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PLACE

Telling the New Testament  
Story of God



**SESSION 2**

Historical, Social, and Religious Settings of the World of Jesus

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# Historical, Social, and Religious Settings of the World of Jesus

## SESSION OVERVIEW

### Historical Setting

### Jewish Social Life: Social and Religious Setting

### Application

### Exam

### Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- understand the historical events that led up to the Jewish messianic expectations in the first century.
- understand the setting for the hellenization of the Jews, especially Diaspora Jews (Jews outside of Palestine).
- understand some of the customs and practices of first-century Jews.
- understand the religious setting of first-century Jews and be able to identify the differences among the major Jewish religious groups of the first century AD.
- be able to use this historical, social, and religious data as a basis for interpreting the New Testament.

# Historical, Social, and Religious Settings of the World of Jesus

## INTRODUCTION



In attempting to understand the world which served as the place of origin for the Christian faith in the first century, a problem arises. The Old Testament only chronicles or discusses the period of time up to the restoration work of Ezra and Nehemiah upon the return from exile in the fifth century B.C.E. From 400 to 200 BC, little is known of events in Jewish history. For this reason, these years are sometimes referred to as the silent period. Following the Old Testament, the Jewish apocryphal writings, 1 and 2 Maccabees, are the next major sources of information which describe events in Palestine from 180-132 BC.

Political, social, and religious events and developments during the time between the Testaments are of importance for understanding the New Testament itself. This session will survey these events and developments beginning with the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon.

## HISTORICAL SETTING



### NOTES

#### 539 BC—PERSIAN EMPIRE

Read Ezra 1:2-4, 6:3-5. Persia conquered Babylon in 539 BC and Cyrus, the Persian king, proclaimed freedom to the Jews in Babylon and allowed them to return to Palestine from Babylon. This marks the beginning of Israel's postexilic history. The return of the Jews from Babylon to their homeland took place in stages. Some returned immediately; others waited and returned at a later time. The main reason for the delay was that economic prospects were much better in Babylon than in the devastated land of Israel. So the return continued over the next 200 years, and some never returned to their homeland. Read Ezra 4:1-5.

Shezbazzar led the first group of homecoming Jews in 538 BC and they began the rebuilding of the Temple. A second group, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, continued the rebuilding program. Zerubbabel was the last surviving heir to the throne of David and in 520 BC was made governor of Judah by the Persian government. The Samaritans who occupied the Jewish homeland were a Jew/Gentile mixture of people, the result of people the king of Assyria transported to the Northern Kingdom of Israel to replace the Jews exiled after the fall of Samaria in 722/721 BC. They offered to help rebuild the Temple but Zerubbabel would not allow them due to their religious syncretism. Because of this the Samaritans opposed the building of the Temple and the animosity that developed lasted into the first century AD.

The arrival of Haggai and Zechariah from Babylon brought new energy to the Jews living in Jerusalem. Because of their challenge to continue rebuilding, the Temple was completed and dedicated in 515 BC. Joshua was appointed as the high priest. Jerusalem was repopulated and the walls rebuilt. The arrival of Ezra and Nehemiah between 500 and 450 BC brought reformation to the religious and civil life of the people.

Nehemiah was a layperson, a cup bearer in the palace of the Persian king, Artaxerxes. With the permission of the king, he returned to Palestine and rebuilt the walls and the gates of the city of Jerusalem in 52 days. He restored civil life to the Jews returning from Babylon. In 445 BC, he became governor of Judah. Ezra, a priest, attempted to restore the religious life of the Jews. He called for religious loyalty to the covenant laws given by Moses and set new rules and regulations to guide the religious and secular life of the Jews in Palestine. As high priest, who enforced the observance of the Jewish law, he was the first in a long line of rabbis instrumental in forming and preserving Judaism. Under the Persian rule, the Jews enjoyed relative peace and economic and political stability.

NOTES**334-332 BC—GREEK EMPIRE**

Alexander of Macedonia (the Great) began his conquest of the Persian Empire in 334 BC and completed it in 332 BC. He extended his rule over three continents and created the largest empire ever known to this point. At times, we hear or ask the question, “Who was the person or persons of greatest influence in your life?” Alexander would have mentioned at least two individuals.

