

The Intertestamental Period

PODCAST 1 - WHO IS OUR KING? (A)

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Why Is This Period Important?

1. Four Centuries is a long time!

Fills in the “gap” of history between the Old and New Testaments – *History doesn't stop!*

2. Major challenges and changes in the world

New groups appear, new kingdoms rise (and fall), and new ideas sprout up

3. This period is the lens through which the New Testament writers view the Old Testament

New Testament writers looked back at the Old Testament through this period's issues and ideas

The Intertestamental Lens

Numbers 23:9 (JPS) –

“As I see them from the mountain tops, gaze on them from the heights,
There is a people that **dwell apart, not recognized** among the nations.”

Philo Judeaus in *Book of Moses* 1.278 (early 1st c. CE) –

“For I shall behold them with my eyes from the loftiest mountains, and I shall see them with my mind; and I shall never be able to injure **the people which shall dwell alone, not being numbered** among the other nations, not in accordance with the inheritance of any particular places, or any apportionment of lands, but **by reason of the peculiar nature of their remarkable customs**, as they will never mingle with any other nation **so as to depart from their national and ancestral ways.**”

Exploring the Intertestamental Period

Over 6 lessons we will discuss three categories that shaped Jewish belief during the period up to the time of Jesus

1. Political changes and the new ways of understanding YHWH's reign over the Jewish people (and the world!)
2. The new cultural impulse of Hellenism and how it affected Jewish identity
3. Religious beliefs that developed during the period as well as different groups within Judaism that sprang up

We will also discuss specifically how these changes are reflected in the New Testament

New Political Challenges

The loss of local political control and independent nationhood caused a re-evaluation of what it meant to worship YHWH and live as a “people that dwells apart.”

