



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Notes

4 - From Independence to Roman Control

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Review

I. Maccabean Rebellion Leads to Independence.

- A. The family of the priest Mattathias led a rebellion against the oppressive efforts of Antiochus IV Epiphanes to force the Jews in Israel to accept Greek rule, culture, and religion.
 - 1. The rebellion is named for Judas *Maccabeus* (Hammer), the son who succeeded Mattathias; he regained control of the temple (commemorated by Hanukkah, in 164) (166-160 BC).
 - 2. His brother Jonathan succeeded him; religious freedom was solidified and religious and governmental leadership were merged (160-142).
 - 3. Simon, the youngest son of Mattathias, achieved political independence (142-135).

Independence: The Hasmonean Period (142-63 BC)

II. Expansion Under John Hyrcanus I.

- A. After a reign of relative peace, Simon and two of his sons were assassinated by his son-in-law Ptolemy in 135 BC (1 Maccabees 16.11-24).
- B. The surviving son, John Hyrcanus, the first of the Hasmonean rulers, escaped, defeated Ptolemy, and went on to rule the nation from 135-104 BC.¹
 - 1. Although Syria reasserted control over part of Israel for a short time early in his reign, Hyrcanus proceeded to lead an expansion of Judean territory into Moab and Idumea, an effort that was so successful that some Jews hoped he might be the anticipated Messiah.²
 - a) He forced the Idumeans to be circumcised, paving the way for Herod the Great.
 - b) He also set the stage for increased tension between Jews and Samaritans, destroying the temple the Samaritans had built on Mt. Gerizim (127 BC).

III. Successors and Increasing Instability.

- A. Hyrcanus was succeeded by his son, Aristobulus I.
 - 1. He annexed Galilee and forced circumcision and submission to the law on them.
 - 2. He died of an unknown disease after only a year (Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.11.1-3 [§§ 301-317]).
- B. Aristobulus's widow, Salome Alexandra, released his brothers from prison, appointed Jonathan, the oldest to be high priest and king, and then married him.

1. Jonathan took the Greek name Alexander and was known as Alexander Jannaeus; he reigned from 103-76 BC.
 - a) Josephus called him "a lover of the Grecians" (*Phillēn*, "Greek-lover"; *Antiquities* 13.11.3 [§ 318]), and he ruled as a Hellenistic king.
 - b) "[H]e virtually obliterated the Maccabean ideals."³
2. An ambitious warrior, he expanded the kingdom, seeking possession from "Dan to Beersheba."⁴
3. Caring little for the spiritual duties of high priest, he alienated the people and had to put down a popular rebellion with help from foreign mercenaries.
 - a) "The rebels, ironically, called on Demetrius III (a Syrian king!) to help them against the Hasmonean ruler."⁵
 - b) At the last minute, 6,000 Jews returned to Alexander and helped save his rule.
 - c) In response, "Alexander took gruesome revenge on his opponents, crucifying 800 of his most die-hard opponents while their wives' and children's throats were slit at their feet."⁶
 - d) Blomberg notes that the 800 were Pharisees and that the event solidified the pro- and anti-Hellenization positions, "creating a polarization that remained unresolved in New Testament times."⁷
- C. In keeping with his desire, his wife Salome Alexandra succeeded him (76-67 BC) (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.16.1 [§ 407]).
 1. The only queen in the Hasmonean line, Salome was more supportive of Jewish law and was well liked; her reign was generally peaceful.
 2. She appointed her oldest son, Hyrcanus II, as high priest, and her youngest, Aristobulus II, controlled the armies.
 3. "She repaired the relationship with the Pharisees who during her reign dominated the Sanhedrin."⁸
- D. When Salome died, her heirs contended for the throne (67-63 BC).
 1. Aristobulus was more ambitious and secured an agreement from Hyrcanus that he would retire (67-63).
 2. But Antipater, an Idumean governor, and the wealthy Jews he influenced, secured the help of the Nabatean kingdom and convinced Hyrcanus II to rebel.
 3. Meanwhile, the Romans had subdued the Seleucid kingdom; both brothers appealed to the Roman Pompey to intervene, but he eventually supported Hyrcanus II.
 4. Pompey defeated Aristobulus, profaned the temple by entering the holy of holies, and installed Hyrcanus as high priest, but not king.⁹
 5. Beginning in 63 BC, Judea became a client kingdom under the rule of the imperial governor in Syria.
- E. The independent Jewish state ceased to exist and the Jews now faced their *fourth great crisis during the Second Temple period: life under Roman rule*.

The Roman Period (63 BC-AD 70)

IV. Struggle for Local Control (63-40 BC).

- A. Though granted nominal control by the Romans, Hyrcanus II was plagued by indecision that led the Roman governor to demote him from being the chief political leader of Jerusalem.

