

# S E C T S   O F   T H E   J E W S

**Introduction:** The word sect means denomination or section of a whole. The religious sects of the Jews is a phenomena that originated in the period between the Testaments and had a great effect in the time of Christ on earth and the early day of His church. Here is a summary of the major ones.

**I. The Pharisees** The largest and most influential of the Jewish sects. Their name was derived from the verb "parash" "to separate", Their origin: Originated shortly after the time of the Maccabees and by 136 B.C. were a well established sect. Their particular or peculiar doctrines: (these words from the great Jewish Historian Josephus, born about A.D. 37 and lived to the end of the century)

"But as to the two other orders first mentioned, the Pharisees are those who are esteemed most skillful in the exact explication of their laws and introduce the first sect. These ascribe all to fate (or providence), and to God, and yet allow, that to act what is right, or to the contrary, is principally in the power of men, although fate does cooperate in every action, They say that all souls are incorruptible, but that the souls of men only are removed into other bodies --but that souls of mad men are the subject of eternal punishment."

--Wars of the Jews, Book II, Chap, 8, Sect.14

1. Ascribed all things to fate or providence--yet a place for the free will of men in theory.
2. Believed in the existence of angels, spirits and the resurrection of the dead. Acts. 23:6-8.
3. Their peculiar notions with reference to immortality of the soul seemed to tend toward the theory of transmigration of souls. This possibly explains the language found in John 9:1-4; and in Matt. 16:14.
4. They contended that God was in strict justice to bless the Jews, God must make them all partakers in a terrestrial (physical) kingdom.
5. They interpreted certain portions of the Mosaical Law most

literally and distorted their meaning to favor their philosophical systems. - Mt. 23:15-24

6. They were extremely reverential to the decrees and traditions of the elders. This brought forth some of our Lord's sharpest rebukes against the Pharisees. Some of these traditions bound on the conscience of their countrymen were:
- \* The washing of the hands up to the elbow before and after a meal. Mt. 15:1-6 Mk. 7:1-13.
  - \* Wearing phylacteries and larger fringes on garments. - Mt. 23:5
  - \* Fasting twice a week making a big show. Mt. 6:16; Lk. 18:10-12

7. The Jewish Encyclopedia lists seven types of Pharisees:

- \* The "shoulder" Pharisee, who paraded his good deeds before men like a badge on the shoulder.
- \* The "wait-a-little" Pharisee, who would ask someone to wait for him while he performed a good deed.
- \* The "blind" Pharisee, who bruised himself by walking into a wall because he shut his eyes to avoid seeing a woman.
- \* The "pestle" Pharisee, who walked with hanging head rather than observe alluring temptations.
- \* The "ever-reckoning" Pharisee, who was always counting his good deeds to see if they off set his failures. The "God-fearing" Pharisee, who like Job, was righteous.
- \* The "God-loving" Pharisee, like Abraham.

--Vol. IX, p. 661-666

8. The Pharisees accepted the entire canon of Old Testament scriptures.
9. The Principles of Pharisaism led many times to self-righteousness and hypocrisy, but it must be said that there were among them good and virtuous men. Saul of Tarsus and Nicodemus serve as examples. - Mt. 23:25-28

**II. The Sadducees** According to tradition they derived their name from the sons of Zadok, who was the high priest in the days of David and Solomon. The sons of Zadok were the priestly hierarchy in the time of the captivity (II Chron. 31:10; Ezek. 40:46; 44:15; 48:11) and apparently the name persisted as the title of the priestly party in the days of Christ. (Acts. 5:17) Less in number than the Pharisees, they possessed political power and were

the governing group in the civil life of Judaism under the Herods. Their particular and peculiar tenets:

1. They believed that there is no resurrection, neither angels or spirits. Mt. 22:23; Acts 23:8.
2. They believed that the soul of man perished with the body. Hence they were the materialists of their day.
3. They denied the Pharisee's theory of fate or over-ruling providence. They affirmed the absolute power of the individual to will to do good or evil. Because of this, they were severe judges.
4. They rejected all tradition, adhering strictly to the letter of the scriptures.
5. They placed the five Books of Moses above the Prophets and the writings.

