

## JOSEPHUS ON THE SADDUCEES AND MENANDER

by

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Once I tried (in my Hebrew article in *Iyyun*, Vol. 14, pp. 318-329) to show that in his description of the Pharisaic approach to destiny and free will, Josephus on one hand used Stoic terminology, but on the other hand he reflected correctly the Pharisaic standpoint. My point of departure was that, after the discovery of the Essene Dead Sea Scrolls, it became clear that Josephus is basically right when he ascribes to the Essenes the doctrine of predestination. I have naturally taken into account that Josephus probably used in his treatment of the three Jewish schools, the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes, popular Greek philosophical treatises. In his article, Shlomo Pines has shown that I was too optimistic regarding Josephus' description of the Pharisaic views. Pines has shown that there is a parallel passage in Apuleius' *De Platone et eius dogmate*, the source of which is possibly Antieuch of Ascalon, Cicero's teacher, and it is probable that Josephus took as his model the theories of this Greek Platonist.

Further investigation of this item will be fruitful.<sup>1</sup> Even if Josephus depends on Greek philosophical sources, it is clear that differences about destiny and free will existed among the three great schools of ancient Judaism. This can be seen from Josephus' having spoken three times about those opinions of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes (*Bellum* II, 119-166, *Ant.* XIII, 171-173, and *Ant.* XVIII, 11-12), but only in the second instance (*Ant.* XIII, 171-3), which is entirely devoted to the three different positions toward destiny and free will, does he speak about the opinions of all three trends. In the passage in *The Jewish War*, he brings in only the

<sup>1</sup> The passage of Apuleius should be compared with Cicero's *De Vato*, 39-44 (SVF, Vol. II, p. 292-293, No. 974). There is also a confused passage in Aetius' *Placita*, I, 27, 3 (SVF, p. 284, No. 976), where we read that Plato's view about destiny is similar to that of the Stoics, who think, e. g., that there are things which are decreed by fate and other things which are not decreed. In Apuleius' doctrines, parallel to the words of Josephus, are brought in the name of Plato, of whose school Antioch of Ascalon was the head, and who tried to harmonize Plato with the Stoics, as does the passage from Aetius, and Josephus also uses Stoic terminology. The most important coincidence between the passage in Aetius and Josephus is that according to Aetius the Stoics think that there are things which are decreed by fate, and other things which are not decreed by fate. According to Josephus (*Ant.* XIII, 172; cf. *Bellum* II, 163), the Pharisees also "say that certain events are the work of Fate, but not all" and also according to Apuleius Plato thought that not all events have to be referred to Fate.

opinions of the Pharisees and the Sadducees (*Bellum* II, 162-165), while in the XVIIIth book of the *Antiquities* he speaks only about the opinions of the Pharisees (13) and the Essenes (18). From these inconsistencies we can deduce that the difference between the three great schools on the subject of providence were so well-known that Josephus could forget in two places to bring in the opinion of one of the three parties.

*Antiquities* XIII, 171-3 differs from the other two passages also in that in the two other passages the question is whether God is beyond, not merely the commission, but even the sight of evil and, if man has the free choice of good and evil (*Bellum* II, 164-6), can he act rightly or otherwise (*Bellum* II, 163) and can he choose between virtue and vice (*Ant.* XVIII, 13). Also according to the text in Apuleius, God cannot be a cause of evil. Thus the question of free will and destiny is seen there from the ethical scope. In *Antiquities* XIII, 171-3, the moral aspect of the problem is evidently absent; the good and bad things mentioned there (173) are our well-being and our misfortune. This will be important for our dealing with the description of the position of the Sadducees, not only in *Antiquities* XIII, 173, but also in *The Jewish War* II, 164-5. These are the only two passages in which Josephus speaks about the doctrine of free will of the Sadducees, and we will bring them in full.

*Bellum* II, 164-5: "The Sadducees . . . do away with Fate altogether, and remove God beyond, not merely the commission, but the very sight of evil. They maintain that man has free choice of good or evil, and that it rests with each man's will whether he follows the one or the other."

*Antiquities* XIII, 173: "The Sadducees do away with Fate, holding that there is no such thing and that human affairs are not achieved in accordance with her decree, but that all things lie within our own decision ἐφ' ἑμῶν αὐτῶν, so that we ourselves are responsible (αἰτίους) for our well-being, while we suffer misfortune through our own ill-advisedness."

