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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

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Crisis and Reaction: Roots of Diversity in Intertestamental Judaism

Dr Scott, who teaches at Wheaton College Graduate School, gave this paper at a meeting of the Institute for Biblical Research in New Orleans in 1990.

Introduction¹

Many studies of the Judaism of Jesus' day, published before 1950, assumed an essential continuity between it and the Old Testament. Even more prominent was the assumption that such Rabbinic writings as the Talmud and Midrashim were legitimate sources from which to reconstruct uncritically the Jewish backgrounds of the New Testament.² Recent assessments, especially those published since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and materials contemporary with them, have changed all that. Today it is widely recognized that although Intertestamental, or Second Commonwealth Judaism (= SCJ), was related both to the Old Testament Hebrew faith and culture that preceded it and Rabbinic Judaism that followed, it was identical with neither. Furthermore, although all Jewish groups held

¹ In memory of Professor F. F. Bruce, 1910-1990, mentor and friend, who introduced me to the value of Intertestamental Judaism for a study of the New Testament and early Christianity.

² This is essentially the view behind John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica* (Grand Rapids, 1979, reprinted), 5 vols and Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids, n.d., reprinted). Popular usage has often regarded in this way the great work of George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, (Cambridge, 1927), 3 vols. However, as the subtitle indicates, Moore consciously limited himself to post-New Testament Judaism; note 'The Age of the Tannaim' is 90-200 BCE. N.B., Moore's caution in 'Christian Writers on Judaism,' *HTR*, 14, 1921, 199-254.

to monotheism, covenant, and Torah, SCJ was not a unified whole but, as Robert A. Kraft has termed it, 'multiform.'³

The New Testament, Josephus, Justin Martyr, Hegesippus (as cited by Eusebius), and related sources report that within SCJ there were numerous groups and over-lapping trajectories. These included Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians, the Dead Sea and other Essenic groups, Hellenists, the Apocalyptic, Samaritans, Zealots and Sicarii, Galileans, Therapeutae, Hermobaptists, Masbothei, and many more,⁴ in addition to the Am-ha-Eretz, the Common People of the Land.

We can hardly claim that obvious features of any movement or historical period can be traced solely to a single cause. Personality dynamics and group traits, geographical, sociological, economic factors, and more doubtlessly contributed to the rise of the diversity which is such an important part of SCJ. Our concern is to look at two major events, both historical crises, which, I believe, wre among the most important formative forces in SCJ. Not only were they events of seismic proportions themselves, but their shock waves rumbled through the following centuries and altered the landscape of all they touched. We also will suggest some implications of this investigation for New Testament study.

The Two Crises

During the sixth and fourth centuries BCE, the Hebrews faced two crisis. The first was the destruction of the Jewish state by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and all that this implied. The second was the intrusion of Hellenistic culture from the time of Alexander the Great in the fourth century. Roman occupation in the first century BCE might be considered as a third crisis, but in actuality it merely brought a heightening of the influences of the first two. With the overthrow of the Hebrew state by the Babylonians, the people of Judea lost their land, monarchy, holy city, and temple. To the popular mind these institutions were inseparably bound up with

³ 'The Multiform Jewish Heritage of Early Christianity,' *Christianity, Judaism and other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, J. Neusner, ed. (Leiden, 1975), 174-199; cf. Gary G. Porton, 'Diversity in Postbiblical Judaism,' *Early Judaism and its Modern Interpreters*. Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg, eds. (Atlanta, 1986), 57-80.

⁴ Cf., Leah Bronner, *Sects, Separatism During the Second Jewish Commonwealth* (New York, 1967); Marcel Simon, *Jewish Sects at the Time of Jesus* (Trans. by James H. Farley; Philadelphia, 1967); Joseph Thomas, *Le Mouvement Baptiste en Palestine et Syrie* (Gembloux, 1935); Matthew Black, 'The Patristic Account of Jewish Sectarrians,' *BJRL* 41, 1959, 285-303.

Yahweh's Covenant with Abraham and his descendants as guarantees of his presence with them.⁵ Deportation thrust the Hebrews into inescapable proximity with other cultures and religions. They thus confronted dilemmas both religio-theological and socio-cultural in nature.

