

Chapter XI

Historical and Cultural Background

How did such radically different views for the expression *בין הערבים* (*byn ha-arabim*), the Phasekh supper, and the seven days of unleavened bread come into existence among the Jews? To fully understand this dispute we must begin with an examination of the historical and cultural context wherein the division of views took root in Judaism.

The Dark Period

We preface our examination with one premise. Few are able to challenge the fact that as late as the sixth to mid-fifth century B.C.E. knowledge of the correct system for the Festival of Phasekh and Unleavened Bread was certainly known. We are assured of this assumption based on the fact that there still existed at that time a number of important prophets and other men of Yahweh. What followed them was a dark period.

To demonstrate, it was during the fifth and sixth centuries B.C.E. that the prophets of Yahweh named Haggai and Zechariah prospered (fl. 520/519 B.C.E.).¹ Also living at this time was the famous scribe, priest, and prophet of Yahweh named Ezra (who died shortly after 456/455 B.C.E.).² Ezra is identified by the Targum of the Minor Prophets as the author of Malachi,³ the last book of the Old Testament; and in 2 Esdras we are told that it was Ezra who restored and edited the books of the Old Testament, which had been damaged during the previous period of the Babylonian exile.⁴ Nehemiah, of the book of Nehemiah fame, was even governor of Judaea during this period (456–444 B.C.E.).⁵

Next, it is the precise meaning of the biblical report that serves as the source for the later dispute. Therefore, to begin our task, we are forced to seek the assistance of non-biblical sources in order to discover the different Jewish opinions about the festival and to uncover just when variant views came into existence. Unfortunately, in this endeavor we cannot find any extra-biblical report defining exactly how the term *byn ha-arabim* was understood or how Phasekh and the days of unleavened bread were kept until the mention by a writer from the mid-third century B.C.E. This evidence comes from a Jewish priest named Aristobulus, who is cited by a much

¹ In the second year of King Darius of Persia (Ezra, 4:24–6:22).

² That Ezra died shortly after 456/455 B.C.E. see SJC, chap. xi; cf., Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:5.

³ Codex Reuchlinianus of the book of Malachi, 1:1 (TMP, p. 229, n. 2).

⁴ 2 Esd., 14:19–48; Clement, *Strom.*, 1:22.

⁵ SJC, chap. xi; cf., Neh., 5:14, 13:6.

later Christian author, Anatolius.⁶ It is with this kind of information that we must proceed.

Records become more available after the Hasmonaeans (Maccabeans) came to power in mid-second century B.C.E. Yet by this time the dispute among the Jews was already in full swing. Therefore, we must look to the historical and cultural events that transpired between the days of Ezra until the rise of the Hasmonaeans for clues as to why during the dark period there arose two fundamentally different approaches for keeping the Festival of Phasekh and Unleavened Bread.

Historical Setting

The defining historical moment for the Phasekh debate came in 332 B.C.E., when Judaea was conquered by Alexander the Great. At that time, the Jewish nation became an ally and vassal state of the Greek Empire.⁷ Personal recognition of Alexander the Great's divine right to rule by Jaddua,⁸ the Jewish high priest, certainly played an important role in the way in which the Jewish population favorably accepted Hellenic (Greek) domination.

After the death of Alexander the Great, his empire was divided among his four generals. Among these, Ptolemy Soter and his heirs ruled Egypt while Seleucus and his descendants governed Syria. In 320 B.C.E. Ptolemy Soter of Egypt brought Judaea under direct Greek-Egyptian domination. Friendly relations between the two nations continued for years. Indeed, there arose a considerable Jewish community, concentrated in the eastern sector of Alexandria, Egypt. These people possessed a large number of places of worship located all over that city.⁹ At the request of the Greek king of Egypt, Ptolemy Philadelphus (284/283–247/246 B.C.E.), the first Greek translation of the Pentateuch (the LXX) was produced,¹⁰ which was especially suited for the great number of Greek-speaking Jews living in Egypt.

During this period, Hellenic culture dominated the world and many Judaeans began admiring Greek sponsored ideas, not only those of a political nature but religious and philosophical concepts as well. In the fourth century B.C.E., the Greek philosopher Isocrates noted, "The designation *Hellene* seems no longer to be ethnic, but is a disposition." It had become, as Phillip Sigal points out, "a way of thinking, a complex of ideas, a modifier of a substantive."¹¹ Caught up in this new, massively overpowering civilization, "Judaism survived by virtue of its adaption to the environment."¹² The result was "a *hellenization* of Judaism,"¹³ perceived not as an apostasy but as acculturation.¹⁴ Martin Hengel concludes:

⁶ Cited by Anatolius, 3–4.

⁷ Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:8:3–7.

⁸ Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:8:3–6.

⁹ Philo, *Gaius*, 20.

¹⁰ Aristeeas, 1–322; Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:2:6–15; Aristobulus, fr. 3:2.

¹¹ ECJ, 1.1, p. 148.

¹² ECJ, 1.1, p. 153.

¹³ ECJ, 1.1, p. 155.

¹⁴ ECJ, 1.1, pp. 155, 181.

