

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Lecture 2, Hellenization

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New Testament History and Literature by Dr. David Mathewson. Lecture 2, History and Hellenization.

All right, since you're quiet already we'll go ahead and start, but let's open with prayer and then we'll start talking about the New Testament. And I said what I want to do today is for this week and perhaps part of next week or most of next week is kind of set the stage or the context for the New Testament, recognizing that there were a number of factors historically, politically, there's a lot that went on before and during the time of the New Testament that influenced and factored into the writing of the New Testament documents. So, in order to understand them fully we need to sketch a little bit and have a little bit of an understanding of what was going on leading up to and during the time when the New Testament was produced.

Again, understanding that the New Testament was not written in a vacuum. The writers did not one day sit down and as I used to think as a very young boy they began to glow and feel inspired by the Spirit and just sat down and started writing these documents, but instead they were writing as part of this ebb and flow of these historical and political and religious events going on. So, we need to understand a little bit about that before we jump into the New Testament documents themselves, but let's begin with prayer.

Father, we thank you for giving us minds with which to think, especially minds to think your thoughts after you, your thoughts that you have communicated to us and embedded in what we confess are the Scriptures, your Word, that were produced in very specific historical circumstances and in a specific time and situation. Lord, help us to grasp a little bit of that so that we may have a more profound encounter with your Word and understand more clearly what it is you still want to say to us today as your people. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen.

The first place to start is perhaps what we mean by the word New Testament when we refer to this group or collection of writings that we call the New Testament. What do we mean by that? And part of it has to do with when you and I hear the word Testament, what usually comes to our mind? The reason is today the word Testament is used in a fairly restricted context, so we don't find ourselves very often using this in our normal everyday vocabulary, but when you do use it or hear it used, what usually comes to your mind when you think of the word Testament? The Bible is one thing, but even in normal everyday language, again we don't use it that often, which may be why you're having problems or some of you may not be quite sure how to answer that. In addition to connecting with the Bible, what other context do

we often use the word Testament in? Like a testimony in court, a testament is usually used today in a legal context. For example, as I said here, we often hear of last will and testament, so a testament often is a legal document that stipulates the distribution of my property, for example after I die, and so you're often told to put together a will or a testament.

Again, it's what you want to have happen with your possessions or belongings upon your departure from this life, and some have tried to apply that to how we understand the words Old and New Testament. However, I think we need to think about the word Testament in a slightly different way, and that is the first person to use the word Old or New Testament, although he didn't use English. Actually, this was in Latin.

The first person to use the Old and New Testament was an individual named Tertullian, who lived towards the end of the 2nd century and into the 3rd century, Tertullian used the word, was the first one to use, that we know of at least, to use the word Old and New Testament to refer to what the collection of documents we call the Old Testament and the collection of documents that we call the New Testament. Now, Tertullian, this is important to remember, Tertullian was an individual that we often call one of the early Church Fathers. You'll hear me talk about the Church Fathers occasionally.

The Church Fathers are a group of individuals who, after the Apostles and the authors of the New Testament, were early church leaders who wrote, and we have some of their documents or references to them occurring in some of our early literature, but from roughly 200 to 400 AD, around in that period, is when these individuals such as Tertullian lived, and they wrote, and often say things that are very valuable for helping us to understand the New Testament and how they understood it, but Tertullian was one of the first to refer to the New Testament with the title New Testament. Now, however, the word Testament actually refers not so much to our legal context of last will and Testament, but comes from a Latin word, testamentum, which was meant to translate a Greek word, which looks like this. You don't have to be able to write that down or recognize it, but I just wrote it out so you can see it.

But this word, diatheke, which actually means covenant, is used primarily in the New Testament and the Old Testament to refer to a covenant. If you have had Old Testament survey already, hopefully you learned about the different covenants, the covenant that God made with Moses, the covenant God made with Abraham, with David, a covenant being an agreement that God makes or a relationship he enters into with his subjects, with his people, so that when we think about the New Testament, we're primarily thinking about the word Testament in terms of the word covenant, so that by New Testament we mean a group of writings that testify to God's new covenant relationship with his people established through Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament, the Old Testament ends, I want to talk a little bit about that term as well, especially old and new, but the Old Testament ends with the anticipation or expectation that one day God would establish a new covenant, unlike the old covenant he established under Moses, God would establish a new covenant with his people.

