

Introduction to Early Judaism

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Class 2: Biblical Interpretation

Biblical Interpretation in Alexandria

Primary Texts: Joseph and Aseneth

Biblical Interpretation in non-sectarian Judea

Primary Texts: Greek Esther

Biblical Interpretation in Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls)

Primary Texts: Genesis Apocryphon, Peshier documents, Jubilees

Timeline:

BCE:

587-586: Babylonians destroy the Jerusalem Temple; Babylonian Exile complete

539-538: Persia destroys the Babylonian Empire; allows Judeans to return

515: Building of the Second Temple is complete

334-333: Persian Period ends; Alexander the Great defeats Persia and the Hellenist Period begins

200: Judea has been mainly controlled by Ptolemies (Egyptian Greeks); it now comes under the control of Seleucids (Syrian Greeks)

175-164: Hasmonean Rebellion

103-76: Alexander Jannaeus rules Judea

76-67 BCE: Salome Alexandra reigns as Queen of Judea

63: Hasmonean period ends; Judea becomes a client kingdom of Rome

c.37-4: Herod reigns Judea

c. 20: Philo of Alexandria is born

CE:

6: Judea becomes fully incorporated into the Roman Empire

c.32: Jesus is crucified by the Romans

37: Josephus is born

28: Berenice, great-grand-daughter of Herod, is born

c. 30: Queen Helena of Adiabene converts to Judaism

38-41: Riots against the Jews in Alexandria, supported by Flaccus the governor and largely ignored by Gaius Caligula the emperor

c. 40: Philo writes *Embassy to Gaius*

c. 50: Helena dies

67-70: Jerusalem riots; Temple destroyed by Romans

c. 81: Berenice dies

135: Bar Kokhba revolt: Jews expelled from Jerusalem (which is renamed Aelia Capitolina); Rabbinic community moves to Yavneh and the Galilee

200: Mishnah edited and likely completed

500s (1st half): Babylonian Talmud edited and redacted (it will still be subject to small revisions over the next three centuries)

I. Joseph and Aseneth

Joseph and Aseneth 1:4-9

1:4-9: [Pentephres] had a daughter, a virgin of eighteen years, (she was) very tall and handsome and beautiful to look at beyond all virgins on the earth. And this (girl) had nothing similar to the virgins of the

Egyptians, but she was in every respect similar to the daughters of the Hebrews; and she was as tall as Sarah and handsome as Rebecca and beautiful as Rachel. And the name of that virgin was Aseneth. And the fame of her beauty spread all over that land and to the ends of the inhabited (world). And all the sons of the noblemen and the sons of the satraps and the sons of all kings, all of them young and powerful, asked for her hand in marriage, and there was much wrangling among them over Aseneth.

Joseph and Aseneth 4:5–6:8

And Aseneth sat between her father and mother. And Pentephres, her father...said to her, “Joseph the Powerful One of God is coming to us today. And he is chief of the whole land of Egypt, and the king Pharaoh appointed him king of the whole land, and he is giving grain to the whole land, and saving it from the oncoming famine. And Joseph is a man who worships God, and self-controlled, and a virgin like you today, and Joseph is (also) a man powerful in wisdom and experience, and the spirit of God is upon him, and the grace of the Lord (is) with him. Come, my child, and I will hand you over to him for (his) wife, and you will be a bride to him, and he will be your bridegroom forever (and) ever.”

And when Aseneth heard these words from her father, plenty of red sweat poured over her face, and she became furious with great anger, and looked askance at her father with her eyes, and said, “Why does my lord and my father speak words such as these, to hand me over, like a captive, to a man (who is) an alien, and a fugitive, and (was) sold (as a slave)? Is he not the shepherd’s son from the land of Canaan, and he himself was caught in the act (when he was) sleeping with his mistress, and his master threw him into the prison of darkness, and Pharaoh brought him out of prison, because he interpreted his dream just like the older women of the Egyptians interpret (dreams)? No, but I will be married to the king’s firstborn son, because he is king of the whole land of Egypt. Hearing this, Pentephres was ashamed to speak further to his daughter Aseneth about Joseph, because she had answered him daringly and with boastfulness and anger.

And a young man of Pentephres’ servants rushed in and says, “Behold, Joseph is standing before the doors of our court.” And Aseneth fled from her father’s and mother’s presence, when she heard (them) speak these words about Joseph, and went up into the upper floor and entered her chamber and stood by the large window, the one looking east, in order to see Joseph entering her father’s house. And Pentephres and his wife and his whole family went out to meet Joseph. And the gates of the court looking east were opened and Joseph entered, standing on Pharaoh’s second chariot, and four horses, white as snow and with golden bridles, were harnessed (to it), and the entire chariot was manufactured from pure gold. And Joseph was dressed in an exquisite white tunic, and the robe which he had thrown around him was purple, made of linen interwoven with gold, and a golden crown (was) on his head, and around the crown were twelve chosen stones, and on top of the twelve stones were twelve golden rays. And a royal staff was in his left hand, and in his right hand he held outstretched an olive branch, and there was plenty of fruit on it, and in the fruits was a great wealth of oil. And Joseph entered the court, and the gates of the court were closed, and every man and woman, (if) strange, remained outside the court, because the guards of the gates drew tight and closed the doors, and all the strangers were closed out. And Pentephres and his wife and his whole family, except their daughter Aseneth, went and prostrated themselves face down to the ground before Joseph. And Joseph descended from his chariot and greeted them with his right (hand.) And Aseneth saw Joseph on his chariot and was strongly cut (to the heart), and her soul was crushed, and her knees were paralyzed, and her entire body trembled, and she was filled with great fear. And she sighed and said in her heart, “...now be gracious on me, Lord, God of Joseph, because I have spoken wicked words against him in ignorance/ and now, let me father give me to Joseph for a maidservant and slave, and I will serve him forever (and) ever.

