

Pharisees

The Roman period

According to Josephus, the Pharisees appeared before Pompey asking him to interfere and restore the old priesthood while abolishing the royalty of the Hasmoneans altogether. They regarded Pompey's defilement of the Temple in Jerusalem as a divine punishment of Sadducean misrule. Pompey ended the monarchy and named Hyrcanus high priest and ethnarch (a lesser title than "king"). Six years later Hyrcanus was deprived of the remainder of political authority and ultimate jurisdiction was given to the Proconsul of Syria, who ruled through Hyrcanus's Idumaeen associate Antipater, and later Antipater's two sons Phasael (military governor of Judea) and Herod (military governor of the Galilee). In 40 BCE Aristobulus's son Antigonus overthrew Hyrcanus and named himself king and high priest, and Herod fled to Rome.

The Herodian dynasty, the procuratorship, and the Sanhedrin

In Rome, Herod sought the support of Mark Antony and Octavian, and secured recognition by the Roman Senate as king, confirming the termination of the Hasmonean dynasty. According to Josephus, Sadducean opposition to Herod led him to treat the Pharisees favorably. Herod was an unpopular ruler, perceived as a Roman puppet. Despite his restoration and expansion of the Second Temple, Herod's notorious treatment of his family and of the last Hasmonaeans further eroded his popularity. According to Josephus, the Pharisees ultimately opposed him and thus fell victims (4 BCE) to his bloodthirstiness. The family of Boethus, whom Herod had raised to the high-priesthood, revived the spirit of the Sadducees, and thenceforth the Pharisees again had them as antagonists.

Archelaus antagonized the Jews as his father had, and in 6 CE the emperor Augustus acceded to a delegation by placing Judea and Samaria under the indirect rule of a Roman procurator (or prefect), and the direct rule of a Roman-appointed high priest instead.

Religious and cultural life during the Roman period

In the first decades of Roman rule, the Temple remained the center of Jewish ritual life. According to the Torah, Jews were required to travel to Jerusalem and offer sacrifices at the Temple three times a year: Passover, Sukkot, and Shavuot.

From political party to sect: Sadducees, Essenes, and Pharisees in the Roman period

There is a record of only one high priest (Ananus, in 62) being a Sadducee, although some scholars assume, based purely on speculation, that the Sanhedrin was dominated by Sadducees. Nevertheless, their power severely curtailed, during the Roman period Sadducees are better understood as a sect rather than a political party. Similarly, the Pharisees were politically quiescent, and studied, taught, and worshiped in their own way.

Although popular and respected, they had no political power. Rather, they only had the power of persuasion.

During this period serious theological differences emerged between the Sadducees and Pharisees. Although the Essene lack of concern for the Second Temple alienated them from the great mass of Jews, their notion that the sacred could exist outside of the Temple was shared and elevated by the Pharisees.

Many, including some scholars have distinguished the Sadducees as a sect that interpreted the Torah literally, whereas the Pharisees interpreted the Torah liberally. According to Jacob Neusner, this view is a distortion. He suggests that two things fundamentally distinguished the Pharisaic from the Saducean approach to the Torah. First, Pharisees interpreted Exodus 19:3-6 literally:

And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

Or, in the words of 2 Maccabees 2:17, Pharisees believed that "God gave all the people the heritage, the kingdom, the priesthood, and the holiness."

The Pharisees believed that the idea that all of the children of Israel were to be like priests was expressed elsewhere in the Torah, for example, when the Law itself was transferred from the sphere of the priesthood to every man in Israel (Exodus 19: 29-24; Deuteronomy 6: 7, 11: 19; comp. 31: 9; Jeremiah 2: 8, 18:18). Moreover, the Torah already provided some ways for all Jews to lead a priestly life: the precepts concerning unclean meat were perhaps intended originally for the priests, but were extended to the whole people (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14:3-21); the prohibition of cutting the flesh in mourning for the dead (Deuteronomy 14: 1-2, Leviticus 19: 28; comp. Lev. 21: 5). In practice, this meant that the Pharisees believed that all Jews (*Israelites*) should observe the rules and rituals concerning purification that had developed around the Temple priesthood.

Second, the Pharisees believed that there were two Torahs. In addition to the Torah recognized by both the Sadducees and Pharisees, and believed was written by Moses, the Pharisees believed that there was another Torah. They referred to the five books of Moses as the "Written Torah," and the corpus of oral laws and traditions as the "Oral Torah," because it was not written down but was rather transmitted by God to Moses orally, and was then memorized and then passed down orally by Moses and his successors over the generations. In other words, they did not interpret the Written Torah liberally; rather, they asserted that the sacred scriptures were not complete and could therefore not be understood on their own terms. The Oral Torah functioned to elaborate and explicate

what was written; it is unclear whether or not the Pharisees and later rabbis believed they were interpreting the Torah. The sages of the Talmud believed that the Oral law was simultaneously revealed to Moses at Sinai, *and* the product of debates among rabbis. Thus, one may conceive of the "Oral Torah" not as a fixed text but as an ongoing process of analysis and argument; this is an ongoing process in which God is actively involved; it was this ongoing process that was revealed at Sinai, and by participating in this ongoing process rabbis and their students are actively participating in God's ongoing revelation. That is, "revelation" is not a single act, and "Torah" is not a single or fixed text. It is this ongoing process of analysis and argument that is itself the substance of God's revelation. As Jacob Neusner has explained, the schools of the Pharisees and rabbis were and are holy

