

“At the beginning of the Christian era, Judaism was divided into many different groups.” Evaluate this statement with references and examples to the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and the Zealots.

The factional division of the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots frames the dynamics of Jesus’ public ministry, defining the first-century Jewish world into which he enters. His message engages the excesses of these groups: he affirms some elements, rejects others, and transcends all to produce a Christological synthesis. He is arguably closest to the Essenes, particularly in their concern for repentance, asceticism, and interior purity, though he rejects their isolationism. He challenges the Pharisees and Sadducees over legalism and ritual authority, while opposing the Zealots’ materialistic and militant aspirations.

These groups emerged during an anomalous period of Jewish history, in the short-lived independence following the Maccabean revolt and prior to Roman domination. Judaism at this time was shaped by resistance to Hellenisation, temporary political freedom, renewed concern for the Law, disputes over Temple authority, ritual purity, martyrdom, and divergent responses to foreign power. That Judaism was divided into multiple groups accurately reflects the religious and political landscape at the outset of the Christian era, providing the backdrop for Jesus’ ministry.

The Pharisees arose in the context of the Maccabean revolt, emerging during the period in which the Maccabees established an independent Jewish polity and pursued a vigorous foreign policy, consolidating both political and religious authority while resisting Hellenisation and asserting Jewish self-rule.¹ They were celebrated for their pivotal role in resisting Hellenisation and asserting Jewish independence—a significant victory for the Jewish people during the Maccabean revolt, in which the Pharisees played a substantial part.² They were associated with strong adherence to the Law, known as students of the Law, and focused intensely on the externals of the Law, particularly in their

¹ The Maccabean period lasted from 164 BCE to the Roman entry into Jerusalem in 63 BCE, during which the Maccabees gradually increased their power and prestige. They began as rebels against the Seleucid empire, and by the 140s and 130s BCE the Seleucids had little choice but to accept the independence of the Maccabean state. Shaye J. D. Cohen describes the rise of the Maccabees as ‘phenomenal’, progressing from ‘insignificant country priests’ to ‘high priests and kings’, as ‘the rulers of an independent state’, pursuing an ‘aggressive foreign policy’ and ‘seeking alliance with Rome against the Seleucids and carving out for themselves a kingdom larger than that of David and Solomon’. See Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1991), p. 15.

² Martha Himmelfarb declares 2 Maccabees ‘the first text to present Judaism and Hellenism as opposing categories’. See Martha Himmelfarb, ‘Judaism and Hellenism in 2 Maccabees’, *Poetics Today*, 19.1 (Spring, 1998), pp. 19–40 (p. 19) <https://doi.org/10.2307/1773110>.

cultivation of cultic and ritual piety.³ Their aim was to ensure that ordinary Jews maintained a stricter adherence to the Law and to the moral and spiritual demands of daily Jewish life. In doing so, they accepted not only the Torah but also the wider Hebrew Scriptures and the oral traditions that had emerged and continued to develop.⁴ These oral traditions helped to transmit and popularise themes not explicitly set out in the written Torah, including beliefs in resurrection, angels, spirits, and additional aspects of Temple purity and the Law. Synagogues and schools across Israel and the diaspora became focal points for Jewish worship and piety after the Temple's destruction.⁵ They served as centres for debate and instruction, providing a social space in which the traditions of Israel could be embodied independently of the Temple, facilitating discussion of issues such as Sabbath observance and ritual handwashing.⁶

Following the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the Pharisees were ultimately the survivors. They laid the foundations for Rabbinic Judaism, preserving the oral traditions and integrating disputations within a framework that allowed the continuity of Israelite practices even in the absence of the

³ Burton L. Mack describes the Pharisees as 'a class or type of individual concerned mainly about Jewish piety, especially focused for them in codes of cultic purity applicable to the normal round of daily life'. He asserts that their practices correspond to a wider trajectory of popular devotion extending from the early Hasidic movements through Pharisaism and into Rabbinic Judaism. See Burton L. Mack, 'Wisdom Makes a Difference: Alternatives to "Messianic" Configurations', in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, ed. by Jacob Neusner, William S. Green, and Ernest Frerichs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 15–48 (p. 36).

