

**SADDUCEES** [*Anchor Bible Dictionary* volume V, pages 892–95] [Gk *Saddoukaios* Σαδδουκαίος]. One of the major groups constituting Palestinian Judaism in the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods.

### A. Sources

Contemporary references to the Sadducees are found in Josephus, the NT, and in the rabbinic corpus. Josephus first mentions the Sadducees as the second of the schools of thought (Gk *haireseis*) among the Jews of his day (*JW* 2 §119; 164–65; *Ant* 13 §171). The chronologically earliest appearance of them is in connection with events at the time of John Hyrcanus (135–104 B.C.E.; *Ant* 13 §293, 297). Their doctrine differed from Pharisaic teaching (*Ant* 13 §297–98) and was of great antiquity (*Ant* 18 §11); it primarily concerned personal immortality (which they denied: *Ant* 18 §16), determinism (which they rejected: 13 §173), and the validity of tradition (which they ignored, though inconsistently: 18 §17). Sadducees appear infrequently as a contemporary group with much the same doctrines in the NT (Matt 3:7; 16:1, 6, 11, 12; 22:23, 34; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; Acts 4:1; 15:17; 23:6–8).

Mention of the Sadducees in rabbinic literature is rather more abundant in the Mishnah (e.g., *m. Erub.* 6.1; *Mak.* 1.6; *Yad.* 3.7; 4.6, 7; *Nid.* 4.2; 5.2, 3; *Para* 3.7, 8), the Babylonian Talmud (e.g., *Erub.* 68a; *Yoma* 2b, 4a, 19b; *Hag.* 16b, 23a; *B. Bat.* 115b; *Sanh.* 33b, 52b; *Mak.* 8b; *Hor.* 4a–b; *Zebah.* 65a; *Nid.* 33b), the Palestinian Talmud (*B. Bat.* 8.1), and in the Tannaitic Midrashim (*Sipra* 81b; *Sipre Num.* 112; *Sipre Deut.* 190). In many instances the word “Sadducees” in later rabbinic texts proves to be ambiguous, the intended reference in some contexts being to “heretics” and “gentiles” (i.e., Christians) in avoidance of medieval censors.

It is clear that anyone wishing to study the Sadducees faces a major obstacle, for all of the extant information about this sect must be culled from documents written by people who were not members of the sect and who often opposed them.

### B. Name

Some of the Church Fathers (e.g., Epiphanius [*Haer.* 1.14] and Jerome [*Comm. in Matt.* 22:23]) thought that the term was derived from the adjective “righteous,” *saddîq*. However, modern scholarship connects it with the name Zadok, *šādôq*. Although a story in *Abot R. Nat.* A.5 states that the term “Sadducees” derives from Zadok, a disciple of Antigonus of Soco (who is said to have flourished early 2d century B.C.E.), current scholarly opinion

connects the term to the name of Zadok, the high priest at the time of David (1 Sam 8:17 and 15:24) and of Solomon (1 Kgs 1:34 and 1 Chr 12:29). Stern (1976: 561, 567) states that from the beginning of the Persian period until the wake of the Maccabean revolt, the priestly house of Zadok, descended from Joshua son of Yehozadak, controlled the high priesthood in Jerusalem. Thus, Mansoor (*EncJud* 14: 62) claims that the term “Sadducees” refers to “anyone who is a sympathizer with the Zadokites.” Kohler stated that “in the course of time” the term became “a party name applied to all the aristocratic circles connected with the high priests by marriage and other social relations” (*JEnc* 10: 630–33). However, as we shall see, the actual connection between the Sadducees and the priests is unclear.

