

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, Judaism Before Jesus,

Session 10, The Jewish Sects

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This is Dr. Anthony Tomasino in his teaching on Judaism before Jesus. This is session 10, the Jewish Sects.

In Josephus' Antiquities, in his account of the administration of John Hyrcanus, he suddenly interrupts his narrative and launches into a description of what he calls the three philosophies of the Jews.

He uses the word philosophy very deliberately. Very likely, Josephus here is trying to draw some connections between Judaism and Roman society in those days, when it was considered to be three primary philosophies that were very popular in Rome at that time. Those included Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Cynicism, which had made a big resurgence in the first century A.D. But in Josephus' description of these Jewish sects or Jewish philosophies, again as he calls them, he clearly is trying to make connections on issues that he thought would be interesting to his audience and actually were issues that were oftentimes being debated among the philosophers of his day, but probably not so much among the Jews of his day.

Nonetheless, Josephus is our primary source of information on these sects, these sources of division among the Jews, and so we will trust him in so far as we might to be at least a little bit accurate about his descriptions of the different groups of Jews that existed in his day. The fact that he puts this account during the time of John Hyrcanus seems to indicate that that's probably when some of these divisions that became so prominent in the New Testament times first started to arise among the Jews. But before we talk about the sects of the Jews or the sources of disunity, let's talk about the unity of the Jews.

What is it that makes the Jews a united people? There are certain things that would have been regarded by the Jews as non-negotiables. These non-negotiables include the idea of monotheism. You can't believe in a bunch of gods and be a Jew.

You have to believe in only one God. There are times later in rabbinic Judaism when there comes this whole debate about the two powers in heaven and all these kinds of wonderful things. But even in those periods of debate, it was always very clear to them that there is one God, and they reminded themselves, of course, of that fact every morning by reciting the Shema.

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad, Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. So, monotheism is considered a basic fact of Judaism, and you cannot negotiate that one. Another one, of course, is the idea of circumcision.

If somebody were to abrogate the idea of the covenant of circumcision, they would no longer be considered to be a true Jew. Now, we hear from Philo of Alexandria and some other sources that there were some factions, even of people who would consider themselves Jews, who tried to spiritualize the idea of circumcision. We read, of course, and talked earlier about how there were Jews during the time of the Maccabees who were trying to undo their circumcision.

Even though they might have considered themselves Jews, it is questionable how much their country folk would have regarded them as Jews. You know, these kinds of things, when it comes to drawing lines and so on, it can get a little bit sticky because, you know, even in our day, there are groups that consider themselves Christians that the majority of Christendom does not consider Christian. So, it's a bit of a ticklish point, you might say, this whole thing about circumcision.

Yet another non-negotiable, of course, is going to be the laws of Moses. All Jews accepted the Torah as binding holy scripture. There can be no Judaism without the laws of Moses.

Now, they differed widely in how they interpreted those laws, but they all agreed that the laws of Moses were authoritative for the Jewish people. And finally, the temple in Jerusalem. And this becomes kind of an important point of dissension.

There existed other temples, as I've mentioned before, but the temple in Jerusalem was considered to be the primary temple, the place where animal sacrifices could be made, and the place that must be recognized as legitimate in order for someone to be considered Jewish. Now, in the Dead Sea Scrolls and apparently in other groups as well, there were questions about whether or not the things going on in the temple in Jerusalem were legitimate. And to some extent, there might have even been some talk about the idea that the immorality of the priesthood and even simple things to us, not so much to them, but doing the festivals on the wrong days or something of that sort, disqualified the activities that were taking place in the temple and made them of no merit.

But pretty much everybody seemed to agree that Jerusalem was the place where God would dwell and where the works of God were to be done. And, of course, this is going to cause some separation later on between the Jews and the Christians. Christianity was regarded as a Jewish sect for several decades of its existence, but when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD, there was a movement among Christians to say, well, we don't need the temple.

Jesus is our temple. We've got spiritual worship. We can worship God anywhere in spirit and truth.

To the Jews, that was repudiating their temple. And so that meant to them that Christians could not be regarded as being Jewish. So, with this diversity, we see the distinction being drawn between various groups within that broad umbrella of Judaism.

We've got our basic non-negotiables here, but we've still got wiggle room. Some sources of Jewish sectarianism they could tolerate a whole lot of diversity. And when you think about it, something like, as we're going to talk about, between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the Pharisees believe in the resurrection of the dead, but the Sadducees don't believe in the resurrection of the dead.

To us, that seems like a huge deal. I mean, if you can't agree that people will rise from the dead, how can you consider yourselves even to be part of the same religion? But to the Jews, that wasn't a deal breaker. You could be considered a good Jew if you believed in the resurrection of the dead or didn't believe in a resurrection at this time.

Later on, they're going to draw another line there. But in the time around the time of Jesus, in the century before, and a couple of centuries after, it was acceptable. Now, wash your hands the wrong way, and that might get you in trouble, but believing something like the resurrection of the dead or not believing wasn't going to cause you so much friction.

