

“The Time Between”

A Walk Through the Old Testament—Class 24

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Jeff: Well, this is one of those times in the life of the Bible study where, you know, I thought to myself, people are knowing that we’re going to get into the inter-Testamental period where we’re not going to be looking at Scripture, but that 400-year gap between the last page of Malachi and the first page of Matthew. And I thought to myself, this will be one of those times where you’ll see if folks in the Bible study really want to get into what’s behind it, you know? And then you have a snowstorm, and it ruins your plans of trying to figure out who’s really interested in the background. Anyway, that’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to look at the background. And you’re here and I’m here, so we’re going to press forward with it.

Lots to do today. This is basically the purpose statement. And basically, we’re going to look at what separates Malachi from Matthew, knowing that there is not a prophetic word in it, but also knowing that it was the time that was used to prepare for the coming of Christ. And it’s helpful to know this particular period because when you get to the New Testament, and you read about the Pharisees and you read about the Sadducees and all of these other groups, this is the pivotal period in which these groups were birthed. And so it’s a helpful thing to understand this 400-year time period.

This is the way we’re going to look at it. We’ve left off with the Persians. The Persians captured the Babylonians, and the Jews were under their control. Now we’re going to transition from the Persians to the Greeks. We’re going to look at the Jews under Ptolemais. We’re going to look at the Jews under the Seleucid Empire. We’re going to look at the impact of Hellenism which comes with the Greeks. And then we’re going to look at the struggle that was enacted against Hellenism. And then we’re going to look at the Hasmonian Dynasty, and then the Romans.

The Hasmonian Dynasty is Jewish in orientation. But it’s actually the Jewish priesthood that rises in the inter-Testamental period. And just one more term: *Hellenism*. The idea of Hellenism is the spread of Greek culture. That’s what it is. So when we talk about Hellenism we’re not talking about a lady. We’re talking about the spread of a culture, the Greek culture. And we’ll talk about that as we get there.

So let’s start. And I want us first of all to focus in on *the Persians and the Greeks*. You remember that the Delian League was that league that formed in order to repel the Persians. One of the things that you have to remember is that in the Greek culture, cities that were *polises* were really independent and almost state-like. And so the idea that one *polis*, one city, one geographical area with a large body in it, was being attacked by an outside invader was in one sense not a big deal. But there were Greeks who pulled together, forming things like the Delian League. And then there was another called the Hellenic League. And all of these were different forms of the same kind of thing. And that was that “we’re going to pull ourselves together and repel the Persian attacks on us,” because the Persians, for some reason, always wanted to dominate Greece.

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And so the Delian League was most famous—not for repelling the Persians, but for giving us the deli sandwich. *(Laughter)* Anyway, I digress. *(Laughter)*

Don Nemit: You have to remember. You might forget little-known facts.

Jeff: Little-known facts, fyi. Now the Peloponnesian War also happens within a 100-year period as we close in on the New Testament period. Why is that significant? Because this was sort of an in-house war. This was the Spartans versus the Athenians. It was not necessarily external. It wasn't the Persians attacking the Greeks. This was sort of an in-house war.

But it's during this time that you begin to see a lot of writings that come about that you studied in college, for instance Plato and Aristotle. And this was the time period when these figures were writing—Socrates, Plato, Aristotle. And so one of the things that you have to do when you read treatises, especially *The Socratic Dialogues*, is that you have to read them against the idea that they were losers in the Peloponnesian War. Sparta came against Greece. And Athens just basically said, “Okay, we give up.”

And so a lot of what's happening here in the dialogues, *The Socratic Dialogues*, is really saying two things. #1. Why did we lose? What was it about the Spartans that was superior to us? But also, for instance in the *Socratic Dialogues*, you get the idea that says, well, we're not that bad. We do have an intellectual tradition that is superior, for instance, to the world around us. So there's this sense in which they're trying to re-evaluate, but they're also trying to step forward. And that becomes important, especially in the life of Aristotle, as we'll see.

Now Philip of Macedonia was obviously not a Greek; he was a Macedonian. But he basically comes and sides with them. He basically comes in and conquers the Greek city-states, frees them from Persian rule, unites them together in the Hellenic League, which is basically the Delian League, and then he just basically demoralizes Persia.

Now his plan is to keep conquering. However, he's murdered in 336. A short time after he begins these plans he's murdered. And his son comes to power. And his son is Alexander the Great.

