THE INTERCANONICAL PERIOD

THE period chosen as a limit for this article is a somewhat neglected one, but nevertheless one of great importance and of no small interest to the student of the Bible. It was a period of change, both politically and linguistically; and, from the religious point of view, is of unparalleled moment, if only because it includes the life on earth of the Messiah.

It is the purpose of this article briefly to survey the period from the point of view of the linguistic and religious situation of the Jews, with special reference to the Old Testament during that time.

Historically, the period opens with the winning of Palestine by the Seleucids from the Persian rule, leading on, as it did, to the conflict between the "Pietists" (hasidim) and those who, through travel and the influence of foreign culture, rather despised the exclusiveness of orthodox Judaism. The profanation of the Temple (168 B.C.), together with other atrocities, was followed by the rise of Judah the Maccabee (the Hammerer), who, against tremendous odds, led the Jewish revolt and triumphed, soon restoring order where chaos had previously reigned. Then ensued the succession of Hasmonean rulers; the rise of the Roman power; the life and death of Jesus Christ; followed by the course of events which led to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

I

If, as has been briefly shown above, the period was one of change politically and historically, it was certainly so linguistically. In certain books of the Old Testament, the influence of Aramaic may be seen. Hebrew gradually ceased to be spoken as the *lingua franca*, and became the language of religion.

Only part of the Captivity returned from Babylonia (cf. Ezra i. 2); and those members of the Eastern Dispersion (or διασπορα) who remained in Babylonia and Mesopotamia—and they constituted quite a large number—availed themselves of the use of a Methurgeman to interpret the service of the synagogue from Biblical Hebrew into the Aramaic which was their own every-day language. A verse of the sacred Scriptures would be

read by the officiating officer, and the interpreter would follow with his translation, so that the service might be " understanded of the people." The same procedure was followed in Palestine for the same reason. After the time of Alexander (who died 323 B.C.), another important element was introduced, namely the increasing influence of Greek, which, to a certain extent, became a rival of Aramaic. Under these conditions, it was the duty of the Methurgeman, or interpreter, to translate from Hebrew into Greek.

It was in Alexandria, where a very large colony of Jews lived, that the need was most keenly felt for a translation of the Old Testament Scriptures into Greek ; the services of the Methurgeman, acting merely as an interpreter, were quite insufficient. The Jewish colony in Alexandria flourished under Alexander, who admitted the Jews to full citizenship. Synagogues existed in every part of the city ; and, in the time of Philometer (182-146 B.C.), a disused temple at Leontopolis was even converted into a copy of the Temple at Jerusalem. In spite of these conditions, the Jewish colony remained loyal to the Temple at Jerusalem, both with regard to the festivals there and with regard to the payment of tribute. The longer they stayed in Alexandria, the more accustomed did the Jews become to the Greek language, and the greater did the need seem to them of a version of the sacred Scriptures in the language which was in every-day use amongst themselves, and amongst the people who had treated them so well.

Thus there came to be the version—so familiar to all Biblical scholars and so indispensable in textual criticism—known as the Septuagint or the *Interpretatio septuaginta virorum* or *seniorum.*

The history of the origin of the Septuagint constitutes a fascinating study. First came the translation of the Pentateuch, then the Prophets (probably finished by 132 B.C.), and then the Hagiographa, which have to be dated individually. It is probable that Alexandria possessed all the Hebrew Scriptures in a Greek translation before the beginning of the Christian era. As has been pointed out in a recent number of the QUARTERLY, " the levels of excellence " in this translation vary considerably. " The law is translated with great care, the Prophets somewhat more loosely, and the Hagiographa . . . most loosely of all."[1]

[1] The Rev. R. N. Smith : *The Canon of the Old Testament*, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 52.

The history of the inception of the translation of the Old Testament Scriptures into Greek is not certain in its detail. The letter of Aristeas (now generally acknowledged to be pseudonymous), while probably reliable in its major facts, is unreliable in its detail. It only describes the origin of the translation of the Pentateuch—a fact which early Christian writers, with the notable exception of Jerome, failed to notice. The letter describes how the librarian to Philadelphus (285-247 B.C.) stressed the need of possessing a copy of a translation of the Jewish laws. So there arrived in Egypt seventy-two elders (six from each of the twelve tribes) who set to work in a quiet building at a distance from the city of Alexandria. In seventy-two days the work was completed, to the mutual delight of Philadelphus and of the Jewish community.

Most of the early Christian Fathers accepted the story, but depicted the elders as working separately, and, under divine guidance, reaching identical results. Jerome, however, saw here a legendary element, and rejected it.

There can, however, be little doubt that the basis of the story is historical and that we know the main facts which led to the translation of the Hebrew books into Greek and the means by which this was accomplished. Philo states that the Alexandrian version was treated with almost as great reverence as was the original; this was so, not only in Egypt, but elsewhere in the Hellenistic world.

When the Jews possessed a translation of their Scriptures in Greek, the office of the Methurgeman as translator became unnecessary; and he seems to have assumed the role of the exegete.

"The Septuagint as a whole . . . is a monument of Alexandrian Greek as it was spoken by the Jewish colony in the Delta under the rule of the Ptolemies."[1] As we should expect, the translation bears many signs of Hebrew thought behind it, as is evidenced by the frequently recurring Hebraisms, etc.

To the New Testament student, the position of importance to which the Septuagint had attained by the time that the New Testament books were written can be seen by the great number of quotations which are taken from the Greek rather than from the Hebrew; in fact, the Greek is used considerably more frequently than is the Hebrew.

