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*Jesus*  
*and the*  
*Judaism*  
*of His Time*

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*Irving M. Zeitlin*

# **Jesus and the Judaism of His Time**

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**Irving M. Zeitlin**

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For Esther

# Contents

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Preface

Acknowledgements

## **PART I Judaism in the Time of Jesus**

1 The Unifying Principles

2 Varieties of Jewish Religious Experience

The Pharisees

The Sadducees

The Essenes

The Essenes and the Qumran Community

Zealots and Sicarii

3 The Messianic Idea in Israel

Messianism and False Prophets

## **PART II Jesus of Nazareth: Charismatic Religious Virtuoso**

4 Jesus the Pious Palestinian Jew

Is Matthew Untrustworthy Where the Law is Concerned?

James the Brother of Jesus

5 Jesus' Distinctive Religious Virtuosity

Jesus in the Synagogues

Jesus in the Gospel According to John

6 Jesus and the Torah (the Law)

The Sabbath

Dietary Laws (Kashrut) and Hygiene

The Issue of Divorce

7 Who was the First Evangelist?

Additional Questions about the Marcan Priority Thesis

8 Jesus' Originality and Creative Genius

The Am Ha-aretz

The Beatitudes

The Lord's Prayer

Jesus' Parables

9 The Kingdom of Heaven and the Role of the Messiah

Jesus and the 'Son of Man'

The Question of Bethlehem

### **PART III The Road to Golgotha**

10 Jesus the Revolutionary?

Jesus and the Zealots

The 'Cleansing of the Temple'

11 The Arrest, Trial and Execution

More on the Reimarus-Eisler-Brandon Thesis

'Not this man, but Barabbas'

12 The Resurrection Appearance

13 The First Christians

Enter Saul (Paul) of Tarsus

The Apostolic Council

14 Paul's Reinterpretation of Jesus' Teaching

A Fence Around the Law

Notes

Bibliography

Index

# Preface

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Where did Jesus of Nazareth stand in relation to the Judaism of his time? This is the key question that needs to be addressed if we wish to understand the Jesus of history. This question presupposes an adequate grasp of the nature of Judaism in the first century. Who were the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots? What were the fundamental religio-ethical precepts common to them all, and what is it that distinguished one 'party' from another? It is only against such a background that we can begin to catch a few reliable glimpses of the way Jesus understood himself, and the way he was understood by his disciples, critics and adversaries.

If there is a single general concept that can effectively guide our analysis, it is the concept of *charisma*. The outstanding German sociologist Max Weber was among the first to apply the concept of charisma systematically in his comparative-historical studies of the world religions. Charisma, meaning literally 'gift of grace', is a form of authority based upon the extraordinary personal qualities of an individual who, thanks to those qualities, is able to call forth an absolutely personal devotion to his leadership. Typically, a charismatic leader is self appointed and is followed by those who feel themselves to be in a state of distress; they follow the leader because they believe him to be extraordinarily qualified. Charisma is conditional in that the leader must authenticate his special gifts through miracles, revelations or other 'superhuman' feats. Success

in such feats is essential for the maintenance of his authority; failure leads to ruin. In Weber's words:

The holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission. His success determines whether he finds them. His charismatic claim breaks down if his mission is not recognized by those to whom he feels he has been sent. If they recognize him, he is their master – so long as he knows how to maintain recognition through 'proving' himself. But he does not derive his 'right' from their will, in the manner of an election. Rather the reverse holds: it is the *duty* of those to whom he addresses his mission to recognize him as their charismatically qualified leader.<sup>1</sup>

'Pure' charisma is, by its very nature, the opposite of all 'institutional' social structures, and independent of them:

In order to do justice to their mission, the holders of charisma, the master as well as his disciples and followers, must stand outside the ties of this world, outside of routine occupations, as well as outside the routine obligations of family life.<sup>2</sup>

It is fairly obvious that Weber arrived at this conception of charisma through reflection on the role of the historical Jesus. Indeed, Weber cites the Gospels:

Charismatic rule is not managed according to general norms, either traditional or rational, but, in principle, according to concrete revelations and inspirations, and in this sense, charismatic authority is 'irrational' [or non-rational]. It is 'revolutionary' in the sense of not being bound to the existing order: 'It is written – but I say unto you ...!'<sup>3</sup>

An essential element of charismatic leadership, then, is the challenge it presents to traditional authority.

