

29. Intertestamental Period (Pt. III)

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

1. Prior to the Babylonian Exile

- 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*)

2. During and After the Babylonian Exile

- The circumstances of the Exile led to a significant transformation of the office of Scribe
 - The Temple was destroyed in 586 BC
 - The need for teachers to maintain the knowledge of the Scriptures in the absence of the Temple worship and the priests and Levites
 - The changeover of languages from Hebrew (the language of the Old Testament) to Aramaic
- By the end of the Old Testament era a body of specialist teachers had arisen called “scribes”
- 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.**

3. During the Inter-testamental Period

- 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.
- A great body of Oral Law developed from the Scribe’s responsibility to explain, expand upon and apply the Scriptures to the specific details of life
- With the development of the Synagogue and its ubiquitous presence throughout Israel the authority of the Scribes increased dramatically
 - Cf “No doubt at first [the Scribes] rendered a valuable service; for so long as the living voice of prophecy continued, before which all Israel bowed, their subordination preserved their usefulness.” (Baxter, *Explore the Book*)

4. During the New Testament

- Jesus denounced the Scribes as a profession

Matt. 23:13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. 14 [“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows’ houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation.]

Matt. 23:15 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

Matt. 23:16 “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.’ 17 “You fools and blind men; which is more important, the gold, or the temple that sanctified the gold? 18 “And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated.’ 19 “You blind men, which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering? 20 “Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. 21 “And he who swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. 22 “And he who swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

Matt. 23:23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 24 “You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

Matt. 23:25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. 26 “You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

Matt. 23:27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. 28 “Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

- However, not all Scribes had bought in wholeheartedly to the legalism and oppression of the Scribes:

Mark 12:28 And one of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” 29 Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; 30 and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ 31 “The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” 32 And the scribe said to Him, “Right, Teacher, You have truly stated that He is One; and there is no one else besides Him; 33 and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” 34 And when Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.

B. The Pharisees

- Following the return of the Jews from Exile the Jews sought to distinguish themselves from the surrounding peoples based on the strict adherence to the Law
- Throughout the intertestamental period as the massive body of Oral Law or tradition developed, a group of ultra conservative Jews arose and became known as the Pharisees (which means, “seperatist”)
- One could be a scribe by vocation and a Pharisee by conviction (see Baxter)
- Pharisees were many times marked by snobbery toward the common people
- Pharisees were susceptible to hypocrisy. Baxter describes the progression:
 - Earnest efforts to scrupulously live by the details of the scribal traditions
 - Failing this, they rested in the outward appearance of compliance to the Law and traditions
 - They then justified and excused outward correctness only
 - Then, they masqueraded in outward profession only while secretly sinning
 - They first *lapsed* into hyprocrisy, then *tolerated* it and then they *practiced* it as a lifestyle
- The common person thought that somehow they should be able to live up to the “high” standard of the Pharisees but couldn’t help but fail

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

- The term Sadducee seems to come from the word Zadokite. It is not clear what Zadokite refers to among the following options:
 - From the “sons of Zadok” –Zadok being the priest during the reign of David, His descendants held the priesthood down to the Maccabean period
 - Zadok was a man who lived around 250 BC
 - From the Hebrew word for “righteous”
- During the Intertestamental period the Greek culture continued to spread among the people. The influential and wealthy classes associated with the priests always were the ones with a tendency to compromise in favor of the Greek “liberties”. This group became known as the Sadducees.
- They were always a smaller group whose tendency was to make themselves indispensable to the ruling powers
- They rejected the Oral Law and professed to believe in the Written Law alone.
- They denied the resurrection and denied the existence of angels and spirits
- They were vehemently opposed to the Pharisees since their characteristic beliefs were diametrically opposed to each other. Their opposition to Jesus caused them to put aside their hatred of the Sadducees so that they could conspire to do away with Him

D. The Essenes

NB: Baxter notes: The Pharisees were for the letter of the Law
The Sadducees broke from all but the broad sense of the law
The Essenes sought to live by the mystical spirit of the Law

- The Essenes were a hyper Jewish sect with mystical and separatist habits
- They professed to follow Moses as their highest authority

- They led monastic lives far from the mainstream Jewish populace
- They rejected the Jewish Temple sacrifices in favor of habits and rituals which stressed the spiritual significance of the Law
- They practiced a strict asceticism in the deserts of Judea
- Most of them were celibate

E. The Herodians

- This sect was marked not by its religious doctrines and practices but by its political views
- They were aligned with the family of Herods ruling the regions of Israel
- We can conjecture that the common Jew despised them because Herod was not a Jew but an Idumean (from Edom—descendants of Esau)
- They conspired with the Pharisees in an attempt to trap Jesus:

Matt. 22:15 Then the Pharisees went and counseled together how they might trap Him in what He said. 16 And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. 17 “Tell us therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?” 18 But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? 19 “Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax.” And they brought Him a denarius. 20 And He said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” 21 They said to Him, “Caesars.” Then He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesars; and to God the things that are Gods.” 22 And hearing this, they marveled, and leaving Him, they went away.

F. The Zealots

- This was a Jewish nationalist party interested in the political independence of Israel from Rome
- Simon the Zealot was one of the 12 apostles
- The Zealots were in large part responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70