

The Intertestamental Period

PODCAST 4 – WHO ARE GOD'S PEOPLE? PART B

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Exploring the Intertestamental Period

Over 6 lessons we will discuss three categories that shaped Jewish belief during the period up to the time of Jesus

1. Political changes and the new ways of understanding YHWH's reign over the Jewish people (and the world!)
2. The new cultural impulse of Hellenism and how it affected Jewish identity
3. Religious beliefs that developed during the period as well as different groups within Judaism that sprang up

We will also discuss specifically how these changes are reflected in the New Testament

Last Session Review

- *The rise of the culture of Hellenism presented unique cultural challenges to Jewish identity*
- *The reaction to Hellenism created new literature to express Jewish identity as a minority in the larger ethnic world*
- *Multiple groups formed around different, and sometimes competing, ways to hold to Jewish cultural values*

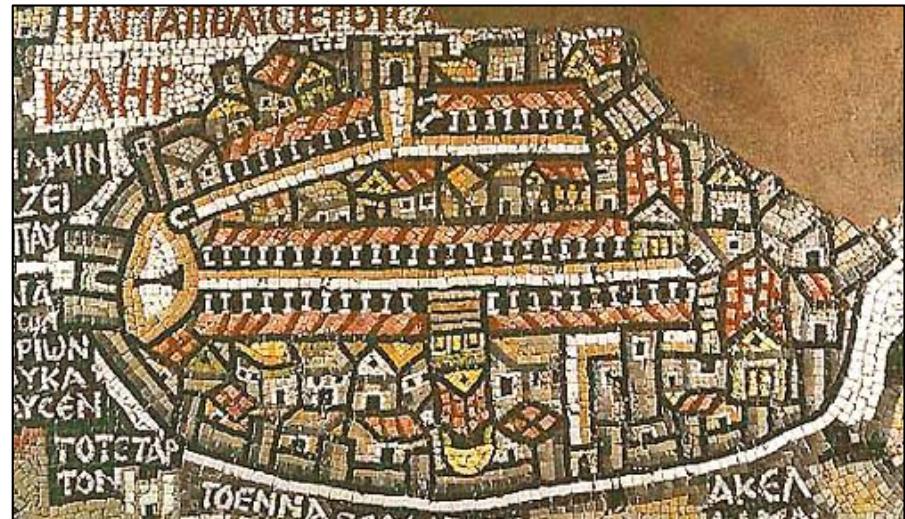
Our focus for today:

- The markers for being in God's covenant people
- The effects on the New Testament

New Cultural Challenges

The confrontation with other cultural perspectives and ideas forced Intertestamental Judaism to further define Jewish identity

- Markers for Jewish identity
- Effects on the New Testament



**Portion of the Madaba Map (542 CE)
showing Jerusalem (Church of the Holy Sepulcher in
bottom center)**

Praxis in Hellenistic Judaism

Everyone knew and accepted that certain practices separated Jewish and Gentile identity.

This fact was commented on by both Jewish and Gentile writers.

These practices reflected Hellenistic Judaism's interpretation of Torah in light of the covenant identity of the Jewish people.

The focus on Torah and ethnic practices does not sprout from legalism. The covenant relationship was presupposed by all Hellenistic Jewish writers, even past the New Testament period.

Praxis in Hellenistic Judaism

Psalms of Solomon 9.8 – 11 (1st c. BCE) –

“And now, you are God and we are **the people whom you have loved**; look and be compassionate, O God of Israel, for **we are yours**, and do not take away your mercy from us, lest they set upon us.

For **you chose the descendants of Abraham above all the nations**, and you **put your name upon us**, Lord, and it will not cease forever.

You **made a covenant** with our ancestors concerning us, and **we hope in you** when we turn our souls to you.

May the **mercy of the Lord** be upon the house of Israel forever.”