According to *Bellum* II, 164-5, the Sadducees think that God does not do or see any evil. A Jew would probably associate these words with Habakkuk 1:13, which says that God's "eyes are too pure to look upon evil." A Greek would probably remember that Homer said the opposite about the sun, Helios, "who sees<sup>2</sup> and hears all things" (*Iliad* III, 277). The idea itself fits a monotheistic religion believing in one God who is completely good. And Ben Sira (15:11-20) admonishes his reader: "Say not: From God is my transgression, for that which He hateth made He not . . . God created man from the beginning, and placed him in the hand of his inclination. If thou so desirest, thou canst keep the commandment, and (it is) wisdom to do his will." There is also, as in the first passage from Josephus, the assertion that God is not the cause of wickedness, but is con-

<sup>2</sup> The Greek verb is the same in both Josephus and Homer.

nected with the doctrine of free choice, but the whole passage in Ben Sira shows that the Jewish author was not prone to accept the strange idea of the Sadducees in Josephus (*Bellum* II, 164; *Ant.* XIII, 173) who supposedly did away with God's involvement in human actions. Pines has already shown that the assumption that the Sadducees "remove God beyond, not merely the commission, but the very sight of evil" (*Bellum* II, 164-5) has its parallel in Josephus' Greek Platonic source, in which we read that no cause of any evil can be ascribed to God. It is strange that Philo<sup>3</sup> says that the Essenes think "that the Godhead is the cause of all good things and nothing bad." This distortion of Essene theology by Philo is surely due to the influence of Greek philosophy upon Philo's description.<sup>4</sup>

Josephus says that the Sadducees "do away with destiny altogether." The Greek word for destiny is the Stoic term (εἰμαρμένῃ) but it can be shown that in Josephus' vocabulary, and especially in his words about the three great Jewish schools, the word has a broader meaning: (εἰμαρμένῃ) means for him not only fate and destiny, but implies the whole involvement of God in the world and in human affairs. It is true that the Sadducees were rationalists who "deny that there is any resurrection, or angel, or spirit" (Acts 23:8) and who did not accept the Oral Law. Thus it is more than probable that the Sadducees really minimized God's part in human destiny and stressed human free will and responsibility. They probably also thought that our well being and misfortune were mainly consequences of our own acts. This position, namely that we are mostly the authors of our own lot upon earth, and that it is out of place to speak about God's reward and punishment when we enjoy our life or when we suffer, is a logical consequence of the disbelief of the Sadducees in the afterlife. But to minimize God's involvement in human fate is by no means identical with rejecting it completely and with believing that there is no interference of God in our life.

Did the Sadducees accept God's rule upon the world, and at the same time believe that God's will does not interfere in our private lives? This vulgar idea is opposed by Ben Sira (16:17-23): "Say not: I am hidden from God, and in the high who will remember me? I shall not be noticed among such a multitude of people, and what is my soul among the mass of the spirits of all the children of men? Behold, the heavens and the

<sup>3</sup> Philo, *Quod omnis probus liber*, 84. The right explanation of the historical kernel of this sentence is pointed out by E. Meyer, *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums* II, 1921, p. 402.

<sup>4</sup> Philo, *ibid.*, 83, says that the Essenes are trained in the knowledge of what is truly good, or evil, or indifferent." This division is Stoic, and not Essene. We know from the Dead Sea Scrolls that for them nothing was morally indifferent. But when Philo says, immediately after these words, that the Essenes learn "how to choose what they should and avoid the opposite," he reflects precisely the Essene dualistic doctrine. For similar sentences in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see D. Flusser, "The Dead Sea Sect and Pre-Pauline Christianity," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* IV, 1958, p. 279.

heavens of the heavens, and the deep, and the earth; when He treadeth upon them they stand firm, and when He visiteth them they tremble. Yea, the bottoms of the mountains, and the foundations of the world, when He looketh upon them, they tremble greatly. In truth, unto me He will not have respect; and as for my ways, who will mark them? If I sin, no eye beholdeth it,<sup>5</sup> or if I deal untruly in all secrecy, who declareth it? And what hope (is there)? For the decree is distant. They that lack understanding think these things, and the man of folly thinkest this." Ben Sira's words will have some importance for our further investigation, but it is improbable that such vulgar ideas, which Ben Sira opposes, were the *Weltanschauung* of the Sadducees. This is also not what Josephus says about them; according to him the Sadducees do away with providence; there is no such thing, and all depends only upon our behaviour. In modern times, similar opinions were accepted by some classes of the Deists: for one group, God is only the Creator, with no further interest in the world; another group admits a Divine Providence, but only in the material, not in the moral and spiritual orders. But even so, it is very improbable that such a theology was accepted by the Sadducees, who were not a small sectarian queer group in Judaism, but one of the three great schools. Thus, it is difficult to believe that one of the three representative groups of ancient Judaism rejected all involvement of Providence in human life. Was there, as in the case of the Pharisees, any Greek, non-Jewish source, which influenced Josephus' description of the Sadducees? We are not so happy as Pines was in the first case, but even so, it seems that we can at least guess the general content of such a source.