And Alexander the Great is sort of one of these guys that is kind of an incredible figure in history, and I'll tell you why. First of all, when you think about Alexander the Great you may not think about this particular thing. But Alexander the Great was a student of Aristotle. Did you know that? That's kind of an interesting fact. What's that?

Brave Man: He was actually tutored by him.

Jeff: Yes, he was actually tutored by him, one on one. So Alexander the Great imbibes the culture of the Greeks. Hellenism becomes his desire. And you know, we talk about evangelizing the gospel. Well, Alexander the Great was an evangelist, a man who wanted to spread Hellenism, the Greek culture, throughout all the world.

Now let me just say a couple of things that might be helpful for you to understand about Aristotle. When you look at Aristotle, Aristotle is this guy in the blue and Plato is the guy on the right. And this picture is called *The School of Athens*, and I think it's by Raphael. But it really illustrates their philosophy. You see Plato pointing upward, and you see Aristotle doing this. *(Jeff points downward.)* And that really encapsulates both their philosophies.

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For Plato the idea was that this is a world that the soul is trying to escape because it's in the body. The prison of the soul is the body. And it's trying to escape to the world of forms. And so Plato is pointing upward, because the soul is always desiring to return from whence it came, the world of forms.

And Aristotle is saying no, no, no. There is no world of forms. What is is here. Here is where form and matter unite. And so form is part of matter. There is nothing else.

So the interesting thing is that when you think about Aristotle, his father was a physician. Most of his writings were about biology, botany and things like that. So he really was a student of this world.

But he was a philosopher. And one of the things that he did was that he talked about the good life. And he talked about what it means to live the perfect life, what he called *the Eudaimonian life*. And I want you to think about this for just a minute, because this intersects with what we're going to say about Alexander the Great.

When you think about Aristotle and what the good life is, he had two words. One was called *The Eudaimonian Ethics*, and the other was called *The Nichomachean Ethics*.

Eudaemonia is the Greek word for *good*. Nichomachea was his son. So those are the names of his two works. We're not sure which one came first. But the interesting thing about it is that they both have intersecting ideas. But they have a different way of applying the ideal of what is the perfect life.

One of these works applies the perfect life by saying that the perfect life is the contemplative life. Now think about it like this. What Aristotle basically says is this. The *eudaimonian* life is the flourishing life. It's not the happy life. You know, it's not the person who is addicted to pleasure. That's oftentimes what we think of when we think of the Greeks and what they think of when they think of pleasure. That's not it.

For him the pleasurable life is the flourishing life. But that life which is flourishing is a life that flourishes in accord with what you are.

So for instance, if you're a fish, where do you want to be? In the water. So we get the saying "I feel like a fish out of water" because I'm not flourishing if I'm not in my natural habitat.

Well, Aristotle said this. He said that the *eudaimonian* life, the contemplative life, ought to be for us like a fish in water. It's not something that we do to get gain. It's something that we do because of the fact that we're flourishing intellectually and cognitively. That's the *eudaimonian* life. But that sounds very much like a contemplative life, a solitary life, a scholarly life. And it is.

In the other book on ethics he talks about a different alternative; it's an interesting thing. He talks about how the *polis* or the city which creates laws, in its best sense creates laws wherein we will flourish as active people. And he then talks about how the highest good is to be the lawgiver, because when you're the lawgiver you give opportunities not for people to fear transgression, but you give opportunities for people to flourish through the obedience of the law that the *polis* or the city gives. and as the lawmaker in the land, that would be the highest place to be, helping people to flourish.

Well, I want you to think about that when you think about Aristotle and Alexander. For Alexander the ideal was that he was the quintessential *eudaimonian* man who became

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what? The evangelist of Hellenism, the great lawmaker for the world, which is, according to this culture, that you will flourish.

And so what he did was, he was the quintessential lawmaker who was spreading the good life or the perfect life, according to the way he saw it, the way he understood it. So the interesting thing is that when Alexander goes out to conquer the world, (and he does), he literally conquered the world until his army says, “We’re going home. We’re not going to step further; we’re going home.” And you know, he ends up coming home.

But until then what does he do? He not only conquers the world, but he takes geologists and botanists and biologists and philosophers with him. Why? So along the way they can collect samples and they can collect libraries and they can collect all of these things and amass a great storehouse of knowledge. Why? So that not only can he spread Hellenism, but so he can understand what other cultures actually believe, and what plant life is there and what animal life is there. Why? Because he’s the quintessential *eudaimonian* man.

