

New Testament Survey Intertestamental History

I. Historical World Empires

A. Babylon - 626 B.C. to 539 B.C.

1. Four major kings ¹

- a. Nabopolassar - 626 B.C. to 605 B.C.

Rebelled against Assyria in 626 B.C.

Joined forces with the Medes to defeat Nineveh in 614 B.C.

- b. Nebuchadnezzar - 605 B.C. 562 B.C.

Conquered Judah and Egypt. Extended Babylonian influence over the known world.

- c. Nabonidus - 555 B.C. to 539 B.C.

Was not originally of the royal family so he married a widow or daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. His son was Belteshazzar.

Nabonidus spent little time in Babylon, having a palace at Tema. He was a religious man, and was instrumental in restoring several temples.

- d. Belteshazzar - 552 B.C. to 539 B.C.

Belteshazzar was the son of Nabonidus, co-regent with his father. He was left in charge of Babylon while his father was living in Tema.

Nebuchadnezzar's grandson

2. Three deportations²

- a. First deportation - 605 B.C.

Nebuchadnezzar took many members of the royal family including Daniel and his three friends. He also took much of the temple wealth including the golden vessels which were later used by Belteshazzar in his feast.

- b. Second deportation - 597 B.C.

After Nebuchadnezzar left in 605, Jehoiakim rebelled but was taken to Babylon as prisoner. His successor, Jehoiachin, reigned only three months because he too rebelled and was taken to Babylon.

¹ John F. MacArthur, *The Rise and Fall of World Powers*, (Panorama City: Word of Grace Communications, 1989), pp. 90-91.

² Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), p. 2.

Nebuchadnezzar left Mattaniah, who was renamed Zedekiah, as a puppet king.

c. Third deportation - 586 B.C.

Zedekiah aligned himself with Egypt in an attempt to gain freedom from Babylon. This alliance did not last and Nebuchadnezzar captured Zedekiah, put his eyes out, and took him to Babylon where he died in captivity. At this time, Jerusalem was destroyed and burned. Solomon's temple, one of the wonders of the ancient world, was destroyed.

3. Results of the 70 Years Captivity³

a. The elimination of idolatry

After the Babylonian captivity, Israel did not have any more problems with idolatry. Never again would they bow the knee to Baal or some other pagan deity, even on pain of death.

b. The rise of the synagogue

Because of the destruction of the temple, the Jews of the dispersion congregated in local groups called synagogues. It was here that the law was taught although sacrifices were never offered in synagogues since it was only at the temple that sacrifices could be made.

c. The rise of the scribe

Priests, who no longer could practice Judaism since there was no temple, took to the copying and preservation of the OT Scriptures. They later became the scribes, the law experts found in the Gospels.

d. The Diaspora

Because of the length of the captivity, we find that many Jews settled down and became permanent residents of foreign countries. This dispersion exists even till today, and will continue to exist until God calls Israel back during the end times.

e. The definition of the OT canon⁴

Lastly, the Jews defined the canon of the OT during this time. Three divisions of the OT were defined, the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. These writings were copied and transmitted by the scribes.

B. Medo/Persia - 539 B.C. to 331 B.C.

1. Five Major Kings^{5 6}

³ Ibid, pp. 2-3.

⁴ Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Between the Testaments*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1978), pg. 12.

⁵ James A. Borland, *A General Introduction to the New Testament*, (Lynchburg: University Book House, 1986), pp. 20-24.

⁶ Gromacki, pp. 3-5.

a. Cyrus the Great (Cyrus II) - 555 B.C. to 529 B.C.

Became ruler of a combined Medo-Persia empire in 550 B.C. Cyrus first inherited the kingdom of Anshan, but quickly tired of being under Median rule and revolted. He successfully conquered the Median armies, due in part to the fact that the Median army revolted against their commander. When he gained power of Media, his kingdom became one of the four major powers of the world, Lydia, Babylonia, and Egypt being the other three. He was able to conquer the first two, and his son Cambyses conquered the last.⁷

Lydia was defeated by Cambyses before he conquered Babylon. Lydia was the land east of the Median empire which now forms the bulk of Turkey. The conquest of the Lydian empire brought great wealth to the Median empire. The king of Lydia defeated by Cyrus was Croesus, whose great wealth resulted in the phrase, "rich as Croesus."⁸

Defeated Babylon and killed Belteshazzar in 539 B.C. This event is recorded in the book of Daniel. Upon the death of Belteshazzar at the hands of Gobyrus, a general under Cyrus, the ultimate fall of the Babylonian Empire was assured. Gobyrus (Darius of Daniel) was named the governor of Babylon. Cyrus marched into Babylon a month after its fall with the applause of the city. It seems that prior to his conquest of the city, Nabonidus had become very unpopular with the people.

