



“INTERTESTAMENTAL” PERIOD

400 YEARS OF SILENCE: MALACHI - MATTHEW

“When the time had fully come, God sent His Son...” Galatians 4:4

535-333 BC – Persian Rule

- Jews allowed to return to Israel, but many stayed in Babylon and travelled to other lands
 - o 479 BC – 465 BC: The story of Esther: God protects His people from genocide in Persia
- The Old Testament ends with them under Persian rule, with a rebuilt Temple and a rebuilt city, waiting for Messiah to come free them and take His place on the throne of David.

330-323 BC – Greek Rule

- Alexander the Great - combined the East and the West in his empire. In this process, he gained control over Israel as well.
- Hellenization: The Greek Empire was a golden age of architecture, art, philosophy, literature, and science. This is the time of the Greek philosophers we still study today like Socrates (470-399 BC), Plato (428-348 BC), and Aristotle (384-322 BC). Greece had a belief that they were the most superior culture in the world and it was their job to teach/convert the rest of the world to their way of life. This process was called “Hellenization” based on the Greek word for Greece, Hellas.
- All nations in the Greek Empire were expected to learn Greek and adopt their culture. The result was a relatively universal culture and language over most of the developed world.

301 - 204 BC – Ptolemy and his dynasty (Egyptian ruler of Greek descent)

- Ptolemy II ordered the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) to be translated into Greek. This version is called the Septuagint (LXX) because it took seventy-two scholars to translate it – six learned men from each of the twelve tribes.
- Cleopatra was the last monarch to rule from this dynasty.

204 - 165 BC – Seleucid Rule (also of Greek descent)

- Antiochus III was the first ruler and had a good relationship with Israel. Because they gave supplies to his army, he exempted them from paying taxes and gave them an offering to the Temple. Like Alexander, he allowed them to continue to live by their own religious and ancestral laws. He even made laws to guard the sanctity of the Temple.
- Antiochus IV declared himself Antiochus “Epiphanes” which means “God manifest.” He outlawed worship of God, forbade many traditional Jewish practices, began a campaign of persecution against the Jews, and desecrated the Temple and the altar.

165 – 63 BC - Jewish Independent Rule – Maccabees / Hasmoneans

- In rebellion against Antiochus IV, Judah Maccabees (his nickname, “the hammer”) and his family led a resistance. rebelled against Antiochus IV. Their story is chronicled in the apocryphal books of 1-2 Maccabees, which are not considered sacred Scripture, but are considered historically accurate.
- The Maccabees captured Jerusalem, cleansed the temple and rededicated the altar, three years to the day after it had been desecrated. Even though there was only enough oil in the lamps to burn for one night, the candles miraculously burned for eight nights. This event is celebrated every year with the festival of Chanukah or Hannukah, which means “to dedicate.”

OF INTEREST:

The Hasmoneans ruled semi-autonomously, yet still under the Seleucids until Simon Maccabees defeated the Seleucids. The Jewish sect called the “Essenes” began when one of the Hasmonean dynasty, Jonathan, was declared both governor and high priest by the Seleucid ruler at the time (152 BC). The dual role of priest and king is something that should only be claimed by Messiah, so a group of devout priests withdrew from his authority and formed a commune at Qumran (where the Dead Sea Scrolls were later found). This community was called the Essenes. They called Jonathan “the Wicked Priest” who they contrasted with the “Teacher or Righteousness,” their leader in the commune. Another sect also withdrew and focused on devoting themselves to the Scriptures and the ritual requirements of the priesthood – they became the Pharisees. The supporters of Jonathan’s high priesthood would become the Sadducees. We will see these groups in the Gospels, all of whom reject Jesus as Messiah. It’s interesting to see that they formed in rebellion to someone else acting like Messiah.

63 BC (until c. 650 AD) – Roman Rule

- Pompey besieged Jerusalem and entered the Holy of Holies. Pompey was confused because there was no image or idol in the Temple and wondered what god was worshiped there. His presence in the Holy of Holies desecrated the Temple again.
- Yet, the arrival of Roman rule makes it the fourth kingdom of Daniel's prophecy, so that means the next kingdom would be the arrival of the Messiah!

The Prophet Daniel (Imagery based on Nebuchadnezzar's dream as Daniel interpreted it in Daniel 2)



- Head of Gold – Babylon
- Chest and Arms of Silver – Medo-Persia
- Belly and Thighs of Bronze – Greece
- Legs of Iron and Feet of Iron & Clay – Rome
- A Rock, not made by human hands, which smashed the feet and destroyed the statue – Christ

The time was “ripe” for messianic expectations:

- 1) Daniel's prophecy;
- 2) The Middle Eastern world had one language and culture under the Roman Empire, including a network of roads which connected all their cities;
- 3) Diaspora Judaism meant Jews were spread all over the Roman Empire and established local synagogues in their cities.