From about the middle of the third century B.C. *all Judaism* must really be designated “Hellenistic Judaism” in the strict sense.¹⁵

A major political change took place in the winter of 199/198 B.C.E., when Antiochus III (Antiochus the Great), the Greek king of Syria, stripped Judaea from the Ptolemies of Egypt.¹⁶ At first, relations between the Judaeans and their Greek overlords remained friendly. In fact, many of the Judaeans during that period so admired Greek culture that they wanted to Hellenize. The desire to attach themselves to Greek culture went to the highest level of the Jewish government and religious thinking. It is explained by the fact that the high priest of Jerusalem was also the head of the Judaeian state.¹⁷ The leading priests were even the directors of the *Gerousia* (Great Council), which later became the Sanhedrin. Their duties, therefore, were as much political as religious. The well-known Jewish historian Emile Schürer writes:

As a result, political issues and interests radically affected their whole attitude. But the more these took precedence, the more those of religion fell behind. This seems to have been particularly true in the Hellenistic period, the reason being that political interests were linked to the interests of Greek culture. Whoever wished to achieve something politically in the world of that time had to be on a more or less friendly footing with Hellenism. So Hellenism gained increasing ground even among the leading priests in Jerusalem. And in a corresponding measure the latter became estranged from Jewish religious interests.¹⁸

We are told, for example, that the sons of the high priest Simeon II (225/224–206/205 B.C.E.), Joshua Jason, and Onias IV (Onias Menelaus), as well as a large number of the Jewish priests and citizens, turned away from their Jewish faith and actually favored “the glory of the Greeks best of all.”¹⁹ These Hellenizing Jews went so far as to build a Greek gymnasium in Jerusalem and even concealed the circumcision of their private parts in order to appear as Greeks when unclothed, giving up whatever national customs they had and imitating the practices of foreign nations.²⁰ Greek personal

¹⁵ JH, 1, p. 104.

¹⁶ Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:3:3f. Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:3:3 §135, quoting Polybius, states, “Scopas, the general of Ptolemy, set out for the upper country (northern Palestine) and during the winter subdued the Jewish nation.” Livy, *Urbe*, 33:19:8, remarks that in the summer previous to the consul year for 197 B.C.E., i.e., in 198 B.C.E., Antiochus III “had transferred all the cities which are situated in Coele Syria from the power of Ptolemy to his own dominion.” Also see JQR, 37, pp. 1–16; HCl, pp. 75f, 435f, n. 101; cf., Polybius, 16:18.

¹⁷ Hecataeus of Abdera speaks of the government of the Judaeans during this period, reporting that the Judaeans had no king, “but the people’s representation is given to that priest who excels over the others in his understanding and lofty qualities. Him they call the High Priest” (Diodorus, 40:3:5).

¹⁸ HJP, 2, p. 412; cf., JH, 1, pp. 47–57.

¹⁹ 2 Macc., 4:13–15.

²⁰ 1 Macc., 1:11–15; Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:5:2.

names likewise became popular, even among the Jewish high priests, e.g., Jason and Menelaus.

The schism created among the priests formed three different approaches to Judaism.

- One group consisted of the extremists among the priests and the general population. These Jews enjoyed Hellenism so much that they wished to Hellenize Judaea—Greek culture, religion, politics, and all. For them, the Temple of Yahweh should become the Temple of Zeus.
- Another group of priests, supported by the Jewish masses, scribes, and many of the non-priestly scholars, were the liberals. They appreciated Greek philosophical and religious methods and even some aspects of Greek culture. At the same time, they did not desire to give up their Jewish identity or the ideals of Judaism. These more liberal elements were willing to incorporate certain parts of Greek culture and learning, which were interpreted to be modern and advantageous to Judaism. Yet they were opposed to any complete surrender to Hellenization or paganism. This group utilized oral laws (traditions) and interpretations espoused by their scholars to bridge the gap between the regulations of the ancient Torah and their modern circumstance. These Jews formed the Hasidim (pious ones).
- Finally, there were the conservative Jews. These were Jews, especially from among the priestly aristocracy of the Levites and their allies, who wished to hold on to their political and religious status. Though they were also affected by Hellenism, they desired no change in the priestly order and held vigorously to their priestly prerogatives. They also realized that for them to remain in political power it required a continuance of a strict observance of the letter of the Torah. It was the Torah that gave them privilege. As a result, any acceptance of the notion that the Torah could be reinterpreted or updated threatened their position.

Political Turmoil

The disturbances and cultural upheavals during the fourth through second centuries B.C.E. resulted in divided loyalties and conflicting claims to authority among the Jewish people of Judaea. Many, such as the more stoic Hasidim, preferred to remain neutral. In the ensuing feud between the high priests Joshua Jason and Onias IV (Onias Menelaus) over the leadership of Judaea, relations between the Greeks of Syria and the average Jewish citizen rapidly deteriorated. The Judaeian government now fell into turmoil and civil war.

Onias Menelaus and his allies, the Tobiads, were forced to withdraw from Jerusalem by Jason and his allies. Onias Menelaus then went to Antiochus IV (Antiochus Epiphanes) of Syria, while that Greek king was on his second expedition against Egypt (169/168 B.C.E.). When he arrived, Onias Menelaus informed the king that his Jewish faction wished to abandon their country's laws, as well as their way of life as prescribed by these laws, and wanted

“to follow the king’s laws and adopt the Hellenic way of life.”²¹ Jason had also favored Hellenization but Onias Menelaus had convinced the king that Jason was part of a rebellion. Further, Onias Menelaus differed in that he wanted full Hellenization immediately.

Antiochus IV, panic-stricken from the circumstance of having to leave Egypt by a Roman threat of intervention, suffering from embarrassment, and believing that the commotion in Jerusalem was in fact a revolt by the Judaeans, returned from Egypt and struck Jerusalem.²² He took the city in late February or early March of 168 B.C.E. Onias Menelaus was returned to power and the Hellenization process was in full swing.²³

In an effort to more rapidly force the Jewish nation inside the bounds of full Greek culture, Antiochus IV made a subsequent and violent attack on the city of Jerusalem in the month of Khisleu (Nov./Dec.) of the 145th Jewish Seleucid year (167/166 B.C.E.). At this time Antiochus IV ushered in a period of abject terror for the Judaeans.²⁴ Strong anti-Greek and anti-Syrian sentiment subsequently took root. The tide toward friendly Jewish relations with their Hellenic rulers and culture had now turned.

