

John Dickson (Studio)

Christianity and Judaism are two clearly different religions ... today!

But if we went back in time to the middle of the first century, in ... say ... Galilee, that statement wouldn't be at all obvious.

Jesus was a Jew. All of the first followers were Jews.

The Jewishness of the original movement is obvious to everyone who seriously studies the question today.

When I taught the Historical Jesus for 10 years at the University of Sydney, I was in the Jewish Studies Department. I was invited to develop and teach the course by the head of the department, herself a leading expert on Jewish history and a practising Orthodox Jew.

But ... here's the thing. When today I say Orthodox Jew, I'm referring to the venerable tradition of Judaism that traces its origins back to a group in the first century

known as the Pharisees, famous for their intricate ‘oral law’, right alongside the law of Moses (or what Christians call the OT).

At the time, they were one sect of Judaism. And that isn’t the sect Jesus – as a Jew – ever belonged to.

There were also Zealots in this period. They resembled the Pharisees in some ways but they had a distinct military theology (directed against the occupying Romans). Jesus certainly didn’t belong to them, either.

There were Sadducees, who dominated the priestly elite and therefore ran the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus didn’t really get along with them.

And there were the Essenes, an ultra-conservative, separatist group, who left us the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. They would have thought Jesus and his movement were complete heretics!!

And, finally, there was a small group of what scholars call the Jewish Baptisers. This has nothing to do with modern Baptists in the Christian sense, except that these ancient Jews were a kind of reform movement

that popularised the one-off bathing ritual as a sign of renewal, of beginning again. One or two of their leaders—we know their names—had a massive influence on the Judaism of the period.

So, what does it mean to say *Jesus was a Jew*, or that Christianity started out as an entirely Jewish movement?

And what happened to bring us to the point where now we think of Judaism and Christianity as two completely separate world religions?

These are massive questions. This is a massive episode. And, for the record, my team insisted we cut this one down to a normal Undeceptions size. I insisted we go nuts! Whatever happens from here is largely my fault!

I'm John Dickson and this is Undeceptions.

READING

“Josiah was 8 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem ... And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord

and walked in all the ways of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.” 2 Kings, Chapter 22

“Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him.” 2 Kings, Chapter 23

John Dickson (Studio)

We're in the 600s BCE, before the Common Era, and Josiah is the King of Judah, the southern part of the traditional land of Israel. The Northern bit—usually just called Israel—was destroyed and repopulated by the Assyrians a century before around 722 BCE.

By the way, in keeping with my book on the World Religions, when I'm talking about the history of another religion, I have a policy of using the standard dating system of BCE (before the common era) and CE (the common era). I use the standard BC and AD when talking directly about Christian history, and when I'm just doing Greek or Roman history (it's still a widely accepted standard in classics academia). But when I'm talking about Judaism (or Hinduism or whatever), it feels more polite to Jewish listeners to use their dating system. That means I'll be using both systems in this episode. I hope it doesn't mess with too many heads.

Anyway in the southern kingdom in the 600s BCE we've got Josiah, a king who's so good, he's compared to King David, the greatest king in Jewish Scriptures.

This is where I begin my epic conversation about Judaism with Dr George Athas, Director of Research: Old Testament and Hebrew at Moore Theological College in Sydney.

George was a guest on our podcast back in 2021 for an episode called *Between Testaments*. It's one of my favourites—actually, according to our data, it's one of your favourites too.

His mammoth book *Bridging The Testaments* has finally been published by our friends Zondervan Academic. I'm calling it now. For the next 20 years, this will be the most important book about the period between the Jewish Bible (or what Christians call the Old Testament) and the time of Jesus and the New Testament.

I caught up with him at Moore College – in my beautiful Sydney — to talk about Judaisms in the time Jesus.

But we had to wind back to the 600s BCE first ...

JD: Um, boy, where to begin? Why don't we begin with, um, you taking us back to 620 BC. I picked that date because I think Josiah was kind of a good guy. You know, a guy who... [00:02:00] believed in the God of Judah, of Israel. So can you tell us, um, what did they believe in so called Judah ism in

George Athas: 620 they believed that they had a patron deity as a nation, um, occupying a particular piece of land and their patron deity was Yahweh. the God of Israel. And, uh, while they may have understood and, uh, believe that all the other nations around them each had their own patron deities as well, uh, the people of Judah believed that their deity whom they owed allegiance to was Yahweh, the God of Israel.

George Athas: And, uh, certain portions of Israelite society, uh, went so far as to say that, um, Yahweh was not just simply the God of Israel, but he was the only God, and that the gods of all the other nations actually didn't exist. They were nothing. And so this gave rise, we see the seeds of monotheism, um, at this particular time.

And the deity Yahweh

is understood to be, particularly if you're, uh, if you're in Judah and you're worshipping in Jerusalem. Um, you understand Yahweh as first of all, the God of Israel, but also someone who is in a very specific relationship with the Davidic King. So in 620 BC, that would have been King Josiah who instituted these reforms, uh, to get people to worship at just one place in Jerusalem, um, get rid of idols, um, all kinds of icons and things like that.

So, um, But the majority of people in Judah, at that particular point, would have understood Yahweh to be one of many other gods. And so it's a minority voice that says, actually there's only one God, and it's our God, Yahweh. When, after that, the kingdom of Judah gets destroyed, The people are taken off to exile in Babylonia, and it's there that the minority voice starts to become the majority voice.

So that people understand Yahweh, the God of Israel, He's not just limited to the people of Israel, while He has this very specific, special relationship with the nation of Israel. And the land that they had occupied. He's also understood to be calling the shots here, there and everywhere with all of the nations is pretty bizarre considering,

JD: you know, they're not at their high point in exile and yet they, you know, cling not just to their God as a tribal God, but as the universal God.

George Athas: Exactly. Yeah, there's nothing like a crisis to spark very deep theological reflection. Yeah.

John Dickson (Studio)

In 587/6 BCE, the Babylonians ended up doing to Judah what the Assyrians had done to the north. Tons of people are deported and the city of Jerusalem, with its glorious temple, is destroyed. The Jewish Scriptures of this time partly *blame* Israel—the disaster is read as the judgment of God—and partly *encourage* Israel with the promise that the future will be even greater than the past.

As George says, there's nothing like a crisis to spark deep reflection... and change.

JD: Okay. So, um, they eventually get back, uh, into their homeland and, uh, eventually the majority become monotheists and it's centered on the temple. Um, when would you say we have a strictly monotheistic, temple focused, um, ethical, , [00:05:30] um, as in, you know, the Jewish laws, the ethical monotheism in place as the dominant form of Judaism,

George Athas: Uh, probably around about the mid fifth century, so 450 BC, um, largely as a result of the ministry of Ezra.

Ezra is a priest and he's also a public servant, uh, working for the Persian, uh, empire. And he's commissioned to go to the areas where people worship Yahweh. So that's in Judah, just to the north of Judah in Samaria. Um, and they're all worshiping Yahweh in their own kind of way. And one of the achievements of Ezra is he gets all of them to adhere to the Torah .

He enshrines the Torah, the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible as kind of the cultural norm.

And it's at that point, very interestingly, uh, we find archaeologically, um, the use of idols and figurines. Uh, in public life and private life starts to wane and it seems largely the result of what Ezra does in establishing the law as the cultural norm. And it's pretty much from that time onwards, all people who worship Yahweh, uh, pretty much strict monotheists.

JD: So if we were to ask Ezra. Yeah. What is your fundamental belief? I mean, you couldn't even ask the question, what is your religion? Because they didn't think in those terms. But what is, what is at the core of what you believe about the world? Can you, can you put in a sentence what you reckon someone like Ezra or maybe the generation or two after would answer?