because there men achieve sainthood through study of Torah and imitation of the conduct of the masters. In doing so, they conform to the heavenly paradigm, the Torah believed to have been created by God "in his image," revealed at Sinai, and handed down to their own teachers ... If the masters and disciples obey the divine teaching of Moses, "our rabbi," then their society, the school, replicates on earth the heavenly academy, just as the disciple incarnates the heavenly model of Moses, "our rabbi." The rabbis believe that Moses was (and the Messiah will be) a rabbi, God dons phylacteries, and the heavenly court studies Torah precisely as does the earthly one, even arguing about the same questions. These beliefs today may seem as projections of rabbinical values onto heaven, but the rabbis believe that they themselves are projections of heavenly values onto earth. The rabbis thus conceive that on earth they study Torah just as God, the angels, and Moses, "our rabbi," do in heaven. The heavenly schoolmen are even aware of Babylonian scholastic discussions, so they require a rabbi's information about an aspect of purity taboos. (1998: 8).

Finally, unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees also believed in the resurrection of the dead in a future, messianic age.

The destruction of the Temple and the end of the Second Temple era

By 66 CE Jewish discontent with Rome had escalated. At first, the priests tried to suppress rebellion, even calling upon the Pharisees for help. After the Roman garrison failed to stop Hellenists from desecrating a synagogue in Caesarea, however, the high priest suspended payment of tribute, inaugurating the Great Jewish Revolt. The destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE not only put an end to the revolt, it was a profoundly traumatic experience for the Jews that marked the end of an era.

From Pharisees to rabbis

Revolutionaries like the Zealots had been crushed by the Romans, and had little credibility (the last Zealots died at Masada in 73 CE). Similarly, the Sadducees, whose

teachings were so closely connected to the Temple cult, disappeared. The Essenes too disappeared, perhaps because their teachings so diverged from the concerns of the times.

Of all the major Second Temple sects, only the Pharisees remained, poised with teachings directed to all Jews that could replace Temple worship. Such teachings extended beyond ritual practices. According to the classic midrash in *Avot D'Rabbi Nathan* (4:5):

The Temple is destroyed. We never witnessed its glory. But Rabbi Joshua did. And when he looked at the Temple ruins one day, he burst into tears. "Alas for us! The place which atoned for the sins of all the people Israel lies in ruins!" Then Rabbi Yohannan ben Zakkai spoke to him these words of comfort: "Be not grieved, my son. There is another way of gaining ritual atonement, even though the Temple is destroyed. We must now gain ritual atonement through deeds of loving-kindness."

Following the destruction of the Temple, Rome governed Judea through a Procurator at Caesarea and a Jewish Patriarch. Yohanan ben Zakkai, a leading Pharisee, was appointed the first Patriarch (the Hebrew word, Nasi, also means prince, or president), and he reestablished the Sanhedrin at Yavneh under Pharisee control. **Instead of giving tithes to the priests and sacrificing offerings at the Temple, the rabbis instructed Jews to give money to charities.** Moreover, they argued that all Jews should study in local synagogues, because Torah is "the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob" (Deut. 33: 4).

After the destruction of the First Temple, Jews believed that God would forgive them and enable them to rebuild the Temple – an event that actually occurred within three generations. Would this happen again? When the Emperor Hadrian threatened to rebuild Jerusalem as a pagan city dedicated to Jupiter, in 132 CE, some of the leading sages of the Sanhedrin supported a rebellion led by Simon Bar Koziba, who established a short-lived independent state that was conquered by the Romans in 135 CE. ...

Romans forbade Jews to enter Jerusalem and forbade any plan to rebuild the Temple. Instead, it took over the Province of Judea directly, and renamed Jerusalem Aelia Capitolina. Romans did eventually reconstitute the Sanhedrin under the leadership of Judah haNasi (who claimed to be a descendant of King David). They conferred the title of "Nasi" as hereditary, and Judah's sons served both as Patriarch and as heads of the Sanhedrin.

According to historian Shaye Cohen, by the time three generations had passed after the destruction of the Second Temple, most Jews concluded that the Temple would not be rebuilt during their lives, nor in the foreseeable future. Jews were now confronted with difficult and far-reaching questions:

- How to achieve atonement without the Temple?
- How to explain the disastrous outcome of the rebellion?
- How to live in the post-Temple, Romanized world?
- How to connect present and past traditions?

Regardless of the importance they gave to the Temple, and despite their support of Bar Koseba's revolt, the Pharisees' vision of Jewish law as a means by which ordinary people could engage with the sacred in their daily lives provided them with a position from which to respond to all four challenges in a way meaningful to the vast majority of Jews. Their responses would constitute Rabbinic Judaism.

During the Second Temple era, when Jews were divided into sects, the Pharisees were one sect among many, and partisan. Each sect claimed a monopoly on the truth, and discouraged marriage between members of different sects. Members of different sects did, however, argue with one another over the correctness of their respective interpretations, although there is no significant, reliable record of such debates between sects. After the destruction of the Second Temple, these sectarian divisions ended. The Rabbis avoided the term "Pharisee," perhaps because it was a term more often used by non-Pharisees, but also because the term was explicitly sectarian. The Rabbis claimed leadership over all Jews, and added to the Amidah the *birkat haMinim*, a prayer which in part exclaims, "Praised are You O Lord, who breaks enemies and defeats the arrogant," and which is understood as a rejection of sectarians and sectarianism. This shift by no means resolved conflicts over the interpretation of the Torah; rather, it relocated debates between sects to debates within Rabbinic Judaism. The Pharisaic commitment to scholarly debate as a value in and of itself, rather than merely a byproduct of sectarianism, emerged as a defining feature of Rabbinic Judaism.