The Greeks of Syria and the Hellenizing Jews made every effort to completely Hellenize Judaea, punishing anyone who opposed them. They shed innocent blood on every side of the Temple; they drove the Jewish inhabitants out of Jerusalem, replacing them with strangers favoring the Greek culture; they forbade circumcision and the observance of the Sabbath day; and “many of the Israelites consented to his (the Greek king’s) religion, and sacrificed unto idols, and profaned the Sabbath.”²⁵

This policy of forced Hellenization resulted in a revolt by the more conservative Jewish elements. It was one thing to borrow and draw upon Greek thoughts, perceptions, and ideas and incorporate them into Judaism. Yet it was quite another thing to have Judaism itself destroyed and wholesale Hellenization forced upon the Jewish people. Yet, even though Greek culture itself subsequently came to be held in disdain by many of the Jews of Judaea, those innovations of Judaism which had gradually been adopted over many previous decades due to the strong influence of the Greeks were no longer seen as Greek. They were by many Jews now considered to be part of their Jewish thought and religion.

It was at the time of this forced Hellenization that the line of Hasmonaean priests (the Maccabees) revolted and came to power. These conservative priests freed the city of Jerusalem from the Greek-Syrian yoke during the latter part of the 148th Jewish Seleucid year (164/163 B.C.E.).²⁶ Yet even here it was not a complete rejection of everything Hellenistic. As Phillip Sigal concludes, “The Maccabee revolt was designed, not against hellenism, but against paganism superimposed upon Judaism.”²⁷

²¹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:5:1–2.

²² 2 Macc., 5:11–26; 1 Macc., 1:16–40; Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:5:2–3.

²³ 2 Macc., 5:22f.

²⁴ Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:5:4; 1 Macc., 1:29–54.

²⁵ 1 Macc., 1:29–4:40; Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:5:4–12:7:5; 2 Macc., 5:24–7:42; 4 Macc., 4:24–18:23.

²⁶ Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:7:6; 1 Macc., 4:41–58.

²⁷ ECJ, 1.1, p. 161.

The Hasidim, meanwhile, did not support either the Hasmonaeans or the revolt against the Greeks.²⁸ They only wished to be left alone in peace to practice their religion. But the atrocities committed by the Greeks against many innocent, law-abiding Jews forced them to flee the persecution and in 167/166 B.C.E. they joined themselves to the Hasmonaean cause.²⁹

The Greek king, Antiochus V, felt that the Zadok (Tsadoq) family of Levite priests was the cause of the Judaeen revolts against their Syrian-Greek overlords. He settled politically with the Hasmonaeans and decided to change the family from which the high priest that governed the country was derived. As a result, Antiochus V killed the high priest Onias IV (Onias Menelaus) and gave his position to the Hellenizing Jew named Alcimus Jakeimos, a descendant of Aaron, the brother of Moses, whose line had rights to the office of high priest but was not of the same family as Onias IV.³⁰

With the death of Onias IV in 162/161 B.C.E., the last of the Zadok line of high priests had governed Judaea. With him also ended the power of the Zadok priests who wished to Hellenize the Jews. Those conservative priests who supported the claim of the Zadok line to the priesthood but represented the older more conservative school of Jewish thought, were subsequently called Zadoki (Tsadoqi, Sadducees).³¹ The priests and others who were supporters of the Zadok line but held to the Hasidic interpretations were subsequently called Essenes.³² Meanwhile, those Hasidim who largely came from the ranks of the scribes and other scholars and were unfriendly toward the Zadok line broke from the Essenes and became known as the Pharisees.³³ These three factions—Sadducees, Essenes, and Pharisees—became the three great religious parties of Judaea during the years following the Hasmonaeen revolt.

A short time later, after the death of Antiochus IV and his son Antiochus V, Greek rulership fell into the hands of Demetrius II (161 B.C.E.). During his reign, an agent of the Greek king made a proposal of peace to the Judaeans. In response, many of the Hasidim left the Hasmonaeen camp. They “were the first among the children of Israel that sought peace from them (the Greeks)” and they even accepted the leadership of Alcimus (a Hellenizing Jew put into power by the Greeks) as high priest.³⁴ These Hasidim were subsequently betrayed by the Greeks and murdered.

The actions of the Hasidim demonstrated that they were not in fellowship with the conservative Jews (the Hasmonaeans and the anti-Hellenizing

²⁸ NBD, p. 505.

²⁹ 1 Macc., 2:42f.

³⁰ Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:9:7, 20:10:3; 1 Macc., 7:14.

³¹ HJP, 2, pp. 405–413; JE, 10, p. 630; EJ, 14, pp. 620ff; ADB, 4, p. 349; MDB, pp. 784f; EBD, p. 902; CBTEL, 9, p. 240. John Dam., 16, notes that the Sadducees were derived “from a priest named Sadok.” The derivation of צדוקים (Tsadoqim), צדוקין (Tsadoqin), and צדוקי (Tsadoqi)—i.e., Sadducees—from the proper name צדוק (Tsadoq, Zadok) finds its parallel in the name of the first Jewish Karaites, who called themselves עננים (Ananyim), i.e., from their founder ענן (Anan), so that ענני (Anani), a follower of Anan, is an exact parallel to צדוקי (Tsadoqi, Tsadoqqi, Zadoki, Zaddoki, etc.), a follower of Zadok (Tsadoq) (CBTEL, 9, p. 234).