Cyrus was very benevolent to the conquered peoples, usually just removing the leaders of the countries he conquered and leaving most of the infrastructure in place. It was Cyrus that allowed Israel to return to Israel and rebuild their temple.⁹

b. Cambyses - 529 B.C. to 522 B.C.¹⁰

Cambyses, one of Cyrus two major sons, became ruler upon Cyrus' death. His brother, Bardiya (or Smerdis as the Greeks called him), tried to take the throne but was ultimately murdered by Cambyses who then consolidated his rule over Medo-Persia. This is confirmed by the Behistun inscription written by Darius, Cambyses successor.

Cambyses' great claim to fame is that he defeated Egypt, adding the last of the three great world powers to the Medo/Persian fold.

c. Darius the Great (Darius I) - 522 B.C. to 486 B.C.¹¹

Darius the Great ruled for over 40 years. His major contribution to the Medo/Persian empire was the consolidation of power and the reorganization of the empire. He was a great administrator who contributed greatly to the efficiency of the government.

⁷ Pfeiffer, pg. 13.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 13-15.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 16-21.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 23ff.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 29ff.

The ministries of Haggai and Zechariah occurred during his reign. The rebuilding of the temple languished during the time immediately after the giving of the decrees by Cyrus. The returning Jews had lost heart and had become more concerned about their own homes than they were about the house of God. According to Ezra 6, Darius confirmed the decree of Cyrus which allowed the Jews to rebuild the temple.

Had five capitols: Susa, Ecbatana, Pasayadae, Persepolis, and Babylon.

After consolidating his power in the empire, Darius turned his attention to military conquests. He conquered the lands of Thrace and Macedonia, but was unable to take mainland Greece, the great city states of Athens and Sparta having stopped their fighting long enough to repel the Medo/Persian advances. The Greeks never forgot this, and nearly one hundred years later take out their revenge under the great military leader, Alexander the Great.

d. Xerxes (Ahasuerus in Esther) - 486 B.C. to 464 B.C.¹²

Xerxes is also known as Ahaseurus, the king of Esther. He was killed in palace intrigue in 464 B.C.

Xerxes continued the campaign against Greece, but was defeated by the Greeks at the Battle of Salamis. His moves against Greece, along with that of Darius, were long remembered by Greece and ultimately resulted in the rise of Alexander the Great and the Greek empire.

e. Artaxerxes (Nehemiah) - 464 B.C. to 423 B.C.¹³

The Medo/Persian empire was unable to take Greece, and made peace with Greece under the reign of Artaxerxes. It was during the reign of this king that the Medo/Persian empire began its decline. Although the empire itself would last another 100 years, the handwriting was on the wall as nation after nation succeeded in overthrowing the Medo/Persian yoke. The final blows occurred under the Greek general, Alexander the Great.

The return of Ezra and Nehemiah occurred during the reign of Artaxerxes. Ezra attended to the religious issues of the Jews whereas Nehemiah attended to the civil affairs. Many think that Ezra was the author of 1 and 2 Chronicles, and the one who collected many of the OT books together.

2. Four Decrees¹⁴

a. The Decree of Cyrus - 536 B.C.

This decree, recorded in Ezra 1:1-4, gives Israel permission to rebuild the Temple.

¹² Ibid, pp. 39ff.

¹³ Ibid, pp. 45ff.

¹⁴ John F. MacArthur, *The Future of Israel*, (Panorama City: Word of Grace Communications, 1991), pp. 29-31.

- b. The Decree of Darius - 516 B.C.

This decree, recorded in Ezra 6, is merely a reassertion of the Decree of Cyrus.

- c. The First Decree of Artaxerxes - 458 B.C.

This decree, recorded in Ezra 7:11-26, gives Israel permission to return and institute Temple worship. It also provides for the means whereby worship could be started.

- d. The Second Decree of Artaxerxes - 444 B.C. or 445 B.C.

This decree, recorded in Nehemiah 2, allows the Jews to return and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. It is this decree that is the most likely candidate for the start of Daniel's seventy weeks in Daniel 9.

C. Greece - 333 B.C. to 63 B.C.

1. Two Major Rulers

- a. Philip of Macedon - 359 B.C. to 336 B.C.

Laid the foundation of the Greek empire by uniting all of the Greek city-states.

- b. Alexander the Great - 336 B.C. to 323 B.C.

Succeeded his father, Philip of Macedon, upon his death.

