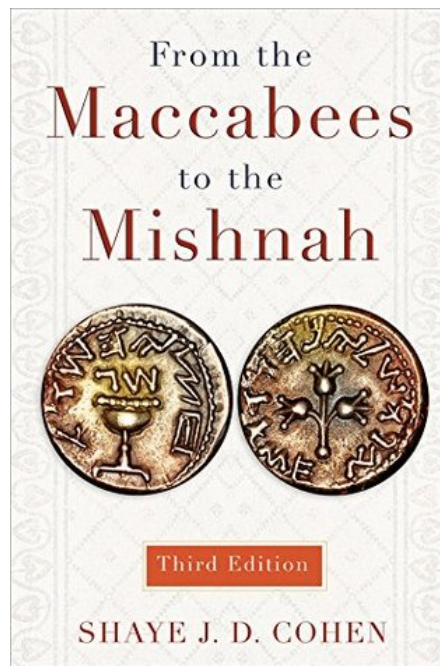




From the Maccabees to the Mishnah, Third Edition

Shaye J.D. Cohen

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From the Maccabees to the Mishnah, Third Edition Shaye J.D. Cohen

This is the third edition of Shaye J. D. Cohen's important and seminal work on the history and development of Judaism between 164 BCE to 300 CE. Cohen's synthesis of religion, literature, and history offers deep insight into the nature of Judaism at this key period, including the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, the function of Jewish religion in the larger community, and the development of normative Judaism and other Jewish sects. Cohen offers students more than just history, but an understanding of the social and cultural context of Judaism as it developed into the formative period of rabbinic Judaism. This new edition includes a brand-new chapter on the parting of ways between Jews and Christians in the second century CE. From the Maccabees to the Mishnah remains the clearest introduction to the era that shaped Judaism and provided the context for early Christianity.

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From Reader Review From the Maccabees to the Mishnah, Third Edition for online ebook

Jimmy says

This book covers the history of the Second Temple period that began with the rise of the Maccabees around 160 BC to the destruction of the Temple in 70 and a bit beyond. As the author noted in the beginning of the book this was a time of a diverse group of sects, groups and social/cultural dynamic within Judaism and interaction with those on the outside such as Hellenistic and Roman culture. The author himself is not a Christian but a Jew though this book is published by the publishing arm of a mainline Protestant denomination (specifically the PCUSA); his perspective at times goes against what evangelical Christians would believe but it also goes against the very denomination of the publishers such as the authors preface protesting the PCUSA's stance against Israel. Yet this book has managed to be in print for decades and it is on its third edition. In reading this book there were some great takeaways while there were also some parts of the book that raised some concerns.

Good:

- The book convincingly made the argument that the Jews tend to pursue the political stance of accommodation with Gentile rulers rather than rebellion with only four exceptional instances.
- The author had a good discussion about the term Hellenistic Judaism because it is not as if there is a Judaism that was non-Hellenistic versus that which was Hellenistic during the Post-Persian period; rather the Hellenism of the Judaism of those period was one of degrees; Cohen sees the term better used as a chronological indicator of the religion after Alexander the Great.
- Cohen shares with the reader that conversion to Judaism entail three elements: monotheism, circumcision and integration into the Jewish community. He also note the distinction that a "Judaized" Gentile might not necessarily adopt all of the theology of Judaism since practice is more determinative than theology for most Jews during this era.
- The discussion on the synagogue is excellent. Second Temple Judaism supplemented the temple with the synagogue and the priest with scribes who were learned teachers.
- The discussion about sects was also very insightful. Cohen define sect as a small group which separate itself from the majority and sees itself as the sole group that understand God's will. Sectarian grounds in Judaism often clash on three points: the law, temple and interpretation of God's Word. He also caution that sectarianism is not the same thing as mere diversity.
- This books gives a good introduction to the Talmud and other Jewish religious writing such as commentaries and paraphrase.
- The end of the book had a helpful "Further reading" section in which the author introduces to the reader scholarly editions of primary sources and also important secondary sources. These are helpful pointers for further study!

Problems:

- There is an interesting secular/sacred, faith/fact divide that the author assumes that colors his perspective. For instance on location 261 the author does not think history can answer the question of whether or not Christianity is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Why not? If Christianity is a religion with historical claims and the Old Testament also makes future historical claims the authors claim is problematic.
- In location 3509 Cohen claims divine origin isn't necessary for biblical status which to me is hard to prove.
- The author takes a liberal dating of the bible that reflect the perspective of the historical critical perspective. For instance in location 1804 Cohen assumes Ecclesiastes was a product of the Hellenistic period rather than Solomonic in origins. Cohen also assume the existence of more than one Isaiah. Moments like these in the book took away from the books strength.
- The chapter on the Canon is the most disagreeable chapter of the book for me. I suppose if there is any value in it, it is a concise summary of a liberal perspective on the Canon.