Thus, as the Pharisees argued that all Israel should act as priests, the Rabbis argued that all Israel should act as rabbis: "The rabbis furthermore want to transform the entire Jewish community into an academy where the whole Torah is studied and kept redemption depends on the "rabbinization" of all Israel, that is, upon the attainment of all Jewry of a full and complete embodiment of revelation or Torah, thus achieving a perfect replica of heaven" (Neusner 1998: 9).

The Rabbinic Era itself is divided into two periods. The first period was that of the *Tannaim* (from the Aramaic word for "repeat;" the Aramaic root TNY is equivalent to the Hebrew root SNY, which is the basis for "Mishnah." Thus, Tannaim are "Mishnah teachers"), the sages who repeated and thus passed down the Oral Torah. During this period rabbis finalized the canonization of the Tanakh, and in 200 CE Judah haNasi edited together Tannaitic judgements and traditions into the Mishna, considered by the rabbis to be the definitive expression of the Oral Torah ...

The second period is that of the *Amoraim* (from the Aramaic word for "speaker") rabbis and their students who continued to debate legal matters and discuss the meaning of the books of the Bible. In Palestine, these discussions occurred at important academies at Tiberias, Caesarea, and Sepphoris. In Babylonia, these discussions largely occurred at important academies that had been established at Nehardea, Pumpedita and Sura. This tradition of study and debate reached its fullest expression in the development of the Talmudim, elaborations of the Mishnah and records of Rabbinic debates, stories, and judgements, compiled around 400 CE in Palestine and around 500 CE in Babylon.

Rabbinic Judaism eventually emerged as normative Judaism and in fact many today refer to Rabbinic Judaism simply as "Judaism." Nevertheless, as Jacob Neusner has pointed out, the Amoraim had no ultimate power in their communities. They lived at a time when Jews were subjects of either the Roman or Iranian (Parthian and Persian) empires. These empires left the day-to-day governance in the hands of the Jewish authorities: in Roman Palestine, through the hereditary office of Patriarch (simultaneously the head of the Sanhedrin); in Babylonia, through the hereditary office of the *Reish Galuta*, the "Head of the Exile" or "Exilarch" (who ratified the appointment of the heads of Rabbinical academies.) Consequently,

The "Judaism" of the rabbis at this time is in no degree either normal or normative, and speaking descriptively, the schools cannot be called "elite." Whatever their aspirations for the future and pretensions in the present, the rabbis, though powerful and influential, constitute a minority group seeking to exercise authority without much governmental support, to dominate without substantial means of coercion. (Neusner 1998: 4-5)

The rabbinic project, as acted out in the Talmud, reflected not the world as it was but the world as rabbis dreamed it should be.

Pharisaic principles and values

At first the values of the Pharisees developed through their sectarian debates with the Sadducees; then they developed through internal, non-sectarian debates over the law as an adaptation to life without the Temple, and life in exile, and to a more limited degree, life in conflict with Christianity. These shifts mark the transformation of Pharasaic to Rabbinic Judaism.

One belief central to the Pharisees was shared by all Jews of the time: monotheism. This is evident in the practice of reciting the Shema, select verses from the Torah, at the Temple and in synagogues. The Shema begins with the verses, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God; the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." According to the Mishna, these passages were recited in the Temple along with the twice-daily *Tamid* offering; Jews in the diaspora, who did not have access to the Temple, recited these passages in their houses of assembly (in Hebrew: "batei kneset"). According to the Mishnah and Talmud, the Men of the Great Assembly instituted that Jews both in Judea and in the diaspora were required to pray three times a day (morning, afternoon and evening), and include in their prayers a recitation of these passages in the morning ("Shacharit") and evening ("Ma'ariv") prayers.

According to Josephus, whereas the Sadducees believed that people have total free will and the Essenes believed that all of a person's life is predestined, the Pharisees believed that people have free will but that God also has foreknowledge of human destiny. According to Josephus, Pharisees were further distinguished from the Sadducees in that Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead.

It is likely that Josephus highlighted these differences because he was writing for a Gentile audience, and questions concerning fate and a life after death were important in Hellenic philosophy. In fact, it is difficult, or impossible, to reconstruct a Second Temple Pharisaic theology, because Judaism itself is non-creedal; that is, there is no dogma or set of orthodox beliefs that Jews believed were required of Jews. Josephus himself emphasized laws rather than beliefs when he described the characteristics of an apostate (a Jew who does not follow traditional customs) and the requirements for conversion to Judaism (circumcision, and adherence to traditional customs). In fact, the most important divisions among different Jewish sects had to do with debates over three areas of law: marriage, the Sabbath and religious festivals, and the Temple and purity. Debates over these and other matters of law continue to define Judaism more than any particular dogma or creed.

Not one tractate of the key Rabbinic texts, the Mishnah and the Talmud, is devoted to theological issues; these texts are concerned primarily with interpretations of Jewish law. Only one chapter of the Mishnah deals with theological issues; it asserts that three kinds of people will have no share in "the world to come:" those who deny the resurrection of the dead, those who deny the divinity of the Torah, and Epicureans (who deny divine supervision of human affairs). Another passage suggests a different set of core principles: normally, a Jew may violate any law to save a life, but in Sanhedrin 74a, a ruling orders Jews to accept martyrdom rather than violate the laws against idolatry, murder, or adultery. (Judah haNasi, however, said that Jews must "be meticulous in small religious duties as well as large ones, because you do not know what sort of reward is coming for any of the religious duties," suggesting that all laws are of equal importance). In comparison with Christianity, the Rabbis were not especially concerned with the messiah or claims about the messiah.