Loss of the symbols of the covenant raised questions about its permanence. Even more, the fall of the Hebrew state forced questioning Yahweh himself—did he really exist? Is he good? Does he really care for his people? Is he able to protect his own or were the gods of the conquerors stronger than Yahweh? In short, they faced the questions of theodicy voiced in advance by Habakkuk (1:13),

You who are of purer eyes than to look at evil
and cannot look on wrong,
why do you look on faithless men
and are silent when the wicked swallows up
the man more righteous than he?

Without the central institutions the traditional Hebraic religion-centered way of life and theology⁶ was difficult, if not impossible, to maintain.

How, in dispersion, could a society and culture centered in temple and law survive? How could a Hebrew maintain racial integrity and ceremonial purity when thrown daily into contact with pagan Gentiles? Could the traditional way of life, which they believed to be dictated by God, survive without the guidance of priests and the financial and coercive support of kings and princes? 'How can we sing Yahweh's song in a foreign land?' (Ps. 137:4).

In addition there seemed to be no word from Yahweh; a 'prophetic silence' had set in.⁷ The Law and other past revelations, suitable for the wilderness or settled existence in Canaan, now gave little direction for living in a ruined, defeated land or as scattered captives. The Hebrew were without divine guidance at a time when they felt most in need direction and support.

The arrival of Hellenism brought a second crisis which threatened equally both scattered Jews and those still living in their homeland. This was nothing less than a threat to ethnic and national identity, to cultural and religious integrity which forced the need to adjust to a new situation. At first the new 'world movement' may have seemed

⁵ I am indebted here and elsewhere in this paper to ideas suggested by Carl Armerding in a lecture to the Wheaton College Graduate Theological Society, Wheaton, IL, March 27, 1981.

⁶ 'Way of life' is purposely placed first; for the Hebrews orthopraxy is always more important than orthodoxy.

⁷ Cf., Ps. 74:9; Ezr. 2:63; 1 Macc. 4:46; 14:41.

to some as a danger only to certain secondary societal features.⁸ The threat by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BCE made clear that Hellenism could have dire religious implications as well.

How could a now scattered, disheartened, threatened, and perplexed people cope with crisis of such magnitude? Many national groups in similar circumstances could not, and have since vanished. The Hebrews survived, but did so through a genuine break with the past and also by instituting significant adjustments in different ways. It is my contention that the uniqueness and diversity which characterized Intertestamental Judaism in large measure resulted from these different reactions to the above-mentioned crises.

Readjustment

1. *Attempt to Restore the Past*

There was, of course, the attempt to restore the past. Undoubtedly Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah envisioned themselves as merely reestablishing the Pre-Exilic order in the Land of Israel. Yet, the work of the Chronicler demonstrates an awareness of the need for readjustments which could make the old fit the new situation. The temple-centered institutions and offices remained throughout the period. Nevertheless, they were at best sentimental, anachronistic remnants of the past. There must have been a lasting psychological effect of knowing that the people and religion had and could survive without the temple. Other, more significant forms of response and readjustment had already begun. At the heart of these changes which made survival possible was a fundamental shift in the major emphasis of Jewish religion. The preparation for it had already been made in the messages of Pre-Exilic prophets.

2. *A Shift of Emphasis and the Development of Extra-Biblical Traditions*

Classical Hebrew religion rested upon twin pillars—cultus, with its temple and ceremony, and obedience to moral and ethical commands.⁹ During the latter part of the monarchy increasing emphasis was placed upon cultus. The prophets denounced what they came to see as a popular trust in temple and ceremony which

⁸ The withdrawal of support by the Hasidim from the Maccabees after the religious victory was secure (1 Macc 7:13) suggests just such an outlook.

⁹ This seems a better explanation than the oft assumed characterization of an ongoing conflict between different priestly and prophetic religions during Old Testament times.

was divorced from the moral and ethical behavior also inherent in Torah. They cited social and individual sins as evidence of failure to maintain her covenant obligations and as symptomatic of Israel's rejection of Yahweh himself. The prophets predicted punishment in precisely the form of the calamity which the nation faced during the Exile.

With the destruction of the Temple and the dislocation of significant segments of the population, a continuation of temple-centered worship was impossible. Had the religious structure rested on this pillar alone it could not have survived. Without renouncing the validity of cultus, influential Exilic and Post-Exilic Hebrews began, possibly gradually and subconsciously, shifting the primary emphasis of their religious life from the ceremonial to the moral-ethical pillar. After all, it was the failure to adhere to moral law which the prophets had said would lead to ruin. Events had vindicated the prophets! This new emphasis upon the study and practice of law was the one side of Hebrew religion which could still be practiced.