The New Testament is convinced that with the coming of Jesus Christ, that new covenant has already been established, that new arrangement under which God provides salvation for his people, that new covenant has already been inaugurated through the person of Jesus Christ. So, when we talk about the New Testament, we mean that group of writings that testify to that new covenant relationship established through and fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. So, by New Testament, we don't mean God's last will and testament with his people, we mean those writings that testify to the covenant, the new covenant that was promised in the Old Testament but now has been fulfilled in Christ.

Those documents that historically and theologically testify to that and give evidence of that are those writings that we call the New Testament. Now that also raises the question, what is so old about the Old Testament, what is so new about the New Testament, or are those even appropriate words? In a sense, there's actually been a push in the last few years to find different terminology because old and new seems to... to call one part of the Bible old seems to be a rather pejorative label. It seems to suggest something that is worn out or old-fashioned or no longer useful or perhaps even worse, a mistake in the first place that needs to be corrected by something that is far better.

So sometimes old and new might carry pejoratively a negative sense with it and a positive sense for new. Some have suggested therefore we should call it the First and Second Testament, the First Testament being the books that you study under Old Testament Survey, and that may be preferable. I'm going to stick with the terminology Old and New Testament just because it's so common and most of us have heard it in those terms.

But I want you to be clear, when we understand the relationship between the Old and New Testament, it's not to be understood in terms of negative and positive or inferior and superior or worn out and better and more recent, but instead, it's to be understood in terms of promise and fulfillment. The Old Testament is seen as that which anticipates the climax and the fulfillment that now comes in the person of Jesus Christ. So, the New Testament is to be seen as the ultimate fulfillment and climax of God's revelation that was already begun and anticipated in the Old Testament writings.

For example, the very first two verses, let's see, the very first two verses of the book of Hebrews in your New Testament capture this idea when it says, the book begins

this way, long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets. A reference to God revealing himself under the Old Covenant scriptures when he revealed himself to Israel, that group of writings that testifies to God's revelation of himself under the Old Covenant with Israel that you focused on in the Old Testament survey. But then Hebrews goes on and says, but in these last days, the last days being now, now that fulfillment has come, the days, the time that the Old Testament pointed to.

Now in these last days, God has spoken to us by his son. In other words, God's revelation through his son, Jesus Christ, reaches its fulfillment and climax. God, yes, God revealed himself in the Old Testament scriptures, but that finds its ultimate climax and fulfillment in God now revealing himself in his New Covenant scriptures, the New Testament.

So that's important to understand when the New Testament is not to be seen as inferior or upgraded or updated and the old is outmoded and old-fashioned, but instead, it's simply a matter of fulfillment or promise and fulfillment. The Old Testament anticipates and promises one day that God would ultimately bring about his covenant relationship with his people. Now that Jesus Christ arrives in the scene, he brings about that fulfillment and the New Testament writings testify to that fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ.

So that's what we mean by testament. That's what we mean, or at least what I mean by Old and New Testament. Again, not last will and testament, but testament in terms of covenant, God's covenant dealing, the arrangement, the agreement, the relationship that he enters into with his people is what we mean by covenant.

And then by New Covenant, we mean those documents that testify to God's revelation of himself, the climactic fullness of his revelation of himself through Jesus Christ. And those documents that testify to that are what we refer to as the New Testament. All right.

The next thing, well, first of all, any questions about how we understand or what I mean by testament, what we mean by New Testament? Hopefully, some of that is familiar from your Old Testament survey course, but I just want to make sure we understand. What that means, I used to think when I went on to, when I became interested in biblical studies, I thought that because I was interested in the New Testament, my task would be easier. Because if you look at the Old and New Testaments, the New Testament is a very small portion of the entire Bible in comparison.

However, because the New Testament is the fulfillment and climax of the Old, I soon found out that I'm responsible for a lot more than just the New Testament, but I'm responsible for the Old and New as well. Because the New Testament, in fulfilling the

Old, assumes it and assumes an understanding of it. So quite often, we'll be jumping back to the Old Testament to demonstrate how certain New Testament documents assume what we read in the Old Testament, showing how it gets fulfilled and climaxed in the person of Jesus Christ.

