

## Intertestament 2

Last time we talked about the political landscape of the intertestamental times, and this week we will talk about the social atmosphere. We will look at a quick synopsis of the group, then look at an interaction Jesus had with the group, where applicable. It is important to know that the Jewish groups emerged in their response to Hellenism, the Greekification of the culture, and the Jewish leadership that followed the Maccabean revolt (priestly kings).

### Sadducees

The first group is the Sadducees. The Sadducees got their name from the High Priest in Solomon's day, Zadok. Zadok would have been the first high priest to serve in the Temple when Solomon built it. Before Zadok, the high priests would have ministered in the Tabernacle. So, you can consider that they took this name because they wanted to show that they were the rightful manifestation of the Jewish religion. This group supported the establishment, which means the Hasmonean dynasty, the Priestly kings that came about in the Maccabean revolt. They were the New Testament's Chief Priests.

These guys were the secularized Jews of the day. Josephus points out that the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, or anything spiritual for that matter (They were sad-you-see because they did not believe in the resurrection). They regarded the first 5 books of the Bible (the Torah) as the only Scripture, and they really enjoyed debating other sects. **Matthew 22:23-33**

Notice how Jesus appealed to the first 5 books of the Bible to refute the Sadducees. He could have picked a passage in Daniel, or Isaiah to illustrate the resurrection from the dead, but He knew they would not regard it as Scripture.

At the seminary I was at, they did not believe most of the stories of the Bible, or the miracles. They were all on board with current social justice issues, and I often wondered what the appeal to Christianity was for them. I mean, they believed Jesus was a social justice warrior Who was killed because He spoke truth to power, and the powers wanted to shut Him up. They did not believe that Jesus rose from the dead, or that we will one die rise from the dead. They were modern day Sadducees. In seeking to share the Gospel with them, I would often point to the hopelessness of their world view, and use their own philosophers to point them to the Gospel.

For example, one of their favorites, Karl Marx, once said that “religion is the opiate of the masses.” I had a conversation with a, self-proclaimed “Christian Atheist” about this quote. She said that is part of why she does not believe in Christianity, because its too good to be true. I told her (slight adaptation of C.S. Lewis), “When you are hungry, it makes sense that you live in a world where there is food. If you are thirsty, it makes sense that you live in a world with water. If you have a longing for life beyond the grave, doesn’t it make sense that you live in a world where there is life beyond the grave? Could it be that religion is the opiate of the masses because it is the thing we were made for?”

People will only hear what they respect, and Jesus went to what the Sadducees respected, which was the Torah. Paul uses this technique in his letters quoting some poets of the culture.

But the Sadducees would be like people today who take what they like from Scripture, take what benefits them, and reject the rest of it. The Sadducees were able to assimilate Greek culture with their religious practice because they didn’t believe it in the first place, it was all about power and prestige. When the Temple was destroyed for good by the Romans in 70AD, the Sadducees ceased as a group.

## **Pharisees**

As for the Pharisees, they get the name from the Hebrew word Phares, which means “Separated.” This group was repulsed by the idea of Hellenism and strictly adhered to the oral tradition of the elders and the Hebrew Scriptures, and sought to bring Temple worship to every day life. Now, they had some precedent for this, because once the Temple was destroyed in 586BC, there were 70 years with no Temple, and the Jews had to try to figure out how to be a Jew without the sacrificial system. The way they went about it was through following the moral law and giving alms to the poor. During the period of the Temple being gone, they began to make a hedge around the law, that is, make more rules about less specific laws. For example, the Bible says to keep the Sabbath holy and to do no work on it, but the Jews *defined* work. This is why Jesus is getting into it with the Jews about keeping the Sabbath.

The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, and the spiritual aspects of Scripture. While the Sadducees went out of existence with the destruction of the Temple, the Pharisees continued the practice they had developed and became today’s Rabbis. **Mark 7:1-23**

You can see, in this passage, that the Pharisees are trying to take Temple worship, and force it on daily living. Only the Priests were required to wash their hands before eating, and the Pharisees were demanding Jesus and His disciples to eat with washed hands. Jesus was pointing out that their emphasis on the age-old tradition (that is, the hedge around the law), caused them to miss the broader point of the law of God, which is not external purity, but internal purity.

The Pharisees would be similar to those who do what the law does not require, and demand that of other people too. For example, I write Scripture on my hand in order to memorize it. That is a great thing to do. But the moment I start to question someone’s spiritual state because they are not writing verses on their hands, that makes me a Pharisee—so to say. Another example would be if someone required you to speak in tongues, or you are not saved, etc.

