

The Intertestamental Period: Jewish Sectarianism

Introduction:

1. We have been looking at topics from a linear perspective. This week we will step back and look at some of the developments that have been occurring in the Jewish Religion behind the scenes.
2. When we speak about Judaism from this time period, it is important to realize that Judaism was not totally united. There were several factions with very different views on how Judaism should be practiced.

I. Core Beliefs Fundamental to Each of These Groups:

- A. Monotheism — There is **One God**.
- B. Claim to be biological descendants from Israel (Jacob)
- C. The authority of the Torah
- D. The practice of circumcision

II. The Pharisees

A. Origins General Information:

1. Their name in Hebrew means “The ones separated.” Likely this group arose in reaction to something.
2. Their name in Hebrew, “P-R-SH,” may be related to “interpretation.” Interpretation would be a challenging issue for the Pharisees as interpretation was the duty of the priesthood.
3. They were likely the successors of the “Hasadim” who opposed Hellenism in the early 2nd century BCE.
4. Josephus tells us they are the most influential sect among the general population. He states that there are ~6,000 Pharisees.

B. Beliefs:

1. They believed in the law, prophets, and writings.
2. Emphasis on ritual purity
3. Free will and divine providence
4. Bodily resurrection and the existence of spirits.
5. They kept the “Oral Law.”

C. The “Oral Law”

1. At Sinai, God delivered two laws to Moses.
 - a) The Written Torah
 - (1) This is the Bible that was available to the masses.
 - b) The Oral Torah
 - (1) These were additional laws and traditions passed down from Moses to the elders and passed down to the Pharisees, and eventually to the Rabbis.
 - (2) This Law was somewhat secretive. Although it was “inspired,” it was shared only with a limited few.

2. The Pharisees appeal to the authority of this law because of their lack of authority in the Temple. Their teaching invokes the authority of past teachers.
 - a) (Matthew 5, 8:28-29)?

D. Jesus and the Pharisees:

1. Agreements:
 - a) Jesus generally agrees with the Pharisees in interpretation (Matthew 23:2-3)
2. Areas of Disagreement
 - a) Association with Sinners — Pharisees “separated” (Luke 15:2)
 - b) Ritual Purity — Non-biblical orders, but traditions (Matthew 15:20)
 - c) Sabbath — Pharisees demanded non-biblical orders (Luke 6:1)

III. The Sadducees

A. Origins

1. Probably some connection to Zadok, The High Priest in David’s Time.
2. Possibly a connection with the Hebrew word “Tsadiq” meaning “righteous”
3. Nearly all Sadducees were priests and wealthy aristocrats.
4. They were a highly political and powerful yet small group.

B. Beliefs:

1. They are mostly described in contrast to the Pharisees.
2. They accept only the authority of the Torah (excluding the prophets, writings, and Oral Law)
3. They deny the resurrection and the spirit world (Acts 23:8)

IV. The Essenes

A. Origins

1. The meaning of their name is unknown. Possibly “pious ones”
2. Josephus says that there are ~4000 Essenes and that they are in every town in Judea.
3. The Qumran community is likely linked to the Essenes, but not all Essenes were associated with Qumran.

B. The Qumran Community:

1. Located about 20 miles east of Jerusalem and 1 mile from the Dead Sea.
2. Some 930 texts (~220 of these are Biblical, and ~710 are extra-biblical) were discovered in caves near this community. These texts are called The Dead Sea Scrolls.

C. The Dead Sea Scrolls.

1. ~33% of these manuscripts are copies of the Bible
2. ~72% of the Biblical manuscripts are of the Torah
3. The Dead Sea Scrolls represent our oldest manuscripts of the Old Testament texts. Some date as early as 200-400 BC. ~1000 years earlier than most of our Hebrew manuscripts.
4. Every book of the Old Testament is represented except for Esther and possibly Nehemiah.
 - a) Remember that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

5. The Non-Biblical texts include:
 - a) Texts are written by the Sect: "Rule of Community" (1QS) and the Damascus Document (CD)
 - b) Apocryphal works and other literature: Ecclesiasticus, 1 Enoch, etc.

V. The Samaritans

A. Origins:

1. The Assyrian conquest of Israel saw the displacement and replacement of many peoples (2 Kings 17:24)
2. These Gentiles began to mix and marry the remaining Israelite population. The result was a mixed Hebrew/Gentile population.
3. Ezra forbids them to help rebuild the Temple. (Ezra 4:1-4, 10).
4. Hostilities grow between these groups.

B. Beliefs and Differences with Judaism:

1. A Belief that the Samaritans are the true Israel and that Judaic Judaism is a correction from Eli.
2. Mt. Gerizim vs. Mt. Zion as the legitimate place of worship (John 4:20)
 - a) A New Temple complex on Gerizim that would be destroyed by John Hyrcanus in 112 BC.
3. Samaritans reject the prophets and writings. They had their own altered version of the Torah to reflect their different theology.
4. The Samaritans were always led by a high priest (even after the Judaism priesthood faded away and still to this day).

C. The Samaritans exist today.

1. There are ~800 left today. They live primarily in two cities, Holon and near Mt. Gerizim.
2. They continue to have a high priesthood.
3. They continue to make animal sacrifices.
4. They continue to practice the kosher laws, feast days, circumcision, etc.

Conclusion:

1. We should be careful not to paint Judaism in this time period with too broad a brush.
2. There were many different sects with a wide variety of different beliefs and practices.
3. Jesus came in the midst of this religious confusion and preached a message of unity under the authority of God. Is that message possible today?