

KOHELET, SADDUCEES AND PHARISEES

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ABSTRACT: According to my recent research, the book of Kohelet has a link to the emergence of the Sadducees (Mandey, 2023). As a product of a thought movement, Kohelet could be the forerunner of Sadduceism. This paper aims to give a closer look at the link between Kohelet and Sadduceism as well as examine their relationship with the Pharisees as another movement that emerged alongside the Sadducees. Despite the challenges of historical information about the emergence of both the Sadducees and the Pharisees, a socio-historical analysis is conducted using literary sources.

KEYWORDS: Kohelet, Sadducees, Pharisees, Socio-Historical Analysis, Old Testament

Introduction

The presence of the Sadducees and Pharisees perplexed us in terms of their emergence. The origins of these two movements are unknown, but the information available indicates that they were the two largest Jewish movements from the first century BC to the first century CE. There are not many studies that go into extensive depth about their beginnings. Despite the challenges, material on the roots of Sadduceism is limited when compared to Pharisaism as the progenitor of Rabbinic Judaism, which has richer textual sources. The terms „Sadducees“ and „Pharisees“ should refer to the followers, in this case, the people of the movements. While the terms „Sadduceism“ and „Pharisaism“ are referenced to the ideas, theology and their thought movements. On this matter, Saldarini writes: „Data on the Pharisees is so sparse and difficult to evaluate that any historical reconstruction must remain incomplete and uncomfortably hypothetical“ (Saldarini, 2001, p. 277). There are three sources that we could find on the information regarding Sadduceism, namely: the writings of

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Josephus, the New Testament and the rabbinical texts. These sources however do not provide further explanation on the origin of Sadduceeism (cf. Stemberger, 2010, p. 1179; Saldarini, 2001, p. 298).

In my research on the Koheletic thought movement (Mandey, 2023) that produced the book of Kohelet, I gave a brief comparison especially the similarities and connection between the ideas of Kohelet as a thought movement and Sadduceeism. Pharisaism on the other hand should also be put a closer look on its position towards the relationship between the root of Sadduceeism and Kohelet. A similar characteristic that could appear in the relationship between Kohelet and Sadduceeism is the idea regarding the afterlife. Both are in the counter position of the concept of life after death (for the position of Kohelet, see: Mandey, 2023; Michel, 1988, p. 73; for the position of Sadduceeism, see: Saldarini, 2001, p. 301; Mark 12:18; Matthew 22:23; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8; Midrash Tanchuma, Bereshit 5:2-3).

This connection between the two movements and Kohelet should be considered not only from its content but also the emergence of Kohelet itself. Even though the time gap between the emergence of Kohelet and the historical information of the Sadducees and Pharisees is around two centuries, but the connection could still be traced.

The emergence of the book of Kohelet could be traced through its language and the possible time was in the 3rd century BC during the Ptolemaic era (Schoors, 1992, p. 1; cf. also: Michel, 1988, p. 114). The language used in the book of Kohelet is categorised into LBH (Late Biblical Hebrew) through its grammar and lexica. Kohelet's relation with the book of Sirach and the findings in the Qumran also contributes to this conclusion. The influence of Aramaic in the book gives a conclusion that the book could not appear before the Persian time, according to Wright (1991, p. 1141). The Hebrew language of Kohelet is a product between Biblical Hebrew and

Mishnaic Hebrew, thus the dating in the 3rd century BC (cf. Wright, 1991, p. 1142-43; Michel, 1988, p. 46). Therefore, estimating the emergence of the book in the 3rd century BC matches the analysis and category of the language used in the book (Schoors, 1992, pp. 1f.).

The relationships between Kohelet and the two Jewish movements, Sadducees and Pharisees, usually lack of the research attention. Nevertheless, the mystery about Kohelet and the origins of the Sadducees and Pharisees should be put into consideration for the analysis. Their theological and cultural connections could be analysed further.

