

The Influence of the Synagogue During the Intertestamental Period and in Preparation for the Birth of the Church

Introduction

God's intent--His mission has never wavered since the dawn of creation. It is God's "Intention to insure that all mankind understand who he is and experience a personal relationship him" (Dollar 1995:lecture). God's method and means have changed, however. Starting with the Abrahamic Covenant, God was "particularistic in that he is working through one specific people. His work is universalistic in that it embraces all peoples" (Hedlund 1985:33). The method was centripetal—all people invited to come to God, through the means of becoming Jews.

A shift in God's method is obvious from the events in Acts and on through the history of the Church. "Sending is the very essence of mission" (Hedlund 1985:191). "The church is sent into the world in the power of the Spirit in order to bring the nations to faith and obedience" (Hedlund 1985:201). The reality of a centrifugal method cannot be denied, but when and how the paradigm shift occurred is a subject of debate.

Roger Hedlund cites support for his premise that it was during the intertestamental period that the change became evident. He states, "The Judaism of the Diaspora was in fact highly missionary. . . .the success of the Jewish spiritual propaganda was due to intentional effort" (Hedlund 1985:142). One of the "tools for mission" offered by Hedlund that indicates this dramatic shift in method was the *synagogue movement* (Hedlund 1985:144).

This paper will confine its focus to considering the synagogue during the intertestamental period. There are many other fascinating developments during this time that can and should be considered when carrying out His mission, such as literature distribution (especially apocalyptic), increase in number of Gentile converts, and the translation of Scriptures into the common language. These issues are not, however, in the scope of this article.

Origin of the Synagogue

It is generally agreed that the origin of the synagogue is “shrouded in obscurity” (Bruce 1963:118) and that “documentable certainty (concerning the origin) is not available” (Sigal 1988:96).

Rabbinic tradition claims that the synagogue dates back to a Mosaic origin, but nearly all scholars agree that there is no proof for this assertion (Gutman 1981:1). Literary documentation “begins with the Book of Enoch, about 150 B.C., and continues through Philo and Josephus” (Stewart 1971:38), but this doesn’t indicate the time of origin. The origin date for the synagogue most commonly accepted today is during the time of the Babylonian exile, after 597 B.C. (Pheiffer 1959:58, Bruce 1963:118, Jung 1992:131, Gutman 1981:1, Sigal 1988:31, Oesterley 1932:167, Stewart 1971:28). The seeds of the movement during this time are described as,

. . . the need for some form of worship during the Exile to take the place of the Temple services compels us to assume that the germs of what later became the liturgy of the synagogue was already in existence at that time; and if this be so, the returned exiles would not have abandoned that to which they had become accustomed; and this, in spite of the Temple services, was a form of worship which was new to them (Oesterley 1932:167).

Pre-Exilic Judaism strongly looked “to the Jerusalem Temple as the focal point of its spiritual life” (Pheiffer 1959:58). But, following the exile to Babylon and, ultimately, the destruction of the Temple, “. . . sacrifices ceased. Prayer, and the study of the sacred Scriptures, however, knew no geographical limitations” (Pheiffer 1959:59), and so the concept of the synagogue took root. Another assumption for the synagogue, besides the destruction of the Temple, is that it was meant to be merely an “extension” of Temple worship. However, instead of extension, the synagogue ultimately served as a replacement for the Temple rites. Roy Stewart writes,

Countrymen absent from the great Jerusalem congregation piously joined themselves to its local extension, the synagogue, much as modern invalids listen to the radio

service-- when the sacrificial Temple worship, rigidly circumscribed, mechanical, and defiled by Canaanite idolatry, became unavailable—the new synagogue, fluid, adaptable and virile, quickly passed by intrinsic superiority from the status of a substitute to that of a successor, for neither subsequent rebuilding of the Temple ever really ousted it. (Stewart 1971:39).

It is commonly agreed that the synagogue was “closely connected with the reading and exposition of the sacred law” (Bruce 1963:118). The one person who is ascribed to have had the greatest influence on the development and liturgy of the synagogue is Ezra. According to one author, Ezra “marks a watershed in the history of Judaism” (Sigal 1988:32). Many scholars offer the Ezra 7 and Nehemiah 8 liturgy as one that was legitimized by Ezra and then taught in Palestine following the Return and the building of the Temple in Jerusalem (Sigal 1988:33). Oesterley confirms that Ezra, “was the first to bring the fullness of the Judaism of Babylonian Jewry to Palestine” (Oesterley 1932:137).