This shift had far-reaching effects. From participation in cult and ceremony, the Hebrew turned to a study of law and its application to daily life. In place of the temple, the synagogue, the combined local gathering place and school, became the focal point for social and religious life. Lay leaders, scribes and teachers of the law (rabbis), eventually replaced the priests as the dominant influences among the people.

This, however, was a shift of emphasis, not an elimination of the cultic, temple-centered pillar. Torah includes cultic and ceremonial provisions as well as ethical and moral. These were also subjects of the attention of scribes and rabbis. Furthermore, cultus occupied a special place in the hearts and society of the Jews, from the first Post-Exilic returnees¹⁰ to those who, in 70 CE, persisted in both conducting temple worship and defending its precincts until cut down by the Romans. But the place that cultus occupied was no

¹⁰ Note that the rebuilding of the temple and reinstatement of its worship and ceremonies was the objective of the first returnees. The Book of Ezra assures its reader that there were priests, Levites, and temple servants among those who traveled from Babylon to Jerusalem (3:36 ff); it wrestles with the problem of insufficient numbers from this group (8:15 ff), certifies proper genealogical purity of priests (2:62 ff), and insists upon their purity (ch. 9). The Chronicler rewrites the history of the monarchy to deal with problems related to temple, priests, and ceremonial worship. Nehemiah struggled to maintain proper use of the temple and the purity of his people.

longer primary or uncontested;¹¹ it was, in fact, essentially undefined.

It is the way Law came to be handled that is probably the most widely recognized result of the shift of emphasis within the Exilic and Post-Exilic situation. At least the general features of this new approach to the Law are exhibited in Ezr. 7:10, where the quintessential scribe 'set his heart to study the Torah of Yahweh, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel.' The Biblical writer is understood to reflect the centrality of Torah (the written Law), to imply the possibility of both the development or expansion of it (the oral law), and the transmission of this legislation in both its written and oral forms. Furthermore, it is usually assumed that there was but a single body of oral tradition, that which is associated with the Pharisaic and later the Rabbinic branch of Judaism.¹² This may be Josephus' point when he says that Pharisees were 'most skilled in the exact explanation of their laws.'¹³ It is certainly the intent of his fuller statement,

The Pharisees had passed on to the people certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded in the Laws of Moses, for which reason they are rejected by the Sadducean group, who hold only those regulations should be considered valid which were written down (in Scripture), and that those which had been handed down by former generations need not be observed.¹⁴

Nevertheless, this notion of but one body of extra-Biblical tradition requires examination.

a. *Pharisaic-Rabbinic Tradition*

The Pharisaic-Rabbinic tradition is described in the Mishnaic

¹¹ Note evidences of the presence of synagogues in Jerusalem during the first century CE. A first century inscription, found on hill of Ophel in Jerusalem attests the synagogue built by Theodotus, son of Venetus. The Mishnah and other Tannaic texts speak of a synagogue within the precinct of the Temple (cf., Yom. 7:1; Sot. 7:7). Rabbinic tradition indicates there were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem (T.J. *Megilla* 3:1, 73b). See also Acts 6:9; 12.

¹² W. O. E. Oesterly says, 'The Oral Law was, however, not universally accepted among the Jews; it was repudiated by the Sadducees as well as by the wealthier classes' (*The Jews and Judaism During the Greek Period: The Background of Christianity* [New York, 1941], 58-59); note similar views in popular surveys such as Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids, 1961, revised edition), 110-111 and C. Milo Connick, *The New Testament: An Introduction to its History, Literature, and Thought* (Encinco, CA, 1972), 60.

¹³ *War* II:14 [162].

¹⁴ *Ant.* XIII:10,6 [297]. This and all other quotations from Josephus are from the Loeb Classical Library edition.

tractate 'Aboth.'¹⁵ It admonishes 'Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a hedge (or fence)¹⁶ for Torah' (1:1). Deliberateness in judgment has reference to the administration of justice by the judge; it may also refer to the wider application of Torah to a broad range of circumstances.¹⁷ 'Raise up disciples' enjoins the teaching-learning process which has transmission as well as knowledge and compliance as its goal.¹⁸ Building a hedge around Torah is clarified in Abo. 3:14, 'The tradition is a fence for Torah.' Hence the justification for the multiplication of laws and instructions around Torah to assure compliance,¹⁹ which makes up so much of what is called 'Oral Tradition.'²⁰ Thus, it seems, at the heart of the new emphasis in Judaism were at least four related steps. First, was the careful study of Torah by all, especially by the leader-teacher (the Rabbi). Then followed the teaching of Torah to students with the transmission of it along with the opinions of past and present teachers. This led to the expansion of Torah, and finally its application to specific situations. The record of discussions and