11:2-7: [Aseneth has fallen in love with Joseph and wants to convert:] Aseneth was tired and had become discouraged and her strength had gone. And he turned upward toward to the wall....she laid her head into her lap, clasping her fingers round her right knee, and her mouth was closed, and she (had) not opened it in the seven days and in the seven nights of her humiliation. And she said in her heart without opening her mouth....The Lord the God of the powerful Joseph, the Most High, hates all those who worship idols, because he is a jealous and terrible god toward all those who worship strange gods. Therefore he has come to hate me, too, because I worshipped dead and dumb idols...”

II. Greek Esther

A, before 1.1; B, after 3.13; C and D, after 4.17; E, after 8.12; F, after 10.3.

Addition A

In the second year of the reign of Artaxerxes the Great, on the first day of Nisan, Mordecai son of Jair son of Shimei son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, had a dream. ³He was a Jew living in the city of Susa, a great man, serving in the court of the king. ⁴He was one of the captives whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had brought from Jerusalem with King Jeconiah of Judea. And this was his dream:⁵Noises and confusion, thunders and earthquake, tumult on the earth!⁶Then two great dragons came forward, both ready to fight, and they roared terribly. ⁷At their roaring every nation prepared for war, to fight against the righteous nation. ⁸It was a day of darkness and gloom, of tribulation and distress, affliction and great tumult on the earth! ⁹And the whole righteous nation was troubled; they feared the evils that threatened them, and were ready to perish. ¹⁰Then they cried out to God; and at their outcry, as though from a tiny spring, there came a great river, with abundant water; ¹¹light came, and the sun rose, and the lowly were exalted and devoured those held in honor. ¹²Mordecai saw in this dream what God had determined to do, and after he awoke he had it on his mind, seeking all day to understand it in every detail.

Addition B

This is a copy of the letter: “The Great King, Artaxerxes, writes the following to the governors of the hundred twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia and to the officials under them: ²“Having become ruler of many nations and master of the whole world (not elated with presumption of authority but always acting reasonably and with kindness), I have determined to settle the lives of my subjects in lasting tranquility and, in order to make my kingdom peaceable and open to travel throughout all its extent, to restore the peace desired by all people. ³“When I asked my counselors how this might be accomplished, Haman—who excels among us in sound judgment, and is distinguished for his unchanging goodwill and steadfast fidelity, and has attained the second place in the kingdom—⁴pointed out to us that among all the nations in the world there is scattered a certain hostile people, who have laws contrary to those of every nation and continually disregard the ordinances of kings, so that the unifying of the kingdom that we honorably intend cannot be brought about. ⁵We understand that this people, and it alone, stands constantly in opposition to every nation, perversely following a strange manner of life and laws, and is ill-disposed to our government, doing all the harm they can so that our kingdom may not attain stability. ⁶“Therefore we have decreed that those indicated to you in the letters written by Haman, who is in charge of affairs and is our second father, shall all—wives and children included—be utterly destroyed by the swords of their enemies, without pity or restraint, on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar, of this present year, ⁷so that those who have long been hostile and remain so may in a single day go down in violence to Hades, and leave our government completely secure and untroubled hereafter.”

Addition C

Then Queen Esther, seized with deadly anxiety, fled to the Lord.² She took off her splendid apparel and put on the garments of distress and mourning, and instead of costly perfumes she covered her head with ashes and dung, and she utterly humbled her body; every part that she loved to adorn she covered with her tangled hair. ³She prayed to the Lord God of Israel, and said: ‘O my Lord, you only are our king; help me, who am alone and have no helper but you, ⁴for my danger is in my hand. ⁵Ever since I was born I have heard in the tribe of my family that you, O Lord, took Israel out of all the nations, and our ancestors from among all their forebears, for an everlasting inheritance, and that you did for them all that you

promised. ⁶And now we have sinned before you, and you have handed us over to our enemies ⁷because we glorified their gods. You are righteous, O Lord! ⁸And now they are not satisfied that we are in bitter slavery, but they have covenanted with their idols ⁹to abolish what your mouth has ordained, and to destroy your inheritance, to stop the mouths of those who praise you and to quench your altar and the glory of your house, ¹⁰to open the mouths of the nations for the praise of vain idols, and to magnify forever a mortal king.... ¹⁵You have knowledge of all things, and you know that I hate the splendor of the wicked and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised and of any alien. ¹⁶You know my necessity—that I abhor the sign of my proud position, which is upon my head on days when I appear in public. I abhor it like a filthy rag, and I do not wear it on the days when I am at leisure. ¹⁷And your servant has not eaten at Haman’s table, and I have not honoured the king’s feast or drunk the wine of libations. ¹⁸Your servant has had no joy since the day that I was brought here until now, except in you, O Lord God of Abraham. ¹⁹O God, whose might is over all, hear the voice of the despairing, and save us from the hands of evildoers. And save me from my fear!’

