

# Intertestamental period



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INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD NEW TESTAMENT ORIENTATION I NBST 525 AN ANALYSIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS IN RELIGION LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY BY: LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2011

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INTRODUCTION The Intertestamental period is the time between the last book in the Old Testament and the first book in the New Testament.

This period is said to be around two centuries or about 400 years long. This particular timeframe dubbed the “ Intertestamental period” is filled with numerous changes in power, war, struggles, treachery and events that changed religious record. This period is vastly rich in history and dramatically impacted the New Testament leading up to and during the time of Christ. This paper will explore the roughly 400 years that make up this era and examine the role that Herod the Great played in shaping the religious and political groups Jesus encountered.

THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD The last sections of the Old Testament illustrate Darius the Persian as the ruler over Persia. At the time Judea was part of the Persian Empire. In 597 B. C. Judea was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar who was the King of Babylon this ended Jewish independence. Nebuchadnezzar had decided to take certain knowledgeable Jews into captivity. It was there in Babylon the Prophet Ezekiel began working on this particular group to teach them and instruct them on how to

provide the necessary leadership it would take to replace those who had fallen in Jerusalem.

Since there was no temple for the Jews many of them came together to learn and practice the Law. Teachers of the Law became the new spiritual leadership for the people. In Ezekial chapter 36: 22-28, Ezekial makes the promise to the Jews that God would eventually restore their homeland of Palestine and that he would make prominent his people once again. This was a period known as Babylonian captivity and the practice of synagogue worship<sup>2</sup> developed among the Jews at this time. The captivity for many of the Jews ended when in 539 B. C. , Cyrus the King of Persia captured Babylon.

God fulfilled the promises made by Ezekial in the first years of Cyrus's reign as King. He allowed the Jews to take many temple treasures and return to their homeland, although many of them decided to remain where they were in the more developed region. Cyrus also promises to rebuild the Jewish temple (Ezra 6: 3-5). Around 516 B. C. the temple is completed. This period for the Jews is vitally important in that it produced many of the scribes that had studied the law, copied it and had become experts in its interpretation. Throughout the New Testament we will see numerous appearances of the scribe during Jesus' ministry.

This period under Cyrus's rule also saw the reestablishment of the synagogue for the Jews which attempted to administer the law and helped to develop the Sanhedrin in the New Testament. Persian rule lasted only until Alexander the Great defeated them in 331 B. C. during the battle of Arbela.

Alexander was tutored by Aristotle in the views of Hellenism and because of his conquest over other nations Hellenism and Greek culture began to spread like wild fire. Alexander wanted to bring a more noble culture in to the less civilized people of Asia.

Alexander had developed a devotion to the Hellenistic ideals and even encouraged many of his own soldiers to marry oriental women so as to better blend the Greek and Oriental cultures. In 323 Alexander became ill and caught a fever and eventually succumbed to it. Alexander's conquests had a major impact on Europe and Asia. (Borza 438-439). After his death four of his generals decided to divide Alexander's kingdom amongst them. During this time Hellenistic culture continued to grow and thrive in Ptolemaic, Seleucid and Roman cultures.

Ptolemy was one of Alexander's generals and he claimed Egypt so as to avoid conflict with any of the other three generals. During the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus between 285–246 B. C. the entirety of the Old Testament was translated into Greek and became known as the Septuagint, many Jews were becoming fluent in Greek at this time as opposed to their native language of Hebrew. Also writers of the New Testament quite often referred to the Septuagint when quoting the Old Testament. Palestine once again changed rulers when Ptolemy V was defeated in battle by the Syrians. This occurred in 198 B. C. and thus began the Syrian period over a nation that had been divided by war. Half the nation gave support to Ptolemies of Egypt and the other half to Syria and because of this power struggles between the two sides occurred for many years. Palestine had been taken over by a man named Antiochus and many deemed him "Epimanes" meaning "mad man.

” Antiochus cared little about Hellenistic religion but wanted to bring the kingdom together on a religious basis. He also sought to control any offerings that came into the Jewish Temple and after this decree outlawed the Sabbath and other religious festivities.

