

The Different Jewish Sects

The Old Testament does not mention the Jewish sects we read about in the New Testament. During the 400 years of silence between the books of Malachi and Matthew, the Jews developed a number of sects in reaction to the political forces. A small remnant returned to Canaan after the Babylonian captivity; the majority of the Jews remained dispersed among the other nations.

Some Jews adopted parts of the Greek culture, they were known as Hellenist. *“Jews throughout the Hellenistic world, adopted Greeks names, subscribed to Greek philosophies, and looked to Greek institutions as the harbingers of cultural progress”* Between the Testaments , page 111 The “Hellenists” are mentioned three times in the Book of Acts. **“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.” (Acts 6.1)** As one can surmise from this passage the Jews in Canaan did not think very highly of their culturally minded brethren. Acts 9.29 we read Paul tried to teach the Hellenists about the Lord, Jesus, but they tried to kill him. According to Acts 11, men came to Antioch preaching the gospel of Christ and they reasoned with the Hellenist.

Another group of Jews were the Essenes. The Hellenists were the radical liberals among the Jews, the Essenes were the radical conservatives. They wanted to isolate themselves from the influences of the world. *“They seemed to have lived for the most part in monastic communities, such as that with headquarters at Qumran, from which the Dead Sea scrolls have come.”* (Between the Testaments, page 116) Some Essenes did not believe in marriage and others did. In Qumran over 350 rolls containing parts of the Old Testament were discovered in 1948.

A third Jewish sect, were the Sadducees. They were the elite Jews that controlled the Temple. They were not popular among the people, did not encourage more members into their sect, and possessed great political power. The Sadducees only acknowledged the first 5 books of the Old Law

as authoritative. This led to false conclusions; they denied the resurrection, the existence of angels (Mark 12.18; Luke 20.27), and were materialistic in their outlook on life.

The final group mentioned in the New Testament was the Pharisees. First appearing around 134 B.C. the name "Pharisee" means separated ones. They were strict legalist. Keep in mind; legalism is not wrong as long as it seeks to understand the letter and meaning of the law. The problem with the Pharisee's was their hypocrisy. They taught one thing and did another and did not consider the meaning of the law. **"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."** (Matthew 23.23) The Pharisee's were held in high esteem, Acts 5.34. The Apostle Paul referred to being a Pharisee as a sign of his devotion to God, Philippians 3.

One was not born a Pharisee or a Sadducee, each recruited new members. **"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves."** (Matthew 23.15) – Dennis Tucker