

5. Jesus and Second-Temple Judaism

The Second Temple Period runs from the end of the Babylonian Captivity (539 BC) to the destruction of the Second Temple (AD 70).

I. Political Situation

A. The Persian Empire

In 539 Cyrus, king of Persia, captured Babylon, ending the Babylonian Empire.

Return from Exile

In 538 Cyrus issued a royal decree permitting the return of Jews to Jerusalem. In 537 a small group returned with Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest. They started rebuilding the temple, but quickly gave up. In 520 Haggai and Zechariah encouraged them to resume, and Second Temple was completed in 515. But it was a disappointment for those who knew the glory of the First Temple (Solomon's) or who were expecting a temple like that described by Ezekiel.

In 458 Ezra came to Jerusalem where he served as a priest and scribe. In 446 Nehemiah came to serve as governor.

The Jews viewed the return to Jerusalem as a miraculous demonstration of God's faithfulness to his people; it was a second exodus. But something wasn't quite right: the second temple lacked the glory of the first, Judah remained a district of the Persian empire. This was not the great return the Jews had expected.

B. Hellenistic Rule

In an amazing campaign in 334-323, Alexander of Macedonia (356-323) swept through Asia as far as India, overrunning Palestine (332) and the remnants of the Persian empire (331). He died in Babylon in 323, aged 32.

Leaving only an inept brother and an unborn son, Alexander's vast empire quickly fell into the hands of his generals (the Diadochi, Gk Διάδοχοι, "successors"), who fought among themselves for 20 years (The Wars of the Diadochi, 323-301) before four of them reached a stable disposition of power, including Ptolemy ruling Egypt and Palestine from Alexandria, and Seleucus ruling Syria from Antioch.

Seleucid rule of Palestine (198-143 BC)

In 198 the Seleucid king Antiochus III the Great captured Palestine from Ptolemy IV.

Faced with the growing power of Rome and an unstable kingdom, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (r. 175-164) tried to unite his kingdom around Greek culture and religion. He turned the temple into a temple of Zeus. When the Jews resisted he responded harshly: he set out to eradicate Judaism by forbidding sabbath observance, feasts, circumcision and sacrifices; by destroying copies of the torah; by requiring Jews to eat pork and offer unclean sacrifices; and by sacrificing a pig on the altar in the temple (167).

Mattathias, an old priest in the village of Modein, refused to offer a sacrifice to Zeus. He and his five sons sparked a rebellion—the Maccabean Revolt. His third son Judah (nicknamed **המכבי** ha-Maccabee "the hammer"; Gk Judas Maccabeus) assumed leadership when Mattathias died in 166. Judas captured Judah, Jerusalem and the temple. In 164, exactly three years after its desecration, the temple and altar were rededicated, a miraculous deliverance commemorated ever since in Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication or Lights (**חֲנֻכָּה** "dedication"). The Jews now had religious freedom under the political rule of Syria. The story of this revolt is told in 1 & 2 Maccabees (in the Apocrypha).

C. Hasmonean Rule (142–63 BC)

Judas continued the struggle for political independence, succeeded by his brothers Jonathan (160) and Simon (143). In 150 Jonathan was appointed high priest and governor of Judea (under Syrian rule). In 142 Simon won independence from Syria to make a dream come true: Israel was independent, free of Gentile rule, for the first time since 587. In 140 the Jews made Simon's position as ruler and high priest a hereditary office, though he was descended from neither David nor Zadok. For the next 77 years Judea was ruled by the Hasmonean line of high priests (Josephus traces the name Hasmonean to Mattathias' great grandfather). Under Simon "each man sat under his vine and his fig tree, and there was none to make them afraid" (1 Macc 14:12).

John Hyrcanus I, Aristobulus I and Alexander Janneus conquered new territory so that Janneus' kingdom was equal in size to that of David and Solomon, i.e., from the Euphrates to the Brook of Egypt.

In 67, the Hasmonean rule degenerated into a civil war between Aristobulus II backed by the Sadducees, and Hyrcanus II backed by the Pharisees. Both brothers appealed to Roman general Pompey. In response to rebellion by Aristobulus II, Pompey attacked Jerusalem; Hyrcanus' followers opened the gates but Aristobulus' followers held the temple for 3 months. Finally Pompey captured the temple and entered the Holy of Holies, where he found nothing.

D. The Roman Empire

Rome rose to power in the Third Century BC, uniting Italy, defeating Carthage in the Second Punic Wars (218-201), defeating Macedonia in 197. By the first century BC, both aristocratic rule and democratic rule had failed to maintain good government and the republic was headed for authoritarian rule. In 49 BC Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon, declaring war on Rome. emerging victorious from the civil war with Pompey he was appointed dictator, acclaimed as a demi-god, and had temples dedicated to himself. He was assassinated in 44 BC. In 27 BC Octavian emerged victorious from a second civil war; a grateful Senate awarded him the title Augustus, and proclaimed him emperor. The Roman empire was born.

