

II.1.g.  
Religion in  
Palestine

Palestinian Religion

The great force in Palestinian religion was Judaism and in the time of our study it was marked by two tendencies: 1) the synagogue ideal and 2) dissatisfaction with the temple.

Of the first of these we note that the synagogue ideal probably originated after the Babylonian Captivity and the basic ideas were proximate to that time...perhaps as late as the middle of the fifth century. Ezra and his cohorts are often thought of as the founders or responsible persons in the Synagogue movement.

The concept was for the provision of a center for a group of Jews who could not have, or did not have, access to Jerusalem and the privilege of "temple". The Synagogue, a "gathering together", would provide the spiritual services in lieu of the temple. It required a governing body of ten men (heads of families) and so tended to make strong Jewish communities rather than to foster a pattern of isolated Jewish remnants. The synagogues eventually conducted schools, instructed the community in the customs and ideas of Jewry, and gave a central focus to the lives of those who saw themselves as Jews. It was mostly responsible for keeping the Jewish remnant from being assimilated into the societal areas in which the communities individually existed. It was also, in time, to prove to be the grounds for the dissenting and sectarian voices within Judaism as they each found their own support in local cultural synagogue settings.

Within the synagogue culture famous rabbinical teachers developed and occasionally had different ideas as to how things should be understood. The study of these teachers and their ideals is interesting and the varying Talmudic tractates contain the legacy of the synagogue system. The system continues to the present.

Of the second of the items mentioned above, we should note that this was due much to the political intrigue that whirled around the temple leadership. The failure of the second temple and the defections in the Herodic temple did much to make many Jews doubt the value of temple worship when there was no Jewish king and, in this case, no prophet. While the temple leadership had its following, there was a sort of popular divorce in many Jews with regard to services they