

Overview of Second Temple Period

519 BC–70 AD



Why important?

1. Helps us understand how we got from the end of the OT to the beginning of the NT.
2. Many of the Jews in this period are faithful followers of God—our brothers and sisters!
3. We will see the themes laid out in Ezra-Nehemiah continuing to play out in history.



Our Sources



Babylon (626–539 BC)

- Nabopolassar (with the help of the Medes) destroyed the Assyrians (late 600's BC).
- After him, Nebuchadnezzar (604–562) reigned as the one great king of this empire.
- Nebuchadnezzar devastated Jerusalem (597, 586) when the kings refused to pay tribute.
- God's people are scattered to Judea, Egypt, Babylon.



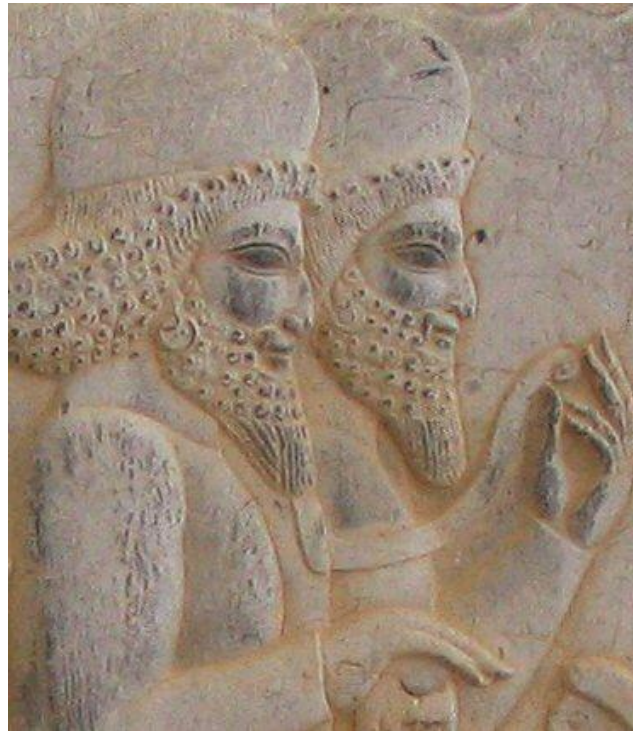
Babylon (continued)

- Babylon begins to weaken toward the end of Nebuchadnezzar's reign
- Nebuchadnezzar is followed by a series of weak kings



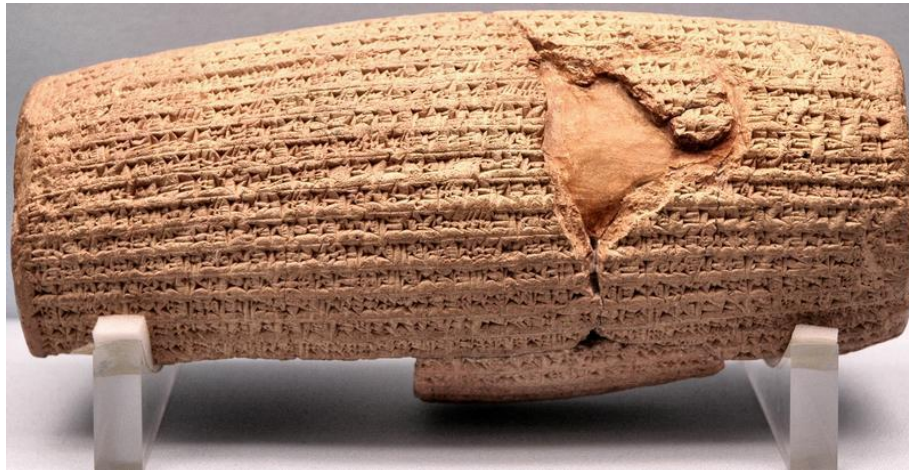
The Rise of Media

- Media always was a rival to Babylon. But toward the end of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Astyages king of Media becomes increasingly powerful (r. 585–550).



Cyrus and the Medo-Persian Empire

- The Median empire came to a sudden end with the campaign of Cyrus the Great, who conquered the Median capital in 550.
- He added the Median empire to his own Persian kingdom. Cyrus himself was both Persian (father) and Median (mother).
- Soon Babylon (sorely weakened by internal strife and weak kingship) fell to Cyrus (539).
- Cyrus had a policy of religious toleration.



