

Temple, Sanhedrin and Synagogue: *Structure, organization and function*



The New Testament World – Week 7
Adult Education

Temple and Priesthood –

Temple:

- 3 in Jerusalem:
 - Solomon – 950-588BCE
 - Zerubabel – commanded by Cyrus, completed around 515, wooden structure, simple structure because of poverty, stood longest, adornment increased as wealth did
 - Herod –
 - refurbished beginning around 19 BCE
 - probably built over the existing structure and deconstructed from the inside
 - cultic system didn't stop
 - completed in 63 CE
 - destroyed in 70
 - doubled area of Temple Mount – 36 acres, larger than the Acropolis in Athens (addition was Gentile court)
 - North – 350m, South – 307m, West – 535m, East – 518m
- Played very political role (2nd Temple)
- Sources:
 - Bible
 - Tenakh – (Solomon's) 1 Kings 6-8, 2 Chronicles 2-4, (Zerubabel) Ezras, Nehemiah, 1 Maccabees
 - NT – Gospels, Acts (Herod's)
 - Josephus (Herod's)
 - Mishnah (Herod's)
 - Temple Scroll (Qumran)
 - Pseudepigrapha – 1 Esdras, Ben Sirah, Letter of Aristeas (Zerubabel's temple during the Hasmoneans, but probably never existed)
- Division of people:
 - Cohenim -
 - Priests who lived in Jerusalem
 - Priests outside Jerusalem
 - David first divided into 24 orders
 - 20 priests from each order were sent twice a year
 - Lighting of the incense, once in a lifetime
 - Offered sacrifices, burned incense, blessed the people
 - Levites -
 - Served in the Temple
 - Carried everything but the Ark
 - 2nd T – door keepers, praisers, shofar blowers
 - Permitted to wear linen again during late 2nd T period
 - Israelites -
 - Not a priest or a Levite
- Temple Organization:
 - General officers -
 - Would distribute tasks to Levitical rotation
 - Announced the opening and locking of Temple Gates
 - Regulated sale of sacrifices and libations

- Directed the details of services
 - Major jobs to priests, minor jobs to Levites
 - Most jobs were hereditary and stayed with clan
 - Beit Garmu – prepared the bread
 - Another family did the incense
- High Priest -
 - Head of the Temple
 - Priest was the head of the people during 2nd T (exception would be early Hasmoneans and Herod)
 - 8 golden garments
 - Sacrifice of cakes offered in the name of the high priest
 - High priest officiated on Shabbat and major holidays
 - Burning of red heifer
 - Reading of the Torah at the end of the Sabbatical year
- Captain -
 - Second in command under high priest
 - Filled in for the high priest if necessary
 - In charge of high priest garments
 - In charge of arrests on the Temple Mount
 - Relative of high priest in early 2nd T, later it was a Pharisee
 - NOT successor to the high priest
 - NT & Josephus – call captain strategos
- Amarkalim -
 - In charge of Temple property
 - Held the key to the storehouses
- Gizbar -
 - In charge of the money
 - Half-shekel tax, free will offering
 - 13 places, shofar-like funnels for people to drop their money (they could tell by the sound – widow’s mite)
 - Assessed value of people, animal and objects brought for sacrifice or dedication
 - Usually mentioned with amarkalim, both were usually blood relatives of high priest
- Temple Guard -
 - 24 posts with 10 men each (rotated)
- Offerings:
 - *Tamid* sacrifices in the morning (shacharit) and the afternoon (mincha)
 - Between, people brought offering
 - 2nd T – prayers, blessings, reading from Torah and additional Levitical singing were added
- People came:
 - To watch
 - To fulfill ritual obligations
 - Gifts
 - Offering