Was Jesus a charismatic leader in Weber's sense? If so, what was the source of his charisma – that is, what was it about him that struck his contemporaries as extraordinary? Does charisma imply 'popularity'? The concept of charisma does seem to carry such an implication and Jesus definitely appears to have drawn crowds; but he was also unpopular. Indeed, not only his influential contemporaries, but the common people as well, found some of his words to be



offensive. If charisma implies a conflict with traditional authority, then how did Jesus fit into the religious traditions of the Judaism of his time? It appears that he was at odds with certain 'traditions of the elders'. Was it his intention, however, to break radically with the laws of Moses and to supplant them *in toto*? Or is the truth rather that Jesus diverged from specific norms in a striking, significant and unique manner? And what was the nature of Jesus' self-understanding with regard to his mission? If he felt himself called to fulfil the Messianic role, why was there so much confusion as to who he was? We are told, after all, that his own family did not believe in him, that his disciples abandoned him, that Peter denied him and that Paul, at first, was among the harshest persecutors of Jesus' followers. Furthermore, is it possible that Jesus was himself not certain who he was? What other meaning can we give to his question, 'Who do men say that I am?'. Finally, why was he executed by the Romans as a political rebel? These and other central questions require a knowledge of the setting in which Jesus worked - a knowledge, in particular, of the fundamental unifying principles of first century Judaism, as well as the varieties of religious experience within it.

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# Part I

## Judaism in the Time of Jesus

# 1

## The Unifying Principles

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Josephus, the famous Jewish historian, is one of our major sources of information for the Jewish traditions of the first century. He was born in Jerusalem in the first year of the reign of Caligula (AD 37/38). His father, Matthias, descended from a distinguished priestly family, ensured that Josephus would receive a careful religious education and a thorough knowledge of the Torah, or law. At the age of 16 he went through the schools of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes, one after the other. Still searching for a deeper religious understanding he withdrew to the wilderness to join a hermit named Bannus. After spending three years with him, Josephus returned to Jerusalem and in his nineteenth year, joined the Pharisees.<sup>1</sup>

Josephus states that when the Jewish war broke out against the Romans (AD 66), he had at first opposed it (*Life* 4). This is quite possible as the Jewish aristocracy in general took part in the war only under coercion. Once the initial blows had been struck, however, he joined the uprising and even became one of its leaders, acquiring the important post of commander in chief of Galilee (*Life* 7). His career as commander ended with the fall of the fortress Jotapata in AD 67 and his capture by the Romans (*War* 3:344). Led before Vespasian, Josephus predicted the Roman general's

ascent to the imperial throne, and was therefore treated from the beginning with consideration and respect. Two years later, in AD 69, Vespasian was in fact proclaimed emperor by the legions in Egypt and Judea, thus fulfilling Josephus' prophecy. Vespasian remembered his special prisoner and granted him his freedom as a mark of gratitude (*War* 4:622). Following his proclamation as emperor, Vespasian, accompanied by Josephus, proceeded to Alexandria where he turned over his command of the war to Titus. Josephus then returned to Palestine in Titus' entourage and was forced, under the Roman general's orders and with considerable danger to his life, to call on the Jews to surrender. With the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans, Titus, in gratitude, urged Josephus to 'take what he wanted'; Josephus merely appropriated some sacred books and pleaded for the freedom of his brother and other prisoners who were his friends. He was able to persuade the Roman commander to take down three men who had already been crucified, one of whom recovered (*Life* 75).

At the close of the war Josephus accompanied Titus to Rome where, benefiting from his favoured status, he carried on with his studies and writing. Vespasian provided him with a dwelling in a house in which he himself had once lived, granting him both Roman citizenship and an annual pension (*Life* 76). It was in these favourable circumstances that Josephus composed his voluminous works. The first of these, *The Jewish War*, is a history covering the period from Antiochus Epiphanus and the Maccabean uprising (175-164 BC) through the conquest of Jerusalem and the war's aftermath, including the liquidation of the last remaining insurgents. Vespasian, Titus and other Romans who had participated in the war attested that Josephus had recounted the events correctly and faithfully. Agrippa II, the exiled Jewish king, agreed with their assessment.

*The Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus' other famous work, reviews the history of the Jewish people from earliest times to the outbreak of the war with the Romans in AD 66. It is in this work that Josephus has a few words to say both about Jesus (*Antiq.* 18:63-4) and his brother James (*Antiq.* 20:200). This famous passage about Jesus, referred to as the *Testimonium Flavianum*, appears to have been tampered with by a later hand. It will be discussed in detail in chapter 10. In addition to *The Jewish War* and *The Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus composed *The Life* and *Against Apion*, a polemic defending the Jewish faith against pagan critics. *The Life* is not a full autobiography, as it deals almost exclusively with Josephus' activities as a commanding officer in Galilee in AD 66/67.

