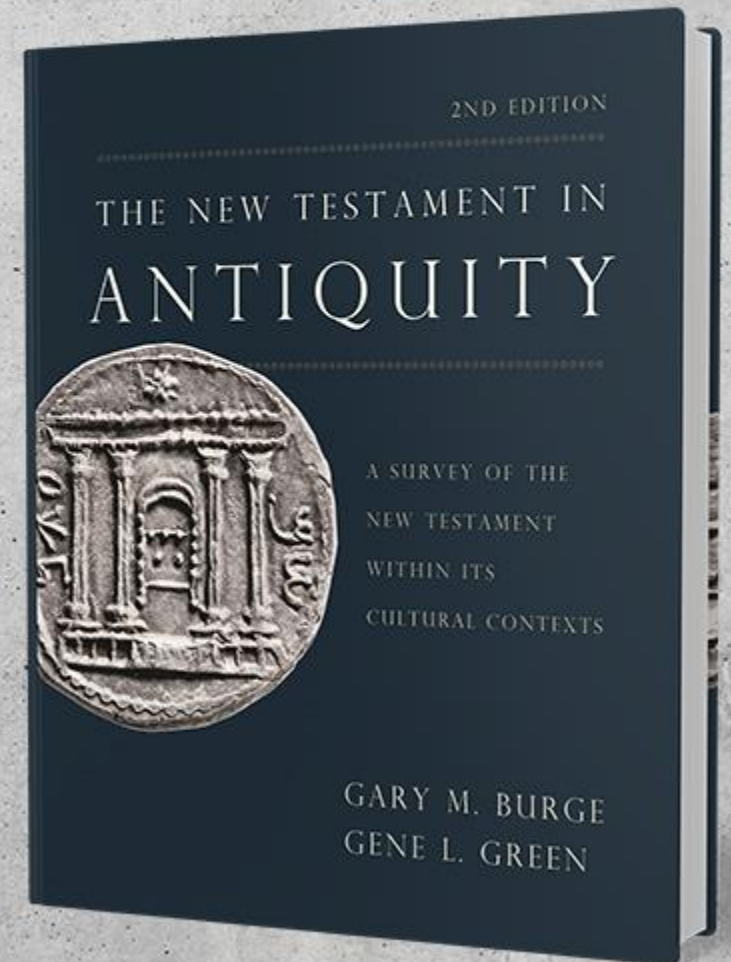


Chapter 2

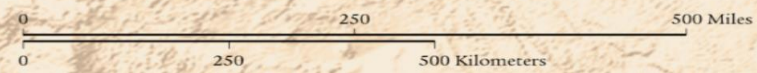
The Historical Setting of the New Testament