- Tithes
 - Vows
 - Firstborn
 - Cleansing
 - Pilgrimage festivals
- To Worship
 - People gathered to pray after the burning of the incense and the priestly benediction would be said
 - When Levites would sing, the people would prostrate
- Deputation (volunteer service)
 - 24 deputations based on geographical living
 - Most of the week they fasted
 - Stood along side the priests
 - Hahnna and Simeon
- Entering the Temple:
 - Ritual immersion
 - Most people wore white
 - Remove shoes
 - Lay aside staff, money belt, cloak, bundles, etc.
- Gentiles:
 - Biblical law permits Gentiles to sacrifice (Lev 22:25)
 - Given to the priest who performed the sacrifice
 - 2nd T period were allowed in the Court of the Gentiles
 - Sign printed in Hebrew, Greek and Latin
 - Sanhedrin could execute the death penalty if a Gentile crossed

Herod's Temple:

- Rebuilding of Herod's started in 20/19BCE
- Completed around 63CE
- 1590 feet north-south, and 1030 feet east-west
- Enclosed by colonnaded porches or porticoes
- NW corner was the Antonia Fortress
- Court of the Gentiles was south of the Temple (place for commerce and main thoroughfare)
- Low wall separated Gentile court from temple proper
- Court of the Women was inside the temple proper on the east side
- "Psalms of Ascents" were the steps that the Levites stood to sing
- Court of Israel surrounded Temple proper
- Court of the Priests had the altar for offerings reached by a ramp and was 50 feet square
- Golden spikes on the roof kept birds from "defiling" it
- Josephus says façade was 100 cubits high and 100 cubits broad
- Temple was considered the stability and center of the cosmos
- Greatest wealth in the 1st century CE
- Major source of income was the half shekel
- Free will offerings were left in the 13 trumpet shaped boxes in the temple precincts
- Jesus' cleansing of the Temple was also an assault on the economic system and challenged the position of Temple authorities

Priests:

- 24 courses, one week at a time, twice a year
- All were to be available at the pilgrimage festivals
- Considerable social gulf between Jerusalem priestly aristocracy and the ordinary priests throughout the country
- Hellenistic kings removed and appointed priests as political favors or in response to bribes
- 28 High Priests from Herod to 70CE
- Two main groups of Levites – singers and gatekeepers
- Levites provided music for services, certain physical and custodial duties and police functions

Cultus:

- Tamid – whole burnt offering sacrificed twice daily
- Morning, at sunrise
- “Evening”, afternoon around 3PM
- Levites began their day by immersing
- Jobs assigned: cleaning the altar of coals, preparing the cereal offering, burning incense, trimming the lampstand
- Incense offering on the altar in the Holy Place was the climax of the daily service
- A priest ordinarily burned the incense only once in his lifetime
- In Jerusalem, the priests used the name YHVH in the benediction
- High Priest probably only presided at pilgrimage festivals
- Priests assisted individuals during guilt, votive or thank offerings
- Twice daily sacrifices for Caesar and the Roman nation – discontinuance by the captain of the Temple was the signal for revolt in 66CE

Sanhedrin –

- Greater Sanhedrin composed of chief priests, elders of the people and scribes
- Greek for “sitting down with”
- Usually refers to supreme political, judicial and religious ruling body in Palestine during the Roman Period before and after of the Temple until 425CE
- Hard to specifically define because Greek and Hebrew sources differ in definition
- Tana’itic sources depict as religious court (not judicial)
- Written references:
 - Josephus – first source, Antiquities 14:91, in 57 BCE Palestine was divided into 5 Sanhedria (administrative districts) by Gabinia
 - Herod was called before the Sanhedrin while ruler of the Galil, then when he became king he had 46 members of the Sanhedrin killed
 - Condemned James to death (Josephus mentions)
 - Tana’itic sources say the Sanhedrin met in the Chamber of the Hewn Stone on the Temple Mount between the hours of the daily sacrifices
- Suggested reconstruction of the Sanhedrin:
 - 141 BCE, Simeon the last Hasmonean needed a new court system
 - Created Beit Din katan
 - 3, 5, or 7 members (judges)