When Josephus' several works are compared, there are discrepancies to be found in his recounting of certain events. In *The Jewish War*, for example, Josephus represents himself as having been the military commander of Galilee from the outset; in *The Life* the young priest of 29 is sent together with two other priests on a mission to dissuade the insurgents and to endeavour to maintain the peace. Later in this work, however, Josephus does mention that he held supreme command. A distinguished Josephus scholar, H. St John Thackeray, has described Josephus as an egoist, a 'self interested time-server and flatterer of his Roman patrons'; he was no Thucydides who recorded the 'tragedy of his nation with strict and sober impartiality'.<sup>2</sup> Thackeray maintained that 'Josephus was commissioned by the conquerors to write the official history of the war for propagandist purposes. It was a manifesto, intended as a warning to the East of the futility of further opposition and to allay the after-war thirst for revenge, which ultimately found vent in the fierce outbreaks [of Jewish revolt] under Trajan and

Hadrian.’<sup>3</sup> For all of his criticisms, however, Thackeray acknowledges, in the end, that ‘the narrative of our author [i.e., *The Jewish War*] in its main outlines must be accepted as trustworthy’.<sup>4</sup>

Other Josephus’ specialists agree that

as a historian, Josephus aimed at accuracy ... He knew the importance of evidence in support of a statement, as his list of [Roman] decrees shows (*Antiq.* 14:185 ff.)... He is the main authority for the Roman period of Jewish history up to AD 70, and a very creditable one. Without Josephus’ works, we should be very doubtful about the siege of Jerusalem, and our knowledge of the rise of the Herods would have to be pieced together from coins and incidental references ... To appreciate the value of Josephus’ works, we have to imagine ourselves without them’.<sup>5</sup>

In *Against Apion* Josephus provides us with a full and systematic exposition of the nature of the Jewish faith in the first century. Thackeray has called this work a ‘fine apology’ for Judaism.<sup>6</sup> But as F.J. Foakes Jackson has observed, ‘one reason why Josephus is of so much interest to us in this respect is because we have so little *contemporary* authority for the Judaism of the first century of the Christian era, the [other] Jewish writers on the subject mostly belonging to a later age’.<sup>7</sup> In sum, although Josephus in *Against Apion* is explaining Judaism to pagans, there is no good reason to doubt the accuracy of his explanation. For it is confirmed, as we shall see, by two other major sources, the New Testament and the Mishnah. We need to remind ourselves that the New Testament is at least in part a Jewish book, in that large portions of it were written by Jewish writers who, despite their new Christian faith, present a picture of the central core of first century Judaism which is entirely compatible with that of Josephus. Besides Josephus and the New Testament, a third source needs to be taken into account, namely the Mishnah,<sup>8</sup> composed c.AD 200. Although the Mishnah and the other parts of the Talmud were composed much later than the period under

consideration, they do contain references to first century teachers, events, beliefs and practices. Used with care, therefore, this source can also be illuminating for our purposes.

From *Against Apion* we gain a rather clear picture of the Law, the temple, the sabbath and other central institutions of Judaism. Apion was a grammarian who wrote, among other things, an Egyptian history containing harsh invective against the Jews. Among all the pagan opponents of the Jews, this Apion stood out for the depth of his hatred and the lengths to which he went in fabricating falsehoods concerning the Jewish faith. He was therefore treated with a special bitterness and contempt by Josephus who refuted each of his false accusations. All in all, Josephus' polemic gives us a good insight into the fundamentals of first century Judaism, a summary of which follows.

The Jews have always prided themselves on the education of their children; and they believe that the most essential task in life is to observe the laws and pious practices which they have inherited (*Ag. Ap.* I: 58-63). This has been true not only in Palestine but in the Diaspora as well. Apion himself attested to this by taking the Jews to task for not worshipping the same gods as the Alexandrians. He was surprised 'at the allegiance to their original religious laws of a people who came to Alexandria from another country' (II:65-7). In accusing the Jews of sedition for not erecting statues to the Roman emperors, Apion likewise confirmed that the Jews residing in Egypt made no images whatsoever. As for the Palestinian Jews, the calamities to which their Holy City was subjected are well known; yet when the successive conquerors occupied the temple, they found nothing but that which was prescribed by the Torah. Anyone who has ever seen our temple, wrote Josephus,

is aware of the general design of the building, and the inviolable barriers which preserved its sanctity. It had four surrounding courts, each with its