Herodian Rule

Pompey made Palestine a Roman province in 63 BC. Hyrcanus II was reappointed high priest, but, behind the scenes, the strings were pulled by Antipater whom Alexander Janneus had appointed governor of Idumea (Edom). Julius Caesar made Antipater II procurator of Judea, and gave Hyrcanus the title of ethnarch of the Jews, but Antipater II was the effective ruler. Antipater II appointed his son Herod as governor of Galilee in 47.

1. Herod the Great

Seeking greater power, Herod married into the Hasmonean line, becoming betrothed to Mariamne, the granddaughter of both archrivals Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus III! This paid off when Caesar appointed him king of Judea in 40. In 37 he recovered Jerusalem from the Parthians who had invaded in 40. During his 33 year reign Herod had the Romans kill Antigonus, then he killed Mariamne's brother Aristobulus III, her grandfather Hyrcanus II, Mariamne herself, her mother Alexandra, his sister Salome's husband Costobarus, his own sons Alexander and Aristobulus, and his son Antipater by his first marriage. It is therefore not surprising that when strangers from the east came looking for one "born king of the Jews" (Matt 2:2), he should respond by killing all baby boys under the age of 2 in Bethlehem. Caesar Augustus remarked, "I would rather be Herod's pig than his son!"

Besides Mariamne, Herod had nine other wives. It is impossible to show the intricate family ties between all the members of the Herodian branch of the Hasmonean family; e.g., Herod Philip, Herod Antipas and Philip the tetrarch were sons of Herod by three different wives.

Herod was a capable but ruthless ruler, upholding the interests of Rome, but very unpopular among the Jews, despite attempts to win their favor and prove himself a Jew. In an attempt to curry favor with the Jews, Herod began to enlarge the temple in 20 BC. By the end of the project nothing was left of Zerubbabel's temple, but because the work was done piecemeal, it remained the Second temple.

When Herod died in 4 BC his kingdom was divided among two sons Archelaus and Antipas. The descendants of

5. Jesus and Second-Temple Judaism

Herod's son Aristobulus continued Hasmonean rule in Palestine for another 100 years after Herod's death. Herod Agrippa I was king of the Jews AD 37–44; his son Agrippa II was king of the Jews AD 50–100.

- Archelaus: governor of Idumea, Judea and Samaria 4 BC–AD 6. He was a tyrannical ruler (Matt 2:22). Augustus deposed him in AD 6.
- Antipas: tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (4 BC–AD 39). He imprisoned John the Baptist when John protested his taking Herodias, his brother's wife (Matt 14). This was the Herod who tried Jesus at Pilate's request (Luke 23:6–12)—Herod was visiting Jerusalem for Passover. In AD 39, Caligula exiled Antipas.
- Agrippa I (10 BC–AD 44). King of the Jews AD 37–44: in AD 37 Caligula gave him the territory of Philip the tetrarch, in 39 the territory of Antipas; in 41 Claudius added Judea and Samaria to give him control of the whole territory of Herod the Great. He killed James, and put Peter in prison (Acts 12).
- Agrippa II: king of the Jews (AD 50–100). Paul made a defense before Agrippa and his sister Bernice with whom he had an incestuous relationship (Acts 25–26).

Roman Rule

When Archelaus was deposed in AD 6, Judea was made a minor Roman province, governed by a prefect appointed by the emperor, and responsible to the governor of Syria; he ruled from Caesarea. The Roman prefect was given the right to appoint and depose the high priest. Prefects included Pontius Pilate (26–36), Felix, Festus.

Effect of Events on the Jewish Mindset

1. Acceptance of punishment: The Jews accepted that God was using the nations to punish Israel for her sins. This punishment was deserved, but they were surprised it was lasting so long. Surely the time must soon be coming when God would judge they had suffered enough.
2. Expectation of vindication: God had vindicated himself and his people against Haman and against Antiochus Epiphanes when they tried to defy him and obliterate his people. On both occasions the underdog won against seemingly impossible odds. In 63 BC Pompey strode into the Holy of Holies, an act of defiance that had gone unpunished. Surely God would soon do what he did to the Persians and the Syrians, as he had done earlier to the Egyptians: overthrow the oppressor and vindicate himself and his people.
3. Expectation of restoration: for 600 years there had been a tension between what God had promised and what had come to pass.
 - a. Return from exile: Although some Jews had returned from Babylon and had rebuilt the temple, the return did not look like what the prophets had foretold: Judea was not independent; the temple was small; and many Jews stayed in Babylon.
 - b. Overthrow of Seleucid oppression: most Jews supported the struggle for religious freedom but many did not support the continued struggle for political freedom. When the Hasmoneans gained independence they quickly became corrupt.
 - c. Herod's temple. A magnificent temple had been built by one claiming to be king, but Herod was an imposter.