⁴ Jacob Neusner notes that 'the three sources of Pharisaism—Josephus, the Gospels, and the Talmudic traditions about pre-70 'rabbis', all of them shaped after 70 A.D.—cannot be moulded into a single continuous narrative'. See Jacob Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* (New York, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 2nd ed., p. xx.

⁵ Cohen observes that 'the first temple, at least after the Deuteronomic reform, was the sole institution in which the Israelites could worship God' and '[t]he second temple too claimed exclusivity, but faced severe competition'. He explains how '[s]ects arose in the second century B.C.E. and disappeared only after the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E.' and how most of them 'seem to have argued that the priests were corrupt and that the temple was polluted, or, at least, unworthy of the exclusiveness and importance it claimed'. He maintains that '[e]ach sect presented itself as the true temple and its adherents as the true priests, because only the sect knew how to serve God properly'. He records how '[s]ynagogues and schools were built throughout the land of Israel and the diaspora' and 'became the focal points of Jewish worship and piety' after the destruction of the temple. See Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, p. 24.

⁶ Howard Clark Kee states that the Pharisees began to develop 'informal, voluntary meetings for the study of the scriptures', wherein they would begin to 'transfer the cultus from the Temple to the table-fellowship of the gathered community', noting that 'with them begins in the late first century B.C.E. the lay movement that will survive the catastrophes of C.E. 70, and will develop into the rabbinic Judaism known from the Mishnah and Talmud as it emerges in the second to the sixth centuries' (p. 193). He further explains that by 65–67 CE, 'the Pharisees are seeking to develop their own structures of purity and piety, over against and withdrawn from the political structure of their time' (p. 195). See Howard Clark Kee, 'Christology in Mark's Gospel', in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, pp. 187–208 (pp. 193, 195).

Temple, forming what would later become the Talmud—the “oral Torah”.⁷ While they were not at the heart of Temple worship—as the Sadducees were—the Pharisees maintained continuity through their oral traditions and emerging structures of teaching and debate, transitioning into the new religious framework that would guide post-Temple Judaism.⁸

At the commencement of Jesus’ ministry, he affirmed many Pharisaic beliefs. He affirmed beliefs concerning the afterlife, the transcendence of God, the survivability of the soul after death, and the pursuit of moral perfection outside of Temple worship. Their appeal to oral traditions provided the basis for Jesus both correcting and affirming them. Jesus regarded the Old Testament as fundamentally incomplete and understood himself as fulfilling the Old Covenant; yet he criticised how oral traditions on ritual purity imposed unnecessary burdens. In the Gospels, the absurdities of legalism become apparent, particularly in controversies over healing on the Sabbath and ritual observance.

Jesus therefore called the Pharisees to a deeper and more interior pursuit of purity, virtue, and the Law itself. He criticised the hypocrisy inherent in man-made rules that prioritised external observance over interior conversion, famously remarking: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach” (Matthew 23:2–3). Likewise, he warns that “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20). Their familiarity with God’s Law made them both closest in principle and most vulnerable to Jesus’ critique.

This tension continues into early Christianity through St Paul, who had been a Pharisee under Gamaliel and was deeply formed by the Pharisaic pursuit of purity and the letter of the Law. Following his conversion, Paul emphasises the insufficiency of the Law to bring about salvation, and many of his epistles reflect a struggle with his Pharisaic past (Phil. 3:4–9; Gal. 1:13–14; Acts 22:3) and a repudiation of its legalistic excesses (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:28; Gal. 5:4–6).