statutory restrictions. The outer court was open to all, foreigners included; women during their impurity were alone refused admission. To the second court all Jews were admitted and, when uncontaminated by any defilement, their wives; to the third, male Jews, if clean and purified; to the fourth the priests robed in their priestly vestments. The sanctuary was entered only by the high priests, clad in the raiment peculiar to themselves. So careful is the provision for all the details of the service, that the priests' entry is timed to certain hours. Their duty was to enter in the morning, when the temple was opened, and to offer the customary sacrifices, and again at midday, until the temple was closed ... No vessel whatever might be carried into the temple [cf. Mark 11:16], the only objects in which were an altar, a table, a censer, and a lampstand, all mentioned in the Law [i.e., the Torah]. There was nothing more; no unmentionable mysteries took place, no repast was served within the building ... there are four priestly tribes [cf. Exra 2:36; Neh. 7:39], each comprising upwards of five thousand members, [and] these officiate by rotation for a fixed period of days; when the term of one party ends, others come to offer the sacrifices in their place, and assembling at midday in the temple, take over from the outgoing ministers the keys of the building and all its vessels, duly numbered. Nothing of the nature of food or drink is brought within the temple; objects of this kind may not even be offered on the altar, save those which are prepared for the sacrifices. (*Ag. Ap.* II:103-9)

In tracing the Jewish law to Moses, Josephus observes that whereas some peoples had entrusted the supreme political power to monarchies, others to oligarchies and still others to the masses, Moses eschewed all these forms of polity and gave his construction the form of a 'theocracy',<sup>9</sup> placing all sovereignty and authority in the hands of God. To God

he persuaded all to look, as the author of all blessings, both those which are common to all mankind, and those which they had won for themselves by prayer in the crises of their history. He [Moses] convinced them that no single action, no secret thought, could be hid from Him. He represented Him as one, uncreated [i.e., not born as were the Greek and other pagan gods] and immutable to all eternity; in beauty surpassing all mortal thought, made known to us by His power, although the nature of His real being passes knowledge. (*Ag. Ap.* II:164-7)

Josephus observes that the wisest of Greeks may have borrowed their conceptions of God from the principles laid down by Moses, a theory that had been propounded earlier

by Aristobulus (second century BC) and adopted afterwards by Philo and later writers. Josephus cites Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Plato, the Stoics and other philosophers, all of whom appear to have held similar views concerning the nature of God. Nevertheless, there is an important difference between even the wisest of the Greek philosophers and the principles imparted by Moses. Whereas the philosophers addressed themselves to the select few, ignoring the masses who retained their own notions, Moses,

by making practice square with precept, not only convinced his own contemporaries, but so firmly implanted this belief concerning God in their descendants to all future generations that it cannot be moved. The cause of his success was that the very nature of his legislation made it far more useful than any other; for he did not make religion a department of virtue, but the various virtues - I mean justice, temperance, fortitude, and mutual harmony in all things between the members of the community - departments of religion. *Religion governs all our actions and occupations and speech; none of these things did our lawgiver leave unexamined or indeterminate.* (Ag. Ap. II:169-71, italics added)

Furthermore, Moses so combined precept and practice that it was not only unprecedented in his own time, it had yet to be followed by the non-Jewish peoples of Josephus' time. Moses had taken great care to ensure that there be practical training in morals for all, and that the letter of the law be followed in daily life.

Starting from the very beginning with the food of which we partake from infancy and the private life [or diet] of the home, he left nothing, however insignificant, to the discretion and caprice of the individual. What meats a man should abstain from, and what he may enjoy; with what persons he should associate; what period should be devoted respectively to strenuous labour and to rest - for all this our leader made the Law the standard and rule, that we might live under it as under a father and master, and be guilty of no sin through wilfulness or ignorance.

For ignorance he left no pretext. He appointed the Law to be the most excellent and necessary form of instruction, ordaining not that it should be heard once for all or twice or on several occasions, but that every week men should desert their other occupations and assemble to listen to

the Law and to obtain a thorough and accurate knowledge of it... (*Ag. Ap.* II:173-5).<sup>10</sup>

The 'Law' in Josephus' time included, at the very least, the Torah [Pentateuch], the Prophets and the Psalms and, most likely, other components of the Hebrew Scriptures as well. Josephus wants to underscore that in contrast to other cultures in which individuals hardly know their laws, often discovering them only after they have been transgressed, all Jews know their Law. They have *internalized* the Law because it has been systematically and unceasingly inculcated from early childhood. 'Internalization of the Law' is no exaggeration, for 'should anyone of our nation be questioned about the laws, he would repeat them all more readily than his own name. The result, then, of our thorough grounding in the laws from the first dawn of intelligence is that we have them, as it were, engraven on our souls. A transgressor is a rarity; evasion of punishment by excuses an impossibility' (*Ag. Ap.* II:178).

