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In Quest
of the Historical Pharisees

Edited by
JACOB NEUSNER AND BRUCE D. CHILTON

BAYLOR UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Waco, Texas 76798

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Cover Design: Pamela Poll
Cover Image: "Large Standing Stone Vessels," courtesy of James F. Strange.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

In quest of the historical Pharisees / edited by Jacob Neusner and Bruce D. Chilton.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-932792-72-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Pharisees. 2. Judaism--History. 3. Rabbinical literature--History and criticism. I. Neusner, Jacob, 1932- II. Chilton, Bruce.

BM175.P4I5 2007

296.8'12--dc22

2007001713

POV 1111872

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper with a minimum of 30% pcw content.

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PREFACE

The essays in this book describe the pictures of the Pharisees that emerge from the several ancient documents that refer to them. These are, in order of chronological proximity, (1) the gospels and references in Paul's writings, (2) the writings of Josephus, and (3) the later rabbinic compositions, beginning with the Mishnah and the Tosefta; hence, ca. 65–90 CE for the gospels, ca. 90–100 CE for Josephus, and ca. 200–300, extending through the Talmud to as late as 600 CE, for the later rabbinic compilations, respectively. We include a discussion of the relationship between the Pharisees and the Judaic religious system adumbrated by the library of Qumran.

We do not undertake to homogenize the distinct sources' pictures or reconstruct a coherent account of how things really were. Prior generations of scholars have signally failed at that task. We begin afresh in a more critical spirit. In these pages each source is described in its own terms and framework.

What about other writings of Judaic origin? A number of books in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament are attributed to Pharisaic writers, but none of these documents positively identifies its author as a Pharisee. Secure attribution of a work can only be made when an absolutely peculiar characteristic of the possible author can be shown to be an essential element in the structure of the whole work. No reliance can be placed on elements that appear in only one or another episode, or that appear in several episodes but are secondary and detachable details. These may be accretions. Above all, motifs that are not certainly peculiar to one sect cannot prove that sect was the source.

No available assignment of an apocryphal or pseudepigraphical book to a Pharisaic author can pass these tests. Most such attributions