

**SADDUCEES:**

- Priests and Levites in ancient Israel had to be men from the tribe of Levi; Jews from the other eleven tribes could not be priests.
- The Sadducees were a priestly caste of conservative Jews who followed the written law of the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Bible.
- Sadducees were conservative in their interpretations of the law and took a rigid, uncompromising approach to the Torah. Unlike other groups, Sadducees rejected the concept of oral law and would not accept anything unless it could be traced directly back to the written word in the Torah.
- According to the Law of Moses, the members of the tribe of Levi were to work as priests or their assistants, serving all the people of God. Since the Levites were not given their own land, they were allowed to keep a portion of the sacrifices that the Israelite people offered to God.
- The Sadducees were often from a wealthy and aristocratic clan of Levite families, who held a monopoly on the high priesthood due to their allegiance to the Romans and were powerful in the Sanhedrin (Ch 2.3). Generally they were very politically aware and sought to maintain a working relationship with the ruling (occupying) political force.
- Theologically Sadducees disapproved of beliefs in angels, evil spirits and the hope of resurrection (Mt 22:23-32) that emerged in later books of the Old Testament, as these concepts were not recorded in the five books of the Torah itself. This was in contrast to the Pharisees (Ch 2.1), who adhered to the oral law and the writings and therefore did believe in resurrection from the dead.

**ROLE IN THE TEMPLE:**

- A high priest was in charge of the Temple, and was supported by chief priests, gatekeepers, temple workers and guards (Mt 21:23).
- Prominent among the Sadducees was Annas, who sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas (Jn 18:24) and later imprisoned many of the apostles (Acts 5:17).
- Priests, such as Zechariah the father of John the Baptist (Lk 1: 8-10), were concerned with the Temple customs and the proper administration of sacrificial rites.
- As well as administering the Temple, priests engaged in other forms of social work such as distributing money to the poor.
- As priests, most Sadducees sought to live in the region of Judea so as to be in close proximity to the Temple. Many lived in Jericho and travelled a day's journey to the Temple for two-week assignments (The Good Samaritan – Lk 10:25-37).
- If a priest became 'ceremonially defiled' (touching a dead person – Mt 23:27) he would have to go to Jerusalem and undergo a week of ceremonial purification before he could resume his normal duties.

**LEVITES: (NUM 1:50)**

- Levites – members of the tribe of Levi who were not priests – worked in the Temple as assistants to the priests and facilitated the daily operations of the Temple. They would prepare the animals for sacrifice, collect the offerings, guard the entrances and help with the distribution of alms to the poor ('the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him; Who are you?' – Jn 1:19).
- In the Temple a group of Levites would be formed into a choir so as to accompany the daily sacrifice. Accompanied by lyres, harps, trumpets and cymbals they would sing psalms specifically chosen for that particular day.

no temple or sacrifice, the distinction between priests and Levites was reduced still further.

It was Ezekiel, in looking forward to a restored Israel, who demanded a sharp distinction between priests and Levites again (Ezekiel 40:46; 43:19). He said that the priests had been faithful to God through the period of the monarchy (Ezekiel 44:15–16; he called them “descendants of Zadok”) in comparison with the Levites (48:11). This demand for separation may have been the reason many Levites appeared to be anxious to return to Jerusalem after the Exile (Ezra 2:36–40; 8:15–20). Once they were back, they became involved in the teaching of the law (Nehemiah 8:7–9) and in normal religious duties (Nehemiah 11:3; 12:27–31).

### **Priests and Levites**

The priests and Levites were about their work in New Testament times. They are familiar in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:31). Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, was the priest on duty in the Holy Place when he was told about the forthcoming birth of John (Luke 1:8–9). Jesus told the leper who had been healed to go and show himself to the priest (Matthew 8:4; see Leviticus 14:2). In New Testament times, the members of the high priestly families were all called high priests or chief priests and were constantly in conflict with Jesus and the early Christians.

