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ORIGIN OF THE NAME PHARISEE

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TWO assumptions in regard to the Pharisees are so highly probable that they have received general acceptance; namely, that the party called the Hasideans at the time of the Maccabean uprising was later called the Pharisees,¹ and that the Hebrew **פְּרוֹתִים**, the Greek *φαρισαῖοι*, mean those who separated themselves, separatists.²

There must be a reason why the party called Hasideans³ at the time of the Maccabean uprising was later called the Pharisees. The reason for changing a name so obviously suitable as the "pious" to the "separatists" must be sought in some event, which at the time of its occurrence made their separation from the rest of the nation their most conspicuous feature—even more conspicuous than the piety for which they were famous.⁴ Otherwise why the change of name? That this separation which was temporarily so important was not of lasting or fundamental significance is shown by the fact that the origin of the name Pharisee was so soon forgotten, for neither Josephus⁵ nor the early Church Fathers⁶ knew its origin. The latter as well as many modern scholars explain the name as meaning those who separated themselves not only from the heathen but

¹ Wellhausen, *Die Pharisäer und die Sadducäer*, pp. 77—78; Schürer, *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes*. 4 ed., vol. 2. p. 473.

² Schürer, p. 465.

³ I Macc. 2 42 7 13 II Macc. 14 6.

⁴ I Macc. 2 42—43.

⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XIII, 5 9. Wellhausen, pp. 77—78.

⁶ Schürer, p. 467, note 52.

also from the uncleanness of the masses. No one will deny that in the Rabbinic period the substantives *perishah* and *perishuth* (פְּרִישָׁה) mean a separation from all uncleanness⁷, but that fact does not constitute evidence for the exact meaning of the passive participle of פְּרִשָּׁת in the Maccabean period.

The half century within which the change of party name occurred is easily determinable. The author of I Maccabees tells us that the "Hasideans were the first among the children of Israel that sought peace"⁸ of Alcimus and Bacchides, and Josephus narrates the break of John Hyrcanus with the Pharisees⁹. In other words it occurred subsequent to the appointment of Alcimus to the highpriesthood and some time before the break of John Hyrcanus with the Pharisees, for the conflict which broke out at that time presupposes a period of previous development of the Pharisaeic party. The part played by the Hasideans in the Maccabean revolt was first clearly set forth by Wellhausen.¹⁰ In the Greek period the party opposed to the laxity of Hellenism was made up of such heterogeneous elements as Mattathias and his friends, the Nazirites¹¹, the scribes, the Hasideans¹², and doubtless many another nameless group¹³ that placed allegiance to the law and ancestral custom above everything else. From the time when the Hasideans joined Mattathias and his friends after their initial success until the granting of religious liberty by the Syrians and the appointment of a legitimate high priest¹⁴, the Hasideans gave their loyal support to the struggle. At the beginning it was a war for the law. When the temple was purified and rededicated and the temple mound fortified, religious liberty was practically regained, although not officially sanctioned¹⁵. It was difficult to confine the war strictly to the religious issue. The expeditions

⁷ Levy, *Neuhebräisches u. Chaldäisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 4, p. 111.

⁸ I Macc. 7 12.

⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XIII, 10 5-6.

¹⁰ Wellhausen, *Phariseer*, pp. 78-86.

¹¹ I Macc. 3 43. ¹² I Macc. 2 42-43.

¹³ I Macc. 2 38. ¹⁴ I Macc. 7 12-15.

¹⁵ I Macc. 1 1-1

against the Edomites, Beanites, and Ammonites¹⁶ were ostensibly and doubtless really for the purpose of avenging and rescuing their co-religionists in those districts: Simon's expedition into Galilee and that of Judas into Gilead were for the liberty of the Jews living there¹⁷, and hence it was in a sense still a religious war. In 164 B. C. occurred the death of Antiochus Epiphanes, the one who was responsible for the whole difficulty¹⁸, and Lysias—albeit through fear of Philip newly returned from Persia—made a “covenant whith them that they should walk after their own laws”¹⁹. Up to this point there was no break among the Jews who opposed the introduction of Hellenic customs and Hellenic religion. However, when Demetrius I ascended the throne in Antioch in 162 B. C. and “sent words of peace to Judas” and gave practical evidence of good faith and of his desire to conciliate the Jews by the appointment of a legitimate high priest²⁰, the religious grounds for the continuance of the war were removed. The object was attained for which the war had been undertaken. Ought not the Jews lay down their arms? The Hasideans and the scribes thought so, and the Hasideans withdrew from the national movement²¹. A party that lays down arms when it sees the aims for which it has been fighting fully satisfied, cannot with justice be accused of fanaticism. On the other hand it is not strange that a party which separated itself from the national movement for independence and secular power, and refused to fight for the country, placing religion above the state, should have appeared to the revolutionists as separatists, and from henceforth have been called by that name.

Our knowledge of the course of events between the appointment of Alcimus to the highpriesthood and the break of John Hyrcanus with the Pharisees is not sufficient to prove that this separation of the Hasideans from the national movement for political independence is the only event which could have occasioned a change in the party name of the Hasideans, but this secession is in itself sufficient to be regarded as an adequate excuse and it

¹⁶ I Macc. 5 1-8.

¹⁷ I Macc. 5 9-54.

¹⁸ I Macc. 6 1-17.

¹⁹ I Macc. 6 59.

²⁰ I Macc. 7 1-11.

²¹ I Macc. 7 13-15.

furnishes an historical explanation which is not at variance with the facts so far as they are known. It supports the suggestion of Schürer²² that the name was given by their adversaries as a name of opprobrium, and it explains why the name *perūshîm* occurs so seldom in our oldest Rabbinical source, the Mishna.

²² Schürer, p. 467.