One person of great influence for Alexander was his father Philip who had come to power in Macedonia and who was intent on military conquest. Like his father, Alexander’s life was consumed with the thought of world domination. A legend asserts that one of Alexander’s greatest fears as a teenager was that his father would conquer the world and leave nothing for him to do.

A second person of great influence in his life, the Greek philosopher Aristotle, would serve as his teacher. Aristotle would provide the moral justification for this world dominion. Alexander learned well the idea of the superiority of Greek culture over all other cultures of the world. It was understood that there are two kinds of people in the world, namely Greek and barbarians. Fortunately for Alexander, his father did not conquer the world and much was left for Alexander to do.

The primary impact of Alexander’s conquests occurred in terms of what is known as hellenization. As generally defined, hellenization involves the spread of Greek culture and ideas throughout Palestine and the Near Eastern world. Hellenism involved everything from architecture, art, fashion, business practices, language, and religion. The Greeks thought of themselves as those who brought civilization to the world. As the Greeks shared their culture with others, however, that culture itself was affected. They proved the idea that we are not unaffected by those with whom we associate.

The Jews would come to adapt Jewish faith to Greek thought and practice. The Greek Septuagint (usually abbreviated LXX, a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek and the Bible for most of the early Christians) and the Greek New Testament are a direct result. Also Jewish teachers like Philo compared great Jewish leaders, like Moses, to the Greek philosophers. They wanted to show that Hebrew thought was as enlightened as Greek thought.

The death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC at the age of 33 resulted in the vast empire being divided into four areas; two concern Palestine—the Ptolemies and Seleucids.


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- The Ptolemies ruled in Egypt. They captured Jerusalem in 320 BC, but their policies created no real problems for Jews. Theirs was a peaceful reign.
- The Greek General Seleucus ruled in Asia and Syria. Later this part of the Greek Empire would conquer Palestine and chase the Ptolemies out. Under the Seleucids, life would eventually change.

### **198 BC—SELEUCID (SYRIAN) EMPIRE**

Antiochus III (the Great) defeated the Ptolemies and took over the land they administrated. He treated the Jews well by providing financial assistance to rebuild from the war and exempted them from taxes for three years. Hellenistic culture was welcomed by the Jewish upper class. They saw economic and political advantage and were eager for assimilation. Jason, the high priest, tried to set Jerusalem up as a Greek city-state. He had a gymnasium built under the patronage of Hermes and Hercules. Because Greek sporting events were done in the nude, there were even attempts to reverse circumcision.

The desire on the part of the rich to be Greek was very strong. The poor, on the other hand, opposed hellenization, seeing no advantages and only corruption of their religious rituals and beliefs. Because of this stance, the term poor also carried the meaning of pious or holy people by the first century AD.

A Jewish religious crisis arose. Read 2 Maccabees 5:15-16 (Desecration), 6:1-9 (Crisis and Desecration), 7:1-7 (Torture of the Faithful). In 175 BC, life for the Jews would change. Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) decided to promote Greek culture and customs throughout the empire. The name Epiphanes that he chose for himself says something of his self-understanding. The title means the manifest one or god manifest. Antiochus banned Judaism and killed or sent into slavery Jews who resisted. He erected an altar to the chief Greek god Zeus in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

Antiochus' greatest claim to fame with the Jewish people derives from an event in December of 168 BC. Antiochus ordered the desecration of the Temple in Jerusalem. He offered a pig on the altar and took holy vessels and money from the Temple treasury.

### **167 BC—MACCABEAN PERIOD AND THE HASMONEAN DYNASTY**

The reforms of Antiochus were at first met with passive resistance. Some Jews continued to practice their faith in spite of governmental edicts or commands. At times, this led to the martyrdom of those participating in such resistance as

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recorded in the apocryphal work 2 Maccabees. This passive resistance would, however, eventually turn to active resistance or the taking up of arms against the Greeks. This takes us to a small village called Modein and the beginning of what is called the Maccabean revolt.

In this village, there was a priest named Mattathias who had five sons (John, Jonathan, Judas, Simon, and Eleazer). In 167 BC, soldiers entered the village in order to enforce Antiochus IV's policy of requiring Jews to offer pagan sacrifice. Members of the community gathered. When one young Jewish man stepped forward to offer the required sacrifice, Mattathias killed him as well as one of Antiochus' soldiers. After this event, Mattathias and his sons fled to the hills. An armed revolt against the Greeks was begun.

