

Dr. Robert C. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 2, Intertestamental Backgrounds Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 2, Intertestamental Backgrounds, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture provides an overview of the historical context of the Synoptic Gospels by examining the Jewish background of the New Testament. It focuses on the Intertestamental Period, also known as the Second Temple Period, exploring various sources of information, including the Old Testament, Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, writings by Philo and Josephus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and rabbinic literature. The lecture references Daniel's visions as a framework to structure the discussion of this period. It discusses the eras of Persian, Greek, and Roman control over Palestine, including a period of Jewish independence under the Hasmoneans. Additionally, it discusses the rise of Hellenism, the translation of the Bible into Greek, the emergence of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, messianic expectations and the eventual end of the Jewish state.

**2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 2 – Double click icon
to play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (New Testament → Gospels → Synoptic Gospels).**



**Newman_Synoptics
_Session02.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 2, Intertestamental Backgrounds

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Robert C. Newman's lecture on Intertestamental Backgrounds of the Synoptic Gospels.

Briefing Document: Intertestamental Backgrounds of the Synoptic Gospels

Main Theme: The lecture focuses on the historical, religious, and political context of the Intertestamental Period (roughly 400 years between the Old and New Testaments), also known as the Second Temple Period. Understanding this period is crucial for interpreting the Synoptic Gospels.

Key Ideas and Facts:

1. Sources of Information on the Intertestamental Period:

- **Predictive Passages in the Old Testament:** Specifically, Daniel's visions in Chapters 2 (the statue) and 7 (the beasts) offer an overview of the empires that would rule over Israel during this time.
- **Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha:** These religious writings, though not considered inspired by all Christian traditions, provide insight into the culture, religious ideas, and biblical interpretations of the period.
- Quote: "So, religious writings of the Jews, mostly during the Inter-Testament Period, though we don't believe that they are inspired writings, do give us some insight into the culture, the religious ideas of some of the sects, and some of the Biblical interpretation of the period, and so would be helpful in that direction."
- **Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BC - 40 AD+):** A Hellenistic Jew who attempted to reconcile the Old Testament with Greek philosophy. He represents a moderate accommodation to Hellenism.
- **Josephus (c. 37 AD - 100 AD+):** A Jewish historian involved in the Jewish War. His works, *Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews*, cover the Intertestamental Period. He was less Hellenized than Philo.
- **Dead Sea Scrolls:** Literature written/copied by a sect (likely the Essenes) at Qumran. Includes copies of Scripture and sectarian writings.

- **Targums and Midrashim:** Jewish Aramaic paraphrases and commentaries on the Old Testament, offering rabbinic oral tradition and biblical interpretations.

1. **Daniel's Visions and Historical Overview:**

- Daniel's visions (statue of different metals, four beasts) provide a framework for understanding the succession of empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.
- The lecturer outlines the historical periods according to these empires' rule over Palestine:
- Palestine under the Persians (539-331 BC)
- Palestine under the Greeks (331-160 BC)
- Jewish Independence under the Hasmoneans/Maccabees
- Palestine under Rome (63 BC onwards)

1. **Palestine under the Persians (539-331 BC):**

- Key events:
- The return of the Jews under Cyrus (539-530 BC), ending the deportation policy.
- The rebuilding of the Second Temple, completed around 515 BC under Darius I, spurred by Haggai and Zechariah.
- The reforms of Ezra (c. 458 BC) and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem by Nehemiah (c. 445 BC).
- Rise of the Aramaic language.
- Multiple temples: Jerusalem Temple, Mount Gerizim Temple (Samaritans), Elephantine Temple (Egypt).

1. **Palestine under the Greeks (331-160 BC):**

- Alexander the Great's conquest and the spread of Hellenism (Greek culture, language, and ideas).
- Quote: "Alexander's agenda had been to conquer as much of the world as he could, but also to mix the Eastern and Western cultures and to spread Greek ideas and attitudes and such all over his conquered territory, including the Greek language."

- After Alexander's death, the empire was divided among his generals: Seleucus (north) and Ptolemy (south) become relevant to Israel/Palestine.
- Ptolemaic rule (301-198 BC): Generally favorable treatment of Jews.
- Seleucid rule (198-160 BC): Increasing Hellenization, leading to conflict.
- Antiochus IV Epiphanes: Attempted to abolish Judaism, triggering the Maccabean Revolt.
- Translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek (Septuagint): Important for spreading knowledge of Jewish scriptures in the Hellenistic world.

1. **The Maccabean Revolt and Hasmonean Dynasty:**

- Maccabean Revolt (167-134 BC): Led by Mattathias and his sons (especially Judah Maccabee) against Seleucid oppression.
- Rededication of the Temple in 164 BC: Celebrated as Hanukkah.
- Hasmonean Dynasty (134-63 BC): Jewish independence and expansion of territory under leaders like John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus.
- Internal conflict and Roman intervention led to the end of Hasmonean rule.