Addition D

On the third day, when she ended her prayer, she took off the garments in which she had worshiped, and arrayed herself in splendid attire. ²Then, majestically adorned, after invoking the aid of the all-seeing God and Savior, she took two maids with her; ³on one she leaned gently for support, ⁴while the other followed, carrying her train. ⁵She was radiant with perfect beauty, and she looked happy, as if beloved, but her heart was frozen with fear. ⁶When she had gone through all the doors, she stood before the king. He was seated on his royal throne, clothed in the full array of his majesty, all covered with gold and precious stones. He was most terrifying. ⁷Lifting his face, flushed with splendor, he looked at her in fierce anger. The queen faltered, and turned pale and faint, and collapsed on the head of the maid who went in front of her. ⁸Then God changed the spirit of the king to gentleness, and in alarm he sprang from his throne and took her in his arms until she came to herself. He comforted her with soothing words, and said to her, ⁹“What is it, Esther? I am your husband. Take courage; ¹⁰You shall not die, for our law applies only to our subjects. Come near.” ¹¹Then he raised the golden scepter and touched her neck with it, ¹²he embraced her, and said, “Speak to me.” ¹³She said to him, “I saw you, my lord, like an angel of God, and my heart was shaken with fear at your glory.” ¹⁴For you are wonderful, my lord, and your countenance is full of grace.” ¹⁵And while she was speaking, she fainted and fell. ¹⁶Then the king was agitated, and all his servants tried to comfort her.

Addition E

The following is a copy of this letter: “The Great King, Artaxerxes, to the governors of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred twenty-seven provinces, and to those who are loyal to our government, greetings. ²“Many people, the more they are honored with the most generous kindness of their benefactors, the more proud do they become, ³and not only seek to injure our subjects, but in their inability to stand prosperity, they even undertake to scheme against their own benefactors. ⁴They not only take away thankfulness from others, but, carried away by the boasts of those who know nothing of goodness, they even assume that they will escape the evil-hating justice of God, who always sees everything. ⁵And often many of those who are set in places of authority have been made in part responsible for the shedding of innocent blood, and have been involved in irremediable calamities, by the persuasion of friends who have been entrusted with the administration of public affairs, ⁶when these persons by the false trickery of their evil natures beguile the sincere goodwill of their sovereigns. ⁷“What has been wickedly accomplished through the pestilent behavior of those who exercise authority unworthily can be seen, not so much from the more ancient records that we hand on, as from investigation of matters close at hand.” ⁸In the future we will take care to render our kingdom quiet and peaceable for all, ⁹by changing our methods and always judging what comes before our eyes with more equitable consideration... ¹⁵“But we find that the Jews, who were consigned to annihilation by this thrice-accursed

man, are not evildoers, but are governed by most righteous laws ¹⁶and are children of the living God, most high, most mighty,^[i] who has directed the kingdom both for us and for our ancestors in the most excellent order...²⁴“Every city and country, without exception, that does not act accordingly shall be destroyed in wrath with spear and fire. It shall be made not only impassable for human beings, but also most hateful to wild animals and birds for all time.

Addition F

And Mordecai said, “These things have come from God; ⁵for I remember the dream that I had concerning these matters, and none of them has failed to be fulfilled. ⁶There was the little spring that became a river, and there was light and sun and abundant water—the river is Esther, whom the king married and made queen. ⁷The two dragons are Haman and myself. ⁸The nations are those that gathered to destroy the name of the Jews. ⁹And my nation, this is Israel, who cried out to God and was saved. The Lord has saved his people; the Lord has rescued us from all these evils; God has done great signs and wonders, wonders that have never happened among the nations... ¹²God remembered his people and vindicated his inheritance. ¹³So they will observe these days in the month of Adar, on the fourteenth and fifteenth of that month, with an assembly and joy and gladness before God, from generation to generation forever among his people Israel.”

Colophon

In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, Dositheus, who said he was a priest and a Levite, and Ptolemy his son, brought in [to Egypt] the foregoing letter [*epistole*] concerning the Phrourae [Purim], saying that it was authentic and that Lysimachus, son of Ptolemy, a resident of Jerusalem, had translated it.

III. The Dead Sea Scrolls

1. The Genesis Apocryphon

And I (Abram) departed....and I travelled towards the south...until I came to Hebron [at the time when Hebron] was being built; and I dwelt there [two years]. Now there was a famine in all this land, and hearing that there was prosperity in Egypt I went...to the land of Egypt...I [came to] the river Karmo, one of the branches of the River (Nile)...and I crossed the seven branches of the River...We passed through our land and entered the land of the sons of Ham, the land of Egypt.

And on the night of our entry into Egypt, I, Abram, dreamt a dream; [and behold], I saw in my dream a cedar tree and a palm tree...men came and they sought to cut down the cedar tree and to pull up its roots, leaving the palm tree (standing) alone. But the palm tree cried out saying, “Do not cut down this cedar tree, for cursed be he who shall fell [it].” And the cedar tree was spared because of the palm tree and [was] not felled.

