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POLITICAL & SOCIAL GROUPS

AT THE TIME OF JESUS

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The Roman Empire

- * The time of Jesus was politically unstable. The Jewish people were used to being conquered by other people- the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks.
- * From out of this chaos, the Roman Empire emerged. The Romans were effective administrators, but they considered anyone not Roman to be a barbarian.
- * They ruled their world with absolute power.
- * The Imperial Empire of Rome was hungry for power, but also for peace. The Romans were anxious to spread their sense of progress throughout the known world
- * They were so successful, in fact, that one third of the world lived and died under the rule of the Caesars - the emperors of Rome.

The Roman Empire

* 1. The Romans

- Well-disciplined, strong army
- Created roads, maintained public order
- Ruled Israel in Jesus' time





* 2. Roman Rule in Israel

The Jewish people resented Roman rule. They believed they were capable of self-government. The Jews hated that fact that the Roman procurators (senior administrators) could appoint and depose (remove from office) the Jewish High Priest.

The People cried out for a Messiah—the leader who would free them from oppression (cruel or unjust treatment).

The Jewish people wanted their Messiah to be a political conqueror like King David. Someone who would defeat the Romans. They were not expecting a peace-loving Jesus.

Religious and Political Groups

* The SIX religious and political groups of Jesus' time that you will study are:

- The Scribes
- The Sadducees (saj-ucees)
- The Sanhedrin (san-hee-drin)
- The Pharisees
- The Essenes (es-seens)
- The Zealots (zell-ot)

Political Groups

Within Jewish society there were many different groups who wanted different things.

1. The Sadducees

- The priestly class - most of the priests in the Temple were Sadducees
- Aristocrats (rich). They were wealthy and powerful.
- Centred in Jerusalem
- Worked with Romans to stay in power; therefore, not liked by many other Jews
- Accepted only the first five books of the Bible (Pentateuch - Torah) and did not follow oral tradition. This put them in conflict with the Pharisees.

2. The Pharisees

- Believed in strict observance of the Law. They thought they could earn heaven by keeping religious custom/Law.
- Mainly middle class
- Accepted the writings of the Prophets as well as the Torah (Law). They memorised these rules.
- Too much reliance on Oral tradition.
- Experts at the Law—our closest equivalent would be modern day lawyers.



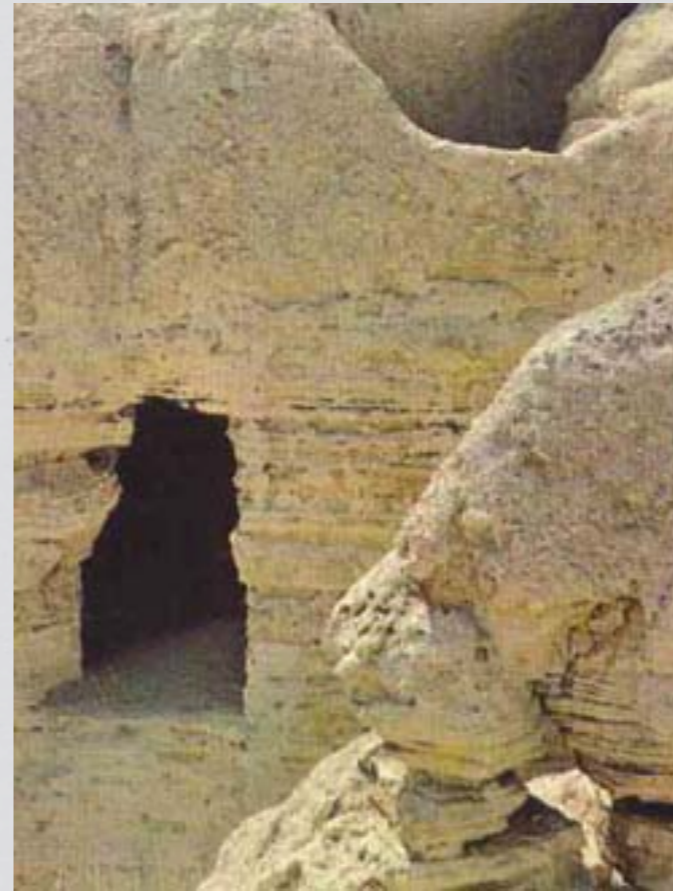
3. The Sanhedrin

- The Supreme court in Ancient Israel
- It was a council that consisted of priests, elders and scribes.
- The Sanhedrin issued rules that controlled day to day Jewish life but was not allowed to impose the death penalty.



4. The Essenes

- Believed God was coming, but only through a catastrophic event.
- Lived strict, pure lives away from civilization
- Had their writings in seaside caves – the Dead Sea Scrolls
- Lived austere lives – avoiding luxuries, sharing communal meals, acts of ritualistic purification, e.g: a vow of silence.



What group of people in today's society would be considered modern day Zealots?

5. The Zealots

- Contrast to Essenes.
- They advocated violence against Rome.
- Not interested in Jesus' teachings of peace and love for one's enemies



6. The Scribes

- The Scribes were considered an authoritative group on the Torah (Jewish law).
- They were the keepers and interpreters of the Jewish religious tradition.