The Sadducees were linked to the priesthood and the aristocracy, especially the political element of Jewish life.⁹ Their aristocratic leadership was closely

⁷ Mack remarks that ‘this group has had no problem with the synagogue’ and that, in fact, ‘this group has discovered in the synagogue a social formation that could embody the traditions of Israel apart from the temple, and that in spite of what might happen to Jerusalem’. He interprets this development as crucial to the preservation and continuation of Jewish religious practice after the destruction of the Temple. Mack, ‘Wisdom Makes a Difference: Alternatives to “Messianic” Configurations’, p. 37.

⁸ Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, p. 24.

⁹ E. P. Sanders notes that the Sadducees were ‘aristocrats, including aristocratic priests, who followed the biblical law but not the relatively new Pharisaic ‘traditions’ and who denied the resurrection’. Politically, Sanders asserts that ‘most of them saw co-operation with Rome as Israel’s best policy’. Similarly, Kee details that ‘those like the Sadducees, for whom the unbroken continuity of Temple cultus is the essence of Jewishness, will be willing to put up with foreign domination—indeed, to cooperate with it—so long as there is no hindrance to the ongoing worship of God in his dwelling-place on Mt. Zion’. See E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992), p. 13; and Kee, ‘Christology in Mark’s Gospel’, p. 193.

associated with the Temple, and their tradition was connected with the older priestly world of David and Solomon, Zadok the Priest, Nathan the Prophet, and the building of Solomon's Temple.¹⁰ The Temple was therefore a source not only of religious worship, but also of economic growth, attraction, wealth, and status. Their primary connection to the Temple was not necessarily religious piety; it was also bound up with worldly glory, political authority, and the pursuit of wealth and status.

Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees held only to the written Torah and rejected traditions after the Torah.¹¹ Their theology was therefore minimalist: they did not believe in angels, demons, or the soul surviving after death.¹² They were not very pious in the Pharisaic sense.¹³ They performed Temple ritual correctly out of respect for Temple worship, but they were also very worldly and very wealthy.¹⁴

This explains why Jesus' teaching threatened them. When he overturned the tables in the Temple, he confronted the money-changing system benefiting the priestly class, including figures such as Caiaphas—the high priest involved in putting Jesus to death. The Sadducees rejected resurrection, so Jesus' teaching on life after death opposed their theology. In the Gospels, they mock his belief in resurrection, asking whose wife a woman would be in the resurrection if she had married multiple husbands (Matt. 22:23–28). Jesus replies that there is no marriage in heaven (Matt. 22:29–30), reaffirming resurrection against Sadducean disbelief (Matt. 22:23–33; cf. 5:20; 23:2–3). They would also have been disturbed when Jesus spoke of "something greater than the temple" (Matt. 12:6), since he challenged the economic benefit the Temple gave to their status. His admonition against the rich and his critique of Jewish political power would likewise have been threatening.

Christianity preserves certain elements associated with the Sadducees, particularly hierarchy and liturgical worship. The title "supreme pontiff" derives

¹⁰ Sanders suggests that it is possible that the Sadducees 'intended to claim the authority of the Zadokite priesthood', and notes the possibility that the name is derived from the proper name Zadok, 'partly because of pronunciation'. He points out that 'some priests who could trace their descent from Zadok agreed with the popular consensus that named the Hasmonean Simon 'high priest for ever', and that 'the remaining Zadokites lent their name and prestige to the Hasmonean settlement, and in return were allowed to retain their possessions and some aspects of their former position'. He acknowledges that these priests 'merged indistinguishably into the Sadducean party', whose authority was consequently bound up with the Temple and older priestly tradition. See Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief*, p. 25.

¹¹ Sanders defines the Sadducees' doctrine by 'two principal and, some think, overlapping beliefs'. The first of these is that 'they accepted only the written law'; the second is that 'they denied the resurrection'. See *Ibid.*, p. 332.

¹² Flavius Josephus records that the Sadducees 'do away with Fate altogether, and remove God beyond, not merely the commission, but the very sight, of evil'. He declares: 'As for the persistence of the soul after death, penalties in the underworld, and rewards, they will have none of them'. See Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War: Volume 2: Books 1–3*, trans. by H. St. J. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library 203 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 2.165, p. 387.

