

HISTORY OF SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

LLN's Yearly Intensive Series

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James L. Bailey

Brief Outline of Israel's History

- ◆ Ca. 1800-1500 BCE – Ancestral Period
- ◆ Ca. 1290 BCE - Exodus from Egypt
- ◆ 1240-1020 BCE – Tribal Confederacy
- ◆ 1020-922 BCE – United Monarchy (1st Temple)
- ◆ 922-722 BCE – Divided Kingdom
- ◆ 722 BCE – Fall of Samaria (Israel) to Assyrians

- ◆ **587 BCE – Fall of Jerusalem (Judah) to Babylonians**

Jerusalem Destroyed by Babylonians in 587 BCE

Lam. 1:1,3-4: *“How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal. . . Judah has gone into exile with suffering and hard servitude; she lives now among the nations, and finds no resting place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress. The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to the festivals; all her gates are desolate, her priests groan; her young girls grieve, and her lot is bitter.”*

Ps. 137:4-6 *“How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right-hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.”*

On 9th of Av (August), Lamentations is read in synagogues, mourning “the most terrible day of the Jewish year” with its fast occurring “during our parched summer, as the land itself seems to convey despair” (Yossi Klein Halevi, *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor*, pp. 25-26).

Map of Ancient Near East

Map of Contemporary Middle East

Life Under Empires

Neo-Assyrian Empire (934-609 BCE)

- ◆ Conquers Israel—N.K. (Samaria in 722)

Babylonian Empire (747-539 BCE)

- ◆ Conquers Judah—S.K. (Jerusalem in 587)
- ◆ Jerusalem elite exiled to Babylon (ca. 40 yrs.)

Persian Empire (560-330 BCE)

- ◆ Cyrus' edict for return of Jews (538)
- ◆ Rebuilding temple (520-515)
- ◆ Ezra, scribe for Torah (458)
- ◆ Nehemiah, builder of walls (444-432)

Map of the Persian Empire

Surprising Words of Exilic Prophet Isaiah 40-55

“Comfort, O comfort my people; Speak tenderly to Jerusalem ...” (40:1-2)

“I am about to do a new thing, now it springs forth, I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert” (43:19)

Cyrus, “He is my shepherd and shall carry out all my purpose (rebuild Jerusalem and temple) ... Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus ...” (44:28-45:1)

“You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified...I will give you as a light to the nations” (49:3,6)

Cyrus’ Edict:

Ezra 1:1-3 *In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom, and also in a written edict declared: ² “Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. ³ Any of those among you who are of his people--may their God be with them!-- are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel-- he is the God who is in Jerusalem . . .*

Ezra Reading Book of Law to People

Nehemiah 8:1-3 *. . . all the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel. ² Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. ³ He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.*

Influence of Greek Control

Greek Empire (333-63 BCE)

- ◆ Conquests by Alexander & overlay of Hellenistic culture (e.g., cities & language)
- ◆ Rule of Ptolemies and Seleucids
- ◆ Antiochus Epiphanes forbade Jewish practices (circumcision, Sabbath, festivals), burned Torah, desecrated temple (1 Macc. 1)
- ◆ Maccabean revolt & rededicated temple, with celebration known as Hannukah (167-164)
- ◆ Semi-autonomous rule of Hasmonean priests (142-63).

Map of the Hellenistic World

Antiochus Epiphanes & Hellenistic Jews:

1 Maccabees 1:10-15 *From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus; he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks. In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us." This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.*

Life Under Roman Empire

Jews under Romans (63 BCE- 326 CE)

- ◆ Octavian (Caesar Augustus) becomes emperor (27 BCE-14 CE) & successor Tiberius (14-37)
- ◆ Herod as client king of the Jews (37-4 BCE)
- ◆ Sons as successors—Philip over area above Sea of Galilee, Herod Antipas over Galilee & Perea, & Archelaus over Samaria, Judah, & Idumea (replaced by Roman Prefects in 6 CE, with Pontus Pilate from 26-36 CE)
- ◆ John the Baptist & Jesus of Nazareth movements (ca. 26-30)
- ◆ First Jewish-Roman war—second temple destroyed, Jerusalem captured, many crucified (67-73)
- ◆ Final defeat of Jews in Bar Kochba revolt (132-135)

Map of Roman Empire in 1st Century C.E.

***Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans* [Book title by Peter Richardson]**

- ◆ Herod ruled as client king from 37 to 4 BCE
- ◆ Herod, the Idumean, was a “bigger than life” figure, avoiding offense to Jews & honoring Roman emperors by his cities and buildings
- ◆ Jewish historian Josephus claimed Herod “was the most savage tyrant that had ever lived” (p. 30)
- ◆ Royal family intrigue (Herod married 10 times), especially over his successors
- ◆ Quite ill, Herod dies at winter palace in Jericho at age 70.
- ◆ His turbulent reign: “*social unrest, high taxation, foreign use of funds, religion as rallying point, unbridled ambition, distrust with the family, Roman failure to understand Judea, opportunism of the surrounding people . . .*” (PR, 25).
- ◆ In the *Res gestae* (summary of signal events in his career), Augustus does not include a single line about Herod.

Herodian Building Projects in Palestine

Map of Herod’s Divided Kingdom

Professor Henze states:

“It may not be an overstatement to say that Jesus and the early Jesus movement would have been inconceivable without the dramatic changes and transformations that took place in the Second Temple period” (quote by Matthias Henze, in *Inside Jesus’ Judaism*, Christian Century, June 5, 2019, p. 32)

Dramatic change #1 – End of Monarchy & Prophets

Failed restoration of Davidic kingship (reference to Zerubbabel in Haggai 2:4)
Later Hasmonean priests with authority under Seleucid rule
Temple state with high priests (later appointed by Romans), supported by Sadducees
Herod not viewed as Jews' legitimate king

Prophets on scene to contest royal abuse of power
Prophets during Exile (2nd & 3rd Isaiah) & rebuilding of second temple (Haggai & Zechariah)
Absence of prophets under Greek overlords (see Jonah)
John the prophet & Jesus of Nazareth hailed as prophets by the masses

Dramatic change #2 – Temple never had same significance

Rebuilt temple did not compare to Solomon's
Herod rebuilt temple mount
High priests & Sadducees viewed as collaborators with Romans & not respected by people
Synagogue as community center around Torah

1st Century Masada Synagogue

2nd-3rd Century Synagogue at Capernaum

Dramatic change #3 – Diaspora becomes permanent reality

In 538, only 42,000 returned to Judah; most Jews remained in Babylon
More Jews lived in Babylon, Antioch, & Alexandria than in 1st century Palestine
Passover as pilgrimage festival (Acts 2:5-11)

Dramatic change #4 – Increasing internal division within Judaism

- **Sadducees** as temple party as successors to Hasmoneans, wealthy & allied with Romans
- **Pharisees** as lay male group observing all commandments in daily life (incl. Lev. 19-26)
- **Essenes** from priests who withdrew to wilderness in Hasmonean period
- **Scribes** as interpreters of Scriptures among Pharisees & Sadducees
- **Sicarii** (dagger-carriers) & **Zealots** as guerilla-like resisters to Roman rule (67-73)
- **Samaritans** lived in Samaria worshipping at Mt. Gerizim (John 4:7-20), viewed as foreigners & adversaries by Jews

Dramatic change #5 – Written texts, with oral interpretation

Scribe Ezra first to read written Torah to people (Neh. 8:1-8)
Pharisees accept written & oral Torah, but Sadducees acknowledge only written Torah
Oral interpretations of rabbis collected in Mishnah (ca. 200 CE)
Post 70 Judaism becomes religion of the Book

Dramatic change #6 – Period of intellectual creativity

Formation of Canon

After crisis of exile, canonical Scriptures creatively authored & copied.

- ◆ Pentateuch/Torah (400 BCE)
- ◆ Former Prophets (Joshua-2 Kings) & Latter Prophets (200 BCE)
- ◆ Psalms/Writings (200 CE)

Then [Jesus] said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you-- that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, . . . ' (Luke 24:44-45)

Apocalyptic Visions (Dan. 7-12)

- ◆ These visions “see” beyond vagaries of history to new time when God’s rule comes.
- ◆ The “seer” uses visionary language to offer deep hope to faithful in the worst of evil & persecution (167-164 BCE).
- ◆ *“This is not a world-escaping hope; rather it is in fact a summons to obedience that refuses accommodation to the rulers of the old age” (Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the O.T.*, p. 358).*

Daniel 7:11-14

*¹¹ I watched then because of the noise of the arrogant words that the horn was speaking. And as I watched, the beast was put to death, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.¹³ As I watched in the night visions, I saw **one like a human being [lit. ‘son of man’] coming with the clouds of heaven.** And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. ¹⁴ To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.*

- New ideas of “coming Son of Man” (Dan. 7:13-14) & the resurrection of faithful dead (Dan. 12:2-3)
- Belief in resurrection separates Pharisees & Sadducees