Conclusion

I do recommend this book but also caution it be read with Christian discernment and maturity.

NOTE: This book was provided to me free by Westminster John Knox Press and Net Galley without any obligation for a positive review. All opinions offered above are mine unless otherwise stated or implied.

Emily says

This is a great college-level, beginning introduction to post-Maccabean Judaism and the rise of Rabbinic Judaism.

Chris says

More a textbook than a monograph—which does not stop it from advancing an argument. The major change in the current edition is a new, concluding chapter on the "parting of the ways" between Jews and Christians. I cannot imagine how the prior editions would read, as the book builds thematically toward that chapter. Cohen's take, in brief, is that the ways did not part, because they never ran together in the first place. As soon as we can identify a Christian church from documentary or material evidence, it did not mix with Jewish communities in "the land of Israel"* or in the diaspora. This telos, in retrospect, governs his prior account of Jewish practice, social organization, and belief.

Likewise, this telos is a function of the book's audience. The primary constituency for a course in "Second Temple Judaism" (let alone "The Jewish Background to the New Testament") is, if not Christian, then at least conditioned by prior interest in the New Testament or Christian origins. I should add, in this connection, that my training is in Christian systematic theology, so I am very much a part of this same audience.

Any American Jew writing for Christians knows what questions are likely interest them. Such is the balance of power. In my judgment, Cohen assesses the New Testament, and Christian evidence on the period more generally, scrupulously and even generously: He treats Jesus as a healer, speaks of "post-resurrection" communities, and considers Paul a very strange Jew, but also a significant Jewish writer of the period and a source of evidence for Jewish language and internal politics. There is refreshingly little polemic here, at least on the surface where a non-specialist would notice it. A prior reviewer contrasts Cohen's account to that of N. T. Wright, which is frankly apologetic: Quite so.

Much of this material was familiar to me in other ways, but there was still plenty to learn from Cohen's presentation, and not only from his argument. Some takeaways—perhaps not new to you, but new to me:

—The only Jewish writer who ever self-identified as a Pharisee was Paul, and then of course as an *ex*-Pharisee. That name (which seems to come from a word for "separation") functioned to name a party, clearly, but that party's members never identified with it, either at the time or in retrospect. The word does not even appear in the Mishnah!

—Likewise with Sadducee, a group that leaves no written testimony at all. One clue: The root of the word seems to be Zadok, a priestly lineage also claimed at Qumran! Now I want to read a 19th-c. historical novel, à la *Ben-Hur*, about a falling-out of aristocratic priestly brothers in the late Hasmonean period.

—The word *politeuma*, cf. *Phil 3:20* ("*our politeuma is in heaven*"), referred to autonomous ethnic communities within Greek cities, such as those of diaspora Jews. The exegetical implications are not yet clear to me, and it can simply mean "citizenship" in a broader sense, but now I'm curious whether NT

commentators have picked up on the diasporic specificity here, as Paul certainly would have done.

**Cohen consistently uses this language as the counterpoint to the diaspora. He likewise includes, in his preface, a protest against the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s position on the Israel-Palestine conflict, which he believes to reflect an "obsess[ion] with the sins of Israel" on the part of Christians. (In case any reader doesn't know: The book's publisher is affiliated with the PCUSA.) I appreciated his forthrightness, while still finding the apologetic undercurrent a bit distracting. YMMV.*

Brian Leport says

Shaye J.D. Cohen has once again updated his popular introduction to early Judaism (1st = 1987; 2nd = 2005). This 3rd edition contains some cosmetic changes ("I have rewritten sentences and paragraphs here and there..."), and some additional information ("I have added some references in footnotes."), but the most important change is an additional chapter. Cohen's eighth chapter addresses the so-called "parting of the ways" between Christianity and Judaism ("Preface to the Third Edition", xi) Originally the book was to be written as a sort of background to early Christianity, but Cohen has written an introduction to early Judaism that is aware of incipient Christianity, but not consumed by it.

Read the rest of my thoughts here: <http://www.brianleport.com/personal-b...>

Abby says

Very good book, but not organized usefully for my classes. I'm teaching a Jewish history course going from the late 7th century BCE through the 3rd century CE, or so, and I teach it chronologically. Because this book is organized thematically, I might use a chapter but it doesn't work as a main textbook for the course. This is a shame, because as a reader, I much prefer this to the textbook that I am using for that class.