The earliest prototypes of the synagogue may have been the meetings in the homes of the prophets, such as Elisha in 2 Kings 4:23. Sigal explains, “apparently, the prophets offered their homes as meeting houses, and out of this alternative spiritual experience arose what was later termed the *synagogue* in Greek” (Sigal 1998:35). But it was during the Exile that these meetings grew in stature and number. Sigal offers the rationale for such meetings,

Many people might have regarded the priestly-sacrificial cult as appearing too impersonal; others might have firmly objected to the frequent syncretism evident in the established Jerusalem cult. Such disparate “dissenters” would seek out a holy man to garner Torah from him, and perhaps to join together in prayer. Thus, it became customary to visit the home an *ish elohim*, a man of God, on Sabbaths and new Moons (2 Kings 4:23). In time this meeting emerged as an alternative worship system. The effort of Hezekiah and Josiah to abolish local shrines and high places and compel all public worship to be conducted in Jerusalem, making local prayer and study gatherings

more important, escalated the expansion of such an alternative worship system. (Sigal 1988:96).

In discussing the origin of the synagogue, Jewish Rabbinical tradition often called attention to the so-called “Great Synagogue”. This entity supposedly began “with the return from Babylon, and last(ed) 170 years” (Stewart 19781:38). However, “This inactive assembly reputedly of 120 persons, remains an hypothesis rather than a proved fact” (Steward 1971:38).

The Meaning of the Synagogue

Mention the term *synagogue* today and a common image appears in the minds of nearly everyone. It is a *structure*, built and set apart for sacred use by the people of the Jewish faith. Because this is true today, and has been true for many centuries, can it be assumed that this was reality for the synagogue during the intertestamental period, and during the First Century A.D.? Did Christ and the Apostles enter such a *building* in order to teach and challenge the religious leaders of that time? While this issue isn’t crucial in determining the effect the synagogue had on God’s theology of mission, it does have implications for the church and needs to be rightly understood.

First, we will consider the derivation of the term *synagogue*, as it was originally used and then look at the archaeological data related to the synagogue prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.

Unfortunately, the exact derivation of the word *synagogue* is also lost in antiquity. But, it is known that “both the Greek word (*synagoga*) and its Hebrew parallel, *bet hakeneset*, mean simply “a place of assembly” (Sigal 1988:96). Other terms used and translated for synagogue are (Sigal 1988:96,260):

edah or *qahal* (Hebrew) meaning “congregation, assembly”

proseuche (Greek) meaning “place of worship”

bet tephillah (Hebrew) meaning “house of prayer”

ekklesia (Greek) meaning “assembly”

moed (Hebrew) meaning “place where the *edah* gathered”

bet kenesset (Hebrew, later usage) meaning “a house or assembly”.

Consistently, the focus of the words translated *synagogue* is on the **people** and **purpose** of the gathering, rather than on the **place**.

“Classical writers used (these terms) for a bringing together or collecting, whether of persons or things, and this is its basic meaning” (Stewart 1971:37). Stewart continues, “Of the 225 Septuagintal usages, 202 explicitly described assemblies of persons. . . the Septuagintal term means almost with uniformity a group of gathered persons—not as yet a building” (Stewart 1971:38). As late as the First Century B.C. “In Greek literature of the period, *synagogai* designations were for the group gatherings, rather than for the places where they assemble” (Kee 1990:6).

Kee emphasizes that *proseuche*, which is frequently used for synagogue in Ptolemaic Egypt by Philo is merely the “standard term for the meeting house” and refers to “the gathered community rather than to the place of meeting” (Kee 1990:5).