George Athas: I think Ezra would have said... Yahweh, the God of Israel is the creator of everyone and everything, but he's in a special relationship with the nation of Israel and he's given them a particular law, a cultural norm for them to follow that will dictate what their culture will be like. And that's meant to be a good ethical culture that will speak out towards the other nations.

And if the other nations pay attention to that, great. Um, they can come and worship Yahweh as well to some extent, if not, well, we just want them to stay in their place and leave us to worship Yahweh in the way that he's mandated for us.

John Dickson (Studio)

The Babylonians were conquered by the Persians, led by King Cyrus in 539 BCE. Weirdly, and happily, he let the Jews go back to their homeland. And ... they started building a new temple, from which comes the scholarly description of Judaism after this time “Second Temple Judaism.”

JD: And what was the significance for them of, of the temple in that system?

George Athas: The temple was, uh, it was two things. Um, in the first place, it was a place of worship. So the Torah establishes that, um, God. Um, told Moses to build a tabernacle, a place where God would be present with his people and they could come and worship him there and offer sacrifices and pray. Um, but the, the tabernacle was something that you could pack away, fold down and move somewhere else.

It was kind of mobile. A temple, you can't do that. A temple is a permanent structure. And the permanence of the temple derived from the Davidic covenant, um, which we read about in 2 Samuel 7.

John Dickson (Studio)

When George says ‘Davidic covenant’, he’s referring to the extraordinary promise of an eternal kingdom vowed to king David 500 years earlier:

READING

“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: ¹² When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. ¹⁵ But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me^[b]; your throne will be established forever.”

2 Samuel, Chapter 7

Um, Yahweh makes this commitment to David and says, David, I'm going to build you a house, that is a dynasty, and your son who represents that dynasty, that house, will build my house.

That is the temple. And so the, the temple in Jerusalem is the physical symbol of God's commitment to David. That his people would always be ruled by a Davidic descendant. So it's both a place of worship as well as a monument to God's commitment to the Davidic dynasty.

John Dickson (Studio)

It's also very important that Jesus came from the line of David. But we'll get to that.

In this period of the second temple, there's a genuine question in the air of who should rule Israel. Without the promised king, maybe it should be the priests of the temple.

JD: Who are the Sadducees, where they come from, what do they believe?

George Athas: Okay, The Sadducees, the short answer is they're a bunch of priests who like power and are all about Jewish culture. Now let me try and unpack that a little bit. Where did they come from? Well, the temple eventually, although the temple itself is a monument to the Davidic dynasty, in the post exilic period, when the Persians are running the place and, um, the Davidic dynasty is not in power.

George Athas: And the ones who fill that power vacuum are the priests, who work in the temple. And the priests eventually, uh, empty the temple ideology of its royal aspect. Um, to the point where they start to believe and, uh, say that, God doesn't really need the Davidic dynasty anymore and they're just really part of our past. The priests are now the ones who are the focus of God's purpose, purposes, and the leaders of God's people. And so the temple really just becomes a place of priestly activity. Um, and the, the priests, uh, therefore were the supremos in Judaism, um, they dictated what happened in the temple, when it happened, what people needed to do, et cetera.

John Dickson (Studio)

The great high priest in Israel's deep past was Zadok. He anointed King David's successor Solomon.

Some of you will hear the name Zadok and immediately think of Handel's famous anthem Zadok the priest. In fact now all of you are thinking of it!!

That was composed for the coronation of the English King George II in 1727 - roughly 2700 years after the original Zadok.

Anyway, after the kings of Israel were gone—thanks to the Babylonians—there were succession conflicts over the high priests.

In the 170s BCE, the Seleucids – one of the Greek dynasties – ruled over the Jews from Syria. They tried to plant their own guy as high priest in Jerusalem, murdering the legitimate, next-in-line high priest, a named Onias III.

There's loads of political wrangling we'll have to leave on the cutting room floor of this episode, but the key point is: a group emerges that claims the legacy of Zadok. These are the Zadokites. And if you think the word 'zadokites' sounds a bit like the word 'Sadducees', you're not imagining it.

George Athas: Um, but now they're left with a situation where there are no Zadokites to take over. And so they are just the ones who preserve the legacy. And so they're called the Zadokites, the Sadducees, the Saddukim, as they are called in Hebrew. And what they primarily believe is that Israel is the people of God.

And at the hub of Israelite life is the temple and what happens there, and the Sadducees, being the priests, are the ones who determine all of that. So, when the sacrifices happen, what's to be sacrificed, et cetera, et cetera. Um, for them Judaism is primarily about cultural expression. And the pinnacle of that cultural expression was what happened in the temple, particularly at festivals.

So priestly activity was the... was the big thing for them.

JD: And there's not just, you know, scores of them, there's thousands of them, right?

George Athas: There's lots of them. A huge roster. Yeah, exactly. And...

JD: they lived throughout Israel, or are they just in Judah?

George Athas: The priests were... there were so many priests, they couldn't all be there at the temple at one time.

And so they had rosters about when they would be on. And they generally served... probably two weeks a year. The rest of the time they were actually outside of Jerusalem mostly. And in the decades of the BC, they had become fabulously wealthy, because the Seleucid overlords had given a special privilege status to Jerusalem that enabled Jerusalem to grow and boom as an economic center.

And, um, that brought a lot of wealth into Jerusalem and the priests being essentially the ones who ran Jerusalem were the beneficiaries of that. And so the priests, because they understood that, um, to their understanding, God no longer needed a Davidic dynasty, and that was now just a relic of the past, the priests were everything within Judaism.

They understood that they themselves were the fulfillment of all God's purposes. And so they started to say, God doesn't need to do anything new, uh, because everything is as it should be. We are running the nation. We're running the temple and this is God's purpose. And if you start saying, well, we don't need God to do anything new.

You start to say we don't need any prophets to give us new divine guidance about what God wants, uh, for the future. And so the Sadducees start to develop this, uh, theology that prophecy has pretty much ceased.

John Dickson (Studio)

The word prophecy, just means to speak forth. It's sometimes used of what we would call 'preaching', it can mean 'plain speaking', and then there's a more specific connotation of the word to refer to the future predictions or promises of holy figures who (according to the Hebrew Bible) speak on God's behalf. A huge literature of prophecy grew up—Isaiah, Ezekiel, etc—promising the full restoration of Israel, complete with the arrival of the eternal kingdom of David. You can see why the Sadducees weren't keen on any new prophets!!

JD: But did they even believe the so-called Biblical prophets? I mean, did they open their eyes, Isaiah and have a good read or, uh, you know, I mean, the cliché is that they only believe the first five books of the, of the, of the ak uh, the Torah. Um, is, is that the case or, or is the evidence mixed?

George Athas: It's a popular misconception. Um, they certainly believed in the primacy of the Torah, the Pentateuch, that was everything for them.

But without the books of the prophets, they actually had no basis, no ideological basis for their own role in Jerusalem.

JD: But they must have turned a blind eye to a few passages that spoke of, spoke of a descendant of Jesse, etc.

George Athas: exactly. They must have. Um, because, uh, not only do they think that, um, God has, um, finished with the Davidic dynasty and they're all just now part of history.

Some of the prophetic literature actually has some very stinging critiques of the priests. So, on the one hand, they need the prophetic literature there to legitimize their existence in Jerusalem, but they don't want to put the prophetic literature on very high volume. Uh, they put the Torah on full blast, um, the prophets are there, but they're switched down, you know, toned down in terms of the, um, how loud they're, they're being

proclaimed.

John Dickson (Studio)

We'll return to the Sadducees and how they disappeared from history, but, after the break, we're going to talk about another branch of Judaism that often gets a bad rap (from Christians). The Pharisees.

BREAK 1

[TAPE - Pete Buttigieg on *The Washington Post*](#)

John Dickson (studio)

We're listening to a short clip from a 2019 podcast interview from The Washington Post with the 2020 Democratic Presidential Nominee Pete Buttigieg. He's talking to the journalist about his views on the Trump administration and the then Vice President Mike Pence in particular (who also had a bit to say about religion and politics).