Judas the Maccabee (which means hammerer) was the third of Mattathias' sons. He succeeded his father as the leader of the revolt and conducted guerrilla warfare against opposing Jews (hellenized) and Syrians (2 Macc. 8:5-7). Wearing the Syrians down with his continual hit-and-run raids at night, he liberated Jerusalem in 164 BC. This liberation is celebrated by the Festival of the Dedication referred to in John 10:22, known today as "Hanukkah." Hanukkah celebrated the purification and rededication of the Temple after Judas the Maccabee liberated Jerusalem. At this time, however, only religious freedom was obtained by the Jews. After further conflicts, political freedom was achieved as well under Mattathias' son Simon who became both the high priest and political ruler.

The Jewish kingdom that developed after this revolt is known as the Hasmonean Dynasty (134-63 BC). This dynasty of priest-kings traced their roots back to Mattathias. For the first time since the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BC, the Jews once again tasted freedom. This freedom would last until 63 BC when the Romans came to power. Of significance for the life of Jesus was that during his ministry political independence was within living memory of his fellow Jews.

The capital city of the newly formed independent Jewish state was Jerusalem. It was the center of religious, political, and economic life. During this time, the Jewish sects of Pharisees and Sadducees developed and flourished.

One of the most powerful Hasmonean kings was John Hyrcanus, who expanded the borders of the Jewish nation. He destroyed the Samaritan Temple on Mount Gerazim in the process of conquering Samaria. This action only added to the hostility between the Jews and Samaritans, begun several hundred years earlier in Zerubbabel's time. The Samaritans, however, continued to maintain distinct national and religious identity even after being conquered by the Jews.




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### 63 BC—ROMAN RULE OF PALESTINE

In 63 BC, internal struggle for power within the Hasmonean family led to the occupation of Palestine by the Roman Empire. Rivalry between the two sons of longtime Hasmonean ruler, Alexander Jannaeus, weakened the Jewish Dynasty, so Pompey came in with Roman legions and captured Jerusalem in 63 BC. Antipater, the Hasmonean king's minister and power behind the throne (Herod the Great's father), was given a political position with the Roman government because of his help to the Romans. The Hasmoneans were allowed to rule Jerusalem until Herod the Great.

In addition to the land of Palestine, Pompey added the Decapolis (which means 10 cities) on the eastern frontier of Palestine. Shortly after this time, the Roman republic was torn apart by strong men trying to gain power. Julius Caesar became emperor and Rome united the then known world in several ways.

*Government.* Provided one central government with local governors bound to Rome by oaths. These oaths were pledges of loyalty to the emperor which, if broken, meant death for the local rulers.

*Road System.* There was a saying at that time: "All roads lead to Rome." These roads were built for military purposes but facilitated trade and dissemination of ideas for a very large area.

#### *Language*

- *Latin.* This was the native language of the Romans and was generally spoken by Roman citizens, merchants, and soldiers.
- *Greek.* The common, unifying language of the Roman Empire was Koine (common) Greek. It was the language of trade, was used in many government offices, and was the everyday language of many people. For most Diaspora Jews, Greek was their common language.
- *Ethnic Languages.* Each ethnic group had its own dialect or language. The Jews had two:
- *Aramaic.* This language came originally from the semi-nomadic Arameans. It flourished after the exile and during the Persian and Hellenistic periods. During the time of Jesus (a time when more than one language was often spoken, including Greek), it was the common language of Jewish and Samaritan populations.


**NOTES**

- *Hebrew.* In first century AD, Hebrew was exclusively the language of the indigenous Jews of Palestine. It was not spoken much in the north (Galilee). Although Hebrew was read in the Galilean synagogues, the discussions on the Hebrew Scripture were most likely conducted in Aramaic or Greek. Most archeological evidence for Hebrew comes from central and southern Palestine.

### 63-4 BC—HERODIAN PERIOD

This period begins with Antipater II (63-37 BC), father of Herod the Great. He became procurator of Judea in 47 BC for his military support of Julius Caesar. Herod the Great (37 BC-4 AD) is the most famous king in this lineage but probably inherited and/or learned his shrewd political ways from his father.