Markers for Jewish Identity

- Circumcision
 - Background
 - Torah instructions
 - Why a defining feature?
 - Symbol of identity
 - Larger metaphor



Egyptian practice of circumcision

Markers for Jewish Identity

Jubilees 15:25 - 34 (2nd c. BCE) –

“And all the **sons of Beliar** will leave their sons **without circumcision** just as they were born. And **great wrath from the LORD** will be upon the sons of Israel because they have left his covenant and have turned aside from his words. And they have **provoked and blasphemed** inasmuch as they have not done the ordinance of this law because they have made themselves **like the gentiles** to be removed and be **uprooted from the land**. And there is therefore for them **no forgiveness or pardon** so that they might be pardoned and forgiven from all of the sins of **this eternal error**.”

Markers for Jewish Identity

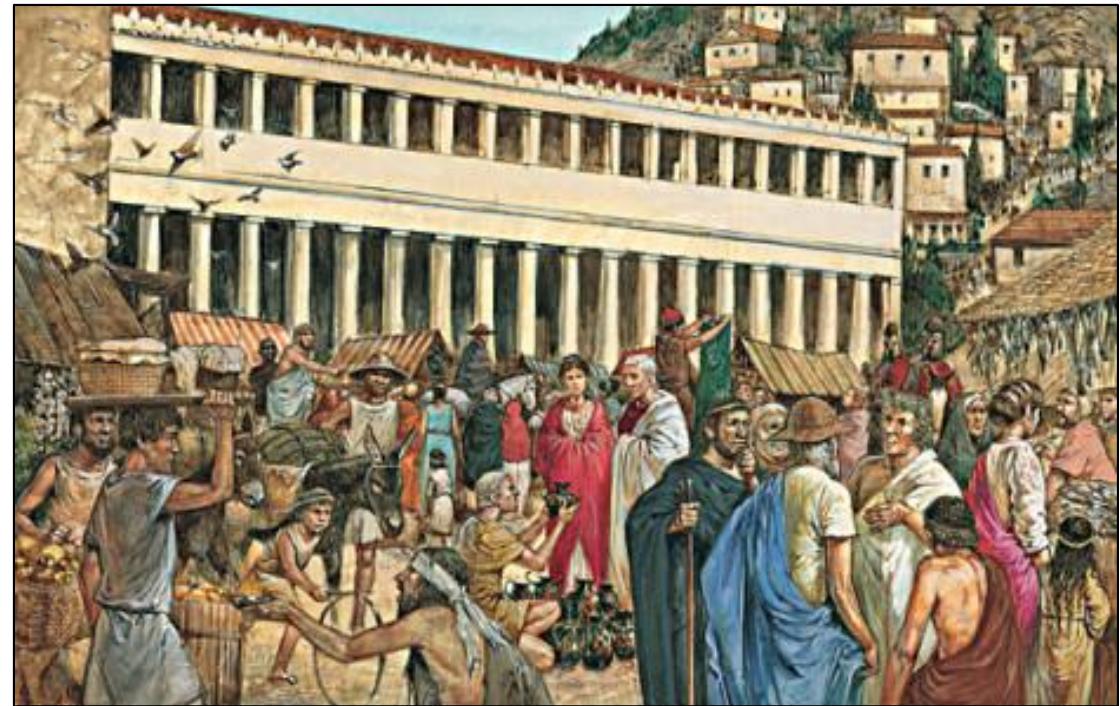
- Circumcision
 - Background
 - Why a defining feature?
 - In daily life
 - Going to the (nude) baths
 - Gentile views



Egyptian practice of circumcision

Markers for Jewish Identity

- Dietary laws
 - Background
 - Why a defining feature?
 - In daily life
 - Gentile views



Greek “agora” (marketplace)

Markers for Jewish Identity

The Jewish Antiquities by Flavius Josephus 14.261 (1st c. CE) –

“Now the Senate and people have decreed to permit them to **assemble together on the days formerly appointed**, and to act according to their own laws; and that **such a place be set apart** for them by the Praetors, for the building and inhabiting the same, as they shall esteem for that purpose; and those that take care of **the provision for the city**, shall take care that such sorts of **food as they esteem fit for their eating** may be imported into the city.”

