The Intertestamental Period

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Intertestamental Paper

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief history of the Second Temple Period, beginning with Alexander the Great and continuing through the reign of Herod’s sons. The impact of various events, individuals, and groups on the Jews and the land of Israel will be explored. In addition, the rise of the Maccabees and their contribution to Judaism will be highlighted and discussed.

Formerly referred to as the “intertestamental period,” Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles assert, “Most scholars now prefer the term “Second Temple Period” for the time from the building of the Second temple in 515 BC by Zerubbabel until its destruction by the Romans in AD 70, including the time of Jesus and the early church.”¹ Although the period between the testaments has been called the “silent years,” Kostenberger et al., suggests, “This rightly underscores the absence of prophet-mediated divine revelation during this period, but the time was anything but quiet.”²

Alexander the Great

The land of Israel had been occupied by the Babylonians from 606-539 BC. The Persians then ruled the land for over 200 years beginning in 539 BC. The Persian rule ended with the Conquests of Alexander the Great in 331 BC.

Alexander’s father, Phillip of Macedon, invested great resources into his son’s education. He was educated not only academically, but also in military tactics. Aristotle was Alexander’s tutor at the age of 13. Kostenberger et al., points out that, “Alexander inherited from Phillip an aggressive attitude and a keen military skill: his education provided him with a deep appreciation

² Ibid.
for Hellenistic ideals, and his military training gave him the courage and skills to conquer the empire before him.”

Daniel had foretold of the male goat that, “Grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven.”

According to John MacArthur, “Alexander the Great defeated the Persian king, Darius III, in three decisive battles that gave him control of the lands of the Persian Empire. The land of Israel thus passed into Greek control in 332 BC.”

Although dismissed by some scholars, after being welcomed into Jerusalem Josephus wrote of Alexander, “And when the book of Daniel was showed him, wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended; and he was then glad.”

After the death of Darius, Alexander was declared the new world ruler. Kostenberger et al., describes the end of Alexander’s life this way,

Alexander pushed east as far as the Indus River where his troops refused to advance. He then returned to Persia where he took on the lifestyle of an oriental despot, a rather curious choice for a man who valued Greek ideals. Soon he caught a fever and died at the age of 33, having conquered his empire in only 13 years.

The Jewish people now had to suffer under a series of Greek kings who strongly believed in the superiority of their culture and intended their occupied territories to adopt that way of life. As predicted in Daniel 8:8, the empire splinters in four directions. The empire was divided among Alexander’s generals known as the diadochi.

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3 Ibid., 65.
4 Dan. 8:8, New King James Version.
7 Kostenberger et al., The Cradle, The Cross, 66.
The Ptolemaic Period

Ptolemy I Soter, was the only general of Alexander to have a successful kingdom. Ptolemy was, “Granted Egypt and kept it; Syria came under the control of the Selucids; Lysimachus got Asia Minor (he eventually lost much of it to Syria); and Cassander ruled Greece. Palestine first came under the jurisdiction of the Egyptian ruler Ptolemy in about 320 BC.”

Until AD 30, every Egyptian ruler was given the name “Ptolemy” whether they were related or not.

The Ptolemaic Period lasted from 320-198 BC. The Ptolemies greatest contribution to history was, “The city of Alexandria, the greatest metropolis of the Mediterranean world by 200 BC (only Rome would later surpass it). The famous library and museum (an academy dedicated to the muses) helped make Alexandria the intellectual and spiritual center of the Greek world.”

Judea was able to govern itself as a temple state under the high priest.

The Seleucid Period

The Seleucids and the Ptolemies were constantly battling over the land of Palestine. Finally, “Ptolemy V lost Israel in 198 BC at Paneas to Antiochus III of Syria. After this battle control of Palestine passed from Egyptian to Syrian hands, never to return.”

The Syrian reign only lasted only from 198-167 BC. Antiochus IV chose the high priest based on bribes paid in exchange for the office. Antiochus IV referred to himself as, “Epiphanes”—“the Glorious One”—implying he was the incarnation of Zeus on earth. But the Jews coined a play on words and dubbed him “Epimanes”—“the Madman.”

MacArthur writes that, “Antiochus desecrated and plundered the temple of Jerusalem in 170 BC. In 167 BC, Antiochus ordered Hellenization in Palestine and forbade the Jews from keeping their laws,

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8 Ibid., 67.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 68.
11 Ibid.
observing the Sabbath, keeping festivals, offering sacrifices, and circumcising their children.”

The Torah was ordered to be destroyed and altars to idols were set up. Kostenberger et al., describes the desecration of the temple stating, “Antiochus erected a statue of Zeus in the temple and sacrificed a pig on the altar.”

### Jewish Self-Rule

#### The Maccabees

An elderly priest named Mattathias was offered friendship with the king, gold, and silver if he would make an offering to the pagan gods. When he refused the offer, another Jew agreed to take the money and make the offering. “Mattathias killed him and the envoy and then fled into the wilderness, sparking a Jewish resistance movement” (Macc 2:15-28).

According to the First book of Maccabees, soon after these events a thousand Jewish men, women, and children were killed on a Sabbath while hiding in the wilderness. After hearing this, Mattathias and his friends decided, “If anyone attacks us on the Sabbath day, let us fight against him and not all die, as our brothers died in the hiding-places” (1 Macc 2:41).