- He was the King of the Jews and ruled over Judea, Idumea, Perea, and Galilee.
- He was part Jew and part Idumean, and more Hellenistic than most Jews. Primarily due to his loyalty oath required by Rome but also because of his natural inclinations, he had total loyalty to Rome. He was deeply hated and feared by the Jews for this.

Events surrounding his death, tell something of his character and relationship to the Jews. Public mourning for the dead was extremely important during this time. Herod knew that when he died, this would not occur. Thereby, he formulated a plan in which citizens beloved by the Jews would be executed at the time of his death. There would be mourning in the land at the time of his passing. Fortunately, following his demise, his plan was not carried out.

- He was a regional king or puppet king for Rome. He also had the fortune of ruling during an era of economic prosperity.
- He was a passionate builder and began the rebuilding of the Temple (20 BC-AD 63). He made the city of Caesarea Maritima into a comfortable Roman city, building a theatre and other civic buildings. Later Roman rulers, like Pontius Pilate, preferred to live in Caesarea and come to Jerusalem only when their presence was necessary. Herod built many palaces for his enjoyment as well as fortresses for defense.

After his death around 4 BC, Herod's kingdom was divided between his three sons:

- Archelaus was given Judea, Idumea, and Samaria.
- Herod Antipas received Galilee and Perea.
- Philip ruled the land north and east of the Jordan.

## JEWISH LIFE: SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS SETTING



### NOTES

#### **JEWISH LIFESTYLE AND RELIGIOUS LIFE DURING THE BABYLONIAN EXILE (597/587–539/8 BC)**

Several significant changes happened to the Israelites during the Babylonian exile. When they were in Israel they were members of 12 different tribes, but during the exile this covenant community established their identity as members of the tribe of Judah and became known as Yehudites or Jews. They adopted the language of Babylon, Aramaic, which became the official language of Judaism for the next 600 hundred years at least.

They took the initiative to preserve the sacred writings, and the beginning of the process of canonization of the Old Testament scriptures began, which was completed in AD 90 at the Council of Jamnia. They adopted a commercial way of life, i.e., merchants and bankers, in contrast to the agricultural way of life they had in Israel.

They organized small-group assemblies for the purpose of reading and studying the Law and for prayer. This was the beginning of the synagogue as a religious institution. Synagogues later became centers of religious education and worship in Israel.

#### **JERUSALEM BECAME A PILGRIMAGE CITY**

Because of the exile, the phenomenon of Diaspora Judaism became dominant. Most Jews were living outside of Palestine and Jerusalem, but according to the Jewish law, every Jewish male was required to visit Jerusalem three times a year. This meant Jerusalem became a pilgrimage city with (during the early part of the first century AD) a year-round population of around 25,000, which would swell to 200,000 or more during festival days. Even with the rise of the local synagogues, the Temple remained the religious center of Judaism until AD 70.

- The Temple area, including the large Court of the Gentiles, was 26 acres or 108,000 square meters.
- The outside court (outside the walls of the main Temple area) was the Court of the Gentiles. Here was where the buying and selling of animals for sacrifice took place, as well as the exchange of money from Roman to Temple money, so people could pay their tithes, etc. This was the only place Gentiles, who had not become Jews through circumcision and observing all the other rituals laws, could come to pray to Yahweh. It was generally a noisy and difficult place to pray.


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- The Women's Court was inside the walls but at the opposite end from the holy of holies. In this court were the alms boxes, storage rooms for wine, oil, and wood, as well as the consulting rooms for those taking a Nazarite vow (see Num. 6:2-21) and for those suspected of leprosy.
- Through the Great Gate or Nicanor's Gate, the ritually pure Jewish man could proceed to the Court of the Israelites. From this court, men would bring their sacrificial animals and food to the priests, who would take the sacrifices into the Court of the Priests. These two courts were not separated by a wall, so the men could view everything that happened in the Court of the Priests.
- The Court of the Priests contained the altar for sacrifice, the laver for water purification, and probably slaughtering rooms.
- The holy place and the holy of holies were housed in a tall cubical building at the back of the Court of the Priests. In the holy place were the altar of incense, the menorah (lampstand), and the table of showbread. Behind a curtain was the holy of holies. This most holy place was entered only one time a year (during Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement) by the high priest, to offer a sin sacrifice for all the people.
- The Temple layout not only reveals zones of holiness or purity but also indicates the hierarchy of the Jewish society. The closer one could get to the holy of holies, the higher one's status.