1. **Jewish Sects:**

- **Pharisees:** Separated ones. Emphasized ritual purity, oral tradition, resurrection, angels, and last judgment.
- Quote: "...if we don't want people transgressing the law we build some extra laws that put it around the outside..."
- **Sadducees:** Compromising. Focused on the Pentateuch, rejected oral tradition, did not believe in resurrection or angels, and associated prosperity with divine favor.
- Quote: "...believed that since you don't exist after you die, there's no judgment. The judgment is in this life. If you're prosperous, God is favorable to you..."
- **Essenes:** Super-Pharisees. Withdrawn from society, emphasized secret books (Enoch, Jubilees), angels, and eschatology.

1. **Palestine under the Romans (63 BC - 135 AD):**

- Roman Peace (Pax Romana): Facilitated trade, travel, and the spread of Christianity.
 - Herod the Great: Appointed king of the Jews by the Romans. Known for his building projects (including the Temple refurbishment) and his tyrannical rule.
 - Division of Herod's kingdom among his sons after his death.
 - Messianic expectation: A widespread belief that someone from Israel would rule the world.
 - Jewish revolts against Roman rule: First Jewish Revolt (66-73 AD) and Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-135 AD).
 - Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD: A turning point in Jewish history.
 - After the fall of Jerusalem, Rabbi Yohanan Ben-Zachai established a rabbinic school at Jamnia, preserving Judaism without a state or temple.
 - Exclusion of Jewish Christians from synagogues (c. 90 AD), solidifying the split between Judaism and Christianity.
1. **Messianic Expectations:** The lecturer highlights the prevalent expectation during the period of a coming ruler from Israel. *Quote: "There was considerable excitement over the idea that someone coming from Israel would rule the world at about this time." He also mentioned, "The Old Testament data regarding Messiah posed various paradoxes regarding the office, his activity, the type of coming, the type of being, etc., and I suggest that these are solved by the New Testament and by Jesus their candidate if you like..."

Significance for Understanding the Synoptic Gospels:

The Intertestamental Period shaped the political, religious, and social landscape in which Jesus and his followers lived. The lecture provides critical background knowledge for understanding the various groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes), the political tensions with Rome, the messianic expectations, and the cultural influences (Hellenism) that are reflected in the Gospels. Understanding the dynamics of this period helps to interpret the actions, teachings, and context of Jesus' ministry.

4. Study Guide: Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 2, Intertestamental Backgrounds

Intertestamental Backgrounds: A Study Guide

Review Topics

- Ancient Sources of Information on the Intertestamental Period
- Daniel's Overviews (Daniel 2 and 7)
- Palestine under the Persians (539-331 B.C.)
- Intertestamental Temples
- Palestine under the Greeks (331-160 B.C.)
- Hellenism and its Influence on Judaism
- Translation of the Bible into Greek: The Septuagint
- The Maccabean Revolt (167-134 B.C.)
- The Hasmonean Dynasty (134-63 B.C.)
- The Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes
- Palestine under the Romans (63 B.C. - 135 A.D.)
- The Herod Family
- Messianic Expectation during the New Testament Period
- The End of the Jewish State and Palestine after the Fall of Jerusalem

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What are the two primary names used to refer to the period between the Old and New Testaments, and what is the significance of each name?
2. According to Daniel's vision in Daniel 2, what four kingdoms would rule the world, and what metals represent these kingdoms?
3. What was Cyrus's policy toward deported peoples, and how did this policy affect the Jews?

4. What were the three temples that existed during the Intertestamental Period besides the Second Temple?
5. What was Alexander the Great's agenda for the conquered territories, and how did this agenda affect the spread of Greek culture?
6. What is Hellenism and what effect did it have on Judaism during the Intertestamental period?
7. Who was Antiochus Epiphanes, and what actions did he take that led to the Maccabean Revolt?
8. What were the main theological differences between the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes?
9. What was the "Pax Romana," and how did it contribute to the spread of Christianity?
10. What were the reasons that the Bar Kokhba revolt started?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The period is known as the Intertestamental Period in Christian circles, emphasizing its role as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments. In Jewish circles, it's called the Second Temple Period, focusing on the historical significance of the Second Temple in Jerusalem during this time.
2. Daniel's vision identified Babylon (gold), Medo-Persia (silver), Greece (bronze), and Rome (iron) as the four kingdoms that would rule the world. The vision also includes a fifth kingdom, the eternal kingdom of God that is established upon the destruction of the previous four.
3. Cyrus ended the deportation policy practiced by the Assyrians and Babylonians, allowing deported peoples to return to their homelands. This policy enabled the Jews to return to Palestine and begin rebuilding the temple.
4. Besides the Second Temple in Jerusalem, there was the Mount Gerizim Temple (Samaria), the Elephantine Temple (Egypt), and the Leontopolis Temple (Egypt). These temples served different Jewish communities in various locations.
5. Alexander's agenda was to conquer as much of the world as possible and to spread Greek ideas, culture, and language throughout his conquered territories. This led to the widespread Hellenization of the Middle East, including the Jewish culture.