On nuance of meaning gives an interesting perspective. The early terms used for *synagogue* often indicated a lack of permanence, or a “temporary assembly of people” (Stewart 1971:37). Sigal underscores this by writing, “The synagogue was a portable sanctuary. . . The destruction of the buildings or the scrolls could no longer profoundly affect the new non-territorial, synagogue-centered, study-oriented Judaism. . . (when only) ten Jews constituted a congregation” (Sigal 1988:98). Ancient rabbis called this institution a “small sanctuary” or the “sanctuary for a while” (Sigal 1988:260). The focus was NOT on a sacred place or building—it was on the **assembly** of God’s chosen people.

If a synagogue did not indicate a particular building, where did this congregation of people meet? Contrary to common understanding, archaeological evidence does not support that during the intertestamental period there were “sacred spaces” built as synagogues, in the manner we know from after 70 A.D. We shall see that it is most likely that the synagogue (the assembly of the people) met in either homes or public meeting rooms.

“While we know a great deal about the synagogue buildings of the Talmudic period (after 200 C.E.), there is a marked lack of archeological evidence for synagogue structures in the more formative stages of classical or synagogue Judaism prior to 200 C.E.” (Meyers 1980:97). Meyers quotes John Wilkinson, “there were 365 synagogues in the

Jerusalem of the late Second Temple, but these surely are nothing more than ‘meeting places’” (Meyers 1980:97). While some scholars have assumed that such sacred buildings must have existed, the most recent analysis of archaeological data does not definitively support this. Of course—it is not known what may be uncovered in the future.

Howard Clark Kee is one writer who offers a strong case for a “non-building” definition of synagogue. He has written several articles refuting contrary conclusions, using both literary/inscriptional evidence and current archaeological evidence. His conclusion is that “it was only after 70 C.E. that the synagogue began to emerge as a distinctive institution with its own characteristic structure: the established religious edifices within Judea during the Second Commonwealth and surely not within the temple precincts.” (Kee 1900:7). It is not possible or pertinent to give the fullness of Kee’s argument in this study, but it is well documented. He quotes Meyers and Strange, writing, “It is highly likely that in the period when the temple stood, a synagogue could have been nothing more than a private home or part of a larger structure set apart for worship.” Kee continues, “It would be more accurate to say, ‘Synagogues met in homes and public spaces.’ This judgment is confirmed, not only on the basis of evidence from Palestinian sites, but from the wider Mediterranean area as well” (Kee 1990:8-9). As further proof, Kee states, “. . . there is simply no evidence to speak of synagogues in Palestine as architecturally distinguishable edifices prior to 200 C.E. Evidence of meeting place: ‘Yes’, both in private homes and in public buildings. Evidence of distinctive architectural features of a place of worship or for study of Torah: ‘No’” (Kee 1900:9).

Joseph Gutmann, Eric Meyers, and James F. Strange affirm Kee’s findings. “Gutman takes the position, ‘accepted by most scholars’ that synagogues as distinct buildings first appear in the third century C.E.. . . No building dating from the first century has been positively identified as a synagogue” (Kee 1990:9). When confronted with such archaeological findings early “synagogue” on Masada and the Herodium, Kee (and others) have concluded that these “houses of prayer” were merely meeting places...” indistinguishable from private houses, or existed simply as space set it aside public building” (Kee 1900:9). Gutman gives confirmation of this interpretation as he remarks, “There is no proof of piety or of a definite place of worship other than excavators’ wishful thinking...(synagogues mention by

Josephus and in the New Testament) are probably indistinguishable from domestic architecture” (Gutman 1975:xi).

As questions are bound to arise concerning the frequent mentioning the synagogue in the Gospels, brief consideration will be given to this time period. It is evident from the Gospels that the synagogue had “at least begun to form social-political structures and law-interpreting procedures” (Kee 1900:14). But it does not follow that these had to be *buildings*, although we usually read the verses with that in mind. (See Kee 1990) “The clearest evidence from the gospel tradition of the development of formal practices in connection with worship in synagogues comes—not surprisingly—from Luke—Acts” (Kee 1990:17–18). But, again, it is not necessary to equate the synagogue with a place—but rather it was an assembly or gathering of people.