And during the night I woke from my dream, and I said to Sarai my wife, ‘I have dreamt a dream... [and I am] fearful [because of] this dream.’ She said to me, ‘Tell me your dream that I may know it.’ So I began to tell her this dream...[the interpretation] of the dream...’...that they will seek to kill me, but will spare you...[Say to them] of me, “He is my brother,” and because of you I shall live, and because of you my life shall be saved...”

And Sarai wept that night on account of my words...

Then we journeyed towards Zoan, I and Sarai...by her life that none should see her...

And when those five years had passed, three men from among the princes of Egypt [came at the command] of Pharaoh of Zoan to inquire after [my] business and after my wife and they gave...goodness, wisdom, and truth. And I exclaimed before them...because of the famine...And they came to ascertain...with much food and drink...the wine...

(During the party, the Egyptians must have seen Sarai, and on their return they praised her to the king).

‘.....and beautiful is her face! How...fine are the hairs of her head! How lovely are her eyes! How desirable her nose and all the radiance of her countenance...How fair are her breasts and how beautiful all her whiteness! How pleasing are her arms and how perfect her hands, and how [desirable] all the appearance of her hands! How fair are her palms and how long and slender are her fingers! How comely are her feet, how perfect her thighs! No virgin or bride led into the marriage chamber is more beautiful than she; she is fairer than all other women. Truly, her beauty is greater than theirs. Yet together with all this grace she possessed abundant wisdom, so that whatever she does is perfect (?).’ When the king heard the words of Harkenosh and his two companions, for all three spoke as with one voice, he desired her greatly and sent out at once to take her. And seeing her, he was amazed by all her beauty and took her to be his wife, but me he sought to kill. Sarai said to the king, “He is my brother,” that I might benefit from her, and I, Abram, was spared because of her and I was not slain.

And I, Abram, wept aloud that night, I and my nephew Lot, because Sarai had been taken from me by force. I prayed that night and I begged and implored, and I said in my sorrow while my tears ran down: “Blessed art Thou, O Most High God, Lord of all the worlds, Thou who art Lord and king of all things and who rulest over all the kings of the earth and judgest them all! I cry now before Thee, my Lord, against Pharaoh of Zoan the king of Egypt, because of my wife who has been taken from me by force. Judge him for me that I may see Thy mighty hand raised against him and against all his household, and that he may not be able to defile my wife this night (separating her) from me, and that they may know Thee, my Lord, that Thou art Lord of all the kings of the earth. And I wept and was sorrowful.”

2. Peshar Habbakuk:

Moreover, the arrogant man seizes wealth without haling. He widens his gullet like Hell and like Death he has never enough. All the nations are gathered to him and all the peoples are assembled to him. Will they not all of them taunt him and jeer at him saying, “Woe to him who amasses that which is not his! How long will he load himself up with pledges?” (2.5–6)

Interpreted, this concerns the Wicked Priest who was called by the name of truth when he first arose. But when he ruled over Israel his heart became proud, and he forsook God and betrayed the precepts for the sake of riches. He robbed and amassed the riches of the men of violence who rebelled against God, and he took the wealth of the peoples, heaping sinful iniquity upon himself. And he lived in the ways of abominations amidst every unclean defilement.

Shall not your oppressors suddenly arise and your torturers awaken; and shall you not become their prey? Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you (2.7–8a)

[Interpreted, this concerns] the Priest who rebelled [and violated] the precepts [of God...to command] his chastisement by means of the judgments of wickedness. And they inflicted horrors of evil diseases and took vengeance upon his body of flesh. And as for that which He said, *Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you*: interpreted this concerns the last Priests of Jerusalem, who shall

amass money and wealth by plundering the people. But in the last days, their riches and booty shall be delivered into the hands of the army of the Kittim, for it is they who shall be the *remnant of the peoples*.

Because of the blood of men and the violence done to the land, to the city, and to all its inhabitants (2.8b)

Interpreted, this concerns the Wicked Priest whom God delivered into the hands of his enemies because of the iniquity committed against the Teacher of Righteousness, and the men of his Council, that he might be humbled by means of a destroying scourge, in bitterness of soul, because he had done wickedly to his elect.

Woe to him who gets evil profit for his house; who perches his nest high to be safe from the hand of evil! You have devised shame to your house: by cutting off many peoples you have forfeited your own soul. For the [stone] cries out [from] the wall [and] the beam from the woodwork replies (2.9–11)

[Interpreted, this] concerns the [Priest] who...that its stones might be laid in oppression and the beam of its woodwork in robbery. And as for that which He said, *By cutting off many peoples you have forfeited your own soul*: Interpreted this concerns the condemned House whose judgment God will pronounce in the midst of many peoples. He will bring him thence for judgment and will declare him guilty in the midst of them, and will chastise him with fire of brimstone.