It is a fact, Josephus maintained, that the unity of religious belief in Judaism is a unique phenomenon. His point is not that there was no diversity in Judaism, for he himself had had first-hand experience with the religious 'parties' of his time. His point is rather that the diversity necessarily remained within the boundaries of the unified world-view of ethical monotheism. 'Among us alone', wrote Josephus,

will be heard no contradictory statements about God, such as are common among other nations, not only on the lips of ordinary individuals under the impulse of some passing mood, but even boldly propounded by philosophers; some putting forward crushing arguments against the very existence of God [sceptics such as Pyrrhon and his disciple Timon], others depriving Him of His providential care for mankind [e.g., the Epicureans]. Among us alone will be seen no difference in the conduct of our lives. With us all act alike, all profess the same doctrine about God, one which is in harmony with our Law and affirms that all things are under His eye. Even our women folk and dependents would tell you that piety must be the motive of all our occupations in life. (*Ag. Ap.* II:179-81)

In Judaism there is the fundamental conviction that the Law was instituted in accordance with the will of God. The theocratic constitution cannot be improved, Josephus avers, for 'Could there be a finer or more equitable polity than one which sets God at the head of the universe, which assigns the administration of its highest affairs to the whole body of priests, and entrusts to the supreme high-priest the direction of the other priests?' (*Ag. Ap.* II: 184).

The first and most fundamental principle of the theocracy is that the universe is in God's hands and that 'He is the beginning, the middle, and the end of all things' (II:190). There is but one temple for the one God and all of one's prayers are for the welfare of the entire community, not merely for ourselves; 'for we are born for fellowship, and he who sets his claims above his private interests is especially acceptable to God' (II: 193-7). As for the marriage laws of Judaism, the 'Law recognizes no sexual connections, except the natural union of man and wife ... The husband must have union with his wife alone; it is impious to assault the wife of another. For anyone guilty of this crime the penalty of death is inexorable, whether he violates a virgin betrothed to another or seduces a married woman' (II:201). The Law enjoins that *all* the offspring should be brought up, and that they should learn to read about the words and deeds of their forefathers, and imitate them in their goodness. Honouring one's parents ranks second only to honouring God. Moreover, the laws of Moses also demand the equitable treatment of aliens. 'It will be seen that he [Moses] took the best of all possible measures at once to secure our own customs from corruption, and to throw them open ungrudgingly to any who elect to share them. To all who desire to come and live under the same laws with us, he [Moses] gives a gracious welcome, holding that it is not family ties alone which constitute relationship, but

agreement in the principles of conduct [cf. Ex. 20:10; 22:21, etc.] ...' (II:209-10).

The Law, says Josephus, orders us to show consideration 'even to declared enemies'. It forbids us 'to burn up their country or to cut down their fruit trees, and prohibits even the spoiling of fallen combatants or outrage to prisoners of war, especially women.' Instruction in gentleness and humanity extends even to the beasts, which if they take refuge in our houses we are forbidden to kill; and even in enemy country the beasts employed in labour are to be spared. For severe offences against the Law the penalty is death: for adultery (Lev. 20: 10), for violating an unmarried woman (Deut. 22:23), for outrage upon a male (Lev. 20:13). Lesser punishments are imposed for fraud in weights and measures, for deceit in trade and for purloining another man's property.

So there are penalties for violations of the Law, but there is also a supreme reward for piety: the reward of a future life. Here Josephus presents a characteristically Pharisaic belief. 'Each individual,' he writes,

relying on the witness of his own conscience and the lawgiver's prophecy, confirmed by the sure testimony of God, is firmly persuaded that to those who observe the laws and, if they must needs die for them, willingly meet death, God has granted a renewed existence and in the revolution of the ages the gift of a better life. I should have hesitated to write thus, had not the facts made all men aware that many of our countrymen have on numerous occasions ere now preferred to brave all manner of suffering rather than to utter a single word against the Law. (*Ag. Ap.* II:218-19; cf. *Ag. Ap.* I:43; II:233; *War* 2:152ff.)