As the Jewish people became familiar with the work of the high priest, priests, and Levites, they would have grasped the idea that lay behind it all—

*representation.* On the one hand the priests and Levites represented the people before God as they led in worship and at the altar, and on the other, they represented God before the people as they taught and explained his laws.

### **The prophets**

Alongside the priests and Levites was another group called to a representative work. The prophets, like the priests, represented people before God. Samuel prayed for the people at Mizpah (1 Samuel 7:5); Elisha prayed that his servant would see God’s protecting armies (2 Kings 6:17); Jeremiah was told that he should not pray for the people since God would not hear him because their sins were too great (Jeremiah 7:16).

The prophets’ real importance however was that they represented God and spoke for him to the people. Abraham (Genesis 20:7) and Moses were both regarded as prophets (Deuteronomy 18:15–19). In the Deuteronomy passage it is clear that a prophet is always called by God (v. 18), has God’s authority (v. 19), and what he says will be proved true (v. 22). The prophet therefore was known as God’s servant (2 Kings 17:13, 23; Ezra 9:11; Jeremiah 7:25). The prophet always stood for God’s standards and called people to him (Deuteronomy 13, esp. v. 4), and it was this that distinguished a true prophet from a false prophet (for example, 1 Kings 13:18–22; Jeremiah 28).

Prophets were not simply people who were politically or socially aware. They were people who by revelation



community and the Greeks in Antioch, they were abandoned by the Hasidim, who wished to be true to their religious faith. The Hasmoneans thus needed the support of the Hellenists, and they therefore continued to move in that direction. Hellenists and Hasidim are not found in the New Testament, but their successors are very familiar.

### The Sadducees

The Sadducees were the successors of the Hellenists. Still the wealthy, ruling class, they were identified with the high priesthood and with Greek thought. Their group name, Sadducee, may be derived from Zadok, to indicate their high-priestly connection. They found the world a good place in which to live and were interested in the here-and-now rather than believing in a resurrection, a judgment, or an after-life. They rejected ideas of resurrection in favour of the Greek idea of immortality of the soul and believed they could show that the idea of a bodily resurrection was ridiculous. They limited the canon of Scripture to the five books of Moses, which is why Jesus confined himself to those books in refuting their arguments against the resurrection (Matthew 22:23–32). The Sadducees rejected any belief in angels or spirits and followed “common-sense” morality—good and evil, they believed, resulted from personal action.

In the time of Jesus, the Sadducees were the majority party in the Sanhedrin, and the intensity of argument between them and the Pharisees over the resurrection was to be exploited by Paul when he stood before the

Sanhedrin (Acts 23:6–10). The Sadducees would have opposed Jesus because they recognized his teaching to be contrary to their own. It was after the teaching about the resurrection and the raising of Lazarus that the chief priests (Sadducees) decided that Jesus must die (John 11:45–53). They would have seen him as an agitator who could upset things for them (the ruling class) and who must be stopped at all cost (John 11:48–50).

The Herodians, Pharisees (with their scribes), Essenes, and Zealots seem to have been derived from the Hasidim. When these groups faced the fact that their country was still under domination, this time of Rome, they reacted in different ways.

### The Herodians

The Herodians supported the family of Herod as rulers. The Herods were originally an Edomite family, and they ruled the country for the Romans. The Edomites, after all, had some affinity with the Jews as descendants of Esau and the Jews believed that intermediary rule by the Herods was better than direct Roman rule. The Herodians accepted the good that Herod the Great had done for Jerusalem by providing a new Temple, although they sided with the Pharisees in objecting to paying taxes to Rome (Mark 12:13–14). They reacted against Jesus when he healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath day (Mark 3:5). Like the Sadducees, Herodian opposition to Jesus was probably because they believed he would upset the status quo and because his clear moral teaching was as big a challenge to their

life-style as had been the teaching of John the Baptist.