6. Hellenism refers to Greek culture as it developed in the East after Alexander's conquests and its interaction with local cultures. It resulted in syncretism, mixing Greek and local religious ideas and impacting Jewish culture, language, and philosophy.
7. Antiochus Epiphanes was a Seleucid ruler who sought to Hellenize the Jewish people and unify his empire. He desecrated the Jerusalem Temple, forbade Jewish practices, and promoted pagan worship, leading to the Maccabean Revolt.
8. The Pharisees emphasized oral tradition and resurrection, while the Sadducees rejected oral tradition and resurrection. The Essenes, considered "super Pharisees," withdrew from society, emphasizing secret books and strict adherence to the law.
9. The Pax Romana was a period of relative peace and stability in the Roman Empire, lasting from 30 BC to 170 AD. It facilitated the spread of Christianity by providing safe roads, easy travel, and a common legal framework throughout the empire.
10. The Bar Kokhba revolt started because the Jews realized that if the Romans built a pagan city on the side of Jerusalem, named Aelia Capitolina, they weren't going to get Jerusalem back anytime in the foreseeable future. It started with a philosophical Ben-Kosiba who was apparently willing to lead the revolt as Messiah

Essay Questions

Instructions: Choose one or two of the following questions and develop a well-structured essay that demonstrates your understanding of the course material. Be sure to use specific examples and supporting evidence from the lectures to support your arguments.

1. Discuss the various sources of information available for understanding the Intertestamental Period. In what ways does each source contribute to our knowledge, and what are the limitations of relying on each source?
2. Analyze the impact of Hellenism on Jewish culture and religion during the Intertestamental Period. Consider both the positive and negative aspects of this influence.

3. Compare and contrast the major theological beliefs and practices of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. How did their differences shape Jewish society and politics during the Hasmonean and Roman periods?
4. Discuss the factors that contributed to the Jewish revolts against Roman rule in the first and second centuries AD. How did these revolts impact the development of Judaism and Christianity?
5. Evaluate the significance of Messianic expectations in the Intertestamental Period and the first century AD. How did these expectations shape Jewish identity, and how did they influence the early Christian movement?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Intertestamental Period:** The period of approximately 400 years between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament.
- **Second Temple Period:** A term used primarily in Jewish circles to refer to the Intertestamental Period, focusing on the historical significance of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.
- **Apocrypha:** A collection of Jewish religious writings from the Intertestamental Period that are included in the Old Testament canon by some Christian denominations (e.g., Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox).
- **Pseudepigrapha:** A collection of Jewish religious writings from the Intertestamental Period that are not considered canonical by most Christian denominations.
- **Hellenism:** The influence of Greek culture, philosophy, and language on other cultures, particularly in the eastern Mediterranean world after the conquests of Alexander the Great.
- **Septuagint (LXX):** The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, traditionally said to have been produced in Alexandria, Egypt, starting around 250 B.C.
- **Maccabean Revolt:** A Jewish rebellion led by the Maccabee family against the Seleucid Empire in the 2nd century B.C., sparked by religious persecution and desecration of the Jerusalem Temple.
- **Hasmoneans:** The dynasty of Jewish rulers established by the Maccabees, who governed Judea with varying degrees of independence from 134-63 B.C.

- **Pharisees:** A Jewish religious and political party in the Second Temple Period, known for their emphasis on oral tradition, ritual purity, and belief in resurrection and angels.
- **Sadducees:** A Jewish religious and political party in the Second Temple Period, often associated with the priestly aristocracy, known for their rejection of oral tradition, emphasis on the written Torah, and disbelief in resurrection and angels.
- **Essenes:** A Jewish ascetic group in the Second Temple Period, known for their communal lifestyle, strict adherence to the law, and messianic expectations.
- **Dead Sea Scrolls:** A collection of ancient Jewish religious texts discovered in caves near Qumran on the Dead Sea, providing valuable insights into Jewish life and thought during the Second Temple Period.
- **Pax Romana:** The period of relative peace and stability in the Roman Empire, lasting from 27 B.C. to 180 A.D.
- **Herodians:** A political faction in Judea during the Roman period, who supported the rule of the Herodian dynasty and cooperated with the Roman authorities.
- **Zealots:** A Jewish political movement in the first century AD that advocated for armed rebellion against Roman rule.
- **Syncretism:** The mixing or blending of different religious or cultural beliefs and practices.
- **Sanhedrin:** The supreme Jewish council or court in ancient Judea.