Rachael says

This is a survey of Jewish culture, theology and politics from the time of Antiochus IV to the end of the first century, including an overview of the Rabbinic era. Cohen does an admirable job of describing the diversity of Judaism in this era, the political turmoil brought about by revolts and destruction of the Second Temple, the nature of the sects, the changing political power of various members of Jewish society such as from the priests to the patriarch and so forth. The only reason I give it four instead of five stars is because the book seemed to lag in generalities at parts which could have been cut short to focus on more meaty substance (such as determining whether or not to use the term orthodox, or normative). Overall an excellent introduction to obviously a complex and transformative time for Jewish history.

Tsun Lu says

REVIEW AND CRITIQUE Shaye J. D. Cohen, S. From the Maccabees to the Mishnah, 2nd ed., 2006

In From the Maccabees to the Mishnah (2nd ed., 2006), Cohen a contemporary Jewish scholar teaching at

Harvard gives the most concise account of the three-hundred-and-fifty years of history of Judaism from the Maccabees to Mishnah. This work is significant to Christian biblical scholarship because Cohen in his research and presentation completely stands away from the current debate regarding early Judaism and unsurprisingly he presents a complete different picture of the history from that offered by the "New Perspective" scholars such as James Dunn and N. T. Wright.

Cohen's study was influenced by Wayne A. Weeks, the pioneer in biblical scholarship who applies sociological approach to the social history of the NT period. His results focus on the general diversity of Jewish world and religious thoughts in the Second Temple period, with mild intention of advocating for the "common Judaism" (Judaism as practiced by the common people) and the religiosity as shown in the liturgical life.

Different from N.T. Wright's summary of the themes of early Judaism (Monotheism, Election, Eschatology), Cohen concludes, "'...the three themes of the Shema are the Kingship of God, Reward and Punishment, and Redemption...by virtue of its central place in the liturgy, serves well as a convenient outline of Jewish beliefs (76)."

Apparently unaware of, or uninterested in, Wright's thesis of Israel's corporate notion of Israel's national identity, Cohen remarks,

"It is perhaps not surprising that outsiders saw the Jews as a single people or ethnic group. Outsiders seldom see the disagreements, tensions, and rivalries that are so apparent to insiders. It is perhaps more surprising that the Jews of antiquity, in some contexts at least, saw themselves as citizens of one nation and one religion, unaware of, or oblivious to, the fact that they were separated from each other by their diverse languages, practices, ideologies, and political loyalties. But in fact, for all of their disagreements and rivalries, ancient Jews were united by a common set of practices and beliefs that characterized virtually all segments of Jewry...This common Judaism was the unity within the diversity (14)."

Also different from Wright, Cohen notes the "innovative" development of reward and punishment to the individuals as opposed to the corporate reward and punishment in the Second Temple period,

"Ezekiel claims that every person receives his or her just deserts from God. The author of Chronicles, a work of the Persian or early Hellenistic period, implemented this theory in his revision of the book of Kings. The Deuteronomic historian was satisfied with the doctrine of corporate responsibility, but the Chronicler was not (85)."

And finally, Cohen's reconstruction of the eschatology in the Second Temple Judaism is much closer to the traditional Christian understanding and more distant to Wright's version:

"Preexilic Israel and Second Temple Judaism also differed in their understanding of theodicy, God's administration of justice...Preexilic Israel believed that God administered justice in this world. The righteous and the wicked were not always the direct recipients of God's attentions, because God could reward or punish their offspring in their stead (emphasis on the collective). Second Temple Judaism insisted that God punishes and rewards only those who deserve it, and that the conduct of one's ancestors is irrelevant (emphasis on the individual). Since God does not always seem to set matters right in this world, he must do so in the next. Second Temple Judaism therefore elaborated complex schemes included the resurrection of the dead. Just as God will reestablish justice for the individual, he shall do so for the nation by destroying the yoke of the nations and restoring the sovereignty of the people of Israel. Jerusalem and the temple will be restored to their former glory and God's anointed one (messiah) shall reign securely, All of these eschatological doctrines....are innovations of Second Temple Judaism (10)."

Critiques:

It is very unfortunate that Cohen's work has been rarely heeded by biblical scholars. This is such a vivid example of how a Jewish historian is not able to reproduce Wright's reconstruction of historical early Judaism.

Cohen's own reconstruction, however, is not without flaws. First of all, he fails to engage detailed exegeses of the Jewish literatures throughout the whole book. And he is not so much self-aware of his own hermeneutic assumptions as the contemporary scholars. He tends to read more Mishnah tradition into the early traditions. And his focus on the "common Judaism" in the liturgical form has misdirected him from probing the depth of Jewish thoughts as contained in the literatures.

