

# The World of Jesus' Day: The Political Landscape

*Looking into the Face of Jesus*  
*The Life of Christ, 1: Pages 10-17*

## Outline: Lesson Plan 2

### Introduction

- A. Malachi was the last OT prophetic book to be written. Nehemiah was the last OT historical book to be written.
- B. It is proposed that the last OT Scripture was written around 430-425 BC.
- C. The first NT event occurred about 5 BC. It was the birth of John the Baptist.
- D. That leaves over 400 years from OT to NT Scriptures.
- E. However, listen to what Malachi left his readers with:

Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts (Malachi 3:1).

- F. B.S. Dean observed that the “natural scenery is the same as when Abraham first pitched his tent at Shechem,” but “all else is changed.”<sup>1</sup>

### I. Why was There so Much Time Before the Sending of His Son?

- A. F. LaGard Smith suggests three reasons:
  - 1. God may have wanted to dramatize the event.
  - 2. God may have wanted to make the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy more impressive.
  - 3. God may have simply been waiting until the religious and political situation was exactly right for Jesus.
- B. Read Galatians 4:4a: “But when the fullness of the time came, . . .”

### II. Sources of Information for the Intertestamental Period

- A. The Apocryphal Writings—the 14 books that are in some Bibles, but not a part of the Canon
- B. The Writings of Josephus—a great historian who was born around AD 37 and survived the destruction of Jerusalem
- C. Miscellaneous Greek and Roman Witnesses
- D. Archaeological Findings
- E. The Scriptures—give us some answers
- F. Dr. Coy Roper has dealt with this period in his third commentary on the Minor Prophets.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>B.S. Dean, “Introduction,” *Truth for Today* (March 1992): 6.

<sup>2</sup>Coy Roper, *The Minor Prophets, 3: Zechariah and Malachi; The Intertestamental Period*, *Truth for Today Commentary Series* (Searcy, AR: Resource Publications, 2013), 355-533.

### III. Political Landscape at the Time of Christ

A. The political framework was outlined in Daniel 2.

1. The great image:

You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay (Daniel 2:31–33).

2. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that he (ruler of Babylon) was the head of gold, but went on to say. . .

Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these (Daniel 2:39, 40).

3. From history, we know the four kingdoms were as follows:

- a. Babylonian Empire
- b. Medo-Persian Empire
- c. Grecian Empire
- d. Roman Empire

4. The most important part of the prophecy is found in Daniel 2:44:

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people.

B. At the end of the OT, Babylon had fallen and the Medo-Persian Empire was established. That is what we will talk about next.

### IV. The Medo-Persian Empire (539-333 BC)

A. At the end of the OT, Persia controlled Canaan. They still allowed the Jews to be controlled by the High Priest.

B. This period is when Samaritans came along due to tensions between the Jews that were returning and the mixed-race inhabitants (see 2 Kings 17:24–33).

### V. The Grecian Period (333-165 BC)

A. This period is also known as the Macedonian Period because Alexander the Great was from Macedonia.

1. Alexander the Great (333-323)
  2. In 336, he assumed command of the Grecian army at just 23-years-old.
  3. He conquered the world in just a few years.
  4. Because of that, Greek culture spread quickly.
  5. This is important to Christians because that is why Greek became the universal language. The NT was written in Greek.
  6. He took control of Jerusalem in 333 BC.
  7. It was during this period that the scribes became a distinct class.
  8. Upon Alexander's death in 323 BC, his kingdom was divided into four territories: Greece, Asia, Egypt, and Syria.
  9. The two that matter to us are Egypt and Syria.
- B. Egypt: The Ptolemies (323-198 BC)
1. Sitting between Egypt and Syria was Palestine, and it was trapped between the struggles of the two.
  2. Mostly during this time, the Jews were under Egyptian control or Ptolemies' rule.
  3. Under their rule, it was a peaceful time.
  4. It was also during this time that Ptolemy II commissioned a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures for the great library of Alexandria. It was completed around 285 BC. It was called the Septuagint, which means 70. It was created by 70 Jewish scholars.
  5. Finally, around 198 BC, Palestine came under Syrian domination.
- C. Syria: The Seleucids (198-165 BC)
1. They are significant because they divided Palestine into five provinces: Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Perea, and Trachonitis.
  2. The Syrian rule was the darkest in the history of Judaism.
  3. The villain was Antiochus IV (see Daniel 8:9-11).
  4. He hated the Jews and tried to make Greeks of them.
  5. He closed the temple, made circumcision illegal, and promised death to anyone who practiced Judaism.
  6. He offered a sow on the altar, poured the ashes into water and then sprinkled the water throughout the temple to desecrate the temple.

## VI. The Period of Independence (165-63 BC)

- A. The Jews were motivated to stop the horrible things happening and were led by a priest named Mattathias.
1. He had five bold sons, one of which was named Judas—the Hammer.
  2. Judas Maccabeus re-conquered Jerusalem in 165 BC.
  3. The temple was rededicated to God, and the origin of the Feast of Dedication was established (John 10:22).
  4. War with Syria continued until 143 BC. John Hyrcanus started his dynasty around 135 BC.

5. This is when Jewish sects rose, including Pharisees and Sadducees.
  6. The high priest office became more political; they were appointed by whomever was in power.
  7. At the end of this era there were times of civil strife.
  8. Descendants of John Hyrcanus were plotting for the throne. One of them invited Rome in for support.
- B. It was not long before the Jews lost their independence once again.

## **VII. The Roman Period (63 BC-AD 70)**

- A. The Jews were conquered by Pompey the Great in 63 BC.
- B. Palestine was put under rulers responsible to Rome. Many of these we will read about in the Gospel accounts.
- C. The Romans gave the Jews many concessions.
- D. The greatest significance to Christians is how the Roman period prepared the way for Christ.
- E. Examples are these:
  1. The universal language (Greek)
  2. The Pax Romana (Roman peace)
  3. The building of massive networks of roads that permitted empire-wide transportation and communication

## **Conclusion**

- A. These 400 years must have been important years.
  1. Look at what was necessary for the bringing in of the Messiah.
  2. The OT and the intertestamental period answer this question: why did Jesus not come before the great flood?
- B. Those of us who live in the aftermath of Jesus' earthly ministry are blessed indeed.
  1. Some say, "Look what the world is coming to!" However, we get to say, "Look who has come to the world!"
  2. We will be tested, but our test will be different from Abraham's test. Our test has to do with the question, "What will you do with Jesus' earthly life?"