¹³ Sanders observes: 'Various pious groups regarded the aristocratic priests, some of whom were Sadducees, as not sufficiently strict in keeping the law'. See Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief*, p. 336.

¹⁴ Sanders explains that, 'despite criticisms, the aristocrats went about their business'—that '[t]hey held actual power: the temple, wealth and armed guards'. Furthermore, 'they did not agree that they were impious or unworthy'. See *Ibid.*

from the priesthood, and Christ himself is designated High Priest. Yet Christianity transcends the Sadducean world—emphasising the Spirit, resurrection, the next life, and interior virtue. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the Sadducees ultimately lost their purpose, since the institution on which their identity depended had been destroyed.

The Essenes were associated with the community near Qumran, from which the Dead Sea Scrolls originated.¹⁵ These scrolls preserved much of the Hebrew Bible, while also including a number of books, such as *Enoch*, that were not incorporated into the main canon. The Essenes therefore adopted a broader approach to scriptural canonicity. They were a community committed to asceticism, bearing similarities to monastic communities, and lived on the outskirts of the city.¹⁶ Both Philo and Flavius Josephus report that the group numbered about 4,000.¹⁷ They were known for extreme ritual purity and focused on strictly adhering to Jewish ritual law pertaining to purity itself.¹⁸

The Essenes were celibate—rejecting marriage not because they regarded it as evil, but because they wanted to be apart from it.¹⁹ They considered themselves “sons of light”,²⁰ focusing on interior perfection and spiritual perfection. They were firm in their pursuit of asceticism, detachment,

¹⁵ Josephus states that the ‘world-shaking discovery at Qumran’ revealed ‘the rules and doctrines of a mysterious sect, which seems to have been no other than the Essenes, that remarkable community which though never mentioned in the New Testament is so fully described in this book’. See Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War*, trans. by G. A. Williamson (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 7.

¹⁶ Philo accounts that these men ‘live in villages, avoiding all cities on account of the habitual lawlessness of those who inhabit them’, avoiding ‘associations with wicked men’ as ‘this would stamp an incurable evil on their souls’ (XII.76). He further documents that they abstain from warlike activities: ‘no one . . . attending to any employment whatever connected with war, or even to any of those occupations even in peace which are easily perverted to wicked purposes; for they are utterly ignorant of all traffic, and of all commercial dealings, and of all navigation, but they repudiate and keep aloof from everything which can possibly afford any inducement to covetousness’ (XII.78). See Philo, *Every Good Man is Free*, in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. by C. D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), XII.76, 78, p. 689.

¹⁷ See *Ibid.*, XII.75, p. 689; and Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities, Volume VIII: Books 18–19*, trans. by Louis H. Feldman, Loeb Classical Library 433 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 19.

¹⁸ Philo highlights that the Essenes’ sacred texts present ‘an infinite number of instances of the disposition devoted to the love of God, and of a continued and uninterrupted purity throughout the whole of life’. He notes their ‘strict adherence to the principle of looking on the Deity as the cause of everything which is good and of nothing which is evil’, and highlights their practices as proof of ‘a love of virtue, such as abstinence from all covetousness of money, from ambition, from indulgence in pleasures, temperance, endurance, and also moderation, simplicity, good temper, the absence of pride, obedience to the laws, steadiness, and everything of that kind’. See Philo, *Every Good Man is Free*, XII.84, p. 690.

¹⁹ Josephus comments that the Essenes, ‘[s]corning wedlock . . . select other men's children while still pliable and teachable, and fashion them after their own pattern—not that they wish to do away with marriage as a means of continuing the race, but they are afraid of the promiscuity of women and convinced that none of the sex remains faithful to one man’. See Josephus, *The Jewish War*, p. 125.

