

THE INSTITUTIONS, THE SECTS, AND THE HOPE OF ISRAEL

The Intertestamental Period saw the rise of several institutions that one meets in the New Testament but that were entirely absent in the Old Testament. These include the development of synagogues and the judicial body called the Sanhedrin. In addition, there were developments surrounding the 2nd Temple as well as in Judaism generally.

2nd Temple Judaism

The Judaism that developed during the Intertestamental Period was diverse. A gradual shift occurred in the balance between the 2nd Temple and the Torah, so that the Torah carried more and more weight in Jewish life and religion. Almost certainly, this shift was augmented by the heavy-handed leadership of the Hasmoneans and the appointment of one of them as the High Priest by his queen mother. The appointment of High Priests by the Herods and Roman governors was equally resented. The development of the synagogues as local centers for Torah teaching (though never for sacrifice) also contributed to the shift in balance from temple to Torah.

Still, the temple continued as a spiritual center, and while there was dissatisfaction over the appointment of High Priests by political entities, the daily temple rituals and annual festivals, which were centered in the temple, continued to hold high value. Only the Essenes and the Qumran community maintained that the temple was altogether corrupt and to be rejected outright.

The Rise of Synagogues

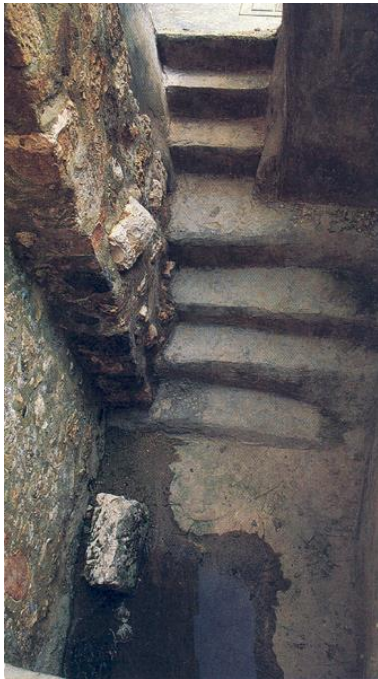
While the origin of synagogues is obscure, there is no doubt that by the end of the Intertestamental Period, synagogues were a major institution among the Jews, both for those living in Judea and Galilee as well as for the Diaspora, who lived in the various cities of the Mediterranean world. In Hebrew, the synagogue is called a *beth ha-kneset*, or literally, “the house of assembly” (the Greek word *synagogue* means essentially the same thing). The community assembled to read the Scriptures and study the commandments. Philo describes the synagogues in Alexandria, Egypt as a place where “you sit in your groups and assemble your regular company and read in security your holy

THE HIGH PRIESTHOOD

From the time of David, the High Priests of both the 1st and 2nd Temples were in the lineage of Aaron and his descendants in the family line of Zadok (1 Sa. 2:35; 2 Sa. 15:24-29; 1 Kg. 1:32-40; cf. Eze. 44:10-16). Presumably, this priestly line lasted into the 2nd century, when it was broken in the aftermath of the Maccabean Revolt. When the Romans took over Judea in 63 BC and the Herods began their long rule, High Priests were appointed and/or deposed at will, and Herod himself took charge of the high-priestly vestments, storing them in the Antonia Fortress. The High Priest could only request them seven days prior to any major festival. In all, Herod would appoint seven High Priests, his son Archelaus would appoint two, and when Rome began to administer Judea under the legates, prefects, and procurators, this practice of appointing High Priests continued, now at the discretion of the Roman governors.

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books, expounding any obscure point and in leisurely comfort discussing at length your ancestral philosophy" (*On Dreams*, Book 2, line 127).



This "laver of living water" (miqveh) was uncovered in Jerusalem just south of the Temple Mount.



In the Khirbet Shema synagogue in northern Galilee, the raised platform, where the Torah cabinet was placed, was oriented southward toward Jerusalem.