Kohelet as a *thought movement*

2.1. *Background*

As explained above, the time of emergence of the book of Kohelet could be put in the 3rd century BC, although the latest era could even be considered until the 2nd

century BC, still in the Ptolemaic era (cf. Loretz, 1964, pp. 22, 29; Lauha, 1978, p. 3; Lohfink, 2003, p. 4; Schellenberg, 2013, p. 39; Schwienhorst-Schönberger, 2004, p. 474). During this time, Israel was no longer a part of the Ptolemaic kingdom during the time of Ptolemy V Epiphanes and Ptolemy VI Philometor since the Seleucids had captured it during the fifth Syrian War. However, Kohelet 10:16, which gives reference to the word נער (youth; young; lad), indicates the political context of the Book of Kohelet. This could be a reference to Ptolemy V Epiphanes, a little boy of five who came to the throne in 205 BC according to Schwienhorst-Schönberger (2004, p. 503).

Regarding the background, Lohfink contends that Kohelet is from a family of priests who were involved in the temple school (2003, p. 11). It was evident from the analysis of Koh. 5 that temple theology became the main focus, particularly in light of Kohelet's connections to apocalyptic themes. It is significant to note that the temple is directly related to the function of the priests in Jerusalem because it served as a location for worship and as the physical location of God (Gäckle, 2014, p. 142). Kohelet has a connection to the priesthood in Jerusalem. The role of the priests is portrayed as that of wise men in the Book of Kohelet as wisdom literature. Kohelet is perhaps a wise man from the priests' late wisdom lineage (Lohfink, 2003, p. 11). The priests who identify as the sages behind the authority and authorship of Kohelet were likely also supportive of, if not co-initiators of, the Koheletic thought movement. In other words, the Book of Kohelet was disseminated by temple priests as their literary product, and its anti-apocalyptic theology was a major component of their theology.

2.2. Characteristics

The Koheletic thought movement began more modestly in contrast to the apocalyptic movement in ancient Israel. Thus, the apocalyptic movement undoubtedly enjoyed greater popularity than the Koheletic movement. This is clear from the amount of literature the apocalyptic movement produced (Russell, 1992, pp. 32f.). The single work that established this movement as canon was the Book of Kohelet. Apocalyptic writing, on the other hand, was elitist in nature and was not popular literature in the meaning that it was not created with the general public in mind (Russell, 1992, p. 33).

In comparison to other wisdom traditions, Kohelet holds a special place among Israel's wisdom traditions (Michel, 1988, p. 67). Kohelet's conception of knowledge and wisdom is a direct refutation of the outdated conventional or previous Jewish wisdom. Certain passages in Kohelet (such as those in 1:13,17; 2:12; 7:14; 8:9,16) must be viewed as expressly criticising this wisdom. Kohelet develops his own scepticism through reflection on human behaviour, the laws of nature, the purpose of

life, and everything that occurs in the universe, rather than primarily in the form of single statements.

In comparison, apocalypticism, which first appeared in writing around 300 BC, can be seen as a movement as well as a literary phenomenon (cf. Tilly, 2012, 6f.36f.). To be more specific, it is a theological “thought movement” within early Judaism (cf. Santoso, 2007). It is also a political movement and it is having an increasing impact on society. The Jewish apocalyptic current itself had a number of traditions or factions, which is one reason why it should be seen as a bigger “movement” in general (Tilly, 2012, p. 36). For more precise, three genres of apocalyptic are distinguished by Hellholm, namely apocalypse scenarios include: (1) one with a heavenly travel; (2) one both with and without; and (3) one without (Hellholm, 1991, p. 146). According to Lampe’s analysis of the social perspective, however, there are two socio-historical groups and two groups with various social ethics (Lampe, 1981, pp. 85f.). Social-historical groups can be identified as follows: (1) the scholars: such as the apocalyptics of the weekly apocalyptic and the Daniel apocalyptic; (2) and the non-noble priests of Jerusalem: apocalyptics of 1QM I and the animal vision. The two social ethics groups are the intellectuals who do not advocate violence and the non-noble priests of Jerusalem who do. The apocalyptic traditions, on the other hand, can be split into three distinct traditions in terms of their formation, according to Russell: (1) the Enoch books/Enoch tradition; (2) the Daniel tradition; and (3) the Jubilee tradition (Russell, 1992, pp. 35f.). The connection between Kohelet and apocalyptic ideas could then be considered as evidence of the two’s interconnectedness. The theological and ideological viewpoint of Kohelet is a critique of apocalyptic notions. This has significance for comparing the sociopolitical contexts of the apocalyptic movement and the Koheletic thinking movement. Both movements have their origins in Israel’s wisdom culture. The apocalyptic movement had more adherents than the Koheletic thinking movement, which most likely only included a smaller number of the priesthood sages (cf. Santoso, 2007, pp. 269–271; Tilly, 2012, p. 36). Therefore, it is evident that the Koheletic thinking movement is a distinct intellectual current and not merely an offshoot of another well-known Jewish movement that has previously been examined. The only book that may be utilized to study it is the Book of Kohelet, which was written in the distinctive style of this movement. This book is the result of a new theological school of thought that appeared during the Hellenistic period in opposition to the rival, larger, and similarly recent movement of apocalypticism (cf. Mandey, 2023). Kohelet makes an effort to dispel what he perceives as the “nonsensical” thinking of apocalyptic concepts. He provides an alternative to the orthodoxy of *שְׂאוֹל* theology, which is coupled with agnosticism about conceptions of an afterlife; he offers a more “realistic” theology that places more emphasis on living in the here and now.

