Jewish Background to the New Testament

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The Intertestament Period

- Valuable to know something of this period, due to big changes between the OT and NT periods.
- OT ends ~400 BC, NT begins ~4 BC.
- Government is Persia at end of OT, Roman at beginning of NT.
- Languages in OT period are Hebrew, Aramaic; NT period adds Greek, Latin.
- OT culture Semitic, NT culture Hellenistic.
- Geographic center: OT is Fertile Crescent, NT is Mediterranean
Fertile Crescent
Ancient Sources on the IT Period

- OT prediction, esp. Daniel
- OT Apocrypha & Pseudepigrapha
- Philo of Alexandria (20 BC – AD 40+)
- Josephus (AD 37-100+)
- Dead Sea Scrolls
- Rabbinic literature
Daniel's Overview of the IT Period

Nebuchadnezzar's Image (Dan 2)

- Image described.
  - Gold head
  - Silver chest
  - Bronze thighs
  - Iron legs
  - Iron & clay feet
- Image destroyed by stone.
Daniel's Overview

- Daniel's Four Wild Animals (Dan 7)
  - Successive animals come out of sea.
  - The horn from the fourth animal.
  - The wild animals judged.
  - One like a son of man receives ruling power.
The Kingdoms

- Kingdom  Image  Animal
- Babylon  Gold head  Lion w/ wings
- Persia  Silver chest  Bear eating
- Greece  Br thighs  Leopard 4-heads
- Rome  Iron legs  Terrible 10-horn

Will use this scheme to structure our survey.
Structure of Survey

- Palestine under the Persians
  - 539-331 BC
- Palestine under the Greeks
  - 331-160 BC
- Independence under the Hasmoneans
  - 160-63 BC
- Palestine under the Romans
  - 63 BC to AD 135 and beyond
Palestine under Persia

539-331 BC
Palestine under Persia

- Rise of Cyrus
- Return of the Jews
- Rebuilding the Temple
- Revival in Judah & Rebuilding Walls
- The Aramaic Language
- Rise of the Synagogue
- The IT Temples
The Rise of Cyrus

- 559 BC – Cyrus inherits small kingdom of Anshan (Persia)
- 550 – Cyrus defeats the Medes
  - Nabonidus cancels his support!
- 546 – Cyrus takes Asia Minor
- 539 – Cyrus takes Babylon
The Return of the Jews

- 539-530 BC
- Cyrus in concerned to stabilize his empire.
- One of the problems of Assyria & Babylon rule was religious triumphalism.
  - So Cyrus tries to be considerate.
- Another problem was their deportation policy.
  - Cyrus allow Jews & others to return home.
Rebuilding: the 2nd Temple

- Cyrus allowed rebuilding to start, but stopped it when neighbors opposed (Ezra 4 & 6).
- When Darius reigns, Jewish loyalty rewarded by allowing rebuilding.
- Temple completed 515 by:
  - Prophets Haggai & Zechariah
  - Governor Zerubbabel & High Priest Jeshua
- This 2nd temple lasts till AD 70.
Revival & Rebuilding: The Walls

- Under Artaxerxes 1 (465-423)
- 458 – Ezra returns from Babylon w/ commission from Persian king; restores people to observing Law.
- 445 – Nehemiah sent as governor to rebuild city walls of Jerusalem.
- With fortifications in place, Jerusalem is now a city again.
The Aramaic Language

- Ancient language of Syria/Aram (upper Euphrates valley)
- Becomes diplomatic & trade language of ancient Near East
- Adopted by the Jews:
  - Probably during Babylonian exile, ~550 BC
  - Oral translations of OT → Aramaic
  - Still in use at time of Jesus
  - Used in rabbinic literature beyond AD 550
The Rise of the Synagogue

- Place of worship for those unable to attend temple
- Features prayer & Bible study but no sacrifice
- Origin obscure
- Continued alongside 2nd temple
- Only place of Jewish worship after AD 70
The IT Temples

- **2nd (Jerusalem) Temple (515-70AD)**
  - Orthodox, on site of Solomon’s temple

- **Samaritan Temple (450/330-128BC)**
  - On Mt Gerizim, near Shechem
  - Destroyed by Maccabees
  - Still a holy site in NT times & today

- **Elephantine Temple (525-390BC)**

- **Leontopolis Temple (160-72AD)**

- [Abstracts of Powerpoint Talks](newmanlib.ibri.org)
Palestine under the Greeks

331-c160 BC
Palestine under the Greeks

- Alexander the Great (336-323 BC)
- Struggle for Succession (to 301 BC)
- Ptolemaic Dynasty (to 30 BC)
  - Controls Palestine 301-198 BC
- Seleucid Dynasty (to 63 BC)
  - Controls Palestine 198-c160 BC
- Hellenism
- The Septuagint
Alexander the Great