### C. Beliefs and Doctrines

Josephus identifies the Sadducees as one of the major varieties of Judaism which came into existence during the Maccabean period. In *JW* 2 §162 he refers to the Sadducees’ rejection of the concept of fate and their acceptance of the idea of man’s free will. He implies that they held these ideas so that God could not be held responsible for evil. Furthermore, the Sadducees did not believe that the soul continued to exist after death or that people suffered punishments or received rewards after they died. In *Ant* 13 §293 Josephus refers to only the Sadducees’ belief in free will, and in *Ant* 18 §16–17 he refers to their claim that the soul perished along with the body at death. The most striking feature about these lists is that no single belief appears in all of them. When Josephus enumerated the Sadducees’ doctrines not one element of their system of beliefs so impressed Josephus or his source(s) that it immediately came to mind when he set down his descriptions of their concepts.

The NT considers the Sadducees’ rejection of resurrection as their primary characteristic, for the issue of resurrection was of central importance to the early Church. *Abot R. Nat.* A.5 claims that Zadok’s followers broke away from Antigonus of Soco over the issue of resurrection; therefore, the evidence suggests that the Sadducees were known for their rejection of the idea of resurrection.

Josephus consistently emphasizes the opposition between the Sadducees and the Pharisees. In *Ant* 13 §297 we first encounter the Sadducees’

rejection of the Pharisaic law “not recorded in the Laws of Moses,” and in *Ant* 18 §17 Josephus says that the Sadducees observed nothing apart from the Law. Thus, the claim that the Sadducees considered valid only those regulations and traditions written down in the Law appears just twice, and only in the latter books of the *Antiquities*. The NT does not draw a consistent picture of the opposition between the Sadducees and the Pharisees. In Acts 23:6–8 the Sadducees sit in the council along with the Pharisees. The gospel of Mark does not place the Sadducees in opposition to the Pharisees, and Matthew often places them together, as if they were two similar groups. Only in Acts do we find the two groups disagreeing; however, here the disagreement centers only on the issue of resurrection. One gains the impression from reading the Gospels that their authors did not have a clear idea of the differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. To the Christian writers, they merely represented two leadership groups within the Jewish community, and their disagreements over issues, with the exception of resurrection, were either unknown or of little importance.

In the rabbinic material we find the most extensive discussions about the differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The earliest rabbinic texts in which these discussions appear are the Mishnah and the Tosefta (Lightstone 1971: 206–17; Rivkin 1969/70: 205–49). The Mishnah, edited ca. 220 C.E. (Neusner 1981), contains several passages in which the Sadducees disagree with the Pharisees; in most of these texts, the two groups dispute over matters of purity: *Yad*. 4.6, whether or not Scripture renders the hands unclean; whether or not the bones of an ass or the high priest are clean; *Yad*. 4.7, whether or not certain types of water are unclean; *Para* 3.7, the importance of the setting of the sun in rendering one clean; *Nid*. 4.2, the state of cleanness of Sadducean women. The Sadducees and Pharisees also disagree about matters of civil law: *Yad*. 3.7, whether or not a slave’s master is responsible for the damage caused by the slave; *Mak*. 1.6, whether or not a false witness is executed only when the one against whom he testified is executed. Lastly, *‘Erub*. 6.1 discusses a matter of Sabbath law and suggests that the Sadducees held their own views concerning the establishment of the Sabbath limit. Similarly, in the Tosefta, a document edited ca. 250 C.E., the major issue between the Sadducees and the other Jews is purity; the other topics found in the Mishnah do not even appear in the Tosefta in the context of a reference to the

Sadducees. *T. Para* 3.8 reflects *m. Para* 3.7; *t. Nid*. 5.2 is the same as *m. Nid*. 4.2; *t. Nid*. 5.3 states, as does *m. Nid*. 4.2, that the Sadducean women do not follow their own laws concerning menstrual purity. The Tosefta informs us that all Sadducean women followed the rulings of sages on this matter. One woman did not consult a sage, and she died soon after her failure to check with a sage. *T. Hag*. 3.35 presents the Sadducees and the Pharisees disagreeing about the purity of the menorah in the temple.

