

New Testament Judaism

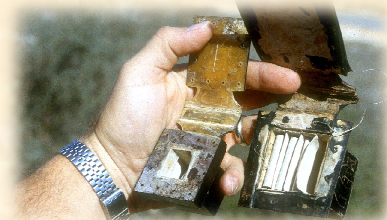
You have been introduced to the major historical figures and events of the intertestamental period. The final step you need to take in acquainting yourself with the world of the New Testament is to learn about religious, political, and cultural aspects of Judaism in the first century. The reason this is important is because this was the everyday life of Jesus and of the Apostles. There will be many occasions that this information will serve you well in your reading of the New Testament. This lesson will be very simple. Below are a variety of topics which will be briefly discussed. They are in no particular order, and their relation to one another varies. You may think of this lesson as a glossary of New Testament Jewish culture. You will also encounter some of the manners and customs of Bible times, which has not been given much attention so far.

The Synagogue

No one is certain when the synagogue originated. Some have attempted to identify its origins in Ezra-Nehemiah; however, the facts are not clear enough for a solid conclusion. Several scholars think that it originated in Babylon during the exile as a supplement for absence from the temple. Others have also suggested that the practice of meeting for prayer and instruction developed in Egypt. The earliest extra-biblical reference to the synagogue dates back to the 200s BC. The Greek word *sunagoghē* (suna-go-ge) literally means “place of gathering” or “place of assembly.” Interestingly, the word church comes from the Greek word *ekklessia* (ekk-less-ia) which means “the assembly” or “the called out ones.” Synagogues were formed by Jews in the land of Israel and throughout the ancient world, wherever there were at least ten elders to form one. Though priests often participated in the synagogue service, the involvement or sanction of an ordained leader was not required. Elders were men who were recognized in the community, and appointed a man to oversee the functions of the synagogue. Another man was appointed to handle the logistical aspects of Sabbath day synagogue meetings. The function of the “place of gathering” developed over time, however there is general uniformity in the New Testament era. At synagogue meetings, the people would gather to pray and read Scripture. The *Shema* was the public recitation of Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41 as a confession of faith. Men from the community often participated in prayer, public reading, and preaching, as did Jesus (Luke 4:42-44), who did not hold an office in the community. It should be observed that while the synagogue was never ordained in the Old Testament, Jesus participated in it.



Synagogue ruins at Masada



Phylacteries

These were small boxes which were worn by the Pharisees and others. The boxes contained copies of Scripture. This was done as an application of Deuteronomy 6:8. The Pharisees did not wear Casio watches.



A modern scribe copying the Hebrew Scriptures.

THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD: LESSON 5

Pharisees

If you have ever wondered about the exact origin of the Pharisees, then prepare to be disappointed. We are not certain about the origin of their name, although some think that it is related to the practice of separation. Like the synagogue, some have identified Pharisaic origin in Israel's post-exilic history. However, Pharisees do not appear clearly until the intertestamental period. While the account is undoubtedly complicated, it was said that John Hyrcanus was a disciple of the Pharisees. However, a conflict arose, and from Hyrcanus' time forward, the Pharisees were opposed to the Hasmonean House. The only exception to the conflict is when the Pharisees held the power behind Salome Alexandra. If you are familiar with the New Testament, you know that the Pharisees typically maintained traditional Judaism. However, as we learn from Jesus, many of them were not concerned about the weightier matters of Scripture (Matthew 23:23). Dedicated to the practice of tradition, they were extremely opposed to any form of Hellenization in Israel. This included the time under the Seleucids, the Romans, and the Maccabees. They were especially critical of the Maccabees who politically governed and held the office of high priest. While most readers of the New Testament have a negative image of the Pharisees, many of them are commended (Luke 7:36ff; 13:31; 14:1; John 3:1-21; 7:45-53; 9:13-16; Acts 5:34-39; 26:6-9).

Sadducees

The origin of the Sadducees lies in equal obscurity to that of the Pharisees. As the conflict between the Pharisees and the House of Hasmon became distinct, so did the association of the Sadducees with the Hasmonean rulers. For this reason, Sadducees were often associated with the high priesthood, but there was not a complete overlap (see Acts 5:17). The Sadducees and Pharisees were generally opposed to one another. Although there were fewer Sadducees, they generally held more power because they were wealthy and did not oppose the Hellenization of culture, or a Gentile government. While most readers of the New Testament see the Pharisees as conservative and the Sadducees as more progressive, the opposite was thought in New Testament times. The Pharisees had a number of practices and beliefs that developed out of tradition which the Sadducees rejected. The Sadducees had their own set of traditions; it was for this reason that they rejected the doctrines of predestination and the resurrection. Those were two token doctrines of the Pharisees (which the New Testament affirms), that the Sadducees did not think were taught in the Scriptures.

