



SCHOOL FOR MINISTRY
The Episcopal Diocese of San Diego

New Testament I

Religion, Politics & Society in 1st Century C.E. Palestine

David Moseley, Ph.D.

Background: A History of Foreign Domination

- 722/721 B.C.E. - Assyrians conquer Israel
- 587/588 B.C.E. – Babylonians conquer Judah
- 559 B.C.E. – Persians conquer Babylonia
- 540 B.C.E. – End of Babylonian Exile
- 333/332 B.C.E. – Greeks conquer Persia
- 323 B.C.E. – Ptolemies take over Palestine
- 198 B.C.E. – Seleucids (Syrians) take Palestine
- 167 B.C.E. – Maccabean Revolt
- The Maccabean Revolt (167-142 B.C.E.) & Hasmonean Monarchy (142-63 B.C.E.)
- Hyrcanus vs. Aristobulus and the Roman Conquest by General Pompey (63 B.C.E.)
- The Hasmonean Client Kingship – Antipater and Herod (63-40 B.C.E.)
- The Parthian Interregnum and the Herodian Restoration (40-37 B.C.E.)
- King Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.E.) – “Athens of the East” and the Second Temple

1. Politics in Israel at the Time of Jesus

- The Division of Herod the Great's Kingdom:
 1. "Ethnarch" – Herod Archelaus (Judaea)
 2. The "Tetrarchs" – Herod Antipas (North-West) and Herod Philip (North-East)

1.1 Judaea

- Deposition of Archelaus after Rebellion (6 C.E.)
- Direct Roman Military Occupation in Judaea under Prefect / Procurator
- Prefect Pontius Pilatus (26-36 C.E.)
- Roman Priorities:
 - ❖ Peace - *Pax Romana*
 - ❖ Tribute – *Tax Romana*
- Jewish Collaboration – Priests and Aristocracy ("Elders")
- Temple is Center of Collaboration – "Sanhedrin" (Council)

1.2 Galilee

- Client King Herod Antipas (Ruled 4 B.C.E. - 39 C.E.)
- Kept Romans Happy
- Executed John the Baptist
- Deposed by Romans for Conspiracy

1.3 Jewish Social Structure

- ❖ Romans
- ❖ Priests
- ❖ Local "Elders" / Landowners [Tax Collectors]
- ❖ Tenant Farmers & Artisans
- ❖ Day Laborers
- ❖ Debt Slaves
- ❖ Outcasts & Beggars

2. Religion in the Greco-Roman World

- I. Anthropomorphism – Not Transcendence
- II. Polytheism – Not Monotheism
- III. This Present Life - Not the After-Life
- IV. Cultic Acts – Not Doctrine
- V. Religion & State Together – Not Separation of Religious & Civic Affairs
- VI. Tolerance – Not Intolerance

2.1 Unofficial Roman Religion

1. Magic & Mystery Cults
 - Unofficial Roman Religion
 - Secretive – Initiation
 - Bizarre Rituals
 - Parallels with Early Christianity

2. Ancient Philosophy
 - The Search for the Meaning of Life
 - Missionary-Oriented
 - Competitive
 - Parallels with Early Christianity

3. Judaism as Religion

- I. Monotheism - One God
- II. Covenant – Israel’s Contract with God
- III. Law – Israel’s Covenantal Obligations
- IV. Temple & Synagogue – Israel’s Places of Worship

4. Ancient & Modern “Worldviews”

- Danger of “Anachronism”

4.1 Modern Worldview

- ❖ Dark Ages
- ❖ Enlightenment
- ❖ Humanism
- ❖ Science
- ❖ Secularism

4.2 Ancient Worldview

- ❖ Explaining the Inexplicable
- ❖ The World of Spirits
- ❖ “Charismatics”
- ❖ Battle of Light vs. Darkness

5. Flavius Josephus (37–c.100 C.E.)

- Rebel Captain in Jewish War (66-70 C.E.)
- Became Client of Emperor Titus
- Devoted to History:
 - ❖ *The Jewish War*
 - ❖ *The Antiquities of the Jews*

6. Sectarian Religion & Politics of First Century CE Palestine

6.1 Groups & Sects

1. Sadducees (Herodians) & Priests

- Ruling Class
- Landowners – “Elders”
- Party of “Zadok”
- Strong Supporters of the Temple and the Priests
- Sadducees and Jesus

2. Scribes & Pharisees (Rabbis)

- “Separated Ones”
- Rabbis = Teachers
- Torah & “Oral Law”
- *Mishnah & Talmud*
- Leaders of Synagogues
- Influential but not All-Powerful
- Pharisees and Jesus

6.2 “Apocalypticism” as Faith and an Ideology of Resistance

- “Metanarrative” – Interpretation of History
- Limitations of “Covenant” Metanarrative of History
- “Apocalypticism” as New Metanarrative of History (200 B.C.E. – 200 C.E.)
- “Apocalypticism” = Unveiling what is Hidden - Revelation
- Afterlife - Judgment – Resurrection – Reward & Punishment - “Messiah”
- Characteristics of Apocalyptic Writings:
 - ❖ Dualism
 - ❖ Pessimism
 - ❖ Vindication
 - ❖ Imminence

6.3 Groups & Sects (Cont.)

3. Essenes (Dead Sea Scrolls Community)

- The “Holy Ones”
- Qumran 1947
- Dead Sea Scrolls:
 1. Hebrew Scriptures
 2. Apocrypha
 3. Commentaries
 4. Rule Books
- Inner & Outer Purity
- Essenes and Jesus

4. 'The Fourth Philosophy' – Zealots

- Violent Insurgency
- Terrorists of Martyrs?
- Asymmetric Guerilla Warfare Tactics
- Zealots and Jesus

6.4 *Popular Modes of Resistance*

- ❖ Silent Protests & Non-Violent Uprising
- ❖ Prophetic Proclamation
- ❖ Violent Insurrection
- ❖ The Jewish Revolt (66-70 C.E.)
- ❖ Tragedy at Masada (73 C.E.)