Fundamentally, the Pharisees continued a form of Judaism that extended beyond the Temple, applying Jewish law to mundane activities in order to sanctify the every-day world. This was a more participatory (or "democratic") form of Judaism, in which rituals were not monopolized by an inherited priesthood but rather could be performed by all adult Jews individually or collectively; whose leaders were not determined by birth but by scholarly achievement. In general, the Pharisees emphasized a commitment to social justice, belief in the brotherhood of mankind, and a faith in the redemption of the Jewish nation and, ultimately, humanity. Moreover, they believed that these ends would be achieved through halakha ("the way," or "the way things are done"), a corpus of laws derived from a close reading of sacred texts. This belief entailed both a commitment to relate religion to ordinary concerns and daily life, and a commitment to study and scholarly debate.

The commitment to relate religion to daily life through the law has led some to infer that the Pharisees were more legalistic than other sects in the Second Temple Era. This is not true — the Sadducees were committed to obeying the commandments of the Torah, and the Essenes governed themselves through elaborate rules and regulations (Josephus does claim that the Pharisees were the "strictest" observers of the law, but he likely meant "most accurate"). It is more accurate to say they were legalistic in a different way. In

some cases Pharisaic values led to an extension of the law — for example, the Torah requires priests to bathe themselves before entering the Temple. The Pharisees washed themselves before Sabbath and festival meals (in effect, making these holidays "temples in time"), and, eventually, before all meals. Although this seems burdensome compared to the practices of other sects, in other cases, Pharisaic law was less strict. For example, Biblical law prohibits Jews from carrying objects from a private domain ("reshut ha-yachid") to a public domain ("reshut ha-rabim") on the Sabbath. This law could have prevented Jews from carrying cooked dishes to the homes of friends for Sabbath meals. The Pharisees ruled that adjacent houses connected by lintels or fences could become connected by a legal procedure creating a partnership among homeowners; thereby, clarifying the status of those common areas as a private domain relative to the members of the partnership. In that manner people could carry objects from building to building.

Just as important as (if not more important than) any particular law was the value the rabbis placed on legal study and debate. The sages of the Talmud believed that when they taught the Oral Torah to their students, they were imitating Moses, who taught the law to the children of Israel. Moreover, the rabbis believed that "the heavenly court studies Torah precisely as does the earthly one, even arguing about the same questions" (Neusner 1998: 8). Thus, in debating and disagreeing over the meaning of the Torah or how best to put it into practice, no rabbi felt that he (or his opponent) were in some way rejecting God or threatening Judaism; on the contrary, it was precisely through such arguments that the rabbis imitated and honored God.

One sign of the Pharisaic emphasis on debate and differences of opinion is that the Mishnah and Talmud mark different generations of scholars in terms of different pairs of contending schools. Around the time the Romans conquered Judea, for example, the two major Pharisaic schools were those of Hillel and Shammai. After Hillel died in 20 CE, Shammai assumed the office of president of the Sanhedrin until he died in 30 CE. Followers of these two sages dominated scholarly debate over the following decades (although the Talmud records the arguments and positions of the school of Shammai, the teachings of the school of Hillel were ultimately taken as authoritative).

Pharisaic wisdom was compiled in one book of the Mishna, *Pirke Avot*. The Pharisaic attitude is perhaps best exemplified by a story about Hillel the Elder, who lived at the end of the 1st century BCE. A man once challenged the sage to explain the law while standing on one foot. Hillel replied, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary. Go and study it."

"Pharisees" and Christianity

In the 4th century CE, Christians canonized a "New Testament" consisting of texts written between 60 CE and about 95 CE, which spell out a New Covenant and provides the case for its basis in the Bible. In the "New Testament" the ruling Pharisees of his time (the house of Shammai) are often represented as being the ideological foes of Jesus.

An important binary in the New Testament is the opposition between law and love. Accordingly, the New Testament presents the Pharisees as obsessed with man-made rules (especially concerning purity) whereas Jesus is more concerned with God's love; the Pharisees scorn sinners whereas Jesus seeks them out. Because of the New Testament's frequent depictions of Pharisees as self-righteous rule-followers, the word "pharisee" (and its derivatives: "pharisaical", etc.) has come into semi-common usage in English to describe a hypocritical and arrogant person who places the letter of the law above its spirit. Jews today (who subscribe to Pharisaic Judaism) typically find this insulting if not anti-Semitic.

Many non-Christians object that the four Gospels, which were canonized after Christianity had separated from Judaism (and after Pharisaism emerged as the dominant form of Judaism), are likely a very biased source concerning the conduct of the Pharisees. Some have argued that Jesus was himself a Pharisee, and that his arguments with Pharisees is a sign of inclusion rather than fundamental conflict (disputation is the dominant narrative mode in the Talmud).^[citation needed] Jesus' emphasis on loving one's neighbor, for example, echoes the teaching of the school of Hillel (Jesus' views of divorce, however, are closer to those of the school of Shammai, another Pharisee). Others have argued that the portrait of the Pharisees in the New Testament is an anachronistic caricature. For example, when Jesus declares the sins of a paralytic man forgiven, the New Testament has the Pharisees criticizing Jesus' blasphemy. But Jewish sources from the time commonly associate illness with sin and healing with forgiveness, and there is no actual Rabbinic source that questions or criticizes this practice. Although the New Testament presents the Pharisees as obsessed with avoiding impurity, Rabbinic texts reveal that the Pharisees were concerned merely with offering means for removing impurities, so that a person could again participate in the community. According to the New Testament, Pharisees wanted to punish Jesus for healing a man's withered hand on the Sabbath, but there is no Rabbinic rule according to which Jesus had violated the Sabbath. According to the New Testament the Pharisees objected to Jesus's mission to outcast groups such as beggars and tax-collectors, but Rabbinic texts actually emphasize the availability of forgiveness to all. Indeed, much of Jesus' teaching, for example the Sermon on the Mount, is consistent with that of the Pharisees.

