

1ST CENTURY SECTS OF THE JEWS
Described by Josephus in Wars 2.8 & in Antiquities 18.1

The Two Major Sects Contrasted

| TOPIC | PHARISEES “Separatists” | SADDUCEES “[Sons of] Zadok” |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Origins | <p>The Pharisees arose during the Hasmonean rebellion (early 2nd Century BC) when there was an attempt to <i>Hellenize</i> (“to force someone to live like a Greek”) the Jewish faith out of existence. They defended the Law with their lives.</p> <p>The Pharisees sometimes allied with the Herodians (those supporting a return to Herodian rule rather from direct Roman rule), as indicated in Mark 3:6. This was perhaps because the Herod family had at least some Hasmonean blood mingled into their line.</p> | <p>The Sadducees probably arose during the Hasmonean period (later 2nd Century BC) when priests <u>not</u> from the line of Zadok (Ezekiel 40:46) were ruling as High Priests.</p> <p>They supported <u>only</u> <i>Zadoki</i> priests in that office.</p> |
| God | He is both personal & interested in the actions of individuals. | He is non-personal & therefore uninterested in the actions of individuals. (Comparable to Deism) |
| The Supernatural | Angels & demons are real entities which interact with humans from time to time. | Angels & demons (if they exist at all) do not interact with humans. |
| “Free Will” | God gave temperaments of “good” & “evil” to all humans, and they have “free will” to act in accordance with their given temperament. (Comparable with Calvinism) | Humans have absolute “free will.” |
| The Afterlife | Individual humans will face divine judgment. Those who are “good” will be resurrected into an eternal body & spend forever in God’s new world. Those who are “bad” will spend eternity in punishment. | Individual existence ends with death. There is no resurrection, no rewards and no punishments. |
| The Law of Moses | Not only must one obey the letter of the Law, one must also follow the oral traditions & Rabbinic understanding about the Law. | One is only obligated to obey the strict letter of the Law. They were quite strident in debating with those who insisted on going beyond the letter of the Law. |
| Sphere of Influence | They were held in high esteem by most of the Jewish public. They also controlled the majority of the Jewish synagogues. | They were relatively few in number but controlled the Temple complex via High Priestly families who were of the Sadducee sect. They often deferred to Pharisaic traditions of Temple worship simply to keep the public peace. |
| Lifestyle | They tended to be more moderate in their diet & drinking. | They could be excessive in their diet & drinking. |
| Attitude Toward Others | They respected their own, most especially their elders. Rabbis were treated deference, even those with whom they disagreed. | Each Sadducee looked out mostly for himself. They were known for arguing among themselves & even took pride in disputing with their senior philosophers. |

THE ESSENES¹

“Those devoted to a holy life”?

Also described in Philo’s Every Good Man Is Free (12-13) & Apology to the Jews 11

There were approximately 4,000 who followed this philosophy during the middle part of the 1st Century.

They seem to have been part of the Sadducees (*Zadoki*) priests were the only legitimate leaders among the Essenes) until some crisis of Temple leadership during the 1st Century BC. While they still sent gifts to the Jerusalem Temple, they chose not to participate in the sacrificial worship there, since they did not accept the animal sacrifices as valid.

They believed in pursuing absolute self control, even avoiding the expression of emotion & physical pain. They believed that the body was like a cell in which the soul was imprisoned for the duration of life, after which, good souls were released into the presence of God while bad souls were consigned into eternal torment.

They abstained from taking oaths, expecting their truthful word to be sufficient.²

God & Moses were the most esteemed personages within the community. To blaspheme either was a capital offense.

They were very strict Sabbath keepers. They would not even defecate on the Sabbath, since their custom required digging a hole beforehand & filling it in afterward, both forms of “work.”

They were interested in prophecy, studying the holy books for clues about the future. They also believed that certain purification processes could result in prophetic insight. They had an interest in plants & roots for medicinal purposes too.

They were very anti-materialistic and lived in tight-knit communes, separate from other Jews. These communes were sometimes located within cities, but typically in more suburban or rural settings since the members generally pursued agricultural & husbandry work. They cared for their own sick & aged within the commune.