So, Jews would band together with people of similar mindsets. And we see this process already happening in the Old Testament, in the book of Malachi. Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard.

A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name. So book of Malachi, I've mentioned the book of Malachi before, it's kind of important for kind of setting up this whole period. We had this problem going on in the country; apparently, it was a famine or something.

And the people were asking why all this was happening to us? We're trying to be good. And God says to them things like, you think you're being good? Look at your offerings. They're terrible. Look at the way the priests are acting.

They're being immoral. You know, look at your tithes. You're not, and you're not tithing like you should.

And so on and so forth. So finally, at the end of the book, we hear that this group of Jews get together, and they say, hey, from now on, we're going to do this. Now, not all the Jews got together and said they were going to do this, just a group of them.

And they formed what we might call a sect. They were one of the divisions here among the Jews during this period. One of the ways I like to envision this is like with a series of filters and shining a beam of light.

You know, you got this great big beam of light, great big wide beam of light, and you shine it at a board with a little big hole in it. Now comes this much smaller beam of light. And then that one will kind of spread out as it goes along.

Then you put another board on it, and you get a much smaller beam of light again, but that one's going to spread out. In some ways, you can see this happening in the Israelite and the Jewish community through history because, you know, you've got the people coming out of Egypt who probably had a wide diversity of views and beliefs. And then along comes Moses, and Moses says, these are the basic tenets of our faith.

You know, we are going to believe in one God. We are not going to have idols. We are going to do this.

We're going to do that, et cetera, et cetera. Don't go killing other people. Don't go eating pigs, et cetera, et cetera.

And so there is a tightening of the beam, so to speak. And then we go on a ways, and you have Josiah's reforms where Josiah says, no, from now on, you're not worshipping on the hilltops. The only legitimate place to worship is in Jerusalem, in the temple in Jerusalem.

That's the only place you can make your sacrifices. And as we have seen already for about 100 and 200 years or so after that, they're still trying to deal with the ramifications of that idea and trying to reign in some of these mavericks, even sometime later. And then you go along a little further and you've got authoritative people and authoritative groups from time to time.

Like I've mentioned already something about the rabbis who later decide that those who don't believe in the resurrection of the dead will have no part in the world to come. Various little filters and so on are set up to try to redraw what are the bounds of orthodoxy. Individuals, events too.

We can think about events that happened that caused the Jews to reaffirm or rethink certain aspects of their faith. The destruction of the temple the first time and the second time are events that caused a major restructuring of Jewish thinking. With the destruction of the second temple, there was the necessity to renegotiate what kind of animal sacrifices would be acceptable.

One of the things that we think about, and one of the things that kind of surprised me when I learned about this, is that when we think that when the temple was destroyed in Jerusalem, that was the end of the sacrifices and so on. Actually, that was not the case because the priests would continue to make pilgrimage to the site at Jerusalem and would perform their sacrifices there out in the open. This probably continued until after the second revolt against Rome, the Bar Kokhba rebellion.

After the Bar Kokhba rebellion Jerusalem was changed into a Roman city and the Jews were forbidden to come within a certain radius of the city on pain of death. So, for some time, they managed to continue and persisted in those rituals there, but already the people were thinking, we need to rethink this thing. How necessary are these sacrifices at Jerusalem to our faith? So, the events like the destruction of the temple caused them to have to rethink those issues.

Now, one of the sects that was excluded, of course, in this whole business is the Samaritans. Samaritans were located in Samaria. Now, I'm not talking about the city because, well, they were to some extent, but we know that the city of Samaria was destroyed by Alexander the Great and repopulated with Greeks.

So, the Samaritans, by the time of the end of the intertestamental period, were scattered throughout the region known as Samaria, but they were not located in the city of Samaria per se. So that we've got that region of Samaria and a number of cities there. You know one of the things that again that we kind of have to have to clear up our thinking here a little bit is we often think of these Samaritans as like a small group of people up there north of Judea.

They were very numerous, actually, and in that region of Palestine, there were probably about as many Samaritans as there were Judeans in that particular region. Now there were more Jews if you looked at the Mediterranean region as a whole because you got Jews in Babylon, you got Jews in Persia, you got Jews in Greece, you got Jews in Egypt and Samaritans were pretty well located right there around Mount Gerizim because they were extremely strict about their understanding that the only place where you could worship the Lord was on Mount Gerizim. Now they worship the same God as the people of Israel do.

They actually use the laws of Moses. They have the same Torah that the people of Israel do, and it's almost identical, which causes fits for those people who are trying to figure out how the biblical canon was being assembled because okay well, we know that the Jews and the Samaritans didn't like each other, how do they end up with the same Bible? But yeah, so they obey the laws of Moses, they've got these books of the Torah but they worship the Lord on Mount Gerizim, whereas, of course, Jews worship the Lord on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, and you think about that little incident in John chapter 4 where the Samaritan woman at the well is talking to Jesus and she says, you people say that you should worship the Lord there in Jerusalem.