Some scholars believe that those passages of the New Testament that present a caricature of the Pharisees were written sometime after the destruction of Herod's Temple in 70 CE, ... at a time when it had become clear that most Jews did not consider Jesus to be the messiah. At this time Christians sought most new converts from among the gentiles. They thus would have presented a story of Jesus that was more sympathetic to Romans than to Jews. It was only after 70 CE that Phariseism emerged as the dominant form of Judaism.

The Apostle Paul of Tarsus, who authored much of the New Testament, spoke positively of being a Pharisee. Acts 23:6 records Paul on trial in the Temple Courts. He apologized for speaking against a priest without knowing who he insulted, and then claimed his belief in the resurrection was based on his doctrinal beliefs as a Pharisee. Paul emphasized the disagreements between Pharisees and Sadducees for his own benefit, resulting in his release. As F.F. Bruce notes in a commentary on Acts, "A Sadducee could

not become a Christian without abandoning a distinctive theological tenet of his party; a Pharisee could become a Christian and remain a Pharisee--in the apostolic age, at least." (F.F. Bruce, The Book of Acts, p. 428).

In the event known as the Council of Jerusalem, Paul argued strenuously that the ritual requirements of Judaism do not apply to Gentile Christians (Acts 15:1-29). In his writings to the church in Philippi, Paul referred to his strict Jewish credentials as a cause for boasting (Philippians 3:4-6), but then stated his belief in Christ Jesus was more glorious.

In a series of two scholarly works ("The Mythmaker"[1] and "Jesus the Pharisee"[2]), Hyam Macabee argues that critical literary analysis of the New Testament text reveals that in reality, Jesus was more likely a Pharisee than not; on the other hand, Paul of Tarsus was clearly not a Pharisee and probably changed Christianity from a (possibly heretical) Jewish sect to a completely new religion in his teachings. This led to representation of many ideas as many figures in the New Testament story (e.g., the Pharisees) as Jewish, while in reality this was a misrepresentation or a caricature at best. On the other hand, many ideas of Jesus which were probably much closer to the authentic Judaism were changed and mixed with local mystery cults and Greek philosophy thus distancing Christianity from Judaism.

Sadducees From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The [sect](#) of the **Sadducees** (or **Zadokites** and other variants) - which may have originated as a political party - was founded in the [2nd century BCE](#) and ceased to exist sometime after the [1st century CE](#). Their rivals, the [Pharisees](#), are said to have originated in the same time period, but have survived as the later forms of Rabbinic [Judaism](#).

Their name in [Hebrew](#) was *tsedduqim*, a name they chose to indicate that they were followers of the teachings of the High Priest [Zadok](#), who anointed [Solomon](#) king during the [First Temple](#) era. While little or none of their own writings has been preserved, they seem to have indeed been a [priestly](#) group, associated with the leadership of the [Temple in Jerusalem](#). Some say that they were not truly descendants of the High Priest Zadok, but rather the followers of another Zadok who rebelled against his rabbinical teacher.

Most of what is known about the Sadducees comes from [Josephus](#), who wrote that they were a quarrelsome group whose followers were wealthy and powerful, and that he considered them boorish in social interactions (see Josephus's [Wars of the Jews, Book II, Chapter VIII, Paragraph 14](#)). We know something of them from discussions in the [Talmud](#) (mainly the Jerusalem), the core work of [rabbinic](#) Judaism, which is based on the teachings of [Pharisaic](#) Judaism.

[\[edit\]](#) Beliefs

It is claimed that the Sadducees denied the immortality of the [soul](#), and are discussed in this light in the Christian [New Testament](#) debating the matter with [Jesus](#) ([Luke 20:27-40](#)), and that they denied the existence of [spirits](#) or [angels](#) ([Acts 23:6-10](#)).

They rejected the rabbis' interpretation of the [Torah](#), and are presented as having denied that any of the [Hebrew Bible](#), apart from the Torah, was authoritative. As to the Torah itself, the Sadducees are presented as interpreting it literally and rigorously on subjects it directly covers, while rejecting the Rabbinic traditions that mitigate the harsher penalties or aim at preventing unintentional rule-breaking.

However there is evidence^{[\[citation needed\]](#)} that there was an internal schism among those called "Sadducees" - some who rejected Angels, the Soul, and Resurrection - and some which accepted these teachings and the entirety of the Hebrew Bible.

In regard to the following records of the Talmud, one must keep in mind that the histories regarding the Sadducees were written by a people who defeated them, and may contain many inaccuracies.

In regard to criminal jurisdiction they were so rigorous that the day on which their code was abolished by the Pharisaic Sanhedrin under [Simeon ben Shetah](#)'s leadership, during the reign of Salome Alexandra, was celebrated as a festival. The Sadducees are said to have insisted on the literal execution of the law of retaliation: "Eye for eye, tooth for

tooth", which pharisaic Judaism, and later rabbinic Judaism, rejected. On the other hand, they would not inflict the [death penalty](#) on false witnesses in a case where capital punishment had been wrongfully carried out, unless the accused had been executed solely in consequence of the testimony of such witnesses.

