

A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORAL LAW

THE AGE OF THE WRITTEN LAW: ITS EXEGESIS, EXPOSITION, AND APPLICATION TO THE LIFE OF ISRAEL

- I. The Period of the Tabernacle (1400-950 B.C.)
- II. The Period of the First Temple (950-586 B.C.)
- III. The Period of the Great Assembly (Knesset Gedolah) (539-332 B.C.)

This is the era of the anonymous Soferim, the "men of the Book," who were chiefly engaged in transcribing the Scriptures and exegeting and expositing the Law. It would appear that they developed the methods of midrash halakhah (halakhic exegesis) i.e., methods of learning and deriving halakhah from the biblical texts themselves.

- IV. The Period of the Pairs (Zugot) (332-37 B.C.)

This period includes several known personalities. Toward the latter part of the period, the supreme spiritual institution, the Sanhedrin, was headed by zugot (pairs of sages), one of whom served as nasi (president) while the other, his deputy, was the av bet din (head of the law court).

Ben Sira
Simeon the Righteous (ha-Tsaddik) - the High Priest
Antigonus of Soko
Johanan the High Priest
Jose ben Joezer of Zeredah and Jose ben Johanan of Jerusalem
Joshua ben Perahyah and Hittai of Arbela
Judah ben Tabbai and Simeon ben Shetah
Shemaiah and Abtalion
Hillel the Elder and Shammai the Elder

THE TALMUDIC AGE

- I. The Period of the Tannaim (37 B.C.-A.D. 220)

The name tanna means one who studies, repeating and handing down what he has learned from his teachers. The tannaim are the sages of the Mishnaic era. Much more information is known about these personalities than those of the zugot.

Bet Hillel (School of Hillel)
Bet Shammai (School of Shammai)
Rabban Gamaliel the Elder
Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel the First
Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai
Rabban Gamaliel the Second of Yavneh
R. Eleazar ben Azariah
R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (Eliezer the Great)
R. Joshua ben Hananiah
R. Akiva ben Yosef

He arranged the vast body of oral law in logical categories; named and supported Bar Kokhba ("Son of a Star") in his rebellion against Rome in A.D. 132, and named him as Messiah; was tortured and died a martyr's death with the Shema Yisrael on his lips.

R. Ishmael ben Elisha