Was the greatest military leader and conqueror of all time.

Alexander died while returning to Greece in 323 B.C.

2. Achievements of Alexander

- a. The establishment of Greek Culture

Alexander made a big point to establish Greek culture in all conquered lands. He did this by establishing many cities (the Decapolis of Christ's time is one such example), establishing Greek customs (the gymnasium and Greek athletic events), and sowing Greek concepts of justice and religion. This was so successful that Greek culture eventually influenced Rome, and from Rome the modern world.

- b. The establishment of the Greek language

As part of Alexander's activities to spread Greek culture, he made the Greek language the common tongue of the day. This succeeded so well that in the time of the NT, the Greek language was used the world over as the common language of commerce and diplomacy (*koine*).

- c. The establishment of the library and Alexandria in Egypt

One of Alexander's greatest contributions was the establishment of the library in Alexandria Egypt where many texts of the ancient

world were collected and stored. Alexandria later became one of the intellectual capitols of the world.

3. The Division of the Greek Empire¹⁵

After Alexander's death in 331 B.C., the Greek empire was split into four pieces as foretold by Daniel in Daniel 8:8. These four pieces and their rulers were:

- a. Lysimachus - Thrace and Asia Minor
- b. Antigonus - Northern Syria and Babylon

Antigonus was later defeated by Seleucus, one of his generals, who gained power over Babylon. This began the Seleucid dynasty which lasted for over one hundred years.

- c. Ptolemy - Egypt and Syria

The Ptolemies and Seleucids eventually fought between themselves over Judah and Syria.

- d. Cassander - Macedonia

4. The Seleucids and Ptolemies ¹⁶

- a. Ptolemaic Influence - 323 B.C. to 198 B.C.

Judah prospered under the Ptolemies.

During the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphius, the LXX was translated and became the "Bible" of the NT.

- b. Seleucid/Ptolemaic Wars¹⁷

Between the years 275 B.C. and 198 B.C. several wars occurred between the Ptolemies and Seleucids which eventually led to the Seleucid's gaining control of Palestine.

These wars are outlined in prophetic form in Daniel 11:5-20.

- 1). A Marriage - Daniel 11:5-6

Ptolemy II Philadelphius (king of the south) married off his daughter Bernice to Antiochus II Theos (king of the north). Antiochus II divorced his wife, Laodice, to marry Berenice, but upon the death of Ptolemy II divorced Berenice and took back Laodice. Laodice murdered Berenice, her son, and her attendants. Laodice also murdered Antiochus II and caused her son Seleucus II Callinicus to become king in 246 B.C.

- 2). Revenge - Daniel 11:7-8

¹⁵ Pfeiffer, pp. 71-75.

¹⁶ Gromacki, pp. 8-10.

¹⁷ John F. MacArthur, *The Future of Israel*, pp. 75-90.

Berenice's brother, Ptolemy III Euergetes, brought an army against Antiochus Seleucus II and defeated him. He carried away a great deal of spoil to Egypt. Seleucus II died in a riding accident in 226 B.C., Ptolemy III ruled six years after that thus fulfilling the prophecy of Daniel 11:8.

3). Antiochus the Great - Daniel 11:9-10

Since Ptolemy III defeated Seleucus II, he controlled Judah. However, Seleucus II had two sons, Seleucus III Soter and Antiochus III the Great). These two sons raised up a large army and continued the campaign against the south. Seleucus III died leaving Antiochus III in charge of the army. He marched through Palestine with an army of 75,000 men.

4). Southern Retaliation - Daniel 11:11-12

Ptolemy IV Philopator, the king of the south during Antiochus' III invasion, raised his own army of 70,000 soldiers and 5,000 cavalry. Ptolemy IV soundly defeated Antiochus, but was not strengthened by the victory, only making Antiochus III angry.

5). The Return of the North - Daniel 11:13-20

Thirteen years after his defeat, Antiochus III returned with a larger army. In 199 B.C., Antiochus III succeeded in routing the southern army. Because of his victory, Antiochus strengthened his control over Judah, something the Jews had not bargained for.

After his victory, Antiochus III gave his daughter to the Egyptian king to be a spy for him as well as the glue of an alliance. However, his daughter loved her husband more than her father and did not take her father's side.

Antiochus then turned his attention to the coasts of the Mediterranean islands and Greece, but was defeated by Rome in 191 B.C. He was then forced to return to his own land where he died while plundering a temple.

Upon Antiochus' death, his son, Seleucus IV Philopator became king. Because of the heavy tribute levied by Rome he became a raiser of taxes. He was killed by his prime minister in 176 B.C. thus fulfilling Daniel 11:20.