According to the Talmud, they granted the daughter the same right of inheritance as the son's daughter in case the son was dead.

According to the Talmud, they contended that the seven weeks from the first barley-sheaf-offering ("omer") to [Shavuot](#) ([Pentecost](#) in Christian reference) should, according to Lev. 23:15-16, be counted from "the day after Sabbath," and, consequently, that Shavuot should always be celebrated on the first day of the week (Meg. Ta'an. i.; Men. 65a). In this they followed a literal reading of the Bible which regards the festival of the firstlings as having no direct connection with Passover, while the Pharisees, connecting the festival of the Exodus with the festival of the giving of the Law, interpreted the "morrow after the Sabbath" to signify the second day of Passover.

In regard to rituals at the Temple in Jerusalem:

- They held that the daily burnt offerings were to be offered by the high priest at his own expense, whereas the Pharisees contended that they were to be furnished as a national sacrifice at the cost of the Temple treasury into which taxes were paid.
- They held that the meal offering belonged to the priest's portion; whereas the Pharisees claimed it for the altar.
- They insisted on an especially high degree of purity in those who officiated at the preparation of the ashes of the Red Heifer. The Pharisees, by contrast, opposed such strictness.
- They declared that the kindling of the incense in the vessel with which the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement was to take place outside, so that he might be wrapped in smoke while meeting the [Shekhinah](#) within, according to Lev. xvi. 2; whereas the Pharisees, denying the high priest the claim of such supernatural vision, insisted that the incense be kindled within.
- They opposed the popular festivity of the water libation and the procession preceding it on each night of the Sukkot feast.
- They opposed the Pharisaic assertion that the scrolls of the Holy Scriptures have, like any holy vessel, the power to render ritually unclean the hands that touch them.
- They opposed the Pharisaic idea of the *eruv*, the merging of several private precincts into one in order to admit of the carrying of food and vessels from one house to another on the Sabbath.
- In dating all civil documents they used the phrase "after the high priest of the Most High," and they opposed the formula introduced by the Pharisees in divorce documents, "According to the law of Moses and Israel".
- [Ben Sira](#), one of the [Deuterocanonical books](#), is believed by many scholars to have been by a Sadducee.

Reliability of claims

None of the writings we have about Sadducees present their own side of these controversies, and it is possible that positions attributed to "Sadducees" in later literature are meant as [rhetorical](#) foils for whatever opinion the author wishes to present, and do not in fact represent the teachings of the sect. Being associated closely with the Temple in Jerusalem, after the Temple was destroyed in CE [70](#) the Sadducees vanish from history as a group.

There is, however, some evidence that Sadducees survived as a minority group within Judaism up until early medieval times. In refutations of Sadducean beliefs, [Karaites](#) Sages such as [Ya'akov al-Qirqisani](#) quoted one of their texts, which was called *Sefer Zadok*. Translations into English of some of these quotes can be found in Zvi Cahn's *"Rise of the Karaite sect"*.

Legendary origin

Josephus relates nothing concerning the origin of the Sadducees; he knows only that the three "sects" — the Pharisees, [Essenes](#), and Sadducees — dated back to "very ancient times" (Ant. xviii. 1, § 2), which point to a time prior to [John Hyrcanus](#) (ib. xiii. 8, § 6) or the Maccabean war (ib. xiii. 5, § 9).

Among the rabbis of the second century the following legend circulated: [Antigonus of Soko](#), successor of [Simeon the Just](#), the last of the [Men of the Great Assembly](#), and consequently living at the time of the influx of Hellenistic ideas, taught the maxim, "Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of a reward, but be rather like those who serve without thought of receiving a reward" (Avot 1:3); whereupon two of his disciples, Zadok and Boethus, mistaking the high ethical purport of the maxim, arrived at the conclusion that there was no future retribution, saying, "What servant would work all day without obtaining his due reward in the evening?" Instantly they broke away from the Law and lived in great luxury, using many silver and gold vessels at their banquets; and they established schools which declared the enjoyment of this life to be the goal of man, at the same time pitying the Pharisees for their bitter privation in this world with no hope of another world to compensate them. These two schools were called, after their founders, Sadducees and Boethusians.

This legend is considered to be non-historical.

New Testament/Greek Scriptures

The Sadducees are mentioned in the [New Testament/Greek Scriptures](#) of the [Christian Bible](#). The [Gospel of Matthew](#) indicates that the Sadducees did not believe in the [resurrection](#) of the dead. [Matthew 22:29](#), 31-32 says:

²⁹ In reply [Jesus](#) said to them: “You are mistaken, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of [God](#) ... [30] ... ³¹ As regards the resurrection of the dead, did you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ³² ‘I am the God of [Abraham](#) and the God of [Isaac](#) and the God of [Jacob](#)’? He is the God, not of the dead, but of the living.”

The Acts of the Apostles likewise indicates that Sadducees did not share the Pharisees’ belief in a resurrection; Paul starts a conflict during his trial, by claiming that his accusers were motivated by his advocacy of the doctrine of the resurrection (in an aside, Acts 23:8 asserts that “The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge all three”).

Essenes

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The **Essenes** (sg. *Essene*, [IPA](#): [ɛˈsɪn]) were followers of a religious way of living in [Judaism](#) that flourished from the [2nd century BC](#) to the [1st century AD](#). Many scholars today argue that there were a number of separate but related groups that had in common [mystic](#), [eschatological](#), [messianic](#), and [ascetic](#) beliefs that were referred to as the "Essenes". There are also contemporary movements which identify themselves as Essenes.