With one exception, in those passages which synagogue is mentioned (in Acts), the term could be understood as referring simply to the meeting rather than to the meeting place...The clearest indication the synagogue is understood in Acts as an architectural structure is in Acts 18:7, where Titus Justus is said to live next door to the house where a synagogue met...Two other details of the evidence in Acts are significant: (1) when Paul withdrew from the synagogue in Ephesus, following a dispute with the Jews there, he set up operations in another kind of meeting hall, a *schole* (19:8), does suggesting the multiple purpose nature of the places we Jews gathered...(2) Acts reports in 24:12 that Paul abstained from disputing with the Jews in synagogues in Jerusalem, but that he worshiped in the temple (Kee 1900:18-19).

The only other clear indication at the synagogue might be considered as a building is found in Luke 7:5, “the centurion loves our *ethnos* and built for us a synagogue”. Kee answers,

The very fact that a “synagogue’ here alone in the Gospel tradition points unequivocally to a building, rather than to a gathering, serves to confirm the impression that Luke-Acts is a document

from a Hellenistic centre, where (as the archaeological evidence we have examined suggests) Jews in the Diaspora had begun to modify houses or public structures in order to serve more effectively the needs of the Jewish community (Kee 1990:17).

Definition of the Synagogue

The beauty and wonder of the synagogue from the Exile to the destruction of the Temple and 70 A.D. was that it *wasn't* a building or an inanimate object. One excellent definition given for this “new” phenomenon in Judaism is a “community center where the law could be read and expanded, and, where service of worship could be carried out in non-sacrificial forms, yet following as closely as possible the order of the sacrificial worship in the Jerusalem Temple” (Bruce 1963:118). The synagogue was a “living” assembly of people seeking to know their God in a more personal way. This has enormous implications in God’s preparation for the still-to-come church.

Küng succinctly describes the synagogue as “the local house of assembly, prayer and community replacing the Jerusalem Temple (Küng 1992:130). Gutman defines the synagogue as a Pharisaic institution which, “became an important meeting place with true prayers and ceremonial practices the individual Jew could affirm his loyalty to the twofold Pharisaic law, with the guarantee that it’s observance would bring about salvation of his soul and resurrection” (Gutman 1981:4).

The Description of Synagogue

The development of the function and form of the synagogue occurred over several centuries. The early liturgy, as witnessed to and Ezra 7 and Nehemiah 8, included much of what is still used today. As it seems to have “enacted the role of the earliest proto-rabbi... he is an academic authority and a spiritual leader a congregation in an assembly at worship” (Sigal 1988:33). Nehemiah records the following elements to constitute the beginning form the synagogue worship, as brought by Ezra to the Jews in Palestine:

- 1) The reading of the Law (core of liturgy)
- 2) The congregation called on Ezra, as their representative to read the Law

- 3) The reader of the Law would stand on the platform
(*bema*)
- 4) The people stood during the reading
- 5) The gathering began by “blessing Yahweh”
- 6) The people responded with “Amen”
- 7) Following the reading, they would be a time of interpreting the Law

Eventually, the synagogue also became the focal point of the entire Jewish community...” providing facilities the instruction of children, the dispensing of justice, and the lodging of visitors, and of course, serving as a house for worship” (Schiffman 1991:87). Philo wrote, “the synagogue appears to have been a place for reading scriptures, expounding passages, discussing and debating interpretation, catechizing, singing hymns to God, and reflecting on Israel’s past” (McKnight 1991:62). Private and corporate prayer became a regular and important part of the lives of the Jews as they attended the synagogue. By the Roman period, Philo “speaks of the large number synagogues and calls them ‘houses of prayer’” (Oesterly 1934:411).

The essence of the synagogue was a *lay assembly*. “Ten Jews constituted a congregation. No clergy and no clerical trappings for mandatory in the conduct of the liturgy” (Sigal 1988:98). The meeting place was either a private home or meeting hall “belong(ing) to the corporate community” (Sigal 1988:67). Unlike the Temple, “any layperson who was invited or volunteered was eligible to lead prayers or read Scripture before the congregation” (Sigal 1988:97). While women were not counted in the needed quorum of ten Jews, nor could they lead the liturgy, they were “permitted to be included along those called to the Torah during the worship service” (Sigal 1988:281). They did participate with the men. Even children were allowed to be present and involved in the worship service (Graetz 1891:381).

