

28. Intertestamental Period (Pt. II)

Internal Developments Between the Testaments

Summary of the close of the Old Testament:

- I. The Lasting Effects of the Babylonian Exile
 - A. Israel's Persistent Problem with Idolatry Cured

 - B. The Effects of Witnessing Fulfilled Prophecy

- II. The Developments and Changes within Judaism
 - A. Judaism Immediately After the Exile
 - Zerubbabel leads 50,000 Jews back from Babylon beginning in 538-39 BC. Since many Jews chose to stay in Babylon, very likely the returnees are the most devout of the Jews held captive in Babylon.
 - 7 months after Cyrus issues his decree to assist the Jews in returning to their Land they gather in Jerusalem, build the Altar of the Lord, offer sacrifices to God and observe the Feast of Tabernacles (Ezra 3:1-7).
 - The land of Israel is a wasteland. The Temple is gone. They fear the occupants of the Land. However, they unite together to begin preparations to rebuild the Temple
 - The Jews collect money and begin to build the foundation of the Temple. The foundation is completed in the 2nd month of the 2nd year of the Return. The work of building the Temple, however, is quickly stalled due to the opposition of

scoffers and enemies in the Land. No work is done on the Temple for 16 years (536-520 BC)

- In 520 BC, through the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah, the Jews are challenged to return to God, make obedience to His will their highest priority and finish the Temple. The Jews finish the Temple in 516 BC, dedicated it and observe the Passover Feast

B. Judaism During the latter Old Testament Period

- The Book of Esther describes events during the period of the Persian king Xerxes (aka Ahasuerus) who reigned from 486- 465 BC. The events of this book take place in Susa (125 miles east of Babylon in what is modern day Iraq).
- Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi were the last of the writing Prophets in the Old Testament. They urged the Jewish people to stay faithful to the ideals of the Mosaic Law amidst the usual worldly pressures:
 - Secularism
 - Externalism
 - Pluralism
 - Persecution
 - Internal Political divisions

C. Judaism During the Intertestamental Period

- During this period the secularizing influences and the political divisions among the Jews led to an increasingly external and merely formal Jewish religious life
- These influences led to an increasingly legalistic religious leadership and laity
- Sometime during this period (400-4 BC) Synagogues began to be built as teaching centers eventually becoming the focal point for the religious life of Israel
 - These buildings were primarily *teaching* centers and not *worship* centers.
 - These Synagogues were not priestly institutions but rather were congregationally run teaching centers
 - The Synagogues were run by leadership as follows:
 - A President and a council of Elders (who were called “rulers”)
 - A legate who recited prayers
 - Deacons who collected the offerings
 - A *chazzon* who called out the names of the daily readers of the scripture, who ensured that the daily readers did their job well, who took care of the Scrolls, who blew the trumpet to announce the coming of Sabbath, who was responsible for lighting the lamps and who applied the scourge when punishment was to be rendered. He was called the *minister* in the New Testament (see Luke 4:20)
- The teachers of the Law increasingly passed on a mass of commentaries, interpretations and supplementations of the Old Testament—especially the Law of Moses. This became known as the Oral Law—or the *Mishna*

- The Mishna was divided into the *Halachoth* (legal exegesis and determinations concerning the Old Testament) and the *Haggadoth* (the moral and practical expansions and commentaries on the Old Testament)
- The Oral Law eventually was compiled in written form around the 2nd Century AD by Rabbi Jehuda and became known as the Talmud
 - The Talmud was divided into the Mishna (the Oral Law) and the Gemara (the commentaries on the Mishna)
 - The Talmud is recognized today as the authoritative encyclopedia of Judaism

II. The Development of Sects within Judaism

A. The Scribes

- There is a big contrast between the scribes of the Old Testament (*sopherim*) and those of the New Testament (*grammateis*; less frequently called lawyers or *nomikoi*)
 - Old Testament scribes were penmen, recorders, transcribers, and secretaries (51 x)
 - By the time of the New Testament (64x), scribes had become the “guardians, the expounders, the doctors of the Law and of the older Scriptures, to the whole nation, and whose power as a class increased the more as time went on. They were not just scribes in the older sense, but ‘the scribes,’ as a specially distinguished order in the nation.” (Baxter, *Between Malachi and Matthew*)
 - As late as the time of Ezra scribes were still an order of servants to be respected. Ezra’s influence coincided with his leading of the 2nd Return to the land in 458 BC

Ezra 7:6 This Ezra went up from Babylon, and **he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given**; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the LORD his God was upon him.

Ezra 7:11 Now this is the copy of the decree which King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, **learned in the words of the commandments of the LORD and His statutes to Israel: 12** “Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace. And now

Neh. 8:1 And all the people gathered as one man at the square . . . and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. 2 Then **Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly** of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 **And he read from it** before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. 4 And Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. . . . 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. 7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites,

explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. **8 And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.**

- After Ezra, prophetic activity had ceased and the scribes lapsed into an order of teachers and expounders who were not interested in explaining the true sense and spirit of the Old Testament but rather were more concerned with specific commands and lists of things people had to do to please God. The scribes had become legalistic to the point that their authoritative explanations of the Law were seen to be more important than the Scriptures themselves.

B. The Pharisees

- The Pharisees were originated towards the beginning of the Intertestamental period. They were interested in promoting and maintaining a separatism from the world based upon a strict observance of the Law and the Oral traditions. They tended to be hypocritical and self-righteous.
- Their religion had much to commend it in terms of doctrine but it was an empty religion of form and external observance to the Law.
- The Pharisees had a lax morality and were marked by excessive pride

Matt. 9:11 And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with the tax-gatherers and sinners?”

Luke 7:39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.”

Luke 18:11 “The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, ‘God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. 12 ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’

- They were frequently rebuked by Jesus:

Matt. 12:39 But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;

Matt. 16:1 And the Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Him asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. 2 But He answered and said to them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ 3 “And in the morning, ‘There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? 4 “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.” And He left them, and went away.

C. The Sadducees

D. The Essenes

E. The Herodians

F. The Zealots