We want to quote not a Greek Philosopher, but a great ancient Greek poet, Menander (342/1 - 293/89 B. C. E.), the leading writer of New Comedy, who was for a time a pupil of the philosopher Theophrastus. We want to compare Josephus' words about the Sadducees in *Antiquities* XIII, 173 with a dialogue from the fifth act of Menander's comedy *Epileptontes* (the Arbitrants).<sup>6</sup> The two persons are Smikrines and the "philosophizing" slave, Onesimos.

Onesimos: Now do you think that gods have leisure time to spare/  
For parcelling the good and ill, day in and day out/ To each and  
all, O Smikrines?

Smikrines: What do you mean?

Onesimos: I will instruct you clearly. In the world, all told/  
Roughly there are one thousand cities, and in each/ Dwell thirty

<sup>5</sup> This resembles the argument of the Sadducees in *Bellum* II, 164-5, that God does not even see evil.

<sup>6</sup> *Menandri reliquiae selectae*, Rec. F. H. Sandbach, Oxford Classical Texts, 1972, pp. 128-9, verses 1084-1099. See also A. W. Gomme and F. H. Sandbach, *Menander, A Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 377-9. The translation quoted is that of Francis G. Allinson, in *Menander, The Principle Fragments*, London, 1927, pp. 117-9.

thousand. Do you think that each of them/ Each several one, the gods preserve or ruin?

Smikrines: What/ if that were true, the gods would live a life of toil!

Onesimos: 'Well, do not then the gods look out for us?'<sup>7</sup> you'll say/ To each of us they have allotted character/ as garrison commander. Ever present he/ Brings to ruin whoso seems to use him ill;/ Another man he saves. Our deity is thus/ and he's responsible for each man's faring well/ or badly.<sup>8</sup> Him propitiate by doing naught/ That's boorish or outlandish, that you prosper well."

"It need hardly be said that it would be absurd to look for any expression of Menander's own opinions in Onesimos' philosophizing. He uses scraps of various current ideas with the object of exasperating Smikrines. This is a comic scene and not a sermon."<sup>9</sup> The contrast between the multitude of mankind and the supposed care of gods for individual men resembles the arguments of the wicked men in Ben Sira 15:11-20. The idea that if the gods concerned themselves with human beings their life would be a laborious one is Epicurean ... but not necessarily solely Epicurean. At any rate there is nothing Epicurean about the sequel that the gods do care for the world, but by mediation of men's own characters."<sup>10</sup> As to Menander's words that Character is our god, this idea is as old as Heraclitus, frag. 119, and "there is something very like Menander's phrase in (Epicarmos) frag. 258 Kaibel", who says that "the character is for men a demon: for some a good, and for some an evil one."<sup>11</sup>

According to the new commentary to Menander,<sup>12</sup> Onesimos has here "confused two ideas: 1) a man's character brings him good or ill fortune; 2) man has in him a guardian spirit which will reward good deeds, but punish offences." I do not succeed in seeing that in Menander's passage the idea that the character "will reward good deeds, but punish offences" is expressed clearly enough. From this aspect, Menander's words seem to be similar to *Antiquities* XIII, 171-3, where Josephus speaks about the different opinions of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes, concerning human affairs. There also, good and evil are not moral terms, but words for well-being and misfortune. Thus, I would suggest, that here Josephus used an-

<sup>7</sup> In the Greek original it is written "take care of us."

<sup>8</sup> The Character is *αἴτιος καὶ τοῦ καλῶς καὶ τοῦ κακῶς πράττειν ἐλάχιστω* the Greek word for "responsible" is common to both Menander and *Ant.* XIII, 173.

<sup>9</sup> *Commentary*, p. 377.

<sup>10</sup> *Commentary*, p. 378.

<sup>11</sup> *Commentary*, *ibid.*, where also Seneca, *sp. mor* XLI, 2, is quoted: "... prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est ... sacer intra nos spiritus sedet, malorum bonorumque nostrorum observator et custos. hic prout a nobis tractatus est. ita nos ipse tractat." About the Greek work for Character used by Menander and Epicarmus, see *Commentary*, p. 523 (to *Perikeiromene*, verses 810-12).