I'll just note here, the music that's added in this clip is part of the original podcast.

TAPE - continues

And it's one I think a lot about.

I try to do so with humility. Because local government officials don't come off the best in the New Testament either. But there's an awful lot about Pharisees in there. And when you see someone who - especially someone who has such a dogmatic take on faith, and they bring it into public life - being willing to attach themselves to this administration for the purposes of gaining power, it is alarmingly resonant with some New Testament themes, and not in a good way.

John Dickson (studio)

Buttigieg did several interviews like this at the time, trying to call out what he saw as the hypocrisy of those in the Republican party who said they were Christian, and he called out Mike Pence, in particular, as a Pharisee, someone who is self-righteous but who doesn't practice what he preaches.

Buttigieg isn't the only one to use this insult.

In 2014, Pope Francis spoke of Pharisees as “close-minded men, men who are so attached to the laws, to the letter of the law that they were always closing the doorway to hope, love and salvation.”

Comments like these have led to a number of Jewish scholars and Rabbis to come out and say ‘Enough’.
Quit picking on the pharisees!

Jewish scholar Amy-Jill Levine - and others like her - says that it's not that people like Buttigieg or Pope Francis are anti-Semites. They just don't know the history of the Pharisees. And that's a problem. Because the Pharisees are the ancestors of modern Rabbinic Judaism.

JD: So this is probably a good point to, um, bring up the next version of Judaism, the Pharisees. Uh, what does this word mean? Where did these guys come from? What did they believe? How do they differ from their good buddies, the Sadducees?

George Athas: Good buddies. Uh, yeah. Uh, the Pharisees are a very interesting case.

They're almost the polar opposite of the Sadducees. The Sadducees are the upper crust of society. They're quite wealthy, um, and they're at the centre. The Pharisees seem to have developed from the fringes. Um, they were initially a lay movement. Um, just the average person trying to figure out how do I worship God, uh, and obey God in my everyday life.

Um, but they were, even from the very beginning, they were a particularly fundamentalist group, uh, or a populist group.

The word Pharisee, there's a little bit of debate as to what it means, but the most compelling argument I think is it comes from an Aramaic word, Barashin, which means separatists.

And they basically argued that Jews had to cocoon themselves from foreign influence, particularly Greek influence and all the pagan elements that went with that. And the way they advocated doing that was by focusing in a very concentrated way on what the Torah and the prophets said, but especially the Torah.

And so they started to interpret the Torah in a hyper literal, hyper-legal way and started to develop customs that reflected this way of interpreting the biblical laws. And they got to the point where they said that this is actually how the whole nation should be worshiping and obeying God.

And in fact, if they weren't, they were actually disobeying God. And to disobey God is to flirt with disaster. God could punish the nation and bring foreign invaders once again and, uh, the nation could be imperiled. And so the Pharisees were very, very strong on literally following these traditions that they'd built up around, uh, the written law.

They developed something that they called the Oral Law. And they ... the oral law to Moses, which was quite a bold move considering that it very obviously didn't go back to Moses, um, but as part of the way of legitimizing Their way of reading the written Torah, they attributed the oral Torah to Moses and said that the two went hand in hand. You couldn't have one without the other.

The Sadducees objected to that very vehemently. And so the focus of the Sadducees on the written law was over and against the claim that the Pharisees had. Which was that there was an oral law as well.

JD: And our first-century writer, Josephus , says this was the key point of dispute. Uh, he says it's quite a serious, energetic dispute. Um, so, help me understand the degree to which, um, Pharisees, or people of Pharisaic persuasion, could become priests and part of the powerful um, elite or to what degree were they only, um, sort of a protest movement on the side?

George Athas: Because the Pharisees were a lay movement, they were very popular. And their brand of piety was something that a lot of, uh, average people felt that they could do, and that they could please God by following these particular traditions.

JD: And you could do it anywhere, right? You could be up in Galilee and maintain a level of purity that you used to think only came by visiting the temple and going through temple ritual.

George Athas: Exactly. It was, it was a kind of daily form of obedience as opposed to an exceptional form of ...

JD: So, very attractive to someone who's sort of piously minded in the boondocks of Israel.

George Athas: Exactly and the Pharisees were, uh, because they were such a big movement, inevitably, um, the politicians couldn't ignore them.

John Dickson (studio)

The Pharisees disputed with each other over fine legal matters. The great schools of Hillel and Shammai were both Pharisaical, but they didn't see eye-to-eye on everything. If you're a PLUS subscriber, you'll be able to hear more about those two schools in the un-edited, full discussion with George that you'll get in your feed.

Anyway, those disputes were nothing compared to our next group, who would have seen both schools of the Pharisees as lightweight progressive liberals.

I'm talking about the Essenes, whose main claim to fame now is that they left us the Dead Sea Scrolls.

George Athas: The Essenes are a very interesting group. The Essenes originally come from a few disparate groups in Judaism.

Most of them were originally from the Zadokite priesthood. Um, these guys weren't, um, necessarily part of the, the, the main direct line from which the High Priesthood was inherited, but they were from parallel lines of the Zadokite clan. And, uh, there was, they seem to have developed in the early second century BC. But from their own writings that we find in the Dead Sea Scrolls, they characterize the initial decades of their own movement as a time when they were like blind men groping about in the dark until the arrival of the teacher of righteousness. Now, who this guy was, I wish we had his name. Unfortunately The Essenes just call him the Teacher of Righteousness, and they never give us his name. But the Teacher of Righteousness seems to have been part of the Zadokite clan, and he had very, um, very strident ideas about the way Israel should be run, particularly what should be done and what should not be done in the temple.

And the teacher of righteousness, um, puts together a document that he submits to the high priest at the time, a guy called Alcimus, and as a way of moving forward, and he says, you know, we want to suggest these changes to the way that the temple operates. Uh, one of those changes was a change to the calendar.

John Dickson (studio)

Judaism operated on a lunar calendar, 12 full cycles of the Moon, 354 days. It meant every few years you had to add an extra month so the seasons stayed in sync.

The Essenes wanted to change Israel to a solar calendar - 365 days; the time it takes Earth to orbit the sun. It's what we use today. The Essenes argued that the solar calendar operated according to the physical world, which was created by God. To be in step with God, the solar calendar must prevail.

It didn't prevail, because the Essenes disappeared. The Jewish calendar today derives from the Pharisees and so it's (mostly) a lunar calendar.

George Athas: Alcemis, the high priest at the time, um, didn't want a bar of it. He, he. Didn't want to change, uh, the calendar or take up any of the other Teacher of Righteousness's suggestions. And so Alcimus instituted a massacre against the Teacher of Righteousness and his followers, who then, uh, left Jerusalem, the ones who survived left Jerusalem, and they seem to have gone up to Syria around Damascus and just lived in exile for a while.

And while they were there, they started to develop a sense that they were the true inheritors of, of Israel, that they were the ones who, with whom God was pleased, what was going on in Jerusalem was abhorrent, um, and that they should be the ones who were running Judaism. It becomes very clear, however, that those who are in power in Jerusalem are never going to let these guys back in.

And so they start to develop a tradition of monasticism, where they withdraw from society to their own communities and they start to develop their own traditions. They start to read the scriptures and interpret them as ways of engaging their current times. So they'll read the prophets, um, who were talking about ages past and they'll see that happening again in their own day.

And um, they believe that God is about to overturn the society, what they see as an evil society and they um, have some very fanciful nicknames for the people who are in power in Jerusalem.

They'll simply call some of the, some of the main people, the wicked priests, Alcimus who tried to kill the teacher of righteousnesses, the wicked priest, um, and,

uh, the, the, the liar and the, um, they come up with all these other names.