So when you think about philosophies having consequences, I think Alexander is sort of the quintessential example of that. He’s trained by Aristotle, and then he goes out and then actually puts that philosophy into practice. The question is, how do the contemplative life and the active life of the lawgiver actually intersect? I don’t know if you could ever make the two intersect. And that’s oftentimes what debates are about in philosophy with regard to Aristotle and his ethics. How does Aristotle bring these two lives together—the life of the contemplative and the life of the lawgiver? And there are all kinds of answers, and I’m not sure anybody knows.

But Alexander’s conquests include three of the Greek city-states. There was a two-year period when his father dies and he comes to power. In the Greek city-states his father is saying, “Hey, this is a great opportunity for us to get out under Philip of Macedon.”

And he said, “Oh, no! This is a great case where son is like father. The son is not weak. This is a case where the son is just as strong as the father.” And within two years he brings all of those cities back under his control, and he says, “Now we’re going to move forward.” And so he does.

And so what he does is that he moves from the area of Macedonia and Greece down into Egypt. And he takes Egypt. And you know, some of these places are like, “You know, we’ve had enough.” And in time, “Hey, you look great! Hey, let’s give you the title ‘the son of Ammon.’” So he goes in there. And the Egyptians are like, “Hey, you could really be a god!”

And he’s like, “Really? You think so?” And so by the time he hits Persia, he’s actually thinking of himself as divine. And that’s the crazy thing about Alexander which I’ll say in just a minute. But he takes Persia in 331.

You know, he’s not a vengeful kind of guy. He does enact vengeance. But, for instance, he does not go into Persia and treat Persia as if it’s a second-class state. He actually goes into Persia, but he goes everywhere else. And he says to his army, “Look, here’s what I want you to do. I want you to marry the women in Persia. And I want you to

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live here.” Why? Because he’s an evangelist for Hellenism. And he’s going to take every opportunity to bring Greek culture to the places that he establishes.

And so when he goes to Persia, the only thing he does that actually has a vengeful tone to it is this. Do you remember Persepolis, that beautiful city, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world? Do you remember that? I showed you a picture of that. He burns it. It was his only act of vengeance against Persia, likely because he was simply saying to them, “I’m the real boss here. This ancient wonder is not really a wonder in comparison to me.” That’s probably what he was saying.

The interesting thing about him is this. The interesting thing is that when you look at Alexander and Hellenism, he dies an apostle for Hellenism. But once he goes to Egypt and accepts the son of Ammon title, what about that? Then he goes all the way to the Orient. This is where his army says, “Look, we’re not going any further. We’re going home.”

But what he does is, he starts dressing like those in the Orient. And when he gets back, when he actually moves back to Persia for a little while, he starts to call himself divine. And so by the time he goes back to Greece, he finds that people are not happy with his rule. He finds a bit of an insurrection. He finds that people are snickering at him behind his back. Why? Because here he is, dressed in these Oriental clothes. He’s the apostle of Hellenism and he’s dressed like the Orient. He’s calling himself divine. And people think he’s a little bit of a joke.

And so it’s interesting that here is this man, right? Here is this man who goes out into the world to evangelize for a particular cultural world view. And he’s affected by the cultures that he evangelizes. And he doesn’t become in one sense a pure evangelist for Hellenism, though he influences a ton of people. So he eventually dies of fever.

Transcriber’s Note: Jeff shows a picture of John Travolta from the movie “Saturday Night Fever.”

Jeff: Not of that kind of fever. *(Laughter)* But he dies of fever. That was for Don. sorry that he’s not here. I did know that Don wasn’t going to be here. We ought to pray for Don. I think he’s getting his stitches out today from the spacious cyst.

Ted Wood: Sebaceous.

Jeff: I know. *(Laughter)*

Ted: That was one of the Ptolemas.

Jeff: That was for Don because he’s going to transcribe. *(Laughter)* So let’s think about *the Jews under the Ptolemaic Empire*. First of all, Alexander dies, and the kingdom is split into four kingdoms, four sections.

Now this is a very complicated mess. And I’m going to make this very simple. Actually Alexander has a wife, Roxana, and she has a son.

Ted: She’s a Persian.

