



Prayer and Worship
(Part I): The Synagogue
and the Sabbath

HPRS50I5/60I5

Session Outline



- Origins and development of the synagogue
 - What do synagogues look like?
 - Worship in the synagogue
 - *Shabbat* and its significance

The Synagogue

- The synagogue building within contemporary Judaism serves a range of functions, e.g. study, prayer, and a general meeting place for the community.
- Terms for the synagogue: *Bet Knesset* ('a house of assembly'); *Shool* ('school'); *Bet Midrash* ('house of study'); *Bet Tefillah* ('house of prayer').

Origins and Development of the Synagogue

- Origin of the institution uncertain. Possible roots in the Babylonian Exile.
- Evidence of synagogue-building in the second temple period, especially in the Diaspora.
- 'Synagogue' appears 38 times in the Gospels without clarification (e.g. Matthew 12:9; Mark 6:2; Luke 4:16-20; John 9:22). Suggests that the institution was well established by this point.

The Synagogue at Masada (Late 1st Century BCE)



The Synagogue at Gamla (c. 50 BCE – 50 CE)



The Migdal Synagogue, Magdala (c. 50 BCE – 100 CE)



The Migdal Synagogue, Magdala (c. 50 BCE – 100 CE)



The Theodotus Inscription (Possible 1st Century CE)



‘Theodotus, son of Vettenus, priest and head of the synagogue, son of a head of the synagogue, grandson of a head of the synagogue, built the synagogue for the reading of the Law and the teaching of the commandments, and guest-house and the rooms and the water supplies for the lodging of strangers in need, which his fathers founded and the Elders and Simonides’

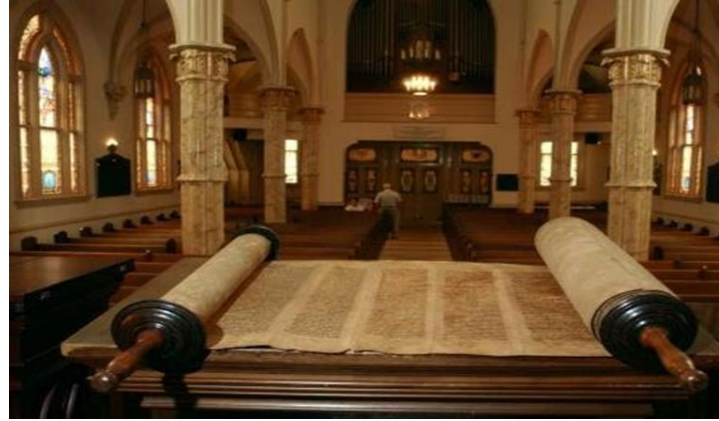
The Role of the Synagogue in the Preservation of Judaism

- The Pharisees centred their activities on the synagogue.
- An alternative place of worship, with a focus on prayer and Torah study.
- Helped to facilitate the reorientation of the faith after 70 CE.
- A *minyan* (quorum) the only requirement for synagogue.

Inside the Synagogue

- Despite the move away from temple practices, all synagogues were perceived as sharing in the holiness of the temple.
- Interior architectural structure of the synagogue sanctuary, even today, reflects that of the ancient temple.
- Exteriors tend to reflect local architectural trends.
- The modern synagogue has developed far beyond the relatively modest buildings of the ancient world and Middle Ages.

The Synagogue Sanctuary



Left: the *Aron Kodesh* (Holy Ark) with the *Sifrei Torah* (Torah scrolls). Above: the bimah corresponding to the pulpit used by the temple priests to preside over sacrifices. Right: the *Ner Tamid* (Eternal Light) which hangs over the *Sifrei Torah*.

Bevis Marks Synagogue, London (Built 1701)



Dohány Street Synagogue, Budapest (Built 1854-59)



Temple Emanu-El, New York (Built 1928-30)



Belz Great Synagogue, Jerusalem (Completed 2000)



Synagogue Mainz (Completed 2010)



Synagogue Services

- The morning services (*Shaharit*) – corresponds to the daily dawn sacrifice at the temple. Followed by an additional service (*Musaf*) on Sabbaths, New Moons and festivals.
- The afternoon prayer service (*Minkhah*) – corresponds to the regular evening sacrifice in the temple.
- The evening service (*Ma'ariv*) – may take place at any time between sunset and dawn. Does not correspond to any temple ritual.
- Ideally, all services should be conducted with a quorum.

Head-Covering

- In the majority of cases, all male visitors to a synagogue expected to cover their heads.
- In the cultures of the Ancient Near East, to keep one's head covered was a sign of respect.
- Customs regarding head-covering have evolved to reflect the history of different Jewish communities.
- The *kippah*/*yarmulke* perhaps the most familiar manifestation of head-covering.