Of crucial interest to this study is the inclusion of non-Jews in the synagogues during this time. “The synagogue community was almost certainly composed of several categories people, ‘full-blooded Jews, proselytes (duly circumcised), and God-fearers (the uncircumcised but devout worshipers) were all to be found in the synagogue” (Hedlund 1985:146). G. F. Moore is quoted by McKnight, stating, “Their (Jews)

religious influence was exerted chiefly through the synagogues, which they set up for themselves, but which were open to all whom curiosity drew to their services” (McKnight 1991:62). The synagogue, this organized assembly of people learning and discussing God’s law, was “user friendly” and available to all the people of the known world, wherever at least ten Jewish men were found.

By the first century BC, we see that the synagogue “often functioned as a place for public address and for the public propagation of variety of ideas within Judaism... Gentiles attended the synagogue services, and the odd Jewish visitor seems to have been afforded an opportunity to give a ‘word of consolation’—if that visitors felt constrained to do so [Acts 13:15]” (McKnight 1991:114).

Now that we’ve seen an overview what the synagogue was, it is helpful to look at what the purpose and/or results were during the 400 years between the Testaments of written revelation. I encourage the reader to be cognizant of the implications for the church, following Pentecost.

Accomplishments of the Synagogue

The synagogue had a tremendous impact on the development and preservation of Judaism. Its impact cannot be overstated. In God’s plan, the line of David and the tribe of Judah were not destroyed, as were the tribes of the Northern Kingdom during their exile. God’s promised Messiah, the Christ, and his fulfillment of the covenant to Abraham depended upon at least the tribe of Judah being preserved. Also, God’s plan that his mission be accomplished at this time through his chosen (particular) people, the descendants of Abraham, demanded the Judaism continue and even flourish. The synagogue was a key institution that fulfilled all of this following the exile of the remaining Southern Kingdom in 586 BC.

It was not merely the tenacity of the Jewish exiles that accomplished these goals. The religion of the Jews—that which they had so often abandoned and perverted—became the driving force that forged them into a “survivor” the nation. “Twice it saved Judaism, in circumstances historically parallel, when the temples of Solomon and of Herod were respectively destroyed” (Stewart 1971:40). Jewish writer Salo Wittmayer Baron recalls this time of Jewish history:

On the whole, the Jewish people maybe said to have very well stood the test of Exile, the most momentous and critical in its entire history. It's prophetic religion had itself become a tremendous social force and, coupled with the living ethnic organism, not only influenced Jewish society in turn, but in fact saved it from threatened extinction... Their decision, particularly, not to build the temple on foreign soil, forced them to establish a new, revolutionary institution: a house of worship dedicated to prayer without sacrificial offering...this innovation was introduced by persons known religious piety and rigid adherents to ritualistic practice, and because its sprang...from highest appreciation, indeed idealization of sacrificial worship, it seems to have been accepted without too much resistance by generations which did not realize the synagogues revolutionary implications (Baron 1951:133-4).

The synagogue became the focal point of Jewish life during the Exile and continued is the people return to the land. For instance, "Around the synagogue began to be grouped other communal institutions which, individually resembling similar establishments among the other more or less temporary, 'foreign' groupings, in their totality formed the nuclei for the new the Diaspora community, equally unprecedented in both quality and endurance" (Baron 1951:134). Baron asserts that what emerged was, "the more definitive formulation of biblical Judaism." Much Judaism as we know it today find roots in the synagogue movement. "The synagogue becomes the vehicle whereby the religion and community of the Jewish people are transported to other parts of Palestine and to the Diaspora" (Meyers 19080:97).

It was during the Exile and Post-Exile years that this strict adherence to the *Sabbath* what's renewed in Judaism. "... whether primarily social or religious, whether rooted in national for cosmic history, the (Sabbath) day became the paramount national institution..." (Baron 1951:144). The Sabbath's importance was great as Isaiah wrote that it had to be first adopted by the Gentile nations, before God's house "shall be called the house prayer for all peoples" (Isa. 56:6-7). The synagogue provided the focal point of the Sabbath resurgence

Renewal of the Sabbath observance only served to further define the Jewish people from the nations around them. During the post-Exilic years,

The religion of Judea tended to become more and more religion of law, and with this was combined a policy of religious and racial exclusiveness. It is common form to deplore this tendency—so plainly contrary... to the program of Israel's mission 'to the nations'—but it maybe asked if it was not necessary for the time being...When the supreme crisis for Israel's faith arrived in the second century BC it is difficult to see how it could have survived apart from the strength of that spirit of exclusive devotion to the divine law which stems Ezra's reform (Bruce 1963:118).

