

# Difference Between Pharisees and Sadducees

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Throughout the Gospels we see Jesus in battles with two different but similar players – Sadducees and Pharisees. While there are many similarities to these two groups of men, there are differences as well. Both were a part of the ruling class of Israel and both were among the best educated. They were important in both the political and cultural experiences of the Temple and Jewish world.

## Sadducees:

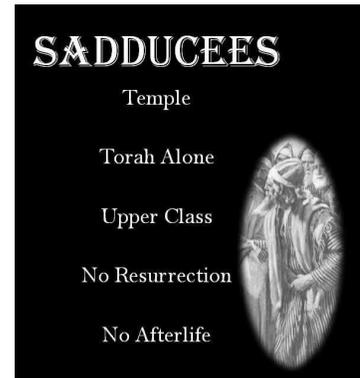
One major difference between the two groups is that the Sadducees were from and a part of the high class or aristocratic families. Therefore they were often wealthy and were able to purchase powerful positions for themselves or their families, including that of chief priest and/or high priest. (All priests are of the tribe of Levi but not all Levites were priests of the Temple.) The Sadducees were the more powerful of the two groups given that they held the majority of the seats of the Sanhedrin. In the time of Christ the Sadducees worked hard to keep the peace in the land which almost always meant agreeing with Rome. Because of these two factors – coming from the wealthy class and in agreement with Rome, they did not relate well to the common people. Sadducees were more concerned with politics than they were with spiritual matters. In matters of religion, the Sadducees were the more conservative group. Other doctrinal issues they held were:

1. They did not believe in the validity of the interpretations of the Torah. They took the words at face value
2. Humanity was meant to be self-sufficient. Sadducees denied God's investment in our everyday life.
3. They denied that there was any sort of afterlife. When a person died so did their soul. The only punishment or reward was during the person's lifetime.
4. They did not believe in a spiritual world meaning they didn't believe in angels or demons.

Sadducees were concerned with Jesus because he brought about unwanted tension with Rome. They ceased to exist as a group in 70 AD. It was at this time that the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed and since their main ties were to the common politics (as well as the priesthood) when Israel held no power and had no Temple the Sadducees had no reason to exist.

## Pharisees

In contrast the Pharisees were mostly "blue collar" or middle class business men and as such related more to the common man and therefore held in higher regard among most of Judaism. Men of this sect were obsessively obedient to the Law and the concern for ritual purity.



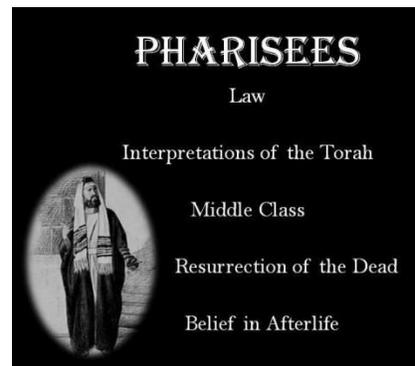
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Unfortunately they were the minority in the Sanhedrin and held few positions as priests, but because of the love of the people they seemed to control the decision making of the Temple.

Religiously, they were more in line with the teachings of Jesus. While the Sadducees believed that only the first five books of the Bible, (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Numbers), believed to have been written by Moses, were inspired by God; the Pharisees believed that there were other written documents inspired to be understood as God's Word. At the time Jesus walked the earth, what we now hold as the canon of the Old Testament was held also by the Pharisees as inspired by God. Other things the Pharisees believed:

1. That God was in control of all things and worked in concert with the individual's decisions
2. That there was an afterlife within which the appropriate punishment or reward was given to the individual
3. They believed in the resurrection of the dead. That when the Messiah came all the dead would rise to new life.
4. Since they believed in an afterlife they also believed in the existence of angels and demons.



Unfortunately the one thing that the two groups agreed on was on the “problem” of Jesus. Yes, these two groups were basically rivals but were equally attacked by Jesus' teachings, and so they worked together to put Jesus to death.

While the Sadducees no longer existed after the destruction of the Temple, the Pharisees did continue on and became the basis of modern Judaism. They too sided with Rome and were able to make peace with Rome after the Jerusalem rebellion which ended in the destruction of the city and Temple in 70 AD. Many Christians who would argue that their spirit continue today in any religion where the individual is more concerned with the letter of the law to the exclusion of the spirit of the law. Anyone like that could be described as a Pharisee.