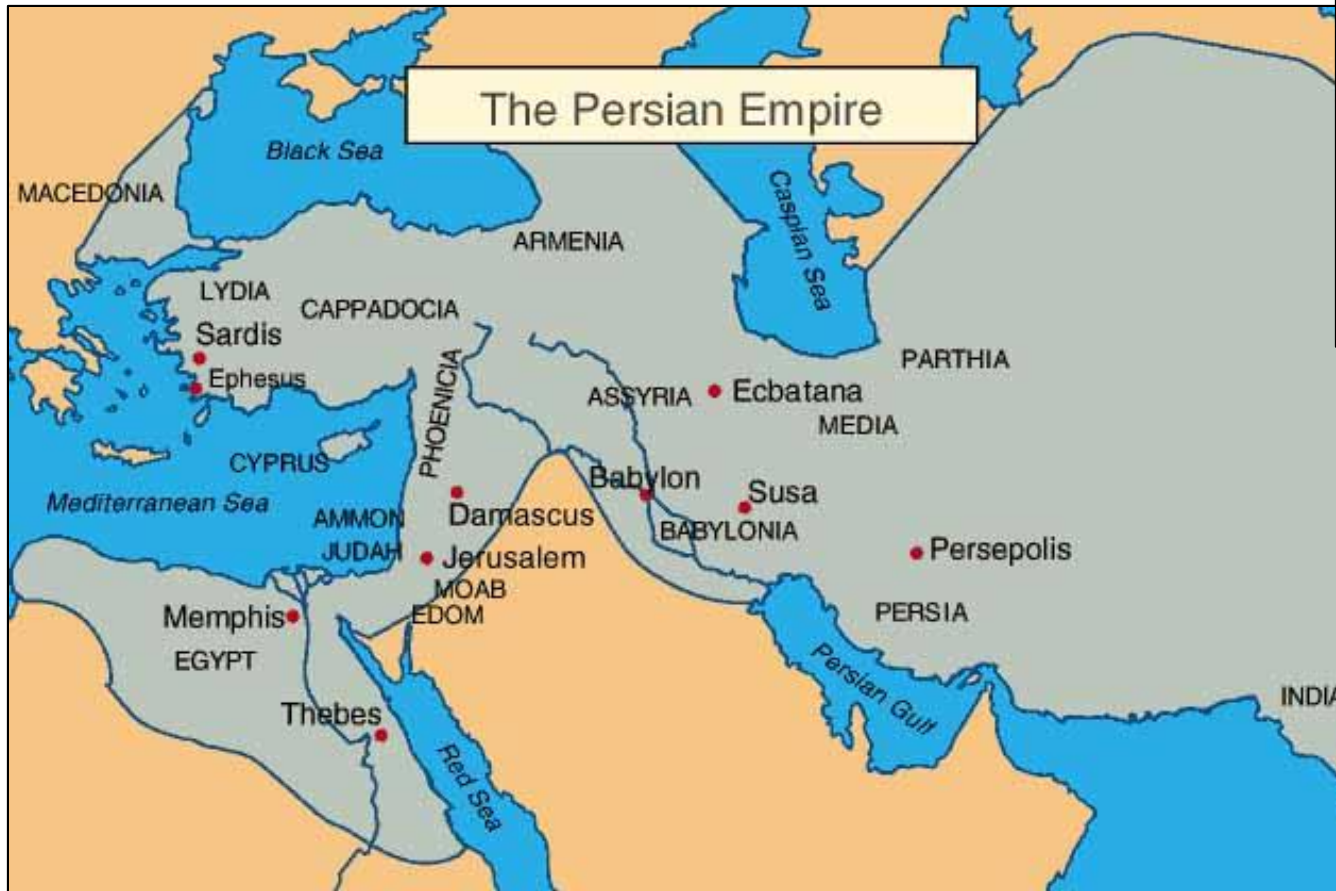
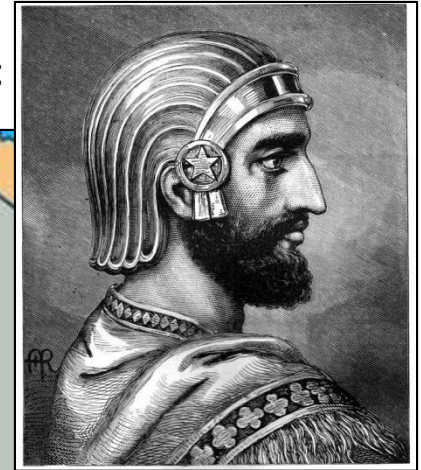
- The transition from detached, distant rulers to localized “foreign” rulers spurred new thinking about what it meant to be YHWH’s special people in a Gentile world
- The actions of these rulers created pressure points with Hellenistic Judaism, either soothing or antagonizing groups

Our focus for today:

- Persian Period to Alexander the Great (late 6th c to 323 BCE)
- Ptolemaic Period up to Maccabean Revolt (323 to 167 BCE)

The Exile Ends with the Persians in Control

Cyrus the Great



Darius I

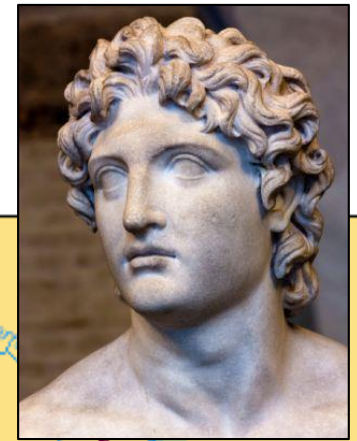


The Exile Ends with the Persians in Control

- Allowed to return to Jerusalem by the Mede-Persian king Cyrus the Great in 538 BCE, a group of approximately 55,000 people return to Judea and begin to re-build
- Persians allow relative freedom for localized rule
 - Appoint a local governor
 - Levy taxes
 - Provide for an umbrella military defense
 - Adjudicate any local disputes
 - Allow for religious freedom of worship
- Existing tensions begin to rise around the question, “What does it mean to be Jewish?”

