

Lesson Supplemental – The Sadducees

Sources:

- Saldarini, Anthony J. J. *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*.
- Wellhausen, Julius. *The Pharisees and the Sadducees: An Examination of Internal Jewish History*
- Stemberger, Gunter. *Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus*.
- Simmons, William A. *Peoples of the New Testament World*:

Like the Pharisees, there are few hard evidence that exist that can trace the true origins of the Sadducees. Like the Pharisees, the Sadducees left no independent body of literature that can serve as a self-testimony of who they were, and what they believed. The same sources that applied to the Pharisees effectively also applied to the Sadducees.

Origins and Practices Traced to Zadok

In *Antiquities*, Josephus makes reference to a Jewish sect that existed "from the most ancient times," and refers to 'Zadok' twenty times with reference to the high priesthood. On this evidence, there are suggestions that traces the roots of the Sadducees to the ancient priestly line of Zadok (2Sam 15:24-35; 1Kgs 1:32-39; 1 Chr 24:3-6; Ezek 43:19) during the time of King David in 1000 BC. This line of priesthood existed until they were disposed of in 172 BC. At issue is the translation of the Greek term *Σαδδουκαῖοι*; if it is indeed a proper translation of the Hebrew term *tsadhuqim*, then the connection of the New Testament "Sadducees" and the Old Testament priesthood of Zadok can be established.

Origins Traced to the Monastic Community at Qumran

Other theories place the origin of the Sadducees as part of the group who retreated to the desert and joined the monastic community at Qumran around the time of the Maccabean revolt (167-160 BC). This theory gain traction from the Dead Sea Scroll manuscript 4QMMT, and presumes that the priests who disagreed with the stance of the Pharisees in the conflict opted to part ways and became part of this group in that community. However, many characteristics, beliefs, and lifestyle of this community in Qumran does not seem to coincide with that of the Sadducees; thus, casting heavy doubt into this theory.

Earliest Evidences / Citation of the Sadducees

Zadok and the line of priests that descended from him are presented in the Old Testament as being powerful in religious and political influence. This is effectively how Josephus describes the Sadducees in *Antiquities*. The Sadducees are described as numbering less than the Pharisees, yet controlled the ruling aristocracy in Israel. Their political ascendance is first mentioned in *Jewish War* in the episode involving Jonathan (the Sadducee) and John Hyrcanus in a political power struggle during the Hasmonean period (140-37BC; see supplemental for the Pharisees). Josephus does not mention the Sadducees in detail in *Jewish War* except as a reference to one of the three branches of Judaism (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes). From these accounts, we can clearly place this group as being in existence as early as the period of the Maccabean War.

Sadducees in the New Testament

Like the Pharisees, the origins of the Sadducees are also not mentioned in the New Testament. Comparatively speaking, Sadducees are mentioned by name far less than the Pharisees in the New Testament. This group was referenced only once in the Gospel of Mark (12:18-27). In Matthew, this group was mentioned frequently but in combination with the Pharisees. The Gospel of Luke mentions the Sadducees only in the discussion on the Resurrection (which was the same discussion

topic in Mark), whereas in the Gospel of John, the group is not mentioned by name at all. In effect, though the Sadducees as a group is formally recognized, by name, to have existed in the New Testament times, little is known specifically about this group other than its association with the Pharisees, and also its distinction from the Pharisees with respect to their belief about the Resurrection .

Influences of the Sadducees

In all periods encompassing the Hasmonean, Herodian, and the times of Jesus, the Sadducees have been viewed as the rival party opposing that of the Pharisees as far as political influence is concern. Specifically, beginning with the episode involving John Hyrcanus, the Sadducees have been characterized as members of the high priesthood. From the time of Herod up until the Jewish revolt against Rome in AD 67, the Sadducees effectively controlled the office of the high priesthood; thus, wielded great political power in Israel. Their power and influence in this capacity is reflected in the arrest, trial, and the crucifixion of Jesus (Luke 19:45-24:53).

Civil status was the key as far as membership into this group is concern. Although the Sadducees are typically associated as the priestly party, the leaders of this group were concerned less with caring for the sanctuary than they are in civil matters. To a large extent, unlike the Pharisees, they struggle to relate to the people they represent because they are viewed to be a party of power and wealth, and too accommodating to foreign oppressors. As a result, this group have no significant following on a popular level.

Summary on the Sadducees

The Sadducees represented a religious and political community arising out of Jewish aristocracy and having a penchant for power and wealth. Their roots may be traceable to the priestly line of Zadok during the time of King David's reign, though this is merely a theory. Documented evidence of their existence dates back to the Maccabean war, where they are typically portrayed to coexist with the Pharisees, but as opposing political rivals. Due to their penchant for power and wealth, as well as their philosophical approach towards foreign oppressors, they do not have nearly the following as that of the Pharisees. However, they do wield significant civil influence on society based on the many appointments they have to the office of the high priesthood. This influence is reflected in the arrest, trial, and the crucifixion of Jesus.