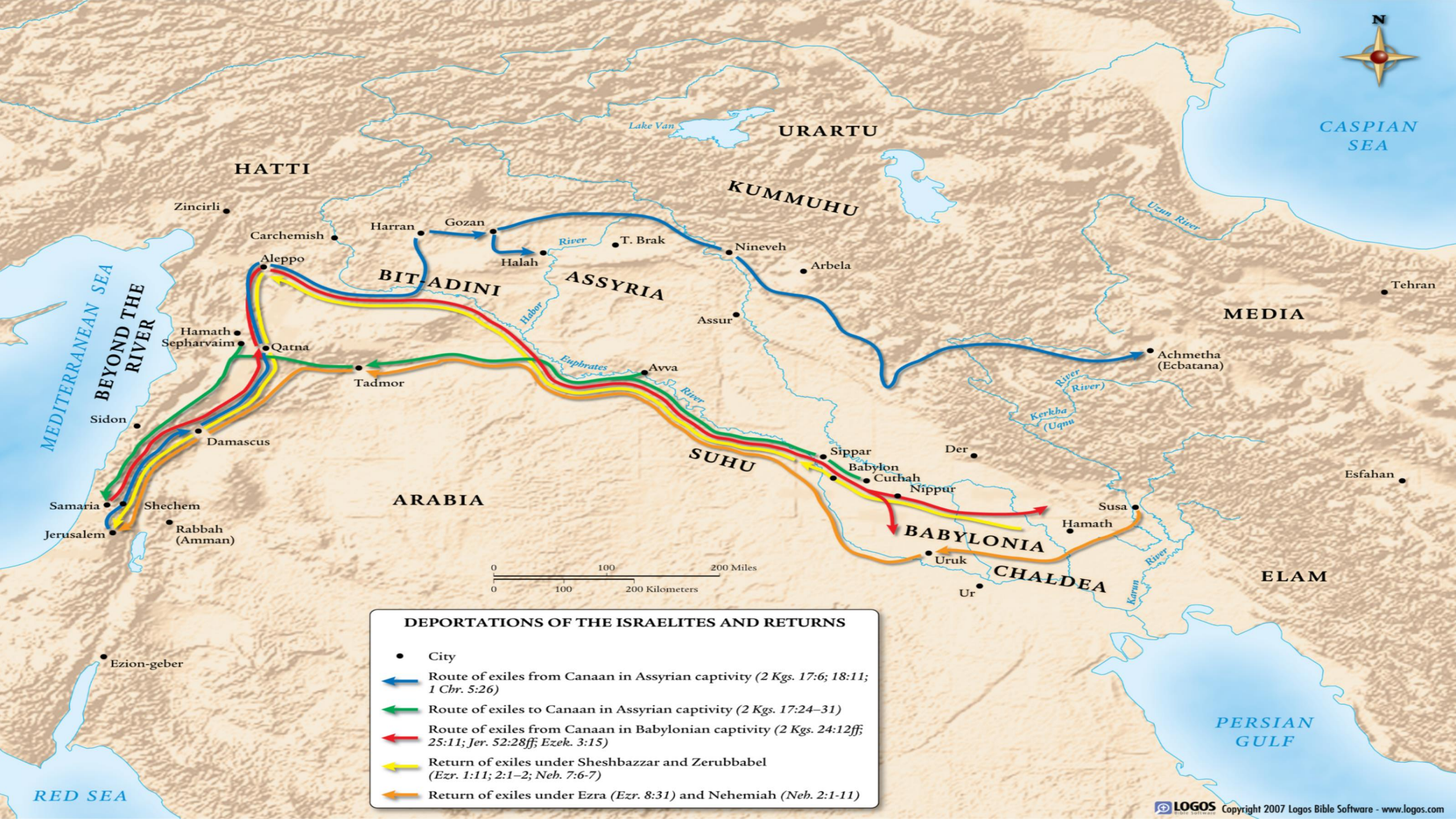


THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

- City
- ◉ Jerusalem/Judah is a free zone within Assyria
- Orange: Core of Assyria (time of Assur-uballit I – c. 1350 BC)
- Light Green: Expansion of Adad-nirari I (c. 1300 BC)
- Purple: Expansion of Tukulti-ninurta I (c. 1225 BC)
- Yellow: Expansion of Ashurnasirpal II (c. 875 BC)
- Brown: Expansion of Shalmaneser III (c. 850 BC)
- Red: Expansions of Tiglath-pileser III (c. 735 BC)
- Dark Green: Expansions of Sargon II (c. 720 BC) and Sennacherib (c. 700 BC)
- Tan: Expansions of Esarhaddon (c. 675 BC)
- Light Green: Expansion of Ashurbanipal (c. 650 BC)







DEPORTATIONS OF THE ISRAELITES AND RETURNS

- City
- ← Blue arrow: Route of exiles from Canaan in Assyrian captivity (2 Kgs. 17:6; 18:11; 1 Chr. 5:26)
- ← Green arrow: Route of exiles to Canaan in Assyrian captivity (2 Kgs. 17:24-31)
- ← Red arrow: Route of exiles from Canaan in Babylonian captivity (2 Kgs. 24:12ff; 25:11; Jer. 52:28ff; Ezek. 3:15)
- ← Yellow arrow: Return of exiles under Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel (Ezr. 1:11; 2:1-2; Neh. 7:6-7)
- ← Orange arrow: Return of exiles under Ezra (Ezr. 8:31) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:1-11)