JD: And we know all this because the Dead Sea Scrolls, found in the 1940s and 50s, sort of reveal, uh, one segment of this monastic form of Judaism, this elite form of Judaism. Um, and, and this, this concept of they are the sons of light, and the people over the mountains there in Jerusalem, they're the sons of darkness.

JD: Okay, so we should now talk about the Zealots. Uh, where did they come from? What was their zeal about?

George Athas: The Zealots were freedom fighters, and we hear about them really in the first century, uh, when we encounter them. Um, essentially... assassinating people they didn't like, whom they viewed as collaborators with the Romans and collaborators with those Jews who upheld Roman rule.

Um, the zealots primary aim was the freedom of the Jews from all foreign oppression and foreign influence. The movement isn't, um, a formal movement to begin with. It's really just, um, a handful of people forming a militia and causing a lot of trouble. But as Roman rule continues, and also Herodian rule. Uh, so Herod's, uh, sons eventually become, um, tetrarchs and, uh, rulers

of Galilee, so Herod Antipas. Uh, becomes the ruler of Galilee. The mentality of trying to overthrow, um, those who are for Rome, um, is the main motivator there.

Um, they, they want to get rid of the Romans because they, on the one hand, don't like the cultural threat to the Jewish way of life. But they also, uh, see the Romans as economically oppressive. They're just making life incredibly difficult for, for everyone. Um, and taxing everyone to the hilt so that people finding it difficult to live.

Um, and under those extreme conditions, they... pick up a sword and start swinging. The, um, there's another movement, the Sicarii, who are related to, uh, to the, the Zealots. Um, but they develop into a more cohesive movement in the mid first century when they start to be, be more organized and more targeted in their operations.

And by the time that we have the outbreak of the Jewish Revolt against the Romans in AD 66, they are a full scale movement, very well, um, or, you know, very well-oiled machine.

John Dickson (studio)

We'll hear more about the first Jewish Revolt in a moment—it was the turning point for Judaism, in some ways, because after the revolt the number of branches of Judaism was ... reduced! More about that later.

JD: Is their theology more like a Pharisee than a Sadducee, uh, or even, indeed, uh, an Essene?

George Athas: The Pharisaic movement would have resonated, I think, with the zealots. Particularly because they were a lay movement. It wasn't from the upper echelons of society.

And so there was a lot of synergy there, I think, Um, but yeah, whether or not the average zealot followed the Pharisaic traditions to, uh, to the nth degree, I'm not sure.

JD: Let's talk about a movement that's very rarely talked about in popular circles, but actually the, the scholarship on Judaism talks about another sect that is loosely called the Baptizers.

And, you know, with due respect to our Southern Baptist friends, they, it doesn't mean the Baptists . No, it doesn't. Tell us about the Baptizers. What do we know of them and their outlook?

George Athas: We don't know a lot. And that's the thing. Um, we have very little information about them. Uh, the most famous baptizer is John the Baptizer, uh, John the, or John the Baptist.

Um, they, the evidence that we have comes from largely the New Testament, as well as Josephus. And what we see is a movement that, um, calls people towards, a personal piety, but not just simply in the way that the Pharisees, uh, advocated. The, the baptizer movement advocated a piety that was geared towards all of society.

It was arguing about how neighbors should treat each other rather than what I should do behind my closed doors. And so in that sense, I think it was an ethical movement as opposed to a pietistic movement.

John Dickson (studio)

In addition to John, we know of another Jewish baptiser named Banus. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus says he'd actually been a student of Banus for a little while before going on to try out the Pharisees.

Josephus also mentions the most famous baptiser, John. Josephus gives the same impression as the NT - that in the late 20s CE John the baptiser was one of the most influential Jewish teachers in the country: people were “aroused to the highest degree by his messages”, Josephus reports in Book 18 of his Jewish Antiquities. And so, he goes on, “Herod Antipas became alarmed. Eloquence that had so great an effect on mankind might lead to some form of sedition.” Antipas had John killed. But not before an army of baptisers was let loose, under the leadership of one Yeshua of Nazareth.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Let's go back to before I interrupted George ...

George Athas: And, um, John the Baptist, um, John is a very interesting character because he himself comes from a priestly family, and I think you would normally

have associated him with the Sadducees Um, certainly his father, according to the New Testament, was a priest operating in the temple, so naturally would have, um, operated in Sadducee circles. But John seems to have eschewed that and he's gone, uh, into the, into the desert. But he's not like the Essenes. He's not exactly like the Essenes. Um, John is in his preaching, telling people about ethics, this is how you should live.

And he also baptizes them, this is where the term comes from, baptizes them as a way of symbolizing the completion of repentance. So that to be a good Jew meant that you ask God to forgive your sins. Um, you were, you acted ethically towards your neighbor, and then you capped [00:54:30] that off by this ritual washing, which symbolized the washing away of your sins, but also the ritual cleanness that was demanded by the law.

And John the Baptist, and I think we can say this about the larger baptizer movement, but you know, there is some doubt just because of the paucity of the evidence.

JD: So, well, Josephus tells us that he studied under one, right? He, he went and lived with Banus, who was a baptizer.

George Athas: That's right. Um, certainly with, um... They seem to have withdrawn from society again, like the Essenes, um, which was a critique on what society was like at that time.

And it's very significant, therefore, that John is not baptising in Jerusalem. There's a lot of places where you can baptise people in Jerusalem, but he's doing it out in the desert. He's removing ...

JD: By the Jordan? Is that significant? Do we have a kind of Israel needs to begin again vibe going?

George Athas: That's exactly what's going on. And people are identifying John, and certainly I think Jesus himself does this too, they're identifying him as the reliable prophet who is to come. Now, the reliable prophet, um, on the one hand, the tradition goes all the way back to Moses, who says that, God will one day raise up a prophet like me, make sure you listen to him.

That then, um, gets recycled in the era of the Maccabees and the Hasmoneans Uh, when the Jews gained their freedom, they were able to have their own Jewish head of state. He's one of the last surviving Maccabee brother, his name's Simon. He becomes high priest and ruler of the Jews. And they put together a

constitutional document. And the constitutional document shows us that there probably was a lot of debate within Judaism at this time as to what kinds of powers the high priest Simon should have. Simon, uh, and his followers, the Sadducees, believed that he was it. He was the fulfillment of God's promises, the Jews were finally free, and so Simon and his sons should rule in perpetuity.

But there was another quarter of Judaism which said, no, Simon can't be the fulfillment of God's promises because we're still awaiting; we're still awaiting a Davidic messiah and the Davidic messiah must arise and he will be the fulfillment of God's promises. And so the constitutional document said Simon and his sons can rule in perpetuity until a reliable prophet arises in, and the implication is he would he would show the nation where next to go. And, uh, John the Baptist is interpreted as that reliable prophet. Um, and certainly Jesus's, um, response to the authorities of his day when they ask him, by whose authority do you do all these things in the temple? He responds, well, who do you think John the Baptist was? And the authorities don't want to acknowledge John the Baptist because he critiqued them.

And pointed to Jesus. And so they evade the question.

JD: Those who are used to the Gospels think of John the Baptist simply as a, you know, little precursor. We get him out of the way, you know, in the first couple of chapters and it's all about Jesus. Fine, theologically. But we also have evidence from Josephus. And if Josephus was our only evidence, we, we would think of John the Baptist as one of the most popular, um, influential teacher prophets of the late 20s AD, wouldn't we?

George Athas: Absolutely. His movement was huge. Uh, and so much so that he caused a lot of noise, um, and he made life difficult for Herod Antipas, who ultimately arrested him and executed him.

JD: Which we have from both Gospels and Josephus.

George Athas: Correct, yeah. And it goes to show that John was critiquing the leadership of his day. And this resonated with a lot of people who were dissatisfied with the leadership of the day. And John, um, contra to the Essenes who were this monastic sect who withdrew while John and the baptizers did withdraw, they didn't encourage everyone to withdraw with them. They got everyone to come with them and then sent them back.

John Dickson (studio)

And one of those people who went out to see John by the Jordan and then returned to the general population ... was, of course, Jesus.

So, how did Jesus fit into the Judaisms of this period?

Stay with us.

BREAK 2

[EXCERPT - The Greatest Story Ever Told](#)

John Dickson (studio)

That's a clip from the 1965 biblical epic, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. Apparently, it was a flop (unlike the original story itself). It didn't do well at the box office. And a lot of people criticised it as beautiful to watch but lacking depth. Almost the *opposite* of the original story!!

Anyway, John the Baptist, played by Charlton Heston, is in a river in the wilderness outside Jerusalem, calling people to be baptised. There's a huge queue of people waiting to hop into the water with him.

And now it's Jesus' turn. In the movie, Jesus is played by the late, great Max von Sydow. And in the movie—and the Gospel records—Jesus' baptism kicks off his public career, as a Jewish preacher – a bit like John.

But ... what type of Jew was Jesus?

JD: Okay. It's out of this movement that the most famous Jewish teacher of all time emerges. Can you... Talk to me, um, about how Jesus emerges from this baptiser movement. Are you awkward about saying that John was Jesus' mentor?

George Athas: No, not at all. I think that's pretty much what he was and I think the Gospels show us that. If John was the reliable prophet, And if he had that self understanding, um, and I think he did, then it makes sense that Jesus would emerge from that movement. Um, the Gospels tell us that when John was in prison, he sent word to Jesus to say, are you the one that we're waiting for? And I think that's where we see the self understanding of John as the reliable prophet who would point to the one who would change the nation.

And so John is the prophetic figure and Jesus is the royal figure who will, um, who will bring in the dawn of a new age for the Jewish nation. And so it, it makes

sense that Jesus's movement initially started with the movement of John the Baptist, but then came out of that as well. And, uh, as we know from the gospel, some of Jesus's earliest disciples were disciples of John themselves.

JD: And Jesus himself was baptized by John.

George Athas: Exactly. Which will have seemed like what many, many people, uh, were doing.

Yeah, Jesus was, uh, it perhaps is a little strange for people to think of Jesus as a disciple of someone else. Um, but a disciple simply means a student. That's literally what it means. And Jesus was a very smart man.

He seems to have been educated in some kind of way, and that implies that he had teachers. And the most significant one seems to have been John the Baptist. It's the only one that we know of. Um, it wouldn't surprise me if Jesus did have other teachers, particularly as he was growing up. Um, but in his adult life, he certainly was a disciple of John the Baptist.

JD: And after John, he, he gives his, um, students the same role of baptizing. So he is consciously part of that

stream of Judaism. He is an extension of the baptizer Judaism.

George Athas: yeah, absolutely.

John Dickson (studio)

So, that's it. That's Jesus' kind of Judaism—not the Sadducees, Essenes, or Zealots. Not even the Pharisees, even though Jesus shared a lot of the same vision of the future kingdom with the Pharisees.

Jesus was part of this hugely popular Jewish baptizer movement. We don't know much about them, except that they believed things were so desperate in Israel all of the Jewish people, God's own chosen people, had to begin again, come out to the Jordan River (where the nation had begun 1200 years before) and start over with a life devoted to God and neighbour.

It was a rigorous moral message—you only have to look at the teachings of John the Baptist and Jesus for that—but at the heart of it all was mercy. A divine reprieve. An amnesty. Full cleansing—hence the bath or baptism ritual.

Ritual bathing had been commonplace in Israel for centuries. The Pharisees did it regularly. The Essenes did it at least 3 times a day.

The innovation of the baptizers was that there was one moment of cleansing—one bath—that was effective for the whole of life.

This was a conversionist movement. More of the same wouldn't do. More law, more ritual, couldn't cleanse. Only a moment of surrender in the purifying waters would make things new.

This is the movement out of which Jesus came ... and which he then extended and modified.

JD: The message of John the Baptist that we hear in the Gospels is, uh, repent because God has his axe and it's about to swing and the nation is about to, um, experience the judgment of God.

George Athas: We need to repent in order for this to be avoided. And when Jesus begins his ministry, he also issues the call to repent. Um, very interestingly, however, um, Jesus doesn't say that God has his axe and he's about to swing. He declares an amnesty. That

God is ready to forgive. The kingdom has arrived, but God is ready to forgive.

Therefore repent, because the kingdom has come. And he points to himself as the king of God's kingdom.

JD: And John is out in the desert and Jesus is amongst the people. John is an ascetic, Jesus is wining and dining. So, can you explain this similarity and difference? How do you account for that? How do you imagine that? Theologically for Jesus, what's going on?

George Athas: Yeah, I think it's primarily because John, in his role as the reliable prophet, has to, in some way, be separated from those that he is critiquing. He's, he wants to take people away from the center of leadership in Jerusalem in order to prime people for what is coming - what's coming is something new. Jesus is the one who brings that new thing - the arrival of God's kingdom and that's not something just for the desert.

That is something for all of society and therefore Jesus is in all the towns. He's in the synagogues. He's in the marketplaces and the squares of the cities proclaiming this and teaching it, and then also sending his own ...

JD: And he's not just living on locusts.

George Athas: Correct. Uh, and it's, it's interesting that we see Jesus's self understanding as he is the groom. He's the bride groom who's arrived, and the bridegroom when he arrives well ... the party's on at that point. Yeah, yeah.

JD: Okay, well, I mean, that's great because we've started to now talk about how Jesus, uh, was similar to and different from, say, the baptizer movement. Let's, let's walk through our various movements.

Let's go next to the Pharisees. How was Jesus similar to and different from the Pharisees? I mean, a reader of the gospels could get the impression that they didn't agree on anything, that you hear the word Pharisee and it's like the bad, the bad guys are moving onto stage. It's not probably exactly what's going on.

George Athas: No, Jesus and the Pharisees do have a lot in common. Uh, they have a very healthy respect for Scripture and for understanding it. And they also believe that God hasn't finished with the nation of Israel, that His purposes are still unfolding. Um, they disagree on how that's happening.

Uh, but they certainly have that same, uh, focus on a prophetic view of history, uh, that God is still doing things amongst his people. But Jesus's primary critique of the Pharisaic movement has to do with their oral traditions and this oral law that they have developed and put on a par with the written law.

READING

7 The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus 2 and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. 3 (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. 4 When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.

5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?"

6 *He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:*

*"These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.*

*They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules.'*[b]

You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions."

The Gospel of Mark, Chapter 7

George Athas: Yeah, Jesus finds the traditions very unhelpful because most of them essentially create a way of doing piety that is obedience by loophole, as opposed to living all of life with a healthy relational dynamic as opposed to a purely functional dynamic.

So the Pharisees, their attitude is, if I do A, B, C and D, God will be pleased with me. Whereas Jesus's dynamic is, I need to love people, I need to understand them and be with them and embrace them and have flexibility within, uh, within relationships. That's what God is pleased with. And therefore when the Pharisees just keep pressing their rules to the detriment of the average

person in some cases, such as the sick and the needy, Jesus just finds that, uh, you know, horrid. And he blasts them, particularly towards the end of his ministry when he just lets them have it.

Reading

*Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:
2 “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. 3 So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. 4 They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.*

5 “Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries[a] wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.

13 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of

heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

15 *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.*

16 *“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.’* **17** *You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?*

The Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 23

John Dickson (studio)

This famous passage has fueled the contemporary moniker of the ‘pharisee’ as a self-righteous hypocrite. As I mentioned earlier, to call someone a ‘pharisee’ is an insult. It casts them prudish and pedantic and probably also a fake!!

But using ‘pharisee’ in this way is also pretty insulting to Jews, many of whom – certainly the Orthodox – trace their tradition straight back to the Pharisees of Jesus’

era. We'll put a couple of good articles on this in the show notes.

Jesus' criticism of the pharisees was an internal critique. As a Jew, he thought that the Pharisees had allowed their oral law to eclipse the written law of Moses.

Of course, the Pharisees would have replied as modern Orthodox Jews also reply: No. Our oral traditions go all the way back to Moses. They just weren't written down until the year 200 CE.

That then is the disputed point.

The reason Jesus could never have been a Pharisee, and the reason Christianity never descended from Pharisaic Judaism, is that Jesus did NOT believe the oral traditions were divine. They were human. And sometimes they were a hindrance to entering the kingdom of God. That's what he meant when he said, "They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders."

So, here's the tricky thing. On the one hand, it's worth observing the historical point that Jesus' renewal or baptizer Judaism and Pharisaic Judaism—despite

sharing core doctrines—were always different tracks of Jewish thought. They were heavily critical of each other!

And, yet, in our modern context, I don't think we should use the term 'Pharisee' as an insult. We might not intend it as a Jewish sleight. But for those who trace their origins to the Pharisaic track of Judaism, it certainly feels like an insult.

Okay, what about the Essenes?

JD: The Essenes. I once interviewed James Charlesworth, right? He's a great Dead Sea Scrolls scholar. And I said, How do you think the Essenes would have viewed Jesus and he said, not very highly? What do you reckon?

George Athas: I think they would have, uh, appreciated certain aspects of Jesus and his ideology, particularly Jesus's critiques the Jewish leadership that's in Jerusalem. I think the Essenes would have given Jesus top marks for that.

But Jesus isn't an ascetic and he he's very willing to engage with anyone and everyone. who wants to have a conversation with him and the Essenes...

JD: ... Eating with sinners.

George Athas: Yeah, exactly.

JD: Which, I mean, according to the Dead Sea Scrolls, is not something that an Essene would do.

George Athas: Exactly. The Essenes are about separating from such people and not polluting yourself with their company. Whereas Jesus wants to love people, and so he will eat and drink with them, um, not in order to promote their way of life, but to call them to repentance. But to do so in the context of a loving relationship where people actually get along rather than holding people at arm's length.

John Dickson (studio)

Here's a bit of the vow Essenes made when they entered their tight knit community:

READING

“... in order to seek God with [all (one's) heart and] with all (one's) soul;] in order to do what is good and just in his presence; in order to love everything which he selects and to hate everything that he

rejects; in order to be united in the counsel of God and walk in perfection in his sight, complying with all revealed things concerning the regulated times of their stipulations; in order to love all the sons of light, each one according to his lot in God's plan, and to detest all the sons of darkness, each one in accordance with his guilt.”

The Rule of the Community (section 1)

George Athas: Yeah, Jesus doesn't, uh, doesn't have, uh, a lot of sympathy for the Sadducees. The Sadducees are the ones who are ultimately responsible for Jesus's arrest and trial.

JD: It's interesting, isn't it, that in the Gospels, we think of Jesus and Pharisees clashing, clashing, clashing, which is true, but when it comes to Jerusalem and those final days, it's the Pharisees almost disappear. It's Jesus versus the priestly Sadducees.

George Athas: Exactly. Jesus frequents synagogues, which were largely set up by Pharisees as schools, places where you can study and debate Scripture. And Jesus is very happy to do that. He's always in the synagogue. But once he goes to Jerusalem, he's now in the Sadducees center of operations.

And when he comes to the temple in the last week of his ministry and he overturns the tables of the money changers, he's upsetting the Sadducees way of doing things. The Sadducees are the ones who are running the temple. They are the high priests. They're the ones who are benefiting from all the money that is coming into the temple.

READING

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

The Gospel of Mark, Chapter 11

George Athas: So they are fabulously wealthy and Jesus overturning the tables and saying, tear this temple down. That's a critique on the Sadducees and it's once again taking, you know, to its logical end point, the ideas that we see with John the Baptist. That is, the leadership must be critiqued. Something else is coming.

You know, John the Baptist calls the, uh, the Sadducees a brood of vipers, um, and Jesus comes in, causes this near riot on Sadducee's home territory, on their own campus and, uh, a few days later they're arresting him and trying him and then handing him over to the Roman prefect to be killed.

John Dickson (studio)

In 2005, the churches in the United Kingdom put together an advertising campaign to get people thinking about Jesus in the lead up to Easter. The dramatic red and black posters bore the slogan “Meek. Mild. As if. Discover the Real Jesus.”

The campaign caused of a bit of a stir because the image of Jesus they used was modelled on a famous picture of the Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara.

The head of the campaign told the media at the time that the posters “We want to get away from the wimpy little Nordic figure in a white nightie ... Jesus was more revolutionary than anyone in the 20th century.”

The picture of Jesus as some sort of political revolutionary isn't new, of course.

In the 1700s, at the beginning of the Enlightenment Herman Samuel Reimarus argued precisely that Jesus was a revolutionary Zealot who was duly executed for insurrection, and then afterwards the disciples invented the resurrection and made Jesus a spiritual Saviour to mask the movement's failure.

In our own day, Iranian-American author and TV presenter Reza Aslan wrote a book called *Jesus The Zealot*. He rehashed Reimarus' arguments and made Jesus a political and military revolutionary who failed. Along Barbara Thiering's *Jesus the Man*, *Jesus the Zealot* is one of least plausible attempts at historical reconstruction of Jesus in the last ... maybe 50 years. I wrote a pretty scathing review of it when it came out. We'll put it in the show notes! Warning. It wasn't my most gracious work, I must admit.

JD: Uh, I tear my hair out when I hear this, but let me hear you say it. Was Jesus a zealot? How would he have thought about the zealots?

George Athas: No. Jesus was not a zealot. If Jesus were a zealot, I don't think he would have ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey.

George Athas: Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey is essentially a stunt enacting Zechariah 9. And Zechariah 9 pictures the Davidic King coming to Jerusalem to, uh, to speak peace and security and the image of riding on a donkey

READING

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

I will take away the chariots from Ephraim

and the warhorses from Jerusalem,

and the battle bow will be broken.

He will proclaim peace to the nations.

His rule will extend from sea to sea

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Zechariah, Chapter 9

George Athas: ... A donkey is not a war horse and, uh, Zechariah 9; very, uh, deliberately contrasts the kind of imagery associated with the promised Davidic king who is to come and your Alexander the Greats who are on their war horses killing people left, right and center.

Now while Jesus does cause a mini riot in the temple, he doesn't have a sword in his hand. Um, he's not out to kill people, he's out to tear the temple down and create something new. He's about transformation, um, he's not about execution. And so, I think to call Jesus a, a zealot is to really misunderstand what he's, what he's doing.

And, um, he himself, uh, while he views himself as a Davidic Messiah, which to some extent we could say is a military figure, his conquest does not involve swords. His conquest involves words and love, and he gives his life rather than takes the life of others.

Jesus, um, sees the coming of the kingdom as something that God will enact, rather than human beings with swords. And the, the right response to, uh, to Jesus's message is ethical living as opposed to revolution. Um, and,

I think it's very telling that in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Peter swings a knife, a blade, and takes off the ear of the high priest's servant. I don't think that's a wild swing. I think there's a lot more going on there. But Jesus says, put your sword back. Um, those who live by the sword will die by the sword.

And I think right there you have the critique of *the* Zealot movement. Um, I think very interestingly also, one of Jesus disciples may well have been a Zealot: Simon the Canaanian. Um, the word Canaanian might come from the Hebrew word qanah, which means zealot, 'Zeal', uh, but I don't think that's a way that Jesus endorsed the zealot movement. I think that, um, what we have in

Simon is a repentant zealot just as Matthew was a repentant tax collector.

JD: Yeah. And, and one of, he goes to the home of Simon the leper. But this is clearly a healed leper. Yes. Not an actual leper. Yeah. So remembered for their past.

George Athas: Yeah, and even the very fact that we have a tax collector, a former tax collector, in Jesus's, amongst Jesus's disciples. The zealots hated the tax collectors, wanted to kill them all. And yet, here amongst Jesus's disciples, we have someone who may have been a zealot, probably was, and a tax collector, both as part of his movement.

JD: Yeah. Hence that amnesty idea that you picked up.

EDITORIAL 18

In AD 66, the Zealots took a leading role in the first Jewish revolt against Rome. It was the climax of decades of unrest, and it didn't go well for various types of Jews.

JD: Where did all the sects of Judaism go? Right? Because, uh, we can't do a whole episode on the, on

the Jewish war, but the, but the Zealots helped create an environment where between 66 and 73, when it really ends, there's a huge war between the Jews and the Romans and the Romans win, obviously.

Um, so where did all the movements go?

George Athas: They went down in flames, except for the Pharisee movement. Uh, the, the Baptizer movement. Um, we really don't hear very much about it. It was a small movement anyway, but, so we kind of don't know if, if anything happens there beyond, um, AD 70 when the temple is destroyed. We do know the baptiser movement continued up until then because we encounter a few people in acts.

Acts 18 and 19, who seem to have been part of the baptizer movement, and then, um, Josephus with um, with Banus. But the, they don't seem to have survived, um, the, the destruction of the temple.

John Dickson (studio)

George will qualify this in a second. Not all the Jewish baptisers disappeared. Stand by.

George Athas: The Sadducees certainly didn't, because the temple was their base of operations, and once the temple was destroyed, the Sadducees lost everything.

While the priests were able, the priests who survived the conflagration, uh, were still able to, um, trace their heritage as priests, they couldn't be Sadducees. They were no longer serving in a temple. So the movement automatically died literally overnight. Um, the, the zealots, uh, were taking up swords against the Romans and even against a lot of Jews.

And when the Romans suppressed the revolt, uh, the zealots You know, they were the diehards. They, they didn't put, um, put their swords away. They continued to battle away and make life difficult, uh, for the Romans. But ultimately, the Romans captured them, got them at Masada in A. D. 73. And all of them died there on Masada.

John Dickson (studio)

Josephus recorded the events of Masada, where he writes that 967 Jewish men, women, and children, chose to take their own lives rather than suffer enslavement or death at the hands of the Roman army.

They had been the last holdouts of the First Jewish Revolt against Rome, which saw the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple three years before.

The remnant had found refuge on Masada, a remote mountain overlooking the Dead Sea - a beautiful place. But they were besieged by an overwhelming Roman force. When it became clear that all hope was lost, Josephus writes that the rebel leader Eleazar Ben-Yair convinced his men to commit mass suicide.

Each man killed his own wife and children. Then the men gathered together and drew lots to determine which ten men would kill the rest of the men. The ten that remained then drew lots again, with one man chosen to kill the other nine before taking his own life.

READING

Finally, then, the nine bared their throats, and the last solitary survivor, after surveying the prostrate multitude, to see whether haply amid the shambles there were yet one left who needed his hand, and finding that all were slain, set the palace ablaze, and then collecting his strength drive his sword clean through his body and fell beside his family.

Josephus, War 7.397-398 Loeb Translation

George Athas: The Essenes, uh, also seem to have been caught up in the destruction of, of A. D. 70. Um, we know this probably, uh, from, uh, the evidence in Qumran. The community that was there at Qumran survived all the way until just before the destruction of the temple in A. D. 70. Uh, at which [01:17:00] point they hid the scrolls that they had in the caves nearby at Qumran.

JD: aren't we glad for that.

George Athas: Yes, and so, and that's how we discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls, um, two millennia later. But the, the site at Qumran as well seems to have, um, been Uh, destroyed and so the, the community there stopped and, uh, the people were dispersed and as a movement they seem to have just fizzled out. And I think particularly because the, the Essenes wanted a [01:17:30] temple, they wanted a physical temple in which to worship.

When the temple is gone, while they might want another temple to arise, they're nowhere near big enough to be able to achieve that. Um, and so they, they seem to have been dispersed and come to nothing. The

Pharisees, however, because they are a lay movement, they didn't need, well, they kind of needed the temple, but they can operate outside the temple.

Uh, the Pharisaic movement was largely about what you did from day to day. They did survive, uh, the destruction

JD: They must have seemed like the only game in town. Those guys have been talking about purity in everyday life. Well, now we need them.

George Athas: Yeah, and, uh, they came to dominate Judaism. They were highly educated, and so they were the natural leaders of Judaism after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. And so they were the ones who essentially dictated the theological discourse of Judaism in the centuries after AD 70 and, uh, Pharisaism develops into what we call Rabbinic Judaism and, um, they begin to, uh, formulate and write down the Oral Torah that they had been promulgating for a couple of centuries up to that point.

EDITORIAL 20

The destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE was a disaster for the Jewish people. And only one (maybe two) branches of Judaism survived.

Pharisaic Judaism had always said that you could have temple-level purity wherever you happen to be, by just following the Pharisees oral laws ... about handwashing, the precise form and times of prayer, and so on.

After the temple had gone, the Pharisees seemed like the only plausible form of Judaism. And so over the next 150 years they codified their oral laws—the same laws Jesus had disputed—and wrote them down in the second holy book of Orthodox Judaism, the Mishnah, written down in the town of Sepphoris (right near Nazareth) in the year 200 CE.

In the centuries after the Mishnah, other books were produced, known as the Talmud, which records authoritative Jewish commentary and debate about the oral laws of the Mishnah.

These new documents didn't exist at the time of Jesus. But they now defined what it meant to be a Jew. Orthodox Judaism today derives from the Talmud, the Mishnah, and ultimately from the Pharisees of Jesus' day. It was inevitable that this great tradition of Judaism would not have a place for Jesus and his followers ... because Jesus and his followers had never been part of that great tradition.

JD: We talked about the Baptizer movement sort of disappearing, but in another sense they didn't.

George Athas: No, they didn't. Uh, because the Jesus movement continued. Uh, the Jesus movement was originally a completely Jewish movement. It was made up 100 percent of Jewish people. All of Jesus disciples were Jewish. Jesus himself understood his mission as being to Israel. And he was understood to be Israel's Messiah. And therefore it was quite natural that the early church was completely Jewish. Um, but the, the notion that Jesus had been raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God, implied that he now had universal rule.

Uh, and what he had done had been effective not just for Jewish people but also for Gentiles.

JD: And that is in the prophets, isn't it, that, that, that the, um, I'm thinking, is it Isaiah 11, um, about the nations rallying to the banner of Jesse?

George Athas: Yes. Something like that. Yes. New

But, um, the, the understanding that Jesus essentially became the light to the Gentiles, um, fueled, uh, a mission towards Gentiles. And this created a very interesting dynamic in the early church because the, um, before this time, if Gentiles wanted to worship God, um, they could only do so to a limited extent, unless they underwent circumcision and therefore converted to Judaism, changed their identity, uh, their ethnic cultural identity.

And initially part of the early church advocated doing that: that Gentiles, if they wanted to be a part of the movement of the Messiah, they had to become Jews, uh, and worship the God of the Jews. But, uh, Paul, uh, the Apostle Paul was integral in, um, arguing, um, theologically that no, what Jesus had done had been effective for Gentiles as Gentiles.

And they didn't need to change their identity, uh, in order to worship God. They could remain Gentiles and still worship God as full members of God's people. And

so the Jesus movement starts to develop. It's still largely a Jewish movement, I think, for most of the first century. Um, but the appeal, um, that the movement had to Gentiles, especially God-fearing Gentiles who would frequent synagogues, um, who found, uh, the Jewish engagement of ethics and metaphysics very, uh, stimulating ...

It appealed to their philosophical, um, uh, tendencies. They saw the Jesus movement and it had a lot of appeal for them, especially because they could, they didn't have to be second class citizens anymore. They could actually be full first-class citizens.

John Dickson (studio)

In the first century, we can't really speak of 'christianity' as a distinct religion. What we call Christianity was a renewal movement within Judaism which believed that this renewal could – as the ancient Scriptures had promised - invite all the nations to share in the grace and wisdom of Israel's God.

So, when did Jesus' branch of Judaism and the Pharisee's branch of Judaism part ways to become two distinct religions? It's hard to know ... But George has a

theory about one of the seeds of this growing separation ...

JD: So, tell me finally about the parting of the ways. I mean, there's this really, um, intriguing thing to get our heads around historically, that what we call Judaism today, or what we call Orthodox Judaism today, is really the descendant of one brand of Judaism in the first century, the Pharisees. And what we call Christianity today, is the descendant of another competing brand of Judaism.

George Athas: It is indeed in the first century.

JD: Um, I've always found it just mind bending to think of that. Um, even though we only call one of them Judaism. When, when would you say there is a genuine parting of the ways between these two forms of Judaism, the Pharisaic Judaism and the Baptizer Judaism that was focused on Jesus as Messiah?

George Athas: It's really hard to put a line in the sand

JD: Yes it is. But you are George Athas! I want the answer.

George Athas: however, the time and date, um, I think the, the seeds of this go back to AD 49. We know that in AD 49, there are vigorous debates happening in the synagogues of Rome. And the synagogues in Rome are debating about the Christ or what, uh, you know, the Roman historian, uh, calls Crestus.

He thinks, uh, that it's a, um, that it's a person's name as opposed to a title. But I think what we see there is in the synagogues in Rome, there is, um, debate as to whether or not Jesus is the Messiah. Because you've got Jews who are coming along to the synagogue saying the Messiah has come and that's Jesus.

Then you've got other Jews there saying, no, that's impossible. He was executed by the Romans. So that doesn't make sense that he could possibly be the Messiah. Um, and then also in that synagogue context, I think you've got Gentiles, God-fearers who, as you said, are attracted by the monotheism and ethics of Judaism.

And so they, particularly because they're opting in. to, um, going to the synagogue. For them, these kinds of debates are not just, um, part of their cultural heritage. They have an active, vested interest, uh, in it. And so,

the Gentiles, I think, are very attracted to the Jesus movement because it means that they can be first class citizens now.

Um, but this debate between Jews who reject Jesus and Jews who advocate Jesus as the Messiah reaches such a pivotal point that riots start breaking out in the synagogues and it seems to have started to be to have happened quite regularly and eventually Claudius issues a decree And according to the decree, all Jews were evicted from Rome, but I don't think that's quite right, historically.

I think it's the Christian Jews who were evicted from Rome.

READING

Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [Christ], he expelled them from Rome.”

Seutonius, The Life of Claudius 25:4

George Athas: So, in the New Testament, we find the likes of Priscilla and Aquila, who had been in Rome. Now they're outside of Rome. Paul encounters them in Corinth, um, uh, and in, in Ephesus as well. Um, and so, left in Rome, now, you've got, in the synagogue, Jews who absolutely maintain that Jesus cannot be the Messiah and Gentile God-fearers who now believe that Jesus is the Messiah and the Gentile, uh, God fearers go away and start forming their own home churches and just doing their own thing.

Um, and I think Paul addresses, um, them largely in his letter to the Romans and part of, I think, the, the logic of Romans is to tell the Gentiles, Hey, the gospel is still for the Jews. You know, you need to get back into the synagogue. But that movement towards being outside the synagogue, forming your own congregations and just keeping to yourself, I think we start seeing the roots of that in AD 49, um, and eventually, as more and more Gentiles become part of the Jesus Movement and the early church, and even we have Gentile churches that are established by the Apostle Paul in Asia Minor, for example, and, um, and in Greece, the engagement with the synagogue starts to disappear.

And so, uh, while I think the, the roots of this really do go back to the end of the forties A. D., it is a couple of generations before we see, before we get to a situation where I think we can say the ways have totally parted now.

John Dickson (studio)

Today, many Jewish people still recite ancient daily prayers in the morning, afternoon, and evening. It's called the Amidah (which literally means 'standing') or the Shemoneh Esrei (which means 'eighteen', because there were originally 18 blessings or prayers.

Here are a few:

No.2. God's Might. You are eternally mighty, my Lord, the Resuscitator of the dead are You; abundantly able to save, . . .

6. Forgiveness. Forgive us, our Father, for we have erred; pardon us, our King, for we have willfully sinned; .

14. Rebuilding Jerusalem. And to Jerusalem, Your city, may You return in compassion, and may You rest within it, as You have spoken. May You rebuild it soon in our

days as an eternal structure and may You speedily establish the throne of David within it.

After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, a Jewish council added a 19th blessing to the 18 blessings.

It was called the Birkat HaMinim: the benediction for heretics.

12. Against Heretics. And for slanderers (minim or heretics) let there be no hope; and may all wickedness perish in an instant; and may all Your enemies be cut down speedily. May You speedily uproot, smash, cast down, and humble the wanton sinners—speedily in our days . . .

JD: Do you see the, um, the 19th [01:31:00] prayer of the 18 prayers - the Amidah - as directed at Christians, or do you think, I mean, because some people say, no, no, it's just directed at the Sadducees do you think that's a significant thing in the parting of the ways or not?

George Athas: Yeah, I think it's, um, the prayer is against the minim. I guess the closest word that we have to it in English is heretic. And I think it's an all encompassing term.

I don't think we can pin it to just one group. And so yes, I would say that the, uh, Christian Jews... are, uh, to be bundled into that particular term. And so there is a daily prayer that, um, uh, those who inherit the Pharisaic tradition are praying where they are praying *against* those Jews who believe in Jesus, along with a [01:32:00] whole host of others, such as, you know, the Sadducees, etc.

But yes, I think, uh, definitely there is, um, there is now bad blood, uh, between, um, the, Uh, what will become Rabbinic Judaism and, uh, Christianity. And eventually Judaism, Rabbinic Judaism will develop the tradition that the prophetic movement stopped centuries before Jesus. Um, there's a very, um, it's very intricate the way this develops, but the claim that God stopped sending prophets centuries before Jesus is in part aimed at countering the Christian claims. Um, Jesus cannot be the Messiah. He's just a very naughty boy, because God stopped speaking and sending people well before Jesus. And so Jesus cannot be the Messiah. He cannot even be a prophet. And the New Testament writings are to be rejected.

JD: Final question. In what sense is Jesus truly, you know, climactically, a Jew? Versus the old idea that really, Jesus started a new religion.

George Athas: Jesus didn't start a new religion. He brought, I think, the, the, the historic faith of Israel to completion. And the mind-blowing aspect of that is that it now encompassed Gentiles as well. It did create something new. Um, but Jesus himself - he saw himself as the Jewish Messiah. He was the son of David, who, whose right it was to rule the people of God, rule Israel, um, to gather Israel around him in worship of God. And this was something that occurred within Israel. Um, his. His ultimate ministry, his death, his resurrection, was something so grand, um, it affected the human condition, not just the Israelite condition.

And so that's why Christianity is now a global juggernaut and not just a Jewish movement. But Jesus himself was thoroughly Jewish.

He, he loved the Jewish scriptures. He read them, he interpreted them, he debated them, um, he followed a Jewish way of life. Um, we see that by him going to

Jerusalem, even though he [01:34:30] had issues with the, uh, temple in Jerusalem, we still see him there at festivals.

Um, so he is himself very much a Jew, but he does something that is absolutely cosmic in scale.