The second thing to say by just way of an overview of the New Testament is that the New Testament, and hopefully for most of you, a lot of you, you've figured this out at least generally, and that is the New Testament is arranged primarily not chronologically, but it is arranged logically. That is, the book of Matthew is not the first book that was written in the New Testament. That pride of place goes to either James or 1 Thessalonians, in my opinion.

We'll talk about that later. Matthew was not the first book written. It was not written before Mark.

Probably it wasn't even written before Romans and a number of other books that Paul wrote. Instead, the New Testament is more arranged logically than it is chronologically. And by that again, I mean it's not arranged according to the order in which the books were written.

Instead, there's a logic to the way the New Testament is put together. Even Paul's letters, which make up the bulk of the New Testament, they tend to be arranged more according to the length. Not entirely, but generally, Paul's letters are arranged, again, not in the order in which he wrote them, but basically in order of length.

So, Romans is the first one. When you get to Paul's letters, you find Romans first because it's the longest one. Instead, again, the New Testament is arranged chronologically.

Oh, by the way, this is just a picture of an ancient Greek manuscript. This would look roughly similar to what the New Testament authors would have actually written. You can't see this real well, some of you.

This is the beginning of the Gospel of John. That's John 1. This is an ancient manuscript that comes from about the 3rd or 4th century AD, so it's quite old. You'll notice that, if you could get a close-up look at this, you'll see it's in columns, and there are some notations in the columns, like paragraph divisions and other things.

But generally, there are a couple of things you notice. There are actually three things you notice about ancient New Testament text. One of the reasons I show you this is it does give you an appreciation for the New Testament translations that you have.

The first thing is the original manuscripts in these older manuscripts would have been written entirely in capital letters. They did not write in cursive. There were no small letters at this point.

At least it wasn't common to use them. And so, if you look at this closely, everything is written in capital letters. That's called an uncial manuscript if you're interested in it, but that won't be in a text or anything.

This won't either. This is just kind of to mainly interest you. But it's written entirely in capital letters.

The other thing you notice about this, there are no word divisions. I'm not sure whether that was, maybe Professor Hildebrandt can tell us, but whether that was to save space or whether that's just the way they wrote. But there were no divisions between words or letters.

Everything was just run on. The third thing is there was virtually no punctuation, no periods, commas, or question marks. So that simply demonstrates the work that went into providing you with an English translation.

Because a lot of times what they had to work with is something that looks like this. But again, this is a very old ancient manuscript testifying, this one, to the Gospel of John. As a lot of you know, we have no original, we don't have the original document of John, but we have a number of copies of it.

This one is a very older and a very high-quality one that testifies to John's writing. So, this is kind of similar to what the New Testament documents would have looked like. But back to the arrangement of the New Testament then.

First of all, naturally the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, come first for two reasons. Number one, they provide a natural bridge between the Old and New Testaments. And second, the reason is because they relate the life of the founder of Christianity, that is the person of Jesus Christ, who brings to fulfillment all the expectations and promises of the Old Testament.

So, because the main subject and content of the Gospels is Jesus Christ, and the fact that the Gospels provide a natural bridge between the Old and New Testament, they logically come first, even if some of them were written later than other documents. So, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John logically and naturally come first in our New Testament. The Book of Acts logically comes next in that it demonstrates how this Jesus movement, how this movement that we call Christianity begun by Jesus, now begins to spread beyond the narrow confines of Jerusalem and Judea to eventually embrace the larger Greek-speaking world of the first century.

So, Acts is again a natural kind of conclusion to or comes logically and naturally comes after the Gospel. And then it relates how did the events of the Gospels, and the events surrounding Jesus' ministry, his life, and his death, how did that now begin to spread and affect the region far, far greater than just Jerusalem and the narrow confines of Palestine? How did it eventually come to embrace the entire inhabited world of the first century? You can also see how logical the New Testament is in that Acts, we'll talk about this later when we get to these books, but one of the Gospels, the third Gospel, Luke, as some of you probably know, was actually part of a two-volume work along with Acts. Luke and Acts were originally two volumes that belonged together, but logically they've been separated so that Luke then goes along with the other books that it resembles, Matthew, Mark, and John, and then Acts provides a natural kind of transition into describing how the events from the Gospels now begin to spread and take effect in the broader world.