In the face of the uninformed and malicious attacks by Apion upon the Jewish conception of God, Josephus could not resist contrasting it with the views of the Greek and other pagan cultures. Their gods are numerous and engendered in all manner of ways. They reside in definite localities like animal species, some under ground (Hades, Persephone), others in the sea (Poseidon, Amphitrite,

Proteus). The god to whom the Greeks have allotted heaven is a tyrant

with the result that his wife and brother and daughter, whom he begot from his own head, conspire against him, to arrest and imprison him, just as he himself had treated his own father ... Furthermore, ... the father himself, after seducing women and rendering them pregnant, leaves them to be imprisoned or drowned in the sea; and is so completely at the mercy of Destiny that he cannot either rescue his own offspring or restrain his tears at their death. Justly do these tales merit the severe censure which they receive from their intellectual leaders. (II:239ff)

Josephus concludes his encomium on the Jewish Law by observing that it has stood the test of time and has been widely imitated. Not only have the greatest Greek philosophers been inspired by Moses' teachings, so have the masses who show a keen desire to adopt Jewish religious observances; for

there is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the fasts and the lighting of lamps and many prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed ... The greatest miracle of all is that our Law holds out no seductive bait of sensual pleasure, but has exercised this influence through its own inherent merits; and, as God permeates the universe, so the Law has found its way among all mankind. (II:282ff)

In *Against Apion* Josephus' tribute to the Law stresses the unity of Judaism's world outlook; in his other writings, however, he gives due attention to the diversity within that unity. It is to that remarkable diversity that we now turn.

## 2

# Varieties of Jewish Religious Experience

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### **The Pharisees**

The Pharisees, Josephus informs us, concerned themselves with the strict observance of the Torah in all its details. They 'are considered the most accurate interpreters of the laws' (*War* 2:162). They pride themselves on their adherence to ancestral custom and the Law of the fathers (*Antiq.* 17:41). They 'simplify their standard of living and make no concession to luxury' (*Antiq.* 18:12). Their ideal was to live in accordance with the Torah, but not necessarily with the *letter* of the Law as it is found in the Pentateuch. Their ideal was rather to live in conformity with the Law as interpreted by their forefathers from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile. The Pharisees were therefore the representatives of the course followed by Judaism as it continually adapted itself to the changing socio-historical circumstances of the post-Exilic epoch. Their 'party' was an important and highly influential movement within the body of Palestinian Jewry in the first century.

The relationship of the Pharisees with the Sadducees was one of considerable tension, in which the religio-political animosity between them could often rise to a high pitch. 'Sharp economic and social differences added to the political controversies. The Sadducees, representatives of the priest and lay aristocracy, had every reason to resist customs and beliefs evolved by the masses under the leadership of middle class and "plebeian" intellectuals [i.e., the Pharisees]'.<sup>1</sup> Once the Pharisaic party came into being, most of the distinguished Torah scholars emerged from its ranks. If there were any Sadducee scribes we have no knowledge of them, for they have left no mark on history. Whenever either Josephus or the New Testament mentions the party allegiance of Torah scholars, they are all regularly described as Pharisees (*Antiq.* 15:3; *Life* 191; Acts 5:34).

In the Pharisee outlook 'Torah' meant not only the Scriptures (written Torah) but 'oral Torah' as well, with equal zeal for both. 'The Pharisees', wrote Josephus

had passed on to the people certain regulations handed down by former generations [Greek: from the tradition of the fathers] and not recorded in the Laws of Moses, for which reason they were rejected by the Sadducean group, who hold that only those regulations should be considered valid which were written down, and that those which had been handed down by former generations need not be observed. (*Antiq.* 13:297)

Josephus' view coincides in this respect with that of the New Testament, where Jesus' disciples are accused of transgressing the 'tradition of the elders' (Matt. 15:2; Mark 7:3).<sup>2</sup> This 'tradition of the fathers' or 'oral law', elaborated by the Torah scholars over a period of centuries, became, by the time of Jesus, no less binding than the written Torah. The oral or traditional law was eventually called '*Halakhah*' (Heb. 'The Way') in the earliest strata of the Mishnah: 'The sword comes upon the world because of the delaying of justice and the perverting of justice; and because of them



that teach the Law not according to the *Halakhah*' (Mish. Aboth 5:8; cf. 3:12).

