

## THE SADDUCEES

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### **Sadducees – The Party of Zadok**

The Sadducees were a Jewish religious party in the New Testament. They were the party of Zadok. They had notable political and religious influence during the time of Jesus. They and the Pharisees are equivalent of modern day religious groups that are sometimes referred to as “sects” or “cults”.

The Sadducees trace their religious and political influence to a popular priest in the reign of David, namely, Zadok the son of Ahitub. (2Samuel 8:16-17). Zadok, like many other priests in the Old Testament, was from the tribe of Levi. However, this tribe had at its core those who could trace their ancestry to Aaron, the older brother of Moses. At the time of David, Zadok was the leader of the Aaronites. (1Chronicles 27:17) Zadok was a close ally, counsellor and confidante of David, along with Nathan, the prophet. (1Kings 1:8, 26) He played a very crucial role during the two uprisings that David faced when his sons Absalom and Adonijah tried to usurp the throne. (2Samuel chapters 15-19; 1Kings chapters 1-4). His faithfulness and loyalty made him and all his descendants trust-worthy officials in succeeding governments and religious circles. (2Chronicles 27:1; 2Chronicles 31:10; Nehemiah 11:11)

In the prophecies of Ezekiel concerning the restoration of the political power and dominion to Israel, Zadok was named by God as the priest whose descendants will minister in the restored temple at Jerusalem. (Ezekiel 43:19; 44:15; 48:11)

The Sadducees were not descendants of Zadok, they were followers of the party or cult named after him.

### **THEIR APPEARANCES IN THE GOSPEL**

The Sadducees are not too different from the Pharisees, except that they were not legalistic. They were not strict in their interpretation of the law of Moses. They actually believed that there was no resurrection. (Matthew 22:23-33)

Their attitude to life is probably what Paul was referring to in his letter to the Corinthians: “If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” (1Corinthians 15:32)

John the Baptist characterised them as a “brood of vipers”. “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (Matthew 3:7) They lived a life of luxury at the expense of the poor, they depended on the religious ceremonies and the temple establishment for their upkeep.

Their attitude to Jesus was one of indifference, antagonism, ridicule and persecution. Like the Pharisees, despite the many miracles of Jesus, they turned on the Lord at every opportunity asking for a sign that He was the Messiah. (Matthew 16:1-4). Their social and religious life made the Lord to describe them as “a wicked and adulterous generation.” They claimed to

believe in God but they were far away from Him and deceived many people by their outward success, their political power and their religious influence. Jesus warned his disciples to beware of their teaching and corruptive influence. (Matthew 16:5-12)

### **THEIR APPEARANCES IN THE ACTS OF APOSTLES**

In alliance with the priests and the temple guards, the Sadducees opposed the growing Church in Jerusalem. (Acts 4:1-12). By this time, the Sadducees had great influence on the Sanhedrin – this was a kind of Jewish parliament and executive cabinet rolled into one. The Sanhedrin decreed that the gospel should not be preached but Peter and John answered boldly that they would remain loyal to Christ rather than obey the voice of men. (Acts 4:13-22)

The Sadducees appeared on the scene again when God worked various miracles through the apostles and the number of believers grew. (Acts 5:12-32) The apostles were beaten and forbidden to preach the gospel. (Acts 5:40-42) However, the apostles carried on in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Sadducees appeared again at the trial of Paul. Paul exploited their rejection of resurrection and turned them cleverly against the Pharisees. The trial ended as a fiasco, a mockery of justice. (Acts 23:6-8 : “ But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection-and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.”)