Woe to him who builds a city with blood and founds a town upon falsehood! Behold, is it not from the Lord of hosts that the peoples shall labor for fire and the nations shall strive for naught? (2.12–13)

Interpreted, this concerns the Spouter of Lies who led many astray that he might build his city of vanity with blood and raise a congregation on deceit, causing many thereby to perform a service of vanity for the sake of its glory, and to be pregnant with [works] of deceit, that their labor might be for nothing and that they might be punished with fire who vilified and outraged the elect of God.

For as the waters cover the sea, so shall the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord (2.14).

Interpreted, [this means that] when they return...the lies. And afterwards, knowledge shall be revealed to them abundantly, like the waters of the sea.

Woe to him who causes his neighbors to drink; who pours out his venom to make them drunk that he may gaze on their feasts (2.15).

Interpreted, this concerns the Wicked Priest who pursued the Teacher of Righteousness to the house of his exile that he might confuse him with his venomous fury. And at the time appointed for rest, for the Day of Atonement, he appeared before them to confuse them, and to cause them to stumble on the Day of Fasting, their Sabbath of repose.

You have filled yourself with ignominy more than with glory. Drink also, and stagger! The cup of the Lord's right hand shall come round to you and shame shall come on your glory (2.16).

Interpreted, this concerns the Priest whose ignominy was greater than his glory. For he did not circumcise the foreskin of his heart, and he walked in the ways of drunkenness that he might quench his thirst. But the cup of the wrath of God shall confuse him, multiplying his...and the pain of...

[For the violence done to Lebanon shall overwhelm you, and the destruction of the beasts] shall terrify you, because of the blood of men and the violence done to the land, the city, and all its inhabitants (2.17).

Interpreted, this saying concerns the Wicked Priest, inasmuch as he shall be paid the reward which he himself tendered to the Poor. For *Lebanon* is the Council of the Community, and the *beasts* are the simple of Judah who keep the Law. As he himself plotted the destruction of the Poor, so will God condemn him to destruction. And as

for that which He said, *Because of the blood of the city and the violence done to the land*: interpreted, the city is Jerusalem where the Wicked Priest committed abominable deeds and defiled the Temple of God. *The violence done to the land*: these are the cities of Judah where he robbed the Poor of their possessions.

More on Sectarianism

1. Josephus, Life, 2:

At about the age of sixteen I determined to gain. personal experience of the several sects into which our nation is divided. These, as I have frequently mentioned, are three in number—the first that of the Pharisees, the second that of the Sadducees, and the third that of the Essenes. I thought that, after a thorough investigation, I should be in a position to select the best. So I submitted myself to hard training and laborious exercises and passed through the three courses. Not content, however, with the experience thus gained, on hearing of one named Bannus, who dwelt in the wilderness, wearing only such clothing as trees provided, feeding on such things as grew of themselves, and using frequent ablutions of cold water, by day and night, for purity's sake, I became his devoted disciple. With him I lived for three years and, having accomplished my purpose, returned to the city. Being now in my .nineteenth year I began to govern my life by the rules of the Pharisees, a sect having points of resemblance to that which the Greeks call the Stoic school.

2. Josephus, Antiquities, 13.5.9.

At this time there were three sects among the Jews, who had different opinions concerning human actions; the one was called the sect of the Pharisees, another the sect of the Sadducees, and the other the sect of the Essenes. Now for the Pharisees, they say that some actions, but not all, are the work of fate, and some of them are in our own power, and that they are liable to fate, but are not caused by fate. But the sect of the Essenes affirm that fate governs all things, and that nothing befalls men but what is according to its determination. And for the Sadducees, they take away fate, and say that there is no such thing, and that the events of human affairs are not at its disposal; but they suppose that all our actions are in our own power, so that we are ourselves the cause of what is good, and receive what is evil from our own folly. However, I have give a more exact account of these opinions in the second book of the Jewish War.

3. Josephus, Antiquities, 13.10.6.

What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers; and concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them, while the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude of their side; but about these two sects, and that of the Essenes, I have treated accurately in the second book of Jewish affairs.

The Jews had for a great while three sects of philosophy peculiar to themselves; the sect of the Essenes, and the sect of the Sadducees, and the third sort of opinions was that of those called Pharisees; of which sects although I have already spoken in the second book of the Jewish War, yet will I a little touch upon them now.

Now, for the Pharisees, they live meanly, and despise delicacies in diet; and they follow the conduct of reason; and what that prescribes to them as good for them, they do; and they think they ought earnestly to strive to observe reason's dictates for practice. They also pay a respect to such as are in years; nor are they so bold as to contradict them in anything which they have introduced; and, when they determine that all things are done by fate, they do not take away the freedom from men of acting as they think fit; since their notion is, that it hath

pleased God to make a temperament, whereby what he wills is done, but so that the will of men can act virtuously or viciously. They also believe that souls have an immortal vigor in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and live again; on account of which doctrines, **they are able greatly to persuade the body of the people; and whatsoever they do about divine worship, prayers, and sacrifices, they perform them according to their direction; insomuch that the cities gave great attestations to them** on account of their entire virtuous conduct, both in the actions of their lives and their discourses also.