¹⁵ The date of Aboth in its present form is a complicated issue. That it was written by Rabbi Judah the Holy (d. 219), compiler of Mishnah, is not an unlikely possibility. However, like other parts of Mishnah, it contains older material, probably some of the oldest in any Tannaitic writing.

¹⁶ The word, *s'pāg*, does not occur in the Hebrew Bible. It occurs occasionally in Rabbinic writings; e.g., Orl. 1:1; Nid. 3b; Tg.J.I., Nu. 22:25; Mi. 7:4. R. Travers Herford, *Pirke Aboth. The Ethics of the Talmud: Sayings of the Fathers* (New York, 1954, reprinted, 1962, 19, 85) translates it as 'hedge' in Abo. 1:1 and 'fence' in 3:14 [17]. On the basis of observation of the nature of tradition, the concept of 'hedge,' a protective, but living and growing barrier, seems preferable to 'fence,' which implies something more static.

¹⁷ Such an opinion may be included in the comments of Herford, 'Deliberation in judgment originally as here, the judgment of a judge, but later "argument", is the key to the casuistry of the Talmud, and in the main justifies that casuistry. For deliberation expresses the desire to study a question from every point of view, and to take account of every possible even though improbable contingency.' *Pirke Aboth*, 20-21.

¹⁸ Note the praise in Abo. 2:8, 'Eliezer b. Hyrcanus is a plastered cistern which loses not a drop'; 5:12 says the best type of disciple is 'swift to hear and slow to lose.'

¹⁹ Moore translates the word *s'pāg*, 'barrier,' and speaks of 'enactments meant to guard against any possible infringement of the divine statute . . . "to keep a man far removed from transgression" (M. Ber., 1:1),' *Judaism*, 1, 33. The barrier was intended to 'protect it [Torah] by surrounding it with cautionary rules to halt a man like a danger signal before he gets within breaking distance of the divine statute itself,' *Judaism*, 1, 259.

²⁰ E. P. Sanders ('Did the Pharisees Have Oral Law?') *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah. Five Studies* [Philadelphia, 1990] summarizes different definitions for 'Oral Law,' and argues, that 'there are some senses in which not only the Pharisees but others must be said to have had the oral law' (98). However, he doubts that the Pharisees held to the 'Oral Law' in the sense in which it is usually understood.

actions themselves became something of a body of 'case law,' the basis for further expansion and application. At least the first two chapters of tractate Aboth describe and legitimize this transmission.

The Pharisees,²¹ of course, were a part of the line of tradition-transmission of Aboth. As noted above,²² Josephus confirms that they held extra-Biblical teachings which had been consciously selected and were passed on to others. Josephus and the NT agree that this Pharisaic tradition contained belief in such concepts as fate (predestination), angels and spirits, resurrection, rewards and punishments, and a virtuous life style.²³ As we shall see, it also dealt with ceremonial, cultic and other matters.

b. *The Secret Tradition of 2 Esdras*

Another text, an apocalypse, throws further light on SCJ views of law. In 2 Esdr. 14:19 Ezra acknowledges that the Lord has sent him to 'improve the people who are now living' but, for the sake of those not yet born, he asks permission to write again the law which 'has been burned.' His request was granted; he wrote ninety-four books and was commanded,

Make public the twenty-four books that you wrote first and let the worthy and the unworthy read them; but keep the seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people. For in them is the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the river of knowledge.²⁴

We see here the importance of (1). an appointed leader, (2). the primacy of the written Scriptures, and also (3). the necessity of again making the Law available. These three, especially the latter, constitute an acknowledgment of the need for adjustment in the Post-Exilic situation. But perhaps most significant in 2 Esdras is a claim for the existence of a public and a secret tradition, both of which, it

²¹ Travers Herford, *The Pharisees* (Boston, 1962, reprinted); Louis Finkelstein, *The Pharisees: The Sociological Background of their Faith* (Philadelphia, 1962, reprinted) 2 vols.; Jacob Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions About the Pharisees Before 70* (Leiden, 1971); John W. Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees* (Cambridge, 1973); Ellis Rivkin, *A Hidden Revolution: The Pharisees Search for the Kingdom Within* (Nashville, 1978); see also review of Rivkin by Moises Silva, 'The Pharisees in Modern Jewish Scholarship,' *Westminster Theological Journal* 42, 1979-80, 395-405.