Most of these communes were exclusively male. They chose not to marry, believing that women were incapable of being faithful to one man. (Josephus was aware of one commune that permitted marriage, but sexual contact within those marriages was limited to the propagation of children only.) Since children were not being produced by these men-only communes, they increased their ranks by adopting young men (presumably in their late teens) who wished to join.

They practiced communism, even sharing simple white clothing (which was worn until no longer repairable). Stewards appointed by the community oversaw the common pool of resources, including any monies earned by those working within the larger Jewish community.

All decisions were made by the leaders of the community. The only “free will” choice ever made by individual Essenes was to render assistance to anyone who requested it.

If a full-fledged member of one commune moved or travelled to another commune, they took nothing with them other than self-defense weaponry. Once at the new commune they were immediately treated as a full-fledged member of that commune.

¹ Paul may have had the Essenes in mind when he wrote 1 Timothy 4:1-5: “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, *men* who forbid marriage *and* *advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.”

² This parallels Jesus own teaching on oaths (Matthew 5:33-37), which was repeated by his half-brother in James 5:12.

A common Essene day is described thusly:

- They would rise while it was still dark and dress in their simple white clothing. No one anointed themselves with olive oil (as was the custom of that day) for this was considered a prideful act.
- They would welcome the sunrise with a traditional prayer. No words beyond this prayer were spoken.
- Everyone would head off to their assigned tasks until about 11 am, at which time they would bath themselves, put on special white clothing and proceed to the community dining room.
- Lunch was a simple, single serving of bread & vegetables (never meat) set before them by the cook. The meal began & ended with a ritual prayer offered by an Essene priest. Only one person spoke at a time during the meal & then quietly. The general rule was that unless all agreed to someone speaking, silence reigned.
- After lunch they would put their work clothes back on & work until evening.
- The supper ceremonies were exactly like that for lunch.
- Evenings were spent studying the ancient writings in order to learn how to be a more self-controlled person.

Converts had to prove their commitment to the Essene lifestyle over a one year period before being admitted into a community. After that, there was another two-year period before he was considered a full-fledged member.

As they entered the community, they agreed to the following items (quoted from Josephus' Wars 2.8.7 & very much in line with the Essene Manual of Discipline discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls):

- he will exercise piety towards God
- he will observe justice towards men
- he will do no harm to any one, either of his own accord, or by the command of others
- he will always hate the wicked, and be assistant to the righteous
- he will ever show fidelity to all men, and especially to those in authority, because no one obtains the government without God's assistance; and that if he be in authority, he will at no time whatever abuse his authority, nor endeavor to outshine his subjects, either in his garments, or any other finery
- he will be perpetually a lover of truth, and propose to himself to reprove those that tell lies
- he will keep his hands clear from theft, and his soul from unlawful gains
- he will neither conceal anything from those of his own sect, nor discover any of their doctrines to others, no, not though any one should compel him so to do at the hazard of his life
- he [will] communicate their doctrines to no one any otherwise than as he received them himself
- he will abstain from robbery
- [he] will equally preserve the books belonging to their sect, and the [names] of the angels.

Community trials were very thorough & involved no fewer than 100 jurors.

Those condemned to excommunication for violations of the rules, having committed themselves to eating only the common meal of the commune, would sometimes be reduced to eating grass until they were readmitted; or, as sometimes happened, to die of hunger.

THE KANANIM³
“The Zealots”

“But of the fourth sect of Jewish philosophy, Judas the Galilean was the author. These men agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions; but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty; and say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord. They also do not value dying any kind of death, nor indeed do they heed the deaths of their relations and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man Lord; and since this immovable resolution of theirs is well known to a great many, I shall speak no farther about that matter; nor am I afraid that anything I have said of them should be disbelieved, but rather fear, that what I have said is beneath the resolution they show when they undergo pain; and it was in Gessius Florus’ time that the nation began to grow mad with this distemper, who was our procurator, and who occasioned the Jews to go wild with it by the abuse of his authority, and to make them revolt from the Romans;”⁴

Early on, the Kananim engaged in civil disobedience to accomplish their goal of Jewish independence from Rome. Later, during the early 60’s they began to practice the assassination of both Jews & Gentiles they considered roadblocks to their cause.

³ In Mark 3:18 & Matthew 10:4, the apostle Simon was called “the *Kanani*”. In Acts 1:13 he is referred to as “the Zealot.”

⁴ Antiquities 18.1.6.