

7th Grade New Testament (Gospels)

Lesson Plan: Introduction to the NT World (Part 1)

Learning Goals: Students should be able to give a basic outline of the structure and history of the time between the Old and New Testaments. They should also be familiar with the personalities involved in this time period.

Question: What happened in the 400 years between the Old and New Testaments?

Prayer.

Discuss Question on board.

Josephus - an early historian of Jewish life and history in the first century. He is the most important source for Jewish history in the Roman period.

Inter-testamental History (*time between the Old Testament and New Testament*):

722 BCE Northern Kingdom of Israel exiled by Assyrians

586 BCE Southern Kingdom of Judah exiled by Babylonians

Persian Empire overtakes Babylonians and King Cyrus allows the Jews to return to the Promised Land.

Ezra and Nehemiah return with some of the Jews and begin rebuilding the temple and the city walls of Jerusalem. Ezra reinstates the sacrificial system and brings spiritual renewal to the people.

3 Temples:

1. Solomon
2. Ezra
3. Herod

Alexander the Great leads conquest from Greece all the way to India. In his path, he leaves behind Greek culture (Hellenization), setting the stage for two important developments for the coming of the Messiah:

1. The spread and use of the Greek language in the known world
2. The spread of roads and infrastructure in the known world (including the establishment of cities)

At Alexander's death, his territory was split among 4 of his generals. The Ptolemies were in charge of Egypt and the Seleucids (Syrians) were in charge of the area north of Jerusalem. They fought for control over Palestine. By 198 BCE, the Seleucids gained control over the region. This time period is marked by the following under the rule of Antiochus Epiphanies:

1. Forced worship of Greek gods
2. Attempts to transition Jerusalem into a Greek city
3. After fears that the city was in revolt, he robbed the temple and slaughtered thousands of Jews.

4. His determination to end Jewish religion came to a peak in 168 BCE when he had a hog sacrificed on the altar in the temple in the name of Zeus. Every copy of the Pentateuch was ordered destroyed. Practicing the law of Moses was forbidden.

In 167 BCE, the Jews fought back, led by Mattathias, an elderly priest. He scrambled a few men together and fought guerrilla style warfare against the Syrians. This is called the Maccabean Revolt. His son, Judas the Maccabee, gained religious liberty for his people and rededicated the temple on December 25, 164 BCE. This event is celebrated today as Hanukkah.

The second son of Mattathias, Simon, won political independence from the Syrians in 143 BCE. His descendants became more and more influenced by Greek culture over the generations. The Pharisees and Sadducees appear at this time. A civil war breaks out between Mattathias' line of kings and the Pharisees. Over 50,000 Jews die in the war and the king at the time (Alexander Jannaeus) has 800 Pharisees crucified and executes their families in front of them. It was during this time that the priesthood became a political role.

The New Testament World

1. Political

The Roman Empire captured Palestine in 63 BCE. Augustus Caesar was the Roman Emperor during the birth of Christ. Tiberius, his adopted son, succeeded him and ruled from 13-37 CE. He was ruling during the time of Jesus' death. The notorious Nero was emperor during the years of 54-68 CE. He was very brutal and carried out persecution against Christians in Rome. According to church tradition, Paul and Peter were killed during these persecutions.

The Romans appointed Herod the Great to control the Palestine territory between 37 and 4 BCE. He was known as a clever yet brutal ruler and politician. This is the Herod mentioned in Matthew 2:13-18 when the wise men came to look for Jesus.

Herod's sons were Archelaus and Antipas who each inherited a portion of their father's territory. Herod's grandson Agrippa I murdered James the Apostle and put Peter in prison. His son, Agrippa II heard Paul's defense of the gospel when he was under trial.

Roman Emperors:

- Augustus Caesar - ruled during the time of Jesus' birth (31 bce - 14 CE)
- Tiberius - ruled during the time of Jesus' life and death (14-37 CE)
- Caligula (37-41 CE)
- Claudius - Jews are expelled from Rome during his reign (41-54 CE)
- Nero - ruled during the time of the Apostles; Peter and Paul are executed under his persecution (54 - 68 CE)

By 68 CE, the Jews were ripe for rebellion (again) and longing for independence. The Romans subjugated them and by 70 CE, the city of Jerusalem was leveled. The temple was destroyed, leaving only the Western Wall (still there today).

Lesson Summary /Review:

Students should review and highlight the following vocabulary terms and concepts from this lesson in their notes:

- Josephus
- Alexander the Great
- Antiochus Epiphanies
- Augustus Caesar
- Tiberius
- Herod the Great
- Hellenism
- Maccabean Revolt
- How did Alexander the Great contribute to the future spread of the gospel?