6). Antiochus Epiphanes - Daniel 11:21-35

Antiochus Epiphanes (IV), obtained the throne by deceit in 175 B.C. He then devastated Egypt and their boy-king Ptolemy VI Philometor in the battle of Pelusium. After his defeat of Egypt, Antiochus returned to Judah where he plundered the temple and sacked Jerusalem on his way back north.

Antiochus made a second attack against Egypt, but was turned back by the ships of Kittim (Rome). As he returned to his land in humiliation, he took out his frustration against Judah again causing immense suffering. It was the atrocities started by

Antiochus Epiphanes that ultimately resulted in the Maccabean revolt in 166 B.C.

5. The Maccabees¹⁸

a. The Persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes¹⁹

After his humiliation in Egypt, Antiochus Epiphanes returned to Jerusalem and took out his frustration on the Jews. At the end of the year in 167 B.C., he desecrated the temple. Furthermore, he outlawed the Torah. Observance of any part of the law was made a capital offense. Altars were erected to false deities and the Jewish people were forced to worship idols upon pain of death. Antiochus sacrificed a pig on the altar in the temple thus desecrating the holy place.

The process of forcing Greek culture on the Jewish populace was known as Hellenization. This took several forms:

- 1). The establishment of a gymnasium and games where the participants competed completely naked.
- 2). The removal of the sign of circumcision.
- 3). The abandonment of the law.
- 4). The full acceptance of Greek culture and ideas.
- 5). The abandonment of the Sabbath day of rest.
- 6). Jewish names were exchanged for Greek names.

Most of the Jews bowed to the pressure and worshipped pagan deities, at least outwardly. In order to expose Jews faithful to the law of God, emissaries of Antiochus were sent from city to city to make pagan sacrifices in the city square and cause the population of the city to worship the pagan gods. Jews who would not take part in the pagan ceremonies were arrested, tortured, and martyred.

b. The Uprising of Mattathias²⁰

In 166 B.C., agents of Antiochus made their way to the town of Modin. When the first apostate Jew stepped forward to take part in the pagan sacrifice, Mattathias took a sword and killed the Jew and the delegate from Antiochus. He then proceeded to tear down the altar and flee into the wilderness, along with his family, to avoid the authorities. Thus began the Maccabean revolt.

From the Judean hills, Mattathias organized resistance against Antiochus Epiphanes. This revolt took the form of raids on the forces of Antiochus and those who would want to Hellenize the Jews. When Mattathias died in 165 B.C., leadership fell on his third son, Judas, who was surnamed Maccabeus, the hammer.

¹⁸ Borland, pp. 28-32.

¹⁹ Elias Bickerman, *From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), pp. 93-111.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 96-97,

c. The Maccabean Wars²¹

After the death of Mattathias, Judas Maccabeus became the leader of the fledgling revolt. During the next two years he increased the size of his army and staged many raids on small villages and enclaves of Antiochus' troops. At first, the Seleucids ignored the Maccabees, considering them another robber band. However, it soon became apparent that the Maccabean revolt was much larger than just a band of robbers, and more attention was given to them by Antiochus.

The success of the Maccabees revolved around the concept of guerrilla warfare. The Syrian armies of Antiochus were made up of a lot of regulars who had little experience in this type of warfare. As a result, the Maccabees were very successful by attacking from the hills and at night when the Syrian army least expected it.

After a major conflict in 165 B.C., the Maccabees made a treaty with Lysias, the Syrian commander, who interceded for the Jews to Antiochus. Antiochus, who was busy fighting another battle, called a halt to the practice of forced Hellenization. An official proclamation Antiochus Epiphanes granted asylum to all Jews who had taken part in the revolt and restored the right to worship according to the law of Moses. This ended the persecutions of Antiochus against the Jews.

In December of 164 B.C., Judas Maccabeus and his army descended on Jerusalem and reinstated the ceremonial system. It was during this time that the feast of Hanukkah was instituted upon the purification of the temple. Judas presented himself as the rightful leader of the Jewish people, and set about to rebuild and fortify Jerusalem. The only place that remained where soldiers loyal to the Syrians held out was the Accra, the citadel in Jerusalem.

In 163 B.C., Antiochus died at Ispahan after unsuccessfully raiding a temple. At the same time, Judah laid siege to the Accra in order to force its surrender. When news of this reached Lysias, the successor to Antiochus, he marched against Judas Maccabeus in order to deliver the Accra from Jewish hands. When he reached Jerusalem, Judas Maccabeus had garrisoned himself on Mount Zion. While Lysias was laying siege to Judas Maccabeus, news reached him of another person who had been named ruler in Antiochus' place. Lysias made a quick peace with Judas and left.