Markers for Jewish Identity

- Festivals
 - Hannukah
 - Passover
 - Pentecost
 - Tabernacles
 - Sabbath
 - In daily life
 - Gentile views of the Sabbath



Mosaic with symbols of Hannukah

Markers for Jewish Identity

1st Maccabees 2:31 – 38 (1st c. BCE) –

“And it was reported to the king’s officers, and to the troops in Jerusalem the city of David, that those who had rejected the king’s command had gone down to **the hiding places in the wilderness**. Many pursued them, and overtook them; they encamped opposite them and prepared for battle against them **on the Sabbath day**. They said to them, ‘Enough of this! Come out and do what the king commands, and you will live.’ But they said, ‘We will not come out, nor will we do what the king commands and **so profane the Sabbath day**.’ Then the enemy quickly attacked them. But they **did not answer** them or **hurl a stone** against them or **block up their hiding places**, for they said, ‘**Let us all die in our innocence**; heaven and earth testify for us that you are killing us unjustly.’ So they attacked them on the Sabbath, and they died, with their wives and children and livestock, to the number of a thousand persons.”

Markers for Jewish Identity

- Monotheism & the Temple
 - Religion in the ancient world
 - Ritual versus ethical systems
 - Unique nature of Judaism and Christianity



Temple of Artemis in Ephesus

Markers for Jewish Identity

Wisdom of Solomon 13:1 – 3 (1st c. BCE) –

“For all people who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature;
And they were **unable from the good things** that are seen **to know the one who exists**,
nor did they recognize **the artisan** while paying heed to his works;

But they supposed that either **fire or wind or swift air**,
or the **circle of the stars**,
or **turbulent water**,
or the **luminaries of heaven** were **the gods that rule the world**.

If through delight in the beauty of these things people assumed them to be gods,
let them know how much better than these is the Lord,
For the **author of beauty** created them.”

Markers for Jewish Identity

- Monotheism & the Temple
 - Religion in the ancient world
 - Jerusalem Temple as covenant symbol
 - Reactions to Temple and monotheism



Herod's Temple

Markers for Jewish Identity

- Marriage
 - Background
 - Why a defining feature?
 - Ethnic concerns
 - Religious concerns
 - Possible influences on marriage in the ancient world
 - Gentile views



Isaac meets Rebekah

Cultural Effects on the 1st c. CE

Who are the true children of Abraham?



Jesus Healing in John 9

Cultural Effects on the 1st c. CE

Judaism & Christianity: open or closed to outsiders?

Against Apion 2.145-47 (1st c. CE) -

But now, since Apollonius Molo, and Lysimachus, and some others, **write treatises about our lawgiver Moses**, and about **our laws**, which are neither just nor true, and this partly out of ignorance, but chiefly out of ill will to us, while they calumniate **Moses as an impostor and deceiver**, and pretend that **our laws teach us wickedness**, but nothing that is virtuous, I have a mind to discourse briefly, according to my ability, about our whole constitution of government, and about the particular branches of it; for I suppose it will thence become evident that **the laws we have given us** are disposed after the best manner for the **advancement of piety**, for **mutual communion** with one another, for **a general love of mankind**, as also for **justice**, and for sustaining labors with **fortitude**, and for a **contempt of death**; and I beg of those that shall peruse this writing of mine, to read it without partiality; for it is not my purpose to write an encomium upon ourselves, but I shall esteem this as **a most just apology for us**, and taken from those our laws, according to which we lead our lives, against **the many and the lying objections** that have been made against us.

Cultural Effects on the 1st c. CE

Must Gentile Christians also follow Jewish ethnic customs?



Council at Jerusalem
– Acts 15

Today's Takeaways

- The Intertestamental Period forced Hellenistic Judaism to further define what makes up Jewish identity
- Jewish cultural actions served to highlight contrasts with the Gentile world distinguishing who was in and who was outside the covenant people of YHWH
- These issues were confronted by the Christian community as well, as seen in the New Testament
- Most became moot over time as the Christian community separated from the Jewish community and the cultural values changed

Next Time – Vipers, hypocrites, and bandits: What did Intertestamental groups believe?

Questions and Feedback

I hope you were blessed by this study. I pray that God might deepen your knowledge and faith through it.

For any questions or feedback, I can be reached at:
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Charis!

Thom Rowe, March 2017

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