The Sanhedrin

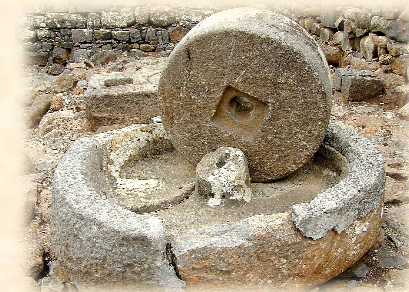
Like the synagogue, Pharisees, and Sadducees, the Sanhedrin had its most distinct origins in the intertestamental period. In the absence of a monarch in Israel, the Sanhedrin functioned as the

Work



Two mules, ready to plow...mules with red sweat pants make especially good workers. Most of us think of work as a bad thing. However, Adam worked before the fall (Genesis 2:15).

It would benefit you to think about what daily tasks were like in the ancient world. What would it be like without the things like washing machines, cars, running water, and grocery stores? Where would you get bread? How would you wash your clothes?



Olive press

THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD: LESSON 5

body to rule particular affairs. We are told that it consisted of seventy men. Depending on the particular time, men were included from the priesthood, as well as the Pharisees and Sadducees. As this period in Israel's history experienced a varied number of political contexts, the role of the Sanhedrin was not consistent from the outset. For example, in AD 6, the Sanhedrin was responsible for governing within Judea, while the Roman procurator maintained external oversight. This had not always been the role of the Sanhedrin.

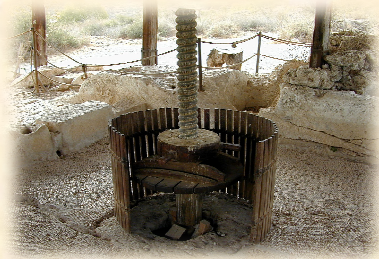
Scribes

A scribe is simply someone who was responsible for copying Scripture. The reason why this was such a significant role, is because the printing press did not exist in Bible times. High scrutiny was always given to the copying of Scripture, lest errors be multiplied. Additionally, copying any document prior to the time of the printing press (invented in the 1400s AD) was very expensive. Not only was the act of copying time consuming, but parchment, or paper was expensive and not always durable. Having a personal Bible was on the order of having a car today. The origin of the scribes goes as far back as documents were copied. However, Ezra is perhaps the most preeminent scribe of the Old Testament. For a time, tradition was modeled after Ezra's role as a scribe, priest, and governor. For this reason during the intertestamental period, many priests were also scribes and teachers. However, by the New Testament, most scribes did not hold a religious or political office. Because of their intimate familiarity with Scripture, many of them taught publicly. Sometimes the scribe was a secondary occupation to another vocation they held.

The High Priest

At this point, you realize that the office of the Levitical priest had long since been a thing of the past. As you have read in the Old Testament, the high priest functioned as the mediator between Israel and God. As you read in Lesson 2, the high priesthood suffered the conflict of the Oniads and Tobiads, followed by the occupation of the Hasmonean House. During this time, priests were more occupied with governing than the original mediating function. While we are uncertain about God's response to the priests of this time, we can be confident that not all priests were corrupt (Luke 1:5-6). Antigonus was the last of the Maccabean rulers, and therefore the last high priest of his family. Although, at this time the high priesthood was hardly recognizable from the Old Testament description, certain stipulations continued to be maintained. For this reason, Herod the Great did not attempt to appoint himself to the office because he was an Idumean. Nevertheless, through a series of complications, he appointed many to the office, including Simon, the father of Mariamne.

Food and Drink



A winepress

Preservable grape juice was not developed until the 19th century AD. In Bible times, when wine was made, it had a potent amount of alcohol. Water was often been added to dilute the alcohol.



Kitchen materials



Baking pan

THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD: LESSON 5

After the death of Herod the Great, the priestly role in government gained more power, mostly in its relationship to the Sanhedrin. Through another series of complications, Quirinius the governor of Syria had appointed Annas who held the office from AD 6-15. He and his son-in-law Caiaphas are the two most well known of the high priests in the New Testament. Even after he was removed from office by the procurator Valarius, he retained the clout of the office, which you will read about. The last high priests were appointed by Herod Agrippa I, Herod the king of Chalcis, and Agrippa II. The office of high priest became extinct when Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. Through the course of this description, and in previous lessons, you have observed much corruption of the office. Part of this has to do with the fact that the priesthood had been separated from its Levitical ancestry. As you know, the original function of the priest was to provide a picture of Christ, who is the one mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). However, Christ was not from the tribe of Levi, but of Judah. Therefore, his qualification to serve as the perfect priest is not based on his genealogy, but his origin from a higher priestly order (Hebrews 5:9-10).

Essenes

The Essenes were a sectarian group that lived near the Dead Sea. We do not know what their name means and they are never mentioned in the New Testament. They withdrew from mainstream Jewish culture because they found Hellenistic, as well as Pharasaic tradition detestable. Their lifestyle was characteristically ascetic, similar to many Christian monks of the past. They spent much of their time studying Scripture and other Jewish writings. Because of his distinct lifestyle, some have suggested that John the Baptist was an Essene. However, there is nothing convincing to suggest that he was.