We say we should worship the Lord on this mountain, and Jesus comes back with his nice little reply, and he says you know the day is coming when neither this mountain nor that mount is not going to make a difference.

The Lord wants those worshipers who worship him in spirit and truth. But that wasn't at this time because these guys were really, really convinced that it had to be either this mountain or that mountain. The Samaritans said their mountain, Mount Gerizim, had their own stories, their own narratives, which essentially said that the Jews were all apostate going all the way back to the days of King Solomon and that they were the only true worshipers of the Lord because they worshiped on Mount Gerizim and of course, the Bible has its own storytelling about the Samaritans and how they ended up worshipping the Lord wrong.

So, the Samaritans are still around by the way. There are some still around, and here we can see a couple of Samaritans with a Torah scroll. So, in the same Bible, they even look Jewish, but they are not Jews because they reject the temple at Jerusalem and they reject the idea of Jerusalem as being the holy city.

So, there you have an excluded sect. Now the orthodox sects of Judaism, well we've got a number of them and we've already talked about the fact that we have Josephus who gives us this nice little account of the different groups involved here. There was disagreement, obviously, but as long as you agree to the non-negotiables, you're okay.

We have the Hasmoneans versus the Hasidim. Now, these people were not disagreeing so much on interpretations of the laws of Moses or something, but maybe how much or how strictly we have to follow the laws of Moses. We saw the Hasidim said even if somebody attacks us on the Sabbath day, we will not defend ourselves because that's work, and we don't do work on the Sabbath day.

Whereas the Hasmoneans say anybody attacks us on the Sabbath day we're fighting back you know and we might even fight back harder because they dared to attack us on our Sabbath day. So, we have these two people here, these two groups who are disagreeing on how the Sabbath day should be kept holy. Neither one of them would argue that it shouldn't be kept holy, but they have their questions about how that was to be carried out.

So, Josephus describes four Jewish sects of his day. Now the way he says this is there were three sects among the Jews and as I already said very likely here he's trying to draw these connections with the Romans who like these nice little schematic things. They've got the Stoics, they've got the Epicureans, they've got the Cynics, and those are the three sects of the Romans.

Now there were a lot of other philosophies among the Romans in that time but those were kind of like the three defining groups. There was also skepticism and some other things going on, of course Neoplatonism, and all these marvelous things were percolating among the Romans at that time. But they would have thought of Stoicism, Epicureanism and Cynicism in the first century here when Josephus was writing those would have been their main groups.

He tells us there are three sects among the Jews, and then he goes on for philosophies. I should say he that's his word philosophies, and then he goes on to say something, oh, there is this fourth philosophy, too. So yeah he's got four philosophies among the Jews and clearly trying to follow this sort of schematic pattern. Once again, there are almost certainly more groups among the Jews, and in the Mishnah, there are many other groups among the Jews in this time period and in the Talmud more still.

There was a great deal of diversity you know and there was really nobody at this point who was saying you have to believe these things in order to be a Jew except for as I mentioned the non-negotiables. So, the first of these groups that Josephus mentions are the Pharisees. What do we know about the Pharisees? The Pharisees are kind of an interesting group.

St. Paul identified himself as a Pharisee, and he talked to the Pharisees and tried to build bridges with them at various points. Jesus, of course, butted heads with the Pharisees and any of the other sects of his day that that we know of. So, who are these people the Pharisees? Well first of all the word Pharisee certainly comes from the Hebrew verb *paras* which means to separate and that's about all we can say with certainty.

We know for certain that it comes from the word *paras*, but we don't know what the significance of that is. Partially, we look at this that the *ee* ending here in the end is what we call a gentilic ending, so has the sense of being of the etc etc so of the division. *Paras* may refer here to coming a noun form. The form *paras* sometimes is noted to be similar to an Aramaic passive form, so could it mean the separated ones, the people who have been separated out? Does it mean those people who make separations, those people who make divisions? And think about Jesus saying that the Pharisees very carefully made divisions in their tithes, and they're you tithe them your mint and cumin and dill and he talks about them making these divisions between things and so on and that was kind of who they were people who were constantly just distinguishing between the good and the bad between the pure and the impure.

I mean, that's the really big thing here. What makes one pure? What makes one impure? Maybe that's where this is coming from.

Maybe that's the kind of division they're talking about. On the other hand, in one of the very important Dead Sea Scrolls, we have a letter where the group explains their rationale for their existence, and they use this same verb, *paras*, to say, this is why we have separated from the people. Now, the group who wrote that scroll were definitely not Pharisees, but even so, we see that this same term was used at a time when the term was already being claimed by the Pharisees.

So that just throws another complexity into the whole question of what the name Pharisee really means. And we don't know. We can think about the Pharisees as being kind, liberal interpreters of Scripture. Now, this is not going to mean liberal in the way we think of liberal so much, but rather, what we mean here is that the Pharisees were not bound to the literal meaning of the text.