³² HJP, 2, pp. 413, 586f; SCO, p. 22; MDB, p. 263; EBD, pp. 351, 465; NBD, p. 505.

³³ HJP, 2, pp. 397–401, 413; ADB, 4, p. 349; SCO, pp. 23f; MDB, pp. 680f; EBD, pp. 465, 824; NBD, pp. 505, 981. Hippolytus (*Ref. Her.*, 9:24) reports that the Pharisees were a sect of the Essenes.

³⁴ 1 Macc., 7:12–18; Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:10:1–3, 6.

branch of Zadok priests who were later called the Sadducees). They instead felt content to live in peace with the Greeks and the Hellenizing Jews like Alcimus. After their betrayal, the Hasidim were driven back into the Hasmonaean camp, shortly thereafter to reform into two major camps: the Pharisees and the Essenes.

Under the Hasmonaean rulers, the phil-Hellenic elements of the Aristocratic and Hasidic Jews were purged from the government.³⁵ The anti-Greek Sadducees became the favorite party of the Hasmonaean rulers—this despite the fact that the Hasmonaean rulers held the high priesthood and were not themselves from the Zadok line. The Hasmonaean rulers, nevertheless, permitted the Sadducees to maintain official authority over the Judaeans.³⁶

The point that cannot be missed is the fact that most of the Hasidim, before the Hasmonaean purge of the phil-Hellenic elements, were quite at home with Greek domination. This reveals their previous relationship with Greek culture before many Hasidim became actively anti-Greek and before they were divided into different rival factions (Pharisee, Essene, etc.).

Greek and Other Cultural Influence

The major influence on the religious thought of the early Hasidim and the people of Judaea in general came from Greek (Hellenic) culture, ideas from the pagan nations among whom many Jews had lived, and from the utilization of traditions—the latter being an innovation meant to build a fence around the Torah and make Judaism more Jewish.

Scriptures were weighed against the philosophies of Plato and Greek thoughts and were analyzed and seen through the biased attitude of the Greeks, Babylonians, Persians, and Egyptians. Jews even argued that famous Greek writers, like Plato and Pythagoras, had borrowed from the Torah to build their Greek ideas.³⁷ This contention, of course, made the use of these ideas much more palatable. Pharisaic writers, like Philo, not only built premises for Jewish concepts based upon Greek philosophical approaches but felt free to liberally quote and openly borrow ideas from the Hellenic writers.³⁸

Though this branch of Judaism accepted new ideas, perceptions, and innovations from outside sources, they also resisted any overt change in what they perceived to be the practice of Judaism. Circumcision, Sabbath keeping, and numerous rituals and customs had to be maintained. Their first line of defense became Jewish traditions which had been built up over decades. Strict compliance with these traditions not only protected one's observance of the laws and statutes found in the Torah but in their eyes made one more pious.

Far less contemplation was given to what Scriptures had said within the context of the time of Moses and the other prophets of a bygone era. What occurred was the merging of Greek and other pagan thoughts with Jewish

³⁵ MDB, p. 785; HJP, 2, p. 413.

³⁶ MDB, p. 785.

³⁷ E.g., Aristob. Alex., frags. 3 & 4. The Christian writer Hippolytus continues this argument (Hippolytus, *Ref. Her.*, 9:22).

³⁸ See OTP, 2, pp. 821–830; and for a list of Philo's use of Plato and Pythagoras see the Index of J. W. Earp in Colson, *Philo*, x, pp. 469–471, 473.

religious culture. To demonstrate, the influence of the Babylonians and Persians (with whom many of the Judahites lived during the Babylonian exile period and after), as well as of the Egyptians, especially of Alexandria (with whom many Jews of the Greek period also lived), cannot be over emphasized. The Jews admit, for instance, that they obtained the Babylonian names for their months during their Babylonian exile.³⁹ They also learned the concept of a 24-hour day (12 hours in a day and 12 hours in the night) from the Babylonians.⁴⁰ Therefore, pagan cultures even helped shape the way that the Jews looked at time.

The further paganization of the Jews who had returned from their Babylonian exile to Judaea began fairly early on. For example, intermarriage with pagan women was rampant when Ezra came to Judaea in the mid-fifth century B.C.E.⁴¹ Sabbath breaking was also a serious problem in those years, prompting the Judaeen governor, Nehemiah, to forcibly contend with it.⁴² Greek settlements and contact with Hellenic culture were already well-established years prior to the conquest of that region by Alexander the Great.⁴³ There can be little doubt that many of the traditions which later became the oral laws promoted by the Hasidim were developed out of the personal feelings of some of the spiritual leaders of the Judaeans in the days between Ezra and the arrival of Alexander the Great. These oral laws were an attempt to counteract some of the pagan influences on the Jewish population in order to make the people more pious.⁴⁴ Then, with the advent of Alexander the Great, the flood gates of Hellenization were opened.

The Jewish Encyclopedia candidly admits that such things as the "philosophical or theological speculation" about an immortal soul began during post-exilic times (i.e., after 538 B.C.E.).⁴⁵ In another place this encyclopedia reports, "Only through the contact of the Jews with Persian and Greek thought did the idea of a disembodied soul, having its own individuality, take root in Judaism."⁴⁶

The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics similarly states, "The Greeks thought of the soul as naturally immortal. This idea was BORROWED by the Alexandrian-Jewish writers."⁴⁷ In James Hastings' *A Dictionary of the Bible* we find this statement:

The Jews came under the influence of the great Babylonian myth-cycles, in which the struggle between right and wrong was expressed as one between God and various supernatural enemies such as dragons and giants. To this period must be attributed also

³⁹ J. R.Sh., 1:1.