**\* Beware of "leavening" of these two sects - Matthew 16:6-12**

**III. The Essenes** There has been much discussion as to the origin of this name. It is thought by many to be connected with the Greek word Hosis which means "holy". The Essenes then were "The Holy Ones" "Their existence as a community can not be traced back earlier than the closing years of the second century B.C. The first Essene known to history is a man called Judah, who lived in the reign of the Hasmonean king Aristobolus I (104-103 B.C.) and was renowned for his ability to predict the future." (FF. Bruce, Second Thoughts of the Dead Sea Scrolls,

1. This sect is not mentioned by name in the New Testament. Some think Christ referred to it in Mt. 19:12. The particular and peculiar tenets of the Essenes: (Josephus gives a most interesting description of this sect)

"These Essenes reject pleasures as evil, but esteem continence and the conquest over our passions, to be virtue. They neglect wedlock, but choose out other persons children, while they are pliable and fit for learning and esteem them to be one of their kindred and form them according to their manners. They do not

absolutely deny the fitness of marriage --"

"These men are despisers of rich and so very communicative as raises our admiration. Nor is there any to be found among them who hath more than another: for it is a law among them, that those who come to them must let what they have be common to the whole order."

"They think that oil is a defilement; and if any of them be anointed without his own approbation it is wiped off his body; for they think to be sweaty is a good thing, as they also do to be clothed in white garments. They also have stewards to take care of their common affairs, who every one of them have no separate business for any, but what is for the uses of them all."

2. Josephus describes at length the rules for entrance into the sect's fellowship, showing that there is a period of trial in which one is proved able to meet the demand of the sect. Then tremendous oaths must be taken.

"Moreover, he swears to communicate their doctrines only as he himself received them; that he will abstain from robbery, and will equally preserve the books belonging to their sect and the names of angels. These are the oaths by which they secure their proselytes to themselves."

"What they most of all honor, after God, is the name of their legislator Moses, whom if any blasphemes is punished capitally."

"For their doctrine is this: That bodies are corruptible and that the matter they are made of is not permanent; but that souls are immortal and continue for ever; and that they come out of the most subtle stir and are united to their bodies as to prisons, into which they are drawn by certain natural enticement; but that when they are set free from the bonds of the flesh, they then as released from a long bondage, rejoice and mount upwards."

"There are also those among them who undertake to foretell things to come, by reading the holy books and using several sorts of purifications and being perpetually conversant in the discourses of the prophets and it is but seldom that they miss in their predictions."

--Josephus, Wars of the Jews-Book II, Ch. 8, Sec. 2-13

**IV. The Herodians** They were more of a political faction among the Jews, rather than religious. They derived their name from Herod the great and were very much attached to his family. They went along with the idea proposed by Herod to submit to his rule of the Romans and in many ways complied with them in their heathenish practices, such as erecting temples with idolatrous worship.

1. Because of their willingness to submit to Roman rule they were opposed by the Pharisees.
2. Christ warned against the "leaven of Herod" -- Mk. 8:15.
3. The Herodians probably were Sadducees. Compare w/ Mt. 16:6
4. How much Christ was hated is illustrated by the Pharisees and the Herodians, who bitterly opposed each other making common course against Christ. Mt. 22:15-16.

**V. The Zealots** These were not a religious sect but were a group of fanatical nationalists who advocated violence as a means of liberation from Rome. The apostle Simon belonged to this sect. Lk. 6:15; Acts 1:13.

1. They were responsible for the Jewish War in 66 A.D. which led to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.
2. Thought it was an act of treason to pay taxes to Caesar.

**Conclusion:** There were noble things about each of these, but none were what God wanted in total. Of what sect was Jesus a part? None! Though He surely had some things in common with them all, He was simply a man of God. And so should we!

\* Jesus could commend each for some good...

1. Pharisees devotion to the law
2. Sadducees concern for maintaining the priesthood and temple
3. Essenes desire for moral purity
4. Even the Herodians and Zealots zeal, as well as possible other qualities, were praiseworthy