3. Kohelet's Relationship with Sadduceeism

3.1. Background

As previously mentioned, the Sadducees are not extensively covered in ancient literature. *The New Testament*, *the rabbinic scriptures*, and *Josephus' writings* account for the majority. The Sadducees are merely mentioned in a number of sources without any more description of their actions, history, origin, or teachings. Josephus' writings contain significant material on Sadduceeism, particularly *Bellum Judaicum* 2:119 and *Antiquitates Iudaicae* 13:171; 18,11. These sources list the Sadducees with the three Jewish factions or schools of thought that existed in Josephus' time: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. Tiwald summarized Josephus' judgment of the Sadducees that the Sadducees are even more schematic, and Josephus does not express any affection for them in *Bellum Judaicum*. He also very briefly mentions them in *Antiquitates* (13:293) and merely sketches them in the *Vita* in connection to the Pharisees (Tiwald, 2016, p. 125).

The writings in the New Testament provide some essential details concerning the Sadducees' doctrine, specifically their statement that there is no resurrection of the dead. *Acts* 23:8; *Matthew* 22:23; *Mark* 12:18; and *Luke* 20:27 all support this assertion. According to Stemberger, the allegations made about the Pharisees in the New Testament books have a definite evolution, while the Sadducees only go as far as to claim that the resurrection did not occur (2013, p. 34). Since they hold the same apocalyptic belief in the resurrection of the dead, it is important to keep in mind that the Pharisees must be viewed as belonging to apocalyptic traditions in some ways. The most recent ancient sources that also confirm the existence of the Sadducees are the rabbinic texts. They don't offer as much information about the Sadducees' activities and doctrines, nevertheless, as the previous sources did. Three texts, however, at least in my judgment, provide us with a little background on the Sadducees. The first passage, Mishnah Yadayim 4:6–8, briefly references the Pharisees and Sadducees without going into any further depth. The second passage, Midrash Tanchuma, Bereshit 5:2–3 (citing Hi. 7:9), provides some insight into the group's primary tenet: they rejected both the afterlife and the resurrection. The final paragraph is found in Horayot 4a:12, and it provides some insight into their religious practices by stating that they only accepted the written Torah, which they took literally, and rejected the oral Torah. Thus, only a few halakhic discrepancies between the Sadducee perspective and that of the rabbis are applicable to the use of rabbinic literature (Stemberger, 2013, p. 58). The Sadducees were primarily priests who belonged to the upper layer of society, making them the elites and aristocrats, according to another piece of information from Josephus (Cf. *Antiquitates Iudaicae* 13:297f.; Gäckle, 2014, pp. 183–184; Saldarini, 2001, pp. 298–299). Since there were also priests who belonged to the Pharisees,

the relationship between the Sadducees and the priesthood might thus be regarded as one in which many Sadducees could be priests but not all priests were Sadducees.