But the doctrine of the Sadducees is this: That souls die with the bodies; nor do they regard the observation of anything besides what the law enjoins them; for they think it an instance of virtue to dispute with those teachers of philosophy whom they frequent; but this doctrine is received but by a few, yet by those still of the greatest dignity; but they are able to do almost nothing of themselves; for when they become magistrates, as they are unwillingly and by force sometimes obliged to be, **they addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees, because the multitude would not otherwise bear them.**

The doctrine of the Essenes is this: That all things are best ascribed to God. They teach the immortality of souls, and esteem that the rewards of righteousness are to be earnestly striven for; and when they send what they have dedicated to God into the temple, they do not offer sacrifices, because they have more pure lustrations of their own; on which account they are excluded from the common court of the temple, but offer their sacrifices themselves; yet is their course of life better than that of other men; and they entirely addict themselves to husbandry. It also deserves our admiration, how much they exceed all other men that addict themselves to virtue, and this in righteousness; and indeed to such a degree, that as it hath never appeared among any other man, neither Greeks nor barbarians, no, not for a little time, so hath it endured a long while among them. This is demonstrated by that institution of theirs which will not suffer anything to hinder them from having all things in common; **so that a rich man enjoys no more of his own wealth than he who hath nothing at all. There are about four thousand men that live in this way, and neither marry wives,** nor are desirous to keep servants; as thinking the latter tempts men to be unjust, and the former gives the handle to domestic quarrels; but as they live by themselves, they minister one to another. They also appoint certain stewards to receive the incomes of their revenues, and of the fruits of the ground; such as are good men and priests, who are to get their corn and their food ready for them. They none of them differ from others of the Essenes in their way of living, but do the most resemble those Dacae who are called Polistae [dwellers in cities].

But of the fourth sect of Jewish philosophy, Judas the Galilean was the author. These men agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions; but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty; and say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord. They also do not value dying any kind of death, nor indeed do they heed the deaths of their relationships and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man Lord; and since this immovable resolution of theirs is well known to a great many, I shall speak no farther about that matter; nor am I afraid that anything I have said of them should be disbelieved, but rather fear, that what I have said is beneath the resolution they show when they undergo pain; and it was in Gessius Florus's time that the nation began to grow mad with this distemper, who was our procurator, and who occasioned the Jews to go wild with it by the abuse of his authority, and to make them revolt from the Romans; and these are the sects of Jewish philosophy.

4. Josephus, *The Jewish War*, II.8.2-14:

For there are three philosophical sects among the Jews. The followers of the first of whom are the Pharisees; of the second the Sadducees; and the third sect, who pretends to a severer discipline, and called Essenes. These last are Jews by birth, and seem to have a greater affection for one another than the other sects have. These Essenes reject pleasures as an evil, but esteem continence, and the conquest over our passions, to be virtue. They neglect wedlock, but choose out other persons' children, while they are pliable, and fit for learning; and esteem them to be of their kindred, and form them according to their own manners. They do not absolutely deny the fitness of

marriage, and the succession of mankind thereby continued; but they guard against the lascivious behavior of women, and are persuaded that none of them preserve their fidelity to one man.

These men are despisers of riches, and so very communicative as raises our admiration. Nor is there any one to be found among them who hath more than another; for it is a law among them, that those who come to them must let what they have to be common to the whole order, insomuch, that among them all there is no appearance of poverty or excess of riches, but every one's possessions are intermingled with every other's possessions: and so there is, as it were, one patrimony among all the brethren....**they have no certain city but many of them dwell in every city; and if any of their sect come from other places, what they have lies open for them, just as if it were their own; and they go into such as they never knew before, as if they had been ever so long acquainted with them...**

And as for their piety towards God, it is very extraordinary; for before sunrising they speak not a word about profane matters, but put up certain prayers which they have received from their forefathers, as if they made a supplication for its rising...

For their doctrine is this: That bodies are corruptible, and that the matter they are made of it not permanent; but that **the souls are immortal, and continue forever; and that they come out of the most subtle air, and are united to their bodies as in prisons, into which they are drawn by a certain natural enticement; but that then they are set free from the bonds of the flesh, they then, as released from a long bondage, rejoice and mount upward. And this is like the opinion of the Greeks, that good souls have their habitations beyond the ocean, in a region that is neither oppressed with storms of rain, or snow, or with intense heat, but that this place is such as is refreshed by the gentle breathing of a west wing, that is perpetually blowing from the ocean; while they allot to bad souls a dark and tempestuous den, full of never-ceasing punishments. And indeed the Greeks seem to me to have followed the same notion**, when they allot the islands of the blessed to their brave men, whom they call heroes and demigods; and to the souls of the wicked, the region of the ungodly, in Hades...

There are also those among them who undertake to foretell things to come, by reading the holy books, and using several sorts of purifications, and being perpetually conversant in the discourses of the prophets; and it is but seldom that they miss in their predictions.

Moreover, there is another order of Essenes, who agree with the rest as to their way of living, and customs, and laws, but differ from them in the point of marriage, as thinking that by not marrying they cut off the principal part of the human life, which is the prospect of succession; nay rather, that if all men should be of the same opinion, the whole race of mankind would fail. However, they try their spouses for three years; and if they find that they have their natural purgations thrice, as trials that they are likely to be fruitful, they then actually marry them...