II. Second-Temple Judaism

In the later second-temple period there were several major strands in Judaism.

A. The Sadducees

οἱ Σαδδουκκαῖοι, probably from Zadok (the priest).

The first mention of the Sadducees is after the Maccabean Revolt (167–164 BC). They were closely associated with most of the Hasmonean priest-kings. Herod reduced their power and manipulated the office of high priest for his own ends, but they regained power when the Roman governors allowed the high priest and the Sanhedrin greater autonomy.

The Sadducees were the aristocracy: wealthy landowners and the religious leaders. The high priest, chief priests

(leading priestly families) and elders (leading lay families) were all Sadducees. In order to retain their power and maintain the status quo they collaborated with the Romans, for which the people despised them.

Distinctive beliefs

1. rejected the oral law of the Pharisees, accepting as inspired only the written Torah (first five books, the Pentateuch).
2. emphasized the freedom of human will over against the sovereignty of God; their focus on this world and concern for political power led them to grab and maintain political power for themselves.
3. did not believe in the resurrection (Matt 22:23; Acts 23:6-8). Their emphasis on power, position and wealth in this world left no room for eschatological hope of a coming kingdom of God.

Interaction with Jesus: Jesus had little to do with the Pharisees until his final week in Jerusalem, where the Pharisees were concentrated.

B. The Pharisees

οἱ Φαρισαῖοι, probably from פְּרֻשִׁים perushim, “separated ones”

Like the Sadducees, the Pharisees are known to have been in existence shortly after the Maccabean Revolt, but their origins probably go further back. Some Pharisees were scribes—professional Torah scholars—but many were just laymen. While the Sadducees were unpopular with the people, the Pharisees enjoyed great public support.

Distinctive beliefs

1. Oral law: They believed that in addition to the written Torah, God had given Moses oral law (halakah, from halak to walk) which had been handed down through the generations (ἡ παράδοσις τῶν πρεσβυτέρων the tradition of the elders, Matt 15:1-9; par. Mark 7:1-13). This tradition was received (παραλαμβάνω) from the previous generation and handed on (παραδίδωμι) to the next. This halakah guide the Pharisees in living daily life. They considered this oral law a fence around the Torah. Keeping the law was not a matter of salvation but of sanctification: God had called Israel to be holy.
2. Emphasis on purity: though only a few Pharisees were priests, they all tried to keep the purity laws required of the priests in the temple. They formed brotherhoods (haburot; members haberim), eating only with those who had a similar level of purity.
3. On God's sovereignty vs. man's free will, Josephus says the Pharisees took a middle position between the Essenes (all was fate, determined by God) and the Sadducees (all was up to man). God will intervene to restore Israel but faithful Jews should be ready to help. On this, as on several other issues, the Pharisees split into two groups: the school of Shammai (ca. 50 BC–AD 30) and the school of Hillel (ca. 60 BC–AD 20).
 - a. Active opposition: promoted by the school of Shammai. They were politically active and favored revolution.
 - b. Passive acceptance: promoted by Hillel and his followers (see the speech of Hillel's son/grandson Gamaliel in Acts 5:33-39). Although Saul of tarsus studied under Gamaliel, he favored active opposition.
4. Belief in resurrection. By this they understood that God would vindicate himself and his people, creating a reconstituted and restored Israel.

Interaction with Jesus

Jesus interacted a lot with the Pharisees. They showed much interest in him, and in many ways accepted him as an equal. In many respects he was another rabbi with disciples, another scribe expounding the Scriptures. The interaction centered upon the issues of paramount concern to the Pharisees: ritual purity—Sabbath observance, table fellowship, ceremonial cleanness, etc. The Pharisees objected that Jesus did not walk according to the oral law, the tradition of the elders. Jesus countered that they had displaced God's word with the traditions of men.

5. Jesus and Second-Temple Judaism

C. The Essenes

The Essenes perhaps came into existence after the Hasmoneans gained political independence. Viewing the Hasmonean priest-kings as unlawful, the Essenes retreated to the wilderness where they saw themselves as the true, uncompromised Israel waiting for God to vindicate them. They kept very strict purity laws, had communal property, many were celibate. The Qumran community (located next to the caves of the Dead Sea Scrolls) was probably an Essene community.