3.2. *Etymology*

The derivation of the word “Sadducee” has received a lot of attention in the last century. Manson has done a very detailed analysis of the meaning and etymology of the name Sadducee in his article, (Manson, 1938, pp. 144-159). He claims that the name’s derivation from the word צדוק “*sadoq*” is incorrect due to the letter ט with the double consonant. He prefers the Aramaic root סדקיא instead. And, in his opinion, the term צדק (*ṣedeq*: righteous) or צדיק (*ṣadiq*: righteous one - for person) is viewed as a self-designation. The narrative of Zadok (צדוק), the high priest, is more likely where the word’s origin, צדוק (*sadoq*), comes from. The Zadokid tradition is probably where the Sadducean tradition originates.

3.3. *Characteristics*

The basic belief and religious practices of the Sadducees can be distilled down to at least two main principles, according to the ancient sources. The first is the anti-apocalyptic theory, which denies angels’ existence, the afterlife, and the possibility of a resurrection or other form of life after death (cf. Tiwald, 2016, p. 131; Stemberger, 2013, pp. 62-63; Wellhausen, 1967, pp. 54-56). In terms of religious practice, the Sadducees, as already indicated, rejected the oral Torah and applied a literal interpretation to just the Scriptures, the Torah. This does not imply that they rejected the entirety of the Tanakh, but rather that they regarded the Torah as the Tanakh’s most authoritative text (cf. Stemberger, 2010, p. 1180). The Pharisees might be categorized as apocalypticists and the Sadducees as anti-apocalypticists in terms of their apocalyptic teachings. The rejection of apocalyptic ideas was shared by the Sadducees, but this did not necessarily imply that the Koheletic thinking movement was already a component of Sadduceeism.

3.4. *Relationship with Kohelet*

The Koheletic thought movement was not just a branch of Sadduceeism, as was previously indicated, because the two clearly differ from one another. The first one is related to literature. There is no written work associated with Sadduceeism or its movement. Several attempts to establish that some writings must be assigned to the Sadducees have fallen short (Tiwald, 2016, p. 123). The texts 1 Maccabees, Ben Sira, Judith, the Targum of Ruth, and other works that share Sadduceeism’s philosophical tenets are thought to be the offspring of that school. But the outcomes do not indicate a successful resolution (Stemberger, 2010, p. 1179; Theißen, 2003, p. 111). I think it would likewise be impossible to directly ascribe the Book of Kohelet to the Sadducees.

Kohelet's authority was never attributed to the Sadducees or the high priest Zadok; rather, it was always attributed to Solomon. Additionally, Sadduceeism has never been associated with the name Kohelet, its origins, or Kohelet's role as a wise man and teacher (Cf. Koh. 12:9), at least not in the ancient scriptures. In comparison to the period of origin of the Koheletic thought movement, the formation of Sadduceeism is likewise seen as occurring later. According to Gäckle, the development of Sadduceeism only occurred in the latter half of the second century BCE, which may have coincided with the Maccabean uprising (Gäckle, 2014, p. 181; cf. also Weiss, 1998, p. 590; Stemberger, 2010, p.1180). As previously established, Josephus, who lived in Roman times, is the author of the first recorded documents about the Sadducees. However, it is possible to compare the Kohelets' and Sadducees' sociopolitical backgrounds. The Sadducees were mostly priests and members of Israel's higher social class, as was already mentioned. However, the Koheletic thought movement suggests a distinct background, as is seen from the Book of Kohelet. Texts like Kohelet 4:1-3 and 5:8 (5:7) show Kohelet's concern for the disadvantaged in society. The Pharisees, who received more support from the lower class, rather than the Sadducees, whose background this thought more closely resembles (cf. Gäckle, 2014, pp. 183-184; Saldarini, 2001, pp. 298-299).

Given their aristocratic and elite background, the Sadducees lived lives filled with wealth and power. Josephus' writings make it obvious that the Sadducees had no adherents among the common people and relied solely on the affluent for their support (Cf. *Antiquitates Iudaicae* 13:298; Stemberger, 2010, p. 1180). Due of the Sadducees' doctrinal perspective, the wealthy are supporting them. Theißen contends that on the other hand, a conservative religious movement linked with the aristocracy, of which Josephus claims the Sadducees found support only among the wealthy and elevated (*Ant* 13:298), was supported by the aristocracy as a whole (Theißen, 2003, p. 112). However, Kohelet views riches as *הֶבֶל*, especially in Koh 5:10 (5:9) - 6:9. The end of life is death, which one cannot bring one's money into. Therefore prosperity, in his view, is ephemeral and meaningless. This theological viewpoint is a part of the Koheletic school of thought, which rejects the newly rising apocalyptic movement and bases its ideology not on wealth and power - either in this life or thereafter - but rather on the reflection of life via critical insight.