The pull to merely be absorbed into the Hellenistic culture during the intertestamental period was great. How did Judaism survive? Gregg asserts that it was accomplished into ways: "1st, by means of the synagogue; and 2nd, by means of the Holy Scriptures.... In their synagogues in every city of every land, these Foreign-Jews came together to confer, to argue, and to teach their faith to the children" (Gregg 1907:30-31).

There is no doubt that this commitment to the Torah was a preserving factor in the lives of the Jews, but it went even deeper than that. "This zeal which the Jews showed for the Torah throughout the whole Hellenistic period was, however, not simply zeal for the Book, but rather for the Covenant to which the Book testified" (Russell 1960:47-48). The Jews became the "people of the Law". This distinguished them from all other nations in a way differently during this time period than any other in their history. The place the Torah held, as it was read and taught in the synagogue, is summed up in these words of Dr. H. Wheeler Robinson,

The Law was the charter of Judaism, the real source of its strength through the many centuries...the Law showed its power by the creation of a new Judaism, able to endure without land, city or temple. To the reading of the Law, supplemented by that of the prophets, in the scattered

synagogues of the Dispersion, the knowledge of one holy God and of his covenant with Israel was kept fresh in the hearts of all (Russell 1965:48).

Judaism was defined and maintained in the face of almost overwhelming pull to blend into the culture around them as the synagogue became the focal point Jewish life. It spawned the whole rabbinical movement and, eventually, the various sects of Jewish life. It was during this time at the understanding but it wasn't enough to merely *be* a Jew by birth that enabled them to enjoy God's favor, but that *obedience* is also required. Küng asserts that they "never gave up hope of the messianic Kingdom, they attached this messianic hope to the strict obedience to the law (Küng 1992:132). Such obedience included:

The rabbi as a model and authority, Torah is the principle and organizing symbol, study of the Torah as the capital religious deed, the life of religious discipline as the prime expression of what it means to be Israel--the Jewish people....in other words everything that was to make Judaism and distinctive for almost twenty centuries (Küng 1992:132).

This obedience was seeded in the formation and development in the synagogue as a movement in Jewish life. To further underscore the importance of the synagogue, Schiffman states, "throughout the Diaspora the synagogue became the major institution for the preservation of the Jewish tradition, a role it would soon become to occupy even in the land of Israel with the destruction of the Temple" (Schiffman 1991:87).

In addition to setting Judaism apart from the other nations, the synagogue aided the Jews and their ability to live and adapt to the cultures around them. The synagogue played both roles, "Here the Jews gathered to worship and to hear homilies which taught them how to synthesize Judaism with the prevailing culture" (Schiffman 1991:89). In Alexandria, it was even more evident as "Judaic acculturation in which a vast community preserves its ancestral religious tradition in the vernacular of a society which does not share that tradition, and under the impact alien cultural influences" (Sigal 1988:48). So, Judaism both

enhanced its particular definition, and yet learned to relate to others through the synagogue and other related institutions during this time. L. Michael White concludes, "... the development of the synagogue as the central institution of Jewish worship life... derived a sense of communal identity and observance of Torah while living and working in the social structures of the Gentile world" (White 1987:154).

It is clear that the synagogue had a great impact in the development, preservation and dissemination of Judaism. But what influence did it have on the paradigm shift from centripetalism to centrifugalism of God's theology mission? What implications does it have for the development of the church and the fulfillment of the Great Commission? An assessment of this is now presented.

The Influence of the Synagogue on Theology of Mission

The Synagogue was only one of the revolutionary changes in Judaism during the intertestamental period, As indicated in the early stages of the study. The inclusion of a "new" class of people associated with Judaism, the "God-Fearers" is significant. Vast numbers of Gentiles began attending the synagogue (assembly), learning the Torah and about the God of the Jews. Glasser, as quoted by Hedlund, gives some explanation for this phenomenon, "Diaspora Judaism had an appeal to certain segments of the Gentile world. It represented oral strength, the intellectual vigor of a consistent monotheism, the attractiveness of disciplined living, and the martyr tradition of a persecuted minority" (Hedlund 1985:144).