But then as to the other two other orders at first mentioned: the Pharisees are those who are esteemed most skillful in the exact explication of their laws, and introduce the first sect. These ascribe to all fate [or providence], and to God, and yet allow, that to act what is right, or the contrary, is principally in the power of men, although fate does cooperate in every action. They say that all souls are incorruptible; but that the souls of good men are only removed into other bodies, but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment. But the Sadducees are those that compose the second order, and take away fate entirely, and suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil; and they say, that to act what is good, or what is evil, is at men's own choice, and that the one or the other belongs so to every one, that they may act as they please. They also take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards in Hades. Moreover, the Pharisees are friendly to one another, and are for the exercise of concord and regard for the public. But the behavior of the Sadducees one towards another is in some degree wiled; and their conversation with those that are

of their own party is as barbarous as if they were strangers to them. And this is what I had to say concerning the philosophic sects among the Jews.

The Specifics:

A. Pharisees:

[Josephus, Antiquities, XIII.15:5-9]

New Testament: Matthew 12:34-39, 15:7-8, 23:2-33; Mark 7:5-13; Luke 11:39-49, 15:1-2, 18:9-13; John 5:39-40; 12:48-50

B. Sadducees:

[Josephus, Antiquities, XIII.10:6]

Matthew 23:23

5. Matthew 22:23-40

23 The same day some Sadducees came to him, saying there is no resurrection; * and they asked him a question, saying, ²⁴“Teacher, Moses said, “If a man dies childless, his brother shall marry the widow, and raise up children for his brother.” ²⁵Now there were seven brothers among us; the first married, and died childless, leaving the widow to his brother. ²⁶The second did the same, so also the third, down to the seventh. ²⁷Last of all, the woman herself died. ²⁸In the resurrection, then, whose wife of the seven will she be? For all of them had married her.’

29 Jesus answered them, ‘You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels* in heaven. ³¹And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, ³²“I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is God not of the dead, but of the living.’ ³³And when the crowd heard it, they were astounded at his teaching.

34 When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷He said to him, ‘“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”’ ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”’ ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’ (Trans. NRSV) (Cf. Mark 12)

6. Mishnah Yadayim 4:6-7:

The Sadducees said, "We blame [object to] you Pharisees, because you say, 'Sacred Scriptures make the hands unclean, but the books Hameram do not make the hands unclean.'" Rabbon Jochanan ben Zachai replied [ironically], "And have we nothing else to object to the Pharisees but this? They also assert that the bones of an ass are clean, but the bones of Jochanan the high priest are unclean." They [the Sadducees] replied, "According to their love [the estimation in which the bones are held] is their uncleanness, so that no one may turn the bones of his father and mother into spoons." He answered them, "In like manner [are] the sacred Scriptures; according to their love [the high estimation in which they are held] is their uncleanness; whereas the books Hameram, which are not beloved [held in no esteem], do not make the hands unclean."

The Sadducees said, "We blame [object to] you Pharisees, that ye declare the stream [which flows when water is poured from a clean vessel into an unclean one] to be clean." The Pharisees replied [with much better right], "We [may] blame [object to] you Sadducees, that ye declare a streamlet of water which flows from a burial ground to be clean." The Sadducees [further] said, "We blame [object to] you Pharisees, because ye say, 'If mine ox or mine ass cause any damage, I am bound [to make compensation], but should my bondman or bondwoman cause any damage, I am absolved [from making compensation];' if I am bound for mine ox and mine ass, respecting which there are no duties enjoined on me, [does it not follow that] for my bondman or bondwoman, respecting whom

there are duties enjoined on me, it is just that I should [also] be bound [to compensate] for the damage he [or she] occasions?" [But] they [the Pharisees] replied, "Not the same rule which applies to mine ox or mine ass, that are not possessed of reason, can apply to my bondman or bondwoman, who are possessed of reason; for, should I offend them, they may [maliciously] set fire to the growing corn of another person, in order that I might be bound to pay for it." (Trans. Sefaria.Org)

C. Essenes:

7. Philo of Alexandria, *Hypothetica*, 11:1-18

[The Essenes] live in many cities of Judaea and in many villages and grouped in great societies of many members. Their persuasion is not based on birth, for birth is not a descriptive mark of voluntary associations, but on their zeal for virtue and desire to promote brotherly love. Thus no Essene is a mere child nor even a stripling or newly bearded, since the characters of such are unstable with a waywardness corresponding to the immaturity of their age, but full grown and already verging on old age, no longer carried under by the tide of the body nor led by the passions, but enjoying the veritable, the only real freedom. This freedom is attested by their life. None of them allows himself to have any private property, either house or slave or estate or cattle or any of the other things which are amassed and abundantly procured by wealth, but they put everything together into the public stock and enjoy the benefit of them all in common.

They live together formed into clubs, bands of comradeship with common meals, and never cease to conduct all their affairs to serve the general weal. But they have various occupations at which they labour with untiring application and never plead cold or heat or any of the violent changes in the atmosphere as an excuse. Before the sun is risen they betake themselves to their familiar tasks and only when it sets force them selves to return, for they delight in them as much as do those who are entered for gymnastic competitions. For they consider that the exercises which they practise whatever they may be are more valuable to life, more pleasant to soul and body and more lasting than those of the athlete in as much as they can still be plied with vigour when that of the body is past its prime.

