

## Publican

Publican in the Greek language is *telones*. It is the combination of *telos* and *oneisthai*. *Telos* is defined as something paid for the purpose of the state, a toll tax or duty. *Oneisthai* means to buy or purchase. The English word “publican” comes from the Latin *publicanus*. In the widest sense of the word it is defined as anyone that has business connections with the state.

There are a few divisions of publicans. One of the divisions is between general farmers and under-farmers. The general farmers are usually men of high stature. They would have other collectors underneath them, the under-farmers. They would be subordinate to the general farmers. The under-farmers would do the actual process of collecting taxes from the people.

The publicans were also divided in a different manner. The top tier now would be those who purchased their right to collect taxes. Under them would be the supervisory officials, who had the opportunity for personal gain. Under the supervisory officials were those who collected taxes at toll booths or tax offices. The publicans that Jesus associated with are most likely the final kind. They would have been located at the transportation centers of Jericho and Capernaum. These two cities were major transportation centers because the Jews would go through them trying to avoid Samaria.



There were many different kinds of taxes collected by the Romans. First, there were personal taxes based upon the census. Then, there were land taxes. Both of these taxes would have been collected by the general farmers under the direct employment of the Romans. These two taxes were followed by many other indirect taxes, which included taxes for the transport of goods. The transport tax made up a significant portion of the tax revenues. The collectors for this tax would have been the ones at the commercial and transportation centers.

Tax collecting had the possibility of being a money making proposition. Publicans could be either contracted by public officials or they could purchase their right to be a publican. The publican would start by paying the state its dues. Then they would proceed from there to collect from the people. This type of system led to a lot of the publicans taking advantage of the people they collected from. They would frequently overcharge them for profit.

The Jewish people looked down upon the publicans. They saw the publican as supporting Rome, since they were working for them. Publicans were equated with the likes of pickpockets and thieves. They were also considered to be sinners, because of the reputation they had of taking advantage of their provinces. This also caused the problem of the publican not being a reputable person from which to reciprocate upon. People with a good name did not want to be tax collectors for fear of ruining their reputation. Thus, the people that took the position were usually those who already had a bad reputation, so this just compounded the problem.

In the Gospel's Jesus has many encounters with the publicans. These encounters are only found in the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus' association with the publicans is viewed as showing the message of God's mercy to sinners. Zacchaeus was one of the tax collectors Jesus associated with. He was the chief publican at Jericho. Apparently, he had other publicans underneath him as well. Mathew was also a tax collector. He was considered one of the inferior publicans.



## Scribes

A scribe is a person of the class of literate professionals ranging from copiers to secretaries, and other government officials in the earlier Old Testament periods, to special scholars and teachers of the Torah from after the Babylonian exile through the New Testament periods. These scribes were very well educated. There is no direct evidence of scribal schools, but they are thought to have been in most of the major cities.

The first mention of a scribe in the Old Testament is in the Song of Deborah. This scribe is mentioned to be a muster officer, which ultimately refers to a person in charge of a group. The chief scribe at the Jerusalem court was a high cabinet officer concerned with finance, policy, and administration. Another scribe of the Old Testament was Baruch. He is known for recording the words of the prophet Jeremiah and was ranked among the highest government officials. After the exile, the most well known scribe was Ezra. He is known for being skilled in the Law of Moses. He was granted permission by the Persian king to lead a group of exiles back to Jerusalem. Scribes in the Old Testament were seen as treasurers. The scribe Zadok, along with a priest and a Levite, was appointed to be a treasurer of a storehouse, where tithes were being brought. After the exile many of the roles of leaders in Jewish society overlapped. This accounted for the many different purposes the scribe fulfilled. The scribes are responsible for the transmission of the Biblical text.



There are also many scribes spoken of during the Greco-Roman period. Since the scribes were learned persons, they were appointed to government offices and councils. The Greeks had many needs for people with scribal skills. Often, scribes were community officials with access to the king, and they were responsible for supervising observance of the law. Scribes were also thought to have been government record keepers.

Scribes also play an important role in the New Testament. In the New Testament, the scribes are seen as a unified group but that might not have been the case. The synoptic Gospels put the scribes together in a group opposed to Jesus, but they fail to provide any characteristics as to the group. In the Gospel of Mark, the scribes are associated closely with the chief priest, which probably means they were either high officials or advisors. Matthew groups the Pharisees and the scribes together. Matthew approves of the scribes and perceives the role they will play in the new Christian community. He sees them as guides for the community and guardians of tradition. In the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, the scribes are, more or less, looked at as part of a larger group of Pharisees. At the time of Jesus' death, they are associated with the chief priests in Jerusalem. In Acts, they continue to appear as learned leaders active in protecting Judaism. The scribes in the synoptic Gospels are seen as bureaucrats and experts on Jewish life. The role of the scribe seems to be that of an associate to the priests, both in judicial proceedings and in enforcement of the Jewish custom and law.

