

Demographic Introduction to the Life of Christ

Bibliographic note: apart from the Bible, these notes were formed from Donald Guthrie's New Testament Introduction, F.F. Bruce's New Testament History, and Eduard Lohse's The New Testament Environment.

1A The Sadducees.

- 1B This religious group came into being about 300 years before Christ. They are characterized by their aristocracy, their cultural surrender to the Greeks and others, and their opposition to everything Pharasaic.
- 2B Their name comes from the Aramaic Sadduqim, which meant 'righteousness'. However, those who were in opposition to them called them saddiqim, which meant 'destruction'.
- 3B They came from the ranks of the priests and high priests of Israel, during the time of the Greek occupation. Their desire was to give in to the Hellenizing influences of the Greeks, and thus retain their favor.
- 4B The Sadducees had a lot to lose to the occupation forces of the Greeks, because they were mostly prosperous, aristocratic people. In order to maintain their lifestyles and possessions, they placated the Greeks, giving in to their cultural and even religious influences.
- 5B During the Maccabean revolt, they stayed in the background. They were in fact very unpopular. When Jonathan Maccabee was appointed high priest by popular demand, it looked like the Sadducees would be gone forever. At the time, almost all of the people in the land were willing to sacrifice anything for their freedom. The strong oppression of the Syrians drove them to this sacrificial attitude.
- 6B After about 40 years of on and off civil war, the Jews became tired of the bloodshed, and popular opinion tended toward peace. In this case, peace meant compromise, and compromise was the game of the Sadducees. John Hyrcanus, of the Maccabees, was really very close to the Sadducee way of thinking.
- 7B However, the compromising policy of Hyrcanus became unpopular in a few years, and so the Pharisees came into power.
- 8B Due to the double tyranny of the Pharisees and king Herod, the Sadducees had made a great comeback not long before the birth of Christ. Let's face it: the Pharisees were no fun at all.
- 9B The religious beliefs of the Sadducees can be summed up in a single thought: they were always opposed to what the Pharisees believed.
- 10B They believed that only the written Law is binding, whereas the Pharisees believed that the body of tradition and written interpretation were just as important as the Law itself.
- 11B The Sadducees punished breaches of the Law severely, but the Pharisees often interpreted their way around the written Law, and thus got out of the proscribed punishment.
- 12B They had a strong belief in human free will, while the Pharisees believed in predestination to the point of being fatalistic.
- 13B They denied the resurrection, and any kind of continued existence of the soul after physical death. This led to their inordinate value of private property and possessions. The Pharisees, however, believed that the soul continued after death, and that there would be a severe judgement in eternity.
- 14B The Sadducees did not believe in angelic beings, or demons, and any reference to such in

Scripture was converted to a manifestation of God Himself. The Pharisees did believe in angels.

15B The Sadducees always reserved the right of private opinion about Scripture and the Law, while the Pharisees rejected that right, tyrannically imposing their opinions on all.

16B The Sadducees were a mixture of both the conservative and the liberal from today's American society. The pressures of history and their religious beliefs worked together to make them what they were. Although they had some good elements to their philosophy, they were just as spiritually and morally bankrupt as the Pharisees. They are a good example of wrong reaction for the right reason. It was a good thing to be opposed to the religious tyranny of the Pharisees, but the motives of the Sadducees were wrong, and thus their beliefs went in the wrong direction. Although religion was important to them, relationship with God was not, and so they destroyed themselves. They left the pages of history forever after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

2A The Essenes.

1B The Essenes were a widespread movement in the ancient world. They appeared on the scene not long before the Maccabean revolt, about 175 B.C.

2B Their decision was to withdraw from the evils of the world around them, and they were the prototype of the monastic movement of the dark and middle ages.

3B Because of the destruction of the Jewish nation, and their deportation to points all over the ancient world, this movement was widespread.

4B These are the people who produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, and who lived in the caves of Qumran.

5B In a sense, these were the ostriches of the time, sticking their heads in the sand, and hoping that others would leave them alone.