Other areas of change that may have attracted Gentiles were in the Jewish literature of the day. Again, Glasser is quoted, "The universal of its Wisdom literature provided an added attraction in identifying Wisdom with Yahweh and thereby bridging the gulf between Israel's history and the best clues of common grace within religious and philosophical thoughts of the Graeco-Roman world" (Hedlund 1985:145). Apocalyptic literature was also a strong force to awaken both Jews and Gentiles to the sovereignty of God. The momentous event was the first translation the Old Testament Scriptures into the lingua franca of the day, Greek. According to Hedlund, this translation, the Septuagint, But only served for instruction of the Jews whose language had become Greek, It was an interpretation that "tended to favor the Gentiles" (Hedlund 1985:145).

All of these recruits events during the intertestamental period. The conclusion drawn by some Christian writers is that they will add up to evidence of a paradigm shift in God's method of doing mission. "The Judaism of the Diaspora was in fact highly missionary... the success of the Jewish spiritual propaganda was due to *intentional* effort" claims Hedlund (Hedlund 1985:142). He continues,

Therefore in the Judaism of the Diaspora there grew up the conviction that among the nations God had appointed one nation as priest to bless the others, and hence they *set out* to create communities of God-fearing Gentiles. The mission of the Diaspora Jews stands in startling contrast to the Old Testament centripetal notion of the nations coming up to Jerusalem [emphasis mine] (Hedlund 1985:146).

H.J. Schonfield is cited as affirming the belief that the paradigm shift occurred during the intertestamental times, using much the same argument as Hedlund (Derenberger 1992:8). While I agree tremendous changes did take place, it cannot be assumed that God's method of reaching the world had significantly changed. I believe that this change can be dated to the end of Jesus earthly ministry and the birth of the church. Many scholars agree with this understanding.

Baron writes, "... there were no professional missionaries...there is not the slightest evidence that the official Pharisaic leaders ever made an organized attempt to spread Judaism among the nations..." (Baron 1938:173). He continues to write concerning the influx of proselytes, "the religious principles concerning admission accommodated themselves to the new demands, but paradoxically, the principle of ethnic purity was maintained...Through a conscious process of assimilation, the proselyte was expected to divest himself of all former racial and ethnic characteristics and gradually to become ethnically a Jew" (Baron 1937:181). The particularism and centripetalism had not been cast off.

Even in the Old Testament "missionary" call of Jonah was primarily to call the nation of Israel back to its responsibility and privilege to be the conduit between God and mankind. It all centered around the nation of Israel.

Scot McKnight continues the refutation of Hedlund's interpretation in his book, *A Light among the Gentiles*. He readily acknowledges the changes that had occurred, including the importance of the synagogue. But he quotes several scholars to underline his belief at the synagogue was intended for the Jews—not as a missionary thrust. He writes concerning the synagogue, "This is... supported by the presence of Gentiles in Jewish synagogues through the ancient world... there is not a sharp segregation of synagogue from society; in fact the Jewish synagogue is at the heart of the society and a fully integrated form" (McKnight 1991:26-27). Note to synagogue consistently remained a *Jewish* entity—even with the provisions for "friends and aliens".

W.G. Braude quoted by McKnight, saying, "In the main Jews secured converts through uprightness of conduct, preaching in the synagogue, religious conversations with Tannaim and Amoraim (Talmudic Rabbis whose views were recorded in the Torah) and, probably, the influence of the Greek Bible" (McKnight 1991:30). The conversion was not through a missionary effort or breaking down of the demands the Jewish law. At other times, McKnight records, "There is no hint... the Jewish missionaries or zealous individuals spread the good news the salvation and called for conversion" (quoting C. Burchard: McKnight 1991:2). "If the synagogue was an evangelistic platform, there is no substantial evidence for such a view in Philo. That it was used to instruct proselytes cannot be doubted, but we must be careful not to build 'castles in the sky,' constructed on inferences from texts that cannot hold their weight" (McKnight 1991:63). Evidences for this view are too numerous to be considered in this study but it seems clear that a paradigm shift has not yet occurred.

