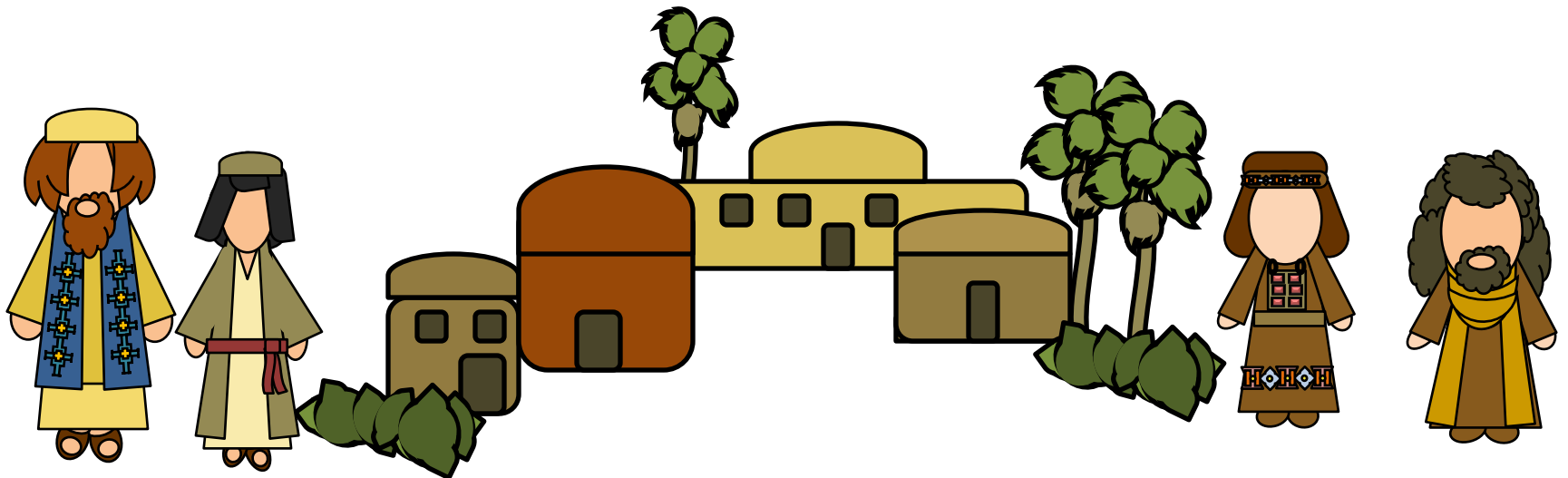


# Major Jewish Groups in the New Testament (Victor L Ludlow)



# Political-Religious Sect

# Samaritans

- ❖ Originated from a mixture of people living in Samaria and others who migrated into the area following the 721 B.C. conquest of Samaria by Assyria.
- ❖ They stressed that they were direct descendants of the Joseph tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.
- ❖ They occupied a territory in central Palestine, where their own high priest supervised sacrifices offered on Mount Gerizim.
- ❖ They built a temple on Mount Gerizim because they were not allowed to go to the Jerusalem temple.
- ❖ The Jews refused to consider the Samaritans as Israelites, mostly political and religious reasons.

## Political-Religious Sect    Samaritans

- ❖ They accepted the Pentateuch (Torah) as the only inspired scripture.
- ❖ The primary cause for hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans was that Solomon's kingdom was split in two. Centuries later animosity continued.
- ❖ They were persecuted along with the Jews during the Persian and Greek eras, but favorable among the Romans as they were gaining control of Palestine.
- ❖ Herod, the King of the Jews, ruled from a Samaritan capital and had a Samaritan as one of his wives.

## Political-Religious Sect    Samaritans

- ❖ After the Romans expelled the Jews from Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the Samaritans remained in Palestine, where they maintained their communities through the following Christian and Moslem eras.
- ❖ Today, a few hundred of them still reside in Israel.

## Political-Religious Sect

## The Zealots

- ❖ They were a group of Jewish nationalists who strongly opposed Roman rule.
- ❖ The movement stemmed from the action of Judah (Judas) the Galilean, who believed theocracy should be the law of the land and Jews should not pay tribute to Rome nor acknowledge the emperor as their master.
- ❖ Judah was killed in a revolt and his followers took to the deserts, where they maintained a guerrilla resistance against the Romans.
- ❖ Simon, one of Christ's apostles, was a Zealot indicating that Zealot principles were not inconsistent with the church.

## Political-Religious Sect

## The Zealots

- ❖ Christ was associated with Zealot activities at his Roman trial when his fate was linked with that of Barabbas, who had led a recent insurrection against the Romans.
- ❖ Christ was crucified between two lestai (thieves). Since lestai (a place for thieves) was the official Greek designation for Zealots, the Romans probably viewed Jesus as a Zealot leader.
- ❖ Zealot activity increased following Christ's death and seized the temple in 66 A.D. The Romans forcibly crushed this revolt and destroyed Jerusalem, and the temple in 70 S.D.
- ❖ At Masada, a desert plateau near the Dead Sea, they defended their garrison for over a year.

## Social-Vocational Sects

## Publicans

- ❖ Originally Publicans were men who served in public works or fanned public lands for the Roman Government.
- ❖ Later they became known as professional tax farmers, who made their profits from the excess taxes they collected.
- ❖ The right to collect taxes was sold at public auctions to private corporations of Publicans who gave the highest bid.
- ❖ Since the publicans were native Jews of Palestine, they were detested, ostracized, and often excommunicated by most Jewish groups.
- ❖ Matthew was a Publican and received the gospel very readily, and Jesus associated frequently with the Publican.

