

BETWEEN THE LINES

A Deeper Look...

#916- BIBLE POLITICS: Political Parties in Jesus' Day

The Pharisees...

- The name "Pharisee" may have come from *perushim*, "the separated ones"
- There were about 6,000 Pharisees during the gospel period
- They taught the authority of the oral law as equal to the written law
- They sought to apply the written law to the actual world
- Apparently had a well organized school/training system for law
(Example, "Isaac, of the school of Mordecai the Just")
- Gamaliel was a great Pharisaic scholar/rabbi and his prize pupil was St. Paul
- Hillel, a gentle woodcutter from Babylon, was a great Pharisee of that time
- They "lived above" pollution by avoiding contact with common folk
(They called them, "am ha-aretz", "people of the land")
- Herod sought to control the temple/Sadducee class by appointing "*the segan*"
(A deputy who forced pharisaic rules on temple activities)
- They held that even the king was answerable to the Sanhedrin
(The kings ignored that)
- They supported the smashing of the Temple's golden Roman eagle
(It violated the 2nd commandment... and got many killed)
- Alexander Jannaeus crucified 800 Pharisee leaders during Sukkot
(After they saw their children and wives throats slashed)
- They lived in communities with those they called "*the haverim*"
- They opposed public athletic events so much loved by Romans and Greeks

Conclusion: Pharisees were sincere, determined, and probably the force that most preserved and developed Judaism, as it exists to this day... and some even looked for Messiah in Jesus!

Search the Word... Matthew 12, Matthew 22, Matthew 23, Mark 7, Luke 18, Acts 23

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#### The Sadducees...

- They represented the old aristocracy of Jerusalem
- They were generally considered to be "the priestly class"  
(And they were much resented by common people)
- They sought to get along in the world that existed... it's called "pragmatism"
- They considered themselves the heirs of Zadok, the great priest of Solomon's day
- They lived lives of wealth and privilege  
(Therefore, why rock the political boat?)
- As strict constructionists they held the Torah to be the only basis for judgment
- From the Torah they developed an additional text called *The Book of Decrees*
- Sadducees dominated the Sanhedrin for most of its history
- Afterlife is not explicit in the Torah, hence no afterlife!
- The daily prayer called the "Birkat ha-Minim" was originally aimed at them  
(It means, "prayer against the heretics")

**Conclusion:** We really know little in specific about Sadducees, but we do know that some of them went to John seeking out baptism!

**Search the Word...**Matthew 16, Mark 12, Acts 4, Acts 5, Matthew 3

**The Zealots...**

- The Zealots were founded by Judah the Galilean during the Augustus taxation
- They took inspiration from the violent story of Phineas in Numbers 25
- "No king but God" was the rallying slogan of the Zealots
- Josephus called them *the Sicarii* when he spoke of their violence  
(The term means "the dagger men")
- When Josephus spoke of their admirable nationalism he called them Zealots
- They were attacked Romans and collaborators in crowded streets in daylight
- They considered themselves the true heirs of the Maccabees
- Zealots refused to pay Roman taxes
- Eleazar ben Yair led a group of doomed Zealots in defending Masada in 70-73 a.d.

**Conclusion:** The Zealots were super-nationalists, fiery, passionate, and probably not predisposed to a Messiah who talked of a kingdom based on servitude and peace... but some were!

**Search the Word...**Luke 6, Acts 1, Luke 22, Matthew 5

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The Essenes...

- Josephus lived three years with an Essene hermit and left a detailed description for us
- Essenes fractured from the Pharisees because they found them too liberal
(They called them, "givers of easy interpretations")
- They helped develop the "apocalyptic" style of writing
- Many opted to leave society for monastic communities like Qumran
- Qumran was only one of many Essene retreats
- The Essenes planned to prepare in the desert and then assault the urban areas
- Pliny called them, "a solitary race... strange above all others in the entire world"
- They were approximately 4,000 Essenes in Jesus' time
- The "apprenticeship" period to join the sect was three very harsh, demanding years
(After that you were initiated for a harsh, demanding existence for life)
- They lived a life of harsh discipline, often celibate, and very restrictive
(That they might have souls purified, bodies hardened... as soldiers)
- They held that the "sons of light" were destined to victory over the "sons of darkness"
- They looked for a prophet, a kingly messiah of David's line, and a priestly leader
- Each day began with prayer and no other word could precede it
- Essenes had two unique practices... multiple ritual washings and communal meals
(The silent, "common bread" increased yearning for Messianic banquets to come)
- No Essene could even relieve himself on the Sabbath
(Punishment for a rule infraction was seven years exclusion from membership!)
- Many Jewish scholars see Jesus as part Essene, part Pharisee

Conclusion: The Essenes really believed they were preparing a highway for God... and some of them recognized Him when He walked into their presence!

Search the Word...Isaiah 35, Isaiah 40, Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3

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