### The Pharisees

The Pharisees followed a direct line from the Hasidim. Their name means “those who separate themselves.” There were some six thousand of them at the time of Jesus. They were concerned, above all else, for their religious faith and believed that the Exile had been the result of their ancestors’ breaking God’s law. They wanted to be legally pure, separate from any form of defilement. They believed that the difference between being “clean” and “unclean” depended upon that law. What was “clean” was obedience to the law; what was “unclean” was disobedience to the law.

This position regarding the law created problems, however, for although there are six hundred and thirteen commandments in the Torah (the books of Moses), they are not always specific. If the Sabbath day was to be kept “holy,” then exactly what may be done and what may not? There were lengthy discussions on such subjects as whether or not it was lawful (or “unclean”) to eat an egg laid on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees developed a set of regulations designed to save people from breaking the law itself, and they tried to apply the ancient law to new situations. It was necessary that stories be told illustrating the principles of the law (the *Haggadah*), and it was necessary for decisions about the law to be transmitted to others. The people responsible for this side of the work were the scribes, and there were sever-



The Jewish law was written on scrolls of papyrus or parchment.

al different schools of interpretation. The strict school of thought was led by Shammai, who came from a wealthy aristocratic family. The lenient school of thought was led by Hill’el, who came from the middle classes and understood the people. The differences of interpretation became live issues, so that Jesus was asked to give his opinion about the disputed divorce laws (Matthew 19:3–12).

The interpretations of the law were of little importance to the common people, who refused to join the Pharisees, the result being a great deal of bitterness between the two groups. The Pharisees believed in the historic doctrines of Judaism—in the unity, holiness, and providence of God; in the resurrection, the immortal soul bringing about a revival of the body;



# 31 Who Is My Neighbour?

## Look it Up

**Love your neighbour:**

Luke 10

**The great laws:**

Deuteronomy 6, Leviticus 19; Exodus 20, also Deuteronomy 5

The teachers of the Law were intrigued and puzzled by what Jesus said. However, they were suspicious that Jesus was disrespectful of the Law. One day, a teacher of the Law came and tried to trap Jesus by asking him a question that might lure him into saying things that would prove them right.

*'Teacher,' he asked. 'What must I do to receive eternal life?'*

*Jesus answered him, 'What do the scriptures say? How do you interpret them?'*

*The man answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind"; and "Love your neighbour as you love yourself."*

*'You are right,' Jesus replied; 'do this and you will live.'*

*But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'Who is my neighbour?'*



The story of the Good Samaritan is just a story. Nevertheless, Jesus gives it a real setting between Jerusalem and Jericho. This ancient roadside inn is visited by many pilgrims to remind them of Jesus' story.

The priest and the Levite hurry past the man lying wounded in the road. Jesus' listeners would have understood one reason for their seeming heartlessness: the old laws said that touching a dead body made a person 'unclean' – unfit to take part in religious ceremonies until the purification rituals were complete. Jesus' story shows that kindness is more important.

Then Jesus told this parable:

*'There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by, on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came along, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by, on the other side. But a Samaritan who was travelling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. "Take care of him," he told the innkeeper, "and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him."*

*And Jesus concluded, 'In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbour towards the man attacked by the robbers?'*

*The teacher of the Law answered, 'The one who was kind to him.'*

*Jesus replied, 'You go, then, and do the same.'*

Luke 10:25-37



The Jewish people believed that Moses had brought the ten commandments from God, carved on tablets of stone.

## The great laws

The teacher of the Law quoted two scriptures to answer Jesus:

*'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.'*

Deuteronomy 6:5

*'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.'*

Leviticus 19:18

These two great laws were a summary of hundreds of other laws. Another famous summary in the scriptures is the ten commandments, which also contain instructions about loving God and one's neighbour.

- I am the Lord your God. Worship no god but me.
- Do not make images of anything or bow down to idols.
- Do not use my name for evil purposes.
- Keep the sabbath day holy.
- Respect your father and your mother.
- Do not murder.
- Do not commit adultery.
- Do not steal.
- Do not accuse anyone falsely.
- Do not covet what belongs to someone else.