⁴⁰ DB, p. 255.

⁴¹ Ezra, 9:1–10:44; Neh., 13:23–31; Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:3f.

⁴² Neh., 13:15–22.

⁴³ HCJ, pp. 40f.

⁴⁴ CBTEL, 9, p. 235.

⁴⁵ JE, 6, pp. 564f.

⁴⁶ JE, 11, p. 479.

⁴⁷ ERE, 11, p. 843.

the development of the idea of Sheol, until it included the places for the punishment of evil spirits and evil men.⁴⁸

Shailer Mathews adds:

The influence of the Babylonian myth-cycle was great, but there is also to be seen the influence of the Greek impulse to pictorial expressions. No nation ever came into close contact with Greek thought and life without sharing in their incentive to aesthetic expression.⁴⁹

Josephus notes that the Pharisees, who were the most liberal of the Jewish schools, were “a sect having points of resemblance to that which the Greeks call the Stoic school,”⁵⁰ and, like their Greek philosophical counterparts, they “attribute everything to Fate and the deity.”⁵¹

Every ψυχὴν (*psukhen*; soul),⁵² they maintain, is imperishable, but the soul of the good alone passes into another body, while the souls of the wicked suffer eternal punishment.⁵³

The Pharisees also believed, like the Greeks, that upon death the souls of the pious went to heaven. They also believed that these souls would later return to earth to inhabit new bodies.⁵⁴

The Jewish Essenes, who like the Pharisees are derived from the Hasidim, are described as following “a way of life taught to the Greeks by Pythagoras,”⁵⁵ that is, an ascetic life of self-denial and purification. Like the Greeks, they believed in an immortal soul and Fate.⁵⁶ Josephus adds:

Sharing the belief of the sons of Greece, they maintain that for virtuous souls there is reserved an abode beyond the ocean, a place which is not oppressed by rain or snow or heat, but is refreshed by the ever gentle breath of the west wind coming in from the ocean; while they relegate base souls to a murky and tempestuous dungeon, big with never-ending punishments.⁵⁷

⁴⁸ DTB, p. 236.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Jos., *Life*, 1:2.

⁵¹ Jos., *Wars*, 2:8:14.

⁵² The term ψυχὴν (*psukhen*) is used by Greek writing Jews for the Hebrew term נֶפֶשׁ (*nephesh*), a “breathing creature” or “life” (SEC, Heb. #5315), and is generally translated into English as “soul” or “life.” Also see above Chap. VII, p. 107, n. 97; Intro to Part II, p. 133, n. 2.

⁵³ Jos., *Wars*, 2:8:14.

⁵⁴ Jos., *Wars*, 3:8:5.

⁵⁵ Jos., *Antiq.*, 15:10:4; cf., Jos., *Wars*, 2:8:2–13. Hippolytus, *Ref. Her.*, 9:22, claims that the Greeks received their philosophy from the Jews.

⁵⁶ Jos., *Wars*, 2:8:11, *Antiq.*, 13:5:9, 18:1:5.

⁵⁷ Jos., *Wars*, 2:8:11; cf., Hippolytus, *Ref. Her.*, 9:22.

Fate, eternal punishment in the underworld, immortal souls, a stoic or Pythagorean lifestyle, and afterlife concepts holding that the pious go to heaven or to an isle of bliss upon death—these ideas are Greek and pagan, not Yahwehist. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, for example, freely admits that the pagan doctrine of an immortal soul entered into Jewish thought via the Greeks:

The belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from FROM CONTACT WITH GREEK THOUGHT and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principle exponent, who was led to it through Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries in which Babylonian and Egyptian views were strangely blended, as the Semitic name "Minos" (comp. "Minotaurus"), and the Egyptian "Rhadamanthys" ("Ra of Ament," "Ruler of Hades"; Naville, "La Litanie du Soleil," 1875, p. 13) with others, sufficiently prove.⁵⁸

The application of Greek constructs, philosophical approaches, and world ideas to scriptural issues helped develop new expressions of Judaism. These innovations were then placed within the context of an adherence to the traditions of the Jewish fathers for a more pious approach to Scriptures. It was a way of looking at the world and Scriptures through the colored glasses of the then modern Greek world.

Emile Schürer expresses this merging of Greek and Jewish ideas in another way. With regard to Josephus' declarations that the Hasidic schools were Stoic and Pythagorean, he notes, "we have at least to deal with a strongly Hellenized presentation of Jewish views." He continues:

But it is in effect only the garb that is borrowed from Greece. The substance itself is authentically Jewish.⁵⁹

Emile Schürer's view of a core of Jewish substance is true. The issues considered were not Greek; they were derived from the Old Testament. Nevertheless, in the period prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., the Greek garb covering the early Hasidic views did in fact create several important differences when compared with the garb worn by the more conservative Jews of the Aristocratic schools. To demonstrate, the methods used by the conservative Sadducees, being derived from the old Levitical and aristocratic families of the priesthood, were never compared with any of the Greek philosophies. Instead, as Josephus states, they "do away with Fate altogether." He adds:

As for the persistence of the soul after death, penalties in the underworld, and rewards, they will have none of these.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ JE, 6, pp. 564f.

⁵⁹ HJP, 2, p. 393.

⁶⁰ Jos., *Wars*, 2:8:14.