6B They were widely admired, especially by the intelligentsia of the day. Both Josephus and Philo are full of praise for them (but notice that neither wanted to be one).

7B Their group was strictly organized, and enforced strict obedience to their leadership.

8B They had a system of double initiation. First, they had to undergo a probation period of one year, and after this time they would undergo an initiation ceremony of ritual purification.

9B After two more years of probation they gained their full membership in the community. At this time an oath was taken in which the new member would swear himself to complete truthfulness to other members of the community, and complete secrecy on the doctrines of the community to those outside (this is one reason why Christ forbade swearing).

10B Only adults were admitted into the Essene order, but they did have a childrens' recruiting and introduction program.

11B Modern Masonry is remarkably similar to the order of Essenes in all of these ways.

12B However, there are some major differences. The Essene community was dedicated to total communism.

1C They had a common purse.

2C They had common clothes.

3C They had common food at a common table.

- 4C Trading of any kind was prohibited.
 - 1D They had a strictly regulated daily labor plan.
 - 2D They were total pacifists. They were not even allowed to make weapons or anything that might hurt someone (Ralph Nader would love these folks).
 - 3D They observed the sabbath with strict adherence.
 - 4D They read and explained Scripture in their daily worship schedule.
 - 5D They were extremely ascetic in many ways.
- 13B They abstained from sex and marriage; their ranks were only perpetuated through outside recruiting. It is a testimony to their popularity that they have continued in one form or another until even today.
- 14B They were prohibited from profanity, make-up (or anything that might enhance their physical appearance), bathed only in cold water, wore only white, and were greatly modest about all bodily functions.
 - 1C They substituted their own ritual system for God's, and they thought their own to be superior. They did not sacrifice any animals.
 - 2C The Essene movement was a reaction to the incursions of the evil outside world. They were not much different from the other utopian movements of history. They depended very much on strong and virtuous leadership, and when their leadership failed them, they disappeared from the pages of history.
 - 3C Unlike their Pharisee and Sadducee counterparts, they seemed to have a more vital, daily relationship with God. However, distortions were inevitable due to their rejection of God's ritual system, and some of them even went so far as to engage in sun worship. They were most like the Pharisees, and could even be considered a radical Pharisee sect.
 - 4C They were the pattern which the early church (mistakenly) patterned themselves.
 - 5C Since they lived such sequestered lives, Christ would have little to say about them, because He never ran across them.
 - 6C John the Baptist was considered to be like the Essenes because of his ascetic life in the desert, but he really wasn't.

3A The Zealots.

- 1B The Zealots were almost purely a political party. They called for the violent overthrow of the Roman rule.
- 2B They carried on the tradition of the Maccabees - they were militant, and full of zeal and purpose.
- 3B They were the cause of the Jewish wars and the destruction of Jerusalem.
- 4B They fought with complete fanaticism to the very end. They were extremely patriotic, but not many were Godly.
- 5B They took their patriotism to great excess, and vowed to strike down all the enemies of Israel.
- 6B Although they were politically correct (not in the modern sense), they were morally wrong, and in this they were most similar to the southern U.S. in the early 1800's.

4A Transition.

- 1B The nation of Israel at the time of the birth of Christ was an unhappy nation.
- 2B For hundreds of years, they had battled for their freedom and lost. They had been under the crushing rule of foreign nations.
- 3B For hundreds of years, a great destiny had been before them, taunting them.
- 4B Because of this, they chafed under the yoke of Roman rule through Herod.
- 5B Without a national relationship with God, the nation could not be free.
- 6B Without a national relationship with God, the nation could not enjoy the blessings of the unconditional covenants.
- 7B Without a national relationship with God, they would reject the greatest of all world leaders of all time: Jesus Christ. One and all, they would reject Him.
- 8B Therefore, we will now turn to our first major principle in our study of the life of Christ, which is the doctrine of civil disobedience.
- 9B Nobody liked the Pharisees except the Pharisees, though most pretended to like them.
- 10B Everyone hated the Zealots except the Zealots.
- 11B Most people tolerated the Sadducees.
- 12B Everyone like the Essenes, though few people wanted to be one.