We find three references to the differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees in three early midrashic collections. *Sipre Num*. 112, a midrash on the book of Numbers which was edited some time in the latter half of the 3d century C.E., interprets Num 15:31, “for he despised the word of YHWH,” as a reference to the Sadducees. This is our earliest reference in the rabbinic texts to the view that the Sadducees did not follow the Word of God as interpreted by the rabbis/Pharisees. *Sipre Deut*. 190, part of a midrash on the book of Deuteronomy which appears to have been edited sometime in the 3d or 4th century C.E., contains a story about a Sadducean high priest who did not burn the incense on the Day of Atonement in accordance with the rules of the sages; compare this passage with *Sipra* 81a.

The Babylonian Talmud contains a number of references to the Sadducees; however, the censorship which this document has undergone makes some of these references suspect, for the word “Sadducees” often replaced reference to “gentiles” or “heretics” (Le Moyne 1972: 97–99).

*B. ‘Erub*. 68b is the Amoraic discussion of *m. ‘Erub*. 6.1. In *b. Yoma* 19b we find a version of the *Sipre* and *Sipra* story about the Sadducean high priest who offered incense on the Day of Atonement. In this version we learn that the Sadducees were afraid of the Pharisees and that the former generally followed the rulings of the latter. We are further told that the high priest who offered the incense in a manner different from the way in which the Pharisees ruled soon died. *B. Nid*. 33b, which is the Amoraic discussion of *m. Nid*. 4.2, informs us that if the attitude of a Sadducean woman is unknown, she is considered to have followed the rules concerning her menstrual period to which all other Israelite women adhere, that is, the Pharisaic/rabbinic injunctions. These are clearly examples of rabbinic propaganda, attempts to make everyone into a Pharisee. The Gemara contains a version of *t. Nid*. 5.3; however, the version in the former pits the Sadducees against the Pharisees rather than against

the “sages” as we find in the Tosefta. The Sadducean view concerning the importance of the sun’s setting in matters of cleanness is discussed in *b. Yoma* 2b, *b. Hag.* 23a, and *b. Zebah* 21a. In *b. Yoma* 4a the Sadducees are excluded from the “students of the sages” and the “students of Moses.” This is probably a reference to the fact that the Sadducees, who did not follow the Pharisaic/rabbinic traditions, were seen as rejecting the complete revelation given to and transmitted by Moses. *B. Hag.* 16b and *b. Mak.* 8b refer to the matter of the execution of false witnesses. In *b. B. Bat.* 115b we learn that the Sadducees and the Pharisees differed concerning a daughter’s right of inheritance in certain circumstances. In *b. Sand.* 52b, R. Joseph, a third generation Babylonian Amora, refers to a Sadducean court; however, Joseph lived after the Tannaitic period and in a land which probably had not seen a Sadducee. From *b. Menah.* 65a we learn that the Sadducees believed that individuals, and not the community, should pay for the daily offering. *B. Hor.* 4a and *b. Sanh.* 33b discuss a court which incorrectly ruled according to Sadducean law, a suspect reference, given the date of the collection in which they appear.

When we review the rabbinic evidence, we discover that the basic issue separating the Sadducees and Pharisees/rabbis was purity. This is not surprising, given the importance of the idea of purity in the Judaism of this period (Smith 1960/61: 7; Neusner 1973). Curiously, virtually no one, with the exception of Lightstone, points to the purity laws as a major area of disagreement between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Rather, scholars such as Bowker (1973: 18), Sandmel (1969: 39), Guttmann (1970: 127), Mansoor (*EncJud* 14: 621), Meyer (*TDNT* 7: 63), and Le Moyne (1972: 378–79) argue that the essential element of Sadducean belief was their rejection of the oral law and their literalist interpretations of the Bible. While there are a few references in Josephus and the later rabbinic texts to support this claim, this disagreement must be put into its proper perspective. Both Josephus and the rabbis/Pharisees had something to gain by claiming that they had the correct interpretation of revelation, that those who disagreed with them or rejected their ideas were incorrect, and that everyone followed the Pharisaic/rabbinic teachings anyway. Furthermore, if Judaism around the turn of the era was based on interpreting God’s revelation to Moses, it stands to reason that each group would have its own set of interpretations which it favored, while rejecting those of the other groups. Lastly, it is unlikely that

any group in the 1st century would have claimed that they were not in fact offering the “literal,” or correct, interpretation of the Mosaic revelation. Each group would claim that it alone was faithful to the Law and that it taught only things contained in the Law. To claim that the Sadducees rejected the Pharisees’ “oral law” is merely to state that Pharisees were not Sadducees (Blenkinsopp 1981: 1).