Now the book of Acts, the book of Acts introduces you to some very, as a narrative, kind of a historical narrative about the spread of the early church, the Gospel of Acts introduces you to some very important characters, very important early Christian leaders like Peter and James, and one of them is a man, a converted Pharisee, actually a converted first-century terrorist, who is converted to Christianity, whose name was Saul and his name becomes Paul, and he is responsible for a large part of the New Testament. So it's natural that one of the characters that plays a dominant role of Acts in Acts would then play, his letters play a key role in the next section of the New Testament. So following Acts, we find the letters of one of the main characters in the book of Acts, the letters of Paul, starting with Romans and going all the way through a little book called Philemon.

Paul's letters are a group of letters that are often called the general letters or general epistles, which simply then relate the letters from other great Christian leaders that were introduced in the book of Acts, such as Peter and James were introduced to other main figures in Acts, and we find their letters included in the New Testament as well after Paul's. And then finally, the book of Revelation, which there may be, there's probably a number of reasons why it's at the end of the New Testament, but logically it certainly fits as the book that relates the climax or goal of history, of the climax of God's redemptive plan of saving the entire cosmos, Revelation plays a fitting role at the end of the New Testament. Revelation, the other book may be the Gospel of John, but either the Gospel of John or Revelation probably would lay claim to being the very last book of the New Testament written, written very close to the end of the first century.

But again, as you can see, the New Testament has a logic to the way it's arranged. It's not arranged according to the order in which the book's written, but seems to reveal kind of a logic in the way it's put together. All right, let's talk a little bit about, well, how did this all come about? What was going on leading up to and during the time of the writing of the New Testament? As we said, the New Testament was not simply, it

did not simply emerge from nothing, created ex nihilo, nor did, it certainly would have been simpler if God had simply dropped from the sky a list of what it was as he wanted his people to think about and believe.

But instead, God chose to reveal himself through very historical events and circumstances, in a very specific culture and location, and in a very specific language. And so, it'll help us to understand a little bit about that, or help us to understand, I think, the New Testament more if we understand a little bit about the situation and circumstances that produced it. And again, at this point, I only want to paint broad brushstrokes.

At least for me, I find the history of the New Testament time, the Greco-Roman world, and the Jewish world of the time very fascinating, but I realize that a lot of you may not, so I want to mainly convey or paint very broad brushstrokes. What was going on politically, historically, culturally, religiously? What were the main and dominant movements or events or features that provide the backdrop, and that I think are essential that you understand in order to understand the New Testament more profoundly? First of all, let's look at the political climate. What was going on politically leading up to and including the time of the New Testament? Again, in your notes that I have on Blackboard, I've listed a number of, again, in very broad brushstrokes, a number of key features.

The first starting point in understanding the political climate, the political climate, is to understand the emergence of a great general. And by that, I have in mind an individual named Alexander the Great. And they actually discovered, archaeological digs actually discovered that they had Kodak cameras, and this is exactly what he looked like.

There's Alexander the Great. Who knows what he looked like? But anyway, this is one bust and figure of Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great was known for starting in about 336 BC, so we're roughly 330 years before Jesus Christ was born and emerged on the scene of history.

So about 330 years before that, a man named Alexander the Great took over his father's kingdom. And for roughly 10 years, a 10-year period, Alexander simply takes the world by storm. And he actually expands his father's kingdom.

Alexander the Great expanded that kingdom to cover a territory that was larger than anything known before. So, Alexander the Great is one of the most significant rulers of the time. This next, this shows you, this isn't the best chart, but this would be, Jerusalem would be like right in here.

This is the Mediterranean Sea. Here's Jerusalem. This is modern-day Turkey, Asia Minor.

Over here in Greece. Rome and Italy would be over here. Down here is Egypt, so you kind of get the picture.

This dotted line shows you roughly the extent of Alexander's kingdom, which was quite significant in that time. And one thing you notice is that the land of Palestine, Jerusalem, that area falls well within the reign of Alexander the Great. So he went on this big military campaign and conquered a kingdom and expanded the kingdom even further than his father had expanded it.

Alexander was known for being a brilliant military strategist. Alexander did one thing that was very important, and you need to know this term, and the term you need to know is Hellenization. H-E-L-L-I-N-A, wait, H-E-L-L-I-N-I-Z-A-T-I-O-N.