PERSPECTIVE

1. The Post-Exilic Period (539-332 BC)
2. The Hellenistic Period (332-63 BC)
3. The Roman Empire (63 BC-AD 135)

PERSPECTIVE

- Israel, after coming back from Babylonian exile, had adapted to life without the temple cult through its emphasis on the study of Torah, prayer, and strict adherence to the Law.
- Greek culture left an indelible mark on the eastern Mediterranean world. Hellenism significantly affected the local language, religion, philosophy, and literature.
- The Romans eventually eclipsed the Greek empire, and in 63 BC they overtook Jerusalem. This paved the way for a series of rulers that remained loyal to Rome, while attempting to placate the native Jews.
- After a series of Jewish revolts, Titus, the son of the famed general Vespasian, mounted an attack on Jerusalem. In AD 70, the city eventually collapsed and the temple burned.

THE POST-EXILIC PERIOD, 539–332 BC

Persia's defeat of Babylon in 539 BC changed Israel's fortunes immediately. While Babylon's policy for conquest had included the resettlement of defeated national groups (to disrupt their national identities), the Persians used these frustrated exiles as allies, promising to send them back to their homelands.

Cyrus, the Persian monarch, permitted the Jews to begin this emigration soon after Babylon's fall. While many no doubt returned at once, the migration was likely gradual, taking decades to complete. But some Jews chose to remain in Babylon, and by the first century, they enjoyed self-rule. The Jewish Babylonian community grew large, though little evidence remains to help us reconstruct its size or welfare.

THE POST-EXILIC PERIOD, 539–332 BC

The turmoil described at the close of the Old Testament period set the stage for the Jewish faith we meet in the New Testament.

Babylonian armies had sacked the walled city of Jerusalem and destroyed its temple in 586 BC. The sacred vessels of the temple and numerous exiles were carried off to Babylon, where the conquering king Nebuchadnezzar presented them as a part of his spoils of war. For a generation Judaism lived in despair, wondering whether they could believe in a God who could be defeated like this.

THE POST-EXILIC PERIOD, 539–332 BC

The story of Israel's return can be traced in the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah and in the prophets Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Some scholars add Daniel and Esther to this list. Since the exile was explained as divine judgment for Israel's covenant failings (Mal. 2:11), the Jewish leadership returned to Jerusalem with a profound desire to keep the law. Religious rigor characterized the call of Ezra, who not only demanded that the law be kept with care but called on Jews to separate themselves from those people living in the surrounding hills. The prophet Malachi reinforced this, prohibiting "mixed marriages" that would compromise faith (2:10–12) and calling for righteousness in everything from temple sacrifices (1:6–8) to wages given to the poor (3:5). This remarkable severity signals how fragile the Jews saw themselves as a culture and as a nation. They were in jeopardy of not surviving and so demanded their tribal exclusivity be maintained.

THE POST-EXILIC PERIOD, 539–332 BC

Haggai reminded Israel that faithfulness to God would return prosperity to the land (Hag. 2:19). And he pronounced a test on the nation's faith by calling for God's house (the temple) to be built before any of the city's neighborhoods (1:4–8). Many of the minor implements for the temple returned with the Jews, but most major items (such as the ark of the covenant) were lost. Work on a new temple began promptly and took about five years to complete (515 BC).

THE POST-EXILIC PERIOD, 539–332 BC

But the full restoration of Jerusalem was incomplete until Nehemiah began reconstructing the city's wall system (about thirteen years after Ezra's arrival). He had been a high official of the Persian king, but when he learned about the devastated condition of Jerusalem's infrastructure, he returned to Judea with the king's blessing. **This development, combined with the rebuilding of the temple, signaled something ominous to those non-Jews living in the area.** Ezra carried an authorization from the Persian king to resettle the land (Ezra 1:2–4; 6:3–5), Nehemiah had an approval to reconstruct the walls (Neh. 2:1–8), and now the returning refugees were acting on these pledges. **To the non-Jewish tribes in the hills north and south of Jerusalem, these efforts would have been viewed as deeply political acts, threatening perhaps to their own security.** The Persians were unsure whether the rebuilt Jerusalem would become a regional rival to local Persian rule. So the Jews were prohibited from raising an army or reconstituting their monarchy. Political leadership then fell to the Jerusalem priesthood.