While it is fair to say that synagogues were not in direct competition with the 2nd Temple, it is also true that they provided a new kind of religious intimacy than was not typical of the temple. The temple may have been the "navel of the world," but synagogues were the local sites where Jews came together to study Scripture and pray. The *Amidah* (= standing), the central prayer, was recited facing Jerusalem. The Torah ark was set on the wall opposite the holy city, aligned toward the 2nd Temple. "Whenever ten people congregate in the synagogue, the divine presence is with them" (*Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael* on Exodus 20:21). Ritual baths (*miqvot*) were set up in synagogue courtyards for purification rituals.

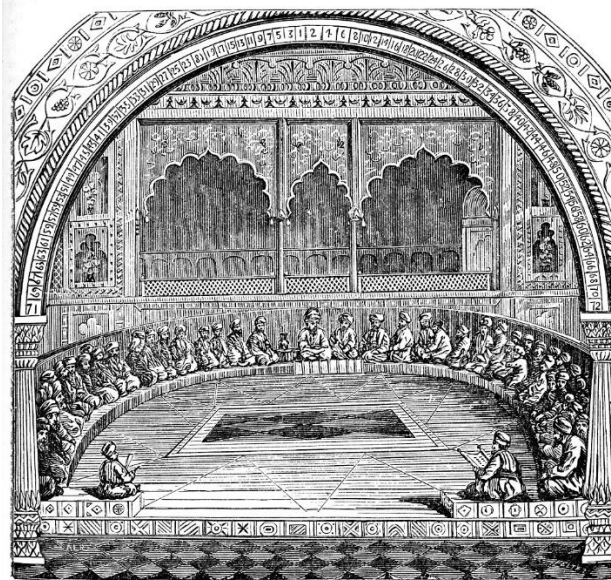
Even the Samaritans built synagogues, both in central Israel and among the Diaspora. On the Aegean Island of Delos, for instance, an ancient inscription dating to ca. 200 BC was discovered that refers to "Israelites [on Delos] who make offerings to hallowed *Argarizein* (a Greek form of Mt. Gerizim). A telltale indication that a synagogue was Samaritan was its orientation toward Mt. Gerizim rather than Jerusalem.

The Sanhedrin

The idea of a *synhedrion*, a judicial council of elders, probably has its origin in the Old Testament references to the 70 Spirit-anointed elders of Israel, who functioned as a body of judges to adjudicate violations of mosaic law (Ex. 18:21-22; Nu. 11:16-17, 24-25; Dt. 1:15-18; 17:9-12).

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However, it was not formally instituted among the Jews, at least as we see it in the NT, until relatively late in the Intertestamental Period, though there are some general references in Pro. 31:23 and 2 Macc. 14:5. Josephus describes a *synhedrion* in 57 BC during the Roman



Drawing of the Sanhedrin from an 1883 encyclopedia

administration in which the country was divided into five provinces, and at the head of each was a *synhedrion*. Jerusalem was the seat of one of them. In the *Mishnah*, there were two classes of Sanhedrin, the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, made up of 71 members (70 elders plus the High Priest), and lesser Sanhedrins in other cities, made up of 23 members.

In the 2nd Temple Period, the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, according to the *Mishnah*, met in the Temple precincts in the Chamber of Hewn Stone, convening on days other than the festivals and the Sabbath. With the high priest as its *Nasi* (head), who was appointed by the Roman governors, it served, not so much as a representative of the Jewish people, as an

extension of Roman administration through the High Priest. Membership to the Sanhedrin also came by invitation from Roman authorities. Scholars are somewhat cautious about accepting as historically precise the various details concerning the Sanhedrin derived from the *Mishnah*, but at least the general profile of this body is not in doubt.

