

# Background of the New Testament

## The Promises

God made us for Himself, for relationship as His beloved children.

The whole history of the world is the Grand Story of God calling out a people for Himself

- **Adam** - Genesis 3.15: The "Protoevangelion" - The woman's seed will bruise the serpents head.
- **Noah** - Genesis 8.21-22: God will never again curse the ground, seasons will continue until the end. God's longsuffering, not desiring any to perish - looking ahead to the coming of Christ
- **Abraham** circa 1900 B.C.
  - Abraham is called the "friend of God".
  - He foreshadows the Father giving His beloved son as sacrifice for the sin of the world.
  - Genesis 22:18: In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.
  - Same promise repeated to son Issac, and grandson Jacob
  - Yahweh is thereafter called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
- **Moses** circa 1400 B.C.
  - Moses as Lawgiver and Leader is a type of Christ. Deuteronomy 18:15: The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.
  - The Law - God's character and holiness revealed. Only One could ever fulfill it
  - The Tabernacle - God with us, points to Jesus
  - The Passover and the Sacrificial System - Jesus will be the perfect Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of world
- **David** circa 1000 B.C.
  - David as Shepherd King is a type of Christ: A "man after God's own heart" - 1 Samuel 13:14: the LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people
  - He wanted to build a house for God, but God said no, He would build David a house
    - 2 Samuel 7:11-13: The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

# The Preparation

## Rise of Fall of Empires

### The visions in Daniel

- Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2
  - The Grand a glorious statue
  - The Empires seen through the eyes of the world
- Daniel's vision in Daniel 7
  - Same empires seen as horrible ravaging beasts
  - Human Empires seen from the eyes of Heaven

### Timeline

- **Assyrian** c. 911–609 BC
  - Conquered and destroyed the Northern Kingdom (Israel) in 722 BC
  - Southern Kingdom (Judah) remained unconquered due the faithfulness of Hezekiah
- **Babylonian** c. 605–539 BC
  - Destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple built by Solomon
  - Carried Judah captive to Babylon c. 586 B.C
- **Persian** c. 539–330 BC
  - Cyrus
    - Issued decree for the exiles to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple
    - Prophesied by name in Isaiah 44 and 45
    - Account of his deeds in Ezra, 2 Chronicles and Daniel
  - Darius
    - Promoted Daniel, fasted for him in the lion's den (Daniel 6)
  - The Magi in Matthew 2 are of these people
- **Macedonian** (Greek) c. 336–323 BC
  - Alexander the Great, tutored by Aristotle
  - Died young at 33, after conquering the world
  - Empire divided between 4 generals, two of whom were Ptolemy and Seleucus
- **Seleucid** c. 312–63 BC
  - Originally the Ptolemies (Cleopatra was the last of them) controlled Judah, and were relatively friendly to the Jews
    - during their reign the Septuagint translation (Greek) made c. 250 BC in Alexandria
  - In 175 BC a Seleucid usurper Antiochus Epiphanes seized the throne, and annexed Judea

- he sought to force pagan religion on the Jews, and persecuted them harshly
- he defiles the Temple, including a altar of Zeus, unclean sacrifices (pigs), and temple prostitutes
- **The Maccabean Revolt** c. 165 BC
  - The faithful Jews who resisted were called the *Hasidim*
  - One of the families of the Hasidim, the Maccabees, led a rebellion and gained independence from the Seleucids
  - Over time Maccabean rulers, aka Hasmoneans, eventually became corrupt (human nature)
    - One group of the Hasidim withdrew their support - these were the Pharisees ("Separated Ones")
    - Another group of wealthy priests remained loyal to the Hasmoneans - these were the Sadducees
- **Roman** c. 27 BC – AD 476
  - Started as a Monarchy in c. 753 BC
  - Became a republic (SPQR) in 509 BC
  - Conquered Judea in 63 BC
  - Under Julius Caesar became an Empire in 27 BC

## Hellenization

- "Hellas" is the Greek word for "Greece"
- So "Hellenization" simply means "Greekification"
- Result of Alexander's conquest
- Greek became the language of commerce throughout the Empire, and eventually was spoken by nearly everyone
- The New Testament is written entirely in Greek
- This prepared the way for the Gospel to be spread to all peoples across the Empire

## Pax Romana

- "Roman Peace"
- circa 27 BC to AD 180
- Established under the rule Julius Caesar's nephew and successor, Octavian, who became Emperor under the name Caesar Augustus
- He called for the census which brought about the fulfillment of prophecy
- Law and Order prevail across the vast Roman Empire
- Roman roads and shipping make travel safe and accessible as never before
- Alexandrian ships could carry 200 passengers!

