

In my previous post I talked about two of the known Jewish sects from the days of Jesus in Palestine. The idea that there are specifically four sects comes to us from the late-first-century Jewish historian Josephus, whose many volumes of writings (e.g., on the Jewish War and on Jewish Antiquities - the latter a history of the Jewish people from biblical times up to his own day) are our principal source of information about Judaism at the time. In addition to the Pharisees and Sadducees, Josephus mentions the "Essenes" and a "Fourth Philosophy." Here is a summary of what these groups stood for, again taken from my introductory textbook on the New Testament. (The reason I'm giving this information: it is the background to my discussion of the afterlife in Judaism at the time of Jesus.)

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## Essenes

The Essenes are the one Jewish sect not mentioned in the New Testament. Ironically, they are also the group about which we are best informed. This is because the famous **Dead Sea Scrolls** were evidently produced by a group of Essenes who lived in a community east of Jerusalem in the wilderness area near the western shore of the Dead Sea, in a place that is today called **Qumran**. Although the term "Essene" never occurs in the scrolls, we know from at least one ancient authority, the Roman writer Pliny the Elder, that a community of Essenes was located in this area; moreover, the social arrangements and theological views described in the Dead Sea Scrolls correspond to what we know about the Essenes from these other accounts. Most scholars are reasonably certain, therefore, that the scrolls represent a library used by this sect, or at least by the part of it living near Qumran.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls was completely serendipitous. In 1947 ...

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