The synagogue was the local center since the third century BC. Primary sources of information for studying the synagogue include: the Gospels, Acts, Josephus, Philo, and other Jewish writings. The synagogue preserved study and observance of Old Testament law. In order to establish a synagogue in a community, at least ten men were needed.

Services were led by laypersons, although priests might participate like anyone else. A typical order of service the singing of a Psalm, the recitation of the Shema, the Hebrew name for Deut. 6:4 (Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone, NRSV), prayers facing Jerusalem, the reading of scriptures (Law and Prophets), a sermon or discussion and application of the scriptures, and a blessing by the president of the synagogue. This individual was usually the person or relative of the person who gave the money for the building.

Some scholars think the synagogue became a community center, school, and civil law center in the first century AD. As such it, it would have served a place of importance, particularly to Diaspora Jews or Jews living outside Palestine. This institution would help the Jewish people survive after the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the Temple by the Romans in AD 70.


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## ANNUAL FEASTS/FESTIVALS

Another very important aspect of Jewish religious life during this time was the annual feasts or festivals. Religious Jewish men were expected to come to Jerusalem three times a year to participate in these events. There are seven main events and several of these follow one after another.

- *The New Year festival, or Rosh Hashanah*, came in September or October depending on the Jewish lunar calendar. It was also called the *Feast of Trumpets* since trumpets were used to announce the beginning of the New Year. This festival also coincided with the end of the grape and olive harvests.
- Ten days after the New Year celebration came the *Day of Atonement* or *Yom Kippur*. This was not a feast but a serious time of reflection on one's faithfulness to God. During this time the high priest entered the holy of holies and offered a sin offering for all the people.
- *Feast of Tabernacles* or *Booths* came five days after the Day of Atonement. This was a celebration of the fall harvest and a time when the Jews remembered the days in the wilderness when they lived in tents or booths. This festival lasted eight days with eating, visiting, and even sleeping outside under a brush arbor. Many Diaspora Jews who came for the New Year festival would stay until the end of this feast (over three weeks).
- The festival of *Hanukkah* came in December and was a celebration of the liberation of Jerusalem by Judas Maccabeus and the rededication of the Temple in 164 BC. During this time lamps were lit to remind the people of the miracle of the oil. There was only enough sacred oil for the lamp stand in the Temple for one day, but God caused the oil to last eight days until more sacred oil could be made. So this festival also lasts eight days.
- The festival of *Purim* which comes in either February or March depending on the lunar calendar, remembers the Jews' deliverance in the time of Esther. During the first century, this festival was not celebrated in Palestine. It developed in Babylon and had a wild, carnival-type flavor to it. The Jewish leadership in Jerusalem felt it was much too wild. We do not find this festival referred to in the New Testament, but it does become very important and prominent to the Jewish people during the middle ages and even in the modern era, especially during the time of Hitler.
- The feast of *Passover* comes in March or April, depending on the lunar calendar. It is a celebration of freedom from slavery and a time to remember the Exodus from Egypt. It was a very important and significant feast during the first century.


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- The feast of *Pentecost* was celebrated in May or June. It came 50 days after Passover, and thus the name Pente or 50. Its religious significance is the remembrance of the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. This festival also coincided with the end of the wheat harvest.

### IMPORTANT FIRST-CENTURY JEWISH BELIEFS

In addition to the festivals, as well as the Temple and synagogue worship, there are several significant general beliefs of the Jews during this first century AD. First, the Law was a framework for Jewish life and was the legal basis for regulation of activities in Palestine.

Second, the Jews believed keeping the Law (God's revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai) was the basis for receiving God's covenant blessings. Those who did not keep the Law could expect God's wrath. So blessings were associated with being good and disaster with being bad. Therefore, like we do today, they struggled with why bad things happen to good people. They also believed God will create a new order of things and deliver His people. The apocalyptic book, *The Assumption of Moses*, was written at the end of first century BC. Its apocalyptic language sounds much like Mark 13:24-27 (see session 18 for a discussion of apocalyptic literature).

### POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

There were luxurious palaces and villas in upper Jerusalem for the high priests and the wealthy. The palaces and villas of the wealthy were built of brick or concrete, had tile floors, a central atrium (court), open-hearth kitchen, oil lamps, plumbing and heating, inside toilets, walls with murals, and floors of mosaics. They were in upper Jerusalem because the sewage flowed downhill. So the lower on the hill you were, the smellier and less desirable your location.