²⁰ Jörg Frey, ‘Apocalyptic Dualism’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. by John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 271–294 (pp. 287, 279); and Shemaryahu Talmon, ‘Waiting for the Messiah: The Spiritual Universe of the Qumran Covenanters’, in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, ed. by Jacob Neusner, William S. Green, and Ernest Frerichs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 111–137 (p. 119).

ritual purity, and repentance.²¹ Their belief that the Temple priesthood had become illegitimate meant that they emerged as a rejection of the state of Judaism as it was at that time.²² Their detachment from worldliness, especially through celibacy and asceticism, was later preserved in Christianity through the celibate priesthood and the emphasis on ascetical life.

John the Baptist, though not an Essene, appears influenced by them: preaching out in the wilderness (Matt. 3:1–2; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3), practising a baptism of repentance (Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3), and speaking to corruption and the state of Judaism at that time (Matt. 3:7–10; Luke 3:7–9). The Essenes are not directly mentioned in the New Testament, but their ethos is present in the background. Jesus, if aligning with any group, would resonate with the Essenes' concerns about Temple corruption and internal purity.

However, Jesus rejected their isolationism. The Essenes sought physical separation from sinners and the unclean, maintaining a strict distinction between the just and unjust. Jesus practised the opposite: he ate with sinners and tax collectors (Matt. 9:10–11; Mark 2:15–16; Luke 15:1–2) and led by example in preventing the stoning of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3–11). Yet he does affirm their interest in ascetical perfection. Jesus praises "the eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:12), and Paul's teaching likewise places strong emphasis upon the eschaton and the inevitability of the end times (1 Thess. 4:13–18; 1 Cor. 15:20–28; 2 Thess. 2:1–12; Rom. 13:11–12)—themes resonating with Essene eschatology. Separated from any city, the Essenes would not have heard Jesus directly, but references to the destruction of the Temple—"not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down" (Matt. 24:2)—would have been fully comprehensible to them. However, they would not have appreciated his pastoral closeness to sinners, or his teaching that "it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out" (Matt. 15:11). Notably, there is no episode in the Gospels in which Jesus directly engages the Essenes.

The Zealots did not emerge from the Maccabean revolt but instead arose in opposition to Roman rule, focusing on the expectation of a Messiah who would liberate Israel from political servitude. Josephus refers to them as the 'Fourth

²¹ Josephus observes that the Essenes engaged in a disciplined communal life, carrying 'only weapons to keep off bandits'. He notes that '[n]either garments nor shoes are changed till they are dropping to pieces or worn out with age' and that 'nothing is bought or sold: everyone gives what he has to anybody in need and receives from him in return something he himself can use'. Josephus further remarks that they 'show devotion to the Deity in a way all their own', offering 'traditional prayers' before sunrise, 'as if beseeching Him to appear', and assembling 'in a building of their own which no one outside their community is allowed to enter', where they 'sit down in silence'. He notes that they are empowered to take 'personal aid, and charity'—that 'they may of their own accord help any deserving person in need or supply the penniless with food' to 'champion good faith and serve the cause of peace'. See Josephus, *The Jewish War*, p. 126.

²² Philo notes that the Essenes 'are all free, aiding one another with a reciprocal interchange of good offices' and that this arises because 'this natural relationship of all men to one another has been thrown into disorder by designing covetousness' (XII.79). He adds that they devote their attention to 'the moral part of philosophy, using as instructors the laws of their country which it would have been impossible for the human mind to devise without divine inspiration' (XII.80). See Philo, *Every Good Man is Free*, XII.79–80, p. 689.