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[\[edit\]](#) Contemporary ancient sources

The main source of information about the life and belief of Essenes is the detailed account contained in a work of the 1st century Jewish historiographer [Josephus](#) entitled [The Jewish War](#) written about 73-75 AD (*War* 2.119-161) and his shorter description in his [Antiquities](#) finished some 20 years later (*Ant.* 18.11 & 18-22). Claiming first hand knowledge (*Life* §§10-11), he refers to them by the name *Essenoi* and lists them as the followers of one of the three sects in "Jewish Philosophy" (*War* 2.119) alongside the [Pharisees](#) and the [Sadducees](#). The only other known contemporary accounts about the Essenes are two similarly detailed ones by the Jewish philosopher [Philo](#) (fl. c. 20 AD - c. 54 AD; *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* XII.75-87, and the excerpt from his *Hypothetica* 11.1-18 preserved by [Eusebius](#), *Praep. Evang.* Bk VIII), who, however, admits to not being quite certain of the Greek form of their name that he recalls as *Essaioi* (*Quod Omn. Prob.* XII.75), the brief reference to them by the Roman [equestrian Pliny the Elder](#) (fl. 23 AD - 79 AD; *Natural History*, Bk 5.73).

The [Dead Sea Scrolls](#), found in caves at [Qumran](#), are widely (but not universally) believed to be the work of Essenes or to reflect Essene beliefs. See [below](#).

[\[edit\]](#) Name

Josephus uses the name *Essenes* in his two main accounts (*War* 2.119, 158, 160; *Ant.* 13.171-2) as well as in some other contexts ("an account of the Essenes", *Ant.* 13.298; "the gate of the Essenes", *War* 5.145; "Judas of the Essene race", *Ant.* 13.311, but some manuscripts read here *Essaion*; "holding the Essenes in honour", *Ant.* 15.372; "a certain Essene named Manaemus", *Ant.* 15.373; "to hold all Essenes in honour", *Ant.* 15.378; "the Essenes", *Ant.* 18.11 & 18; *Life* 10). In several places, however, Josephus has *Essaios*, which is usually assumed to mean *Essene* ("Judas of the *Essaios* race", *War* I.78; "Simon of the *Essaios* race", *War* 2.113; "John the *Essaios*", *War* 2.567; 3.11; "those who are called by us *Essaioi*", *Ant.* 15.371; "Simon a man of the *Essaios* race", *Ant.* 17.346). Philo's usage is *Essaioi*, although he admits this Greek form of the original name that according to his etymology signifies "holiness" to be inexact (*NH* XII.75). Pliny's Latin text has *Esseni*. Josephus identified the Essenes as one of the four major Jewish sects of that period.

The Essenes have been the focus of much alternative history and esoteric speculation. Recently, for example, Ahmed Osman claims in his book *Out of Egypt* that the name "Essene" is to be translated as "follower of Jesus (Essa)." This "obvious" translation had been overlooked, it is claimed, because of a previously unquestioned assumption that the origins of Christianity lay in the first century AD. In Eerdman's *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis*, Gabriele Boccaccini (p.47) implies that a convincing etymology for the name Essene has not been found, but that the term applies to a larger group within Palestine

that also included the Qumran community. Josephus' reference to a "gate of the Essenes" in the Temple Mount perhaps suggests an Essene community living in this quarter of the city or regularly gathering at this part of the Temple precincts.

[\[edit\]](#) Location

According to Josephus the Essenes had settled "not in one city" but "in large numbers in every town" (*War* 2.124). Philo speaks of "more than four thousand" *Essaioi* living in "Palestinian Syria" (*Quod Omn. Prob.* XII.75), more precisely, "in many cities of Judaea and in many villages and grouped in great societies of many members" (*Hyp.* 11.1).

Some modern scholars and archeologists have argued that Essenes inhabited the settlement at [Qumran](#), a [plateau](#) in the [Judean Desert](#) along the [Dead Sea](#). While Pliny's location ("on the west side of the Dead Sea, away from the coast ... [above] the town of [Engeda](#)") tends to be cited in support of this identification, there is as yet no conclusive proof for this hypothesis. Nevertheless, it has come to dominate the scholarly discussion and public perception of the Essenes.

The Church Father [Epiphanius](#) (writing in the fourth century AD) seems to make a distinction between two main groups within the Essenes: "*Of those that came before his [Elxai, an Ossaeen prophet] time and during it, the Osseaens and the Nazarean.*" (Panarion 1:19). Epiphanius describes each group as following:

- "[Nazarean](#)" Essenes:

"The Nazarean - they were Jews by nationality - originally from Gileaditis [where the early followers of Yeshua fled after the martyrdom of James, the brother of Jesus], Bashanitis and the Transjordan . . . They acknowledged Moses and believed that he had received laws - not this law, however, but some other. And so, they were Jews who kept all the Jewish observances, but they would not offer sacrifice or eat meat. They considered it unlawful to eat meat or make sacrifices with it. They claim that these Books are fictions, and that none of these customs were instituted by the fathers. This was the difference between the Nazarean and the others. . ." (Panarion 1:18)

- "Ossaeans" Essenes:

"After this [Nazarean] sect in turn comes another closely connected with them, called the Ossaeans. These are Jews like the former ... originally came from Nabataea, Ituraea, Moabitis and Arielis, the lands beyond the basin of what sacred scripture called the Salt Sea. . . Though it is different from the other six of these seven sects, it causes schism only by forbidding the books of Moses like the Nazarean." (Panarion 1:19)

Josephus also writes: "*Moreover, there is another [ie. a second] rank of Essenes who agree with the rest as to their way of living and customs and laws but differ from them in the point of marriage.*" (*War* 2.160).