Antiochus made it a capital offense to practice circumcision and outlawed owning copies of the Old Testament. This obviously angered and affected the Jewish community because they could no longer practice rituals from their own religion. This was part of what drove many of them to eventually revolt against Antiochus. The Jews were baffled as to why God would allow such a thing to happen to them. However, Jewish people were very devout to their religious faith and eventually they rose up against Antiochus led by a man named Mattathias thus ending effective Syrian control over Palestine.

This began what is known as the Maccabean period from 167 to 142 B. C. and Antiochus was still in power. Antiochus attempts to bribe the village priest Mattathias but to no avail and upon Mattathias death he leaves control of his military to Judas his third son. Judas was very military minded and bested Antiochus’ men at every turn even with fewer numbers. In 164 B. C. in the face of opposition Judas won over religious freedoms from the Syrian rule and Antiochus ended the ban on the Jewish religion. Judas then was able to lead the Jews to worship Jehovah in a purified temple.

This is a very important event in the lives of all Jews because even today they still celebrate this victory and call it Hanukkah or the Feast of Lights. The Jews then enjoyed much freedom and began learning numerous military and administrative skills. Following the Maccabean period was the

Hasmonean period from 142 to 63 B. C. The Hasmonean era was filled with treachery, including the murder of the current leader of the Jews, Simon, as well as all but one of his sons. His surviving son Hyrcanus took over the throne and ruled Palestine with much cruelty. During his rule you see the beginnings of the Pharisees and Sadducees two groups that rose to prominence in the New Testament. During the time of Hyrcanus' reign there was much disorder and confusion in Palestine. There was unrest among the Jewish people because Hyrcanus had alienated many Godly Jews. There was also a hunger for power between all Hasmonean successors to the throne. This era was forgettable for the Jews who faced much hardship and adversity during that time. Palestine begins drawing the unwanted attention of Rome and is invaded by Pompey who reduced the Jewish land of Judea into a Roman territory.

However, Judea still remained under Hasmonean rule and the end of the era wasn't until 37 B. C. During the Roman Empire from 63 B. C. on there were many changes in leadership including Augustus who was important from a New Testament perspective because he was in power during Jesus' birth (Luke 2: 1). Other rulers included Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian and Herod the Great. Herod the Great was the first non Jewish ruler to be selected to office by the Romans. Herod was a very brutal ruler and though many Jews despised him Herod was able to pacify his mostly Jewish kingdom.

Herod had to take over political office by military means and with a little help from Rome he conquered Jerusalem and overthrew Antigonus. His audacious behavior is documented in scripture (Matthew 2: 16-17) when he kills the

innocent children of Bethlehem. Herod also had nine or ten wives and numerous sons and in order to prevent his sons from rising up against him or fighting over who would be in line as successor to the throne he killed at least three sons and two of his wives thus proving his viciousness. Herod ruled Rome with an iron fist but behind all the vindictiveness was a man who knew how to work the people.

During famines he gave out free grain and clothing and other goods during disasters. He also built up Roman defenses by reconstructing the perimeter wall around the city. Herod also built new buildings, harbors and renovated temples all being paid for by the taxes he collected from the people. Herod had become ill and after attempting to get better he realized that he was in his last days. He hatched a plan to call to his kingdom and kill many Jewish elders so there would be mourning when he died instead of a celebration. (Steinmann 13). Luckily for these Judeans this plan was never carried out.

Upon Herod's death possibly due to intestinal cancer in 4 B. C. his remaining sons took over various parts of the kingdom. This laid the foundation for Herod's descendants to rule over Rome during the time leading up to the ministry of Christ. Archelaus, one of Herod's sons, ruled Judea at the time which motivated Joseph to move to Galilee with Mary and Jesus (Matthew 2: 22). There is no doubt that Joseph was prompted to go to Galilee because of fear for his families safety. Two other descendants of Herod worth mentioning were Herod Agrippa I and Herod Agrippa II.