His general lack of the skills in "narrative analysis" and "worldview analysis" in historical study makes him appear more superficial than Wright. However it also exposes the possibility that Wright's approach is not so much purely "historian" but also a mixture of ideological re-imagination in the enterprise of historical study. Cohen remains to be a Jewish Rabbis and historian rather than an interpreter and philosopher.

Dan Curnutt says

For a history book written by a Professor from Harvard I found that this text was completely readable and easy to follow. It is scholarly but written for even the layman to understand.

This is the third edition of the book, for some great reviews go back to the first and second editions and you will find very lengthly well written reviews. For a third edition you expect to find some new material. Chapter 8 is the best section of "new" material as it takes you from the Jewish culture and history to that of Christianity. The first two editions lacked this section, but that was not an oversight it was intentional as the book is about the culture and history of Israel before the advent of Christianity.

For most Christians we have not read the history of the Jews that is found most commonly in the Apocrypha. This was included in Catholic Bibles but is absent in Protestant Bibles. But more than the history of the Apocrypha Professor Cohen takes us through the history of Israel from the time of minor prophets through the 400 years of silence leading up to the New Testament. It is a great textbook for us on learning much more about the nation of Israel and what happened to them and brought them to the place that they are today.

I found that material highly interesting and found myself asking, why hadn't I heard about the first two editions? I'm grateful that I heard about this third edition and grateful to the publisher for making a review copy available to me.

For students of the Bible and Christianity I think that this textbook is a must read as it will bring together many aspects of the nation of Israel that answer underlying questions that you might have as to why they rejected the Messiah, why they act the way they do and the frustration they must have felt with the subjugation they underwent by being over run and ruled by foreign kings and dictators forever.

I won't go into the technical side of the book, I think that this is done by reviews of volume two. The first two reviews by David Blair and Bruce Marold are excellent and well worth your read.

Consider this as your next technical read or a gift to the one you know who loves history, theology, or anything Jewish

Ron says

Some would say that they can't appreciate a book that they've been assigned to read. This was the first book that was assigned to me in a college course on the New Testament. I must say, though, that I've thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. The author, Shaye J.D. Cohen, describes in a readable way the history of second temple Judaism, and its impact on the development of early Christianity. The book is written from a historical perspective only, and the author takes pains not to insert comments that might indicate a sectarian or religious bias. Every serious student of the development of early Christianity should know something about second temple Judaism, and this book provides a good foundation upon which further studies can be pursued.

John Kight says

Shaye J. D. Cohen is the Littauer Professor of Hebrew Literature and Philosophy in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations of Harvard University—one of the oldest and most distinguished professorships of Jewish studies in the United States. Prior to Harvard, Cohen was the Samuel Ungerleider Professor of Judaic Studies and Professor of Religious Studies at Brown University, as well as the Dean of the Graduate School and Shenkman Professor of Jewish History at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Cohen has written numerous scholarly articles and authored several important books, which include, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, and Uncertainties* (University of California Press, 2001), *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised?: Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (University of California Press, 2005), and perhaps his most widely known book, now in its third edition and the subject of the present review, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Westminster John Knox, 2014).

From the Maccabees to the Mishnah is a calculated exploration into the history and development of Judaism between roughly 164 BCE to 300 CE. It is here that Cohen carefully guides readers through a variegated landscape of transition, both before and after the rise of Christianity. However, Cohen does far more here than provide a mere historical survey of Judaism and its development into the rabbinic period. Rather, Cohen seeks to usher readers into the very heart of the social, cultural, and religious environment of Judaism as it was shaped and molded by the world and events around it.

Those familiar with the two previous editions of *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* should welcome the revisions made to this third edition. Cohen has revised and updated the content for clarity and usability, and updated/added footnotes as needed. However, the most significant contribution to this third edition is the addition of a new chapter, titled, "Ways That Parted: Jews, Christians, and Jewish Christians (ca. 100-150)." This new chapter is a shortened and revised version of an essay Cohen wrote, "In Between: Jewish-Christians and the Curse of the Heretics," in *Partings: How Judaism and Christianity Became Two*, edited by Hershel Shanks.

The strength of this volume are many, but the weaknesses are equally as numerous. For many readers, the approach to the topic brought by Cohen will be a breath of fresh air. He is lucid and judicious in his treatment of the period and its development, and the scope of material covered therein is well-organized, easily understandable, and presented with clarity. However, Cohen writes from a predominantly liberal Jewish perspective and his presuppositions can be seen on almost every page—especially the material on canonization and its implications. Still, apart from the content proper, the "Suggestions for Further Reading" section that has been included at the end of the book is alone worth the price of admission.

