

Sects in Jesus' Days

I. Historical Context: Religious/Political Environment

A. Sanhedrin

1. During the time of Christ, this body was the supreme Jewish Court of Justice. They had jurisdiction within the Roman framework.
2. Composition – high priest, members of the high priestly family, elders (tribal heads), Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees.
3. According to the “Mishna” the numbers was 70.

B. Sadducees

1. Josephus: “Sadducees were wealthy, persons of rank, from the priesthood.” Members of the **aristocracy**
2. Practical, pragmatic politicians
3. **High priestly** families belonged to the Sadducean party.
4. **Rejected the supernatural** (Acts 23:7-8)
5. Rejected the concept of the resurrection
6. Accepted only the written law, rejected the Oral traditions.
7. Liberal in their religious views

C. Pharisees

1. One of the three prominent religious parties of Judaism at the time of Christ – **Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes**
2. Started about 165 B.C (After the Maccabean revolt) mainly lay people
3. Pharisee means “**The Separated Ones,**” or “Separatists.”
4. Had a zeal to maintain Jewish **religious and national liberty (Against Hellenism)**
5. Dedicated to Old Testament Law
6. Approx. 6000 members at their height of popularity
7. Wore long distinguishable robes for easy recognition
8. Promoted great emphasis on **Jewish legalism**
9. Accepted the **teachings** of the **Scribes** and put that into practice
10. They pledged themselves to obey all facets of the “**traditions**” to the minutest detail, and were sticklers for ceremonial purity
11. They despised those whom they did not consider their equals and were **haughty and arrogant** because they believed they were the only interpreters of God and His Word.
12. They made life **difficult** for themselves and **bitter** for others.
13. Ultimately, this type of religion became a **practice of externals** and not of the heart.

D. Scribes

1. A class of learned men who made the systematic study of the law and exposition of Scripture their professional occupation (Office)
2. Referred to as “Teachers of the law,” “Lawyers,” “Doctors of the law,” “Rabbi.” They were often associated with the Pharisees, i.e. “Scribes and Pharisees.”

3. The majority of Scribes belonged to the Pharisee Party.
4. Biblical concept of “scribal function” came into view with Ezra.
5. Initially, this function was performed by priests, but gradually there arose a group of students who gave themselves to the preservation, transcription, and exposition of the law.
6. During the **Hellenistic** period the leading priests became tainted with paganism and politics.
7. **The Scribes assumed the responsibility zealously defending the law,** and teaching the common people.
8. **By NT times they held undisputed sway as the recognized exponents of the law and the revered representatives of Judaism.**
9. **The Problem:** Accepting the law as a basis for the regulation for all of life, they made it their primary task to study, interpret, and expound that law as a rule of daily life. The lack of details in the law they filled up through the gradual development of an extensive and complicated system of teaching intended to safeguard the sanctity of the law. By their practice of making a **“fence about the law,” they added to its actual requirements, loading the people with “burdens they can hardly carry.”** (Mat. 23:4). This vast and complicated mass of scribal teaching, known as **“the tradition of the elders”** (Mat 15:2) was orally transmitted and required prolonged study to master.
10. The Scribes served as judges
11. Scribes constituted an important element of the **Sanhedrin.** (Mat 26:57)
12. Because Jesus refused to be bound by their scribal additions to the law, they soon fiercely opposed him. (Mk. 7:1-13, John 5:10-18)

E. Zealots

1. Jewish patriotic party
2. Fanatical defenders of the theocracy
3. Conducted limited guerilla warfare against the Romans

F. Essenes

1. Origin around 150 B.C.
2. Community of ascetic men in Palestine forming the first cell group of organized monasticism.
3. Located around the northern end of the Dead Sea
4. Not specifically mentioned in the Bible. But, one could imply references to them in Mat.19:11-12; Col. 2:8, 18, 23.

G. Herodians

1. A political party supporting the Herods.
2. They hoped that Herod may ultimately free them from Roman rule
3. They were at odds with the Pharisees, politically and religiously.
4. But, they were united in their opposition to Jesus. (Mark 3:6)