The treaty between Lysias and Judas not only restored Judaism, it made it the dominant religion. The treaty also marked the end of the reform party, headed by Menelaus, who had attempted to wed Judaism with Greek culture. On order of Lysias, Menelaus was executed and the reform part disbanded. This treaty also ended the Maccabean revolt. Jakim, a member of the previous high priestly family, was named high priest and changed his name to Alcimus. Supported by the Syrian authorities, he became the leader of Judah while Judas Maccabeus retired into the hills.

²¹ Ibid, pp. 112-135.

Judas reappeared in Jerusalem a short time later to protest the activities of Alcimus, and his right to be high priest. This conflict escalated to the point that the Syrian army, under the leadership of Bacchides, defeated Judas Maccabeus' small army and killed Judas.

Although Judah had regained a large degree of independence, it was still under the domination of the Syrian empire headed by the descendants of the Seleucids.

d. The Road to Independence²²

After Judas Maccabeus' death in 161 B.C., the mantle passed to Jonathan, Judas' brother. He retired to the hills of Tekoa as the head of a bunch of outlaws, but in 156 B.C. made peace with the authorities and was granted Michmash as a place of residence.

Jonathan would have probably lived out the rest of his years in Michmash, except that in 152 B.C. a pretender to the Syrian throne arose named Alexander Balas. Supported by Rome, Egypt, Pergamum, and Cappadocia, Alexander began to make plans to wrest power from Demetrius II, the current king of Syria. Demetrius gave Jonathan the power to gather troops to help him in his bid to keep the throne.

In 159 B.C., Alcimus died without an heir to the high priesthood. The first thing that Jonathan did was to secure his position in Jerusalem. Alexander Balas, wanting to secure Jonathan on his side, asked Jonathan for his price. Jonathan's price was to be proclaimed high priest, and at the Feast of Tabernacles in 152 B.C. was proclaimed high priest even though he was not of the right lineage.

The ascent of Jonathan marked a decided change in the course of the Maccabees. Prior to this, Judas Maccabeus had fought and died for the purity of the high priestly office. Now, Jonathan had accommodated the law so that he could be high priest. This began the process of Hellenizing the Jewish law to fit the political atmosphere of the day. Jonathan not only rose to power by playing both sides of the political fence, but he consolidated his power the same way. Using his political savvy he rounded out the borders of Judah and succeeded in setting himself up as the rightful leader of Judah.

Upon his death in 143 B.C., Simon, his brother, succeeded to the leadership of Judah. By playing both sides of the political fence, Simon eventually succeeded in emancipating Judah from the Syrians. In 142 B.C., documents were dated according to the years of Simon. In 139 B.C., Simon was granted the privilege of minting coins in his name.

This independence was short-lived, however. After the death of Simon at the hands of his son-in-law in 134 B.C. his son John Hyrcanus assumed the mantle of leadership. The Syrian army, under the leadership of Antiochus VII, subdued Jerusalem once again making Judah subservient to a foreign power. John Hyrcanus was allowed to continue as High Priest but the cities taking by

²² Ibid, pp. 136-147.

Jonathan and Simon were forfeited. Thus began the Hasmonean period and thus ended the Maccabean era.

e. The Hasmoneans²³

The period of the Hasmoneans were marked by jealousy, intrigue, and greed. The office of the high priest was held by men who were disqualified due to the fact they were not of the house of Zadok. In fact, the office of the high priest was forever changed to that of a political prize, often occupied by the highest bidder.

During the reign of John Hyrcanus, two political parties arose. The first was that of the Hasidim, who could be considered the conservative element who wanted to retain historic Judaism. This group were the separatists, who were the forerunners of the Pharisees. The other party was the Hellenizers who were willing to sacrifice distinctive Judaism to gain the advantages of Greek life. This group eventually became the Sadducees.

John Hyrcanus was also an able military and political leader. Under his leadership, he raised a foreign army and became one of the strongest military powers under the Syrians. He succeeded in subjugating the Samaritans and destroying their temple on Mt. Gerezim. He annexed the area of Galilee and assigned it as the residence of Alexander Jannaeus, his son. When John Hyrcanus died in 104 B.C. he left his successor Judah Aristobulus a territory that extended from Galilee to Masada, and from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan river.

