

JTB XII. THE INTERTESTAMENTAL ERA

(Era of Prophetic Silence)

Scripture: Predicted in Daniel, Ezekiel, Hosea, Micah

Historical Era: ca. 400 - 5 B.C.

The Political Conditions in Palestine

(1) The Jews lived peacefully in Palestine under Persian rule for nearly 200 years [ca. 536-332 B.C.]

(2) Alexander the Great marched through Palestine in 332 B.C. and Josephus recorded an account [*Ant.* XI.viii. 4,5] of Alexander's kindness to the Jews. Following Alexander's death (323 B.C.), four of his generals divided the empire and ruled sections of it, with the Greek rulers of Egypt (Ptolemies) and Syria (Seleucids) fighting over Palestine from 312-170 B.C. Rebuffed by Rome on his last attempt to conquer Egypt, Antiochus IV tried to forcibly impose Grecian culture on the Jews (170-164 B.C.). This brought on the revolt (164-142 B.C.), led by the Hasmonean priestly family, which eventually drove the Syrians out of Palestine.

(3) The Hasmonean priestly family became "priest/governors" over Palestine (142-63 B.C.) and increased Israel's borders almost to what they had been in David's time. A squabble between brothers over which was to rule brought Roman intervention and control in 63 B.C.

(4) The Romans ruled Palestine (through local rulers when possible) from 63 B.C. until the Roman Empire divided and declined and the Moslems took over in the 8th century A.D. Rome tried to rule a rebellious Jewish population from 63 B.C. until 70 A.D. (when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed) and 132-135 A.D. when another revolt brought the expulsion of all Jews from Palestine. Jesus' ministry occurred in the midst of this period, ending about 40 years before the Temple fell.

The Cultural Conditions in Palestine:

(1) Greek pressure to adopt Hellenistic culture divided Judaism, during the latter part of the period into at least three major groups: (a) Hellenists, (b) those who wished to compromise both philosophies, and (c) strict conservatives, the Hasidim or "pious ones."

(2) The Synagogue (which probably arose during the Babylonian exile) came to be as much a focus of Jewish life as the temple. The synagogue was the place of weekly meetings for Scripture reading and prayer, as well as the school and center of Jewish community life. Between 250-100 B.C., the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek (LXX/Septuagint) in Egypt for those Jews who continued to live out in the "Diaspora" where Greek was the main language used.

(3) Many uninspired religious writings surfaced during the latter half of the period and these both expressed and helped to mold popular Messianic hopes within Judaism. While neither was given canonical status by Judaism, two groups of writings can be distinguished: the *Apocrypha* and the *Pseudepigrapha* (falsely-ascribed writings).

Religious Division of Judaism

(1) The *Sadducees* were the aristocratic and priestly families around Jerusalem. They were conservative in their rejection of all but the written laws of the Pentateuch, but they were liberal in their rejection of the resurrection and angels (Acts 23:8). They were associated with the temple.

(2) The *Pharisees* (right) were the largest party (ca. 6,000) and held strictly to traditional laws (Mark 7:1-9) as well as the Scriptures (Acts 23:8). Their power was centered in the synagogue.

(3) The *Zealots* were fierce nationalists who wanted political freedom so much that they wanted war with Rome.

(4) The *Herodians* were "political activists" who supported the Herodian dynasty as the best political solution (Mark 3:6).

(5) The *Qumran Community*, centered in their settlement at the northwest end of the Dead Sea, had abandoned the temple and priesthood as corrupt and lived as a separate sect of "true believers" awaiting Messiah. It was their copies of Old Testament books that were sealed in jars and stored in nearby caves – the Dead Sea scrolls.



Why Did Judaism fail to See Jesus as Messiah?

Why did the leaders of Jesus' time not recognize Him as Messiah (John 1:10,11; Acts 13:27)? Certainly there was still widespread expectation that a "personal Messiah" was coming (John 1:45; 4:25; 7:31,40-42). Part of the answer lies in the great theological confusion created by the non-canonical literature that had surfaced and become popular, causing numerous misconceptions and erroneous expectations (Matthew 16:21-23). Another reason was the devotion given to human tradition, sometimes to the extent that Scripture was misinterpreted or ignored (Mark 7:1-13). The leadership in Jerusalem was also too concerned with maintaining their position and place of favor with the Romans (John 11:47-53). This they would only consider changing for a "warrior Messiah" who would remove the need to get along with Rome. I have concluded that Jesus' failure to alter the outward situation with Rome as expected (John 18:36,37) caused Him to be rejected even by the crowds that had so confidently welcomed Him into Jerusalem only a week before. In spite of their claims of loyalty to Him "no matter what," even His own disciples abandoned Him temporarily (Matthew 26:31-35,56).

Paul later commented to the Corinthians Church that Jesus came at a time when both Gentiles/Greeks and Jews were misguided in their expectations (1Corinthians 1:20-24) – Greek philosophy (assuming that deities were either totally apathetic to what is occurring on earth or else power-oriented and manipulative micro-managers that force all things to occur as He intends) could not embrace an all-powerful God allowing His Son to die for rebels – rebels should be destroyed. The Jews stumbled at the same thing in a different way – they balked at the crucifixion because they wanted signs of God's activity and desired the conquest and destruction of their Gentile enemies, especially Rome. Psalm 2, 22 and Isaiah 53 suggested something like

the conspiracy and crucifixion, but popular expectations did not embrace it. Even the Apostles had to struggle with their own expectations (Matthew 16:13-23).

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