They believed that there was room and, in fact, an obligation to interpret the text broadly, and in the Mishnah and later the Talmud, we have lists of rules that could be used in order to be able to draw out meanings from the biblical text. So, some of those rules involve some things that we would recognize as being pretty decent kinds of ideas and procedures, like looking for common themes and so on. Others, maybe not so much.

You know, like things like looking in Hebrew, each letter also has a numerical value, and they're sort of like Roman numerals, you know. So, what you could do is take the letters of a word, add them up, and come up with a number. So, then what they could do is they could take that number, and they could use that as a basis for linking one verb or one verse of Scripture or one word of Scripture to another word which has a similar value and thereby form an interpretational bridge that allows them to interpret the one text in light of the other.

This is just one kind of thing they did. A number of other rules and procedures that they used would allow them to draw sometimes very profound and major truths out of what would seem to be us to be a kind of minor Scripture passage. They love to tell stories about the Scriptures and love to expand upon them and draw out meanings through the use of storytelling, just like Jesus did.

So, in that sense, when we say that they're liberal interpreters of Scripture, we mean that they allowed for a broad latitude of interpretation. Now, among the rabbis later, and the rabbis generally, we consider to be the heirs of the Pharisees, and they considered themselves to be the descendants of the Pharisees as well, but among the rabbis, you would see that there were limits to how far you could go in these interpretations. You know, they would argue it out, and eventually they would have to sometimes say, okay, that's one step too far.

Just as kind of a fun little example here, the idea of the plagues of Egypt, you know, one of the... They would just like to kick these things around every now and then.

The word for frog in Hebrew can be a collective noun. It can have the sense of one frog or multiple frogs.

And so one of the rabbis suggested that the frog of Egypt was a single giant frog. Frogzilla! And the other rabbi said, oh shut up. Too far! Too far! No.

So yeah, so that's the kind of thing that they would engage in. But it also, of course, had to do with the way that they would interpret certain laws as well because they would develop these oral traditions regarding the interpretation of certain laws. It comes from the Bible, but then they go forth from the Bible and use their various interpretation methods, and they come up with rules regarding how those things were to be understood.

Once again, I keep referring to the rabbis and to the Mishnah, the collection of rabbinic traditions, because they do seem to reflect a similar kind of thinking, but one of the first precepts, statements in the Mishnah is that it is the role of the sages to build a hedge around the law. In other words, to set up a hedge of tradition so that people won't even get close to breaking the law. So, for instance, if somebody thinks, well, you know, it says we shouldn't do work on the Sabbath day.

So, what constitutes work? Well, I think if a scribe is writing stuff on the Sabbath day, that means he's breaking the Sabbath. So, scribes are not allowed to write. And somebody else says, well, but what about if he's going about with his quill stuck behind his ear? Couldn't he be tempted to write? Why, doggone it, you're correct.

So, they pass yet another tradition that says that you're not allowed, if you're a scribe, to go about with a quill tucked behind your ear on the Sabbath day because that would tempt you to do work. They're building this hedge of protection around each of the laws and the commandments, and what constitutes too far? How far is too far to walk in the Sabbath day? Well, if we think it's 50 feet, we'll tell everybody you can't walk 25 feet, you know, something like that. So yeah, these are the kinds of things that the rabbis were engaged in.

They had this oral tradition that they had built up around the laws, these methods of interpretation, these binding ideas, and they considered these to be binding, that they would lay upon people's backs. And, you know, in the New Testament, where we read about the rabbis laying burdens upon people's backs, things that they're, the laws that are too heavy for themselves to carry, some of these things were indeed seeming to us almost ridiculous when you look at it. But to them, it was very important because it helped to define for everybody what it was that were their obligations and what they needed to do in order to not be guilty of breaking the laws.

So, one of the things that Josephus focuses on in his discussion of these Jewish sects is the question of free will. Now, this is an interesting thing. It was a big question among the philosophers of Greece and of Rome.

The Epicureans, the Stoics, and the others, they wanted to know if there was such a thing as free will. You will not find any discussion in any Jewish literature about whether or not there's free will, really. I mean, they've got, they kind of hint around the question at times or something, but there is no discussion, really, of free will.

They don't debate that question at all. So, where is Josephus getting this from? Well, he's interpolating, we might say. He wants his audience to see how similar the Jews are to the great peoples of Greece and Rome.

He wants to see them in that same kind of light, to paint them as this race of philosophers. He says we have these various positions on free will, and he manages to cover the whole spectrum here in his discussion. The Pharisees, according to Josephus, believe in free will to an extent.

They believe that all things are foreseen, but everybody has to decide for themselves. So, in that sense, they're kind of like the Methodists of their day, you know. They believe in spirits.

