

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR NEW TESTAMENT

I. BASICS OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

A. Major Periods of OT Story:

1. Patriarchal period: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel)
2. Slavery in Egypt and the Exodus
3. Conquest of Palestine and the period of the judges
4. United Monarchy: Saul, David, Solomon
5. Divided Monarchy: kingdoms of Israel (north) and Judah (south)
6. Fall of Judah; destruction of temple; exile in Babylon
7. Restoration of Judah (=Jews) and temple rebuilt under Persian empire

B. Major Themes

1. **Covenants**
 - a. Abrahamic: God promised Abraham a great nation; land as inheritance
 - b. Mosaic/Sinai: God would fight Israel's enemies if Israel kept commandments
 - c. Davidic: David's throne would be established forever
2. **The Prophets' Message**
 - a. Doom: Nations would be destroyed because of violation of Sinai covenant
 - b. Hope: Restoration (by "Messiah") would occur because of Abr./Davidic covenants
3. Two major *events that determined Jewish literature and thought*: **Exodus** and **Exile**

II. THE PERSIAN PERIOD (539-333 BC)

- A. Persia (modern Iran) ruled Near East to 333 BC; Judah at close of OT
- B. Judah was an isolated, relatively unimportant and peaceful province
- C. Persia made unsuccessful attempt to conquer Greece (490, 480 BC)

III. THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD (333-167 BC)

A. **Alexander the Great** (356-323 BC)

1. Son of Philip of Macedon
2. Crossed Hellespont into Asia Minor; **333 BC**; defeated Darius III
3. 332-331 BC: conquered entire Persian empire, including Palestine
4. Alexander spread Greek language, culture throughout Near East
5. 323 BC: Alexander dies at Babylon with no heir apparent
6. 323-301 BC: Alexander's generals fight each other for control

B. **Ptolemaic Empire**: based in Egypt, ruled Palestine 301-198 BC

C. **Seleucid Empire**: based in Syria, capital at **Antioch**

1. Antiochus III (223-187 BC) conquered Palestine in 198 BC
2. **Antiochus IV Epiphanes** (175-163 BC)
 - a. Had father's war debt; failed to conquer Ptolemaic Egypt
 - b. Began to oppress the Jews
 - 1) Allowed the office of High Priest to be sold
 - 2) Robbed and violated the temple; sacrificed a pig to Zeus
 - 3) Suppressed Judaism: forbade synagogue, Torah, circumcision
 - 4) Attempted to force Hellenism on the Jews

D. **The Maccabean Revolt** (167-164 BC)

1. Caused by policies of Antiochus IV
2. Revolt begun by Mattathias, priest of village of Modein and sons
 - a. Slew local Jew and Greek who were going to sacrifice a pig
 - b. Conducted guerilla warfare from hills against Syrians
3. Mattathias dies; son **Judas Maccabeus** led victories over Syrians
4. **164 BC**: partial Maccabean victory; temple cleansed, rededicated
5. Religious freedom granted 162 BC; Judas killed 161 BC
6. Jonathan (also son of Mattathias) became High Priest, 152 BC
7. Simon (another son of Mattathias) gains political autonomy 142 BC

IV. THE HASMONEAN PERIOD (142-63 BC)

A. Rule by High Priests (142-104 BC)

1. Simon proclaimed High Priest and Ethnarch forever in 140 BC
2. John Hyrcanus (134-104 BC) expanded Jewish territory

B. Kings (104-63 BC)

1. Aristobulus I (104-103 BC)
2. Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BC) suppressed uprising of Pharisees
3. Alexandra (76-67 BC), wife of Alexander promoted the Pharisees
4. Civil war: Hyrcanus II vs. Aristobulus II; Rome intervenes 63 BC

V. THE ROMAN PERIOD (63 BC →)

A. Direct Roman rule 63-37 BC (through **Antipater**, an Idumean 63-43 BC)

B. **Herod the Great** (37-4 BC) ruled as Roman puppet

1. Son of Antipater, an Idumean (descendants of ancient Edomites)
2. Great building projects: **Jerusalem temple**, Caesarea, Samaria/Sebastiya, Palaces
3. Character
 - a. Kept Jewish law (to appease subjects?)
 - b. Paranoid about his reign; had son, wife, and others killed

C. Herod's successors (sons)

1. **Archelaus** ruled Judah, Samaria, Idumea (4 BC – AD 6); deposed and exiled
 - Roman **procurators** in Judea, Samaria, Idumea (AD 6-41, 44-70)
2. **Herod Antipas** ruled Galilee, Perea (4 BC – AD 39); deposed in 39
3. **Herod Philip** ruled northeast Palestine, Iturea (4 BC – AD 34); most stable

D. Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great (AD 37-44); ruled all Palestine 41-44

E. Procurators (44-66); **First Jewish Revolt** (AD 66-70); **Temple destroyed AD 70**

F. Some Important **Roman Emperors** for the New Testament Story

1. Augustus (27 BC – AD 14): ruled at Jesus' birth
2. Tiberius (14-37): Jesus' ministry and death, resurrection
3. Caligula (37-41): demanded worship of himself, was murdered
4. Claudius (41-54): expelled Jews from Rome (49)
5. Nero (54-68): persecuted Christians in Rome; killed Peter and Paul
6. Vespasian (69-79): began to crush Jewish revolt, made emperor
7. Titus (79-81): destroyed Jerusalem and temple as general in 70
8. Domitian (81-96): persecuted church; background for Revelation