Jeff: She is Persian. He marries a Persian, just like he had commanded his soldiers to do. And for a while his brother and his unborn son who is born shortly after that are protected for a brief period of time. Eventually, all of them—Roxana, the brother and the son—get killed because there’s a struggle, as you might expect, a struggle for the thrones.

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So Ptolemais captures Syria in 312 B.C. Now the interesting thing about it is this. I should have thrown a map up here. But here is Egypt, and Ptolemais is down in Egypt. And remember that Syria is north of the land of Israel. So he goes up the coastal way and conquers Syria. So he's going through the land of Israel in order to conquer Syria.

Now when he gets up to Syria and conquers, they pay him tribute. And he establishes local priests. The local priest basically becomes a political station where you can exact money from people and things like that. Why is that important? It's because when Ptolemais goes out to conquer Syria he goes on the Sabbath Day. And he says, “I want to come and offer a sacrifice to your God.”

And he comes in and he lied. And so basically he takes power over Israel along the way and subjects them to his rule. And so now the land of Israel is now under the Ptolemaic kingdom, as well as Syria.

Simon the Just becomes a figure of importance because Simon the Just rebuilds the walls that Ptolemais destroyed. There is some resistance after the walls are destroyed. So he becomes a Nehemiah-like figure.

Something that we need to keep in mind is Onias and Tobias, the Oniaic family and the Tobiaic family. They are interesting figures. Onias is a priest. And Tobias is a relative of Tobiah the Ammonite in Nehemiah. And so there's an interesting relationship that goes on here.

Now I want you to think about this just for a minute. Onias says, “We should not support the Ptolemaic Empire.” Remember how it was back in the Old Testament, where there may have been a pro-Babylonian and an anti-Babylonian party? Well it was the same here, an anti-Egyptian party. And that would be represented by Onias and his family. And Tobias and the Tobites were the pro-Egyptian family. And the pro-Egyptians said, “We ought not only to submit to the Ptolemaic Empire, but we ought to do our best to support them.”

Obviously this causes a rift among the people in Israel. And so there's a refusal on the part of the Oniaic family, the priestly family, to pay tribute to Ptolemais. He enacts vengeance. And the vengeance is short-lived because Ptolemais' general, Seleucis, takes power in Babylon and erects another dynasty, a dynasty that is now going to be in opposition to the Ptolemaic dynasty.

The other three rulers in the Alexandrian kingdom basically fall away or are taken over by one or the other of these rulers. And so you basically have the Ptolemaic and the Seleucid empires being the powerful empires of the day.

So the question is who's going to take Syria? Is it going to be Ptolemais the Egyptian? Or is it going to be Seleucid, the Babylonians and those who are in the North? His land is in the North, and it's far larger.

So let's think now about *the Jews under the Seleucid rule*. Antiochus III comes to power. And he takes the Syrian-Palestinian area to himself in 198 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes, Antiochus IV, is his son. And he comes to power after his father and is very cruel to the Jews. It becomes a very dark period in Israel at this point.

There is forced Hellenization. Remember what we said about Alexander being the apostle of Hellenism. Hellenism has not gone away. Hellenism remains the culture of the

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day within these areas, within these lands. And so when the Seleucid Empire comes to power there is a forced Hellenism that takes place.

There are some things that happen. I'll tell you what a forced Hellenism looks like. First of all a Greek philosopher is brought in to oversee the Hellenization of Israel. Yahweh is now Jupiter. The image of Antiochus is placed in the temple for worship. There are swine that are sacrificed on the altar. There are compulsory orgies, and no circumcision is allowed. So this is kind of a bad time in the life of Israel. It's not a good thing. There is some resistance. Yes?

Rich Clark: Jeff, what year is this approximately?

Jeff: This would be within 200 years of Christ's birth that this is happening. Resistance grows up. You've heard of the Hasidic Jews. Well, the Hasidic Jews arise at this period of time. The Hasidim are called "The Pious," and they resist what's happening, the forced Hellenization that's happening. And let's just take a minute to look at the impact of Hellenism.

It's really a double-edged sword. Think about it. It is a terror to the Jews. But Hellenism actually becomes a tool. Why? Because the common language is Koine Greek. What's the language of the Bible?

Ted Wood: Koine Greek.

Jeff: Koine Greek.

Ted: Which means common Greek.

