

# Sadducees

The Hebrew word by which the Sadducees were called is **tsaddiqim**, “the righteous ones”. If we only look at the points of differences between them and the Pharisees, we get a distorted picture of the Sadducees; but each party had its strong characteristics, that of the Pharisees being a rigid realism, while the Sadducees were aristocratic. According to Josephus, “they gain only the well-to-do; they have not the people on their side.” The high priestly families, for example, were almost all Sadducees.

## Beliefs of The Sadducees

The Sadducees accepted only the written law and prophets as binding. They rejected the entire traditional interpretations and the further developments of the Scribes. “The Sadducees say only what is written is to be thought of as legal...what has come down from tradition of the fathers need not be observed.” (Josephus, Antiquities, XIII, 10,6).

In legal matters the Sadducees were very rigid in judging offenders, while the Pharisees were much milder. “They saw in the tradition of the elders an excess of legal strictness which they refused to have imposed upon them, while the advanced religious views were, on the one hand, superfluous to their worldly-mindedness, and on the other, inadmissible by their higher culture and enlightenment” (Scheurer, Jewish People, Div. II, Vol. I, p. 41). A more thorough discussion of legal matters among the Sadducees can be found in Unger’s Bible Dictionary, pp. 952,953.

In ritual, the only important differences of Sadducees from Pharisees was in respect to laws of

cleanness. They derided the Pharisees for the oddities and inconsistencies which they had brought into their laws of purity. They did not reject the idea of Levitical uncleanness, however, and they demanded a higher degree of cleanness for the priest who made the red heifer offering than did the Pharisees.

## Doctrines of the Sadducees

The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection of the body or in retribution or reward in a future life. They did not feel bound by any doctrine which did not proceed from Moses, and there was no assertion by Moses in the Pentateuch of any resurrection from the dead. The Sadducees would have given much more weight to Moses’ writings than to any of the prophets or historians, even though they regarded those writings canonical.

The Sadducees denied that there were angels or spirits, independent spiritual beings besides God. Even the soul, they said, was only refined matter and would perish with the body.

It is not surprising that the Sadducees laid great stress on human free will. With a strong insistence on personal liberty there came a decrease of the religious motive. They insisted that man was at his own disposal, and they rejected the idea that a divine cooperation takes place in human actions. The Pharisees accentuated the divine to the verge of fatalism, and insisted on absolute preordination of every event in its smallest detail. The Sadducees opposed notions like these.