The conservative Sadducees followed the Old Testament tenets of a mortal *nephesh* (soul),⁶¹ believing that the “soul perishes along with the body.”⁶² Their method was to reject everything alien, whether from the Greeks or any other pagan source, and then interpret only from what was allowed within Scriptures. They were not always accurate in their interpretations, but they were strong in their opposition to those ideas drawn from foreign cultures.

The charge made against the Hasmonaeans, the allies of the Sadducees, by the later Hasidic factions (Pharisees, Essenes, etc.), that they socially flirted with Hellenization, does not mean that there was a change in the religious stand of the Sadducees. The important point is that the subsequent hatred by most of the Jews of Judaea against the Greeks, which ensued after the attempted forced Hellenization of Judaea in 167 B.C.E., does not remove the previous centuries of peaceful exchange of ideas with the Greeks. Indeed, this strong Greek influence continued for centuries, even in the Jewish schools of Alexandria, Egypt.

The Hasidim

One of the most important historical and cultural developments in Judaism during the Hellenic period was the formation of the Hasidim during the late third century B.C.E. From them are derived the Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, and others, including the later Rabbinists and Talmudists, who are their spiritual descendants.⁶³ The name Hasidim means “pious, devout” ones.⁶⁴ These early Hasidim must not be confused with the German mystics of the 12th–13th centuries C.E. or with the modern Hasidic movement, founded in 18th century Poland by Israel ben Eliezer.⁶⁵

Very little is known of the origins of the early Hasidim themselves. The book of 1 Maccabees makes the first reference to the existence of the ἡσιδαῖοι (Hasidaioi) as a body of religious people. Their appearance is placed in 167 B.C.E., just before the rise of the Hasmonaeans (Maccabees).⁶⁶ They are described as being “voluntarily devoted unto the law.”⁶⁷

As demonstrated by the Mishnah,⁶⁸ the real historical and spiritual father of the Hasidim and their liberal brand of Judaism, with its reliance on oral laws, was Simeon II (also called Simeon the Just), the son of Onias II.⁶⁹ He is the first proto-rabbi known by name.⁷⁰ Simeon II (225/224–206/205 B.C.E.)

⁶¹ Ezek., 18:4, 20; Lev., 23:30; Ps., 22:28f; Eccles., 9:2–5. Also see above n. 52.

⁶² Jos., *Antiq.*, 18:1:4.

⁶³ NBD, pp. 505, 981; MDB, pp. 263, 680, 785, 980; EBD, pp. 351, 465, 824.

⁶⁴ See above Intro.: Sect. I, p. 173, n. 2.

⁶⁵ EBD, p. 465.

⁶⁶ 1 Macc., 2:42, 7:13; 2 Macc., 14:6.

⁶⁷ 1 Macc., 2:42.

⁶⁸ Ab., 1:2. Also see JSMIA, pp. 348ff; HCJ, pp. 79ff, 437, n. 111; NBD, p. 46.

⁶⁹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:4:10; B. Yom., 69a; *schol.* Meg. Taan.; Tosef. Sot., 13:6–8; J. Yom., 43c; B. Yom., 39a, b; B. Men., 109b. Some hold to the possibility that this Simeon the Just could also be Simeon I (e.g., TNTB, p. 140; Danby, *Mishnah*, p. 446, n. 6). Yet there is no event in the time of Simeon I that would account for the breakup of the Great Synagogue, a political body to which the high priest was automatically considered a leading member. On the other hand, about the time of the death of Onias II, the father of Simeon II, hostilities and civil war broke out among the Jews over their leadership (Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:4:10–12:5:1). This civil war would have been a direct cause for the disbandment of the Great Synagogue.

⁷⁰ ECJ, 1.2, p. 19.

was of the Zadok line of high priests, a line that had been ruling in Judaea ever since a remnant of the Judahites returned from their Babylonian exile to that country in 538 B.C.E.⁷¹ It is also believed that the subsequent leader of the Hasidim was Onias III (205/204–181/180 B.C.E.), the son of Simeon II.⁷²

It is politically interesting that Simeon II—the person to whom the Pharisees, who were so strongly against Greek culture, admit owing so much—was from the Zadok line of high priests and from a family who thought so highly of Greek culture. The pro-Seleucid *Gerousia*, which welcomed Antiochus III, the Greek king of Syria, into Jerusalem in 198 B.C.E., was headed by Simeon II.⁷³ It was Simeon II and his family of Levitical priests who not only favored Hellenistic culture but wanted to bring Judaism in line with the philosophies and views of the modern world of their own time. It further points to the fact that the early Hasidim, prior to the Hasmonaean revolt, were attempting to reach a form of piety through Greek-like methods, which explains why they were Stoic and ascetic in their approach.

In the mythical account of the origin of the oral laws used by the Pharisees, the Mishnah makes the claim that they were first received by Moses, who in turn gave them to Joshua, the son of Nun. Then, from Joshua these oral laws were supposedly committed to the elders, from the elders to the prophets, and finally, from the prophets to the Great Synagogue.⁷⁴

The Great Synagogue consisted of 120 elders, including many prophets, beginning with those who came up from their Babylonian exile with Ezra in the mid-fifth century B.C.E.⁷⁵ This august body broke up in 227/226 B.C.E. upon the outbreak of hostilities at the death of Onias II, the father of Simeon II. The Great Synagogue pronounced as its doctrine, “Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Torah.”⁷⁶ Simeon II “was of the remnants of the Great Synagogue.”⁷⁷

By their writings, Moses and many of the other prophets of Yahweh clearly prove that they did not adhere to the oral regulations later espoused by the Hasidim (later to become the Pharisees, Essenes, etc.). It is also impossible that the conservative scribe Ezra or any of the other prophets of Yahweh associated with him held to any of these oral laws. The greatest proof against the belief that any of these men of Yahweh adhered to the oral laws of the Hasidim is

