

Jews among Greeks and Romans

Judaism in the Second Temple Period

The Worlds of the New Testament

- Interpretation against a Greek (Hellenistic), Roman or Jewish background?
- Jewish Palestine already deeply influenced by the culture of Greece and the rule of Rome.
- Importance of the Jewish context of the New Testament should not be denied:
 - a) Jewishness of the Jesus movement
 - b) NT emphasis on the place of Gentiles within the people of God.
- First-century Judaism not a monolithic religion.

What are the available sources?

- The writings of Josephus (a Jewish historian, 37-100 CE)
 - The Jewish Antiquities
 - The Jewish War
 - Against Apion
 - Life
- The writings of Philo (a Jewish philosopher from Alexandria in Egypt, ca. 20 BCE-50 CE)
- Dead Sea Scrolls
- Papyri and inscriptions (Jewish and Greco-Roman)
- Greco-Roman Writings

The Narrative World of the New Testament

‘The world as the New Testament materials
actualize it’

(Achteemeier, Green & Thompson, page 19).

Second Temple Judaism

History of the Jews in Palestine is a history of unrest and domination by foreign powers (Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans).

The period of the Jews after the exile (586-539 BCE) is known as **SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM**.

Alexander the Great and the Hellenization of Palestine

- 333 BCE - Alexander defeats the Persians in Asia Minor (present day Turkey)
- His rule was characterized by:
 - Expansion of lands (as far as Pakistan)
 - Greek culture (business, administration, education) and language ('koine') become the unifying features of Alexander's empire.

Greeks = Hellenes = Hellenization = Hellenism

Alexander's Empire



 The Empire of Alexander the Great. Alexander's conquests united Eurasia from Greece to India into a cultural and, briefly, a political unity.

The Maccabean Revolt and the Hasmoneans

- After the death of Alexander the Great (323 BCE), his kingdom is divided between his generals (Ptolemy and Seleucus).
 - Syria- Seleucids
 - Egypt - Ptolemies
 - Palestine - corridor between them

Antiochus Epiphanes IV and the Maccabean Revolt

Relations with the Jews of Palestine deteriorate, because Antiochus

- Raids the Temple treasury
- Enforces a policy of Hellenization (and outlaws Jewish practices)
- Dedicates the Jerusalem Temple to the Greek god Zeus ('the abomination of desolation' cf. Daniel 2:30ff; I Maccabees 1).

The Maccabean revolt erupts in 167 BCE (Mattathias and his five sons, including Judas Maccabeus).

The revolt leads to victory and the Temple is rededicated in 164 BCE.

The Jews gain national independence in 142 BCE (the period of Hasmonean rule).

Roman Rule in Judaea

64 BCE - the Roman consul Pompey enters Jerusalem and subjects Judaea to Roman rule.

27 BCE - Octavian (= Augustus Caesar) becomes the first emperor of the Roman empire.

The Rule of Herod the Great and his Sons

37 BCE - Herod (the Great) is appointed a client king of Judaea. He is known for his

- magnificent building projects
- destruction of possible rivals (paranoia?), including some of his sons and his first wife
- Image as ruthless tyrant in the NT infancy narratives (Matt. 2:1-19; Luke 1:5)







Division of Herod's Kingdom

Archelaus - southern Palestine (Judea and Samaria) but replaced by a series of Roman procurators (including Pontius Pilate).

Herod Antipas - Galilee and Perea (cf. Mark 6:17), also known for the beheading of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:1; Luke 3:19) and for his role in Jesus' trial (Luke 23:6-12).

Philip - north-eastern Palestine (Golan, Trachonitis, Batanea).

Herod Agrippa I - ruled the whole of Palestine from 41 to 44 CE.



Jewish Response to Direct Roman Rule

Reasons for Jewish dissatisfaction with Roman rule

Lack of Roman sensitivity to Jewish concerns (Pilate commands his soldiers to bring their shields into Jerusalem)

Heavy tax imposed on a predominantly poor population (note response reflected in Gospel texts: Matthew 13:24-30; 20:1-16; 21:33-41; Luke 17:7-10)

Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem



