

THE JEWISH SECTS AND OTHER IMPORTANT GROUPS.

- A. The Pharisees. The most numerous and influential of the five Jewish sects: Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Herodians, and Essenes. The Pharisees numbered about 6000 at the time of Herod the Great (Gundry 48).
1. The most succinct description of the Pharisees that I have found is by Rivkin: "A scholarly class dedicated to the teaching of the twofold law (the written and the oral) and to the dissemination of their belief in the world to come and the resurrection of the dead. They are not mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures, they taught laws and doctrines not set down in those scriptures, and they promised salvation to the individual in a life beyond the grave, a concept not formulated in the Pentateuch. Yet these Pharisees were so successful in winning over the people to their innovational teachings that in the time of Jesus they are sitting in the chair of Moses, and legitimately so (cf. Mt. 23:1-3)" (657).
 2. The Pharisees are first mentioned during the reign of John Hyrcanus (135—104 BC). (See point VIII.) They were the successors of the Hasidim ("the pious"), the Jews who resisted the Hellenization efforts of the Séleucids (See point VI. E). Antagonism between the Pharisees and the Sadducees was known this early. The Sadducees favored the efforts of Hellenization.
 3. Josephus tells us much about the Pharisees. This information is summarized by Rivkin 658.
 - a. They passed on to the people certain regulations handed down (παρέδοσαν) by former generations. Oral traditions not recorded in the law of Moses.
 - b. Most accurate expositors of the Law.
 - c. Held position of leading school of thought.
 - d. Offered a total system of governance to believers.
 - e. Preached the immortality of the soul and resurrection of the body.
 - f. Affirmed the interplay of fate and free will.
 - g. Simon, son of Gamaliel, is mentioned as an unrivaled expert in the laws.
 4. New Testament information about the Pharisees.

- a. The New Testament names Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Gamaliel, and Saul of Tarsus as Pharisees. Paul stated that the Pharisees were the "straightest sect of our religion" (Acts 26:5), the epitome of orthodoxy.
- (1) As to the law, Paul had been a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5-6).
 - (2) He was zealous for the traditions of the fathers (Gal. 1: 13-14). This was the technical expression used by Josephus and the Gospels to denote oral law.
- b. The Gospels present the Pharisees as a scholar class of the twofold law (Mk. 7:5)-
- c. The Pharisees rebuked Jesus and His disciples on several occasions.
- (1) For plucking grain on the sabbath (Mk. 2:23-27).
 - (2) For allowing the disciples to transgress the traditions of the elders (Mt. 15:1-9).
 - (3) Challenging him on the legality of divorce (Mt. 19:1-9).
 - (4) Questioning the payment of tribute to Caesar (Mt. 22:15-22).
 - (5) They commended Jesus when he refuted the Sadducees about the resurrection (Mt. 22:23-34).
 - (6) They differed with Jesus on whether the Messiah must be the son of David (Mt. 22:41-45).
- d. Jesus' analysis of the Pharisees. They sit "in the chair of Moses. " Practice what they tell you, but do not follow their practice (Mt. 23:2-3). "Here the Pharisees are explicitly confirmed as the authoritative spokesmen for the Law and legitimately so. This, despite whatever hostile feelings they engender in the followers of Jesus and however hypocritical they may seem to be. (They may indeed wish all their deeds to be seen by men; they may indeed wear their phylacteries broad and their fringes long; they may relish the place of honor at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, and being called rabbi, but withal they sit in Moses' seat and exercise authority over the law legitimately (Mt. 23 passim).)" (Rivkin 658). 5. The Synagogue was used by the Pharisees to perpetuate their views. Rivkin admits that the origin of the synagogue is obscure, but states that there was no

mentation of it in Palestine before the Hasmonean period.

He says, however, that "the most durable of institutions which the Pharisees created was the synagogue. " (Rivkin 661).