THE POST-EXILIC PERIOD, 539–332 BC

- The New Testament emerges from Old Testament turmoil
 - Babylon destroyed the temple in 586 BC.
 - The Persians then defeated the Babylonians in 539 BC.
- This unsettled Jewish self-identity
 - Their defeat cast doubt upon Yahweh's fidelity.
 - The prophets were all instrumental in making sense of this tragedy and figuring out how Israel would rebuild itself.
 - Aramaic became the common language of Israel.
 - Without a temple, Jews relied more on the synagogue than sacrifice.

THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD, 332–63 BC



THE GREEK EMPIRE (ALEXANDER AND POST-ALEXANDER)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● City ⊙ Siege — Persian Royal Road — Alexander Empire boundary ← Alexander route from Pella ← Alexander route from Memphis ← Alexander route from Babylon ← Alexander route to Babylon ★ Battle | <p style="text-align: center;">Post Alexander</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hellenistic kingdom ■ Seleucid kingdom ■ Ptolemaic kingdom ■ Antigonid kingdom |
|--|--|



THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD, 332–63 BC

- THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD (332–63 BC)

While the conquering empires of the east permitted the Jews to retain their cultural and religious identity, the coming of Greek culture—or Hellenism—in the fourth century made an indelible mark on Jewish life. Greek culture was missionary by nature, sweeping up new peoples and converting them to a new, “modern” way of life. Judaism soon found itself enticed to join the wider Mediterranean world, and this would both bring enormous opportunities and present subtle threats to the integrity of Jewish life.

Alexander the Great of Macedon

- One of the most famous figures of antiquity
 - Tutored by Aristotle
 - Defeated the Persians under Darius III (333–330 BC)
- Military success
 - The Macedonian phalanx: square of 256 men with long *sarissa* spears
 - The heavy cavalry: armored horses burst through enemy lines
 - The siege train: wagons with supplies, catapults, ladders, and preparations
- Alexander had the greatest empire.
 - He plundered Persian treasuries and amassed wealth.
 - He even pushed into the Hindu Kush Mountains of India.

- The Empire of Alexander

- After his death in 323 BC, his empire was divided between his generals.
- The Ptolemaic Dynasty in Egypt had its capital in Alexandria.
- The Seleucid Dynasty in Syria had its capital in Antioch.

- The Legacy of Alexander

- His lands were Hellenized, i.e., reflected Greek culture.
- Theaters, gymnasiums, schools, and governments
- A universal currency was established.
- Greek became the language that united the cultures of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Mediterranean.
- All writings including poetry, philosophy, medicine, and religion used Greek.
- Greek dominance prevailed until the rise of Islam in the seventh century.



Ptolemaic Rule (320–198 BC)

- Ptolemy I Soter (Gk. *savior*) was governor of Egypt.
 - His rule spanned from Alexandria to Jerusalem.
 - Judea was the region surrounding Jerusalem.
 - A remarkably free and peaceful time for Judea
- Hellenism posed a threat to Jewish identity.
 - Greek values, social habits, and dress spread throughout Judea.
 - Koine or “common” Greek became the normal language of the Jews.
 - Hebrew Scriptures were no longer understood by Hellenized Jews.
 - Septuagint (LXX) translation of Hebrew Scriptures into Greek commissioned by Ptolemy Philadelphus, done by seventy-two translators
 - The standard Bible for Greek-speaking Jews, such as St. Paul and the early church

Seleucid Rule (198– 67 BC)

- Seleucus I Nicator (Gk. *conquerer*) established western capital
 - Largest region of the empire including Syria and Anatolia
 - War against the Ptolemies (198 BC) led to Jerusalem falling under Seleucid rule.
- Abuses under Seleucid rule
 - Antiochus IV accepted bribes from those wanting to be high priest.
 - Hellenizers often ran the temple rather than priestly families.
 - Antiochus assumed the title Epiphanes (Gk. *manifestation*), demanded worship.
 - He blamed his military failures in Egypt on Jerusalem's rebellions.
 - He made the Jewish religion illegal and Greek religious festivals mandatory.
 - He turned the Temple to worship of Zeus (167 BC), and further desecrated it by sacrificing pigs on its altar for three years (cf. 1 Macc 1:41–61).