The Sects and the Hope of Israel

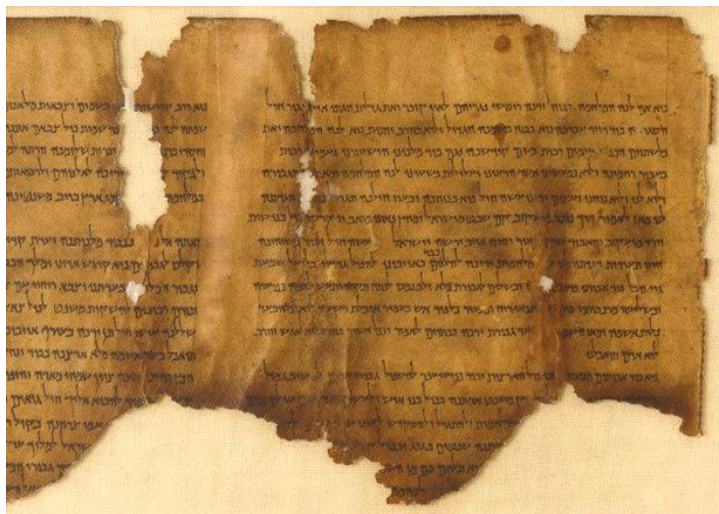
Josephus mentions three primary sects among the Jews, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes (*Wars* 2.8.2-14; 13.5.9; *Antiquities* 18.1.2-6), and there were others as well. This, in turn, suggests that when we speak of 2nd Temple Judaism, we should think in the plural rather than the singular, Judaisms rather than Judaism. Nor should we assume that all Jews belonged to one or other of these groups. Many Jews, probably most, did not necessarily align themselves with any particular sect. Rather, the sects were more like religious clubs, small groups of social elites, each promoting its own version of religious life. The people as a whole were deeply religious, of course, whether or not they belonged to a sect, and their religion was embedded in all aspects of life, including social life, political life, and any expectations about the future. One did not choose religion; he/she was born into it. To be a Jew was to be part of the larger Jewish society with its culture, behavior, and religious practices.

While the sects held many things in common, at the same time each had unique theological perspectives. This diversity is evident in the many versions of the hope of Israel. While the expectation of a Messiah was central, the profile of what this promised champion might be or do

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was not uniform. Would he be like Moses (Dt. 18:18-19; 34:10-12), like Elijah (Mal. 4:5-6), like David (Is. 16:5; 55:3-5; Je. 23:5-6; 30:8-9; 33:14-26; Eze. 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Ho. 3:5; Zec. 12:7—13:1), or like Judas Maccabeus? The Qumran community believed in two Messiahs, one priestly and one royal. Two of the more popular names with which parents graced their sons was Jesus (Joshua) and Judas, both military heroes from the past. In one way or another, all of the sects anticipated a restoration of the Israelite nation to former glory, the day when Yahweh would be King over the whole earth (Zec. 14:9). The question of Jesus' disciples reflects this anticipation: "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Ac. 1:6).

It probably is fair to say that in most minds the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of God were one and the same. The restoration of the one would usher in the rule of the other or vice versa. The question, of course, was how to get there? Here is one place where the sects had their differences. For the Pharisees, the path into the future was Torah intensification. The Essenes withdrew



The Qumran War Scroll from about 100 BC
Israel Museum, Jerusalem

THE JEWS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD/HEAVEN

A future day when God would be recognized as King over the whole earth was widely anticipated among the Jews. This reign of God contrasted sharply with the powers of the present world, notably Rome. Indeed, the words of Zechariah, "...the LORD will be King..." (Zec. 14:9) are translated in the Aramaic Targum as "The kingdom of God shall be revealed." The language "kingdom of God," while not strictly an Old Testament phrase, begins showing up in Intertestamental Literature. The ancient synagogue liturgy climaxes with the prayer that "God may establish his Kingdom speedily." The expectation of God's kingdom was regularly reiterated in liturgical prayers, and it was even laid down that no blessing would be effective without reference to the Kingdom (Berakot. 12a). Hence, the greater the oppression from Rome, the more eager the hope for the Kingdom of Heaven. (Out of reverence for the divine name, pious Jews used the circumlocution "kingdom of heaven" rather than "kingdom of God." In the New Testament, Matthew follows this idiom.)

into the desert to await an apocalyptic divine intervention. The community at Qumran anticipated a 40-year conflict between the Sons of Light (themselves) and the Sons of Darkness (the Romans). Sadducees seemed more inclined to collaborate with

Roman occupation as a necessary, if temporary, expedient. Zealots urged immediate armed resistance. Still, all the sects continued to embrace the memories of Maccabean success and the hope that, in God's time, it would happen again.