6. The Pharisees may not have accepted the resurrection of Christ, but they could not scoff at the idea of resurrection-
7. The Pharisees tend to be looked upon as "guardians of orthodoxy, 'legalists," or "extremists. " Their name literally means 'separatists. Gundry lists some of their extreme positions (4849).
 - a. Scrupulous Sabbath Observance.
 - (1) Some forbade spitting on the bare ground on the Sabbath lest this be considered plowing, thus Sabbath-breaking work.
 - (2) A woman should not look in a mirror on the Sabbath lest she see a gray hair and be tempted to pluck it.
 - (3) Some questioned whether they could eat an egg laid on a festival day. It might be tainted even though the hen was unaware of the festival day.
 - b. They devised legal loopholes for their convenience.
 - (1) One could not carry his clothes out of a burning house on the Sabbath, but he could put on several layers of clothing and wear them out of the house.
 - (2) Travel on the Sabbath was limited to three-fifths of a mile from the town where he lived. On Friday they could take food to a house three-fifths of a mile from home and go there on the Sabbath. This was considered his "home away from home" so he could go yet another three-fifths of a mile.
- B. The Sadducees. The Sadducees were a smaller group than the Pharisees, but wielded more political power because they controlled the priesthood (Gundry 49).
 1. The Origin of the Sadducees. They are first mentioned as a party during the reign of John Hyrcanus (135—104 BC). (See point VIII) They perpetuated the ideal of the Hellenist party.
 2. The Name. There is considerable difference as to the origin of the name Sadducee.

a. The name means "righteous ones. "

b. The name is derived from Zadok, a leading priest under David (2 Sam. 8:17; 15:24ff.) and chief priest under Solomon (1 Kings 1:32; 2:35).

c. T. W. Manson has suggested that the Aramaic/Hebrew word is a transliteration of the Greek word COVÖIKO% meaning "syndics, " "Judges," or "fiscal controllers. " "The use of su/ndikoi can be traced back to 4th cent. BC Athens. It came during the Roman period to refer to individuals having responsibilities and authority quite similar to that held by the Sadducees in Jerusalem (i.e., serving in somewhat of a mediatorial role between the Roman authorities and the local or national community). Thus the word syndic was used also to refer to members of the Jewish senate, the Sanhedrin" (Hagner 212).

3. Beliefs and Teachings.

a. Regarded only the Pentateuch (Mosaic law, or Torah) as fully authoritative. they denied the oral law of the nonpriestly rabbis.

b. "They did not believe in divine foreordination, angels, spirits, or the immortality of the soul and resurrection of the body, as did the Pharisees" (Gundry 49). See Mt. 22:23 and Acts 23:8.

4. The Sadducees were of the aristocratic class. In their religious views they were liberals.

5. When the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, the Sadducean party disintegrated.

C. The Zealots. The Zealots were concerned chiefly with political matters, longing for the independence of the Jewish people as a nation. They were "revolutionaries dedicated to the overthrow of Roman power. They refused to pay taxes to Rome, regarded acknowledgment of loyalty to Caesar as sin, and sparked several uprisings, including the Jewish revolt which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Scholars usually identify the Zealots with the Sicarii ("assassins"), who carried concealed daggers" (Gundry 51).

1. Origin. According to Josephus the sect of the Zealots was formed in AD 6 when Judas the Galilean and Zadduk the Pharisee rebelled against Rome. Russell points out that "they may justifiably be regarded as true spiritual children of the Maccabees" (37, 53).
 2. One of the twelve apostles had been a member of this party, "Simon the Zealot" (Lk. 6:15; Acts 1:13). Cananean is the Aramaic word for Zealot (cf. Mk. 3:18).
- D- The Herodians. A minority of influential Jews who were wholly politically minded. Gundry says they were mainly 'the Sadducean aristocracy of priests who supported the Herodian dynasty and, by implication, the Roman rule, which had put the Herods in power' (51).
- E. The Essenes. Not mentioned in the New Testament, but mentioned by Pliny, Josephus and Philo of Alexander. The monastic group who left the Dead Sea Scrolls, at Qumran, on the west shore of the Dead Sea, are usually identified with the Essenes.
1. Origin. Some scholars look upon the Essenes as "a Palestinian phenomenon, the fruit of a reaction against the progressive hellenization of Palestinian Judaism" (Murphy-O'Connor 103). W. F. Albright, in 1946, and Murphy-O'Connor, in his recent "provisional" article, suggest that the Essenes were Jews who returned from Babylon just prior to the time of the Maccabean high priest Jonathan (152—143 BC). He believes that the "wicked priest" of the Dead Sea literature was Jonathan, who held the office of high priest without having any traditional right to it. This makes the "Teacher of Righteousness" a contemporary of Jonathan.
 - a. Gundry says that the Essenes, like the Pharisees, "evolved from the Hasidim" (50).
 - b. Possibly during the time of Jonathan, but probably during the reign of John Hyrcanus, at least part of the Essenes took up residence in the wilderness at Qumran.
 - c. The dated coins at Qumran help to identify the time period of the settlement. Coins range from the reign of Antiochus VII (132—130 BC) to the days of the Roman prefects and procurators. Occupation at Qumran was

from the second half of the second century until about AD 68 (cf. Vermes 210).