## Social-Vocational Sects

## Scribes

- ❖ Scribes performed secretarial services for many who were unable to read and write.
- ❖ Jewish Scribes were well versed in the laws of Moses, making them the spiritual and temporal legal counselors of the period.
- ❖ Most Scribes were Pharisees, so Jesus frequently referred to them in connection with the Pharisees.
- ❖ Some others were affiliated with the Sadducees and other religious groups.



# Jewish Religious Sects

## Sadducees

- ❖ The Sadducees were an aristocratic, priestly class of Jews and influential in the temple and the Sanhedrin.
- ❖ Their name derived from the high priest Zadok, since the sons of Zadok were the most worthy to minister to the Lord in the temple.
- ❖ They originated when the wealthier elements of the population united during the Hellenistic (Greek culture around 200 B.C.) period.
- ❖ They held to older doctrines and always opposed the Pharisees, both politically and religiously.
- ❖ Although both groups believed in the Pentateuch (Torah), the Pharisees accepted the oral law while the Sadducees refused to accept anything not written in the Torah.

## Jewish Religious Sects

## Sadducees

- ❖ Strict Sadducees questioned the existence of the spirit and the concept of punishments and rewards in a life after death, and denying the doctrine of the physical resurrection
- ❖ They represented the worldly minded aristocrats, and interested in maintaining their own privileged position.
- ❖ Both John the Baptist and Jesus strongly denounced the Sadducees, who were also unpopular with the common people.
- ❖ Their strength was in their control of the temple, and when it was destroyed in 70 A.D. they ceased to exist as a viable political or religious force among the Jews.

# Jewish Religious Sects

## Pharisees

- ❖ The Pharisees were the largest of the Jewish sects.
- ❖ They observed Jewish ritual and studied the Torah and the oral law.
- ❖ They tried to adapt old codes to the new urban conditions, fulfilling religious interests of many of the common people.
- ❖ They conceived of God as an all-wise, all-knowing, all-just, and all-merciful spiritual being.
- ❖ They believed man had his free agency, and would receive retribution for his actions, either in this life or the life to come.
- ❖ They believed in life after death and in the resurrection of the dead.

# Jewish Religious Sects

## Pharisees

- ❖ The Torah was the center of their teaching, and its inspired laws and commandments were to be interpreted by the rabbis in each generation to harmonize with more advanced ideas.
- ❖ The Pharisees became scholars of the law, making the synagogue as a place of study, worship, and prayer.
- ❖ As rabbis interpreted the commandments and new systems of laws it evolved into a conflict of the original commandments.
- ❖ Some Pharisees sought to “bend” the laws to their own philosophies and ways of life.
- ❖ Jesus publicly criticized the Pharisees, but did not condemn their beliefs. He condemned their hypocritical manner of living that violated the ideals they taught.

# Jewish Religious Sects

# Pharisees

- ❖ The Apostle Paul was a Pharisee and was taught by one of the sect's most eminent scholars, Gamaliel of Jerusalem.
- ❖ Many doctrines were similar to Christian one, however, the two groups separated when Paul and the Christian missionaries used Jewish communities and synagogues to teach the gospel.
- ❖ Some Christians refused to sympathize with Jews who didn't convert to Christianity, while many Jews couldn't appreciate
- ❖ After the temple was destroyed and other sects ceased to exist, the Pharisees continued to function.
- ❖ They promoted Judaism and the preservation of its teachings and scriptures until Pharisaism and Judaism became coextensive.

# Jewish Religious Sects      The Qumran Community and the Essenes

- ❖ The Dead Sea scrolls portray the communal life of a Jewish religious sect in Qumran similar to the Essenes, a religious communalistic brotherhood.
- ❖ The Essenes, with their own beliefs probably stood somewhere between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, doctrinally.
- ❖ They claimed to be the true priests of God and the descendants of Zadok.
- ❖ They called themselves the “holy” or “pure” ones.
- ❖ They believed in the immortality of the soul, but rejected the idea of bodily resurrection.

# Jewish Religious Sects      The Qumran Community and the Essenes

- ❖ They regarded religious observances in the synagogues and temple as corrupt.
- ❖ They sought God in the wilderness of Judea and organized communities and brotherhoods (many of them monastic).
- ❖ They studied zealously the scriptures, and sought to practice justice toward men.
- ❖ Initiation into the community involved a baptism, and a ritual bath took place daily in connection with a meal where special blessings were given over bread and wine by a priest.
- ❖ John the Baptist probably knew of this sect and of the Essenes since he lived, preached, and baptized only a few miles from Qumran.

## Jewish Religious Sects

## Nazarenes

- ❖ According to the Gospel of John, some thought nothing good could come from Nazareth.
- ❖ The term “Nazarene,” then, as a contemptuous one in early Christianity.
- ❖ The root meaning the word Nazarene helps explain why it was degrading. The Hebrew spelling of Nazarene has the same root letters as the Hebrew word nezer, which mean twig, sprout, shoot sprig, or branch.
- ❖ Matthew changed it to a title of honor when he referred to the Messianic prophecy, telling of a branch (nezer) that would grow out of the roots of Jesses.



# Jewish Religious Sects      Nazarenes

- ❖ Early Christians were apparently called Nazarenes, since Paul was accused of being a leader of this sect.
- ❖ Later Nazarenes were absorbed within Judaism and Christianity by the end of the fifth century.
- ❖ The term Nozri (Nazarene) remains as the Hebrew word for Christian.