Hellenization. Hellenization refers to the spread of Greek language and culture, and that's what Alexander did. Again, it comes from the Greek word Hellen, which means Greek, and Hellenization refers to the expansion and the spread of Greek language and culture.

So, throughout this empire, one of the ways of unifying it was to spread the Greek culture, religion, and Greek language all throughout the entire empire. So virtually nothing, including Jerusalem and the home of God's people, the Jews, nothing escaped the influence of Hellenization. Nothing escaped the influence of Greek culture and the Greek language during that time.

In fact, one of the implications of this is not too long after this, there was a translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. It's basically the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and one of the main reasons was the more people spoke Greek, the more need there was for a Greek translation of the Old Testament, which as you know, hopefully from the Old Testament class, Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, a couple sections of Aramaic, but with the spread of Hellenism and Greek language and culture, there eventually was a need for a Greek translation as well. At least that's part of the reason for it.

So, Alexander then is known for spreading an empire, again, a grand empire, the largest one, actually since, for example, the Persian Empire that the Jews found themselves under, you find that in a book like Daniel and the Old Testament, etc. Now, upon Alexander's death, again, Alexander builds this grand empire. Upon his death, Alexander never kind of had an heir to his empire or had anyone to bequeath it to or give it to.

And so, at Alexander's death, again, we're still about 320 years before Christ, roughly, before Christ comes on the scene. During this time, after Alexander's death, basically a struggle arises between some of his generals, for example, over who's

going to inherit this kingdom. Basically, it boils down to a struggle for power between two groups or two generals, and that is what is known as the Seleucids and the Ptolemies.

The Seleucids, is that simple? All you need to know, again, I'm trying to simplify things, the Seleucids would be the group that resided north of Jerusalem in the land of Syria. So again, if I can go back to this map, you'll see here Syria, this would be the area of the Seleucids. The Ptolemies, the next group, are down in Egypt, down south.

So, to go back to this slide, you have the Seleucids in Syria up north, north of Jerusalem, the land of Palestine, and then you have the Ptolemies down in Egypt to the south. Now, for some time, the Israelites, and remember, God's people, the Israelites, seem like they found themselves in one era after another under foreign rulership and reign, and this is no different. Now that Alexander dies, now they find themselves, first of all, under the rule of the Ptolemies in Egypt.

Again, these are the two powerhouses of the day, the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. So, first of all, Israel finds itself under the rule of the Ptolemies from Egypt. Now, this was generally a good experience.

Israel enjoyed a substantial measure of peace, and things were not, you know, things, living quite easy for them under Ptolemaic rule. However, later on, the power shifted then to the Seleucids, and things were not quite so easy under Seleucid rule. So Israel's kind of in between the north and the south and found themselves now thrown back and forth. So now they're under the rule of the Seleucids, which was not quite so peaceful and not quite so good of an experience.

However, under the Seleucid rule, this came to a climax. Again, the Seleucids didn't treat the Israelites quite so nicely, and one of the rulers in particular, an individual that we call Antiochus Epiphanes IV. He's noted in your books, or in your note, the crisis under Antiochus Epiphanes.

In a period of roughly 175 to 63 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes and the Seleucids ruled. Antiochus Epiphanes is the one, again, one of the Seleucids, who is known for going into Jerusalem. One time he went in and basically looted the temple, took all the gold and all the riches, and actually slaughtered a number of the Jews.

And then later on, he went back again, and this is where he completely destroyed and desecrated the temple. So, he went in, and destroyed the temple as legend has it. He slaughtered a pig at the altar.

He renamed the temple according to the god Zeus, the Greek god Zeus, defiling the temple of Israel's god, and destroyed everything. And again, that was kind of the pinnacle or climax of the Seleucid rule over Israel. Now, that went on for a little while

until, again, I'm not going to be real precise with dates or anything like that at this point, but that went on for a little while until an individual named Judas Maccabees, you see the reference to the Maccabeans in your notes, Judas Maccabees, a son of a high priest, led a series of revolts against the Seleucids to try to get them out of Jerusalem.

Again, you have to remember, that these are God's people, the Jews, and this is their temple where God dwells with them. This is a sacred space. This is the holy city.

And now you have a bunch of foreigners who have come into it and desecrated it. They have looted it. They have desecrated it by renaming it with the name of a foreign pagan god.