2. It has been suggested by some that John the Baptist was an Essene, by others that Jesus was an Essene, and that the early church grew out of the Essene movement. For a reply to this view see Jenkins ("Did Christianity.. or Bruce (Second Thoughts).

OTHER GROUPS

- F. Scribes. Not a religious or political group, but a "professional group." The terms "lawyer, scribe," and "teacher (of the law)" are used synonymously in the New Testament. These men were also called "rabbi" literally, 'my great one,' or "my master, teacher" (Gundry 51).
 1. Originated with Ezra who read and interpreted the law to the returned captives (Ezra 7:12; Neh. 8:8).
 2. Most of the scribes were identified with the Pharisees at the time of Christ. (See information about Pharisees above).
 3. The scribes were regarded as authoritative interpreters of the law. They likewise had to be experts in all the traditions of the elders.
 4. The teaching methods of Jesus (as one possessing authority, "I say unto you. . .") was impressive to the people who had been listening to the scribes (Mt. 7:28-29). The scribes would cite the law and then give the various interpretations of the fathers.
- G. The Sanhedrin.
 1. Under Roman rule the Jews were allowed to exercise power over religious and domestic affairs. There were many local courts but the supreme court was the Sanhedrin.
 - a. There were 71 members: a high priest and 70 other members from both Pharisees and Sadducees. The Sanhedrin was dominated, however, by a priestly aristocracy (therefore, mostly Sadducees) (Hagner 271).
 - b. New Testament Names: council (assembly) of the elders, chief priests, scribes (Lk. 22:66, Mt. 27: 1;

26:59; Acts 22:5). The Greek name is οὐνέδριον

(sunedrion), literally meaning "a sitting together. "

- c. They commanded a police force (Jn. 18:3). Jesus was tried by the Sanhedrin. Note that they had to deliver Jesus to the Romans for execution (Jn. 18:31).
 2. History. rabbinic tradition traced the Sanhedrin back to Moses (Num. 11:16). Ezra is said to have reorganized the Sanhedrin. This was called the "Great Synagogue. " The first historical record of the Sanhedrin is in the days of Antiochus III (223—187 BC).
 3. The Sanhedrin exercised some power in the Diaspora. From the Sanhedrin Paul received letters to the synagogue at Damascus (Acts 9:1-2, 14).
 4. The Sanhedrin and the early church.
 - a. Apostles were admonished not to continue preaching (Acts 4:5-22; 5:17-42). Gamaliel, the famous rabbi, made a plea for justice.
 - b. Stephen tried and stoned (Acts 6:9 — 8: 1). See the article by Hagner in on the question of whether the Sanhedrin really had power in capital cases.
 - c. Paul was tried by the Sanhedrin.
 5. Some famous members of the Sanhedrin. a- Nicodemus (Jn- 3:1-5•, 7:50-51; 19:39).
 - b. Joseph of Arimathea (Jn- 19:38).
 6. The Sanhedrin was dissolved in AD 70.
- H. The Tax Collectors (Publicans). The term tax gatherer, tax collector, or Customs Officer is preferable to the KJV publican
1. Under Roman rule wealthy men bought the privilege of collecting the taxes in certain localities. These men were "tax farmers" who employed local Jews to do the actual collecting of the taxes. Revenue collected in Palestine went to the emperor. This prompted the question, "Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" (Mt. 22:17).
 2. Attitude toward the Tax Collectors: "As a class, the tax collectors were hated by their fellow Jews. This was almost inevitable. They represented the foreign domination of

Rome. Their methods were necessarily inquisitorial. That they often overcharged people and pocketed the surplus is almost certain. In the rabbinical writings they are classified with robbers. In the synoptic gospels they are bracketed with 'sinners' (Matt. 9:10; 11:19; Mark 2:15; Luke 5:30; 7:34). This shows the common attitude of the Jewish people toward them. They were considered to be renegades, who sold their services to the foreign oppressor to make money at the expense of their own countrymen" (Earle 606).