The Might of the Persians (550–330)

- The Persian Empire eventually stretched over the whole Ancient Near East.
- Many powerful kings reigned, whom we also know from the Bible: Darius I, Xerxes I (=Ahasuerus from Esther), Artaxerxes I.
- This is the period of Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.



Alexander and the Greek Empire

- The Persians were never able to conquer Greece.
- Eventually, when Persia began to weaken from internal strife, Alexander arose from Macedonia and conquered the whole Persian empire in a matter of a few years.
- Alexander was eager to propagate Greek (Hellenistic) culture and language.
- He only reigned a short time (336–323) before dying suddenly in Babylon.



The fragmented Greek Empire

- Alexander's empire was then divided between his generals (the "diadochoi")
- The primary two segments go to:
 - Seleucus: Babylon and the East
 - Ptolemy: Egypt



The Ptolemies (Greek) rule Judea (330–198)

- The Ptolemies allow the people to live under their own laws and High Priest, but the High Priest must tax the people and send it to the Ptolemies.
- The Jewish rulers under the Ptolemies are generally compromisers and not exclusivist in their pursuit of religious purity, hence it is a relatively calm period politically.
- During this time:
 - A large Jewish colony grows in Alexandria in Egypt.
 - The Samaritans move to Shechem, which becomes a major religious site.



The Seleucids (Greek) rule Judea (198–c. 160)

- As the Seleucids in the North gain power, they eventually take Judea from Ptolemaic control.
- Eventually a Seleucid ruler arises, Antiochus IV, who seizes the throne.
- Antiochus IV enjoys much success, but eventually is turned back by the Roman senator Gaius Popillius Laenas.
- He returns to find a Jewish rebellion in Jerusalem. In his rage he began to impose Hellenism severely.



A fight for identity

- The silence of the prophets (1 Macc 4:44–46; 9:27; 14:41–42)
- Hellenism was hugely attractive to many Jews. It was also sometimes forced upon them (e.g., by Antiochus IV)
- Responses:
 - Scribalism: emphasis on Scriptural study, schools of scribes
 - Retreat (Qumran)
 - Synagogues: the place of prayer, of teaching, of Sabbath worship
 - Traditionalism: adherence not just to Torah, but to traditions surrounding it.
 - Violent resistance.
 - Non-violent resistance (martyrdom).
- Different big groups have their origin in this period: Sadducees, Pharisees, etc.



The Septuagint

- During the Ptolemaic period, the Old Testament began to be translated into Greek.
- Many Jews no longer spoke or understood Hebrew.
- The Septuagint was a very literal, wooden translation (often did not sound like smooth Greek).
- The legend of the “seventy” from the letter of Aristeas gave mystique to this translation.
- This translation became the Bible which many NT authors used and was widely used by the early church.

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ΤΩΝ ΠΑΤΡΙΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΑ



The Qumran Community

- Approximately 176 BC, the “Teacher of Righteousness” founds the Qumran community in the desert of Judea.
- This monastic-like sect emphasized intense self-discipline, Scripture study, and separation from “wicked people”
- They see themselves as key to the fulfillment of end-times prophecy.



The Maccabean revolt and the Hasmonean Dynasty (164–63)

- Antiochus IV eventually defiles the temple in Jerusalem by offering a pig to Zeus in 167.
- Infuriated by the sacrilegous and the “convert-to-Hellenism-or-die” policy of Antiochus IV, Judas Maccabeus (“the hammer” in Hebrew) stages a successful revolt, eventually rededicating the temple in 164. (Hebrew for “dedication”: Hanukkah)
- Eventually the Maccabees ruled as kings and priests (a.k.a., the “Hasmonean” dynasty) in Jerusalem until the days of the Romans (60’s BC).