²² Quoting *Ant.* XIII:10,6 [297]. In *Ant.* XVIII:1,3 [12], he says, 'The Pharisees . . . following 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.'

²³ Josephus *Wars* II:8,14 [162-166]; *Ant.* XVIII:1,3 [12-15]; cf. Acts 23:8-9.

²⁴ 2 Esdr. 14:45-47.

was assumed, came from God. Note also the implied provision for the transmission of this tradition, both open and secret.

What in the SCJ situation precipitated the need for an authoritative tradition in addition to the written one? The answer, I suggest, is the fact of at least the perception in some quarters of a prophetic silence in the face of the situation brought about by the crises of the Post-Exilic Period.²⁵ The Law and other past revelations, suitable for the wilderness or settled existence in Canaan, now gave little direction for living in a ruined, defeated land or as scattered captives. The Hebrews were without divine guidance at a time when they most felt in need of such direction and support. The tradition became a way of adjusting to this situation for which divine approval was claimed.

Both Josephus and 2 Esdras almost certainly represent different sets of traditions held by different SCJ groups, the Pharisaic-Rabbinic tradition and the apocalyptic milieu.²⁶ It may be assumed that there was general agreement on the content of the written Torah, but what was the relationship of the content of the 'hedged around Torah' and the 'secret' books of 2 Esdras? We do not know the subject matter of the secret tradition of 2 Esdras. Most probably it was not the same as the 'hedged.'²⁷ If so, these alternative traditions contributed to the building of the 'multiform' nature of SCJ.

c. *The Dead Sea Community and Other Essenes*

Is there evidence of other strands of extra-Biblical tradition which show additional responses to the crises of the time? The Dead Sea Scrolls also know of a separate tradition. The Damascus or Zadokite Document, col. 1, says that God, 'raised for [the community] a Teacher of Righteousness to guide them in the way of His heart. And he made known to the latter generations that which God had done to the latter generations.'²⁸ 1QpHab 1 condemns

those who were unfaithful together with the Liar, in that they [did] not [listen to the word received by] the Teacher of Righteousness from the mouth of God. And it concerned the unfaithful of the New [Covenant] in

²⁵ Cf., Ps. 74:9; Ezr. 2:63; 1 Macc. 4:46; 14:41 and the statement by Josephus (*Ap I B* [40-41]) that the writing of Scripture was complete by the end of the reign of Artaxerxes [Longimanus], d. ca. 414.

²⁶ But note W. D. Davies ('Apocalyptic and Pharisaism,' *Christian Origins and Judaism*. London, 1962, 19-30) who, with others, sees apocalyptic influences among the Pharisees.

²⁷ Jacob M. Meyers, *I and II Esdras. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [Garden City, NY, 1974, 329 associates the seventy secret books with 'the views of the school of apocalyptists.'

²⁸ This and all other quotations from the Dead Sea Scrolls from *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*. G. Vermes, ed. Baltimore, 1987, 3rd ed.

that they had not believed in the covenant of God [and have profaned] His holy Name.

The Habakkuk peshet goes on to describe the Teacher of Righteousness as the one 'to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of His servants the Prophets' (Col VII). Here again are assumptions familiar from our study of Ezra, Aboth, and 2 Esdras—the assumption of an extra-Biblical tradition, come from God himself, through his chosen instruments, which is to be communicated to following generations. It is described as a 'mystery' (*raz*), a 'secret tradition,' one certainly different from that of 2 Esdras.

