



## 1b. Historical Background of the New Testament

*Overview of Jewish History from Old to New Testament; the Maccabees and false expectations; Jewish Groups at the Time of Jesus; Herodians and Romans*

### Jewish History from Old to New Testament

- Israel from David to the Babylonian Captivity
- Effects of Captivity
- Jews under the Persians
- Jews under the Greeks
- Brief independence under the Hasmoneans (the Maccabees)
- Under the Herods and Romans

## United Monarchy of David and Solomon

- **David**, despite faults, becomes the quintessential type of great king and “the Lord’s anointed” (*messiah* with a small “m”)
- **Davidic covenant** promised that his line would always rule and reign in Israel > promise fulfilled ultimately in **Jesus Christ**, “the Son of David”



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## Divided Kingdom

- Northern Kingdom of Israel
  - Largely apostate, fell into repeated idolatry
  - Assyrians destroy Israel in 721 B.C.
  - 10 tribes largely scattered, although Samaritans are a partial remnant
- Southern Kingdom of Judah
  - House of David remained on throne but more wicked kings then righteous
  - **Babylonian Captivity of Judah**, beginning in 586 B.C.
    - Jerusalem and temple destroyed
    - Nobility, priests, and craftsmen taken into captivity; peasants and other commoners remain in land



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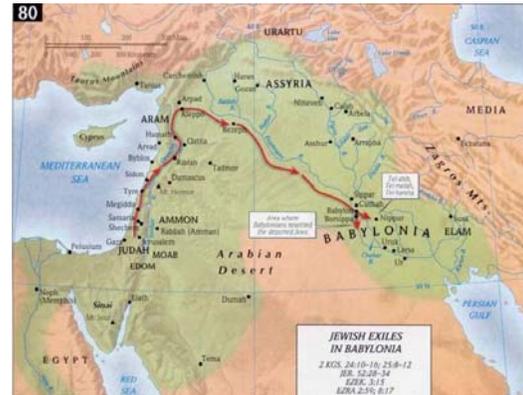
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## Effects of Captivity

See Robinson (packet, section 3) or *JCWNT*, 18

- Renewed **sense of identity**
  - Robinson, 12, “single-minded devotion to institutions and traditions” and “Gentile phobia”
  - Kept them from assimilating into surrounding peoples
- **Devotion to the Law**
  - Exiles recognized that failing to keep the Mosaic law had led to their destruction
  - Prophets like **Ezekiel** called the people to repentance and **renewed their commitment to keep the law better than their ancestors**
- Nonetheless some foreign influences
  - **Aramaic become the vernacular language**, Hebrew being reserved as a scriptural and liturgical language
  - Accepted Babylonian calendar



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## Jews and Persians

See Robinson (section 3) or *JCWNT* 17–20

- **Persia** conquers Babylon
- Persian king Cyrus frees captive and deported peoples
  - Jews adopted Aramaic as vernacular
- The Return of the *ʿam HaGôla* (people of the exile) after about 40 years
  - Zerubbabel and the Second Temple, Nehemiah and the city of Jerusalem
    - Judah, a theocratic state within the Persian Empire
  - **Ezra the scribe** and the beginning of OT canon and rabbinism
  - **Tensions with those who had remained**
    - *ʿam Ha'aretz*, or “people of the land,” in the territory of old Judah
    - Bulk of the population of the old northern kingdom of Israel, with Assyrian and neighboring admixtures, became the NT Samaritans
- Judah a theocratic state under Persia
  - High priests become civil as well as religious figures
  - **Temple and Torah**
- Beginning of the **Diaspora**
  - Many Jews remained in Babylonia and the east



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## Under the Greeks (“Between the Testaments”)

See *JCWNT* 28–33

- **Alexander the Great** conquers Persia
- Alexander’s successors establish “Hellenistic states,” Greek kingdoms through the Near East
- Political unity was lost, but a common culture, called **Hellenistic**, nonetheless developed
  - *Koinē* Greek becomes the *lingua franca* of the Near East
  - Hebrew Bible (OT) translated into *Koinē*: **the Septuagint (LXX)**



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## The Maccabees and False Expectations

