

## The Gospel of Mark

### Study Week 1 : The Intertestamental Period

- A. Introduction
  - a. Greeting
  - b. Galatians 4:4
  - c. The Intertestamental Period circa 400 years
  
- B. The end of the O.T. (books of Ezra/Nehemiah; prophets Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)
  - a. Jews returned from exile in Babylon
  - b. Zerubbabel rebuilds the temple
  - c. Ezra restores worship
  - d. Nehemiah rebuilds the walls

*Jews are back in Judea but still under Persian rule for about another 100 years*
  
- C. Persian Rule
  - a. Tolerant of Jewish worship and practice
  - b. Emergence of synagogues
  - c. Development of Oral law
  
- D. Alexander the Great and Greek Culture
  - a. 331 BC conquers Judea
  - b. Greek culture was attractive – improved living standards; good administration; good communication networks, progressive education. Began to influence Judaism
  - c. But ungodly and there was an element of tension between these Hellenistic influences and the Jewish traditions.
  - d. Alexander was short lived, died in 323 BC aged 32.
  
- E. Egyptian Rule 323 BC – 198 BC (circa 120 years)
  - a. Ptolemaic rule still essentially Greek/ division of Greek empire
  - b. Continuation of Persian policies, a period of relative peace and prosperity

*200 years of relative freedom and peace, albeit under foreign rule*
  
- F. Syrian Rule 198 BC – 167 BC (circa 30 years)
  - a. Seleucid empire (another remnant of Greek empire)
  - b. Much less tolerant.
  - c. Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) 175 BC
    - i. Hostile and oppressive towards the Jews.
    - ii. Promoted Hellenization
    - iii. Forbade Jewish worship and customs
    - iv. Declared himself to be god
    - v. Allegedly killed 40,000 Jews in one day
    - vi. Set up a pagan altar in the temple and slaughtered pigs on it.
  
- G. Maccabean Revolt and Hasmonean Dynasty (167 BC – 63 BC) circa 100 years
  - a. A priest named Mattathias led a revolt with his five sons
  - b. Became known as the Maccabee(s); Greek for 'hammer'

- c. Mattathias' son Judah waged a guerrilla campaign and reclaimed the temple precincts and purified the sanctuary (Hanukkah)
- d. By 142 BC all Syrian presence was removed from Judea.
- e. A dynasty of priest kings was established called the Hasmoneans,
- f. A golden era of Jewish independence. Not seen again until 1948!
- g. Over time, Maccabean ideals were compromised and ultimately abandoned.
- h. Sadducees were identified with the Hasmoneans, centred around the temple and the priestly office.
- i. Also thought that the Pharisees emerged during this period, calling back the people back to faithfulness to the law.

#### H. Roman Rule 63 BC into NT era

- a. Pompey invaded Jerusalem and profaned the temple, entering the holy of holies
- b. Set up a client king Antipater who ruled for circa 20 years, he gained favour with Julius Caesar and gained some religious freedoms for Judaism (religio licitia)
- c. 37 BC Herod the Great became 'king' *under Roman rule*
  - i. Reigned until 4 BC, 34 years
  - ii. Undertook magnificent building projects, including an expanded and greater temple in Jerusalem.
  - iii. His later years were marked by paranoia regarding potential coups and threats to his rule, he killed his wife and two sons.
- d. Herod's successors – three Herod's
  - i. Archelaus, Judea and Samaria – but was removed and replaced with a Roman procurator, the most famous being Pontius Pilate.
  - ii. Antipas, Galilee and Perea – killed John the Baptist.
  - iii. Phillip, remaining provinces to the N & E of Galilee.

*Brings us into the NT era into which Jesus was born*

#### I. Roman/Greek religion

- a. Traditional mythology...in decline
- b. Eastern mystery religions/cults , often involving blood initiation rites, sacramental meals and sexual excess.
- c. Greek philosophy. Various 'schools' including Platonism, Cynics, Skeptics, Epicureans, Stoics, Pythagoreans.
- d. Emperor worship.

#### J. Judaism.

- a. Not homogenous, various expressions of what Judaism meant, four groups
  - i. Pharisees. Popular, centred around the synagogue and called people to obedience of the law (written & oral). Jesus was probably closer to these than any other – but accused them of hypocrisy and legalism.
  - ii. Sadducees. Aristocratic, priestly families. Centred around temple practises. Were accepting of the Romans. Had become corrupt and used position to gain wealth. Rejected the oral law. Accepted all of God's word, but only the Pentateuch was binding.
  - iii. Zealots – revolutionaries who wanted to evict Rome through violence.

- iv. Essenes – more monastic, withdrew from society, were preparing for a messiah figure to come.
  - b. Some characteristics of NT Judaism
    - i. Greater interest in angels and demons
    - ii. Increase in apocalyptic themes
    - iii. Increased influence/power of Sanhedrin.
    - iv. Badges – dietary laws, keep the Sabbath, circumcision. Jesus challenged 2 of these, Paul challenged them all.
    - v. National symbols – temple, Torah, land
- K. Summary of the intertestamental period
  - a. Most of the period under foreign, gentile rule. Sometimes tolerant, sometimes oppressive.
  - b. A golden period of independence was relatively fresh in the memory.
  - c. There was a newly refurbished and magnificent temple in Jerusalem, run by a priestly sect.
  - d. A fractured Judaism, with some groups focussing on obedience to the law, some on the temple cult, some on violent resistance to Rome, some on withdrawal.

*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law. Gal 4:4*

## Week 1 : Questions

1. What three things were important for the exiles returning from Persia
2. We might consider that the church is at present 'in exile'
  - a. Do you agree?
  - b. What things might be important for the church if/when it returns from this exile?
  - c. Are there parallels between the Israelites return from exile and the church?
3. What did Greece/Greek culture bring to the world.
4. Is there anything attractive in our world today?
5. Does the church compromise with the culture? If so, How?
6. Antiochus Epiphanes and later Pompey desecrated and profaned the temple?
  - a. How?
  - b. Are there any parallels in our world today?
7. An account of the Maccabees is found in the Apochrypha. What is the Apochrypha, does it have any value for the church?
8. How did Jesus and later Paul, challenge the three 'badges' of Judaism – dietary laws, Sabbath keeping and circumcision?
9. What four Jewish groups (at least) were active in New Testament times?
  - a. How did Jesus critique the Jewish religious leaders and legal experts of his day? Find examples.
  - b. Are there parallels of such groups (or attitudes) in today's religious or even Christian environment.
  - c. Is the Old Testament law relevant for us today?