And this is kind of a funky statement because, you know, everybody believes in spirits, right? The Sadducees apparently had a different understanding of spirits, and I'm sure that the Sadducees believed in angels because, you know, they read the same Bible that the, well, maybe not the same Bible to the same extent, but they've got the same books of Moses, at least, that the other Jewish groups had. And we have angels appearing all over the place in Genesis and Exodus and other books of the Torah. So, what does it mean to say that the Pharisees believe in spirits more so than the other sects? Very likely, it seems to me, what he's talking about is the intervention of spirit beings, that the spirits can come and intervene in human affairs, you know? When Paul is brought before the Sanhedrin in the book of Acts, he looks at the composition of the group, and he sees that part of them are Pharisees and part of them are Sadducees.

He decides I can work with this. And he says, brothers, I'm on trial today because I believe in the resurrection of the dead. And the Sadducees are like, ah, take this man away.

He's just a troublemaker. And the Pharisees are saying, wait a minute, but what if a spirit has spoken to him? So, the Pharisees not only believe in the resurrection of the dead, but they also believe in the possibility of spirit intervention in our day and age. The Sadducees were probably a little more skeptical about the work of spirits in their day.

Resurrection of the dead, mentioned, of course, several times. We see how in the book of 1st Maccabees, there was apparently no idea of the resurrection of the dead. In 2nd Maccabees, on the other hand, all of those who die for the sake of defending their faith are promised that they will be raised from the dead.

And this same thing appears in the book of Daniel, in Daniel chapter 12, where Daniel was told to go his way, that at the end of days, he would be raised, and that those who were righteous would shine like the stars of the heavens. So, the idea of the resurrection of the dead was something that was treasured by the Pharisees as well. According to Josephus, the Pharisees were popular with the people, and this is one of those things that you have to take, I wouldn't say take it with a grain of salt, but I would say more in the sense of taking it as being relative.

Popular compared to the Sadducees, who were not so popular. In the New Testament, the Pharisees are sometimes depicted as being boorish and as in a way, kind of annoying to the people. We're also told in the New Testament that the Pharisees were lovers of wealth, whereas, according to Josephus, the Pharisees tended to be poorer and more to identify with the average Joe.

So, a little bit of disagreement there between our sources. I suppose it's entirely possible to love wealth and not have it, but we also know that, of course, there were some wealthy Pharisees as well, and those might well have been the ones with whom Jesus had many of his conflicts. One more point, which I've already mentioned a couple of times.

There has been a lot of debate and discussion among scholars about this question, about what the connection is between Rabbinic Judaism, as we find it in the Mishnah, and then the Talmud, and the religion of the Pharisees. I've said before the rabbis thought of themselves as the heirs of the Pharisees, and in their little scenarios in the Mishnah and in their other writings, there are often conflicts between the Pharisees and the Sadducees or other sects, and the Pharisees are typically the heroes of those encounters. Some scholars don't like this idea, and they say, oh, that's too simple.

Well, maybe it's too simple, but it seems to be correct, so we're going to go with it. I do believe that the Pharisees eventually became the progenitors of Rabbinic Judaism as time goes on, and as Judaism, and particularly Pharisaism, goes through various crises, like, for instance, the destruction of the temple, which caused them to rethink some of their positions and reformulate some of their understandings, particularly of the role of sacrifice and its place in the religion. So, let's talk about the Sadducees.

Once again, we're going to begin with the name. The name Sadducee almost certainly comes from the word Zadok, and the word Zadok means righteous. Now,

does that mean that the Sadducees considered themselves the righteous peoples? That's a possibility, but there's another possibility, and that is that the Sadducees considered themselves the party of Zadok.

Who is Zadok? Zadok is the guy who was the progenitor of the line of high priests that was eventually displaced by the Hasmoneans. So, in that light, you would think that the Sadducees would have started as maybe a protest movement against the Hasmoneans taking the high priesthood. Logically, that would make a lot of sense, just based upon the name.

Historically, on the other hand, it's really hard to come up with that kind of a formulation because of the fact that, according to Josephus, it seems that the Sadducees were supporters of the Hasmoneans, at least until the time of Alexander Salome. So, we're unsure, once again, what the meaning of the name Sadducee is. The Sadducees were conservative interpreters of the Bible.

In other words, they wanted to stick to the literal meaning of the text. They did not believe in expansions on the text or going into lots of different nuances and so on. They wanted things to be very clear and based upon the literal meaning as much as they could be, based upon the literal meaning.

It's also a possibility that the Sadducees considered only the books of Moses to be fully authoritative Scripture. One of the reasons why we say this is because of this idea that they reject the notion of the resurrection of the dead, which is, you know, one of the other points that we've been talking about here. Why did the Sadducees not believe in resurrection of the dead? It's in the book of Daniel.

It says it right there. At the end of days, you're going to be raised from the dead. There are images of resurrection in the book of Ezekiel and in the book of Psalms and in some other places in the Old Testament as well.

Now, when Jesus is talking to the Sadducees and arguing with him a little bit, he says to them, now as for this resurrection of the dead thing, yeah, says, don't you remember how in the Torah that God says to Moses, I am the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob. God is the God of the living, not the God of the dead. Why would Jesus choose that particular passage of Scripture to refute their disbelief in the resurrection of the dead? He could have easily taken the passage from Daniel.