Some of them labour on the land skilled in sowing and planting, some as herdsmen taking charge of every kind of cattle and some superintend the swarms of bees. Others work at the handicrafts to avoid the sufferings which are forced upon us by our indispensable requirements and shrink from no innocent way of getting a livelihood. Each branch when it has received the wages of these so different occupations gives it to one person who has been appointed as treasurer. He takes it and at once buys what is necessary and provides food in abundance and anything else which human life requires. **Thus having each day a common life and a common table they are content with the same conditions, lovers of frugality who shun expensive luxury as a disease of both body and soul.**

And not only is their table in common but their clothing also. For in winter they have a stock of stout coats ready and in summer cheap vests, so that he who wishes may easily take any garment he likes, since what one has is held to belong to all and conversely what all have one has. Again if anyone is sick he is nursed at the common expense and tended with care and thoughtfulness by all. The old men too even if they are childless are treated as parents of a not merely numerous but very filial family and regularly close their life with an exceedingly prosperous and comfortable old age; so many are those who give them precedence and honour as their due and minister to them as a duty voluntarily and deliberately accepted rather than enforced by nature.

Furthermore they eschew marriage because they clearly discern it to be the sole or the principal danger to the maintenance of the communal life, as well as because they particularly practise continence. For no Essene takes a wife, because a wife is a selfish creature, excessively jealous and an adept at beguiling the morals of her husband and seducing him by her continued impostures. For by the fawning talk which she practises and the other ways in which she plays her part like an actress on the stage she first ensnares the sight and hearing, and when these subjects as it were have been duped she cajoles the sovereign mind.

And if children come, filled with the spirit of arrogance and bold speaking she gives utterance with more audacious hardihood to things which before she hinted covertly and under disguise, and casting off all shame she compels him to commit actions which are all hostile to the life of fellowship. For he who is either fast bound in the love lures of his wife or under the stress of nature makes his children his first care ceases to be the same to others and unconsciously has become a different man and has passed from freedom into slavery. Such then is the life of the Essenes, a life so highly to be prized that not only commoners but also great kings look upon them with admiration and amazement, and the approbation and honours which they give add further veneration to their venerable name.

8. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 5.15: 1st century Rome.

(17.) Lying on the west of Asphaltites, and sufficiently distant to escape its noxious exhalations, are the Esseni²⁹, a people that live apart from the world, and marvellous beyond all others throughout the whole earth, for they have no women among them; to sexual desire they are strangers; money they have none; the palm-trees are their only companions. Day after day, however, their numbers are fully recruited by multitudes of strangers that resort to them, driven thither to adopt their usages by the tempests of fortune, and wearied with the miseries of life. **Thus it is, that through thousands of ages, incredible to relate, this people eternally prolongs its existence, without a single birth taking place there;** so fruitful a source of population to it is that weariness of life which is felt by others. (Trans. John Bostock; Perseus.Tufts.Edu)

D. Hasidim:

[1 Maccabees 2:37-47]

i) 1 Maccabees 7:8-18

8 So the king chose Bacchides, one of the king's Friends, governor of the province Beyond the River; he was a great man in the kingdom and was faithful to the king. ⁹He sent him, and with him he sent the ungodly Alcimus, whom he made high priest; and he commanded him to take vengeance on the Israelites. ¹⁰So they marched away and came with a large force into the land of Judah; and he sent messengers to Judas and his brothers with peaceable but treacherous words. ¹¹But they paid no attention to their words, for they saw that they had come with a large force. ¹²Then a group of scribes appeared in a body before Alcimus and Bacchides to ask for just terms. ¹³The Hasideans were first among the Israelites to seek peace from them, ¹⁴for they said, 'A priest of the line of Aaron has come with the army, and he will not harm us.' ¹⁵Alcimus spoke peaceable words to them and swore this oath to them, 'We will not seek to injure you or your friends.' ¹⁶So they trusted him; but he seized sixty of them and killed them in one day, in accordance with the word that was written, ¹⁷'The flesh of your faithful ones and their blood they poured out all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them.' ¹⁸Then the fear and dread of them fell on all the people, for they said, 'There is no truth or justice in them, for they have violated the agreement and the oath that they swore.' (NRSV)

j) 2 Maccabees 14:1-11

3 Now a certain Alcimus, who had formerly been high priest but had willfully defiled himself in the times of separation, realized that there was no way for him to be safe or to have access again to the holy altar, ⁴and went to King Demetrius in about the one hundred and fifty-first year, presenting to him a crown of gold and a palm, and besides these some of the customary olive branches from the temple. During that day he kept quiet. ⁵But he found an opportunity that furthered his mad purpose when he was invited by Demetrius to a meeting of the council and was asked about the attitude and intentions of the Jews. He answered:

6 ‘Those of the Jews who are called Hasideans, whose leader is Judas Maccabeus, are keeping up war and stirring up sedition, and will not let the kingdom attain tranquillity. ⁷Therefore I have laid aside my ancestral glory—I mean the high-priesthood—and have now come here, ⁸first because I am genuinely concerned for the interests of the king, and second because I have regard also for my compatriots. For through the folly of those whom I have mentioned our whole nation is now in no small misfortune. (NRSV)