4. Kohelet's Relationship with Pharisaism

4.1. Background

Comparatively speaking to information concerning the Sadducees, historical reports about the Pharisees are simpler to come across. Any historical reconstruction, however, will always be imperfect and speculative due to the fact that the material is scarce and challenging to analyse, especially in light of the discrepancies between the

sources (cf. Saldarini, 2001, p. 277; Newman, 2006, p. 53). Similar to the main sources of the information regarding the Sadducees, the primary historical sources on the Pharisees are also the New Testament; Josephus' writings and the early rabbinical writings. It's possible that the Pharisees first appeared during the Hasmonean era and developed into a distinct sect of laypeople and scribes in opposition to the Sadducees (Britannica, 2023). The name Pharisee could be derived from the root word שָׂרַף in Hebrew meaning „separate“, „and meant that those who bore it were separated from all that is abominable in God's sight“ (Manson, 1938, p. 156).

The Pharisees as a sect developed not only as a single faction, rather with two houses (Hebrew: זוגות „pairs“) during the first century BCE to the first century CE. The houses of Hillel and Shammai were the most prominent in the development of Jewish law and life, especially after the destruction of the second Jewish Temple in 70 CE (cf. Saldarini, 2001, p. 289). Pharisaism served as the cornerstone of the Rabbinic school of thought that developed without the presence of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem when Judaism was subject to Rome. However, even though it is reasonable to attribute some individual *halakhic* beliefs to Pharisees, these cannot be considered a systematic pattern, making it challenging to understand the broader significance of certain judgements and opinions. The underlying assumptions that underlie the decisions and conclusions are necessarily speculative. The characteristics of Pharisaic religious belief and action are therefore still difficult to picture (Green, 2007, p. 423).

4.2. Characteristics

Despite the complexity in defining the characteristics of Pharisaism, there are aspects that could be examined in regards to the philosophy and ideology of the Pharisees. Some of the doctrinal views of the Pharisees are rejected by the Sadducees, these include (1) the idea of the divine purpose in history; (2) retribution of actions in life in the life after death; (3) angelology and demonology; (4) the authority of tradition and scripture in religion (Manson, 1938, p. 154). Further examination reveals that these viewpoints (points 1-3), which the Sadducees as well as Kohelet reject, are also consistent with the notion of apocalypticism. Thus, the Pharisees tend to be more eschatological and apocalyptic in terms of how they perceive life and death, in contrast to the Sadducees. In this life and the next, the Sadducees saw humans as independent and cut off from God; in contrast, the Pharisees saw God and humanity as having a close relationship in both (Saldarini, 2001, p. 290). They did not remove their social life from Jerusalem society as the Essenes did, despite the meaning of the word Pharisee from פָּרַשׁ. In keeping with this notion, Hillel is credited with the Pharisees' slogan: „Do not separate yourself from the community“ (אַל תִּפְרוֹשׁ מִן הַצִּיּוּר) (see Newman, 2006, p. 181).

4.3. Relationship with Kohelet

Kohelet's relationship with Pharisaism could be seen as not directly. The contribution is through Sadduceism that also played an important role in building relation and contact with the Pharisees. As some of the similar theological positions and ideological characteristics of Kohelet could also be found in Sadduceism, which are on the contrary to Pharisaism, then Kohelet's position in this regard is a counter position towards Pharisaism. Unique ideas are provided by some scholars, like Michel, Levy and also Hölscher on the relations between Kohelet and the Pharisees through Sadduceism. Nevertheless, the origin of Sadduceism is oversimplified, in my opinion, by Michel's argument, which is also based on Levy's thesis. With his polemic, Michel argues that Kohelet is either starting or has already entered the movement that leads to Sadduceism. (Michel, 1988, p. 74, cf. p. 75f.; cf. also Levy, 1912, pp. 44-48). However, another argument is presented by Schwartz which is also cited in Newman (Schwartz, 1992, pp. 230-39 cited in Newman, 2006, p. 206), that the Sadducees are associated with the Qumran group, which is contradicted with the belief of the Pharisees. The Sadducees and the Qumran were rather realists, while the Pharisees were likely to be more nominalists.