Judah Aristobulus reigned only one year and was succeeded by Alexander Jannaeus. Under his leadership Judea extended its borders into the Trans-Jordan and the plains. From the outside it appeared as though Judea was eminently prosperous, but inwardly it had become Hellenized and corrupt. This eventually proved its downfall.

Under the reign of Alexander Jannaeus, civil strife escalated between himself and the Pharisees. This eventually led the Pharisees to ask Demetrius III to intervene on their behalf against Jannaeus. After the battle with Demetrius III, the Syrian King in which Jannaeus mercenaries were slaughtered, Demetrius left the country which allowed Jannaeus to suppress the rebellion. He murdered over 800 of the rebels while he himself had a party.

On his deathbed in 76 B.C., Alexander Jannaeus transferred the rule to his wife Salome Alexandra. He also counseled her to change the policy of the government as it pertained to the Pharisees. She named John Hyrcanus II to be the high priest and entrusted the government to the Pharisees. Using their newfound influence as well as their newly gained seats in the Sanhedrin, the Pharisees took out their vengeance on the counselors of Alexander Jannaeus who had the insurrectionists killed.

However, there was a significant anti-Pharisaic coalition which formed under Alexandra and her second son Aristobulus. As soon as Alexandra died in 67 B.C., open hostilities broke out between

²³ Ibid, pp. 148-152, 168-177.

Aristobulus and Hyrcanus II, the rightful ruler. Hyrcanus abdicated the throne to Aristobulus, but later sought to regain it with the aid of the Nabateans. In 65 B.C., Hyrcanus II laid siege to Jerusalem with the aid of the Arabian Nabateans, who were led by Antipater, the father of Herod the Great.

At this time Rome entered the picture. In 66 B.C. Scaurus, the legate of Pompey, came to Damascus and decided in favor of Aristobulus. This caused the Arabian Nabateans to lift the siege of Jerusalem. In 63 B.C., Pompey himself came to Damascus and again both Aristobulus and Hyrcanus made their appeal to Pompey for control of Judea. Because of a lack of confidence, Aristobulus lost the support of Pompey who then ordered the occupation of Jerusalem. The city was laid siege and taken in the fall of 63 B.C. Thus ended the Hasmonean dynasty and thus began the occupation of Rome.

D. Rome - 63 B.C. to Middle Ages

1. Judea under Rome

In 63 B.C. Pompey occupied Jerusalem and ended independent rule for Judea until A.D. 1948. Pompey, a great military leader, was married to the daughter of Julius Caesar. He was murdered during the conquest of Egypt in 47 B.C. Antipater II, Herod the Great's father, assisted Rome in their conquest of Egypt. Julius Caesar appointed Antipater II Procurator of Judea because of this assistance.

In 44 B.C., Julius Caesar was murdered by Brutus. The empire was then ruled by Octavius and Marc Antony. In 31 B.C., Octavius defeated the army of Brutus and Marc Antony at Actium and became the sole ruler of Rome. He took upon himself the title of Augustus.

2. First Century History²⁴

Rome had succeeded in conquering most of the known world by the time the New Testament starts. The Roman Empire extended from Spain in the west all the way to Parthia in the East, from Britain in the North, to Northern Africa in the South.

Although Rome controlled the known world, it was not a brutal empire. For the most part, conquered territories were allowed a great deal of self rule, provided they paid their taxes to Rome, obeyed Roman law, and did not threaten to rebel.

Conquered territories were organized into provinces. There were two basic types of provinces, Imperial and Senatorial. Imperial provinces were frontier provinces where a strong army was required to keep the populace in line. They were ruled over by Procurators, who were selected by the Emperor and served as long as the Emperor desired. Senatorial provinces were basically peaceful. They were ruled over by Proconsuls who were annually appointed by the Roman Senate. Judea was an Imperial province.

a. Roman Emperors in NT Times

²⁴ Gromacki, pp. 13-22.

Emperor	Dates	Biblical References
Augustus	30 B.C. to A.D. 14	Luke 2:1
Tiberius	A.D. 14-37	Luke 3:1
Caligula	A.D. 37-41	
Claudius	A.D. 41-54	Acts 11:28; 18:2
Nero	A.D. 54-68	Acts 25:10; 28:19
Galba	A.D. 68	
Otho	A.D. 69	
Vitellius	A.D. 69	
Vespasian	A.D. 69-79	
Titus	A.D. 79-81	
Domitian	A.D. 81-96	
Nerva	A.D. 96-98	
Trajan	A.D. 98-117	

Nero was most likely the Emperor who had Paul and Peter put to death and the Caesar to whom Paul appealed. He was also the Emperor during the first great persecution.