Philosophy'.²³ While they are often depicted as a revolutionary party enduring throughout the first century CE, some scholars caution that the Zealot movement may have developed partway through this period, with a more complex and episodic history than a single continuous organisation that endured from 6 CE until the fall of Masada.²⁴ Nevertheless, the core concern of the Zealots was consistent: overthrowing foreign domination and asserting Jewish autonomy, with armed resistance as a defining feature. Their disdain for foreign rule is biblically exemplified when they refuse to pay taxes to Caesar, which comes up explicitly in the Gospels when Jesus says: "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). This is a direct rebuke of their viewpoint.²⁵

The Zealots believed in political Messianism—looking for the overthrow of Roman rule.²⁶ They engaged in guerrilla warfare and terror attacks against Roman authority.²⁷ At the time of Christ's crucifixion, Pilate questions Jesus in a way that suggests concern over whether he is one of these revolutionary figures. Jesus rejects that identification: "My kingdom is not from this world" (John 18:36). Likewise, his warning that "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52) directly critiques those who believe the Kingdom of God can be brought about through violence.

Simon the Zealot shows that this revolutionary world was not far removed from Jesus' own movement. Yet Jesus corrects the Zealot viewpoint rather than confirming it. He was not a revolutionary in the Zealot sense; the Zealots—if they followed him—would have been very disappointed. He was not the political Messianic figure they were awaiting. His Kingdom was not the

²³ While Josephus refers to the group as the 'fourth philosophic sect', the term has subsequently become standardly translated and cited as the 'Fourth Philosophy' in modern scholarship. See Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, Vol. IV, trans. by William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), XVIII.1, p. 3.

²⁴ Sanders acknowledges the 'long-standing scholarly convention' to 'identify the "fourth philosophy" as a party or sect, to call its members "the Zealots", and to think that the Zealot party was the freedom movement that eventually took Israel into war against Rome'. He posits, however, that the title is best used as the name of 'a group that emerged part of the way through the great revolt, attacked and defeated the aristocratic leaders, executed some of the remaining aristocrats, and defended Jerusalem to the bitter end'. See Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief*, p. 281.

²⁵ Martin Hengel suggests that through the interpretation of Judas the Galilaean, 'God was uncompromisingly recognised as the only Lord of Israel', and thus 'tribute paid to a foreign ruler could be seen as worshipping an idol'. He explains that 'anyone paying taxes to the emperor ceased to be a true Israelite', demonstrating how refusal to pay tribute was tied to a principled rejection of foreign rule. See Martin Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigation into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I Until 70 A.D.*, trans. by David Smith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), p. 139.

²⁶ Hengel observes that the movement, initiated by Judas, had 'a clearly recognisable history' and that Judas' message was 'inseparable from active revolt against foreign rule' and 'presupposed the formation of an organised community', demonstrating the Zealots' commitment to political Messianism. See *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁷ Hengel emphasises that an 'essential aspect of the activity of the Galilaean's new sect was the unhesitating use of violence, which did not stop at the shedding of blood and murder'. He points out that the Zealots regarded as opponents 'not only the Roman oppressors and their accomplices, but also all Jews who were prepared to submit to the Roman rule for the sake of peace', demonstrating their engagement in guerrilla warfare and targeted attacks. See *Ibid.*, p. 85.

restoration of Jewish sovereignty through force, but something that transcended Roman occupation and political liberation altogether.

Jesus' claim to be the Messiah challenged the expectations of these Jewish factions, correcting their excesses while affirming what was true within them. From the Pharisees, Christianity preserves concern for moral perfection, resurrection, and life beyond the Temple, while rejecting legalistic externalism; from the Sadducees, it inherits hierarchy and liturgical worship, yet moves beyond their worldliness and denial of the afterlife; from the Essenes, it retains asceticism, repentance, interior purity, and eschatological longing, while rejecting isolation from sinners; and from the Zealots, it preserves the awareness that God's Kingdom must confront worldly powers, while rejecting political militancy and revolutionary messianism.

The Christian Gospel thus embodies both a radical departure from and a fulfilment of these groups, integrating virtues within each while correcting distortions. The Church elevates these elements, showing how Jesus' teaching was tailored to the communities he engaged. That Judaism was divided into multiple groups at the outset of the Christian era is therefore not only accurate but illuminates the political, religious, and social milieu in which his mission was proclaimed, highlighting the context for the Gospel.

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