- Beit Din (Sanhedrin katan)
 - 23 members
 - 3 Beit Din katan with leader and assistant
- Beit Din Gadol (Sanhedrin)
 - 71 members
 - 3 Beit Din with leader (Nasi) and assistant (Av Beit Din)
 - Pool of over 100 people that could be called up
- By Herod's time, the only name is "Sanhedrin"
- Under Simeon, it was a legislative body (government)
- Hasmonean Sanhedrin was composed of all classes (priests, patriarchs, aristocracy, Am Israel)
- Could not try death penalty cases under Roman Rule, except Gentiles at the Temple
- Never met at night, Shabbat, festivals or the eve of the festivals (Mishnah Sanhedrin 7:2 and Tos. Sanhedrin)
- Judgment on one day and penalty on another
- Went to Yavneh, then the Galilee and settled in Tiberius with Yehuda HaNasi
- Drops to Beit Din and drops to 3 judges
- Tried cases dealing with a whole tribe, false prophet and the high priest
- After 70CE, replaced by rabbis, presided over by the President (Nasi) and the VP (Av Bet-Din)
- Executive, judicial and academic functions were combined in the scholars
- Greek sources say that political council presided over by king or high priest
- Rabbinic sources say a legislative-judicial body of scholars headed by the two leading Pharisaic scholars
- Mishnah lists three courts in Jerusalem: one at the gate of the temple mount, one at the gate of the temple court and one in the chamber of hewn stone (possibly subdivisions of the Great Sanhedrin)
- Trial of Jesus – Gospel accounts are flagrant violation of the regulations in the Mishnah, may have applied to a different court
- Capital punishment was reserved for the governor
- Gave considerable power to local bodies to administer justice
- There are instances of the Jewish leaders executing those they found troublesome (Stephen)
- A court of three judges is required for judicial decisions (Mishnah)
- Capital cases required a court of 23 called a Lesser Sanhedrin and were located in larger towns
- City was required to have 120 men to have a lesser court
- Greater Sanhedrin in Jerusalem had 71 members (like the 70 elders in the wilderness with a Nasi)

Community Organization:

- Authority belonged to the community as "the assembly of men of the city"
- Normally a council of older men provided the leadership
- Local Sanhedrin members were ordained and wore the title "elder"
- Judicial and disciplinary, interpreted and applied Torah according to the precedents established by the scholars
- Provided: marketplace, bathhouse, synagogue, ark of the law and Torah scroll

- City was to provide: law court competent to scourge, a prison, charity fund, synagogue, public bath, public latrine, doctor, artisan, scribe, slaughterer and teacher
- “mother” and “father” of the synagogue was an honorary designation for patrons and benefactors
- Some inscriptions identify women as priestess, elder, ruler of the synagogue, etc.
- Many titles were honorary
- Plurality of elders seems to account for the presence of elders in the early Christian communities, particularly those with close Jewish ties

Rabbis:

- Ordained scholars, post-70
- Pre-70 the term was applied much looser
- Professional, salaried rabbis do not begin until the Middle Ages
- Ordination gave judicial authority in interpreting Jewish Law
- Leadership, teaching and preserving the tradition
- Immediately after 70, there was no central organization for ordination so rabbis ordained one or two of their students
- Centralized under the Patriarch in the 2nd century
- Qualifications: wisdom, understanding, fame, able, fear God, men of truth hating unjust gain, married, raised children and around age 40
- Rabbis instituted the centrality of Torah study as an act of piety incumbent on all male Jews
- Prayer became a communal act of service to God
- Scholars replaced priests as the religious leader
- Drew on elements of earlier Judaism to create “rabbinic Judaism”

Synagogue –

History:

- End of 2nd T period, central institution in Jewish life
- Did not function in antiquity as it does today
- Took worship out of the priestly hands and put it in the hands of the people – any Jew could participate (much more inclusive)
- Focus shifted from sacrifice to Torah, from cult to study and eventually to prayer
- Archeological evidence from first century – Gamla, Herodian, Massada, Kiryat Sefer (near Modi’in), possibly Jericho. One in Diaspora in Dellos in Asia Minor

Origin of the synagogue – three ideas:

1. Pre-exilic (Schools of the Prophets)
 2. Exilic (Babylon)
 3. Post-exilic
- Originally referred to the assembly of people, later became the building
 - Origin is unknown, possibly from exile as places to read Torah
 - Earliest Egyptian synagogue from 3rd century BCE
 - Not created as a temple replacement