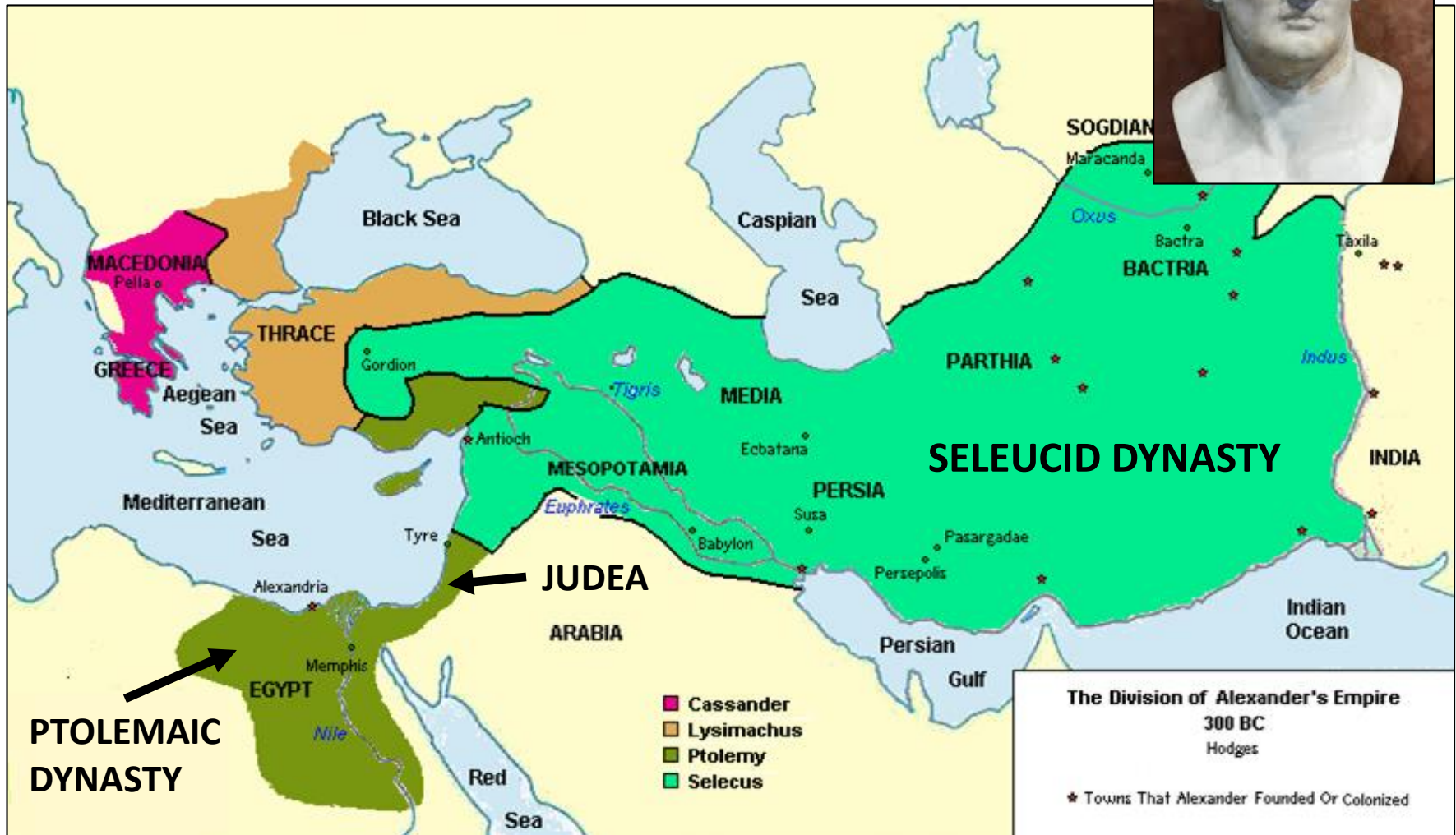
Alexander Conquers the World

Alexander I of Macedonia "The Great"



His Generals Divide the Kingdom

Ptolemy I "Soter" (Savior)



“Good” Life as Minority under Ptolemies

- Jews enjoyed some political and religious freedoms, gaining acceptance and increased influence in society
- Jewish community expands to include Diaspora
 - Alexandria ascends in importance
- Tensions arise in the Jewish community around ethnic identity
 - Some Jews completely assimilate – no longer keep “customs of the fathers” and follow Hellenism
 - Some Jews acculturate only – Greek names, cultural ties to non-Jews, but keep Jewish distinctive customs
 - Some Jews hold exclusively to Jewish customs and reject Hellenist culture and society