But, I would want to stop and emphasize that, though Jesus has a lot to say about the Pharisees, the Pharisees were trying to do what is right by God. In the Gospels, it is the Pharisees that have the most back and forth with Jesus. I have heard it said that you tend to disagree most sharply with those closest to you. The Pharisees had a lot in common with Jesus and His followers **Midrash**

The problem with the Pharisee, however, was that they focused on outward purity, not inward purity. But if you had a Pharisee turn to Christ (Paul), look out world, because here they come.

One more quick word on the Pharisees, they were so adamant about keeping the law, because they believed if they didn't, God would take the Temple again.

### **Zealots**

This group was founded in the early AD times, when their founder, Judas the Galilean (mentioned in Acts 5: <sup>33</sup> *When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.* <sup>34</sup> *But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while.* <sup>35</sup> *And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men.* <sup>36</sup> *For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.* <sup>37</sup> *After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered.*) revolted against a Roman census for taxation by governor Quirinius (yes, the Quirinius mentioned in the book of Luke). It is probable that this is the census that Joseph and Mary left Galilee and went to Bethlehem for.

The Zealots were rebels against external forces. They refused to call anyone but God King, and revolted every chance they could. They refused to pay taxes, and one extremist group (extreme extremists) became known as the Sicarii, or daggersmen. These zealots were like assassins, looking to

stab Romans and Jewish elites (Sadducees). Josephus says they didn't mind dying for their cause, or that their family would die for their cause. He also says that they were most like the Pharisees in their religious practice.

Now, even though the particular movement known as the Zealots came around at Jesus' birth, the spirit of the Jewish Zealot was around since Jews were Jews.

One of Jesus followers was a Zealot (Simon, not Peter), and **Matthew 22:15-22** was most likely a trap to turn the Zealots or Romans against Him.

### **Essenes**

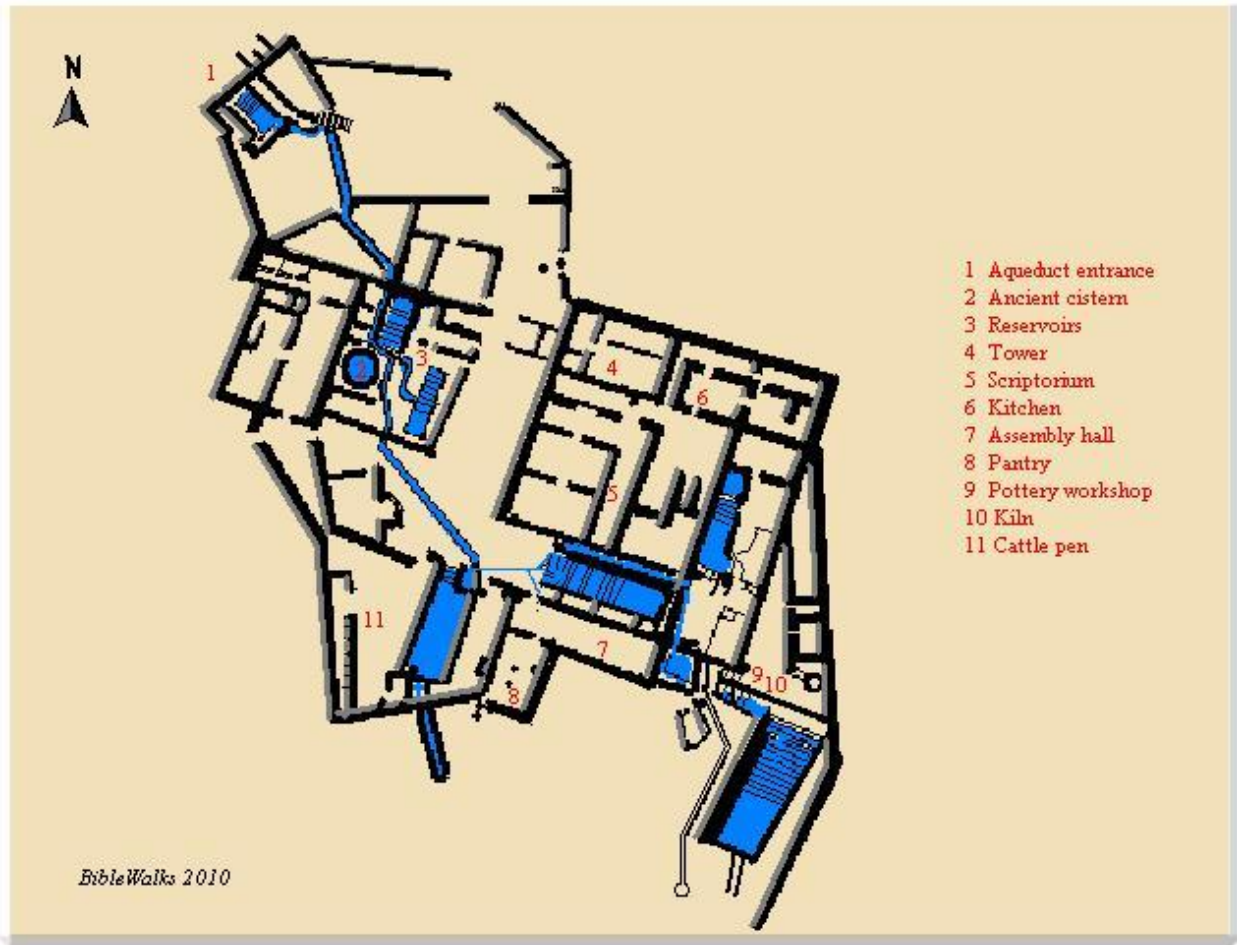
The Essenes are probably my favorite group of people. Josephus says that they ascribe everything to God, and that eternal rewards should be earnestly strived for. He notes that they do not go to the Temple, but they do send gifts to the Temple, because they have removed themselves from Temple sacrifice, though they sacrifice things in their own place.