Tallit & Tzitzit

- The *tallit* or prayer shawl worn by Orthodox males during the morning service.
- The fringes or tassels on each corner of the tallit are the crucial feature. The significance of the *tzitzit* ('fringes') is given in Numbers 15:37-41.



The Significance of the Tzitzit

‘The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites, and tell them to make fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and to put a blue cord on the fringe at each corner. You have the fringe so that, when you see it, you will remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and not follow the lust of your own heart and your own eyes. So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and you shall be holy to your God. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God”’ (Num. 15:37-41).

Tallit & Tzitzit

- When the *Sefer Torah* is paraded around the synagogue (*hakafah*), it is the custom to extend the *tzitzit* to touch it.
- A small *tallit* (*tallit katan*) may be worn by some traditional males throughout the day.



Tefillin

- On weekday mornings, men will put on *tefillin* to pray.
- No obligation to wear them on the Sabbath or during the festivals.
- Women and children in traditional communities do not wear *tefillin* or a *tallit*. However, as a result of the rise of feminism, many Jewish women have taken to wearing the *tallit* and *tefillin*.
- In some less traditional communities, it is maintained that wearing the *tallit* should be obligatory for women, just as it is for men.



The Synagogue Service

1. Call to worship (*Bar'chu*)

2. **The *Shema* and its blessings** – the text of the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num. 15:37-41) always the same. The most ancient part of the liturgy (see Mark 12:28) and the cornerstone of Jewish worship.

3. **The *Amidah*** – known by the early rabbis as *ha-Tefillah* ('THE Prayer'). Comprises 19 *berakhot* ('benedictions') that state some of the most basic tenets of the Jewish faith. 'One should not say the *Tefillah* while immersed in sadness or idleness or laughter or light talk or frivolity, but only in the joy of the performance of the *mitzvah*' (*Berakhot* 31a).

4. Concluding prayers

The Synagogue Service

- Same basic structure underlies all services (although, Shema omitted in the afternoon).
- The morning service the longest of the day, the size of which increases again on Sabbaths and festivals with the addition of readings from the Torah and the prophets.
- A sermon also included in some traditions.
- All prayers for synagogue services printed in the main prayer book, the *siddur* ('order'), first compiled in the 9th century.

Shabbat/The Sabbath

- Related to the Hebrew verb meaning ‘to cease’.
- From an early period, a hugely important feature of Judaism, especially in the Diaspora.
- A symbol of allegiance and fidelity to God.
- ‘Far more than Israel has kept the Sabbath, it is the Sabbath that has kept Israel’ – Ahad Ha’am

The Significance of the Sabbath

- The first verses in the Torah to speak about Shabbat as a divinely-established institution found in Exodus: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the LORD' (Exod. 16:23. See also 16:26-28; 20:8-11).
- Genesis creation story the basis for the prohibition against work on the Sabbath (Exod. 20:8-11).
- 'And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done' (Gen. 2:2).

The Significance of the Sabbath

- In Deuteronomy, Shabbat linked with redemption rather than creation.
- ‘Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day’ (Deut. 5:15).
- The Torah also considers Shabbat to be God’s gift to Israel, a sign of the special covenant between God and his people (cf. Exod. 31:12, 15).

Shabbat as a Day of Rest, Joy and Worship

1. **A day of rest** – the prohibition of work one of the main ways in which Shabbat is observed. What is considered ‘work’ governed by the list of prohibited activities found in the Mishnah.
2. **A day of joy** – emphasis on family time. The Sabbath meal on a Friday evening a special family occasion. Common to share ideas from the Torah and to sing hymns during the meal.
3. **A day of worship** – Torah study an essential feature of the Sabbath. The Shabbat morning service the longest of the week, complete with Torah readings and a sermon.

The End of the Day

- Shabbat formally brought to a close in a ceremony known as *Havdalah* ('separation').
- Special prayers and blessings recited over wine, a flame and spices.
- A blessing recited for the separation of 'holy and secular, light and dark, Israel and the [other] nations, Shabbat and the six days of labour'.



Summary

- The synagogue a well-established institution by 1st century CE. Helped to facilitate the shift from temple to Torah.
- Times of the synagogue services intended to correspond to the sacrifices in the temple. While there are variations, additions and omissions, the same basic structure underlies all services.
- The Sabbath a day of rest, joy and worship.
- Both the synagogue and the Sabbath have helped to sustain the faith in difficult times.