[1] H. B. Swete: *Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek.* Cambridge, 1914, p. 21.

It should be noted that Philo, whose influence made itself profoundly felt, not only in Christian dogma, but also in the Jewish mediæval Kabbala, used the Septuagint extensively; in fact, with the exception of some seven books to which he does not seem to refer, quotations of his from all the books of the Old Testament are in existence.

II

Turning to the more specifically religious consideration of the period, the place and manner of synagogue worship in the life of the Jews deserves some notice; as also does the rise of the Pharisaic and Sadducean parties.

Whatever the origin of the synagogue may have been, it seems to have originated as a permanent institution during the period of the Babylonian Captivity. The captive Jews needed a place for worship and for instruction in the Torah, etc., and this need was met by the בֵּ֣ית הַכְּנֶסֶת or *συναγωγη*. At Nehardea, the home some centuries later of one of the great academies, one of the oldest synagogues was built; it was the place of public worship —the "little sanctuary" where, to a great extent, Judaism was saved from extinction.

In Egypt, too, the synagogue played an important part in the religious life of the Jews, at least from the time of Ptolemy and Queen Berenice. In Alexandria there were many synagogues (called by Philo *προσευχαι*), where the Jews would attend the reading of the Law and other religious services. In Syria, there was the famous synagogue at Antioch, and in imperial Rome there were several. In Palestine itself, there sprang up a very large number of synagogues. One tradition says that there were in Jerusalem, at the time of its destruction by Titus, no less than four hundred and eighty. There is no doubt that the foreign Jews in Jerusalem had their own synagogues (cf. Acts vi. 9); and the student of the Gospels is familiar with the mention of synagogues in such places as Nazareth and Capernaum.

The account of Christ taking His part in synagogue worship (Luke iv. 16-29), standing up to read one of the two "lessons", choosing the great passage from the 61st chapter of Isaiah, folding up the roll and returning it to the synagogue officer, and giving His "commentary" on the passage, is of unique interest to the Bible student. Such a service as the one at which Christ was

then present was typical of the ordinary Sabbath morning service. It opened with the recitation of the Shema, followed by prayer which was said by the leader and to which the people answered Amen. Next came the lessons with their translation by the Methurgeman, then the sermon, and finally the blessing.

It may be said that the synagogues served the purpose of explaining the Torah and of applying it to the Jews under a variety of conditions, and of keeping alive, especially in places outside Palestine, that spirit of racial and religious oneness without which Judaism would swiftly have declined.

The synagogue has well been called "the nursery of Mosaism." Josephus points out that "in the Jewish household every servant-maid knew from the religious service what Moses had ordained in the law in every single instance." This was due to the influence of the synagogue. Philo pays his tribute by saying that "every virtue which the human and the divine recognize and enjoin" are taught in the "houses of prayer in the several towns."

The Bible student very frequently meets, in his reading of the Gospels, the parties known as the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and no sketch of the religious side of the period now under consideration would be complete without some reference to their origin and to the place which they occupied in Jewish religious life.

The Pharisees (or Separatists) were so called chiefly because the idea of the sovereign joining in himself the functions of priest and ruler, as in the case of John Hyrcanus, was repugnant to them. It was also probably a term of scorn applied to them by their critics, much as the term Methodists was applied to the followers of Wesley, and was accepted gladly by them. The Sadducees, so called because they belonged chiefly to the priests of the family of Zadok, agreed with the method of government which was so offensive to the Pharisees. The rift between the two parties grew as the years went by.

In their religious views, the Pharisees stressed love of God and of one's neighbour as being the main teaching of the Torah. Zealous to a degree in their regard for the letter of the Law, their piety degenerated into a mechanical system—a boasting legalism—which incurred frequent and severe rebukes from Christ. They stressed the importance, not only of the written law but equally of the "oral" law (the striking contrast of Christ's

teaching in, for example, Matthew v. 43, 44, is noteworthy), and reiterated the doctrines of the coming Deliverer and of the resurrection.

In the time of Herod, the Pharisaic party was divided into the two great schools of Hillel and Shammai. Hillel (who died circa A.D. 10 and who was known as "the kindly") came to Palestine from Babylonia. He was responsible for the seven laws of interpretation, or hermeneutic principles (later expanded to thirteen), for interpreting the Torah. His main teaching might be summed up in the words which he uttered to one who asked him for instruction in the Jewish religion in the shortest possible time—"Do not unto others what is hateful to thyself; this is the whole of the Torah; all the rest is commentary."

Shammai was sternly rigorous in his application of the Torah; according to his teaching, it must be interpreted on the strictest possible lines. It is hardly to be wondered at that the two schools came into conflict—a conflict which Gamaliel II, some twenty years after the close of the period dealt with in this article, sought to bring to an end.

The Sadducees, on the other hand, refused to be bound with the fetters of tradition which the Pharisees had made for themselves. They were a political and worldly party, and favoured Greek thought and freedom and the Hasmonean rulers. The written word was all that mattered—oral tradition was of little account. The resurrection of the body they denied (cf. Matthew xxii. 23), as also such beliefs as a final judgment and the existence of angels.

It is only possible in an article of this length to outline a few of the more important features of a period which is of extraordinary interest, whether studied from the historical, literary or religious standpoint. It is a period which deserves closer study from Bible students; and if, in however small a measure, this article stimulates such study, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

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