Cultural Convergence in Egypt

The Fragments of Artapanus 27.3 – 6 (approx. 200 BCE) -

“As a grown man he was called Mousaeus by the Greeks. This Mousaeus was **a teacher of Orpheus**. As a grown man he bestowed many useful benefits on mankind, for he **invented boats** and **devices for stone construction** and **the Egyptian arms** and the **implements for drawing water** and for **warfare**, and **philosophy**. Further he...**appointed** for each of the nomes [states] **the god to be worshipped**, and for the priests the sacred letters, and that **they should be cats and dogs and ibises**.

On account of these things then Moses was loved by the masses, and was **deemed worth of godlike honor by the priests and called Hermes**, on account of the interpretation of the sacred letters.”

Moses as the creator of the Egyptian religion and as the Greek God Hermes?!?!

New Seleucid Rulers = New Rules

- Seleucids (NE part of Alexander's empire) take over Judea
- A debate begins in Judea on how to deal with Hellenism
- Seleucid king Antiochus IV ("Epiphanes") "encourages" the growth of Hellenism
- Antiochus also alienated many Jews with actions



Coinage of Antiochus IV

Judean Debate on Hellenism

1 Maccabees 1:11 – 15 -

“In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, ‘Let us go make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we have separated from them **many disasters have come upon us.**’ This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who **authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles.** So they **built a gymnasium** in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and **removed the marks of circumcision,** and **abandoned the holy covenant.** They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.”

Why would someone choose to repudiate their religious/ethnic identity?

Antiochus Desecrates the Temple

1 Maccabees 1:20 – 23 -

“After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the 143rd year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He **arrogantly entered the sanctuary** and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; **he stripped it all off**. He took the silver and the gold and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures he found.”

The Maccabean Revolt

- Antiochus gives up on the carrot and begins to use the stick, enforcing Hellenism on his subjects
- A lower priestly family forges Jewish dissatisfaction into a military movement that rebels against the Seleucid king
- Temple re-dedicated in 164 BCE – new annual 8-day festival inaugurated (Hanukkah)
- Priestly family becomes the de facto Jewish leaders and founds Hasmonean dynasty in 163 BCE



Antiochus Enforces Hellenism

1 Maccabees 1:41 – 50 -

“Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that **all should be one people**, and that **all should give up their particular customs**...he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to **forbid burnt offerings** and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to **sacrifice swine** and other unclean animals, and to **leave their sons uncircumcised**. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. He added, ‘And **whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die**.’”

The Revolt Begins

1 Maccabees 2:19 – 27 -

“But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: “I and my sons and my brothers **will continue to live by the covenant of my ancestors**. Far be it from us **to desert the law and the ordinances**. We will not obey the king’s words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or the left...When Mattathias saw [a Jew come forward to sacrifice], he **burned with zeal and his heart was stirred**. He gave vent to his righteous anger; **he ran and killed him** on the altar...Then Mattathias cried out in the town with a loud voice, saying: ‘**Let everyone who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!**’ Then he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in town.”

The Cleansing of the Temple

1 Maccabees 4:42-43, 54 - 56 -

“[Judas] chose blameless priests **devoted to the law**, and they cleansed the sanctuary and **removed the defiled stones** to an unclean place.”

“At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshipped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. So they **celebrated the dedication of the altar for 8 days**, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a **sacrifice of well-being** and a **thanksgiving offering**.”

Today's Takeaways

- Multiple foreign rulers challenged the pre-Exilic Hebrew conception of what it meant to be the people of YHWH
- Groups begin to emerge with different strategies of how to live in a Gentile world
- The authoritarian implementation of Hellenistic culture by the Seleucid rulers led to a radicalization of conservative groups into a full rebellion in Judea

Next Time – Beware getting what you wish for: the return to power of a (sort-of) Jewish dynasty

Questions and Feedback

I hope you were blessed by this study. I pray that God might deepen your knowledge and faith through it.

For any questions or feedback, I can be reached at:
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Charis!

Thom Rowe, March 2017

Bibliography

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