⁷¹ Simeon II (the Just) was the son of Onias II (Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:4:10), the son of Simeon I (the Just) (Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:4:1, 12:2:5), the son of Onias I (Jos., *Antiq.*, 12:2:5), the son of Jaddua (Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:8:7), the son of Jonathan (Johanana) (Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:7:2; Neh., 12:10, cf., 12:22f), the son of Joiada (Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:7:1, 2; Neh., 12:22, cf., 12:10f), the son of Eliashib (Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:7:1; Neh., 12:10), the son of Joiakim (Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:5; Neh., 12:10), the son of Yahushua, the high priest of Yahweh at Jerusalem after the return of the Judahites from their Babylonian exile (Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:1; Neh., 12:10). All of the above performed as the high priest at Jerusalem. Yahushua was the son of Jozadak, the son of Seraiah—Seraiah being of the Zadok line and the last high priest of the first Temple of Yahweh before it was destroyed by the Babylonians (2 Kings, 25:18; 1 Chron., 6:14; Jer., 52:24–27; Ezra, 3:2, 8, 5:2, 10:18; Neh., 12:1f, 8–11; Hag., 1:1, 12, 14, 2:2, 4; Zech., 6:11; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:8:5, 6:11:3–10, 20:10:2).

⁷² NBD, p. 505; SCO, p. 20.

⁷³ ECJ, 1.1, p. 151

⁷⁴ Ab., 1:1f.

⁷⁵ Danby, *Mishnah*, p. 446, n. 5.

⁷⁶ Ab., 1:1.

⁷⁷ Ab., 1:1f.

the strong condemnation of the “traditions of the fathers” by the prophets and by Yahushua the messiah himself.⁷⁸

On the other hand, some 230 years after Ezra and the formation of the Great Synagogue, and over 100 years after the conquest of Judaea by Alexander the Great, we arrive at the last period of the Great Synagogue. A different climate now prevailed. The divisions among religious leaders at that time and their favorable attitude toward Greek philosophy and culture offered the fertile ground upon which new ideas could grow. Phillip Sigal speaks of the third century B.C.E., the era which gave rise to Simeon II, as the period of the origination of the oral law.

It was the age of the *sofrim* or *hakhamim* (sages) who interpreted biblical literature and applied it to everyday use. Here we may have the origin of the so-called “oral torah,” material which was not written in coherent essay or book form nor even collected as groups of sayings in order not to have the interpretation compete with the source-text.⁷⁹

Therefore, the specific mention of Simeon II as the recipient of the oral laws from the Great Synagogue is of utmost importance. He had in fact jointly served as high priest with his father during the last years of the Great Synagogue and would certainly have been part of that body. Jewish legend has this priest accompanied by the incarnate deity into the Holy of Holies.⁸⁰ In this way the Pharisees made their founder both priest and prophet. After the death of Onias II, the Great Synagogue broke up and Simeon II led the “remnant” of that group.⁸¹ Here the truthfulness of the history of the oral laws takes its beginning.

The Jewish book entitled Ecclesiasticus (c.200 B.C.E.) reflects the orthodoxy of the Hasidim.⁸² This text speaks grandiloquently of Simeon II, noting that he had fortified and done many other great repairs and services to the Temple in Jerusalem.⁸³ Such comments point to Simeon II as the founder of a new religious movement. Further, Joshua ben Sirach, the author of Ecclesiasticus, as *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* notes, was “open to Hellenistic influences.” This text continues:

His hymn in praise of the heroes of the past is clearly indebted to Hellenistic encomiastic historiography and to the educational and social concerns served in that tradition. . . . The author may therefore have

⁷⁸ Jer., 10:1–8; Matt., 15:1–14, 16:6, 23:1–3, 13–39; Mark, 7:1–13, 8:15; Luke, 12:1; Gal., 1:11–17, cf., Acts, 23:6; Titus, 1:12–15.

⁷⁹ ECJ, 1.1, p. 151.

⁸⁰ Lev. Rab., 21:12.

⁸¹ Ab., 1:2.

⁸² NBD, p. 46; EBD, p. 954. Joshua ben Sirach was a scribe and sage who worked in an academy located at Jerusalem. In the Hebrew version of Eccclus., 51:129, a blessing is given on the “sons of Zadok.” This favorable attitude toward the house of Zadok (Tsadoq) reflects the fact that Joshua was on the Essene side of the Hasidic spectrum.

⁸³ Eccclus., 50:1–18.

been indebted in his reflections TO STOIC CONCEPTIONS of an all-embracing world law.⁸⁴

What follows the naming of Simeon II in the Mishnah is a long list of the names of individuals who passed down in succession the oral laws until they were given to the famous Pharisee scribe and leader Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, the compiler of the Mishnah itself.⁸⁵ The Mishnah is nothing less than the written codification of the oral laws as they came down and were modified through the hands of the Pharisaic branch of the Hasidim.

