

Zodiac from the Beit Alpha Synagogue

# Faith in a *(sometimes)* Hostile World

Coming Home: The  
Return to Judea

January 20, 2019

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**WoodsEdge**  
COMMUNITY CHURCH

# Living in Our World Today

01

The church exists in the already/not yet stage of fulfillment

02

We live tension – living with the guidance of the Holy Spirit but still see the evil effects of sin

03

Our calling is to spread the message of the Christ and thus announce the arrival of the Kingdom of God

04

The question is: How do we do that?

# A Crucial (Unknown) Period

**Our mirror for thinking about this issue is the Intertestamental Period:**

- From late 5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE to the 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE
- Judaism grew from the ashes of the Babylonian Exile
- A single culture, Hellenism, spread throughout the Mediterranean
- The church took root and began to spread the Gospel



# Why Use This Time of History?

## **1. Relatively Unknown to Modern Christians**

Fills in the “gap” of history between the Old and New Testament

## **2. A Transformative Period**

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

## **3. Agenda-setting**

The issues of this specific period form the lens through which the 1<sup>st</sup> century writers view the Old Testament

# 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 **dwelt apart, not recognized** among the nations.”

## Philo Judeaus in *Book of Moses* 1.278 (early 1<sup>st</sup> 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.**”



# How Does This Period Compare to Today?

- Communication
- Meta-culture
- Religious Pluralism
- Minority Status of Judaism/ Christianity



# What's in It For Me?

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## Build

Build a better understanding of the Bible

- Influences on the New Testament
- Characters, groups, and ideas of the period

## Learn


Learn how various groups dealt with their challenges

- Values – similarities/ differences from us
- Strategies – successful and not

## Examine

Examine our own attitudes/ideas

- Are we choosing well or simply re-hashing bad choices?
- How can we best further the Gospel?



## Your Ideas – 3 Minutes

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- Introduce yourself to your neighbors
- What is one thing you'd like to get out of our classes together?