Josephus' descriptions of the Essenes,²⁹ a group of which the Qumran community was almost certainly a part, gives a long list of their practices and ideas. He clearly shows that their traditions included, among other things, unique views on ceremonial and cultic matters,

They send votive offerings to the temple, but perform their sacrifices employing a different ritual of purification. For this reason they are barred from those precincts of the temple that are frequented by all the people and perform their rites by themselves.³⁰

Essene traditions were to be transmitted, and transmitted accurately. Josephus says, the Essene inductee 'swears to transmit their rules exactly as he himself received them.'³¹

d. *The Sadducees*

It is often assumed that the Sadducees rejected oral traditions, holding to the written Torah alone. This is the initial impression of the statement by Josephus in *Ant.* XIII, quoted above, and also in *Ant.* XVIII:1,4 'The Sadducees . . . own no observance of any sort apart from the laws,' 'laws' here being taken to mean 'written laws,' or maybe the Pentateuch. However, the passage continues, 'They reckon it a virtue to dispute with the teachers of the path of wisdom that they pursue.' These 'disputes' could imply disagreements not only about the meaning of written law, but also about additional traditions associated with it.

Josephus and the New Testament emphasize that the Pharisees and Sadducees differed both in doctrine and life style. The *Antiquities* (XVII:1:4 [17]) also relate

Whenever they [the Sadducees] assume some office, though they submit unwillingly and perforce, yet submit they do to the formulas of the Pharisees, since otherwise the masses would not tolerate them.

²⁹ *War* II:8,2–13 [120–161]; *Ant.* XVIII: 1,5 [18–22].

³⁰ *Ant.* XVIII:1,5 [19].

³¹ *War* II:8,7 [142].

Clearly, the difference between Sadducean preference and 'the formulas of the Pharisees' included interpretation relating how public ceremonies and religious rituals were to be performed as well as to points of belief and conduct. Whether or not such preferences and concepts were contained in as large or as well defined body of traditions as that of the Pharisees, they certainly constitute part of a distinctive tradition, a Sadducean 'Oral Law.' Josephus is not our only witness to this fact. Elsewhere I have noted,

Mishnaic and rabbinic references to the Sadducees describe them almost entirely in terms of their differences with the Pharisees on ritual, ceremonial, and judicial matters. These issues involved a wide range of questions relating to such matters as the date and observance of certain feasts, sabbath-keeping, the way sacrifices were to be offered and temple ritual performed, the conduct and penalties in criminal cases, and procedures relating to ceremonial defilement and cleanliness.³²

One example of this is found in the experience of the Hasmonean priest-king, Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BCE). According to Josephus (*Ant.* XIII:13,5 [372]), while officiating in the temple, Jannaeus was pelted with citron (fruit) by worshippers who disapproved of the way he carried out a part of a ritual for the Feast of Tabernacles. Mishnaic tractate 'Sukkah' 4:9, in relating Pharisaic-Rabbinic liturgical procedures, dictates that the water-libation for the festival be poured into one of two bowls to the right at the top of the Altar-Ramp. However the text adds 'once a certain one poured the libation over his feet, and all the people threw their citron at him.' The Talmud adds that the offender as, 'a certain Sadducee (Boethusian),'³³ and Jannaeus was known to be a supporter of the Sadducees. His performance of the ritual was probably dictated by Sadducean preference, thus again confirming the existence of at least a cultic-ceremonial tradition of this group which differed from that in the Pharisaic oral law. There was, it appears, a distinct Sadducean tradition, differing from that of the Pharisees both in theological and cultic matters. In other words, instead of admitting no oral tradition, the Sadducees appear to have held to their own which differed from that of other groups.

3. *The Apocalyptic Movement*

The apocalyptic movement, of which 2 Esdras was a part, was itself a complex reaction which collected, developed, interpreted, and

³² 'Sadducees,' *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Colin Brown, ed. (Grand Rapids, 1971), 3, 440.

³³ 'Sukkah' 48b.

transmitted variant traditions. Even if the roots of the apocalyptic pre-date the crises of the sixth and fourth centuries, these crises and subsequent events gave it impetus and issues with which to react, and called for new attitudes and perspectives to facilitate survival.

This is not the place for a detailed description of the apocalyptic as a part of the reaction and changes which took place within SCJ. Let it suffice to note a few relevant facts. The Greek word *apokalupsis* itself means 'to reveal that which is hidden,' thus, as we have already learned from 2 Esdras, this movement assumed a 'secret tradition' which the writer makes known. The apocalyptic framework makes clear that divine origin is claimed for its tradition. Furthermore, its content frequently deals with the very questions and conditions brought on by the historical crises of the Second Temple period.