What is often overlooked is the fact that the sons of Simeon II, namely, Joshua Jason and Onias IV (Onias Menelaus), wanted to abandon Judaism altogether because they loved “the glory of the Greeks best of all.”⁸⁶ Also of interest is the fact that the third name in the list of those passing on the oral traditions was Jose ben Joezer,⁸⁷ whose uncle was Alcimus (162/161–159/158 B.C.E.), the great Hellenizing Jewish high priest in the days of Antiochus V and Demetrius II.⁸⁸

Greek influence in the household of Simeon II, therefore, must have been great. Accordingly, there can be little doubt that the “traditions of the fathers,” so adored as the mainstay of Pharisaic oral law, were in fact accumulated and derived from one division of Jewish leadership during the last period of the Great Synagogue—a body whose precepts were intended to “make a fence around the Torah.”⁸⁹ This motto became the living creed of the Pharisees. Some of these traditions were even gathered from the Jews who came out of Babylonia. Others were added by subsequent generations.⁹⁰

At the same time, the more anti-Hellenic and conservative branch of the priests (the Sadducees) were certainly right in their claim that the oral laws were never given by Moses and transmitted down by the prophets to the Great Synagogue. What is most important for our concerns is the fact that the oral laws and interpretations rendered by the scribes were considered by the Pharisees not just equal to but superior to the Torah.⁹¹ This self-aggrandizing claim gradually moved the early Hasidim and their offshoots the Pharisees, Essenes, and others, away from the strict guidelines of the Old Testament and the early traditions of the Levitical priests. At the same time, they used Greek philosophical methods as a vehicle to more strictly observe the Torah. As Emile Schürer points out:

⁸⁴ EBD, p. 955.

⁸⁵ Ab., 1:2–2:1.

⁸⁶ 2 Macc., 4:13–15.

⁸⁷ Ab., 1:4.

⁸⁸ 1 Macc., 7:4–22; Danby, *Mishnah*, p. 446, n. 7.

⁸⁹ Ab., 1:1.

⁹⁰ CBTEL, 9, p. 235.

⁹¹ In the B. Erub., 21b (cf., J. Ber., 1:5, 3b) we read this warning from the sages, “My son. Be more heedful of the words of the *sofrim* (scribes) than of those of the written Torah. For the words of the Torah contain positive and negative injunctions (for the transgression of which there is no death penalty) but whoever transgresses the words of the scribes incurs the penalty of death.” Sanh., 11:3, states, “Greater stringency applies to (the observance of) the words of the scribes than to (the observance of) the words of the (written) Torah.” Cf., Ab., 1:1; TNTB, p. 140; Danby, *Mishnah*, pp. xvii, 446, n. 2; EJ, 15, p. 81.

The tendency of the Hasidim towards strict observance of the Torah gained more and more influence. And with it, their claims also mounted. He alone was a true Israelite who observed the law in accordance with the interpretation given by the Torah scholars. But the more pressing these demands became, the more decisively did the aristocracy reject them. It therefore appears that it was the religious revival itself of the Maccabean period that led to a consolidation of the parties.⁹²

It can therefore be concluded that the high priest Simeon II (225–206 B.C.E.) and the people he gathered around him, particularly from the class of scribes and scholars, not only founded the group that later became the Hasidim (pious ones) but were the originators and gatherers of the initial traditions (oral laws) later followed by the Pharisees. As the decades passed, the Pharisees moved these traditions from cultic practice among certain segments of the population to commanded ordinances. A long list of rabbinical schools then continued to update these oral laws.⁹³

It was the Hasidim, guided by the scribes who filled their ranks, who not only brought into effect many new principles with regard to the Torah in order to “build a fence around the Torah” but also borrowed and incorporated many thoughts, premises, and interpretations used by the Greeks and other pagan societies. Among these practices were stoicism, the unutterable sacred name doctrine, and adherence to oral traditions—all in the name of becoming more pious by more strictly observing the Torah. For example, it was no longer appropriate to just observe the Sabbath day, which began at sunset. According to the oral laws, one must begin observing the Sabbath day on Friday afternoon, during the few hours before sunset.⁹⁴ The theory went that if one should work right up to the time of the Sabbath he “might” err and work beyond sunset and break the Sabbath. By addressing such scriptural issues in this stoic fashion, the Hasidim believed it made them more pious.

It should be especially noted that the Hasidic book of Jubilees, composed between 161 and 140 B.C.E.,⁹⁵ concludes with instructions and a discussion on how to observe the Phasekh and the order of the Jubilee years.⁹⁶ There can be little doubt that this text was produced to provide some kind of written authority for the Hasidic observance, authority which is lacking in any oral tradition. The book of Jubilees is in fact the earliest known record of this Hasidic interpretation and method of Phasekh observance.

⁹² HJP, 2, pp. 412f.

⁹³ See, for example, the long list of contributing rabbis mentioned in Ab., 1:4–3:3. The commentaries found in the Mishnah and the Talmud are replete with references to various rabbis and their opposing views up to and including those from the time of the second revolt in 135 C.E.

⁹⁴ HUCA, 54, p. 128; DR, 13; B. R.Sh., 9a. Also see the discussion in SJC, chap. xvi.

⁹⁵ OTP, 2, pp. 43–45; THS, p. 283.

⁹⁶ Jub., 49:1–50:13.

Conclusion

From the days of Alexander the Great (332 B.C.E.) until the Hasmonaean revolt (167 B.C.E.) a great deal of Greek philosophy, thought, and ideas had entered Judaism, especially into the ranks of the scribes and priests who formed the Hasidic movement. These foreign ideas had become so strongly incorporated into the culture and religion of Judaism that, by the mid-second century B.C.E., they were no longer viewed by the Hasidim as alien but, somehow, had become completely Jewish.

It would be unrealistic and naive to believe that Greek dominance of Judaea, during the centuries after the conquest of Judaea by Alexander the Great, had no effect on the religious, philosophical, and cultural views of the various Jewish sects of that period. As we proceed with our examination of the origin of the views held in Systems A, B, and C, it will be of great assistance if we keep in mind the context of this historical and cultural background from which the opposing Jewish schools sprang.