Some modern groups who claim a connection with Essenism also claim the location of the Ossaeans, who encouraged celibacy, to have been around the [Qumran](#) area; and the Nazarean, who encouraged marriage, to have been around the [Mount Carmel](#) area.

[[edit](#)] Rules, customs, theology and beliefs

The accounts by Josephus and Philo show that the Essenes (Philo: *Essaioi*) led a strictly [celibate](#) but [communal](#) life – often compared by scholars to [Buddhist](#) and later [Christian monastic](#) living – although Josephus speaks also of another "rank of Essenes" that did get married (*War* 2.160-161). According to Josephus, they had customs and observances such as collective ownership (*War* 2.122; *Ant.* 18.20), elected a leader to attend to the interests of them all whose orders they obeyed (*War* 2.123, 134), were forbidden from [swearing](#) oaths (*War* 2.135) and [sacrificing animals](#) (Philo, §75), controlled their temper and served as channels of peace (*War* 2.135), carried [weapons](#) only as protection against robbers (*War* 2.125), had no [slaves](#) but served each other (*Ant.* 18.21) and, as a result of communal ownership, did not engage in [trading](#) (*War* 2.127). Both Josephus and Philo have lengthy accounts of their communal meetings, meals and religious celebrations. From what has been deduced, the food of the Essenes was not allowed to be altered (by being cooked, for instance); and they may have been strict vegetarians, eating mostly bread, wild roots and fruits. ^{[[citation needed](#)]} After a total of three years probation (*War* 2.137-138), newly joining members would take an oath that included the commitment to practise piety towards the Deity and righteousness towards humanity, to maintain a pure life-style, to abstain from criminal and immoral activities, to transmit their rules uncorrupted and to preserve the books of the Essenes and the names of the Angels (*War* 2.139-142). Their theology included belief in the immortality of the [soul](#) and that they would receive their souls back after death (*War* 2.153-158, *Ant.* 18.18). Part of their activities included purification by water rituals, which was supported by rainwater catchment and storage. Also, living in Qumeran as they did, many of them cliff-jumped into the pools of collected flood waters of the rock.

[[edit](#)] Scholarly discussion

The Essenes are discussed in detail by [Josephus](#) and [Philo](#).

Many scholars believe that the community at Qumran that allegedly produced the Dead Sea Scrolls was an offshoot of the Essenes; however, this theory has been disputed by [Norman Golb](#) and other scholars.

Since the 19th century attempts have been made to connect early Christianity and Pythagoreanism with the Essenes: It was suggested that [Jesus](#) of Nazareth was an Essene, and that [Christianity](#) evolved from this sect of Judaism, with which it shared many ideas

and symbols. According to [Martin A. Larson](#), the now misunderstood Essenes were Jewish [Pythagoreans](#) who lived as monks. As vegetarian celibates in self-reliant communities who shunned marriage and family, they preached a coming war with the Sons of Darkness. As the Sons of Light, this reflected a separate influence from [Zoroastrianism](#) via their parent ideology of Pythagoreanism. According to Larson, both the Essenes and Pythagoreans resembled *thiasoi*, or cult units of the [Orphic](#) mysteries. [John the Baptist](#) is widely regarded to be a prime example of an Essene who had left the communal life (see *Ant.* 18.116-119), and it is thought they aspired to emulate their own founding *Teacher of Righteousness* who was crucified. However already in 1875 J.B. Lightfoot published an essay ([On Some Points Connected with the Essenes](#)) showing that attempts to find the roots of Essenism in Pythagoreanism and the roots of Christianity in Essenism are seriously flawed.

Another issue is the relationship between the *Essaioi* and Philo's *Therapeutae* and *Therapeutrides* (see *De Vita Contemplativa*). It may be argued that he regarded the *Therapeutae* as a contemplative branch of the *Essaioi* who, he said, pursued an active life (*Vita Cont.* I.1).

One theory on the formation of the Essenes suggested they were the movement was founded by a Jewish High Priest, dubbed by the Essenes the [Teacher of Righteousness](#), whose office had been usurped by [Jonathan](#) (of priestly but not [Zadokite](#) lineage), labeled the "man of lies" or "false priest".

[\[edit\]](#) Modern and contemporary Essenes

Several groups claim spiritual descent from the ancient Essenes and describe themselves as Essenes.

Scholars such as J. Gordon Melton in his "*Encyclopedia of American Religions*" point out that the modern Essene movement possesses no authentic historical ties to the ancient Essene movement. He states, "Essene material is directly derivative of two occult best-sellers--The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ, by Levi H. Dowling; and The Mystical Life of Jesus, by Rosicrucian author H. Spencer Lewis."

[\[edit\]](#) Essenes in fiction

The Essenes are an important part of [H. Rider Haggard's](#) *Pearl-Maiden: A Tale of the Fall of Jerusalem*. [\[1\]](#)

A community of Essenes led by John the Baptist takes in [time traveller Karl Glogauer](#) in [Michael Moorcock's](#) [1966 science fiction](#) novel *Behold the Man*.

The production material for [Neon Genesis Evangelion](#) identifies the [SEELE](#) group as having begun as the Essenes.

Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes II
January 20, 2007

[Norman Mailer](#)'s novel *The Gospel According to the Son* ([ISBN 0-679-45783-6](#)) (1997) portrays [Jesus Christ](#) as an Essene Jew.