I'm sure he knew it, you know, but instead, he chooses a passage from the Torah. Could it be because they did not regard Daniel to be authoritative? That was an argument made by FF Bruce. That was not from me.

But at any rate, it was an interesting perspective and I find that line of thinking kind of compelling. So, according to Josephus, they do not believe in divine intervention. They do not believe in spirits.

They do not believe in resurrection. They also believe in completely in free will, according to Josephus. They don't believe that there is any kind, as I say, divine intervention here.

They don't believe there's any kind of predestination of our wills. So we are free to do what we wish. I already talked about the question of spirits and so on.

Sadducees generally seem to be more upper-class people, and you can see the reasoning behind this. If you don't believe there's a resurrection of the dead, if you don't believe that there is a reward for doing righteousness in the world to come, then you want to get all your rewards in this world, you know, and you can essentially judge how righteous somebody is by how much stuff they got because they're being blessed. So, for the Sadducees, being upper-class is a sign that their works are regarded favorably by God.

Josephus says they're not popular with the masses and he says that they are boorish even with each other, which is an interesting kind of position. One of the typical kinds of associations that we see for these fellows is we associate them with the temple and the leadership in the temple, particularly in the time of Jesus. And this has been questioned by a number of people because we really don't know of the religious affiliation of all of the high priests.

We do know that the ones who were involved in Jesus's trial were Sadducees. We know that there were a number of other families that were associated with the high priesthood who were Sadducees as well, but there are a lot of high priests that we don't know about, and from some accounts, at least one of them was not a Sadducee. One of them was almost certainly a Pharisee.

So, you can't just say that the Sadducees had control of the temple. That's certainly not the case. Besides the fact that we have the Sadducees who are high priests and others, we also have the other broad priesthood, which was apparently quite varied in its religious orientation as far as whether there are Sadducees or Pharisees or none of the above, which seemed to have also been quite common.

So, the high priesthood may have been largely affiliated and associated with the Sadducees for some time. I think it's probably just as likely that a lot of the high priests did not consider themselves Sadducees and probably didn't consider themselves to belong to any of the sects. I'll get to that in a little bit here, too.

Okay. The other group that Josephus mentions is the Essenes and the Essenes were never mentioned in the New Testament. They're never mentioned in the Intertestamental texts.

They are mentioned by Philo of Alexandria. So we do know that that they existed. Josephus' account and Philo's account vary a little bit, have a few variations between them.

But the reason why Josephus and Philo both talk about the Essenes is because, well, frankly, they're weird, you know. And the Romans and the Greeks loved weird people. Plus, it's clear in Josephus' description of the Essenes that he's drawing some similarities, some parallels between the Essenes and the Cynics.

So again, he's building these bridges trying to convince the Romans that the Jews, hey, we're just like you guys, you know, see we got our crackpots, too. But the Essenes, we don't know where this word comes from. It has been associated with perhaps the word for hesed or the hesedim.

Almost nobody buys that anymore. That was an old theory. Okay.

It has been affiliated with the word *asah*, which means to make or do in Hebrew. That seems a more possible derivation, at least linguistically speaking, but what does it mean? That we're not sure of. So, we've got this word, we've got this name, Essenes, Josephus uses it, Philo uses it.

We don't know what it means. So, who are these people? Well, it's not mentioned in the New Testament. According to both Josephus and Philo, they were ascetic.

They eschewed physical comforts and pleasures. You know, they lived lives of stern kind of discipline. Both Josephus and Philo say they were celibate, but Josephus then adds, but there's this other group of Essenes who aren't celibate, too.

So, you know, so we have generally, they're celibate. Now, another interesting distinction between Josephus' Essenes and Philo's Essenes is Philo says that there would not be found among them any who make or sell weapons, which a lot of people have interpreted that to mean they're pacifists. That's a possibility.

Another possibility that people have pointed out is, well, selling weapons in those days was big business, just like it is in our day, and so people who eschew money and property and so on might not purchase or sell or make weapons because it's a sign of their simple lifestyle. Now, Josephus doesn't say anything about the Essenes being pacifists, and in fact, one of the leaders of the revolt against Rome is identified as being an Essene. So, it seems unlikely, according to Josephus' description, that they were pacifists.

Philo possibly seems to make that idea that they are pacifists. He also says they won't own slaves and in general act very strange compared to their to the other countrymen. They reject the idea of free will.

Everything is predestined according to the Essenes, and on this, both Philo and Josephus are in agreement, but again, this isn't something that Jews really talk about much. Here again, it seems like Josephus is drawing connections to Greek philosophy. They believed in astrology. Josephus says that the Essenes were the most accurate interpreters of the prophetic oracles, and that they almost never erred in their predictions, and he also talks about their use of astrology.

Philo talks about that as well. So, these people here who are this very ascetic, very stern Jewish sect also have these kind of funky weird ideas. Oh, herbs too.