Two additional observations about the reactions of the apocalypses are in order. First, the apocalyptic is a means of interpreting and applying the Hebrew Scriptures³⁴ just as surely as are the Pharisaic oral law, the words of the Teacher of Righteousness, and other extra-Biblical traditions. The apocalypst is consciously working with the Biblical text and from it derives literary and historical structures, personal names, events, allusions, and concepts which he transports from their original context into his own. As a hermeneutic the apocalyptic attempts both to maintain the relevance of the written Scriptures and to break through the prophetic silence. Furthermore, we must remember, the apocalyptic does not represent a united tradition; it both mirrors and contributes to the diversity of SCJ. For example, in the apocalyptic we meet a plurality of eschatological schemes with many divergent details. These must have contributed to the confusion and controversy of those who, like the first Jewish Christians, viewed themselves as living in the eschatological age.

4. *Nomistic Practices*

In response to the threat of loss of identity, certain Old Testament observances, most obviously circumcision, Sabbath, and observance of Kosher laws, were given new prominence. Not only was strict adherence to these a part of the new stress upon law, but it also provided a defense for ethnic and religious identity. In the greater pagan (especially Hellenistic) world, they were bastions against

³⁴ Cf. Neil S. Fujita, *A Crack in the Jar. What Ancient Jewish Documents Tell us About the New Testament* (New York, 1986), 120 ff; Walter Schmithals, *The Apocalyptic Movement: Introduction and Interpretation* (trans by John E. Steely, Nashville, 1975), 68-88.

assimilation. Attacks upon them were assumed to be attacks upon Judaism itself, with its unique standing and privileges before God.

5. Other Reactions to Hellenism

Hellenistic Judaism had its own internal emphases, traditions, and groups. Some of these are exemplified in the writings of Philo, the LXX and other early Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, and by other documents. The variety of reactions to it provide other examples of the diversity with which I am concerned here. Some withdrew from society to avoid contact with 'pagans,' as they called the Hellenists. Those who heeded the call of Mattathias, the father of Judas Maccabaeus, 'Let everyone who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me' (1 Macc. 2:27), reacted with violence. Philo's nephew, Julius Tiberius Alexander, sold out completely to Hellenistic culture and Roman political interests. Between these was a wide spectrum of reaction. The presence of a strong Hellenistic Judaism, both in and beyond the Land of Israel, and the quietism of many simple, pious culturally Semitic Jews, demonstrates that most tacitly followed their leaders, but without going to an extreme. Among them, perhaps Philo represents a fairly cautious approach, as he sought to syncretize the Hellenistic and Semitic worlds by allegory, but there is no mistaking his allegiance to the traditional Hebrew God and faith as he understood them.

Contemporary scholars differ on the identity of literary reactions to Hellenism. Few would doubt the Hellenistic influence in The Letter of Aristeas, 4 Maccabees, the Sibylline Oracles, and other Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal writings. Scholars are sometimes divided on precisely which documents represent either Hellenism or polemics against it. Elias Bickerman, for example, sees opposition to Hellenism in Jubilees but a positive influence of it in the wisdom tradition of Ecclesiastes.³⁵ Martin Hengel expounds a strong anti-Hellenistic sentiment in another wisdom document, Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus).³⁶ I should note, however, that I am not aware of any distinctive 'secret tradition' in Second Commonwealth Hellenistic Judaism, although it was probably present in proto-Jewish Gnosticism and later in mystical Judaism.

³⁵ *From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees* (New York, 1962, reprinted), 59-64.

³⁶ *Judaism and Hellenism. Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (Trans by John Bowden, Philadelphia, 1974), 131 ff.

6. Other Groups with Distinctive Traditions

The list of groups with distinctive traditions is doubtlessly as long as the list of distinctive groups and sects. The mention of but two more, both within the Land of Israel, must suffice here. The Zealots were a variant to Pharisaic tradition.³⁷ It appears to me that their position was rooted in a strict view of the theocracy that saw any foreign ruler as occupying the position over Israel which was reserved for God. Even simple administrative directives such as taking a census (N.B., 2 Sa. 24) were blasphemous, usurpations of the privilege of God. Therefore, rebellion was a religious act, aimed at restoring God's kingship over his people. In this venture God would be obliged to come to the aid of his people.

