

## The Sadducees

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by Bill Crews

Some believe that the name “Sadducee” is derived from a word meaning “to be righteous,” but most scholars believe that it came from the name of a high priest, “Zadok” (perhaps the colleague of Abiathar and contemporary of David). Not so much is known about them as about the Pharisees. They ceased to exist not long after the fall of the Jewish state, along with the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple (A.D. 70). The Pharisees, however, continued on. The Talmud is Pharisaic and reveals little about the Sadducees.

Apparently the priestly class gradually crystallized into the sect of the Sadducees. After the Babylonian exile, the high priest in particular begins to emerge with both religious and civil powers (the latter conferred upon him by foreign governments who dominated the Jews). The Sadducees were a religio-political party.

The Sadducees were a priestly, aristocratic, wealthy, and politically influential party. During their early history they often clashed with the Pharisees and sometimes persecuted members of that sect (at times many were martyred, usually by crucifixion). In the New Testament, a common enemy, Christ, often caused them to lay aside differences and become allies with the Pharisees. They laid great stress upon ceremonial exactness, in particular upon sacrificial ceremonies. They rejected the oral traditions of the Pharisees. They also rejected the immortality of the soul, the resurrection from the dead, miracles, angels, spirits and divine providence. They were the liberal party of their day among the Jews.

## The Essenes

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The religious party of the Essenes is not mentioned in the New Testament, but a word about them is in order. This will show us that the danger of men forming their own religious parties has always been present and will always be present. We must resist the temptation to form them.

The name “Essenes” was coined by Philo and Josephus. Its origin, meaning or significance we do not know. The origin of the Essenes may be the same as that of the Pharisees. Many of their principles and regulations were similar to those of the Pharisees, only they were much stricter and far less concerned about reputation. They believed that rigid self-discipline and self-denial was the only pathway to true holiness. The difficulty of keeping their strict rules while living among others led to their withdrawing into isolated communities of their own. Most were found in Palestine just northwest of the Dead Sea. Since most advocated celibacy, they remained small in number and were compelled to recruit new members. No traces of them are found after the fall of the Jewish state under the Romans (culminating in 70 A.D.). Their principles and practices seem to come from oriental religions, Greek philosophy, Jewish doctrines and ideas of their own. They offered no animal sacrifices. They took part in no wars.

{Compiled from the *Encyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, by McClintock and Strong, on “Essenes,” Vol. III, p. 301ff.}

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