

## **Jewish Sectarians Groups**

## **Jewish Sectarians Groups First Century A.D.**

A.D. – Anno Domini, In the Year of our Lord, In the Christian Era,

B.C. – Before Christ, Before the Christian era.

I. **Essenes**, a group which evidently produced new legal precepts based on the Torah and the Pentateuch, about marriage, the calendar and other matters.

A. Their leader came to be called “Teacher of Righteousness.”

B. He was of the lineage of the High Priest and opposed the Maccabean/Hasmonian claim to the High Priesthood under Jonathan who, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, is called the “Wicked Priest.”

C. In about 150 B.C., led by the “Teacher of Righteousness,” the Essenes established the Qumran community saying the Jerusalem worship was corrupt.

D. Essenes spread over Palestine and fought in the wars against Rome in A.D. 66 and also at Masada later.

II. Beliefs of the Essenes included:

A. A one-year probationary period followed by a two-year probationary period were required for a person to become a member of the sect.

B. Only adult males were admitted to the sect though children were taken in to educate.

- C. The members were celibate except for one sub-group within the Essenes that practiced marriage.
- D. The members surrendered all of their possessions to the community and lived in personal poverty.
- E. They forbade the practice of slavery.
- F. They forbade the use of oaths.
- G. They bathed in cold water before each meal.
- H. They wore white robes like the priests in the temple.
- I. The eating of a meal together as a community was considered highly important. The priests of the community prepared the meal according to their purity rules, took their ritual bath, then assembled for the meal. No uninitiated person could participate.
- J. They practiced healing and cultivated the knowledge of medicinal herbs.
- K. The Essenes also believed they had prophetic gifts.
- L. Essene beliefs are best discovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Their theology begins with belief in the absolute providence and sovereignty of God. Everything that happens is predestined or “appointed” by God. This predestination includes nature, history and individual actions and thoughts. God has created two spirits or powers: good and evil. Man’s status depends on belonging to the domain of one of these spirits. Those

belonging to the domain of the good are called “Sons of Light” and those belonging to the bad “Sons of Darkness.”

III. While Essenes are not mentioned in the New Testament, Christ and John the Baptist had to be well aware of their teachings because of the number of Essenes in Palestine at the time of Christ. Some must have been early converts to Christianity.

**Pharisees** (separatists who separated from the Sadducees) first appear in Josephus during the High Priesthood of John Hyracanus who dismissed them from his government which may indicate that the Pharisees were originally a “political action group” who were also concerned about religious matters.

I. Hillel changed the direction of the Pharisees from political to pietist.

II. After the Jewish defeat in A.D. 66 the Pharisees emerged again as the dominant political party.

III. During Christ’s life on earth the party numbered some 6,000 members.

IV. The Pharisees produced two rival leaders, Hillel and Shammai.

V. Leading doctrines of the Pharisees included:

A. Primary among these characteristics was the belief in and devotion to the oral Torah. Both Josephus (Antiquities 13.297, 408) and the New Testament (**Mark 7:3, The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing holding to the tradition of the elders.**) refer to the “traditions” that the Pharisees followed and which were handed down from their forefathers. This oral Torah,

which the rabbis claimed originated with Moses on Mt. Sinai, was actually an interpretation of it. The adherence to the oral Torah was the main point of contention between Pharisees and Sadducees.

- B.** The Pharisees taught the general resurrection of the dead and the retribution of the wicked after death, doctrines the Sadducees rejected (War 2.163; Ant. 18.16;) (**Mark 12:18, The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.**).
- C.** They believed in the existence of angels and spirits, which the Sadducees denied (**Acts 23:8, The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.**).
- D.** Josephus writes something about divine sovereignty and free will that is not totally comprehensible. It appears, however, that the Essenes believed in total predestination and absolute divine sovereignty, that the Sadducees rejected these doctrines, and that the Pharisees were somewhere in between. God is sovereign, but humans also have free will according to Pharisees (War 2.163).
- E.** The Pharisees concerned themselves much about dietary and purity laws and about tithing. They wanted to be in a state of ritual purity or cleanness as were the priests in the temple and so were meticulous about what they thought would render the hands and garments unclean. Washing of hands was of ritualistic importance. (m. Yadaim 4:6, m. Hagiga 2:7; **Mark 7:3), For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the traditions of the elders.**

Likewise they ate not only kosher food but only grain from which the proper tithes had already been given (m. Demai 6:6; **Matthew 23:23**), **Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not leave the other undone.**)

F. The Pharisees were, according to Josephus, the most popular of the Jewish sects. They had the complete confidence of the masses (Ant 18.15-17).