Maccabean War (167–141 BC)

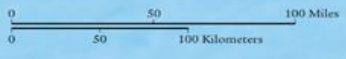
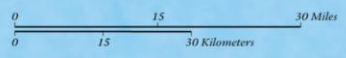
- A reaction to Seleucid abuses
 - Jews had criticized and resisted Hellenism for decades before the “abomination of desolation” in the temple occurred.
 - The Hasidim (Hb. *pious ones*) led to criticism and resistance to Hellenism.
- The Maccabees' revolt against Seleucids
 - Led by the priest Mattathias who would not sacrifice to Zeus, along with his sons
 - Jews won the war and “rededicated” (Hb. *hanukkah*) the Temple.
 - Outline of its history in 1 Macc and heroic episodes in 2 Macc.

The Hasmonean Dynasty (141–63 BC)

- The Jewish Dynasty following the Maccabean War
 - The Maccabean family formed the first Jewish dynasty in centuries.
 - For the first time since 586 BC Jewish coins were minted.
- Divided Judaism
 - Hellenized Jews: embraced Greek culture and life
 - Hasmoneans: aristocracy that brokered power in Jerusalem
 - Hasidim: called for religious purity and warned of power corruption
 - Hasmonean suspicions of rebellion led to the crucifixion of 800 Pharisees (Hasidim) in one year under the rule of Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BC).

THE MACCABEAN KINGDOM

- City
- Judea at the beginning of the Maccabean Revolt (et. 168 BC)
- Territorial additions by Jonathan (161-142 BC)
- Territorial additions by Simon (142-134 BC)
- Territorial additions by John Hyrcanus I (134-104 BC)
- Territorial additions by Aristobulus I (104-103 BC)
- Territorial additions by Alexander Janneus (103-76 BC)
- Semi-independent municipality



- KINGDOMS OF SAUL, DAVID, & SOLOMON**
- Site fortified by Solomon
 - Extent of Saul's kingdom
 - Extent of David's kingdom
 - Territory nominally controlled by David
 - Boundary of Solomon's kingdom

THE ROMAN PERIOD (BEGINS 63 BC)



Pompey's Conquest (63 BC)

- Pompey the Great (106–48 BC) marched into Judea.
 - In 63 BC, Jerusalem was so divided by civil war that it was easily conquered by the Roman advance.
 - Pompey liberated many Greek settlements from Hasmonean rule.
 - The Greeks of Syria celebrated this liberation and joined his legion.
 - Many troops and abundant provisions came from the *Decapolis*, i.e., League of Ten Cities liberated from Jewish rule.
- Jerusalem was in disarray and Pompey prepared for war.
 - In one day 12,000 Jewish citizens of Jerusalem died.
 - Pompey beheaded many of Jerusalem's leaders who opposed him.

Jewish Rulers under Rome

- Jewish leaders engaged in a delicate game of political cooperation and passive resistance under Roman rule.
 - Antipater (63–43) supported Pompey's high priest (Hyrcanus) and gained power.
 - His two sons, Phasael and Herod, ran Judea and Galilee.
 - When the Parthians killed Hyrcanus and Phasael (40 BC), Herod fled to Bethlehem, the Dead Sea, Egypt, Alexandria, and finally Rome.
 - Herod was declared "King of the Jews" in Rome.
 - Returned with Roman troops to Jerusalem in 37 BC.
 - The conflict was brief, and Herod was made king.