- Post-70, increase of furniture, terminology and ritual of the temple brought into the synagogue
- Christianity – place of recruitment for early believers, many aspects of worship and organization derived from the synagogue
- Represented an organized way of carrying out activities in the Torah

Function from Literary Sources:

- Philo
- Josephus – Dora and Caesarea
- New Testament – in Nazareth and Capernaum
- Talmud – no less than 394 synagogues in Jerusalem at the time of the Destruction
 - Talmud Megila – synagogue of the Trasilians
- Targum – 480 synagogues in Jerusalem (no ruins found)
 - Targum Megilot and Acts 6 – synagogue of the Alexandrians in Jerusalem
- Apocrypha – 3 Maccabees establishment of synagogue (house of prayer) under Ptolemy 4th (246-221) 3rd century BCE

Activities:

- Center of community, religious and social life
- Served as the schoolhouse, house of prayer, meeting house, house of judgment for administering community discipline
- Organized charity and hospitality was important in Judaism
- Community agencies for feeding the poor, clothing the needy, caring for the sick, burying the dead, ransoming captives, educating orphans and providing poor girls with dowries

Synagogue Service:

- Two foci: prayer and studying Scripture
- Meetings were held on market days (Monday and Thursday) for reading Scriptures
- Prayer and confession of faith were also daily duties
- Meeting opened with a call to “Bless the Lord” followed by the Shema with its two preliminary blessings and concluding profession of faith and praise
- Ritual in Synagogue:
 - Sh’ma – recited before the Torah reading
 - Amida (18) – said twice, Ben Sirah 36 and 51 include some of the formulary statements associated with Temple
 - Meeting days – Shabbat and feast days (Acts confirms)
 - Philo – once a week, in Tiberius on Shabbat
 - Tanaitic – Torah was read Shabbat, Monday and Thursday
 - Rabbinic literature – Torah read on market days (Mon & Thurs), ruling for villagers to read Ester on Monday or Thursday if no one could read
 - Fast Days – connected with public assemblies, early Christian writings say Pharisees fasted on Monday and Thursday
 - Didicae – warns against fasting with the hypocrites, fast on Wednesday and Friday
 - Epiphaneaus – Pharisees at the time of Jesus fasted on Monday and Thursday
- Prayer was the Amidah (present form is post-70)
 - 3, 4, 5, 7 and 18 are pre-70 (1st century)

- Place for spontaneous prayer for individual needs
- 1-3 Worship
- 4 understanding
- 5 repentance (revival)
- 6 forgiveness
- 7 redemption
- 8 healing
- 9 prosperity
- 10 gathering of the exiles
- 11 restoration of leadership
- 12 apostates
- 13 converts
- 14 plea for mercy
- 15 hear our prayer
- 16 return to Jerusalem
- 17 thanksgiving
- 18 blessing
- Readings were from the Torah and Prophets
- Cyclical in a three year rotation in Palestine and one year in Babylon
- Passage from Prophets was chosen because of linguistic affinity
- Scriptures read in Hebrew
- Targumim (Aramaic) was a running translation in the vernacular
- LXX (Septuagint) was read in Greek-speaking communities
- Translations were supposed to remain oral so that they would not be considered on par with the Torah, was not to be literal or prepared
- Sermon accompanied the teaching – either topical or expository
- Characteristic to associate by keywords passages from the Torah, Prophets and Writings
- Synagogue service began with chanting of the Psalms and other hymns

Organization:

- Synagogue could be formed with 10 men
- No class had a monopoly on the conduct of the service
- Rosh HaKnesset presided over services, designated persons to perform functions, assumed responsibility for maintaining the tradition
- Servant of the synagogue was salaried and had multiple duties: attendant in charge of the scrolls, functions in the service, care of the building and its furniture, targumist and school teacher, officer of the community, etc.
- Archisunagogos and Hazzan were possible precedents for the offices of bishop and deacon
- Ruler of the synagogue probably a member of the ruling council, either a figurehead or dominant personality.