For some readers, Cohen's approach and perspective will be value-added to their library even if they disagree with many of his conclusions. Others will find it to be rubbish. I am of the former persuasion. I found much of Cohen's material extremely helpful and I appreciate the enduring nature of his work. But, like any book, this was only realized after understanding and evaluating the presuppositions therein. If you are looking for an informative guide into the social, cultural, and religious development of the Judaism underlying the New Testament, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* by Shaye J. D. Cohen is indispensable. Read it closely and carefully, and interact with it rigorously. It comes highly recommended!

I received a review copy of this book in exchange for an honest review. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Steve Gross says

Interesting survey of second temple Judaism with many fascinating speculations. Cohen does tend to use "I" too much.

Mark says

The book describes itself as an introduction to the 350 or so years of Jewish history between the Maccabees to the Mishnah. For most people what is found in this book should be more than sufficient to inform and revise many commonly held assumptions about Jews, Judaism: their history, culture, society, religion, and politics during that time.

Chapter Eight is new in this Third Edition. This chapter discusses the "separation" that took place between Judaism and Christianity. What the chapter reveals is that this was a lengthy process and not nearly as clear-cut as it has been so frequently presented. In fact in some cases it is difficult to see that a "separation" actually took place since because there was no common communion between the two groups. In other cases a separation occurred, not because there was an explicit forcing out of Christianity from Judaism, but because it simply became difficult to maintain social connections when social practices became so different. These and other possibilities are discussed.

The end of the book includes extensive bibliography and suggestions for further study for those who desire to go beyond this "introduction."

Writing as a life-long Christian and as a pastor, this book opened my eyes to ways of thinking about the period of the gospels and the apostles in new ways. The relationships between Jesus, the apostles, the various Jewish sects, the controversies, the intent of the New Testament writings, etc. are far more complicated than is typically heard in Christian settings. The way Christians interpret and discuss Jews and Judaism of the period needs to become more nuanced and charitable. For example, the picture of Pharisees in the gospels are more stereotypes and caricatures than what history reveals as reality of the period. What seems to have happened is that later Christian attitudes crept into the preserved writings and their interpretations, which have been handed down as "true traditions" ever since. This book provides a needed corrective to the "jaundiced" tradition that Christians have received over the centuries and millennia.

I recommend this book to all pastors. As pastors we need to stop perpetuating inaccurate histories and traditions when accurate ones are available. Yes, doing so will challenge us in how to incorporate and present new understandings, and it will challenge our congregations.

(Based on ARC via NetGalley.)

[Name Redacted] says

A classic, not without it's flaws, but worth reading for anyone who wants a basic understanding of the Second Temple period. Sometimes his fealty to rabbinic Judaism bleeds through, sometimes you wouldn't know he was religious! More good than bad, but the parts where his scholarly facade drops or he makes groundless conjectures are hair-tearing-out frustrating. Previously read in 2004, and turned to again and again as a resource for studying the Second Temple period. Especially valuable for establishing the anthropomorphic view of the Israelite/Jewish/Christian God as the ORIGINAL view for all three periods.

Ethan says

A comprehensive analysis of Judaism and its experiences in the Second Temple Period and the transition into the Rabbinic period.

The author begins by establishing definitions and a basic description of the history of the times. He explores the relationship between Jews and Gentiles and their cultural connections and separations, the range of Gentile reactions to Jews, the practices and beliefs of the "religion" of the Jews throughout the period; the community of the people and its institutions; the existence and nature of the sects (or lack thereof); text and canon; development of rabbinic Judaism; he concludes with the separation of Judaism and Christianity.

Throughout the author is in conversation with fellow scholars. I appreciated his insistence that Second Temple Judaism (and Gentile paganism, for that matter) were not creedal, based on belief, as Christianity and Islam would be, but orthopraxic in nature. He challenges assessments of the reasons for the separation of Judaism and Christianity and is far more sanguine about the "dominance" of the rabbis in Judaism during the Roman and early Byzantine periods.

It seems at times that the author is a little too overbearing with the reassessments (dare I say deconstruction?) of some previously commonly held views, especially about the relationship between "Judaism" and "Christianity"; it assuredly was a bit more fluid than a stark dichotomy but in the reassessment Jewish people conveniently seem much less specifically anti-Christian. Perhaps meager evidence is evidence in and of itself; perhaps it is only an indication of how much has been lost.

Nevertheless, overall, an important work for understanding the developments within Judaism through the Second Temple Period into the Rabbinic era.

**--galley received as part of early review program

Briana Grenert says

Last book of 2017!! :)
Well written, well organized.