The period of the Maccabees is named for, “The third son of Mattathias, Judas. Nicknamed “Maccabeus,” “the hammer,” he led a guerilla war against the Selucids. Although Judas was a brilliant tactician, leader, and diplomat, the Maccabees’ success was due as much to Syria’s problems with the Eastern Parthian Empire as to Judas’s leadership.”

Because of Maccabeus’s efforts against the Syrians, in 165 BC, “Antiochus’s representative, Lysias, rescinded the ban on Judaism. The next year Judas led in a cleansing of

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14 Ibid., 70.
16 Kostenberger et al., *The Cradle, The Cross*, 70.
the temple, commemorated to this day as the December Feast of Lights, an eight-day feast known as Hannukah that falls in late December.”17 MacArthur writes,

After a twenty-four-year war (166-142 BC), the Jews were able to gain their independence from Syria because of the growing Roman pressure on the Seleucids. The descendants of Mattathias founded the Hasmonean dynasty, a name derived from Hashmon, an ancestor of the Maccabees.18

Judas was killed in battle by one of Demetrius’s Colonels Nicanor. Judas died in 160 BC. Mattathias’s youngest son, Simon, continued the war and achieved national autonomy. Simon demanded that the excessive taxation cease. In 142 BC, “Simon captured the Syrian citadel in Jerusalem (called Akra). This marks the beginning of national autonomy for Israel.”19

The Hasmoneans

The Hasmonean period lasted from 135-63 BC. Hyrcanus, “Led an expansion of Judean territories into Moab and Idmea. He forced circumcision of the Idumeans and thus paved the way for Herod the Great in NT times. Aristobulus proclaimed himself king after the death of Hyrcanus I. Aristobulus I, “Was the first of the Hasmonean rulers to take that title. He conquered Galilee and founded Jewish settlements there. Aristobulus died of an unknown disease after only one year of rule.”20

The Hasmoneans eventually began to accept Hellenistic ways. The Hasmonean dynasty ended in 63 BC when, “Pompey, a general of Rome, intervened in a clash between two claimants to the high priesthood, Aristobolus II and Hyrcanus II. The land thus passed into Roman control.

17 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
Continuing unrest led the Romans to make Herod the Great king of Judea.”^{21} The, “Independent Jewish state had come to an end, and Rome was now in charge of Palestine.”^{22}

**The Roman Period**

The Roman period lasted from 63BC-AD 70. Herod had been named “king of Judea” by the Roman Senate in 40 BC. This occurred after he fled to Rome. Herod was, “Technically a client king under the authority of Rome; thus he was considered “a friend and ally of the Roman people.” He was an able administrator, but he was cruel and paranoid.”^{23}

**The Herodian Dynasty**

Herod, “Spent much of his wealth on many public works and building programs such as the expansion of the temple, which was considered one of the eight wonders of the ancient world. But Herod was also brutal and deeply suspicious, which provoked him to take murderous action.”^{24} An example of Herod’s cruelty was evidenced when he executed his sons born to his wife Mariamne. Herod had suspected that these sons wished to take his kingdom. Eventually Herod became suspicious of Mariamne and had her executed as well. Herod’s, “Reputation for cruelty and paranoia was well established. Caesar Augustus is reported to have said that it was better to be Herod’s pig than his son.”^{25}

Herod’s cruelty was not limited to his family. Smith’s Bible Dictionary states,

The terrible acts of bloodshed which Herod perpetrated in his own family were accompanied by others among his subjects equally terrible, from the number who fell victims to them. According to the well-known story, he ordered the nobles whom he had called to him in his last moments to be executed immediately after his decease, that so at least his death might be attended by universal mourning.^{26}

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^{22} Kostenberger et al., *The Cradle, The Cross*, 73.
^{23} Ibid., 74.
^{24} Ibid.
^{25} Ibid.
^{26} *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Herod.”
After his death, Herod’s sons were briefly given ruling positions. Archelaus was, 

“Appointed ethnarch over Judea, Samaria, and Idumea, which included Jerusalem (4 BC). Rome dismissed him in AD 6 because of his incompetence. Archelaus was not a skillful administrator like his father, but he was like him in being cruel and paranoid.”

Jerusalem was placed under direct Roman control as a result of Archelaus’s brief reign.

Herod’s son Phillip was an able and conscientious ruler. The most capable of Herod’s sons was Herod Antipas. He was made, “Tetrarch over Galilee and Perea (4 BC). He divorced his wife (daughter of the Nabatean king Aretas IV) to marry the wife of his half-brother, Herod Philip (not the Philip mentioned above), and martyred John the Baptist for his condemnation of this act.”

Conclusion

It was, at the conclusion of this 400 year silent period that Jesus came. Greek was the language throughout the Roman Empire. Paul stated, “In his letter to the Galatians that the Lord Jesus appeared “when the fullness of time came” (Gal 4:4 NASB). The expression “fullness of time” (to pleroma tou chronou), among other things conveys the notion that Jesus came “at just the right time.”

Through the study of the Second Temple Period, one can see the shifting of rulers in fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecies. The time was silent from God prophetically, but the times were far from quiet.

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27 Kostenberger et al., The Cradle, The Cross, 75.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 78.
Bibliography