They're into herbs, you know. So, the Essenes were the new age of the old age. So, because they could interpret these omens, because they could interpret the scriptures, they were able to tell the future and never erred in their predictions about the future.

Now, the way that Josephus describes their understanding of the afterlife, he says that they believed in a spiritual afterlife, and he says they have a belief, which I think is not that different from that of the Greeks, that when people die, that their spirits go to an island where they are in perpetual bliss and enjoy great benefits and, you know, all the wonderful things that heaven might afford them. So, you've got these ranges covered here, right? You've got the Essenes, who believe in total predestination and no free will. You've got the Sadducees who believe in no predestination, everything free will, and you've got the Pharisees who take the middle road and say, some things are predestined, some things aren't, and we're, you know, we have limited free will.

Then we've got the ideas of the resurrection of the dead. You've got the Pharisees who believe in a bodily resurrection, which was something that, for the most part, the Jews held to, but the Greeks and the Romans did not like that idea. See, the Greeks and Romans typically believe that matter is base and evil and corrupt, and only spirit is good.

And so the idea of a physical resurrection that anybody would become, be returned to their bodies after they've been freed from their bodies, that was repugnant to the Greeks and the Romans. So, Josephus didn't really put a lot of emphasis on the idea of physical bodily resurrection, but, you know, yeah, kind of seems maybe grudgingly admits that the Pharisees believe in this physical resurrection, and then you've got the Essenes who have this view of the spirit passing from the body and going to the

realm of the blessed kind of thing. So, he's covering all the bases here with his three sects of Jews.

Then Josephus adds, oh, by the way, there is this fourth group, and he doesn't call them the Zealots here. And this is one of those words that get misused among Bible scholars, and particularly people with just a little bit of knowledge, because, as we all know, a little knowledge is dangerous, right? But he calls them the fourth philosophy. The word Zealot really, he reserves that term for one of the three major factions of the Great Revolt.

So, you could say that some of the other hotheads before the time of the Great Revolt were acting like Zealots, but that is not the term Josephus uses for them at that point. Rather, he calls them the fourth philosophy. You know, we don't talk about Bruno.

He's kind of like that guy we keep out in the back room because he's a bit of an embarrassment to us. We don't, you know, but if I have to talk about him, I'm going to capitalize on their existence here. We've got this fourth group of troublemakers, and what he says is that they're generally like the Pharisees in all of their religious views.

At least this is what he says at one point. In another one of his writings, he says they're nothing like anybody else, but in his Antiquities, he says their views are pretty much like those of the Pharisees. But, he says, they have an unconquerable thirst for freedom such that they will not call anyone king except God.

This would be interesting because you would seem that that would rule out the idea of a Messiah, right? The typical thinking of the Messiah is that he's going to become king of Israel. But, according to Josephus, the Zealots would accept no one as king except God. He almost speaks of this as a noble thing, but at the same time, it is a really radical position.

This is a group, according to Josephus, that incited the revolt against Rome, and would later lead to the Zealots. But, not only the Zealots, but to some of the other factions that were involved in the revolt as well. So, really, he wants to lay all the responsibility at their feet.

It wasn't the Pharisees who revolted. It wasn't the Sadducees that revolted. It was this group, these weirdos, the black sheep of the family, so to speak, that revolted against Rome and led the people astray.

Now, another group that we should mention here, and I'm going to talk about these much more extensively in our next lecture here, is the sect of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Now, this sect was founded by a fellow that was called the Teacher of Righteousness. We don't really know when this person lived, but possibly about 150 BC is I guess.

We know that the Dead Sea Scrolls sect, from their own writings, shared a belief in predestination. They had a belief that was very similar to that which Josephus attributes to the Essenes, the idea that pretty much all things are predetermined and all are in the great plan of God. They also have a kind of ascetic lifestyle, according to some of the scrolls.

Now, other scrolls, not so much. We'll have to talk about that next time. They differed from the Essenes in several ways.

The issue of marriage. One of the primary texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls talks about marriage customs and who they should marry, who you shouldn't marry, and how you find a good wife, and all those kinds of things. Slavery.

Again, Philo tells us that the Essenes did not own slaves. Well, there are portions in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls that talk about the proper treatment of slaves. Passivism.

If the Essenes were pacifists, as Philo seems to imply, then the Essenes are not the Dead Sea Scrolls sect, because these guys were not pacifists, at least not in the long run. They were waiting and biding their time, and when the proper time came, they were going to rise up. They were going to kill the collaborators in Jerusalem, and then from there, they were going to overthrow Roman rule, and eventually they would become the rulers of the world, and the prince of their congregation would become the king.

So, this was their anticipation. They were expecting a violent and bloody uprising, and they had even set a date for this, and I will talk about this again, but 40 years after the death of their teacher of righteousness, they expected the war to begin. So these are not pacifists.

So, they have this strong belief that the world is going to end, or their kind of world, 40 years after the death of their teacher. We'll talk about some of these bases for separation again in our next lecture, but they say they separated from the other Jews. One of the big issues here is the interpretation of the calendar and the dates when certain festivals were to be celebrated.