See Hall, Huntsman, and Peek (packet, section 2) or *JCWNT*, 21–24

- **Antiochus IV Epiphanes**, Greek king of Syria, tries to wipe out Judaism
  - Proclaims himself to be Zeus, defiles temple, forbids circumcision and observance of the law
  - Seems like “the end of the world,” start of **apocalypticism** and focus on **eschatology** (end-time preoccupation)
- A priestly family, **the Hasmoneans**, lead the resistance
  - **Judas Maccabeus**, “the Hammer,” starts a successful revolt
  - Jerusalem recaptured and temple rededicated
- Hasmoneans become **both high priests and kings** (or “messiahs”) of an independent state
  - **Established false expectation of a political Messiah** only 150 years before Jesus
  - **Later Hasmoneans become corrupt and worldly, leading to a religious backlash**
    - Essenes separate, Pharisees push for reforms



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## Jewish Groups at the Time of Jesus

See Robinson (packet, section 3)

- **Scribes** (profession, not religious sect)
  - Educated literate minority
  - Became experts in the law, scriptures, and religion
- **Sadducees**
  - Tended to be from aristocratic and leading priestly families
  - Sometimes Hellenized and worldly
  - **Accepted the Torah (five books of Moses) only**
  - **Denied resurrection**, most angels, etc.
- **Pharisees**
  - Accepted the Prophets and the Writings as well as the Law
  - Accepted **oral tradition** (later incorporated as the Mishnah), built a "hedge about the law"
  - Accepted resurrection, angels, etc.
- **Essenes**
  - Rejected the Jerusalem temple establishment
  - Dualistic, messianic, apocalyptic
- **Zealots (Josephus' "Fourth Philosophy")**
  - **Political rather than religious nationalists**
- The **'Am Ha'aretz**
  - "people of the land," the vast majority of the Palestinian population
  - **"Unschooling in the law," out of power > Jesus appealed to them!**

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## The Advent of Rome

See Hall (packet, section 2) or *JCWNT* 33–39

- In the Macedonian and Syrian wars, Rome was drawn into the eastern Mediterranean
  - Hesitant to directly occupy and annex territory
  - Instead **Rome strove for a "balance of power" and system of alliances and client states**
- Rome and the Hasmoneans
  - **Rome had supported the Jewish struggle against the Seleucids**
- Hasmonean Decline
  - 67–63 B.C. Civil War
    - One Hasmonean prince called in the Romans, the other the Parthians
    - **Pompey's 63 B.C. siege of Jerusalem**
  - Client state of Rome
    - Hyrcanus and his minister **Antipater** (a converted Idumean) restored to power

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## Rome and the Herods

See also *JCWNT* 40–414

- **Herod's rise**
  - After a Parthian revolt, Herod, with a mercenary army and Roman support, took Jerusalem in 37 B.C.
  - **Ruled Judea as a Roman "client king"**
- Responsibility of **client kings**
  - Secure the Roman border
  - Keep order in their kingdoms
  - Provide nominal tribute and aid when requested
- **Herod the Great, r. 37-4 B.C.**
  - **"Rebuilt" the Second Temple**
  - Mixed kingdom of Jews, Idumeans, Samaritans, and Greeks prosperous
  - Personal life complicated, reputation for viciousness
- Division upon Herod's death: tetrarchs
  - **Archelaus:** Judea, Idumea, and Samaria
  - **Antipas:** Galilee and Perea
  - **Philip:** northeastern territories



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## Roman Administration

- Jerusalem aristocracy petitions Rome for a governor to replace the brutal Archelaus
  - **Judea under prefects** (see Huntsman, 270-280, in packet)
    - "procurator" a later title
  - Misconceptions about Roman governance
    - Small garrison (only about 2,500 locally raised militia)
    - Jerusalem Sanhedrin ran day-to-day affairs
- **"Tetrarchies" of Antipas and Philip remain their client princes**



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## For Next Class . . .

- **Complete historical overview**
- **Literary Background and Interpretation of the New Testament**
- **Readings**
  - “Bible,” and “Gospels,” BD 622–24, 682–83.
  - Huntsman, “Teaching through Exegesis: Helping Students Ask Questions of the Text”
  - “Genre Questions: What Kind of Writing Is This Passage?”
  - Additional background can be found in *JCWNT*, 16–41
- **Topics**
  - New Testament gospels
    - review of what they are
    - preview of when they were written and what their sources were
  - Brief history of the Bible
  - Methods of studying, interpreting, understanding, and correctly applying biblical texts
  - Form Criticism and Gospel Genres
  - [The KJV and Other Translations]

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