Another distinguishing feature of Pharisaic doctrine was their belief in *resurrection* - that souls have the power to survive death: 'Eternal imprisonment is the lot of evil souls' (*Antiq.* 18:14); but the souls of the righteous 'are allotted the most holy place in heaven, whence, in the revolution of the ages, they return to find in chaste bodies a new habitation' (*War* 3:373ff). 'Because of these views they [the Pharisees] are ... extremely influential among the townsfolk; and all prayers and sacred rites of divine worship are performed according to their exposition' (*Antiq.* 18:15). The Sadducees, in contrast, 'hold that the soul perishes along with the body' (*Antiq.* 18:16). They acknowledge no observance of any kind that is not written down in the Scriptures; and though they dispute with the Pharisees and resist their ways, the Sadducees yield to them in the end. Whenever 'they assume some office, though they submit unwillingly and perforce, yet submit they do to the formulas of the Pharisees, since *otherwise the masses would not tolerate them*' (*Antiq.* 18:17, italics added). Jesus, it is clear, espoused the Pharisaic doctrine of resurrection (Matt. 22:23ff; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27); and where the belief in resurrection is concerned, the book of Acts is in agreement with Josephus' characterization of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The doctrine of resurrection is first attested as a basic feature of Judaism in the book of Daniel: 'And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt' (12:2). With the triumph of Pharisaism, however, the doctrine became evident in all subsequent Jewish literature, including the New Testament. The belief in resurrection acquired fundamental importance since salvation depended on it. So fundamental was the belief

that the Mishnah states: 'these are they who have no share in the world to come

[Heb. *Olam Haba*]: he that says that there is no resurrection of the dead (Mish. Sanh. 10:1). This certainly helps us to understand why the Pharisees were popular and the Sadducees were not; the latter undermined the people's hope for salvation. 'By denying resurrection and immortality in general, the Sadducees rejected simultaneously the entire Messianic hope ...'.<sup>3</sup> The Pharisees are said also to have believed in the existence of angels and spirits, while the Sadducees denied them (Acts 23:8). In this respect too, the Pharisees represented the outlook of the later Rabbinic ages.

Josephus also ascribes to the Pharisees and Sadducees significant differences with regard to divine providence and human free will. The Pharisees attribute everything to destiny and God; 'they hold that to act rightly or otherwise rests, indeed, for the most part with man, but that in each action destiny cooperates' (*War* 2:163). 'Though they postulate that everything is brought about by Providence, still they do not deprive the human will of the pursuit of what is in man's power, since it was God's good pleasure that there should be a fusion between human will and Providence' (*Antiq.* 18:13). They 'say that certain events are the work of Providence, but not all; as to other events, it depends upon ourselves whether they shall take place or not' (*Antiq.* 13:172).

The Sadducees, in contrast, deny Providence altogether, 'and remove God beyond, not merely the commission, but the very sight of evil. They maintain that man has the free choice of good and evil, and that it rests with each man's will whether he follows the one or the other' (*War* 2:164-5). Rejecting totally the determining role of Providence or destiny, the Sadducees hold 'that there is no such thing and that ... all things lie within our own power, so that we

ourselves are responsible for our well-being, while we suffer misfortune through our own thoughtlessness' (*Antiq.* 13:173). (This aspect of the Sadducean outlook strikes one as the ideological rationale of a privileged group, wishing not only to maintain its prosperity, but also needing to believe that it deserves the advantages it has.)

Some readers of Josephus who have noted his attribution of 'philosophies', a Greek concept, to the Jewish parties of his time, have wondered whether he authentically described their respective beliefs. Their suspicion is strengthened by the parallels Josephus explicitly drew between the Pharisees and the Stoics and between the Essenes, who taught that destiny is absolute, and the Pythagoreans (*Life* 12; *Antiq.* 15:371). Upon reflection, however, it becomes clear that Josephus is simply taking account of his Hellenized audience. If, therefore, the Greek garb is removed, the content itself is clearly Jewish. Josephus is simply formulating in his own terms an outlook that can be traced to the Scriptures where God is, of course, omnipotent, intervenes in history and influences human actions, good and bad. At the same time, however, human conduct does have some influence on God's actions. The essence of the covenantal idea, after all, is that the human being has been taught the difference between right and wrong, and that he possesses sufficient autonomy of will to choose between them. He is therefore morally responsible for his actions. He incurs guilt and punishment when he does wrong, and he gains merit and reward for his goodness. This is a genuinely biblical view. The same logic holds for later Judaism where the moral independence of the human being remains a fundamental presupposition underlying the zeal for the Torah and the hope for the future. Thus the Pharisees promulgated a line of thought that was authentically Jewish. They adhered with equal determination to both principles: to divine omnipotence and to human freedom and

responsibility. Essentially this was also the view of Jesus, who taught that the Kingdom of Heaven will break in when God intends it to; but God will act in response to a higher human righteousness. In the second century we hear the same principle enunciated by the famous Rabbi Akiba: 'all is foreseen, but freedom of choice is given' (Mish. Aboth 3:16). This strongly suggests that in this respect too, the Pharisees represented not a sectarian viewpoint, but the dominant outlook of Judaism.