5. FAQs on Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 2, Intertestamental Backgrounds, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Here is an 8-question FAQ based on the provided text:

FAQ on the Intertestamental Period and Jewish Background of the New Testament

- **What is the Intertestamental Period, and why is it important for understanding the New Testament?**
- The Intertestamental Period refers to the approximately four centuries between the end of the Old Testament narrative and the beginning of the New Testament narrative. It's also called the Second Temple Period in Jewish circles. Understanding this period is crucial for grasping the Jewish background of the New Testament, including the culture, religious ideas, and Biblical interpretations prevalent at the time of Jesus. Key events and developments during this era, such as the rise of Hellenism and the emergence of various Jewish sects, profoundly influenced the context in which the Gospels were written and received.
- **What are the primary sources of information about the Intertestamental Period?**
- The primary sources include:
 - Predictive passages in the Old Testament, particularly the visions in the Book of Daniel.
 - The Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Jewish religious writings from the period that offer insight into cultural and religious ideas.
 - The writings of Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, and Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian who documented the Jewish War and Jewish history.
 - The Dead Sea Scrolls, which contain copies of Scripture and literature from the Essenes, providing information about their interpretations and beliefs.
 - The Mishnah, the Talmud, and Midrashim, which represent the oral tradition of the rabbis and contain biblical interpretations.

- **How did the Persian Empire influence Jewish history during the Intertestamental Period?**
- The Persian Empire, under Cyrus the Great, allowed the Jews to return to their homeland from Babylonian exile, marking a significant shift in Jewish history. Cyrus ended the deportation policy of the Assyrians and Babylonians, permitting the Jews to return to their territories. The Persians also initially allowed the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, although this was later halted due to opposition. Darius I eventually allowed the temple to be completed. The Aramaic language also rose to prominence in Jewish history under Persian rule. Finally, temples emerged outside of Jerusalem, including the Mount Gerizim Temple in Samaria and the Elephantine Temple in Egypt.
- **What is Hellenism, and what impact did it have on Judaism during the Intertestamental Period?**
- Hellenism refers to the spread of Greek culture, language, and ideas throughout the Eastern Mediterranean after the conquests of Alexander the Great. It had a profound influence on Judaism, leading to varying degrees of assimilation among Jews. Some, like Philo of Alexandria, attempted to synthesize Greek philosophy with Jewish tradition, while others embraced Hellenism more fully. This cultural tension ultimately contributed to conflicts like the Maccabean Revolt. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, is a direct result of Hellenistic influence.
- **What was the Maccabean Revolt, and why was it significant?**
- The Maccabean Revolt was a Jewish uprising against the Seleucid Empire in the 2nd century BC, sparked by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes' attempts to suppress Judaism and impose Hellenistic practices. The revolt was led by Mattathias and his sons, including Judah Maccabee. It resulted in the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem (Hanukkah) and a period of Jewish independence under the Hasmonean dynasty. This revolt is significant because it represents a struggle for religious freedom and self-determination, and it shaped Jewish identity and political aspirations in the lead-up to the New Testament era.
- **Who were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, and what were their key theological differences?**
- These were three prominent Jewish sects that emerged during the Hasmonean period.

- **Pharisees:** Emphasized ritual purity, oral tradition, and the "hedge around the law." They believed in resurrection, angels, and the last judgment. Their view of the relationship of God's sovereignty to human responsibility was Calvinistic.
- **Sadducees:** They tended to be more pragmatic and compromising with governing powers and viewed human responsibility as more important than God's sovereignty. They rejected the oral tradition and believed in no survival after death, and denied the existence of angels and the resurrection. They tended to be wealthy and politically influential.
- **Essenes:** A super-Pharisee group. More strict in their views than the Pharisees, they withdrew from society, rejected the Temple leadership, and emphasized secret books and eschatology.
- **How did Roman rule affect Palestine, and what role did the Herodian dynasty play?**
- Roman rule began in 63 BC, marking the end of Hasmonean independence. The Romans initially appointed ethnarchs, then later procurators, to govern Judea. The Herodian dynasty, starting with Herod the Great, ruled as client kings under Roman authority. Herod the Great renovated the Jerusalem Temple and undertook other building projects, but his reign was marked by political instability and family strife. Roman rule, though initially providing peace (Pax Romana) and infrastructure (roads), eventually led to increasing tensions and the First Jewish Revolt.
- **What were the key messianic expectations during the Intertestamental Period and the time of Jesus?**
- There was widespread anticipation that someone coming from Israel would rule the world. These expectations were based on Old Testament prophecies, particularly those in the Book of Daniel. Jewish interpretations of these prophecies led to diverse views about the Messiah's role, the nature of the Messianic kingdom, and the order of events leading up to the final age. Some expected a political and military leader, while others anticipated a more spiritual figure. These varied expectations shaped the reception of Jesus as the Messiah.