- This prepared the way for the Gospel to be spread to all peoples across the Empire

## The Synagogue

- συναγωγή = Greek for a "gathering together"
- established during the Exile by Ezra and other "teaching priests" after the destruction of the First Temple
- Jews were dispersed throughout the world, now there was a synagogue present wherever Jews lived, which was pretty much everywhere
- center of Jewish life, culture and worship - focused on the reading of the Torah and teaching of the rabbis
- The Septuagint (LXX, Greek translation) was often read
- Jesus went there to teach and preach, as did the apostles
- Everywhere the apostles went the Word was already there!
- This prepared the way for the Gospel to be spread to all peoples across the Empire

## The Players

- Romans
  - conquered Judea in 63 BC
  - rulers of the world in New Testament times
  - Generally were tolerant with respect to local religion and gods
    - The Romans had MANY gods! What's one or two more?
  - Generally allowed conquered countries to have a degree of self-government, as long as they submitted to Roman authority and paid taxes
- The Herods
  - a family of political opportunists who ruled over Judea under Rome
  - Not Jews, rather Idumean (Edomite) - descended from Esau
  - Herod the Great ruled when Jesus was born
  - Was given the title "King of the Jews"
  - Slaughtered the babes in Bethlehem
  - Sought to please the Jews by beautifying their Temple (2nd temple build after the return from Exile)
  - So magnificent, it was considered to be one the wonders of the ancient world
  - Consider the words of Jesus when the disciple were marvelling at the Temple buildings: "not one stone will be left upon another"
  - Destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70
- The Tax Collectors

- Jews who were hired by Romans to collect taxes from their own people
- The Romans put these jobs out for bid, and typically gave them to the lowest bidder
- Tax collectors often collected more than required to line their own pockets
- Hence they were almost universally despised and hated
- The religious people were offended that Jesus hung out with "tax collectors" - since they were viewed as the very dregs of society.
- Matthew the apostle, author of the 1st gospel was one before Jesus called him!
- The Sanhedrin
  - συνέδριον = Greek for "sitting together" as the elders do to preside
  - the highest court of the Jews
  - often translated as "The Council" e.g. Acts 5:41: So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.
- The Pharisees
  - one of the two groups that split off from the corrupt Maccabean rulers c. 150 BC
  - "Separated Ones"
  - Diligent students of Scripture and keepers of the Law
  - Very highly regarded in the community
  - The forefathers of current Orthodox Judaism
- The Sadducees
  - mostly wealthy priests who had remained loyal to the corrupt rulers after the Maccabean revolt
  - tended to be secular and skeptical
  - in our time they would be the liberal intellectual elites
  - they were very prominent in the Sanhedrin
  - after the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, they were no more
- The Scribes
  - became a band or guild under the oppression of Antiochus Epiphanes
  - Also known as "lawyers" in the New Testament, i.e. Teachers of the Law
  - a literate minority in an oral based-culture, copied the Hebrew Scriptures
  - regarded as experts in the Law of Moses
  - originators of the synagogue service
  - some sat on the Sanhedrin, and were called upon to make judgments based on the Law
- The Zealots
  - a party of political revolutionaries who advocated rebellion against Roman rule
  - emulated the Maccabees in their resistance to godless tyranny
  - they opposed payment of taxes to Rome since God is the true king of Israel
  - In the inner circle of the Twelve apostles, Jesus had 2 who would naturally be bitter enemies: Matthew the Tax Collector, and Simon the Zealot!

# Assignment

- **Read** chapters 1 and 2 of *Introducing the New Testament*
- **Read** Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–21; 17:1–17 to familiarize yourself with the Abrahamic covenant.
- **Read** 2 Samuel 7:8–16 to familiarize yourself with the Davidic covenant.
- **Watch** The Bible Project [New Testament Summary](#) below.
- **Respond** to the following questions:

## Knowing

1. To whom did the Lord promise "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." ?
2. To whom did the Lord promise "I will raise up your descendant after you... He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ?
3. What does "Pax Romana" mean?

## Reflecting

Choose one or two of the following:

1. Describe some of the ways God orchestrated world events to prepare the way for the coming of Christ and the Gospel in the fullness of times?
2. Explain why in the visions of the rise and fall of empires the King of Babylon saw a glorious statue, but Daniel the man of God saw ravening beasts? What does this show about the differences between the eye of the world, and the eye of Heaven?

## Communicating

You are talking to someone in the coffee shop and she asks you why the God of the Old Testament is so different from the God of the New Testament? One is harsh and angry, but the other is kind and loving. How would you answer?

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