G. Finally, we must say a word about the general assumption that all Pharisees were hypocrites, inwardly evil, while appearing outwardly to be pure. Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees (Matthew 23) should not be taken as applying to all Pharisees. The Pharisees were in the main a pious sect seeking to live out the will of God as best they could. That Jesus strongly disagreed with some of them is clear, but he also seems to have been friends with others of this sect.

**Sadducees** (from Zadok, the priest) saw themselves as the true sons of Zadok, the true priests.

I. Scriptural references:

**A. 1 Kings 2:35, The King replaced Abiathar with Zadok the priest.**

**B. Ezekiel 40:46, These are the sons of Zadok, who are the only Levites who may draw near to the Lord to minister before him.**

## II. Sadducee characteristics:

- A. They were aristocrats. Josephus wrote that they could persuade only the rich to their point of view (Ant 12.298). One is tempted to add that they only wanted to persuade the rich. Aristocrats are seldom concerned about increasing membership. Thus one should think of a rather small, but disproportionately powerful, politico-religious group.
- B. They rejected the oral Torah of the Pharisees (Ant 13.297). Only the written regulations (i.e., the Pentateuch) were considered binding. It is probably not true, however, that the Sadducees rejected the prophetic books of the Old Testament, as the early church writers sometimes alleged. Josephus does not mention that and it would have been very unusual for any Jew to have done so (the half-Jewish Samaritans did so, however).
- C. In penal laws the Sadducees were usually severe and strict, keeping the letter of the law, the Pharisees were lenient, even putting up legal roadblocks to harsh punishments (Ant 20.199; m. Yadaim 4:7; but see by way of contrast m. Makkoth 1:6).
- D. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, the immortality of the soul, or afterlife (War 2.165; Ant 18.16; **Mark 12:18, Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him . . . ; Acts 23:8, The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits. But the Pharisees acknowledge them all.**) They thus denied penalty and reward after death.
- E. They denied the existence of angels (Acts 23:8).

F. Finally, the Sadducees denied entirely the operation of predestination on the will of mankind. Men and women are completely free to choose their own conduct, they believed (War 2.164).

**Zealots** began with Judas the Galilean or Gaulanite.

I. Zealots rebelled against Quirinius' tax assessment on Judeans. Quirinius was a Roman proconsul of Syria. They contended that tax payments to Rome constituted cowardice and apostasy from the commandments of God.

II. The Zealots generally agreed in theology with the Pharisees, but added a passion for liberty and serving God alone as Master.

**A. Judas was evidently killed by Quirinius following an armed uprising. Acts 5:37, After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and lead a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered.**

B. Judas' sons, James and Simon, were later executed by the procurator Alexander for sedition.

C. Zealots were leaders in the revolt against Rome in A.D. 66 and among the defenders of Masada in A.D. 73. The Zealots were leaders of the rebellion that led to the utter destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70.

**Samaritans** were not strictly speaking a Jewish sect. They had a separate ethnic identify and different religious history.

I. Those who remained in the land intermingled with foreigners who were brought into the area for re-population purposes.

**A. 2 Kings 27:24-41, The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim and settled them in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites. They took over Samaria and lived in its towns. When they first lived there, they did not worship the Lord; so he sent lions among them and they killed some of the people. It was reported to the king of Assyria: “The people you deported and resettled in the towns of Samaria do not know what the God of that country requires. He has sent lions among them, which are killing them off, because the people do not know what he requires.” Then the king of Assyria gave this order: “Have one of the priests you took captive from Samaria go back to live there and teach the people what the God of the land requires.” So one of the priests who had been exiled from Samaria came to live in Bethel and taught them how to worship the Lord. Nevertheless, each national group made its own gods in the several towns where they settled, and set them up in the shrines the people of Samaria had made at the high places. The men from Babylon made Succoth Benoth, the men from Cuthah made Nergal, and the men from Hamath made Ashima, the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire as sacrifices to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. They worshiped the Lord, but they also appointed all sorts of their own people to officiate for them as priests in the shrines at the high places. They worshiped the Lord, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought. To this day they persist in their former practices. They**