- 336 – succeeds father Philip at age 20
- 334 – invades Asia Minor
- Major victories:
  - 334 – Granicus River – opens Asia Minor
  - 333 – Issus – opens Syria, Pal, Egypt
  - 331 – Gaugamela – destroys Persian Empire
- Continues to India
- 323 – dies at Babylon, age 33
Alexander's Empire
The Struggle for Succession

- Alexander did not have an heir.
  - Son a baby, dies young
  - Brother mentally incompetent
  - Generals fall to fighting when son dead

- The empire divided
  - Thrace ruled by Lysimachus
  - Macedonia by Cassander
  - Asia Minor, Mesopotamia by Seleucus
  - Egypt, Syria by Ptolemy
The Empire Divided

Lysimachus
Cassander
Seleucus
Ptolemy
The Ptolemaic Dynasty

- Lasts till 30 BC, controls Palestine 301-198 BC
- Ptolemy grabbed off Palestine while other generals fighting Antigonus.
- He & successors (almost all named Ptolemy) treat Jews fairly well.
- Many Jews settle in Alexandria, capital of Ptolemaic dynasty.
The Seleucid Dynasty

- Lasts till 63 BC, controls Palestine 198-160 BC
- Gets Palestine after long series of wars with Ptolemies.
- Antiochus 4 favors Hellenized Jews & allows them to re-establish Jerusalem as Hellenistic city.
- Antiochus later attempts to abolish Judaism (168), leading to Maccabean revolt (167).
Hellenism

- From Greek word for Greece, "Hellas"
- Name for Greek culture as it developed in the East after Alexander
- Influenced Judaism & somewhat influenced by it
- Includes religious mixing
- Various Greek philosophies
- Political, economic benefits of citizenship
The Septuagint (LXX)

- Greek translation of the OT
  - Oldest translation into Greek
- Origin – *Letter of Aristeas*
  - Ptolemy 2 has Jewish elders translate Law for his library
  - Later additions to story
  - General opinion of story today
Importance of the LXX

- Longest translation of any writing from antiquity
- Gives OT text a century before oldest Hebrew manuscripts
- Sets pattern for Greek theological terms in NT
- Put OT in universal language of Mediterranean
- Became the OT for the early church
Independence under the Hasmoneans

160–63 BC
Independence under the Hasmoneans

- Antiochus 4 & the Abomination of Desolation
- The Maccabean Revolt (167-134)
- The Hasmonean Dynasty (164-63)
- Jewish Sects of the Period
  - Pharisees
  - Sadducees
  - Essenes
Antiochus Epiphanes

- 175 – usurps throne from nephew
- Tries to unify empire via Hellenism
- Favors Hellenistic Jews; Jerusalem refounded
- Deposes high priests
  - Onias 3 for Jason
  - Jason for Menelaus
- 168 – defeated by Romans in Egypt
  - Tries to destroy Judaism; rededicates temple to Zeus
The Maccabean Revolt

- Origin
  - Aged priest Matthias resists at Modin
  - He & sons flee to wilderness to resist
- Judah the Maccabbee (166-160)
  - Succeeds father
  - His nickname "Hammerer"
  - Successful series of battles
- Jonathan (to 142) & Simon (to 134)
  - Seleucids weak; Maccs grow by diplomacy
  - Both murdered, but start dynasty
The Hasmonean Dynasty

- John Hyrcanus (134-104)
  - Greatly expands Judean territory
  - Rise of Pharisees & Sadducees

- Aristobolus (103)
  - Kills several brothers, takes title "king"
  - Dies from fear, drink, disease

- Alexander Jannaeus (102-76)
  - Continues expansion to Solomon-sized
  - Troubles with Pharisees
The Hasmonean Dynasty

- Salome Alexandra (76-67)
  - Wife of Aristobolus & Alex Jannaeus
  - Succeeds at Alex’s death
  - Two sons:
    - Hyrcanus 2 – made high priest
    - Aristobolus 2 – given military command

- End of Hasmonean Independence
  - Salome dies, succeeded by Hyrcanus 2
  - Aristobolus 2 snatches throne
  - Hyrcanus flees, opens war, calls on Rome
Jewish Sects of the Period