Vespasian was the Emperor during the Jewish revolt in A.D. 70. His son Titus is the one that led the attack against Jerusalem in which the Temple was destroyed and the nation sold into slavery.

b. Procurators of Judea

Procurator	Dates	Biblical References
Coponius	A.D. 6-10	
M. Ambivius	A.D. 10-13	
Annius Rufus	A.D. 13-15	
Valerius Gratus	A.D. 15-26	
Pontius Pilate	A.D. 26-36	Luke 3:1, 23:1
Marcellus	A.D. 36-38	
Maryllus	A.D. 38-41	
Cuspius Fadus	A.D. 44-46	
Tiberius Alexander	A.D. 46-48	
Ventidius Cumanus	A.D. 48-52	
M. Antonius Felix	A.D. 52-59	Acts 23, 24
Porcius Festus	A.D. 96-98	Acts 24:27
Albinus	A.D. 61-65	

Pilate gained immortality by being the Procurator during the time of Jesus' crucifixion. He was a hated man by the Jews, and at the time of the crucifixion was under investigation by Rome. He had committed several blunders in his dealings with the Jews. He had entered Jerusalem with the Roman banners displaying the Eagle which infuriated the Jewish leaders. He also robbed money from the temple in order to pay for an aqueduct. In just about every way, Pilate succeeded in stepping on the sensitivities of the Jews. As a result, he was easily swayed by the mob to have Jesus, an innocent man, crucified in order to save his own neck and job. He was eventually banished to Gaul by Caligula where he committed suicide.

3. Judea under the Herods ²⁵

²⁵ Borland, pp. 50-61.

a. Herod the Great - 40 B.C. to 4 B.C.

Herod was an Idumean by birth (descendant of Esau), and was hated by the Jews from the start. In order to gain acceptance from the Jews, he married Miriamne, the granddaughter of Aristobulus and Hyrcanus II. Although he married into the Jewish ruling family, he was never accepted and despised by the Jews all his life.

Since Herod could not gain power diplomatically, he went to Rome and sought the backing of the Roman empire. He was named King of the Jews in 40 B.C. by the Marc Antony and Octavius. He then returned to Palestine and proceeded to consolidate his rule over the Jews. His first act was to murder 45 members of the Sanhedrin and set up his own men in their place. He was a ruthless ruler who murdered anyone who threatened his rule. He died in 4 B.C. at the age of 69.

Herod was a great builder. Many of his building projects are still standing. Just before his death he began a massive rebuilding of the Jewish temple, which was destroyed by Rome only a few years after its completion. He courted both the favor of Rome and the favor of the Jews by his massive building projects and the promotion of the Jews at home and abroad. He did much for the Jews although he was never really accepted as their King. Some of this most notable building projects were:

- 1). The fortress Antonia in Jerusalem.
- 2). The fortress Herodium southeast of Bethlehem.
- 3). The fortress of Masada where the Jews made their final stand against Rome in A.D. 72.
- 4). The fortress of Macherias, where John the Baptist was beheaded.
- 5). The fortress Alexandrium east of Nablus.
- 6). Many cultural buildings including a hippodrome, theater and athletic amphiaters.
- 7). A huge aqueduct which can be seen today.
- 8). The reconstruction and beautification of the Temple which took over 40 years to complete.

When Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., his kingdom was split among his three sons Archelaus, Philip, and Herod Antipas.

b. Archelaus the Ethnarch - 4 B.C. to A.D. 6

Archelaus was given the territory of Judah upon Herod the Great's death. He was deposed by Rome after ten years at which time Judea was put under Roman procurators (of which one was Pilate). It was this Herod that caused Joseph to go live in Nazareth.

c. Philip the Tetrarch - 4 B.C. to A.D. 34

Philip was put over Iturea and Trachonitus (northern Palestine). Ruled until A.D. 34 at which time Rome took over direct rule of the lands over which he was a ruler since he had no children.

d. Herod Antipas the Tetrarch

Antipas was put over Galilee and Perea (area of the Decapolis). Christ called him a fox and it was this Herod that had John beheaded. He was banished to Gaul in A.D. 39 when he was falsely accused by Agrippa I of being in league with the Parthians.

e. Herod Agrippa I - A.D. 37 to A.D. 44

Herod Agrippa I eventually ruled all the lands formerly ruled by Herod the Great. He was loved by the Jews because he tried to live according to the law. He had James killed (Acts 12:1-19) and died suddenly because of pride at the age of 54 (Acts 12:20-23).

f. Herodias

Herodias was the wife of Philip and later Antipas. It was because of her unlawful marriage that John was put into prison and later killed. She was the granddaughter of Herod the Great and sister to Agrippa I.

g. Herod Agrippa II - A.D. 50 to A.D. 100

Agrippa II ruled over the lands formerly ruled by Herod the Great with the exception of Judea. It was this Herod that Paul almost persuaded to be a believer (Acts 26:28).

