

# SADUCEES, PHARISEES, ESSENES, "INSURRECTIONISTS"

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[Josephus' two books] are two of our prime sources for the history of this period. And Josephus gives a kind of catalogue for what the major groups are within first century Judaism.... He talks about the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes. He also mentions another group, [for whom] my label is Insurrectionists. That's not his term for it, but he attributes to this group of people the rebelliousness and weariness with Rome that ultimately led to the Great War against Rome in 66 to 70, eventuating in the destruction of the Temple. It's hard to tell exactly how close Josephus' descriptions are to what these groups actually believed and thought. The Sadducees are usually associated with aristocratic Priests, therefore they're in Jerusalem. They seem to not have thought that there was resurrection of the dead, which by this period is almost a normative belief in Judaism. And, since they were Priests, much of their religious interests focused on the smooth operation of the Temple, as is right, because that was their responsibility.

Pharisees, on the other hand, were a school of interpretation of Biblical text.... Priests are family groups in Judaism. If you have a friend named Cohen that means he's a priest. So one is born a priest. One can't choose to become a priest, unlike most other religious groupings in antiquity. But, if somebody is born a priest, he could decide to interpret the Bible according to a Pharisaic tradition, and that's what happened. These are not absolute boundaries. These are permeable identifications. Josephus, for example, this historian we have is from a Jerusalem-like, priestly, aristocratic family, but he aligns himself with the Pharisees, which is one of the reasons why he praises them so much in his books.

The Essenes are another group of people very concerned with purity. There is a lot of purity ritual associated with them. Josephus and another first century historian and writer, Philo, talk about the Essenes as being a philosophic community [with] communal property. There was a group within the Essenes who were celibate. What's interesting is that this is the community that's also represented by the Dead Sea Scroll library. And, given what we now know about them, as a result of finding that library, we can measure the distance between a respectful description by somebody who's not an Essene, and what the Essenes were actually up to. The Essenes, themselves, were very apocalyptic. They were very concerned with purity. They were so concerned about the holiness of the Temple that at least the ones in Qumran had a reputation of not going up there at all....

But how many people are we actually talking about? We have no way of testing Josephus' numbers, but if they're like any other kind of guess done either by a modern newspaper or by an ancient historian, they're not absolute. He mentions ... I'm not absolutely certain. I think his figures are like 6000 Pharisees, 4000 Essenes...maybe there were 20,000 Priests. Of those Priests, how many were aristocrats and therefore Sadducees? I don't know ... but a fraction of that. So that doesn't give us very many Jews actually accounted for. But there were millions of Jews in antiquity, which means that most

people belonged to none of these groups. Who were these people? What did they think? We don't know because we only have the evidence for the groups that have articulated ideologies. I think we have to assume that most Jews who did not associate with one group or the other did the best they could interpreting what they thought was leading a Jewish life according to how the Bible happened to be interpreted in their neighbourhood. Again, this is the vast majority of Jews, and as is the case with most populations in history, it's a silent majority because we don't have written evidence from them.

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