Zealots and Sicarii

The Zealots were a political party that opposed Roman rule in Israel. While the name “Zealot” refers to a specific group involved in the revolt of

Jewish Traditions

You will encounter a number of places in the New Testament where Jesus is highly critical of teachers for their traditions. While many of the extra-biblical Jewish traditions were carried on orally, they eventually comprised several well known Jewish works today. Several hundred years after Christ, traditions and sayings were recorded which is known as the **Mishnah**. Additions, commentaries, and annotations to the Mishnah is what is known as the **Gemara**. The **Talmud** is the Mishnah and Gemara together. There are two versions of the Talmud: The Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud.

Qumran

There was a community who dwelt at Qumran which may have had some relationship to the Essenes, if they were not Essenes themselves. They may have produced the Dead Sea Scrolls which were discovered in caves at Qumran in AD 1947. The collection of scrolls includes writings from most of the Old Testament and other ancient writings.



THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD: LESSON 5

AD 66, one of Jesus' disciples, Simon the Zealot, aka Simon the Cananaean (Luke 6:15; Mark 3:19) is identified with the term. Since Luke is the only one who used the term, he may be using imposing a later term on Simon (this is called anachronism). Additionally, the Zealots may have had roots going back to an event in AD 6 (see Acts 5:37). Others have identified the Zealot movement with the spirit of Judas Maccabeus. A clear definition, and orientation of the Zealots is not available. Generally, we know that they were groups who opposed Roman authority, and were motivated to overthrow it. The Sicarii were a more extreme group, and are sometimes referred to as terrorists. Sicarii comes from the word "dagger." In Acts 21:38, Paul was incorrectly identified with this group.

Samaritans

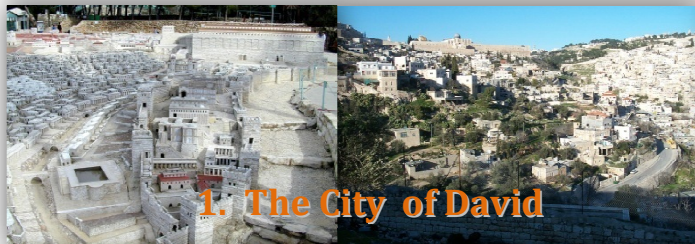
In your reading you will encounter intense hostility between the Samaritans and Jews. This has a long history, which can be traced back to the Assyrian Exile in 722 BC. The Jews of the New Testament so despised the Samaritans that when traveling to Jerusalem, they would go to the trouble of traveling around the region. Samaritans often despised the Jews as well. Though this was the case, you will encounter several occasions in the New Testament where Jesus does not speak of or treat Samaritans with contempt (John 4:1-42; Luke 10:25-37; Acts 1:8). Samaria had already been the capital of Israel (the northern kingdom) since the days of Jeroboam (1 Kings 12). When Assyria invaded, not all Hebrews were exiled, and foreigners were moved into the land. The king of Assyria also sent a Hebrew priest back to Samaria, which produced a blend of Hebrew and Gentile race and religion. After the return from the Babylonian Exile (536 BC), the Samaritans were not permitted to help rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 4), which is why they built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim. This temple was destroyed when John Hyrcanus invaded Samaria in 128 BC. According to Josephus, in AD 6, Samaritans invaded Jerusalem's temple and left dead bodies inside. To add to this intense conflict, the Samaritans had developed their own religious practices. Although idolatry was being practiced initially (2 Kings 17), by the time of the New Testament, they were strict monotheists. Additionally, they had their own edition of the Torah (Pentateuch) and may not have believed in the resurrection. Samaritan religion has continued to develop until today, and it is still practiced.

Publicans

Publicans were people who collected money from the public, which is why they are called "publicans." There were two types of publicans in the New Testament. Matthew was a customs official who collected fees at border crossings. The other kind of publican was a tax collector (Zacchaeus in Luke 19). People who were employed in these jobs were hired by the Romans. In addition to that, they were allowed to collect more than Rome asked for and keep the remainder for themselves. That is two reasons why the Jews hated them and called them "sinners."



THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD: LESSON 5



Herod's temple (4) was destroyed in AD 70. The Muslims invaded Jerusalem in AD 632. The Dome of the Rock (5) was built by caliph Abd al-Malik from AD 688-691.



THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD: LESSON 5

Reading Assignment

Mark 9-16

John 9-18

In the last lesson, you began reading through the Gospels. Your reading schedule is not organized to have all of the events in the Gospel align. The reason for this is to keep a consistent amount of reading throughout the following lessons. If you want to read a harmony of the Gospels, I would recommend *A Harmony of the Gospels*, by Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry. You will also have completed reading the Gospels before the period of the Life of Christ is completed. The reading schedule has been organized this way in order to leave room for other parts of the New Testament. You should always go back and review what you have read.

| Greek | Pronunciation | English | Part of Speech |
|----------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| adel for | <i>adelphos</i> | brother | <i>noun</i> |
| didwmi | <i>did-o-me</i> | I give | <i>verb</i> |
| ajl la | <i>alla</i> | but, except | <i>conjunction</i> |
| ek, ex | <i>ek, ex</i> | out of, from | <i>preposition</i> |
| en | <i>en</i> | in | <i>preposition</i> |