- h. Bernice - daughter of Agrippa I.

Originally Bernice was married to Herod, King of Chalcis. When he died she traveled with Agrippa II and raised suspicions of incest in Rome.

- i. Drusilla - married to Felix, procurator of Judea.

Drusilla was the daughter of Agrippa I.

4. The Socio-Economic World²⁶

- a. Class Structure

There was essentially no middle class in the Roman world. Just about everyone was either very wealthy, or very poor. It has been estimated that nearly 60 percent of the Roman world was slaves. What middle class there was often found themselves poorer and poorer under a tax burden which approached over 40 percent.

Slavery was a basic institution in Roman life. A slave had absolutely no rights, and was often considered little more than a human tool. A master could have his slave beaten or even killed and be totally immune from any legal recourse.

In Judea, most Jews were free but poor. They lived from day to day on the wages they could muster doing manual labor, farming, or fishing. The only wealthy Jews were the Sadducees, who controlled the temple and gained their living by changing money and charging exorbitant prices for sacrificial animals.

- b. Language

Most people of the first century were bilingual, with some being multilingual. The four major languages of the day were:

- 1). Latin - used mainly in the western empire.
- 2). Greek - most common language spoken and read throughout the empire.
- 3). Aramaic - everyday commercial language of Palestine.
- 4). Hebrew - spoken only by the orthodox Jew and used in the reading of the Torah.

- c. Education

Education was not public but private. The wealthy families often hired tutors to teach their children. Very few universities existed, however there were three major university learning centers in Alexandria, Athens, and Tarsus.

Jewish education consisted mainly in the learning of the Torah. Most young Jewish males were exposed to the Torah in large measure, some even being able to recite large portions.

²⁶ Gromacki, pp. 22-24

Women were considered uneducatable. It was a rarity to find a woman who could read. Most were considered little more than property.

d. Gentile Religions

For a religion to be practiced in the Roman Empire, it had to be legalized. Judaism was legalized and hence a protected religion. For a while, Christianity was considered to be a sect of Judaism and hence it was protected as well. However, in the sixth decade of the first century Christianity made a split from Judaism and was therefore illegal. Those who practiced it were subject to death.

Roman religion consisted in a polytheistic collection of Gods. Some notable names are Jupiter, Mercury, Venus, Hera, and Apollo. Most of the Roman gods were taken from Greek mythology and given Roman names.

A major religious order were the mystery religions in Greece. These religions consisted of secret rituals and hidden knowledge given only to initiates. Common religious practices were orgies and drunken parties since it was thought that indulging the flesh was one way to commune with the divine.

Other notable religions and philosophies were:

1). Gnosticism

Gnosticism held that matter was evil and spirit divine. This was founded in philosophical dualism. At death, the soul was released from the prison of the body and free to be all it was created to be. Since the body was evil, it did not matter what one did with the body. Gnostic religions were known for their many excesses

2). Stoicism

Stoicism taught that the world had a purpose it they denied a person God. One's goal in life should be to find that purpose and align oneself with it. Stoics had a great deal of personal discipline and morality.

3). Epicureans

Epicureanism taught that the world came about by random chance. Therefore, the goal of life is to pursue pleasure. Whatever made one feel good was therefore acceptable.

e. Jewish Religion

Jewish religion, as opposed to paganism, believed in a single, personal God. They revered the Old Testament, consisting of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

Throughout the Roman world, the Jews had established synagogues in the cities in which they found themselves. As long as twelve Jewish men lived in a city, it could have a synagogue. It was in the

synagogue that the Old Testament was read and taught by the local rabbis. When Paul began his missionary journeys, it was the synagogues that offered him his first opportunity to meet and tell the Jews about the Gospel.

The Jewish religion was also centered around six feasts and a group of other holy days that had come into existence over the centuries. The defined feasts were:

Feast	Date	Biblical References
Passover	April 14	Exo 12:1-20, Lev. 23:5
Unleavened Bread	April 15	Lev 23:6-8
Pentecost	June 6	Lev 23:15-21
Trumpets	October 1	Lev 23:23-25
Atonement	October 10	Lev 23:26-32
Tabernacles	October 15	Lev 23:33-44
Dedication	December 25	John 10:22
Purim	March 14	Esther 9:26-28