Jeff: There's also an Old Testament translated into the Greek language. And when Paul quotes from the Old Testament in the Greek-speaking churches, he's using the Septuagint or the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

So think about this. Hellenization is a terror to the Jews. But it actually becomes a tool for the spread of the gospel. I mean, it's fascinating when you think about it in that sort of way. Hellenism is not all good. There are some good things that come from it. But Alexandria is in Egypt. And when Alexander goes to Egypt they love him. A city is named after him.

And in one sense Alexandria becomes a wonderful place in history. Why? It collects Greek texts and manuscripts, not just the Greek texts of the New Testament, but manuscripts from all over the world. It is here where transcription becomes professional. So some of the best Greek manuscripts that we have are from Alexandria.

However, because of Hellenization, what grows up in Alexandria is an allegorical way of looking at the Scriptures. And so the Scriptures are interpreted in terms of allegory. Allegory means *other speaking*. In other words, I'm talking about this text. But when I talk about it I'm talking about something totally different.

So for instance, I'll give you an example. When Abraham is said to have had 318 men back in the Old Testament, the three obviously means the Trinity, the one there means something else, one God, and then I can't remember what the eight stands for. The point is that it's not really 318 men. It's allegory; it's speaking about something totally different. And what is totally different is in the imagination and the mind of the interpreter, which is a bad way to go about interpreting. But that arises during this period of time. So there is nothing historical behind it.

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The Alexandrian Jews are quintessentially people who are living on the fence. The Alexandrian Jews loved Hellenism; they loved what’s coming from it, but they’re Jews. And so they do their best to live in both worlds. They become in some ways an example of what it is not good to do today as Christians—to live with one foot in the world and one foot in the church. And if we had more time I’d go into this, but we don’t.

I want you to know that there are two men from Alexandria that are important, Aristobulus and Phyllo. Both of these men are important for trying to bring Hellenism into their theology and their explanation of the Christian gospel. So for instance Phyllo becomes incredibly important because he just dumps in all kinds of Greek writers when he talks about the gospel to the Jews. So these are two guys from Alexandria that are fully imbibed in Hellenism, yet see themselves as strict Jews who are converts.

The struggle against Hellenism. The Hasidim’s first leader is Mattathias the priest. Mattathias the priest is there. They erect an altar at Modeh. And he is told, “Look, you need to go and sacrifice on that altar.” And he refuses to do it. He’s an older man. A younger man comes up, not wanting to upset the military might of the day. And Mattathias comes up and kills him. And then he and his sons flee. And they become leaders of a movement.

The problem is that when you’re a Hasidic Jew and you take the Sabbath seriously, what do you do when the enemy surrounds you on the Sabbath Day? Well, you get slaughtered. And that’s what happened to a lot of Hasidic Jews at that time; they got slaughtered.

They said, “We’re going to lose this war.” So they said, “We need to make a concession. The only way we’ll fight on the Sabbath Day is if we’re being attacked. Then we’ll respond. We won’t initiate on the Sabbath Day, but we’ll protect ourselves on the Sabbath Day.” That’s what they do. So there’s a bit of a change that comes. They’re not taken out.

Judas is the son of Mattathias. He begins to lead the Maccabean revolt. He goes back into Jerusalem and takes down all the signs of paganism and really stands against the enemy. This is how Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, comes about. We could say more about this but we’re not going to be able to.

The Seleucids come and they say to the Jews, “Look. We’re going to invite you to surrender to us, or it’s going to be bad for you.” What were the terms of surrender? “Well, you can have no political control; we’ll have that. You’ll have religious freedom. And by the way, we’re going to rip down the walls around Jerusalem. You won’t have any walls for protection.”

And so the Maccabeans, Judas and the others, reject the prize behind door #1 which is surrender. But—now here it is!—the Hasidics accept the offer. The revolters say “No, can’t do.” But the larger Hasidic party says, “Yes, we’ll take it.” And why? “Because at least we’ll have religious freedom.”

If you ever read *The Fragrance of Oppression*, it’s about how military might and political powers oppress the church. And here’s the secret. The secret is that you never try to exterminate the church. What you do is, you give them enough freedom so that they think they can exist autonomously, but they really don’t. And if you give them enough

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freedom to think that they exist autonomously, then the oppressive power can have them right under their thumb.

It's what happens in Communist countries all the time. You don't exterminate the church. You just get it to the place you want it, and then you control it. And so it's almost like history repeating itself.

Anyway, the Seleucids seize power. And guess what? They kill many Hasidic Jews.