And now, Judas Maccabees leads a kind of push to free the temple from the Seleucids. And he was able to do just that. Judas Maccabees and his group finally freed Jerusalem and the temple from the control of the Seleucids.

For a very short time, for about 80 years, Israel enjoyed freedom from foreign oppression and foreign rule. That is until the next major world power arose. We'll talk about them in a moment.

But the other thing you probably know about Judas Maccabees is Judas Maccabees, upon his freeing of the temple, the Jews rededicated the temple and actually established a ceremony of dedication that Jews today still celebrate, which is what? Yeah, Hanukkah is the festival that celebrates the freedom and the rededication and repurifying of the temple. And there's a legend and tradition surrounding that of what happened during that time. So now for 80 years, roughly 80 years, Israel enjoys a measure of freedom until the next empire.

And in your notes, the next emerging world empire was the Romans. All during this time, during much of this time, Rome was actually beginning to, they're kind of looming on the horizon. And in 63 BC, I'm sorry, 60, yeah, 63, then the next world power takes over, and that is the Romans.

And actually, throughout the rest of the New Testament time and for some time to come, Israel would find itself under the rule of the Romans. So, the entire New Testament is written to God's people living in places under Roman rule. So, Rome, this rising world power then, actually begins to expand its kingdom even further, you'll notice this red line kind of demonstrates the extent of the Roman rule in the first century.

Again, just to get your bearing straight over here, Jerusalem would be right in here. Here's modern-day Turkey, Asia Minor, and Greece. There's Italy and Rome.

Spain down here in Egypt. And so, this red line, you can see the extent reaching almost up into modern-day England, Scotland. The extent of Roman rule was, by the end of the first century, was unlike anything that they had experienced before.

So once again, nobody, virtually no one living within this area escaped the effects of Roman rule, again, including Jerusalem and Palestine, the land of God's people. And we'll begin to see, especially with Paul's letters, almost all the letters he addresses, most of them are addressed to cities in modern-day Asia Minor, which is kind of the hotbed of Roman rule, one of the hotbeds of Roman rule. So nowhere could God's people live without being affected by Roman rule.

Now, one of the things the Romans did, and again, I'm trying to be very, very simple with this. One of the things they did, in order to administer such a large territory, so here's Rome, in order to administer such a large territory, Rome divided it up into provinces and had different ways of governing or ruling those different provinces. And one of the ways they could do that, one of the ways they ruled some of the provinces, was by what was called a client king.

That is, it seems that Rome, depending on how easily they were able to, or how easily people gave into or submitted to Roman rule, sometimes influenced how Rome ruled over it. So, if a certain area of their kingdom, they had a certain area resisted and put up a fight, then obviously Rome was going to implement stricter measures. However, in other areas that may have come more quietly and easily, at times they were allowed to appoint native rulers over their own country, as long as they complied with Rome.

They had a little bit more leeway. Those were often called client kings. We'll talk about one of those client kings in just a moment, but the three things that I want to focus on as far as what were the effects of Roman rule.

And by the way, most people in the first century would have viewed Roman rule, a lot of them, as a good thing. But what were some of the effects of Roman rule? First of all, now there was a common language that united the entire empire. This would include, I'm kind of reaching back to Alexander the Great as well, but now with the exploit of Alexander the Great and now with Roman rule, there is a common language that unites the entire empire, and that is Greek.

A lot of people, many people in that day would have been trilingual, probably spoke Latin, and Greek, and at least for Jews, a lot of them would have spoken Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. I think Jesus was probably trilingual. He probably spoke Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek as well.

But with the spread of Alexander's empire and then the subsequent Roman empire, now the entire empire was united by a common language. That is the language of

everyday commerce, and everyday conversation, and that was Greek. The second product of, especially this phenomenon of the spread of Roman rule, is what some people refer to as Pax Romana, or that is the peace of Rome.

In other words, Rome, as long as you complied with Roman rule, Rome, one of the benefits was Rome promised you freedom and peace and the freedom from conflict and warfare. So, there was a lot at stake in complying with Rome in the first century, and in exchange for your compliance, Rome would offer the benefits of peace, protection, absence of warfare. The third thing was an advanced transportation system and communication.

With the spread of Roman rule, now communication and transportation were possible in a way that it was not before. So those are three of the benefits. I don't think we could talk a lot about how that might affect how we understand parts of the New Testament, and maybe we will when we look at some of the New Testament documents themselves.