Herod the Great (37–4 BC)

- Ruled for thirty-three years
- Balanced Roman and Jewish interests
 - Well-connected with Rome but not well-supported by leading Jewish families
 - Admired by Rome, despised by his own people
- Enacted an ambitious building campaign
 - Caesarea Maritima: impressive harbor connecting to western trade
 - Reconstructed civic buildings, walls, water system, recreational buildings
 - Rebuilt the temple (20 BC–AD 63)



The Division of Herod's Kingdom

- Divided three ways after Herod's death
- Archelaus ruled Judea (4 BC–AD 6)
 - Jews and Samaritans appealed to Rome to remove him because of his brutality.
 - Rome agreed, Archelaus banished to Gaul, territory ruled by Roman governors.
- Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea (4 BC–AD 39)
 - Jesus's ministry began under Antipas' rule.
 - Based in Sepphoris, where Jesus and Joseph may have worked
- Philip ruled northern regions (4 BC–AD 34)
 - Regions chiefly Hellenistic and difficult to lead
 - Built Caesarea *Philippi*, where Jesus was first identified as "Son of God" (cf. Mt 16:13–16)

Roman Prefects

- Provinces
 - Senatorial: compliant with Roman rule and ran by *proconsul*
 - Imperial: especially unruly and under direct control of emperor
 - If they had a Legion, they were ruled by a *legate*.
 - If they were autonomous, they were ruled by a *prefect*.
- Judea after Archelaus' exile became an imperial province
 - In AD 26, Tiberius appointed Pontius Pilate as fifth governor of Judea
 - Governor who oversaw Jesus's trial and ordered his crucifixion (Lk 23:1; Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44)

Later Jewish Rulers

- Herod Agrippa I
 - After Pilate, Claudius made Agrippa king of Judea (AD 41).
 - Agrippa executed James (Acts 12:1–2), imprisoned Peter, and killed the prison guards after Peter's miraculous escape (12:19).
 - Admired by Jews for his piety and respect for the temple.
 - So admired some called him divine, and he was struck dead by a messenger from God (Acts 12:20–23; Josephus, *Ant.* 19.8.2)
- Agrippa II
 - Young ruler eventually given much of Galilee by Nero (AD 54)
 - Adjudicated Paul's case (Acts 25:13, 26:1–29) and set Paul free

TWO WARS WITH ROME

- The First Revolt (AD 66–70)
 - Caesarea riots after the cruel governor Gessius Florus crucified 3,600 people in Jerusalem and plundered the temple treasury.
 - Nero ordered Florus to increase severity lest Parthians strike in the disarray.
 - Zealots led the Jewish revolt against Rome, who lost 5,300 infantry, 380 cavalry, and the Twelfth Legion.
 - The Syrian Legate Cestius Gallus then fled back to Caesarea.
 - Rome sends father and son, Vespasian and Titus

- Vespasian and Titus form a battle plan for Galilee and Judea.
 - Vespasian and two legions (6,000 troops) devastated Galilee, but Nero committed suicide and Vespasian returned to Rome to assume the throne.
 - Titus' four legions fight throughout the region.
- Jerusalem's fall and the temple's destruction devastated Judaism (AD 70).
 - Many Zealots had killed their fellow Jews who whispered surrender.
 - The end of the temple was the end of Jewish sacrifice, the Jewish legal system, and Jewish schools.
 - Early Christians fled during the war to the Decapolis.
 - Many returned to Judea afterwards and formed the nucleus of the ancient church.



The Second Jewish Revolt (AD 132–135)

- The Emperor Hadrian (AD 117–138) decided to rebuild Jerusalem
 - He made it a Roman colony with pagan temples.
 - He forbade Jewish practices.
- Jewish resentment leads to a revolt
 - Rabbi Akiba generated support for a revolt throughout the Diaspora.
 - Simon bar Kokhba seen as the military messiah-deliverer.
 - Ultimately unsuccessful, both bar Kokhba and Akiba killed (AD 135)
 - The remaining followers fled to caves near the Dead Sea and left behind scrolls from their communities, which were recently discovered by archeologists.
- Hadrian completes plans for Jerusalem
 - Renamed *Aelia Capitolina* and Jews were forbidden to enter
 - Temple erected and dedicated to Jupiter

Jewish Rulers

Jewish Rulers

