

Religious Parties Booklet



Answer these questions in complete sentences.

1.39 Why were the Old Testament Scriptures translated into Greek?

1.40 How did the Septuagint prepare the world for the coming of Jesus and the spread of the Gospel?

In studying the background information of this era, we have looked at the various empires and the religious literature of the inter-Testamental period. Now we come to examine the religious parties of this time.

RELIGIOUS PARTIES

The religion of the Roman Empire had conveniently mixed with the religions of other countries. It included gods from Italy, Greece, Asia, Egypt, and other areas. Rome allowed other religions, which did not clash directly with its authority, to function. Temples and statues to the "unknown god" were built in order not to offend any. The Romans were **polytheistic**, meaning they worshiped many gods. The Jews were **monotheistic**, worshiping only one God.

The main religious groups within Judaism were the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. Two lesser groups were the Essenes and Zealots. The Essenes lived a monastic type of life in colonies. Traditionally, they have been credited with writing many books of the Pseudepigrapha. The Zealots were extreme patriots of the Jewish nation who were more influential later in Jewish history.

Read Deuteronomy 16:18 and 19, Matthew 23:1-12, 23-26, and Mark 12:38-40.

The Scribes. The priests were originally the guardians and teachers of the law. The scribes were not priests, but they made studying and interpreting the Law their life's work. As a study



| SCRIBE, PHARISEE, and SADDUCEE

of the Law became more important to the people, so the scribes grew in influence. During the Grecian period, the wealthier priests' Hellenistic lifestyle was opposed by the scribes. The conservative scribes then became the defenders of the Law. In Jesus' day, the scribes had become a distinct class in Jewish society. They did much of the legal work and were honored with such titles as "lawyers" (Matthew 22:35), "doctors of the law" (Luke 5:17), and "Rabbi" (Matthew 23:7). A rabbi was a master teacher, and the followers of Jesus used this title to show honor to Him (John 20:16).

The scribes had added many laws and traditions to God's Law even before Jesus came. Their pride was such that they demanded honor above that given to parents. The Law forbade the scribes to receive payment for judgments they gave from the Law. However,

they twisted it so they might receive donations and gifts for their work. Jesus told the people to obey the Law taught by the scribes, but not to follow their example. His teaching was very different from that of the scribes and other religious leaders.

The legalistic teaching of the scribes produced several wrong ideas of God's Law. First, it became only rules of "do's" and "don'ts." This interpretation caused the spiritual life of Judaism to operate on a low level. Jesus taught that

loving God with all the heart, and one's neighbor likewise, was the sum total of what the Law really meant (Matthew 22:36-40). Second, the scribes believed that the Law was broken only when an act was committed. Jesus taught that God was interested in the motives of the heart. Third, outward obedience had produced pride in Jewish hearts, rather than humility. The Lord resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Jesus taught much about meekness and humility.



Write the correct letter and answer in each blank.

1.41 The Romans were _____, worshiping many gods.

1.42 The Jews were _____, because they worshiped one God.

1.43 The three main Jewish religious groups were

a. _____, b. _____,
and c. _____.

1.44 Two less important groups were the a. _____
and b. _____.

1.45 The scribes were given such titles as a. _____
b. _____, and c. _____.

- a. disciples
- b. doctors of the law
- c. Essenes
- d. lawyer
- e. modernistic
- f. monotheistic
- g. Pharisees
- h. polytheistic
- i. Rabbi
- j. Sadducees
- k. scribes
- l. unknown gods
- m. Zealots

Answer these questions in complete sentences.

1.46 How did the scribes change God's Law? _____

1.47 How did Jesus' teaching differ from that of the scribes with regard to obeying the Law?

Having taken a brief look at the scribes, we shall now have an opportunity to learn about the Pharisees.

The Pharisees. The name comes from a Hebrew word meaning *separatists*. Pharisees tried to keep themselves separate from the common people and thus became a very closely organized group. They referred to each other as “neighbors.” They originated in the time of the Maccabees as Assidaeans but later were called Pharisees.

They were very exact in their interpretation of the Law. They believed that traditions passed down by spoken word had equal authority with the written Law. This belief was one of the major differences between them and the Sadducees, whom we shall study next. The Law of Moses and the traditions of the elders were both included in the *Torah*. Wherever a Jewish community existed, a synagogue was usually there where worship, reading of the *Torah*, and

Read Luke 10:25–37 and
John 7:45–49.



teaching were conducted. The Pharisees would read from the *Torah* and interpret the reading to the people. The scribes, many of whom were members of the Pharisee party, had an important place in the synagogue.

The Pharisees were very devoted and pious in their religion. Their dedication to the Jewish Law gave them great influence over the people. When the scribes and Pharisees did not accept Jesus, the people were confused. They could not understand why their own religious leaders did not accept Jesus if He were the Messiah. The Pharisees were very strict in their interpretations of the Scriptures. They did not tolerate anyone who would disagree with them. Jesus’ teachings about the Law and the kingdom of God did not agree with theirs. They were more concerned with their own position and reputation than the good of the common people.



Complete these statements.

- 1.48 The word *Pharisee* basically means a _____.
- 1.49 The Pharisees called each other _____.
- 1.50 The Pharisees had their roots in the period of the _____.
- 1.51 Pharisees believed that _____ had equal authority with the written law.
- 1.52 The Jews met in a _____ for worship, reading of the
b. _____, and c. _____.
- 1.53 The Law written by Moses and the a. _____ of the
b. _____ were included in the *Torah*.

Answer this question in a complete sentence.

- 1.54 Why did the Jewish people regard the Pharisees highly? _____

The Pharisees did have some good qualities. They believed in the coming of a Messiah and His kingdom. They also accepted the doctrine of life after death and of a final bodily resurrection. They believed in giving alms to help the poor. They even believed in angels and evil spirits. The Sadducees did not accept any of these teachings.

The Pharisees watched the ministry of Jesus very closely. They may at first have wanted Him to join with them. Jesus taught a different view of God, the kingdom, and the Law. He called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites. This word meant *actor* in Jesus' day, referring to a person who pretends to be something he really is not.

The Pharisees hated Jesus because He was more popular with the people than they were.

Jesus and the Pharisees taught many of the same things. However, His emphasis was different from theirs. Jesus taught that God was interested in the hearts of men. The Pharisees taught only the strict observance of the Law. They emphasized what was written in a book. Jesus told them that God wants His Law written on men's hearts. The position and power of the Pharisees made them blind to the truths Jesus taught. They would rather be wrong and popular with the crowds than to accept the truth and be rejected as Jesus was. Jesus denounced the Pharisees more than any other class of people.



Complete this activity.

1.55 List four doctrines the Pharisees accepted and taught.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

Complete these statements.

1.56 Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees _____.

1.57 The name Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees (1.56) means an a. _____, who b. _____ to be something he is not.

1.58 Jesus taught that God is interested in the _____ of men.

1.59 The Pharisees taught the strict keeping of the _____.

1.60 The Pharisees blinded the people to the teachings of Jesus by their a. _____ and b. _____.

1.61 The Pharisees were more interested in a. _____ than in

b. _____.

Having looked at the scribes and Pharisees and their position in the religious world, we turn now to the last religious party, the Sadducees.

The Sadducees. The Sadducees were a political sect composed of the wealthy upper class of priestly Jews. They were not as numerous as their rivals, the Pharisees. Their wealthy and priestly descent gave them much influence. Their name derives either from a verb meaning *to be righteous* or from the name of an Old Testament high priest, Zadok, from the time of King David. The name *Sadducee* came into use over a period of time.

