

Sadducees

No materials survive from the Sadducees themselves. Our only sources are the Christian Bible (New Testament), Josephus (*BJ* 2.119, 164--66; *Ant* 13.171--73, 293--98; 18.11; 16--17; 20.199; *Vit.* 10--11) and scattered rabbinic texts of varying value. These are all to a greater or lesser extent hostile. It is therefore impossible to derive a balanced view of this group. Their name has been derived from *TSADDIQ* ("righteous") and from the name Zadok (either the high priest or another). They have been seen as a primarily religious group (of priestly conservatives); as the Judean aristocracy (again through a supposed link with the priesthood) and as a political party. They have been identified by some scholars (and by some of the later rabbinic traditions) with the Boethusians, an equally obscure group whose major difference with the Pharisees appears to have been over the calendar. Attempts to link the Sadducees with some of the Qumran writings (the *Dead Sea Scrolls*) depend on circular assumptions about the nature and beliefs of the group.

None of our sources actually link the Sadducees with the priesthood, stating only that certain priests were also Sadducees; and 1 Macc. 2.1 derives the Hasmonean priesthood not from Zadok (as one might expect on the conventional understanding of Sadducee origins) but from one Joarib. When the polemic is stripped from the rabbinic materials, all that remains is that the Pharisees and Sadducees had differing understandings of certain laws, particularly purity laws, and of the afterlife. On some issues it is implied that the Pharisees follow a stricter interpretation, on others the Sadducees. They first appear as an entity in Josephus' narrative of John Hyrcanus (*Ant* 13.293--99) as a political group subordinate to the Pharisees, until the Sadducee Jonathan persuades the ruler to support their cause -- a move which Josephus regards as extremely unpopular. Apart from Ananus the high priest, who is incidentally identified as a Sadducee (*Ant* 20.199), they otherwise feature very little in Josephus' narrative of political events. We are therefore left quite uncertain about their origins, social status and *raison d'être*.

In his descriptions of the three philosophies Josephus contrasts the Sadducees with the Pharisees and Essenes as the group which denies divine action in the world, affirms human freedom, and believes that the soul perishes along with the body. He also notes that they have the support of the rich, and accept only the written laws in contrast to the Pharisaic traditions. This last statement cannot be an entirely objective judgement, as certain of those laws (*eg* the prohibition of "work" on the Sabbath, with no definition at all of what is included in "work") demand some traditional interpretation for their fulfilment.

The only issue on which all our sources agree is that the Sadducees rejected beliefs in afterlife, resurrection and a post-mortem judgement. This would cohere with the oft-given impression of a very conservative attitude among them. However, even here one must be cautious. Josephus sees no incongruity in people switching allegiance between Pharisees and Sadducees (John Hyrcanus, *Ant* 293--99, and himself, *Vita* 2), which suggests that he did not see such beliefs as central or burning issues for either

group. P>In the Gospels, the Sadducees appear only once in Mark and Luke (Mark 12.18 // Luke 20.27 // Matt 22.23), with their question about the resurrection. Matthew however adds them into two other narratives (assuming Marcan priority), at 3.7 and 16.1--12, apparently as simply part of the Jewish religious scene.

In Acts their concerns are again primarily over the question of resurrection (4.2; 23.6--8). They are said to be the party of the high priest (5.17), and we are also informed that they were represented in the Sanhedrin (23.6), though Luke is not necessarily saying that the Sanhedrin *consisted* of Pharisees and Sadducees. Their relationships with other groups in the New Testament are summarised in this [table](#).

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