<sup>12</sup> *Commentary*, *ibid.*

other Greek source than in *The Jewish War* II and in *Antiquities* XVIII, where the moral aspect of good and evil is patent. This postulated source of *Antiquities* XIII, 171-3, which influenced Josephus' description, was, as far as the Sadducean view is presented, near to the ideas included in the passage from Menander's comedy.

Pines has shown that the position of the Sadducees in *Bellum* II, 164-5, is influenced by the Platonic source, but on the other hand this passage shows also the same basic ideas as the parallel in *Antiquities* XIII, 173. Both passages begin with the same words: "The Sadducees do away with Fate," and according to both descriptions the choice of good and evil emanates from man's will. As already said, an ethical aspect is lacking from the second passage. Thus it seems that, when Josephus wrote about the Sadducees in *The Jewish War*, he already knew the Greek opinions, parallel to Menander's words, but he combined them with his supposed Platonic source. Our hypothesis is not without importance. We have seen that it is difficult to assume that the Sadducees really believed that God does not interfere in human life. If the whole complex was taken over by Josephus from Greek thought as reflected in Menander, in the way Josephus also adapted the Jewish reality to the Platonic source, then the difficulty is removed, and the consequence would be: the Sadducees evidently did not do away completely with Providence; we don't know precisely what they thought about the dependence of man's destiny upon God, because Josephus interpreted the Sadducean approach with the help of a non-Jewish, Greek source. This source can be better understood from *Antiquities* XIII, 173, because there it is not blended with ethical considerations.

In order to compare the passage in *Antiquities* XIII, 173, with the parallel in Menander, we have to know that this passage of Josephus contains two Stoic terms: the first is the word (*εἰμασμένην* fate, destiny); the second is (*ἐφ' ἡμῶν*) which means verbally "what is up to us." We can translate it by "decision." The Stoic term fulfils in the passage in Josephus the same task as the "character" in Menander. According to Josephus, the Sadducees believe that "all things lie within our decision, so that we are responsible for our well being" and for our misfortune. According to Menander, our character is "responsible for each man's faring well or badly." In Greek the two phrases are even more similar than in the translation.

In Menander we read that gods themselves do not parcel the good and the evil to each man; they do not preserve or ruin each several one, but they are indirectly concerned with human beings; to each of us they have allotted the Character as commander. If we use him ill, he ruins us; but if we use him well, he saves us. He is our god and he is responsible for each man's faring well or badly. Thus, if we want to gain the support of our Character in order to prosper well, we have to do nothing which is bad or stupid.

Even the order of arguments in Menander and in Josephus is practically the same. According to the Sadducees in *Antiquities* XIII, 173, no Providence exists and no god's decree determines human affairs. "All things lie within our own decision, so that we ourselves are responsible for our well-being, while we suffer misfortune through our own ill-advisedness." Even the last argument of the Sadducees can be found at the end of the passage in Menander: in order to prosper well, we have to do nothing which is bad or stupid. The only point which is lacking in Josephus is that our fortune depends only upon our own decision, but God is also indirectly involved in human affairs, because he has allotted to each of us the Character which is responsible for our well-being or our misfortune. I would venture that a similar idea was present in Josephus' supposed source, because without this missing link, Josephus' argumentation seems to lack consistency, or it is at least too harsh. A kind of connection between God and human affairs would make the thought far better, and the parallelism between Josephus and Menander is so great, that we have the right to suppose that Josephus simply omitted, possibly by negligence, the tie between God, who granted to us the freewill, and our own decisions.

It is improbable that in his passage about the Sadducees, Josephus is directly influenced by Menander. On the other hand, even as Onesimos' philosophy was not meant seriously by Menander, the way of arguing in Menander's passage is not as bad as some scholars think. And Menander's words are parallel, even in the order of arguments, to Josephus' passage. Have we therefore to draw from these facts the consequence that Menander was obliged to a philosophical source, whose late descendent was known to Josephus? I would not dare to answer positively. But even so, the comparison between Josephus and Menander was important. Among other things, we were able to free the Sadducees from the guilt that they did not believe in any form in God's providence.

What is the historical kernel behind Josephus' words about the Sadducean theology? As in the case of the Pharisees, Josephus was here influenced by Greek philosophical thought and adapted Jewish theology to it, and therefore it is difficult to reconstruct from his description the real opinion of the Sadducees about providence and free will. But because Josephus is always a good witness, we can deduce from his words that the Sadducees weakened the impact of God's providence and stressed the importance of human responsibility more than other Jewish groups. Such a rationalistic attitude fits the very nature of the Sadducees.

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