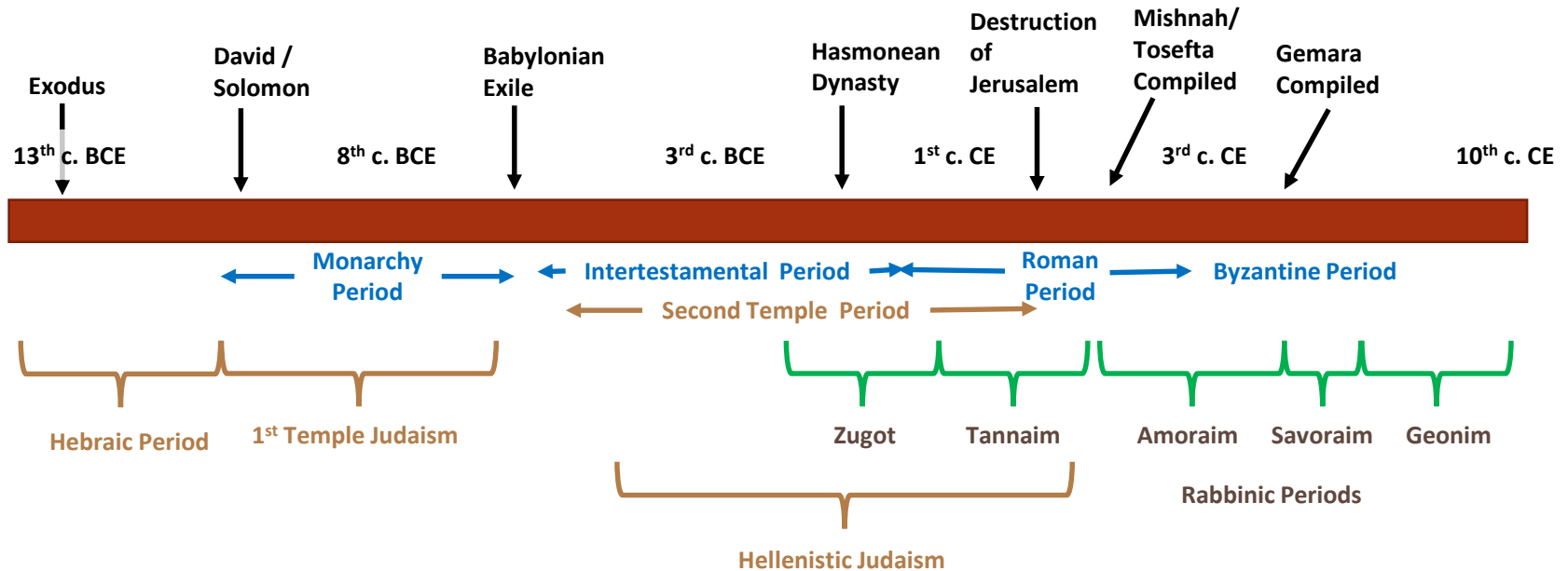
# Schedule

- Coming Home: The Return to Judah
- Leading “Citizens”: Egyptian Judaism
- (Beware) Getting What You Want: The Hasmonean Dynasty
- A Pure Faith: The Dead Sea Scrolls Community
- Protecting God’s People: The Sadducees
- Personal Everyday Faith: The Pharisees
- Foolishness & Stumbling Blocks: The Early Church
- End of an Era: The Destruction of Jerusalem



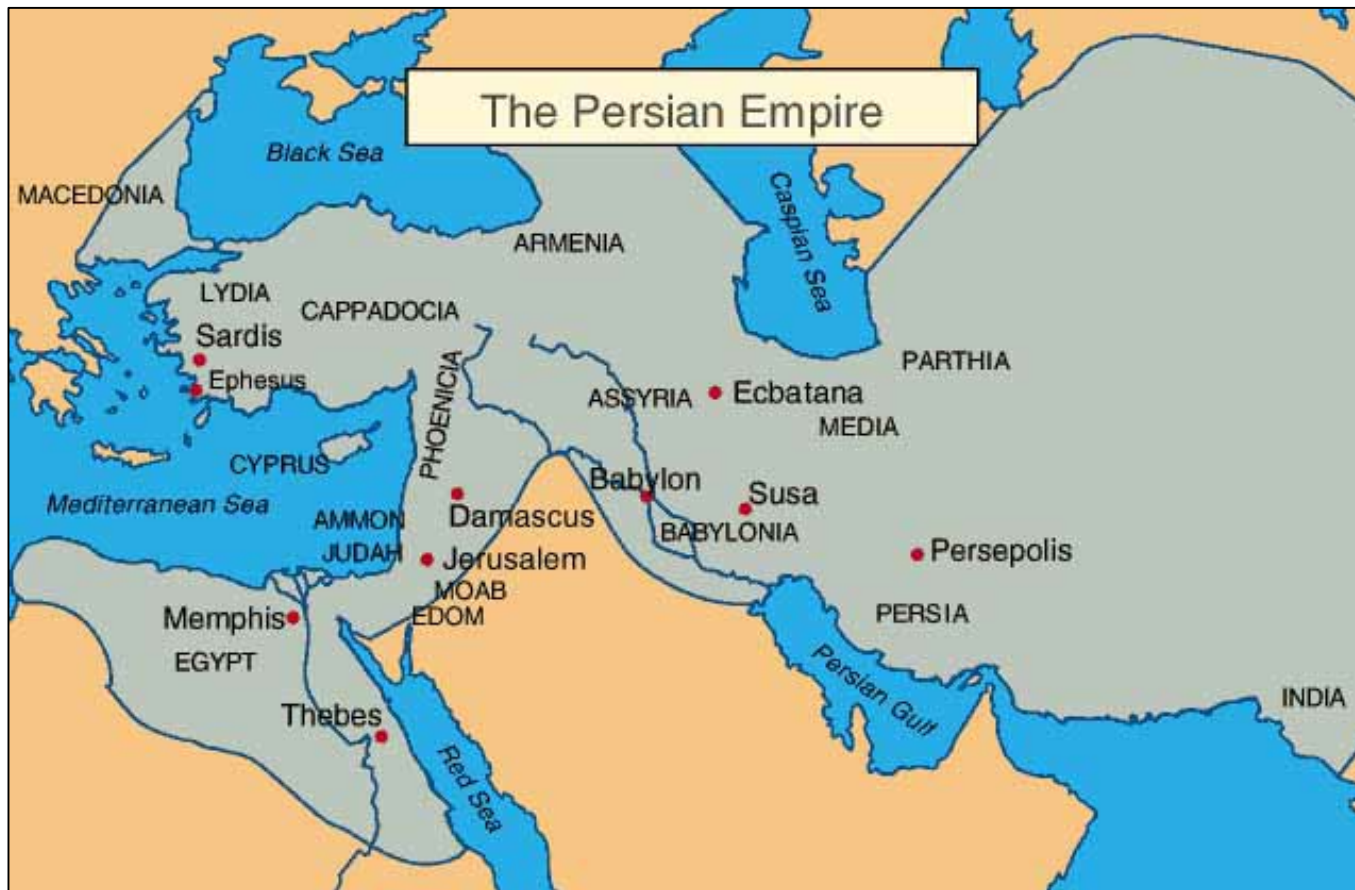
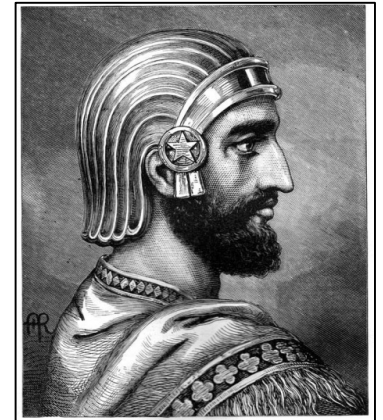
# A Timeline of Judaism