Distinctive beliefs

1. Emphasis on God's providence. Although the essenes longed for the restoration of Israel, they were waiting for God to perform it in his own time. However, many of them believed that God had already started to act by calling them out as the true Israel.
2. Exclusive claims. Calling themselves the Sons of Light they saw all other Jews as Sons of Darkness, no longer part of true Israel. The Sadducee high priests were false, the temple corrupt, the Pharisees loose in following the purity laws.
3. Strict purity laws: frequent immersion in a *mikvah* (מִקְוָה), a pool for ritual cleansing.
4. Messianic expectation: they expected two Messiahs—a true Davidic king, and a true Zadokite priest.

Interaction with Jesus

The NT makes no mention of the essenes. In many ways John the Baptist lived and behaved like an Essene, as did the early Church.

D. The Zealots

Although many Jews tolerated the Romans, waiting for God to vindicate himself and them against the oppressor, some turned to violence to overthrow the enemy. In the period 4 BC (death of Herod) – AD 70, Palestine was like a simmering pot, threatening to boil over. Often the pot boiled over due to provocation by the Roman rulers. Although there were a few organized groups of rebels (the Zealots, the Sicarii), much of the rebellion is better seen as the response of ordinary Jews to Roman provocation, i.e., Pharisees and the ordinary “people of the land” joined in. The NT mentions two of these rebellions: Judas who rebelled against the census of AD 6 (Acts 5:37); an Egyptian of the Sicarii “Assassins” (σικάριος dagger-man, Acts 21:38). Josephus describes many more.

After the Fall of Jerusalem the Zealots retreated to Masada. The Romans besieged the fortress, used captured Jews to build a ramp, and captured the citadel in 73.

The Zealots had no distinctive theological beliefs.

Interaction with Jesus

One of Jesus' disciples, Simon, was named a Zealot (Cananaean Καναναῖος from זָקַף to be jealous/zealous, Matt 10:4; Mark 3:18; Zealot ζηλωτής from ζηλώω to be jealous/zealous, Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13).

Jesus' response to rebellion or provocation is usually to tell the Jews they are fighting the wrong enemy (e.g., Matt 22:15-22; Luke 13:1-5).

III. Jesus

A. Jesus and Israel's History

Matthew introduces his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. He tailors the genealogy into three sets of fourteen generations to show Jesus fulfilling three important stages of Jewish history:

1. Abraham: Jesus is the one through whom the promises to Abraham will be fulfilled.
2. David: great David's greater son, the Son of God, the Messiah, has been born.

3. Exile: though there had been a partial return of the exiled Jews to their homeland, many remained scattered throughout the nations (the Diaspora) and the land was under the control of an alien power. The Jews of Jesus' day awaited the day of redemption and restoration when God would deliver his people and bring them home. The true Israelite, true Messiah has now come to bring an end to the exile.

B. Jesus and Torah

Jesus functioned as a rabbi with his disciples to whom he passed on instruction.
he called twelve disciples to be with him, to be representative founders of a reconstituted Israel.
he instructed his disciples: "I tell you..."

But Jesus taught a new Torah:

1. Matthew's five blocks of teaching: Matthew collects Jesus' teaching into five blocks, corresponding to the five books of the Torah. Each block ends with the phrase "When Jesus had finished..." (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). The first of these blocks is the sermon on the mount, which Jesus delivered after going up on a mountain (as a new Moses) and sitting down (as a rabbi).
2. Intensified Torah: six rounds of "You have heard that it was said...but I say to you" (5:21-48). Jesus addressed murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, vengeance (*lex talionis*), and treatment of enemies. He intensified the Torah, building a fence around it.
3. Contrasted his teaching with human tradition: Jesus contrasted two sets of teaching (Matt 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13):
 - a. "the tradition of the elders/of men": the oral law
 - b. the word/commandment of God.
4. Replaced Torah: Jesus told the rich young ruler seeking eternal life to keep the Torah, the commandments (Matt 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23). This was standard rabbinic teaching: God gave Israel the Torah to enable her to "be holy as I am holy." But, Jesus added that there is something beyond this: "If you want to be perfect (τέλειος)," leave everything, then "come, follow me." Beyond the Torah lies Jesus! Jesus came not so much to abolish the torah as to fulfill it (Matt 5:17). The Torah and the Prophets pointed to him.
5. Come, follow me: Jesus replaced the Torah with himself, and called all to come to him and follow him. He redefined the identity of God's people: no longer the children of Abraham but now the followers of Jesus.

Jesus and the Identity of the People of God

Jesus told the Jewish leaders that the children of Abraham are characterized by faith, the faith of Abraham (John 8:31-59). He looked for faith among Israel's leaders but did not find it. Instead he found faith in unlikely places: the little people: the sick, etc.
foreigners: Syro-phoenician/Canaanite woman; Roman.

He redefined Israel around himself, as those who followed him.

Jesus and the Temple