We'll talk about that again in the next lecture, and also other kinds of legal practices in which they felt that their fellow Jews were simply too liberal in their leanings. So, one of the big questions, one of the big issues for Judaism of this time, is the issue of orthodoxy versus orthopraxis, which has nothing at all to do with orthodontia, but among the Jews, disagreements of doctrine, orthodoxy, were not nearly as

significant as disagreements in practice, orthopraxis. So, you can have somebody who will disagree in something as fundamental as resurrection of the dead and say, you and me are brothers, you know, but when it comes to something like somebody washing their hands the wrong way, you could get into a fight.

You could say, I repudiate you; stay away from me; you may not come near me because of these things, because you wash your hands improperly. 4QMMT. 4QMMT stands for, 4 is the K4 of Qumran, Q is Qumran.

MMT is an abbreviation for the phrase Miqsat Ma'ase Hatorah, which is some of the works of the law or some of the issues of the law or something of that sort.

4QMiqsat Ma'ase Hatorah is a text where the sect of the Dead Sea kind of lays out all their reasons for disagreeing, for breaking away, starts off right with the calendar, says this is when your Sabbaths are supposed to be, this is when your festivals are supposed to happen. That's the big one for them.

You know, the text is kind of fragmentary, so we don't have the whole thing, but then they go into all the bad things that particularly the priests are doing in Jerusalem, as far as things like, well, improperly washing their hands. This is a fun little example here, but in the typical Jewish practice in those days, to wash your hands before performing your sacrifices, what you'd do is you'd like all your priests up, and they'd all hold their hands out, and somebody would come along with this big jug of water and pour water on all your hands. This is going along here.

Well, this group, the Dead Sea Scroll sect, said, don't you realize that when that water touches that guy's hands, all the impurity in his hands goes right back up into that bucket of water? So, you're pouring dirty water all over everybody's hands. Yeah, so yeah, these are the kinds of things that got them, well, that got their dander up and made them say, we cannot fellowship with you people. You don't wash your hands right.

In the Pharisees and the Sadducees, we have these arguments, which are recorded in the Mishnah between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and they're pretty much kind of straw man arguments. Again, as I've mentioned already, in the Mishnah, the Pharisees are the heroes and the Sadducees are kind of their foils, really. But the things that they're arguing about are all matters of practice, not matters of belief.

Never do you have a Pharisee in the Mishnah saying, we have this against you, O Sadducees. You don't believe in the resurrection of the dead. It doesn't happen there.

No, instead, they say, we have this against you; o well, Sadducee starts it here. He says, we have this against you, O Pharisee. You pronounce the water that runs

through a cemetery to be clean or something of this sort, you know, or we have this against you.

You used to say that the bones of your parents do not render your hands unclean, unfit for performing sacrifices. These are the kinds of things they're arguing about in Mishnah. With the Sadducees, not whether or not there's a resurrection of the dead, not whether or not there's free will, they're arguing about piddly little points of practice.

So, I already mentioned here that Josephus talks about these three sects, and then he throws in the fourth sect of Jews. Does that mean that that gives us an account of all the Jews in the time before Jesus? Absolutely not. And according to Josephus, we've got Pharisees.

He says there are about 6,000 of those. 6,000. You would have thought it would have been a few more than that, wouldn't you? You know, so he says the Pharisees constitute about 6,000 men. I got women and kids too, you know, but hey, Sadducees, he says around 5,000 or maybe fewer than that even.

The Essenes, he says, comprise a number of about 4,000. And then he says the Zealots, oh, they're just a small little group of hotheads. Don't worry about that, right? So, what does this all add up to? Well, maybe 14 or 15,000 Jews.

How many Jews were there in the Roman Empire at that time? Well, if you talk about the whole Middle Eastern area, maybe about a million. So, the members of these sects constitute a very, very small minority of Jews. So, who are the other Jews? Well, very likely, there are some other sects that existed that simply weren't as prominent, particularly in politics of the day.

But more likely even than that, I would say most Jews just said, what do you mean Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes? I'm a Jew for pity's sake, you know? So, for most of them, this all didn't matter very much. They didn't get hung up on these distinctions. So, being a part of a sect did not define you as a Jew.

In fact, it seems that many of these people would have been regarded as maybe leaders, or maybe as divisive, or maybe as oddities. Among the great masses of Jews, these things didn't matter very much, which I don't know.

I mean, there's something kind of compelling to that. Wouldn't it be nice if we could all just get along sometimes? But on the other hand, as we have seen way back in the book of Malachi, there is this tendency for us birds of a feather to kind of flock together and find people who are of like mind and of like feelings. The main issue for most of the people, most of the Jews in those days, and I think really for a lot of people in these days, is when those people who have flocked together and come up

with their own little brand of aviary studies or whatever, decide that they are going to then try to impose those things on everyone else.

This is Dr. Anthony Tomasino in his teaching on Judaism before Jesus. This is session 10, The Jewish Sects.