Herod Agrippa I was grandson to Herod and during his rule over Palestine he executed James an apostle of Jesus and put Peter in prison. This is all

recorded in Acts 12 of the scriptures. Herod Agrippa II was tetrarch of Chalcis and also a grandson of Herod the Great. Paul gave his remarkable testimony to Herod Agrippa II in the book of Acts chapter 26. The political tone throughout the Roman period set the tone for what Jesus would face in the New Testament. Politics was shaping the Roman Empire and in the New Testament the political walls were being put up by the different Jewish Sects so you can see what Jesus was up against.

**HEROD THE GREAT'S PALESTINIAN RULE** Herod the Great ruled Palestine from 34 BC to 4 BC. His rule would have a great affect on many different Jewish sects creating a race for Political power. This influence created the political climate that ultimately led to the trial and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In this sense, Herod the Great had a direct impact on not only the salvation story, but also on the many teachings of Jesus that were based on or around the misguided actions and teachings of the Pharisees. Herod the Great was a local ruler in Palestine, ruling under the authority of Rome.

Perhaps because he was the first leader of non-Jewish background, Herod appears to have a kind of paranoia associated with his power. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is in Herod's order to have the children of Bethlehem murdered in an effort to avoid the rise of the promised Savior. This effort of course was in vain and is just the first in a series of actions that illustrate Herod's desperation to hang on to power. 8 Within Palestine, four major Jewish sects existed. These sects ultimately threatened Herod and therefore Herod made diligent and conscious efforts to contain their influence.



The Essenes were one such sect. Unlike their other Jewish counterparts, the Essenes chose to live their lives in seclusion, away from worldly influence. They actually migrated from their Qumran community sometime during Herod's rule. It is unknown as to whether or not Herod had anything to do with the Jewish group having to uproot; however it is probably safe to assume that he did not mourn their exit. With the Essenes out of Palestine, Herod had one less group that threatened to overturn his power or raise up a leader that could potentially take his place.

Perhaps most importantly to Herod, the absence of the Essenes also meant fewer people to proclaim the coming of the Messiah—one who was greater than and would rule over him. Herod did not like the Jewish community because they were keepers of the Law and many adhered to their religious and political beliefs. Herod attempted to keep the Jews apart from their religion by banning or outlawing their religious festivals and activities. Herod would stop at nothing to destroy anyone or anything that got in the way of his political agenda thus causing much of his hate for the Jewish community.

He was not accepting of their culture, laws, or regulations and this made him a hated man among the Pharisees who held very strict religious laws. The Jewish community had grown very hostile toward the end of Herod's reign as king. Some Jewish rabbis conspired against Herod to have many of his statues torn down just before he died. Two of these 9 Rabbis succeeded in tearing down a golden eagle that he erected but when he found out Herod had them burned alive. Herod had killed virtually everyone that could have possibly had claim to his throne.

He had created a dangerous and hostile political climate that upon his death really began to take shape. These political changes altered world history and also shaped the world that Jesus began ministering to. It is no wonder that the very Jewish groups that Herod had suppressed for so many years were the same people that had Jesus hung on a cross. For years the Jewish community only knew hatred, deceit and treachery under Herod the Great's reign. It seems as if they were educated in the art of death by none other than Herod himself.

Ultimately, they persecuted Jesus for the same reason that Herod persecuted them—a fear of “mutiny” among Jesus' followers. This is perhaps one of the most glaring instances of irony found in the Bible. CONCLUSION Although often overlooked, the intertestamental period is one of great importance. A time of transition, it marked coming change and prepared the world for a Savior. This vital time period deserves attention and study among those wishing to understand the chronology of the Bible and the circumstances and situations that affected Jesus' life and ministry.

Many important people, groups and events existed during the intertestamental period and each tells a piece of the story; one such individual is Herod the Great, who attempted to avoid the coming Savior by oppressing the Jewish nation that promised Him. Herod's failed attempt, as well as the failed attempt by the Pharisees and others who persecuted Jesus, is worth paying attention to, as it is of many examples of how human and worldly influences were powerless to stop the coming of Jesus Christ or to undermine his authority as Savior of a fallen world. BIBLIOGRAPHY Brenner, Charles. Herod the Great Remains True to Form. ” Near Eastern Archaeology <https://assignbuster.com/intertestamental-period/>

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