

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Intertestamental Period Seminar

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Lecture 2



Prologue

- Temple of Solomon destroyed in 587 BCE
- Jews in Babylonian Exile
- Cyrus conquers Babylon
- Jews allowed to return to Jerusalem in 537
- Temple rebuilt, completed in 510
- Temple officiated by the Zadokite priests

Sectarian Judaism

“For there are three philosophical sects among the Jews. The followers of the first of which are the Pharisees; of the second, the Sadducees; and the third sect, which pretends to a severer discipline, are called Essenes. These last are Jews by birth, and seem to have a greater affection for one another than the other sects have.”

— Flavius Josephus

Pharisees

- Largest of the sects. Precursor of later rabbinic Judaism
- Believed in written Torah and “Oral Torah” traditions later codified as the Talmud
- Believed in an afterlife
- Believed in a Messiah to come
- “Blue collar” Jews
- Worked out post-Temple worship practices

Sadducees

- Old School priestly elitists and aristocrats
- Open to Greek/Hellenistic ideas
- Accepted Torah (literalists), but not “Oral Torah.”
- No belief in afterlife/resurrection
- Focused on rituals associated with the Temple
- Opposed non-Zadokite priesthood

Essene Sect

- Found in different urban areas apart from the Qumran Community
- Apparently had sympathizers who were not members
- Qumran community was celibate
- Fairly small
- Extremely radical compared to biblical and later rabbinic traditions

Zoroastrian Ideas

- Dualistic nature of the universe
 - Ultimate good vs. Ultimate Evil
- The “two ways” doctrine
- Belief in a final cosmic conflict (“Endtimes”)
- Belief in a permanent post-battle utopia
- Expanded interest in angels, demons, and their names
- Idea of a coming Messiah
- Great interest in afterlife: resurrection and eternal punishment

Maccabean Victory



- Seleucids driven out
- Temple restored (Miracle of Hanukkah)
- Judah becomes an independent kingdom
- Hasmonean family rises to prominence

Essene Contentions

- Temple was holy, but administration was corrupt
- Priesthood belonged only to the Zadokite Family
- Attempted to replicate a limited simulacrum of temple worship
- Believed that the Jerusalem Temple would eventually be destroyed, then reconstructed

Biblical Purity Regulations

- Impurity ≠ Sin
- Impurity removed after time and ritual action
- Purity/Impurity regulations were arbitrary
- Polluters were phenomena or items associated with death
- Purity system was a symbolic object lesson: life triumphant over death
- Essenes “conflated” impurity with sin

Biblical Covenant

- A set of mutual obligations enforced by blessings and curses
- Israel had defined itself by the covenants made with Abraham, Moses, David
- Question of Israel's failure revolved around covenant, worship, and social justice.
- Qumran Essenes were deeply Covenant-centric (1QS).

Rule of the Community (1QS)



- Entry into the Covenant
- Rules for daily life
- Communal living
- “Church of Anticipation” (Cross)
- Purity, Mosaic Covenant, Law paramount
- Egalitarian, except when it isn’t
- Messiahs Aaron and Israel

Motifs in 1QS

- Community approximates a Temple
- Two Ways only (col. III)
- References to end of the world, eternal punishment
- “Reign of Belial” usually refers to Roman rule
- Sons of Light/Sons of Darkness



Essene Community as a Temple

“When these are in Israel, the Council of the Community shall be established in truth. It shall be an Everlasting Plantation, a House of Holiness for Israel, an Assembly of Supreme Holiness for Aaron. They shall be witnesses to the truth at the Judgement, and shall be the elect of Goodwill who shall atone for the Land and pay to the wicked their reward... It shall be a Most Holy Dwelling for Aaron, with everlasting knowledge of the Covenant of justice, and shall offer up sweet fragrance.”

— 1QS VIII.5 f.

Holiness of the Land

“But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations, either the citizen or the alien who resides among you (for the inhabitants of the land, who were before you, committed all of these abominations, and the land became defiled); otherwise the land will vomit you out for defiling it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you.”

— Leviticus 18:26-28

Holiness of the Land, continued

“When these become members of the Community in Israel according to all these rules, they shall establish the spirit of holiness according to everlasting truth. They shall atone for guilty rebellion and for sins of unfaithfulness, that they may obtain loving-kindness for the Land without the flesh of holocausts and the fat of sacrifices.”

— 1QS IX.3-5

Two Ways, Eschatology

“The nature of all the children of men is ruled by these (two spirits), and during their life all the hosts of men have a portion of their divisions and walk in (both) their ways. And the whole reward for their deeds shall be, for everlasting ages, according to whether each man’s portion in their two divisions is great or small. For God has established the spirits in equal measure until the final age, and has set everlasting hatred between their divisions. Truth abhors the works of injustice, and injustice hates all the ways of truth.”

— 1QS IV:15f.

Covenant of Damascus (CD)



- Probably pre-date 1QS
- Slightly less strict; allows marriage
- Discussion of “Teacher of Righteousness” and “Wicked Priest”
- Gives some history of the sect
- Only sectarian document from Qumran that was already known

Ben Ezra Synagogue, Cairo



Solomon Schechter



“[The Cairo Genizah] is a battlefield of books, and the literary productions of many centuries had their share in the battle.... Some of the belligerents have perished outright, and are literally ground to dust in the terrible struggle for space, whilst others...are squeezed into big, unshapely lumps.”

— Solomon Schechter

The Times of London, August 3, 1897

Food and Fellowship

- The Essenes were known to be competent farmers
- Both Pliny and Josephus mention their skill in farming
- Farmers today are able to grow barley and other crops in the Judean desert.

Agriculture at Qumran

- Archaeological finds included a large grinding stone, and a wine press
- While no evidence of grapes were found, it seems unlikely that they were not grown there or very close by.



More Farming Tools Found at Qumran



Sickle blades



Scissors for sheep shearing

Food Impurity

- Different from Kosher laws, which mostly concern animals
- Impurity could be imparted to food, mostly by certain liquids of other contaminated foods
- Consuming impure food is *not* prohibited.



Food Impurity: Pharisees

“the Pharisees were (whatever else they were) primarily a society for table-fellowship, the high point of their life as a group. The laws of table-fellowship predominate in the Houses-disputes, as they ought to ... and correspond to the legal agenda of the Pharisees according to the Synoptic stories.”

--Jacob Neusner

Jesus and Table Fellowship

- Used food references in parables
- Ate with disreputable people, but not with Gentiles
- Fed multitudes
- “Revealed himself in the breaking of bread”
- Last Supper → Eucharist



Essene Table Fellowship

- Access to the “pure food” defines full membership
- Punishments include reduction of food, or expulsion from the table
- Essenes were known to starve rather than touch impure food.