There are also many evidences in the Gospels and the Book of Acts that a shift has not happen before the New Testament opens. One such incident is Luke's description and Acts 10 of the conversion of the Gentile "God-fearer", Cornelius. "Luke's two-volume story of Christianity it's about how this movement gradually moves from the particular (Jewish) to the universal (Gentiles). But it is only in Acts 10 that Luke shows Gentiles becoming Christians without having embrace Jewish culture" (Dollar 1993:13-14). It is clear that God had to convince Peter, through miraculous signs, that the shift from centripetalism to centrifugalism had occurred. It is again emphasized in Acts 15, during the Jerusalem Council which occurred nineteen years following the

Great Commission, that even the Jewish Christians have not accepted that a change had occurred. In this confrontation, the very “people who made the decision to confirm Biblical Universalism were the ones most heavily into old particularism and needed the new confirmed” (Dollar 1995: lecture).

So if the synagogue isn't reflective of a new method of mission, what influence did it have? Based on the research offered above, I assert that

1. Synagogue preserved and defined Judaism. In essence it made the Jews “better Jews”. Particularism was enhanced.
2. God's plan that the particularism of the Jews be used to further his universalistic mission was expressed through the easy availability of the synagogue.
3. God became the “personal God” of the Jews in a way before unknown. The people took “ownership” of their worship, study and prayer.
4. The study and the application of the Law both change the Jews as a nation, as well as the lives of individuals.
5. The synagogue also gave rise to various sects and division within Judaism, As well as contributed to the burden of the “traditions” that were added to the Torah.
6. Women, children and Gentiles were welcomed into the assemblies of the synagogue.

These results of the synagogue paved the way for the coming of Christ and Church. The foundation for the church was being laid during the intertestamental period and the synagogue was a crucial part of this. Pfeiffer claims, “The earliest Christian church adapted the synagogue type of service as the vehicle of Christian growth and evangelism. Without the development of the synagogue, neither Judaism nor Christianity could exist as we know them today” (Pfeiffer 1959:64).

The burden of adhering to the Law... with the thousands of restrictions of the Traditions as well, made it clear that no man can fulfill the demands in his own strength (Galatians 4). Jesus called the Jews to return to being the people of God, in the midst of the synagogue... the assembly of the people. The Apostles, including Paul, started in these assemblies to preach the good news of Christ death, burial and

resurrection—and the forgiveness of sins to grace in addition, the order in the place of worship for the fledgling church was based upon what the Jewish people had known for centuries—the synagogue. ”In effect, the Church is a community of faith, learning, and living, just as the synagogue serves as a house of worship, study, and assembly” (Wilson 1989:189).

It cannot be ignored that the home and community-based assemblies of the synagogue contributed greatly to the formation of the church subsequent to God’s paradigm shift to the centrifugal method of mission. This “communal self awareness” is considered vital result in the synagogue in Jewish–Christian life that continues to call to us today. “Whenever the Church has for sake in this aspect it’s Jewish roots—the so-called democracy of the synagogue—and become authoritarian or hierarchically centered, rather than lay–or people–centered, its social consciousness has been greatly blunted” (Wilson 1989:190).

At the birth of the church that met in houses, beside a river or in other public community rooms would have seemed normal and valued because of the experience of the synagogue. God had prepared a seamless flow from the “old” into the “new”. The purpose of these “assemblies” of believers was much the same as the synagogue, as described in Acts 2:42, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Conclusion

This study has been a long journey and, in essence, brings us back to the beginning. God’s mission marches on from Creation, through the nation of Israel, the incarnation of Christ, Pentecost, and the missionary zeal of the church. The synagogue is merely one evidence or tool in the hands of God to perform his mission. It is another evidence of God’s sovereign plan that four hundred years before the Incarnation and Pentecost, God was preparing for the church and the cataclysmic paradigm shift from a “gathering” method to a “sending” method. While the synagogue is firmly placed in the centripetal method of the Old Testament, while having foundational influence that continued through this shift to centrifugalism that remains in effect today.