distinct group with the fall of the temple in 70 AD, although they were the forebears of the entire rabbinical system of Judaism that we have today. Their name means “separated ones” and they were noted for their piety. Josephus claimed there were about 6000 Pharisees in his time. He was likely one himself.

Pharisaism was a decentralized group. They were in some ways the party of the people, in opposition to the

Sadducees who represented the temple priests and ruling authorities. The Pharisees read Exodus 19:6, “you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” as a mandate that all Jews could and should act as priests. One practical outcome was that they followed the temple purification rites even in daily life; see verse 38.

Jesus was not a Pharisee or a Sadducee. He taught in both the synagogues and the temple, and regarded the temple as sacred. But as the Pharisees taught, we are also a kingdom and priests (Revelation 5:10). One important difference, however, is that we are not decentralized. Not the temple, but Christ, is our Center.

Questions:

1. What is the sign of Jonah?
2. What do the people of Nineveh and the “queen of the South” have in common?
3. What is figured by the lamp in verse 33?

4. Explain verse 35.

5. List the Lord's criticism of the Pharisees. How could we fall into similar practices?

6. Read verse 44. What might be some unmarked graves we could walk over?