We often present Judaism as a monolithic religion with only one viewpoint but it is actually very diverse



# 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 Cyrus the Great in 538 BCE, a group of approximately 55,000 people return to Judah and begin to re-build



Persians allow relative freedom for localized rule:

- Local rule (as appointed by King)
- Levy taxes
- Provide for an umbrella military defense
- Adjudicate any local disputes
- Allow for religious freedom of worship

# Conditions in Judah

*What was it like to live in Judah?*

- Hostility with other neighbors – Nehemiah 2:10, 19; 6:6; Ezra 4:12ff
- Economic struggles – Nehemiah 5:1ff
- Class tensions ( between haves and have-nots) – Nehemiah 2:16, 5:6ff, 6:17

Discussion  
Question

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3 minutes

If we had an additional 25-33% of our population show up, would you have concerns? What?



# Recalling Identity

Leadership takes specific steps to re-institute Jewish identity and practice among both the returnees & others

- Reading of Deuteronomy in front of the people: Nehemiah 8:1ff (1<sup>st</sup> synagogue in Judah?)
- Feasting & gifts (contrast with Dan. 1): Nehemiah 8
- Re-establishment of Festival of Booths, Passover: Nehemiah 8:17ff; Ezra 3:4, 6:19
- Corporate repentance: Nehemiah 9:1ff
- New economic/political/social system: Nehemiah 10:29ff, 13:19f





# A People “Dwelling Alone”

Separation from “foreigners” is a major concern

- Cited in Neh. 6:17; 9:2; 10:31; 13:3, 23; Ezra 9:1ff; Ch. 10

“...shall we once again **violate your commandments** by intermarrying with these peoples who follow such abhorrent practices?...O LORD, God of Israel, you are benevolent, for we have survived as **a remnant**, as is now the case.” Ezra 9:14-15

“You have trespassed by bringing home **foreign women**, thus aggravating the guilt of Israel. So now, make confession to the LORD, God of your fathers, and do his will, and **separate** yourselves from the **peoples of the land** and from the **foreign women**.” Ezra 10:10f

Why would someone enter into a non-Jewish marriage? Can you think of any biblical examples of people doing that?

Discussion  
Question

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3 minutes

# What About Our World?

How would you describe the Exiles' strategy to remain the covenant people of God upon returning to Judah?

Pros?

Cons?

Is this a good or bad strategy for us today?

What does the Bible teach about our relationship to the society around us?

# A Biblical Perspective

There is a tension for the church between being “engaged” and being an “outsider”

Matt. 28:19-20: “Go into all the world and make disciples...”

2 Corinthians 6:14: “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?”

What is our responsibility to our neighbors?

# Today's Takeaways

Judaism focused in the post-Exilic period on questions central to identity and survival

The central strategy was to live as a “faithful remnant”

The church lives in tension between our mission to evangelize and to be a faithful remnant

Each one of us chooses every day which side of the scale we fall on - what am I willing to risk to see others come to Christ?

# Reading for Next Week

Read  
Esther  
Ch. 7 - 9

- Is the plot to kill the Jews a governmental affair, a religious dispute, or an ethnic conflict?
- What is the Jewish response once the political upper hand has been gained?



**Next Week: *Is Moses the founder of Egyptian religion?***

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