Josephus says they shared everything in common so that the rich were not better off than the poor, and that they are addicted to virtue in righteousness. Unfortunately, the Bible does not explicitly mention the Essenes, and so that is all the information we have about them, until, in 1947, a goatherder was herding his goats through the wilderness of the Dead Sea, when one of his goats climbed up a precipice and went into a cave. Seeking to scare the goat out, he threw a rock and heard a crash. He then went up and found jars with scrolls in them, which are known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The guy, not knowing what he had found, sold them for a pair of sandals.

Well, the way they found the scrolls comes under scrutiny, some believe they were actually tomb raiders, and thought they would find some treasure. But, I would wonder if they would settle for a pair of sandals if they were tomb raiders looking for gold.

I believe it was the Davinci code that made the Dead Sea Scrolls famous. All sorts of mystery surrounds them, and they have a pretty intriguing name, but they are called the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) because of their proximity to the Dead Sea. This was a community that came to the Northwest edge of the Dead Sea, to a village called Qumran. This Qumran community was escaping the priestly kings, the Temple they believed was corrupt through greed, as well as not up to Ezekiel's Temple standards, and the Hellenization of the Jews. They literally forsook everything and went to the desert, awaiting God's Messiah to come and build a new kingdom and Temple. They lived there from 250BC-70AD, when the Romans destroyed the Temple and killed the people at Qumran.

There is some debate about whether the DSS community actually were Essenes, but that debate is really moving toward the "Yes, they were Essenes," side of the debate. The people at Qumran had intricate waterways for the purpose of purification. They had waterways that would narrow then widen, which was their way of filtering the water.



Obviously, the water would be used to clean the utensils used for sacrifice, incense, and commonly used, but there were also Miqvaot, which were pools one could enter and be submersed in, sort of like baptism. Now, Miqvaot were not unique to Qumran, they were used throughout Israel, but Qumran seemed to centralize around water, probably because they did not go to the Temple. In other words, water was a big deal to the Qumranians. Well, you might ask, and I am glad you did, "How did they get all this water in the desert wilderness they were in?" Astute question. They had runoffs that collected water from flash flooding. You can easily look up a flash flood at Qumran, and see a video. It is pretty violent when it happens, and dusty!

The scrolls that were found among the DSS were, Scripture (except Esther, though it could have been eaten by a hungry worm), Communal living, Hymns and Poems, Calendars, Prayers, Apocalyptic,

Commentaries, Wisdom stuff, and a couple miscellaneous things. So, to remove some of the mystery, the DSS have Scripture, how they live together as a community, and how they think the end is going to happen.

Some interesting comments that come out of a few of the scrolls, that are pertinent to the New Testament are: The Holy Spirit is explicitly mentioned. Jannes and his brother are mentioned, Paul identifies the magicians in Egypt who tried to do what Moses did as Jannes and Jambres in 1 Timothy 3:8. They consider themselves people of the “New Covenant,” of course, another word for covenant is testament, new covenant, new testament. There is a quote that says, “The Lifegiver will raise the dead of His people,” in the scroll called “The Messianic Apocalypse.”