#### D. Social Status

Josephus offers us limited information concerning the Sadducees’ social status. In the context of his description of the split between John Hyrcanus and the Pharisees (*Ant* 13 §297), Josephus states that the Sadducees did not have the support of the masses; they enjoyed only the “confidence of the wealthy.” In *Ant* 18 §17 only a few men of the “highest standing” know the Sadducean doctrines; however, we also discover that the Sadducees follow Pharisaic teachings. This “sociological information” appears only in these two contexts, and it is clearly connected with Josephus’ attempt to prove that one cannot rule Palestine without the Pharisees (Smith 1956: 75–76). In *Abot R. Nat.* A.5 we read that the Boethusians and/or the Sadducees used silver and gold vessels, “not because they were ostentatious, but because it was the Pharisaic tradition to afflict themselves in this world, hoping to receive a reward in the world-to-come.” The *b.* version of *Abot* contains a shorter version of this story and omits the reference to the gold and silver vessels. Thus, the evidence for the patrician nature of the Sadducees is based on Josephus’ polemical passages and a text in one version of *Abot* which points to the Sadducees’ acting as rich people for theological reasons. Ignoring the polemical side of Josephus’ description and the curious nature of *Abot*’s description, Mansoor (*EncJud* 14: 621), Jeremias (1977: 230), Le Moyne (1972: 349), and Baron (1952: 35) argue that the Sadducees were the Palestinian aristocracy.

In *Ant* 18 §16–17 Josephus states that the Sadducees considered it a virtue to dispute with their teachers. In *Ant* 20 §163 he tells us the Sadducees were “boorish,” and in *Ant* 20 §199 he describes them as “more heartless” than other Jews.

In *Ant* 20 §199 Josephus tells us that *one* high priest, Ananus, was a Sadducee. While the NT sometimes pictures the Sadducees’ working in concert with the high priest (Acts 4:1–4; 15:17–18), it does not equate the priests and the Sadducees. Similarly, the rabbinic texts speak of Sadducean priests, especially in the discussions of how one is to burn the incense on the Day of Atonement, but the

rabbis also believed that there were Pharisees who were priests and identified many of the early rabbis, such as Ishmael and Tarfon, as priests. Therefore, none of our texts allow us to claim that all priests were Sadducees or that all Sadducees were connected to the priesthood. For this reason, we must look with suspicion when Goldstein (*I Maccabees* AB, 57), Sundberg (*IDB* 4: 160–61), Baumbach (1973: 208), and Jeremias (1977: 230) see a close relationship between the Sadducees and the priesthood.

The problem of the hellenization of Jewish groups during this period is difficult. The complexity of this situation is reflected in the scholarly discussion of the hellenization of the Sadducees. Mansoor (*EncJud* 14: 622), Baron (1952: 236), and Farmer (1956: 189) suggest that the Sadducees were highly hellenized, while Sundberg (*IDB* 4: 162) claims that the Pharisees were as hellenized as the Sadducees. Meyer (*TDNT* 7: 44), Zeitlin (1961: 125–26), and Sundberg (*IDB* 4: 162) have argued that the Sadducees were the most nationalistic of the Jewish population. Baron (1952: 36) seems to believe that the Sadducees were at the same time the most hellenized and the most nationalistic of the Palestinian Jews, without seeing any contradiction between the two positions. The problem is that our sources simply do not give us any information with which we could decide on the hellenization of the Sadducees or their political and nationalistic views.

