

Major Religious and Political Parties of Judaism (Early 1st Century AD – in Palestine)

| PARTY | ORIGIN | INSTITUTION | CANON | SOCIAL CLASS | BELIEFS / PRACTICES |
|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| Sadducees | Hellenizers (embraced Greek culture) | Temple (monopolized the economy) | First 5 Books (Torah, Law, Pentateuch) | Upper-class (wealthy, powerful, aristocrats) | Irreligious Did not believe in the afterlife |
| Pharisees (Derived from the Hebrew word, PERUSHIM -meaning “pure ones”) | Hasidim | Synagogue (means gathering together- there were thousands, most visible in practice, was always open, was religious institution, school, city hall, etc.) | All OT & oral interpretation (“Tradition of the Elders” often called the “Hedge around the Law” about AD 220 “Mishnah” came out of the oral interpretation) | Lower-class (day laborers) | Scrupulous in belief and practice (The Law was a means to an end, concerned with staying ritually pure before God) |
| Zealots | Hasidim | None Observed | None Observed | Pharisees who got fed up | The end justifies the means (“Freedom Fighters” Sicarri – were paid assassins who would use small knives to stab people in the heart and then they would walk away) |
| Essenes | Hasidim | New Temple (was inside them) | OT and other books (spent year’s copying text) | lower-class / middle-class (withdrew to the Dead Sea) | More rigid than Pharisees |

Note: Together all of these parties only made up about 5% of the population. The other 95% of the population were known as the “People of the Land” (AM HA ARETZ - Hebrew), they were largely unlearned and ignorant. When pushed too far they would join the Zealots. They were equated with sinners and it was considered their lot in life to be outcast. It was with these people that Jesus mostly associated.