The high priests who returned to Israel after the captivity in Babylon became important rulers. They were powerful governors in both civil and religious matters. During the Persian Empire they were considered kings over the Jews. The high priest and his officers dealt directly with the heathen governments over them. This position made them more political and less religious. The Grecian Empire gave

Read 2 Samuel 15:24–29;
Matthew 22:23–46;
Matthew 26:57–68;
John 19:13–15; and John 11:47–54.



more power to the high priest's office. It also controlled them more and used them as leaders in the spread of Hellenism, or Greek culture, among the Jews.

The Sadducees would not fight in the struggle the Maccabean family waged against the heathen rulers. They were opposed by a conservative group that became known later as the Pharisees. The Sadducees were not very interested in matters of the religious law at first, but they had to become concerned in order to defend their party. When the Roman government was called into the argument, it sided with the Pharisees. The wealth and influence of the Sadducees, however, soon won back for them their power and high priestly office.



Write the correct answer on each blank. Use the words from the word list.

- 1.62 The Sadducees' a. _____
and b. _____ descent gave them much influence.
- 1.63 After the Babylonian captivity, the high priests were powerful governors of both a. _____ and
b. _____ matters.
- 1.64 The priests were considered _____
over the Jews during the Persian Empire.
- 1.65 As they dealt directly with heathen rulers, the priests became more
a. _____ and less b. _____.
- 1.66 The Sadducees would not fight in the war waged by the
_____ family against the heathen rulers.
- 1.67 The Grecian Empire used the Sadducees to spread Greek culture or
_____ among the Jews.

Word List

Asmonean
civil
Grecian
Hebrew
Hellenism
kings
legalistic
Maccabean
particular
Pharisaism
political
powerful
priestly
religious
righteousness
theological
wealth

The Sadducees would not accept any additions or traditions that the Pharisees included with the Law. They believed the Law of Moses, the first five books of the Old Testament, to be the only Scriptures. They gave great importance to the Law and very little to the rest of Scripture. Their zeal was concerning the Law and its ceremonial instructions. These instructions were more in accord with their social lifestyle. They placed very little value on any hope of a coming Messiah and His kingdom.

The Sadducees denied the **immortality** of the soul. They claimed that the soul died with the body; therefore, they denied the resurrection of the dead. They also denied the existence of angels, spirits, or demons. The emphasis of the Sadducees on material things caused them to misunderstand the Scriptures. Both the Sadducees and the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus by asking him tricky questions about the Law. Jesus trapped them instead. If they had answered the questions Jesus asked them, they would have had to believe in Him.

The Sadducees were officials of religion, but they were not truly religious. They became

purely political in interest. They did not really oppose Jesus until He was proclaimed the Messiah of the Jews. This could have put the Jewish nation in danger of the wrath of the Roman Empire and affected the wealth and position of the Sadducees. They were willing to resort to violence against Jesus to prevent this from happening. We see their attitude reflected in the opposition they organized against Him.

Jesus did not denounce the Sadducees as much as he did the Pharisees. The Sadducees did not play the hypocrite. They were more concerned with the upper class, and Jesus moved mainly among the common people. The distinctions between the teachings of Jesus and those of the Sadducees were very obvious. The Sadducees gathered generally in Jerusalem, while Jesus ministered mainly in Galilee and in the outlying districts of the Land of Palestine.

The scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees made up a ruling body of the Jews, called the Sanhedrin. The high priest was the leader of this religious council, which was the supreme religious court of the Jewish nation. Before this council Jesus, Stephen, and Paul were condemned.



Complete these statements.

- 1.68 The Sadducees believed only in the a. _____ of b. _____.
- 1.69 Sadducees were mainly interested in _____ things.
- 1.70 This religious party, the Sadducees, became purely _____ in interest.
- 1.71 The high priest was the leader of the _____.

Complete these activities.

- 1.72 Describe the differences that kept Jesus and the Sadducees apart. _____

- 1.73 What was the Sanhedrin? _____