- Three main groups:
  - Pharisees
  - Sadducees
  - Essenes

- Their Theology

- Their Influence & Survival
Palestine under the Romans

63 BC to 135 AD
Palestine under the Romans

- End of the Hasmonean Dynasty (63)
- The *Pax Romana* (30 BC – 170 AD)
- The Herod Family
  - Antipater, Herod's father
  - Herod the Great
  - Herod's sons
  - Herod's descendants
- Messianic Expectation & the End of the Jewish State
The End of the Hasmonean Dynasty

- Hyrcanus flees brother Aristobolus.
  - Romans intervene in dispute.
  - Judea loses most of its conquered territories.
  - Hyrcanus 2 made "Ethnarch" of Judea instead of king.
- Romans rule Palestine as client state or province from 63 BC to AD 639.
The Roman Peace

- Two centuries (30 BC – 170 AD) of peace over empire beginning with Augustus
- Great growth in prosperity, reaching peak in 2nd century AD
- Important for early spread of Xy:
  - Peace
  - Roman roads
  - Lack of national boundaries
The Herod Family

- Antipater, Herod's father
  - Idumean, advisor to Hyrcanus 2, power behind the throne
  - Made procurator of Judea for helping Julius Caesar
  - Made sons Phasael & Herod administrators
  - Assassinated 43 BC
Herod the Great

- 42 – appointed joint Tetrarch with brother Phasael
- 40 – Phasael killed by invading Parthians, Herod flees to Rome
- 40 – Roman senate appoints him King of the Jews.
- 37 – Herod reconquers Jerusalem.
- 31 – Throne insecure till death of Antony & Cleopatra
Herod the Great

- His terrible family troubles
  - Combination of conniving & suspicion
  - Eventually he kills favorite wife & three sons, among others.

- Herod's accomplishments
  - Ruled large territory
  - Renovated Jerusalem temple (19 BC +)
  - Building projects (Caesarea, Sebaste)
  - Killing Bethlehem's children
Herod's Sons & Descendants

Sons: ruled by his will after death
- Archelaus – Judea/Samaria/Idumea till AD 6
- Antipas – Galilee/Peræa to AD 39
- Philip – Iturea/Trachonitis to AD 34

Descendants by Mariamne
- Herod Agrippa 1 – King of Jews 41-44
- Herod Agrippa 2 – a king to c100
Messianic Expectation

- Messianic fervor by the end of the IT period
- The person of the Messiah
- Various views of the Messianic Period
- The typical order of events
Messianic Fervor

- Very strong in the 1st century AD
  - Dissatisfaction with Roman rule
  - Zealot leaders calling for revolt
- Influential in leading many Jews to participate in revolt against Rome
- Probably one of the reasons was that Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks looked like it was running out
The Person of the Messiah

■ Variety of views, changing with time
  ■ Early interpreters see Messiah as more than human, tho no clear view of deity
  ■ Later rabbinic materials tend to minimize importance of Messiah.

■ OT Paradoxes:
  ■ Re/ office, activity, being, coming
  ■ Solved by NT and Jesus
Various Views of the Messianic Period

- Several alternatives:
  - Messianic period only
  - Eschaton only
  - Both will occur – most common

- These alternatives somewhat resemble the Christian views:
  - Post-Millennial
  - A-Millennial
  - Pre-Millennial
Order of End-Time Events

- Signs will precede the end
  - Moral decay, disaster, signs, forerunner
- Messianic kingdom established
  - Return from exile, nations punished, Messiah rules
- Days of Messiah (= Xn millennium)
  - Variable features, length uncertain
  - Ends with rebellion
- The Age to Come (= Xn eternal state)
  - Resurrection, judgment, eternal states
End of the Jewish State

- The Roman Procurators (6-66 AD)
  - Replacement for Archelaus (AD 6)
  - The activities of the Zealots (6+)
  - Caligula's statue (41)
  - Herod Agrippa 1's short rule (41-44)
  - The insensitivity of the Procurators

- The (1st) Jewish Revolt (66-73)
  - Started in Caesarea
  - Moderate Jews lose control to Zealots
  - Jerusalem destroyed (70), Masada (73)
Palestine Afterward

- Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai
  - Got Roman permission to continue school & court at Jamnia
  - Rebuilt Judaism w/o sacrifice
  - Xns excluded from synagogue

- The (2nd) Bar-Kochba Revolt (132-35)
  - Romans to rebuild Jerusalem as pagan city.
  - Simeon b Koseba revolts & is recognized as Messiah.
  - Revolt put down w/ much slaughter.
  - Jews forbidden to come near Jerusalem
But God is not finished with Israel yet!