



2. 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 711 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 than 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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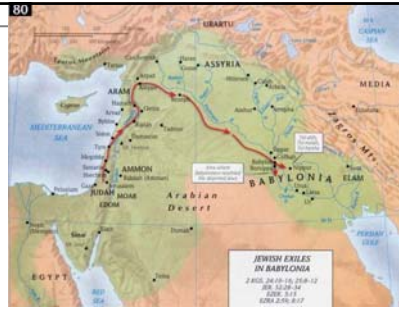
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Effects of Captivity

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 Hall, Huntsman, and Peek (packet, section 2)
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 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**
 - **am 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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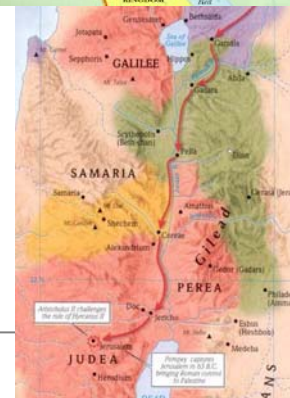
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The Advent of Rome

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 nominally independent under their client princes



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For Next Class . . .

- **Literary Background and Interpretation of the New Testament**
- **Packet 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