**neither worship the Lord nor adhere to the decrees and ordinances, the laws and commands that the Lord gave the descendants of Jacob, whom he named Israel. When the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites, he commanded them: “Do not worship any other gods or bow down to them, serve them or sacrifice to them. But the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt with mighty power and outstretched arm, is the one you must worship. To him you shall bow down and to him offer sacrifices. You must always be careful to keep the decrees and ordinances, the laws and commands he wrote for you. Do not worship other gods. Do not forget the covenant I have made with you, and do not worship other gods. Rather, worship the Lord your God; it is he who will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies.” They would not listen, however, but persisted in their former practices. Even while these people were worshiping the Lord, they were serving their idols. To this day their children and grandchildren continue to do as their fathers did.**

- B. By the first century the Samaritans had their own High Priesthood.
- C. A small number of Samaritans continue to live in Israel at the present time.

## II. Samaritan beliefs include the following elements:

- A. They believed in Yahweh as the only God and were thus fiercely monotheistic.
- B. They accepted the five books of Moses only (the Pentateuch), rejecting the prophets and the writings.

- C. They once had a temple, which was destroyed in the Jewish War of A.D. 66-73 just as the Jewish temple was destroyed. The Samaritans also took part in the Jewish war. Josephus recorded that 11,600 of them were massacred on Mt. Gerizim where their temple was located.
- D. They believed in a coming day of vengeance and recompense (in other words, a judgment day). The animosity between Jews and Samaritans was great, but Jesus portrayed the Samaritans in a favorable light.
- E. Luke 10:33, But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.**
- F. The early Christian community welcomed them into the church. **Acts 8:5-17, Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So there was great joy in that city. Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. When**

**the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.**

**Scribes** were not a Jewish sect, but professionals who arose in the Old Testament pre-exile period. They were highly educated government ministers and personal secretaries. Scribes were very devout Yahwists who were Torah scholars.

**Note:** Before A.D. 70 Judaism was pluralistic. After A.D. 70 the Pharisees were the normative group and influenced Judaism markedly. They led in expanding synagogue service with the temple's never again being built.

## Jewish Sectarian Groups

### Questions

1. A.D. means \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. B.C. means \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ produced the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ which were discovered at \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ in 1947.
3. The Pharisees produced two rival leaders, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Adherence to the oral \_\_\_\_\_ was the main point of contention between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Pharisees believed in the \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ saw themselves as the true sons of \_\_\_\_\_.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ believed there is no \_\_\_\_\_ and that \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ do not exist.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ began with \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.
9. \_\_\_\_\_, the founder of the \_\_\_\_\_, was killed by \_\_\_\_\_. His sons, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_, were later executed by Governor \_\_\_\_\_  
for \_\_\_\_\_.

10. The \_\_\_\_\_ were leaders in the \_\_\_\_\_ that  
led to the utter destruction of \_\_\_\_\_ and the  
\_\_\_\_\_ in A.D. \_\_\_\_\_.

11. \_\_\_\_\_ were the racial and religious \_\_\_\_\_  
of the \_\_\_\_\_ which were conquered by  
the \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ B.C.

12. \_\_\_\_\_ accept the \_\_\_\_\_ books of  
\_\_\_\_\_ only (the \_\_\_\_\_) and reject the Old  
Testament \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

13. \_\_\_\_\_ were highly educated, devout \_\_\_\_\_  
who were \_\_\_\_\_.

14. The leader of the \_\_\_\_\_ came to be called  
\_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ was  
known as the \_\_\_\_\_.

15. The \_\_\_\_\_ envisioned the world as being  
composed of the good called \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ and the bad called \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

16. Jewish groups mentioned in this lesson are: \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

17. The Torah consisted of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ all of which were written by \_\_\_\_\_.

18. After A.D. 70 and the destruction of the temple the most influential Jewish sect was the \_\_\_\_\_ who took the lead in expanding \_\_\_\_\_ service.

19. If you had lived in Palestine in the first century of which Jewish group would you have been a member? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

20. Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_