The common people usually lived in lower Jerusalem or in the towns. They lived in homes made of sun-dried brick and stucco, floors of hard earth or stone, and mud-plastered, flat rooftops used for sleeping in hot weather and to dry or store food. They slept on mats and had no plumbing or inside toilets. These were two-level apartments or houses with the upper level for people and the lower level for animals.

During the first part of the first century Palestine was peaceful and prosperous. A common Roman proverb of the time was: Peace to Rome and quiet to the provinces.

Rome protected Jewish privileges. Jews were allowed to pay Temple tax in lieu of public works taxes. Rome also issued a decree protecting the sacred Torah scrolls even from Roman soldiers and leaders. Jews were allowed to observe the


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Jewish Sabbath and were exempted from military service. This last exemption was probably in the interest of the Romans as well as the Jews. What Roman centurion would want men in his troop who had to eat special foods, prepared in special ways, and could not eat with the rest of the men because they were unclean; or required time off for Sabbath and festival celebrations?

### JEWISH RELIGIOUS ROLES

Three main roles need to be understood, as they are referred to over and over again in the New Testament:

- The *high priestly families* in Jerusalem were collaborators with the Romans to some degree, because their positions were political appointments. They had the delicate position of being the Jewish religious leaders who presided over Jewish religious and civil cases, based on the Law, but had also to make Rome happy with their decisions. Rome was primarily concerned about rioting, so a priority for these high priestly families and leadership would be not to cause or incite riots.
- The *Levites* were the priests for Temple service. Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, was a Levite. Generally these priests took turns serving in the Temple and were farmers or artisans the rest of the time.
- The *Scribes* were teachers and interpreters of the Law. They were generally called Rabbi and had disciples. They were laypeople.

### JEWISH RELIGIOUS PARTIES

The two main parties during this time were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They could be either a Pharisee or a Sadducee, but the priests tended to be Sadducees and the scribes tended to be Pharisees.

- *Pharisees*, which means separated ones, was a lay not priestly association of men who were considered to be experts in the Law. They developed the oral law that was later codified (written down in the form of a code) in the Mishnah around AD 200.

According to Jewish tradition, when Moses went up on Mount Sinai, he received more than the written Law of God. He also received oral traditions which were essentially the how to instructions concerning the carrying out of this law in the world. As we are aware, when an answer is provided to a question, often another question arises. The oral traditions continued to grow and expand.


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The Pharisees described the oral law as a fence around the Torah that helped to prevent inadvertent breaking of the Law of God. For example: A tailor was not to carry a needle on the Sabbath (oral law), because he might accidentally use the needle and work on the Sabbath, thus breaking one of the Ten Commandments (Torah). They also believed in angels, spirits, and bodily resurrection.

- The *Sadducees* came mostly from priestly families and the wealthy. They opposed the oral law of the Pharisees and their belief in angels, spirits, and resurrection. They tended to collaborate with the Romans. They only accepted the Pentateuch as authoritative. The Prophets and the writings we include in the Old Testament were considered good literature but not authoritative religiously. This party disappeared after AD 70 when the Temple was destroyed, since the Temple was the center of their religion.

### JEWISH RELIGIOUS SECTS

In addition to these two main parties there were several smaller sects. The two largest and most well-known of these are the Essenes and the Zealots.

- The *Essenes* withdrew from society either physically or socially to maintain their pure religion. They saw most of Israel's history as unfaithful to God and especially the first-century Temple religion. It is thought the Qumran Community (traditionally viewed as being associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls), which existed during the time of Jesus, was Essene and that perhaps John the Baptist belonged to or was influenced by some kind of Essene sect.
- The *Zealots* were so called because of their zeal for the Law. They advocated rebellion against non-Jewish rulers as a sign of loyalty to Yahweh. According to their understanding, there was no legitimate king of the Jews except God. A rule by Rome was unacceptable. Many of these people suffered death and torture for their beliefs. One of Jesus' disciples, Simon the Zealot, is identified with one of these groups (Matt. 10:4). These people were considered very dangerous because of their tendency to incite riots, a number-one prohibition by Rome.