The Samaritans developed their own extra-Biblical tradition, cultic practices, and theological emphases. They too claimed divine sanction for these developments and transmitted them to their children. Note again the presence of a 'secret tradition' as reflected in the title of the English translation one of the primary Samaritan documents, *The Asatir: The Samaritan Book of the 'Secrets of Moses.'*³⁸

³⁷ Josephus says, 'This school agrees in all other respects 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' (*Ant.* XVIII: 1,6 [23]). He says the group had its origin in the Judas of Gamala who held, 'that the assessment [census] carried with it a status amounting to downright slavery, no less, and appealed to the nation to make a bid for independence . . . that Heaven would be their zealous helper to no lesser end than the furthering of their enterprise until it succeeded' (*Ant.* XVIII:1,1 [4-5]).

Cf., Martin Hengel, *The Zealots, Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I to 70 A.D.* (Trans by David Smith, Edinburgh, (1989); Richard A. Horsley with John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs, Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (New York, 1985); W. R. Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots and Josephus. An Inquiry into Jewish Nationalism in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York, 1957).

³⁸ (Oriental Translation Fund; Translation and notes by Moses Gaster; London, 1927. On the Samaritans in general see Alan Crow, ed., *The Samaritans* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989); James D. Purvis, 'The Samaritans and Judaism,' *Early Judaism and its Modern Interpreters*. Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg, eds. (Atlanta, 1986), 81-98; John Bowman, *The Samaritan Problem. Studies in the Relationships of Samaritanism, Judaism, and Early Christianity* (Trans by Alfred M. Johnson; Pittsburgh, 1975; John MacDonald, *The Theology of the Samaritans*. (London, 1964); Moses Gaster, *The Samaritans: Their History, Doctrines and Literature* (The Schweich Lectures; London, 1925); J. A. Montgomery, *The Samaritans. The Earliest Jewish Sect* (Philadelphia. 1907).

Implications for New Testament Studies

All this has serious implications for New Testament studies. At the very least, one should not necessarily assume a common heritage for all early Jewish Christians nor a unanimity of the Jewish views and traditions within which New Testament writers react.³⁹ Furthermore, although knowledge of the more important features of SCJ is a helpful background for understanding the New Testament, that by itself is insufficient. Awareness of how and why some of these features developed adds an appreciation of their nature and why they were often discussed in an emotionally charged atmosphere.

For example, Jesus criticized the Pharisaic 'traditions of men' and contrasted them with 'the commandment of God' (Mk. 7:8). However, for his hearers these traditions were of equal divine authority with the written law. Furthermore, these Pharisaic traditions (Mk. 7:1, 5) were a part of both that which their forefathers had developed to ensure ethnic, national, and religious survival and that which made the Pharisees distinct from other Jewish groups which also had their own, separate traditions.

Likewise, Jesus' criticism of customs surrounding the observance of Sabbath and Kashrut and the early Church's rejection of circumcision as a requirement for inclusion was more than an exercise in casuistry. It was tantamount to a rejection of the type of responses which, in reaction to the crises of the Intertestamental period, had molded SCJ into what it had become, and permitted Judaism to survive.

More could be said of the need for students of the New Testament to understand the effect of SCJ reactions and developments on beliefs about the nature of the final age (the Eschaton), the Kingdom of God, Messianic expectations, the effect of the arrival of the Final Age on Covenant and Torah and the place of Gentiles in that period. An understanding of the threats posed by the afore mentioned crises to Intertestamental Judaism makes understandable the ferocity with which Jewish separatism, particularism, and privilege were protected. Awareness of the place, nature, and transmission of the various Jewish traditions also throws light on the concept of early Christian traditions and their transmission.⁴⁰

An understanding of the diversity of SCJ and some of the reasons

³⁹ This, it seems to me, is a flaw in the approach of E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia, 1977).

⁴⁰ Cf., *paradosis* (1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thes. 2:15; 3:6) and *paralambanō* (1 Cor. 11:23; 15:1,3; Gal:1:9,12; Phil 4:9; 1 Thes. 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thes. 3:6. Col. 2:6; 4:17 seems to refer to the authorization of one who transmits the tradition. N.B., also F. F. Bruce, *Tradition: Old and New* (Grand Rapids, 1976).

for it provides the student of the period, including the New Testament interpreter, an awareness, not only of the objective facts of history and culture, but even more something of the feelings and emotions associated with the Jewish spirit and sectarianism which were significant ingredients of both the Jewish and early Christian experience in the first century.⁴¹

⁴¹ I gratefully acknowledge more than a little help from my friends—Faith Baker, C. Hassell Bullock, Robert D. Carlson, Walter A. Elwell, John M. McRay, and last, but foremost, my wife, Florence.