Jonathan is the next leader. Jonathan becomes very diplomatic. He's a very political figure. And Simon is the next Maccabean leader afterwards. He also forms the priestly dynasty known as the Hasmonians. And Simon's son John Hurcanus is a loyal Hellenist, and with him the Maccabean revolt dies. So Hellenism basically triumphs over Judaism in that regard, even with the Maccabean revolt.

The ideals of Hellenism are embodied in—Yes?

Brave Man: Is that why Maccabees I and II are written?

Jeff: That's correct. Maccabees I and II are about this historical period. The ideals of Hellenism become embodied in a group called the Sadducees. You've heard of that before? The Sadducees arise during this time of diplomacy among the Hasidic party. Those who once were revolters or rebels now become diplomats and friendly to the Seleucids. And so the Sadducean party arises and Hellenism is embodied and imbibed and spread by them.

And the ideals of the Hasidic Jews are carried on by the group that arises and becomes known as the Pharisees. So you have the Sadducees and the Pharisees. And we now know why they oppose one another. Sometimes we think they oppose one another because we talk about the Sadducees not believing in the resurrection, and so on. But they don't believe in the resurrection and so on because they embody Greek Hellenism.

Do you remember what happened when Paul talked to the Athenian philosophers, and he talked to them about the resurrection? And they go, “Who would want to be resurrected?” Remember, Greek philosophy said that we're trying to escape the body and get to the realm of forms. So the Sadducees reject the resurrection because they embody Hellenism.

And so the Pharisees embody the conservative biblical world view: that there is an afterlife, and so on and so forth. So the tension between the Sadducees and the Pharisees is really tension between the embodiment of Greek philosophy and culture and the embodiment of the Biblical world view. And that's really what it amounts to.

Now the Pharisees go on track. And it becomes a *nomianism*, a legally oriented way of life. For instance, you can't help but think this. Remember what I said about the *Eudaimonian* life, and how the lawmakers provide a place to flourish. You can't help but wonder if the Pharisees were impacted by that to such an extent that they forgot about grace. Grace taught the steadfast love of God revealed in the promises of the Messiah. They started to think of themselves as lawmakers in Israel wherein the good life would flourish. There's a parallel there that one just can't hide from. And one begins to suspect that they were just as influenced by Hellenism, only in another aspect type of way. So it's just kind of an interesting thought. But anyway, that's where they end up growing up.

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Alexander Jannias is a Sadducee. And I put this in there just to show you that the Pharisees at this time are harshly against the Sadducees. And Alexander presides over 800 crucifixions, and they are all Pharisees. The Sadducees hate the Pharisees and the Pharisees hate the Sadducees. So when you get to the New Testament and you get to the Gospels, it’s not a little tension. They were killing one another.

And so Alexander’s wife rules briefly after his death and there’s a brief period of peace. The Romans come to power. Hurcanus II rules briefly. Aristobulus II is his brother, and he enacts a hostile takeover over Hurcanus II. Hurcanus flees and meets a guy by the name of Antipas. He tells Antipas all about his woes. And Antipas says, “We ought to go and take the throne back.” And so they plan to do that.

They meet the Romans. The Romans get pulled into this. The Romans decide, “Hey, we’re going to help these two boys, nice boys that they are. We’re going to help them out.” And once Hurcanus gets his throne back in Israel, Antipas and his sons seek what? “Well, it’s time to grease our throne now. We gave you your throne back. You know, with our help you got it.” And so one of his sons, Herod, is made a prominent person in the government. And when Hurcanus dies, guess who takes power? Herod Antipas. The son of Antipas, Herod Antipas, takes power. And it was this Herod who feared the birth of Jesus Christ. Isn’t that interesting!

So that takes you through the inter-Testamental period. Wow, in about forty minutes!
(Laughter)

Sig Tragard: Could you just back up? Why did Herod fear Jesus’ birth?

Jeff: Matthew 2, remember? The Messiah is born, and—

Sig: So he thought He was going to overthrow his government.

Jeff: Yes. I mean, this is an alternative ruler, right?, the Messiah. People were talking about the Messiah coming. What’s the Messiah going to do? The Messiah was understood to be a King.

Don: The King of the Jews.

Jeff: The King of the Jews.

Sig: And the romans were opposed at that time because they had helped the Jews take power.

Jeff: Yes. I didn’t spend a lot of time with the Romans overthrowing the Seleucid Empire. But the Romans come and they overpower the Seleucids. They’re very much like Babylon with Assyria. They were a vassal state. And they continue to grow and grow and prosper, and eventually they become over-throwers themselves.