When it came to politics the Pharisaic attitude was likewise genuinely Jewish, in that political questions were approached not from a secular but from a religious standpoint. In these terms we need to qualify the term 'party' as applied to the Pharisees, since strictly speaking they were not a political party at all. Their aims were religious not political. So long as the Torah, the twofold Law, was rigorously observed, they could live with any government - and here too we may observe that this appears to have been Jesus' attitude when he said, 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's' (Mark 12:17). Only when the secular government interfered with the observance of the Torah did the Pharisees unite to oppose it, thus acquiring temporarily the characteristics of a political party, countering power with power. This first occurred with the *Hasidim*, the precursors of the Pharisees, during the oppression of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean revolt to which it gave rise. It occurred again when the Pharisaic rulings were opposed from a Sadducean standpoint, by the Hasmonean princes, John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus. But if the Pharisees were in opposition under these princes, they later held a leading position in the government of Queen Alexandra who left all religious matters in their hands. Politics as such was a matter of indifference to them.

The Pharisees were neither a 'party' nor a 'sect', but rather a socio-religious movement. And we should note that within the boundaries of the Pharisaic movement one can discern at least two different religious approaches to a given political situation. The different approaches became especially evident when Palestine was ruled by a pagan power or by a Jewish government friendly to it. The key question concerning foreign domination, direct or indirect, was whether it was with the will of Divine Providence. Those who answered it affirmatively believed that the domination of the Jews by the Romans was desired by God, who gave them power over his people to punish them for their transgressions. It followed that it was necessary to submit willingly to the divine chastisement, so long as the observance of the Torah was not thereby obstructed. This seems to be the standpoint from which the Pharisees Pollion and Sameas counselled their fellow countrymen to accept the rule of Herod (*Antiq.* 14:174; 15:3). If, on the other hand, foreign domination was regarded as contrary to the will of God, then it was an outrage which had to be purged. The Holy Land had only one king, God alone; and Israel should therefore acknowledge no ruler other than the one anointed by God from the house of David. Accordingly it was also a Pharisee, Zadok, who together with Judas the Galilean founded the revolutionary party, the Zealots, in AD 6 (*Antiq.* 18:4). From the point of view of such Pharisees it could not have been anything but unlawful, i.e., contrary to the Torah, to pay tribute to the pagan authorities. Hence, we can appreciate the complexity of the question put to Jesus (Matt. 22:17ff; Mark 12: 14ff; Luke 20:22ff). One wing of the Pharisaic movement, then, exercised some influence on the revolutionary trend which gained ground among the Jews in the first century. It is therefore quite evident that prior to AD 70 'Pharisaism', so-called, far from being a monolith, was a rather complex and heterogeneous religious movement.

The term 'Pharisees' is derived from the Hebrew *Perushim*, of which the Greek *Pharisaioi* is a transliteration. The Hebrew word means, literally, 'the separated ones' or 'those who separated themselves'. Separated from whom and under what circumstances? Later, when we explore the origins of the Pharisaic movement, we shall see that the term 'pharisee' has nothing to do with separation from the Gentiles; nor from the alleged uncleanness of the mass of the people. There is no sign in the New Testament nor in any other contemporary source of any such separation from the masses as such. Most likely, '*Perushim*' was an epithet hurled at the Hasidim in the Hasmonean period when they separated themselves from the Aaronite, Sadducee, priestly aristocracy. That it was their Sadducean opponents who gave the *Hasidim* the name of 'separatists' is strongly suggested by the evidence of the Mishnah where the term appears in only three passages, and in one of them issues from the mouth of a Sadducee (Mish. Yad. 4:6-8; Mish. Hag. 2:7; Mish. Sot. 3:4).

Some scholars have alleged that the Pharisees were a 'sect' in the narrowest sense, and that they represented no one but themselves. But if any Jewish party in Palestine became *the* popular movement of the masses, it certainly was the Pharisees. There is no evidence to support the view that the

Pharisees had set themselves apart from the rest of the people, or from the humbler social levels of society. Nor is there any Pharisaic opposition to the *am ha-aretz* (literally 'people of the land') for their lack of learning or education. The uneducated man as opposed to the scholar is known as *hediot* in Hebrew, and as *idioteis* in Greek. As we shall see in a later context, those who most often fell short of the requirements of the strict observance of the twofold law were not the so-called common people, but rather the privileged and well-to-do. The notion that the 'people of the