

Unity and Diversity in First-Century Judaism

Jewish Beliefs and Practices

Second Temple Judaism: Unity and Diversity

- A period of major transition after 70 CE
- A Temple-centred religion is now replaced by a Torah-centred Judaism (and an enhanced role for the synagogue)
- Jewish religious life restructured in Yavneh under the leadership of Yohanan ben Zakkai

‘We have another atonement as effective as this, and what is it? Acts of loving kindness, as it is written, ‘For I desire mercy and not sacrifice’ (Hosea 6:6) (***Aboth de Rabbi Nathan 4***)

Main Features of Second Temple Judaism

- The God of Judaism (cf. Deut. 6:4)

Josephus, *Antiquities* 5:112: the recognition of the one God is common to all the Hebrew people.

- God's Covenant with Israel
- The Centrality of the Torah (Israel as a 'holy nation')
- Temple and Priesthood

m. Kelim 1:6-8: the land of Israel is more holy than other lands, the walled cities of Israel are holier, the city of Jerusalem holier still, then the Temple mount, the rampart, the Court of Women, the Court of Israel, the Court of Priests, areas between porch and altar, the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies.

- National Festivals and Fasts
- Eschatology

Diversity in Second Temple Judaism

- Diversity is the result of responses to Hellenism and foreign domination
- Josephus mentions four groups:
 - 1) The Pharisees
 - 2) The Sadducees
 - 3) The Essenes
 - 4) The 'Fourth Philosophy'
- The '*am ha'aretz*' (the people of the land)

Josephus on the Pharisees

Antiquities 18.12-15

The Pharisees simplify their standard of living, making no concession to luxury. They follow the guidance of that which their doctrine has selected and transmitted as good, attaching the chief importance to the observance of those commandments which it has seen fit to dictate to them. They show respect and deference to their elders, nor do they rashly presume to contradict their proposals. Though they postulate that everything is brought about by fate, still they do not deprive the human will of the pursuit of what is in human power... and that there are rewards and punishments...: eternal imprisonment is the lot of evil souls, while the good souls receive an easy passage into the next life. Because of these views they are ...extremely influential among the townsfolk....

Josephus on the Sadducees

Antiquities 18:16-17

The Sadducees hold that the soul perishes along with the body. They own no observance of any sort apart from the [written] laws..... There are but a few to whom this doctrine has been made known, but they are persons of the highest standing.

Josephus on the Essenes

Antiquities 18:18-22

The doctrine of the Essenes is wont to leave everything in the hands of God. They regard the soul as immortal and believe that they ought to strive especially to draw near to righteousness. They send votive offerings to the temple, but perform their sacrifices employing a different ritual of purification They hold their possessions in common, and the wealthy receives no more enjoyment from property than the one who possesses nothing....

The Essenes and the Qumran Sectarians



Common Features

Emphasis on purity

Separation from communities

Wilderness communities (celibate men)

Sharing of property

Strict observance of the Sabbath

Dead Sea Scrolls

Fragments of around eight hundred manuscripts have been discovered (Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic)

The manuscripts stem from the last three centuries BCE to around 70 CE.

The manuscripts were the library of the Qumran community, consisting of

Biblical books

Copies of other late Second Temple Jewish writings

Sectarian texts (e.g. Manual of Discipline)



Qumran Origins



Founders of the sect were probably Zadokite priests who separated themselves from the Temple.

The leader is described as the 'Teacher of Righteousness' and his opponent is known as 'the Wicked Priest'.

Josephus on 'the Fourth Philosophy'

Antiquities 18:23-25

As for the fourth of the philosophies.... this school agrees in all other aspects with the opinions of the Pharisees, except that they have a passion for liberty that is almost unconquerable, since they are convinced that God alone is their leader and master. They think little of submitting to death in unusual forms and permitting vengeance to fall on kin and friends if only they may avoid calling any person master.

The Baptist Movement

- John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness urging people to repent of their sins.
- Through John baptism became an early Christian rite.
- He is mentioned by Josephus (*Antiquities* 18:116-119) and by all the four evangelists (cf. Mark 2:18; Luke 7:18; John 1:19; 3:25; Acts 19:1-7)