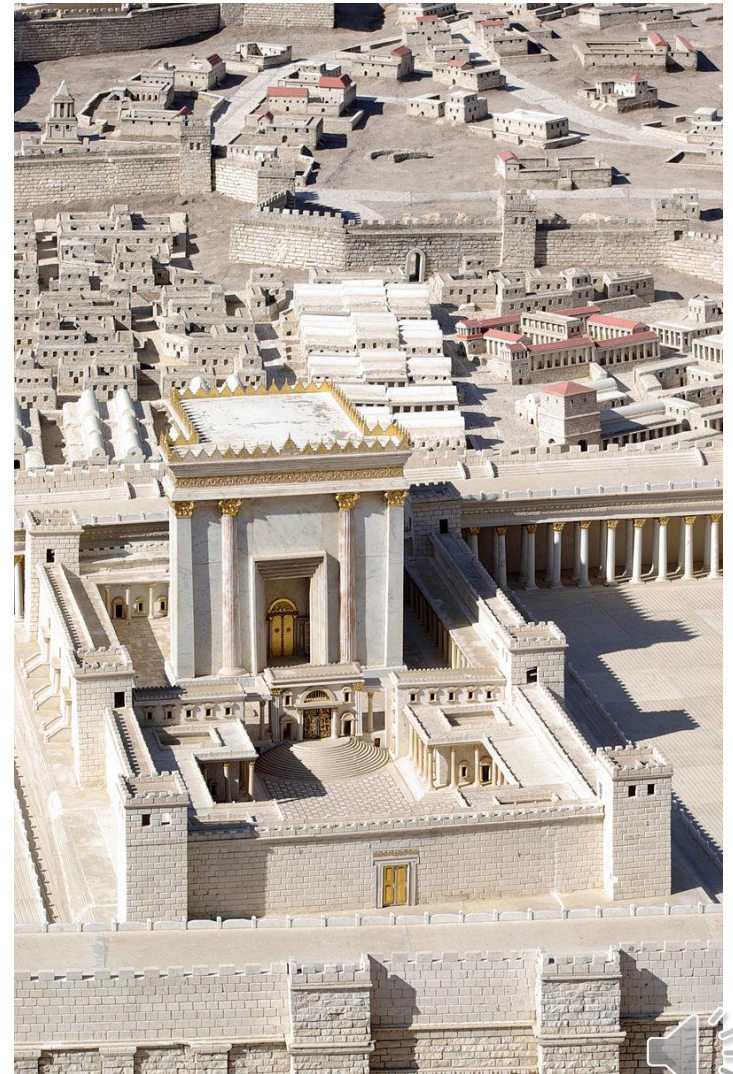
The Romans rule Palestine (63 BC onward)

- The Hasmoneans were constantly troubled by internal strife.
- In 63 BC, into the midst of a civil war between two Hasmonean rulers (Hyrchanus II and Aristobulus II), the Roman General Pompey arrived and was asked to arbitrate.
- This led almost immediately to Roman control of Palestine and the defilement of the temple again.



The Romans rule Palestine (63 BC onward)

- Early in the period of Roman rule, Herod the Idumean emerges as a power: he defeats the Parthians (enemies of the Romans) and the Romans make him king over Judah.
- Herod embarks on many building projects, including an overhaul of the Second Temple.



The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ

- Roman rule was difficult on the people of Judea.
- Into the midst of this oppression, Jesus Christ came and carried out his ministry.
- The date of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is debated, but is approx. 30–33 AD.



Jewish Revolt against the Romans

- One Jewish response to the Romans was guerilla warfare.
- The Romans were constantly repressing Jewish uprisings until matters reached a head in the late 60's AD.
- Jewish forces seized several strategic positions and held them against the Roman forces.
- One such position was Jerusalem. Jerusalem eventually fell after a horrible siege in 70 AD. Temple and city were destroyed.



Recap

- Babylon: 626–539 BC, most powerful in 610's to 570's
- Persian Empire: 550–330 BC
- The Greeks:
 - Alexander the Great (330's BC)
 - Followed by a divided kingdom: first the Ptolemies in the South rule Palestine (330's–198 BC)
 - Then the Seleucids in the North (198–160's BC)
- Maccabean revolt and the Hasmonean dynasty (~160–63 BC)
- Romans rule Palestine starting 63 BC
 - Death and resurrection of Jesus: ~33 AD
 - Jewish revolt and the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans: 70 AD



Connections to what we've been learning

- A little reviving in our bondage
- Emphasis on:
 - Repentance
 - Scripture
 - Patient faith, even to martyrdom
- Like the church in any era:
 - Those who compromise with the society
 - Those who become separatist
 - Those who are trying to be faithful to God's word