Brave Man: Where does Masada come in?

Jeff: I don’t know the year of Masada.

Ted: 135.

Jeff: 135.

Ted: The Bar Kokhba revolt. It was after Jesus. It was a revolt of some kind.

Jeff: Is this i.e. the Kokhba Cabana revolt? *(Laughter)* Anyway,--

Corky Semler: Where are some references from which this information comes? I’m just interested.

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Jeff: You can get a book by F. F. Bruce that’s called *New Testament History*. The opening chapters are about this period of time. There are a number of books you can get. There’s a guy by the name of Russell who writes topically about the people of the Book and the people of the land and things like that, those kinds of chapters. You can glean a lot of information from there. Charles Pfeiffer is an older writer who wrote a book on this particular time period.

F. F. Bruce writes a really good book. Half of it is about this particular time period, and I can’t remember what it is. If you type in “F. F. Bruce” you’ll be able to tell by the title. But I used some of that book for some of the information here; it’s a really good book. I don’t know if this was his area of expertise, but boy, he sure does write a lot about it, and he’s pretty good.

Ted: What is his denomination?

Jeff: He was actually a Brethren.

Ted: He became an Anglican.

Jeff: Did he really?

Ted: I just want to give him credit where it’s due. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Oh yeah?

Sig: Jeff, last week Don Maurer made the comment that secular scientists have looked at the earth and said, “Boy, it almost seems like it’s ripe for people to live in,” the way it’s designed or built. So my question to you is, when you look at this time in history, does it look ripe for a Messiah to come?

Jeff: Well, I would answer that by taking you back to Galatians 4:4. *“When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,”* right? And I think that Galatians 4:4 has in mind with *“when the time had fully come”* not only when it came time for the Biblical promises to be fulfilled, but if you think more broadly, culturally God had prepared the earth for this moment.

Sig: But when you talk about the history, when we see the Pharisees and the Sadducees killing each other and all this other stuff happening, can you be more specific as to why it is right for the Messiah?

Jeff: I think mainly, in the main, it was right because generally speaking Hellenism had created a world where the gospel could flourish, right? So you have common customs, you have a common language, you have a common means of travel. You have the Roman peace, which meant not that the Romans were at peace with one another, but that with external enemies they were at peace. So there was an ease in travel. You have the Roman highways that were built at this time. So you really have the residual of Hellenism being carried out under roman rule too. And I think that in terms of the Hellenization of the world, which was a great curse to the Jews, that it becomes a great blessing to the Christians.

Sig: Thank you.

Jeff: Okay. Rich?

Rich: I just find this interesting, that under Aristobulus and his reign that Pompeii is the general, okay?

Jeff: Yup.

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Rich: He took Jerusalem after a three-month siege in the temple area, massacring priests in the performance of their duties and entering the Holy of Holies. This sacrilege began roman rule in a way that the Jews could neither forgive nor forget. But what happened to the city of Pompeii a hundred years later?

Ted: He’s actually known as Pompey.

Rich: Okay.

Ted: The general was Pompeii; the city was Pompey.

Rich: Two different things?

Ted: Well, yes. It’s not an uncommon name.

Jeff: Like Ptolemis. Every ruler in the Ptolemaic Empire is Ptolemis. They’re not very creative. *(Laughter)*

Rich: I just thought it was interesting.

Ted: You say potatoe, I say potato.

Jeff: Well, you know what? One could actually look at this period of time and say that Hellenism was sort of like God’s curse upon Judaism for their continual disobedience, right? And yet that curse becomes a blessing for those who have eyes to see, right? It’s really ironic. I mean, it’s just an ironic thing when you think about how much of a curse Hellenism was to the Jews, and how much of a blessing it becomes. And the apostles employ not Hellenism per se, but the effects of Hellenism in the spread of the gospel. It’s really quite astounding.

Well, let me pray and then we’ll adjourn. I think I have to take my kid to school; they’re on a two-hour delay. *(Laughter)* Let’s pray.

Father, thank You for this day, for the time You’ve given. Thank You, Lord, for the opportunity to be here and to think about this topic. And Lord, we pray that You will bless us on the way home and throughout the day. Be with our families as well. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: Next week we’ll get back to the Bible. And I think we’re going to go to a book in the New Testament just to give you a heads-up. *(Applause)*