## E. History

Just as we cannot draw a clear picture of the political, theological, or nationalistic views of the Sadducees, we are also unable to clearly delineate the history of the group. Mansoor (*EncJud* 14: 620) argues that the sect originated ca. 200 B.C.E., while Sundberg (*IDB* 4: 160–61; cf. Baumbach 1973: 240) places its origin “not long before the reorganization of Judaism under Maccabean leadership.” Le Moyne (1972: 331) merely states that in the 1st century B.C.E. “the Sadducees constituted a complete group inserted into Jewish life.” Jeremias (1977: 243), Bowker (1973: 10), Davies (1967: 19), Meyer (*TDNT* 7: 31), and Sandmel (1969: 58) tie the end of the Sadducees in with the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. This view rests on the assumed close relationship between the Sadducees and the priesthood; however, we have seen that that relationship is far from firmly grounded in our sources. Sundberg (*IDB* 4: 161–62) argues that the end of the Sadducees did not come about simply

with the destruction of the temple, for the Jews anticipated the rebuilding of the temple; “probably,” he writes, “the Sadducees, concentrated about Jerusalem and being implicated in the war, suffered heavily with the fall of the city.” Eppstein’s suggestion (1966: 213–23) that the end of the Sadducees is related to the Pharisaic doctrines concerning the waters of the Red Heifer is based on a naive reading of the rabbinic texts. Virtually all we know about the history of the Sadducees is that Josephus first mentions them in the Maccabean period at the same time that he first discusses the Pharisees and the Essenes. Furthermore, with the Pharisaic/rabbinic rise to power after 70 C.E., the Sadducees play a small role in the Jewish documents which have come down to us from that period.

## Bibliography

- Baron, S. 1952. *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*. Vol. 2, *Christian Era: The First Five Centuries*. New York.
- Baumbach, G. 1973. Der sadduzaische Konservatismus. Pp. 201–3 in *Literature und Religion des Frujudentums*, eds. J. Maier and J. Schreiner. Würzburg.
- Blenkinsopp, J. 1981. Interpretation and the Tendency to Sectarianism: An Aspect of Second Temple History. Vol. 2, pp. 1–26 in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, ed. E. P. Sanders. Philadelphia.
- Bowker, J. 1973. *Jesus and the Pharisees*. Cambridge.
- Davies, W. D. 1967. *Introduction to Pharisaism*. Philadelphia.
- Eppstein, V. 1966. When and How the Sadducees Were Excommunicated. *JBL* 85: 213–23.
- Farmer, W. R. 1956. *Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus*. New York.
- Guttmann, A. 1970. *Rabbinic Judaism in the Making*. Vol. 1. Detroit.
- Jeremias, J. 1977. *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*. Philadelphia.
- Le Moyne, S. 1972. *Les Sadduceens*. Paris.
- Lightstone, J. 1971. Sadducees versus Pharisees: The Tannaitic Sources. Vol. 3, pp. 206–17 in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, ed. J. Neusner. Leiden.
- Neusner, J. 1973. *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*. Leiden.
- . 1981. *Judaism: the Evidence of the Mishnah*. Chicago.
- Rivkin, E. 1969/70. Defining the Pharisees: The Tannaitic Sources. *HUCA* 40–41: 205–49.
- Sandmel, S. 1969. *The First Christian Century in Judaism and Christianity*. New York.
- Smith, M. 1956. Palestinian Judaism in the First Century. Pp. 67–87 in *Israel: Its Role in Civilization*, ed. M. Davis. New York.
- . 1960/61. The Dead Sea Sect in Relation to Ancient Judaism. *NTS* 7: 347–60.
- Stern, M. 1976. Aspects of Jewish Society: The Priesthood and Other Classes. Vol. 2, pp. 561–630 in *The Jewish People in the First Century*, eds. S. Safrai and M. Stern. CRINT 1/2. Assen and Philadelphia.
- Zeitlin, S. 1961. The Pharisees: A Historical Study. *JQR* n.s. 52: 97–128.

GARY G. PORTON