

## LESSON 5 – JEWISH SECTS OF THE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD

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Assignments: Tapes 9-10  
Textbook – Chapter 15  
Bible: Matthew 22

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### VI) Jewish Sects of The Second Temple Period

Introduction: Oftentimes, the Judaism of Jesus' day (1st Century A.D.) is mistakenly viewed as a monolithic structure easily defined with total agreement of its adherents as to the definition of what constitutes the essence of Judaism. Quite to the contrary, however, it was a Judaism composed of numerous sects and parties, each believing that it had the "corner" on the truth. The people who heard Jesus were composed mainly of the following five groups.

#### A) Pharisees.

- 1) As the party of the synagogue, the Pharisees strove to reinterpret the Law. As the custodians of the "oral law" they built a hedge around the Torah to enable Jews to live righteously before God in a different world than that which existed in the days of Moses.
- 2) Comparatively few in number, they enjoyed the support of the people and influenced popular opinion if not national policy.
- 3) The Pharisees of Jesus' day were divided into the strict school of "Shammai" and the more lenient school of "Hillel."
- 4) They were the only party to survive the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. and were the spiritual progenitors of later "Judaism." (Mt. 22:34-46; Acts 23:6-10).

#### B) Sadducees

- 1) Hellenism had made its greatest impact in Palestine through this party. Made up of Aristocrats, it became closely associated with the Temple. Because of their position, the Sadducees had a vested interest in the status quo.

- 2) Relatively few in number, they wielded political power and controlled the High Priesthood.
- 3) They honored the Torah (first five books) above all else, and rejected any doctrine (such as resurrection and immortality) which they felt was not found in the Pentateuch. (Mt. 22:23-33; Acts 23:7,8)
- 4) Difficult to know their specific beliefs, because we only know them through the writings of their opponents, the Pharisees.

C) Essenes.

- 1) A small, separatist group, emphasizing strict legal observance, but rejecting the Temple priesthood and sacrificial system as corrupt.
- 2) It is generally agreed that the Qumran community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls was an Essene group. Having separated themselves from Judaism at large, they were preparing for the final war between the "Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness." Although attempts have been made to assign membership in the sect to both Jesus and John the Baptist, there is only a superficial basis for such conjectures.
- 3) Not mentioned specifically in the New Testament, but some have seen a possible reference to them in Matthew 22:16 and Luke 16:8 (Yigal Yadin).

D) Zealots

- 1) Referred to as the "Fourth Philosophy" by Josephus, who traces their beginning to 6 A.D., by Judah of Gamla, and ceased to exist in 73 A.D. at Masada. They opposed payment of tribute to a pagan emperor, since their allegiance was only to God.
- 2) They believed in a future Messianic Kingdom, but also believed they could hasten its arrival through their military overthrow of Rome's occupation. (Mt. 10:4; Acts 5:37).

E) The “People of the Land.”

Not a sect or party, this was the term used to describe the masses who led normal lives, did not have deep religious training, and did not get involved with government, either in advocating or opposing Rome’s occupation. (cf. Jn. 7:49; Mk. 12:37; Acts 4:13)

F) Samaritans (see previous discussion – section II:C:6)

G) Note how Jesus dealt with some of these “sects” in Matthew 22:15-48.



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***Stop!!! Take the First Test Now!*** Be sure to send it to the school as soon as you complete the examination. You may not use any helps or references for the examination.

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