

THE JEWISH FOUNDATIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT



Class X – Judaism in a New Context

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An Introductory Reading

Ecclesiasticus or Wisdom of Ben Sirach (2nd c. BCE) -

The Prologue:

"Many great teachings have been given to us through the Law and the Prophets and the others that followed them, and for these we should **praise Israel for instruction and wisdom**. Now, those who read the scriptures must not only themselves understand them, but must also as **lovers of learning** be able through the spoken and written word **to help the outsiders**. So my **grandfather Jesus**, who had devoted himself especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our ancestors, and had acquired considerable proficiency in them, **was himself also led** to write something pertaining to instruction and wisdom, so that by becoming familiar also with his book those who love learning might make **even greater progress in living according to the Law**."

An Introductory Reading

Ecclesiasticus or Wisdom of Ben Sirach (2nd c. BCE) -

“All wisdom is from the Lord, and with him it remains forever.

The sand of the sea, the drops of rain, and the days of eternity – **who can count them?**

The height of heaven, the breadth of the earth, the abyss, and wisdom – **who can search them out?**

Wisdom was created before all other things, and prudent understanding from eternity.

The root of wisdom – to whom has it been revealed?

Her subtleties – who knows them?

There is but **one who is wise**, greatly to be feared, seated upon his throne – the Lord.

It is he who created her, he saw her and took her measure;

He poured her out upon all his works, upon all the living according to his gift;

He **lavished her** upon those who love him.”

Election and Covenant

- Jerusalem Temple as covenant symbol
- Importance of the Temple as a national/ethnic/religious symbol



Herod's Temple

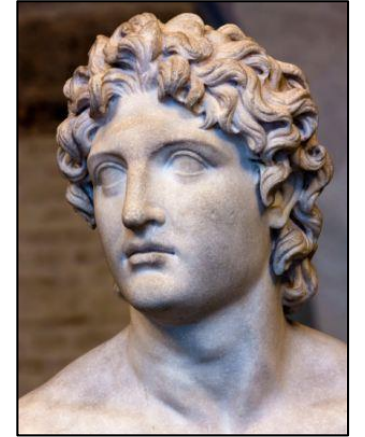
Last Week's Homework

- Read Mark 14:53 - 65
- What is the major charge against Jesus discussed here (also found in Matthew)?
- Why is this such a major charge and affront to Jewish belief?
- Did Jesus actually say it? What did he mean?

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.

Alexander Unites the World



Alexander the Great

The Rise of Hellenism

- Cultural perspective imported by Alexander the Great
- Key ideas:
 - Language – classical Greek, then *koine* (common)
 - Education – gymnasium as center of learning
 - Government – local rule subservient to national needs
 - Philosophy/Ethics – pursuit of highest ideals (virtue)
 - Religion – accept local gods; rise of “mystery” religions
 - Architecture – stadium, theater, gymnasium, columns
- Framed the discussions about Judaism for the next 500 years

Jewish Reactions to Hellenism

- New literature addresses the situation
 - Septuagint (LXX)
 - Apocalyptic literature
 - Testaments, Oracles
 - Mishnah – “Fence around the Torah”



Dead Sea Scrolls

The Apocalyptic Genre

1 Enoch 60:2 - 3, 9 - 10 (1st c. BCE) –

“And the Antecedent of Time was sitting on **the throne of his glory** surrounded by **the angels and the righteous ones**. Then a **great trembling** and **fear seized me** and my loins and kidneys lost control. So **I fell upon my face**.”

“Then I asked the second angel in order that **he may show me** how strong these monsters are, how they were separated on this day and were cast, the one into the abysses of the ocean, and the other into the dry desert. And he said to me, ‘You, **son of man**, according to which it will be permitted, you will know **the hidden things**.’”

2 Esdras 5:1 – 7 (1st c. CE) –

“Now concerning the signs: lo, the days are coming when those who inhabit the earth shall be seized with **great terror**, and the way of the truth shall be hidden, and the **land shall be barren of faith**. Unrighteousness shall be increased beyond what you yourself see, and beyond what you heard of formerly. And the land that you now see ruling shall be a **trackless waste**, and people shall see it **desolate**. But if the Most High grants that you live, you shall see it thrown into confusion after the **third period**; and the sun shall suddenly begin to **shine at night**, and the moon **during the day**. Blood shall **drip from wood**, and the **stone shall utter** its voice; the people shall be troubled, and the **stars shall fall**.”

Mishnah – Putting Torah into Action

Shabbath 5.3 – 4 (2nd c. CE) –

“A man may not go out with a sword or a bow or a shield or a club or a spear; and if he went out [with the likes of these] he is liable to a Sin-offering. Rabbi Eliezer says: They are his adornments. But the Sages say: They are naught save a reproach, for it is written, *And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.* A garter is not susceptible to uncleanness and they may go out therewith on the Sabbath; but ankle-chains are susceptible to uncleanness and they may not go out therewith on the Sabbath.”

Jewish Reactions to Hellenism

- Multiple Jewish groups arise
 - Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes
 - Ascetics
 - Gentile believers/sympathizers
 - Multiple Temples
 - Synagogues as cultural bulwark



Caves at Qumran

Dead Sea Scrolls

The War of the Sons of Light & the Sons of Darkness 1.5 – 16 (1st c. BCE) –

“When the **Sons of Light who are now in exile** return from the desert of the nations to pitch camp in the desert of Jerusalem, the children of Levi, Judah, and Benjamin, who are now among those exiles, **shall wage war** against these peoples – that is, against each and every one of their troops.

After that battle they shall advance upon the [king of] the Kittians of Egypt. In due time, he will sally forth in high fury to wage war against **the kings of the north**, being minded in his anger to destroy his enemies and cut down their power. This, however, will be **the time of salvation for the people of God**, the critical moment when those that have cast their lot with him **will come to dominion**, whereas those that have **cast it with Belial** shall be doomed to external extinction...Wickedness will thus be humbled and left without remnant, and **no survivor shall remain of the Sons of Darkness.**”

Next Week's Homework

- Read Mark 1:4 – 13
- How is John described? Where did he live? What did he eat?
- *What other religious leaders from Jewish history had significant experiences with God in the desert?*
- What is Jesus' experience in the desert?