## Video Link

How the scribes wrote the scrolls: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tvjtpcylzA>

## Sanhedrin

The title of this Jewish governing body is derived from the original Greek word, *sunedrion*, meaning the council. It has also been known by two other names, the Gerousia (assembly of the ancients) and the Beth-Din (house of judgment), the former used among Greek speaking Jews before the time of Christ, the latter used in post-Biblical times. The Sanhedrin is the supreme council of the Jewish people, in many cases including those living outside of the area of Jewish political control. The following are two possibilities for how the Sanhedrin came about:

\* Numbers 11, 16: Moses would rather die than do the work the Lord has asked of him. So God had Moses appoint 70 elders, whom each received portion of the Spirit that had come upon Moses. For Christians, this is a sign of Pentecost.

\* Through Josaphat, the 4<sup>th</sup> King of Judah. 2 Chronicles 19: Judges were Levites, priests, and some of the family heads.

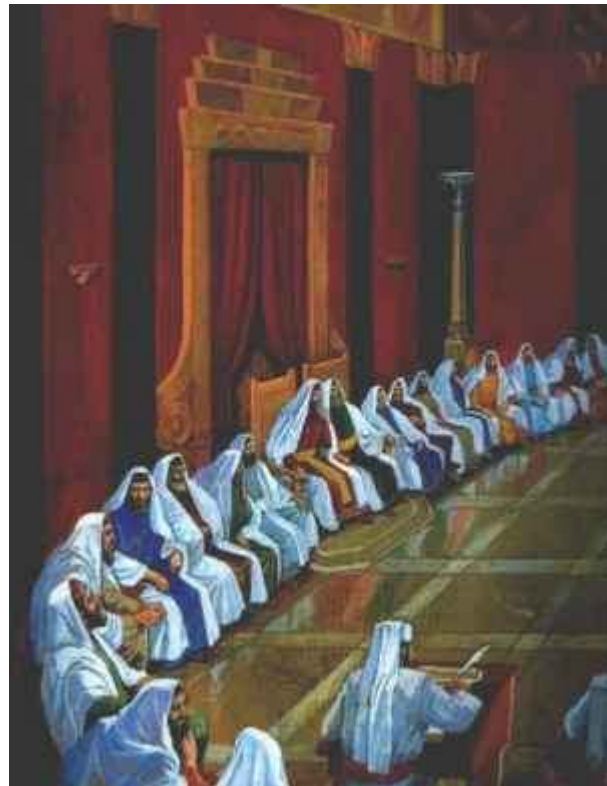
Neither version, however, bears much resemblance to the Sanhedrin we know.

Flavius Josephus first mentions Gerousia in Antiquities in the reign of Antiochus the Great (BC 223-187).

Thus, it certainly existed from that time period until the dissolution of the Jewish Nation. The Gerousia was the forerunner to the Sanhedrin; Antiochus wrote to it in a letter. It was made up of Presbyteroi.

Originally, the Sanhedrin was not a standing body, but a synod called to discuss certain matters. Certain chief priests, scribes, and ancients (the elders of important families) were called together to decide the law.

Though lacking a clear record, with a probability that it changed throughout time, the president of the Sanhedrin was the chief priest. There are several different sources for the requirements to be a member of the Sanhedrin. Among these requirements are: scholarship, modesty, popularity, strength, courage, having held three offices of increasing dignity, tall, imposing appearance, advanced age, multi-lingual, as well as some knowledge of the arts of the necromancer (to know when someone is using false magic).



The council consisted of 70 men, seated in a semicircle around the president and the record keepers, two scribes. A question or legal issue was raised. If anyone claimed knowledge of prior tradition that was applicable, it was stated and the matter decided. If there was no known tradition, the members debated, ballots were cast, and the law was decided. The scope of extent of their authority varied throughout its history. At the time of Christ, it only had direct power of 11 toparchies of Judea, but Jews all over listened to them. The following are some of the political, religious, and criminal topics they had a say on: sending of armies, high priest accusation, supervision of Temple services, Torah transcriptions, Law interpretation, appeals from lower courts, adultery.

There seems to be a contradiction recorded in the New Testament about the authority of the Sanhedrin. They claim no power to kill Jesus, yet quickly stone Stephen to death. It seems likely that the Romans did not give them the power to execute, but in a rage would disregard that command and kill. This demonstrates their relationship with the ruling body at the time, the Romans. The powers they had varied in large measure due to the style of governance the ruling empire chose. The Greeks gave them quite a bit of freedom, the Persians, very little. The Romans gave them a moderate amount. The different Jewish kings also swayed the power and decisions by stacking the council with men favorable to their few of governance.

The Sanhedrin is generally recognized as having come to an end in 358, the last official decision being the recognition of the calendar of Hillel II. Since then there have been two known attempts to revive the Sanhedrin, the first by Napoleon, the second in the state of Israel in 2004. Napoleon, after determining the Jewish way of life was compatible with his governance, convened many of the more important members of the Jewish world to Paris in an attempt to allow them to continue what had been interrupted since 358. That attempt failed, especially after the collapse of the Napoleon Empire. The second attempt has been greatly contested in many quarters, and the final influence of it has yet to be seen.

#### **Video Links**

Jesus before the Sanhedrin (Jesus of Nazareth): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gZ4uE3seHM>

Jesus before the Sanhedrin (Passion of the Christ): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbxuH2d855k>

Sanhedrin Formation (informative): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxNJWfNjNWo&feature=related>

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