The anti-apocalyptic theology that goes along with the Koheletic thought movement had an impact on the canonisation of the Hebrew Bible as well as Sadduceism and its theology. This anti-apocalyptic thought also affects Pharisaism and the Pharisees were likely the ones who initiated the canonisation (cf. Hölscher, 1905, p. 41), and the anti-apocalyptic attitude may have played a significant role as a result of the Jewish response to Christianity and the Hellenistic impact on Jewish society. It reflects on the fact that the Book of Daniel is the only book with the most apocalyptic notions in the Hebrew canon because the selection of books to be included in the canon was also somewhat anti-apocalyptic.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Relationship between Kohelet and the Sadducees

My arguments would like to present the idea that the Koheletic thought movement through its literature, the book of Kohelet, has an impact on Sadduceism. This is through the similarities between the anti-apocalyptic notions of Kohelet and the belief of the Sadducees. However, one cannot deny, the Koheletic thought movement started earlier than Sadduceism. Both should then be considered two separate movements and ideas in two different periods. Despite the fact that the Koheletic thought Movement cannot be instantly and directly understood as a component of Sadduceism, it ultimately leads to this school of thinking (cf. another thesis from Michel, 1988, pp. 74, 75f). However, Kohelet has had certainly some impact on the Sadducees' theology. Even though it can be challenging to pinpoint the origins of

the Sadducee tradition, I believe that Koheletic philosophy is one of the many prior traditions that contributed to the development of Sadduceeism. The ideology of Sadduceeism was inspired by the anti-apocalyptic theology that came from the Koheletic thought movement. Early in the first century, this became the earliest branch of Judaism.

One certainly cannot deny that the years gap between the emergence of the Koheletic thought movement and the historical accounts of the Sadducees and Pharisees lies around one to two centuries. Kohelet appeared during the late Ptolemaic period and the two sects emerged around the time early time of the Hasmonean period, possibly after the Maccabean revolt. This time difference gave us a mystery in terms of the development between the Koheletic era and the Pharisaic-Sadducaic era, due to the lack of historical information. As mentioned above, the main historical resources on the Sadducees and Pharisees are the New Testament, Josephus and early rabbinic writings. While for Kohelet, it is only the book of Kohelet. The line that could be traced is through its similar and contradictory ideas. Hellenistic era is still the similar historical context in which these groups emerged.

As the conclusion, given the contrasts between the two groups in two separate times, it is clear that the Koheletic thought movement was not merely an extension of Sadduceeism. However, the discrepancies are actually more pronounced than the more obvious similarities between Kohelet and the Sadducees' teachings. As a result, Sadduceeism and the Koheletic thinking movement should be distinguished from one another.

5.2. Influence to Pharisaism

It is still complicated to link between Kohelet and the Pharisees. Nevertheless, the indirect impact is obvious through the relations between the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Since the influence of Kohelet to Sadduceeism is clear in my arguments, it is also possible that this contradictory thoughts between Sadduceeism (with its realistic and life oriented belief) and Pharisaism would show the contradictory ideas of Kohelet and the Pharisees as well.

Nevertheless, the influence of the Koheletic thought movement and anti-apocalyptic ideas that go along with it could also be stretched further in on the canonisation. The choice to canonise the Hebrew Bible could be considered as the impact of the anti-apocalyptic point of view on the canonisation. As an example: the Book of Daniel is a book in the Hebrew canon with a full stage of apocalyptic views, as the selection of writings to be included in the canon was also somewhat anti-apocalyptic. It could be hypothesised that the Pharisees are likely responsible for the canonisation (cf. Hölscher, 1905, p. 41). This could be considered as the response to the Hellenistic

influence on Jewish culture, and this may possibly have played a significant role in the canonisation of the Hebrew Bible.

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