

Who were the Sadducees?

During the time of Christ and the New Testament era, the Sadducees were a religiopolitical group that held a great deal of power among the Jews in Israel. The Sadducees confronted Jesus on occasion, attempting to trip Him up (Matthew 16:1; Mark 12:18), and they later opposed the preaching of the apostles (Acts 4:1-2).

The Sadducees, sometimes historically called “Zadokites” or “Tzedukim,” are thought by some to have been founded by a man named Zadok (or Tsadok) in the second century BC. Another school of thought is that the word Sadducee is related to the Hebrew word sadaq (“to be righteous”). The Sadducees were an aristocratic class connected with everything going on in the temple in Jerusalem. They tended to be wealthy and held powerful positions, including that of chief priests and high priest, and they held the majority of the 70 seats of the ruling council called the Sanhedrin.

The Sadducees worked hard to keep the peace by agreeing with the decisions of Rome (Israel at the time was under Roman control), and they seemed to be more concerned with politics than religion. Because they were accommodating to Rome and were the wealthy upper class, they did not relate well to the common man, nor did the common man hold them in high opinion. The commoners related better to those who belonged to the party of the Pharisees. Though the Sadducees held the majority of seats in the Sanhedrin, history indicates that much of the time they had to go along with the ideas of the Pharisaic minority, because the Pharisees were more popular with the masses.

Not all priests were Sadducees, but many of them were. The Sadducees preserved the authority of the written Word of God, especially the books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). While they could be commended for this, they definitely were not perfect

in their doctrinal views. The following is a brief list of Sadducean beliefs that contradict Scripture:

1. The Sadducees were extremely self-sufficient to the point of denying God's involvement in everyday life.
2. They denied any resurrection of the dead (Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18-27; Acts 23:8). Due to this belief, the Sadducees strongly resisted the apostles' preaching that Jesus had risen from the dead.
3. They denied the afterlife, holding that the soul perished at death and therefore denying any penalty or reward after the earthly life.
4. They denied the existence of a spiritual world, i.e., angels and demons (Acts 23:8).

Because the Sadducees were basically a political party rather than a religious sect, they were unconcerned with Jesus until they became afraid He might bring unwanted Roman attention. At that point the Sadducees joined with the Pharisees and conspired to put Christ to death (John 11:48-50; Mark 14:53; 15:1). Other mentions of the Sadducees are found in Acts 4:1 and Acts 5:17, and the Sadducees are implicated in the death of James the brother of John in Acts 12:1-2. The historian Josephus also connects the Sadducees to the death of James, the half-brother of Jesus.

Since the Sadducees left no written description of themselves, all we know about what they believed or what they did is what is found in the Bible and secondhand sources. According to most historical records, including those of Josephus, the Sadducees were

rude, arrogant, power-hungry, and quick to dispute with those who disagreed with them.

The Sadducees ceased to exist as a group in AD 70, when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans.