

# THE JEWISH FOUNDATIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT



Class XIV – Liberals and Fundamentalists

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# An Introductory Reading

**4<sup>th</sup> Ezra 11:1 – 5, 36 - 46 (1<sup>st</sup> c. CE) –**

“On the second night I had a dream: I saw rising from the sea an **eagle** that had **twelve feathered wings** and **three heads**. I saw it spread its wings over **the whole earth**, and all the **winds of heaven blew** upon it, and the **clouds were gathered** around it. I saw that out of its wings there grew opposing wings; but they became little puny wings. But its heads were at rest; the middle head was larger than the other heads, but it too was at rest with them. Then I saw that the eagle flew with its wings, and it **reigned over the earth** and over those who inhabit it.”

“Then I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Look in front of you and consider what you see.’ When I looked, I saw what seemed to be **a lion roused from the forest**, roaring; and I heard how it uttered a human voice to the eagle, and spoke, saying, ‘Listen and I will speak to you. The Most High says to you, “Are you not the one that remains of **the four beasts** that I had made to reign in my world, so that **the end of my times** might come through them?...The Most High has looked at his times; **now they have ended**, and his ages have **reached completion**. Therefore **you, eagle, will surely disappear**, you and your terrifying wings, your most evil little wings, your malicious heads, your most evil talons, and your whole worthless body, so that **the whole earth**, freed from your violence, **may be refreshed and relieved**, and **may hope for the judgment and mercy** of him who made it.”

# Cultural Markers for Jewish Identity

- Circumcision
- Dietary laws
- Marriage



Egyptian practice of circumcision

# Small Group Discussion

- Read Acts 10:9 – 20, 34 - 48
- What was Peter's reaction to his dream?
- What was Peter's insights when he spoke with Cornelius and his household?
- What were the implications of this for the church?

# Perspectives on Religious Practice

- Sadducees' Beliefs
  - Conservatives of Hellenistic Judaism
  - Rejected addition of "oral law"
  - Rejected idea of resurrection and afterlife
  - Membership based on social power structure
- John 10:45 - 54



*Christ Before Caiaphas*, Duccio  
Buoninsegna

# Perspectives on Religious Practice

*The Jewish Antiquities* 18.1.3 (1<sup>st</sup> c. CE) -

“Now, for the Pharisees, **they live meanly**, and **despise delicacies** in diet; and they **follow the conduct of reason**; and what that prescribes to them as good for them they do; and they think they **ought earnestly to strive to observe reason's dictates for practice**...and when they determine that **all things are done by fate**, they do not take away **the freedom from men of acting** as they think fit; since their notion is, that it hath pleased God to make a temperament, whereby what he wills is done, but so that the will of man can act virtuously or viciously.

They also believe that **souls have an immortal rigor** in them, and that under the earth there will be **rewards or punishments**, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be **detained in an everlasting prison**, but that the former shall have power to **revive and live again**; on account of which doctrines they are **able greatly to persuade the body of the people**; and whatsoever they do about Divine worship, prayers, and sacrifices, **they perform them according to their direction**; insomuch that the cities give great attestations to them on account of their **entire virtuous conduct**, both in the actions of their lives and their discourses also.

# Perspectives on Religious Practice

- Pharisees' Beliefs
  - Mishnah – “oral law”
  - Purity
  - Resurrection and afterlife
  - No formal leadership structure
  - Membership based on holding certain beliefs
- Matthew 15:1 - 2



*Christ at Simon the Pharisee's House,*  
Peter Paul Rubens, circa 1619

# Perspectives on Religious Practice

*The Jewish Antiquities* 18.1.5 (1<sup>st</sup> c. CE) -

“They teach **the immortality of souls**, and esteem that the rewards of righteousness are to be earnestly striven for...they do not offer sacrifices because they have **more pure lustrations** of their own; on which account they are **excluded from the common court of the temple, but offer their sacrifices themselves**.

It also deserves our admiration, how much **they exceed all other men** that addict themselves to virtue, and **this in righteousness**; and indeed to such a degree, that as it hath never appeared among any other men, neither Greeks nor barbarians, no, not for a little time, so hath it endured a long while among them. This is demonstrated by that institution of theirs, which will not suffer any thing to hinder them from **having all things in common**; so that a rich man enjoys no more of his own wealth than he who hath nothing at all.

There are about **four thousand men** that live in this way, and **neither marry wives**, nor are desirous **to keep servants**; as thinking the latter **tempts men to be unjust**, and the former **gives the handle to domestic quarrels**; but as they live by themselves, they minister one to another.”



# Perspectives on Religious Practice

- Essenes' Beliefs
  - Extreme purity standards
  - End times
  - Afterlife
  - Other items
  - Praxis *AND* covenant
- Luke 14:5 - 6

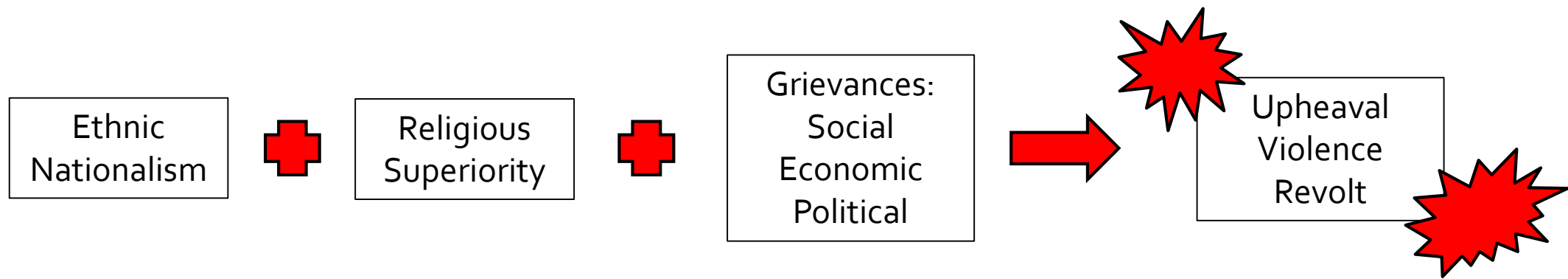


Essenes' Qumran Settlement near  
the Dead Sea

# The Future of Israel

Why the increasing focus on God's redemption of the nation?

- Idealization of the monarchy period
- Dissatisfaction with current status of Roman rule
- Social pressure as minority
- Revelation of the Prophets
- Narrative worldview – not about ideas, about being part of God's story



# Next Week's Homework

- Read Hebrews 1 - 2
- Why are angels contrasted with Jesus?
- How are the believers described?
- What is the basis of the relationship between believers and God?