## APPLICATION



### NOTES

1. In conjunction with your study of historical setting, examine maps of the ancient Mediterranean world. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (with Apocrypha) is suggested. It contains extensive historical, cultural, and geographical notes as well as very adequate maps. The Harper Collins Study Bible and New Interpreter's Study Bibles are also recommended. Each of these Bibles includes the *New Revised Standard Version*. The *Reflecting God Study Bible* may also be of assistance.
2. Relating to the Maccabean revolt read 2 Maccabees 5:15-16 (Desecration), 6:1-9 (Crisis and Desecration), 7:1-7 (Torture of the Faithful), and 8:5-7 (Guerrilla Warfare).
3. Examine a map of Herod's Temple as found in a study bible such as *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (with Apocrypha), the Harper Collins Study Bible, The New Interpreter's Study Bibles, and the *Reflecting God Study Bible*.
4. Based on the information provided in this session, create a timeline for the intertestamental history of Palestine (540 BC-AD 1).

## EXAM



### NOTES

1. \_\_\_\_\_ was the Persian king who proclaimed freedom to the Jews and allowed them to return home to Palestine.
  - A. Shezbazzar
  - B. Zerubbabel
  - C. Cyrus
  - D. Nehemiah
2. All the Jews who were in exile in Babylon were anxious to return to their homeland.
  - A. True
  - B. False
3. Under the Persians, the Jews who returned home enjoyed relative peace and economic and political stability.
  - A. True
  - B. False
4. Hellenization refers to the spread of Greek culture and ideas throughout Palestine and the ancient Near Eastern world.
  - A. True
  - B. False
5. Two persons of major influence on Alexander the Great's life were \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. Philip of Macedonia and Aristotle
  - B. Archelaus and Plato
  - C. Antiochus IV and Mattathias
  - D. Ptolemy and Herod Antipas
6. In an attempt to promote Greek culture and ideas, the Seleucid ruler \_\_\_\_\_ banned Judaism and erected an altar to the Greek god Zeus in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.
  - A. Alexander the Great
  - B. Philip of Macedonia
  - C. Antiochus III
  - D. Antiochus IV Epiphanes

NOTES

7. Under the leadership of \_\_\_\_\_ the Maccabee, the Jews regained religious freedom under the Seleucids.
  - A. Judas
  - B. Eleazer
  - C. Simon
  - D. Mattathias
  
8. In 63 BC, an internal struggle for power within the Hasmonean family led to the occupation of Palestine by the Roman Empire. The independent Jewish state came to an end.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
9. Latin was the common language spoken throughout the Roman Empire.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
10. Herod the Great was loved by the Jewish people, particularly for his rebuilding of the Temple (20 BC–AD 63).
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
11. The synagogue was the primary religious center in Judaism until AD 70.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
12. The religious holiday known as \_\_\_\_\_ was a celebration of the fall harvest and a time when the Jews remembered the days of living in the wilderness.
  - A. the Feast of Tabernacles
  - B. Hanukkah
  - C. Purim
  - D. Pentecost
  
13. The Jewish group known as \_\_\_\_\_ was considered to be experts in the Law. They also affirmed the importance of the oral law.
  - A. Essenes
  - B. Zealots
  - C. Sadducees
  - D. Pharisees

**NOTES**

14. The \_\_\_\_\_ accepted a belief in angels, spirits, and the resurrection.
- A. Zealots
  - B. Essenes
  - C. Pharisees
  - D. Sadducees
15. The \_\_\_\_\_ believed that service to God involved rebellion against non-Jewish rulers. They would not accept Roman rule.
- A. Zealots
  - B. Essenes
  - C. Pharisees
  - D. Sadducees

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

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**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. How does history help us understand the people we know? (Think of a specific situation in which knowing the history altered your perception of the situation.)
2. What would have happened if you did not know this history?
3. Have you ever been in a social setting where you felt out of place and unsure of what was expected of you?
4. Have you ever visited another country or associated with people of another culture or ethnic group? What were questions running through your mind?
5. How does knowledge of the historical and cultural settings leading up to the New Testament help you better understand this collection of writings?
6. What is the importance of Alexander the Great, the influence of the Greek Empire, and hellenization on the first century AD and the New Testament?
7. How is an awareness of the Hasmonean dynasty of importance for understanding the messianic expectations placed on Jesus?