- B. The sons of Antipater, who had previously advised Hyrcanus, were given political control of the region: Herod was given Galilee; Phasael was given Judea.
 - C. Antigonus, son of Aristobulus II, refused to give up and allied himself with the Parthians.
 1. He had Phasael kidnapped and killed.
 2. He then captured Hyrcanus II and took the title "king and priest" for three years.
 3. He was the last of the Hasmoneans, in control from 40-37 BC.
- V. The Herodian Dynasty (40-4 BC).
- A. Herod had fled to Rome and was named "king of Judea" in 40 BC.
 1. Not until 37 BC did he succeed in winning control of his kingdom, deposing Antigonus with the help of Antony.
 2. Herod was a client king under Roman authority, considered "a friend and ally of the Roman people."¹⁰
 - B. Herod's reign can be divided into three periods.¹¹
 1. Consolidation (37-25 BC) — establishing his rule despite opposition from [1] the Pharisees, [3] the aristocracy that had aligned with Antigonus, [3] members of the Hasmonean family, and [4] Cleopatra.¹²
 2. Prosperity / Building (25-14 BC).
 - a) Herod balanced loyalty to Rome with currying favor from his Jewish subjects.
 - (1) He held games in honor of Caesar, and built theaters, amphitheaters, and race courses for both men and horses, all in violation of Jewish law.
 - (2) He built a royal palace and built or rebuilt fortresses and Gentile temples.
 - (3) But he also built / added substantially to the temple, beginning in 20 BC, a project that some saw as perhaps his "'atonement for having slain so many sages of Israel.'"¹³
 - b) In 23/22 BC, Augustus gave him additional territories (and Herod reciprocated by building a temple for Augustus); Herod also remitted one-third of the people's taxes in attempt to elicit good will from his displeased subjects.
 3. Domestic troubles (14-4 BC).
 - a) Herod married ten wives (two named Mariamne), the sons of whom fought for power.
 - b) Suspecting (not always inaccurately) plots against his rule by family members, Herod had several of his wives (including his favorite) and sons killed;¹⁴ he also wrote (and altered) at least five wills, the last of which was honored by Rome.
 - c) He became increasingly paranoid and cruel before his death in 4 BC, so much so that, as his death drew near, he had prominent citizens attested with orders (not followed) to kill them when he died (presumably so Jerusalem would mourn his demise).
 - C. Sons of Herod were given ruling portions when he died.
 1. Archelaus (ethnarch of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea) — 4 BC-AD 6; deposed by Rome (after multiple Jewish complaints) because he was both a bad administrator (unlike his father) and cruel and paranoid (like Herod) (cf. Matt 2.22-23).
 - a) Judea was placed under direct Roman (imperial) control (prefect, procurator).
 2. Philip, who married Salome, daughter of his half brother Herod Philip (tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis) — 4 BC-AD 34; an able, conscientious ruler.
 3. Herod Antipas (tetrarch of Galilee and Perea) — 4 BC-AD 39; considered to be the most capable and astute.

- a) He divorced his wife to marry the wife of his half brother, Herod Philip (*not* the one mentioned above) and killed John the Baptist for condemning the act (Mark 6.14-29).

Summary and End of Second Temple Era

Jesus was born "in the days of Herod the king" (the Great) (Matt 2.1; Luke 1.5), a time when Rome's emperor had ultimate control and local areas were expected to submit to Roman rule (Luke 3.1). The Jews had lost their independence and longed for deliverance, a longing enhanced by prophetic expectations (Old Testament) and communicated in the literature of the second and first centuries BC.

It was a tumultuous time, stemming from Israel's oppressed position along with and partisan rivalries that had their origins during the history of the Seleucid, Maccabean, and Hasmonean periods. It would end with Israel's *fifth Second Temple period crisis, the destruction of the Jewish state and second temple in 70 AD*. Further reflection on specific influences from on the New Testament world and writings must await another time.

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Endnotes

¹ Josephus gave this account of the events when Hyrcanus defeated Ptolemy and took control: "⁵⁴ This Simeon had also a plot laid against him, and was slain at a feast by his son-in-law Ptolemy, who put his wife and two sons into prison, and sent some persons to kill John, who was also called Hyrcanus.^{1 55} (But when the young man was informed of their coming beforehand, he made haste to get to the city, as having a very great confidence in the people there, both on account of the memory of the glorious actions of his father, and of the hatred they could not but bear to the injustice of Ptolemy. Ptolemy also made an attempt to get into the city by another gate, but was repelled by the people, who had just then admitted Hyrcanus; ⁵⁶ so he retired presently to one of the fortresses that were above Jericho, which was called Dagon. Now, when Hyrcanus had received the high priesthood, which his father had held before, and had offered sacrifice to God, he made great haste to attack Ptolemy, that he might afford relief to his mother and brethren" (Josephus, *Wars* 1.54-56).

² T. C. Smith said that the conquests led by Hyrcanus appeared to indicate that he "intended to extend the borders of Judea to include the territory once held by David and Solomon" ("The Religious and Cultural Background of the New Testament," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, ed. Clifton J. Allen [Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1969], 4).

³ Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009), 19.

⁴ Smith, 4.

⁵ Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009), 71.

⁶ Ibid., 72.

⁷ Blomberg, 20.

⁸ Köstenberger, 73.

⁹ Both Josephus and the Roman historian Tacitus take note of the fact that when Pompey entered the temple, he left its contents virtually undisturbed. Josephus noted that he allowed the temple rites to continue while Tacitus was struck by the fact that after Ptolemy's conquest, "it became commonly known that the place stood empty with no similitude of gods within, and that the shrine had nothing to reveal" (Tacitus, *Histories* V. 9; cf. Josephus, *War* 1.7.4 [§ 148]; *Antiquities* 14.4.4 [§ 72]).

¹⁰ Köstenberger, 74.

¹¹ Specific dates for the three periods vary in the literature. I am using the dates found in Harold W. Hoehner, "Between the Testaments," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 190-191.

¹² Herod's political acumen and survival skills are demonstrated in his interactions with Cleopatra. In 34 BC she convinced Antony to give her control of Phoenicia, part of Arabia, and Jericho. But when civil war resulted in Antony's defeat by Octavius (who became Augustus) at the Battle of Actium, Herod executed Hyrcanus II, convinced Octavius of his loyalty (despite having supported Antony), and was confirmed as king (see Hoehner, 190).

¹³ Midrash: Numbers 14:8; cited in Hoehner, 191.

¹⁴ Reportedly, Caesar Augustus said that it was better to be Herod's pig than his son (Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 2.4; cited in Köstenberger, 74, n. 30). This was a play on the Greek words for "pig" (*hus*) and "son" (*huios*).