Some interesting concepts coming out of them is that the community is to strive to be perfect according to the law, and the Sabbath is extremely emphasized. In fact, I don't remember the exact number, but you had to walk something like 3000 steps to do a number 2, but on the Sabbath you were only allowed to walk 2000. That would be a great day for fasting. They encouraged them to hate all sons of darkness. That reminds me of Jesus saying, “You have heard it said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” The Old Testament tells us to love our neighbor, but it never tells us to hate our enemy. That would have come from Jewish teaching like this. The “Messianic Rule” says that the Messiah will be the first to have bread and wine. I could go on, but that suffices to get the idea across.

Now, I did say that the Bible does not explicitly mention the Essenes, but consider this. The Essenes (at the Dead Sea Community anyway) were a strange people with a focus on righteousness, coming out of the wilderness near the Dead Sea, and emphasized water cleansing, and eagerly awaiting the coming Kingdom. Matthew 3:1-12 says:

*In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, <sup>2</sup>“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>3</sup>For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,*

*“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:*

*‘Prepare<sup>[b]</sup> the way of the Lord;*

*make his paths straight.’”*

*<sup>4</sup> Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup> Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, <sup>6</sup> and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*

*<sup>7</sup> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. <sup>9</sup> And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>10</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

*<sup>11</sup> “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>12</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”*

John the Baptist came out of the Judean wilderness, baptized near the Dead Sea, had an emphasis on righteousness, and said the Kingdom was near. Could be a coincidence, but maybe not. An interesting divergence though, would be that John the Baptist would have been the first to be the one who baptized people. Mostly, people would walk themselves down a series of steps, then up out of the water in a series of steps. Being baptized by someone essentially says, “I come under your teaching.” So, when Jesus came to be baptized by John and John says, “I need to be baptized by You,” that is because Jesus was coming under his teaching, that is, coming under the teaching of obedience to the law. Then,

the baptism of Jesus is repentance to obedience to Jesus' teaching. Jesus was born under the law, to redeem those under the law, and being baptized into Him gives us His obedience to the Father.

## **Romans**

I think the only thing to say about the Romans is that they were racist really, but they were kind to those who willingly came under their subjugation. It was a big deal to be an actual Roman citizen, as can be seen with Paul in the book of Acts when rights are suddenly given to him by the soldiers that were flogging him, but if you were not a Roman citizen all bets were off. They could be as cruel as they wanted. They beat, extorted money, and all the other terrible things terrible people do to others. They also worship a god for just about everything, and in the days of the early church, they considered Christians atheists because they did not regard their multiple gods.

## **Greeks/Hellenists**

For the most part, you can think of Greeks as Gentile. This represents the non-Jewish culture around them. Most of the people that Paul writes his letters to are Greeks and not Romans, with the exception of Romans of course. There were Roman citizens within these cities, but they were not granted Roman citizenship by birth unless they were in the military, or descendants of those who were. So, most of the people Paul would be writing to were Greeks, but not Roman citizens. This means that while they were part of the Roman empire, they did not have the special status a Roman citizen would receive. Just think of the different rights an American citizen receives, as opposed to a non-citizen. Even when you are in a different country, your American status protects you. So, the term Greek is comparable to the Old Testament usage of the word gentile.

## **Language**

Another major transition from the Old Testament to the New is the change from Hebrew to Greek in the written text. To complicate matters even more, Jesus would have spoken Aramaic, which is neither Hebrew nor Greek. So, the Gospels are written in Greek, but translating Jesus' Aramaic. Aramaic is not Hebrew, but it is a language similar to Hebrew.

That doesn't matter too much because we usually read that translated into English, but if you have any familiarity with Hebrew, you can see some instances where the Hebrew/Aramaic style is being used in Greek. For example, in Hebrew, when two words appear next to each other, it emphasizes the word. It is not the same in Greek. But for example, in the Old Testament, if it would say, "killing I will kill you," that can be translated as "I will surely slaughter you," or, "I will surely destroy you." A phrase Jesus often uses is, "Truly truly I say to you." Closer to the language is, "Amen Amen I say to you." That can be translated like, "There is nothing more true than." For example, "There is nothing more true than whoever commits sin is a slave to sin."

A couple interesting language things are: **Hallelujah/Alleluiah, Emmanuel/Immanuel, Hallelujah/Amen, Hebrew language**