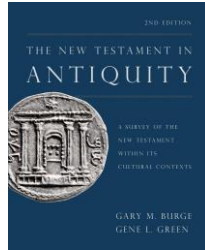


Chapter 2-The Historical Setting of the New Testament



Key Terms Aramaic, Koine Greek, Diaspora, Hellenistic, Septuagint, Hanukkah, tetrarch, prefect, procurator, synagogue

Key Locations and People Babylon, Cyrus, Alexander the Great, Samaria, Alexandria, Antiochus IV, Pompey, Decapolis, Hasmoneans, Antipater, Herod the Great, Caesarea, Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate, Herod Agrippa I, Herod Agrippa II, Vespasian, Titus, Masada

Key Points

- 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.

Noteworthy Backgrounds Decree of Cyrus, Alexander's Empire, family tree of Herod the Great, Herod's Temple

Chapter Summary

As a result of Israel's covenantal disobedience, they were sent into exile to Babylon in a series of deportations, culminating in the destruction of the temple in 586 BC. With the fall of the Babylonian empire came the rise of the Persians. Under the reign of the Persian king Cyrus, the Jews were permitted to return to their land and begin the process of rebuilding their lives and the temple.

About two centuries later, Alexander the Great led his army through Asia Minor and headed south to Egypt, freeing Judah from Persia's rule. Alexander, shortly thereafter, became the greatest ruler in the known world, and his territories were culturally bridged through Hellenization. Greek became the new language of a new world that unified the various cultures of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Mediterranean.

Alexander's death at a young age resulted in his generals wrangling for power and land. His empire was soon divided into discreet territories. Israel's strategic location and fertile land were ripe for the picking. Palestine was the stage of a tug-and-war battle between two generals—Ptolemy I (Egypt) and Seleucus I Nicator (Syria). For a time, Israel became part of Ptolemaic region but was eventually controlled by the Seleucids.

In 167 BC, Antiochus IV, the Seleucid ruler, desecrated the temple for three years by sacrificing pigs on the altar. This desecration prompted a series of Jewish revolts led by Mattathias and his sons—Judas, Simon, and Jonathan. They became known as the Maccabees. Finally, in 164 BC Judas recaptured the temple and cleansed the sanctuary. At long last, Jerusalem gained its independence under this family, commonly referred to as the Hasmonean Dynasty. Approximately one hundred years later, Jerusalem again lost her independence to the Roman commander, Pompey, and Rome quickly installed an Idumean king over the region. Israel, during the next several decades, bore witness to one of its most significant rulers—Herod the Great. Herod initiated a series of building projects, such as the port in Caesarea, the Herodium, and the reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple.

After Herod's death, his kingdom was divided between his three sons: Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip. Rome's relationship with the Judean rulers oscillated between organizing the region into a Roman province and a client kingdom. Due to a number of Jewish revolts against Roman rule, Titus, the son of the famed general Vespasian, mounted an attack on Jerusalem. In AD 70, the city eventually collapsed, and the temple burned. A second Jewish revolt occurred in AD 132–135, but the Romans were able to stave off another rebellion.