But I want to highlight those three as benefits of Roman rule. A common language now united the empire, the Pax Romana, the promise of peace, absence of warfare, protection under Roman rule if you comply, and then finally advanced transportation and communication as a result of the Roman Empire. Now, I said that one of the ways that Rome ruled over its vast territories and provinces, of them was through client kings.

That is, again, especially for sections of the kingdom. When Rome began to spread its rule and annex various countries and geographical places, again, if they came quietly and didn't put up a fight, and depending on other circumstances, they were often allowed, again, under the permission of Roman rule, as long as it complied with Roman rule, they would be allowed to appoint their own ruler. And one of those client kings I have referred to in your note as a cruel king, that man's name was Herod the Great.

You read about Herod the Great. You read about Herod as the king who ruled over the land of Palestine during, actually, the events leading up to the birth of Jesus. Herod was a client king who, again, ruled over Judea during the birth of Jesus Christ.

You read about him in the Gospels. And Herod was known, Herod was one of those persons who was known, as the name implies in your notes, being a cruel king. Herod was one of those persons who was known as a kind of a wacko.

He was when you read stories about him and other ancient writers, the stories are very consistent with what we know about him in the Gospels. One story has it that Herod was quite willing to put people to death, even if he, no matter how close they were to him, if he suspected that they were a threat to his throne, he would have

them put to death. One story has it that one time Herod got wind of someone in his own group of comrades that was, he got wind that this person was going to try to usurp his throne.

So, Herod, had a pool party one night and invited all these people. And with all these people around, he had a couple of his men drown this guy in the pool when no one was looking because he suspected that he was going to take his throne. So, Herod's actions in Matthew 2 are really not out of character.

When we read about Herod putting to death all the baby boys in Jerusalem, or Bethlehem, two years and under, which still wouldn't have been very many, probably under a dozen, given the size of Bethlehem at that time, but those actions are not out of line with what we know about Herod elsewhere. Herod was known for his heavy taxation of the Jewish people, and mainly to fund his building projects, such as the temple that he built in Jerusalem. So Herod was one of those client kings who ruled over Judea during the time of Roman rule.

This was a critical period of time for God's people for a couple of reasons. First of all, with the spread of Roman rule, a couple of interesting things were going on. Number one is that as long as Christians in the first century, as long as they were able to be viewed as just another version of Judaism, of the Jewish religion, basically they were tolerated.

For the most part, despite a lot of stories that we hear, there was a fairly intense persecution under Nero, one of the Roman emperors. You know, you hear some of the stories about Christians being dragged out in the streets and beheaded and taken into arenas where they were torn apart by animals. Really, that was fairly rare in the first century.

Besides sporadically, and it occurred occasionally, most of the time Rome was content to leave Christians alone, especially as long as they were viewed as just another Jewish religion, like the Judaism of the Old Testament. Problems began when they began to separate from that or suspected that they were different from that, and when they did, and said things that seemed to be subversive and called Roman rule into question. But for the most part, one of the things we need to do is, when we think about first-century Christianity, is this image we have that every city in Rome, there were soldiers marching through and they were going from house to house and dragging Christians out in the street and putting them to death.

That's simply not true. Most of the persecution, as we'll see, a lot of the persecution did not come from Rome. It came from a local level, and it was more sporadic, happening in certain locations.

At other locations, again, Rome didn't seem to care, the emperor didn't seem to care much, at least in the first century, about Christians for the most part and left them alone. Again, a lot of the problems came more from a local level with Christians, not from the Roman Empire. So, for the most part, life for Christians would have been relatively peaceful under Roman rule, but again, a lot of the problems came at a local level and sporadically more intense than that.

But the other thing is, both Jews and Christians, with the spread of the Roman Empire, both Jews and Christians and the Jews as God's people, had been asking this question for a long time. And that is, under Roman domination, what does it mean to live as God's people? How far can we accommodate Roman rule and still maintain our allegiance to Jesus Christ? To what extent can we give allegiance to Rome and to Caesar, yet still maintain our distinct identity as God's people? And we'll see that that issue will crop up in a number of New Testament documents, too. What does it mean to be God's people in a pagan environment under Roman rule, where we believe that Jesus is Lord, but Caesar is on the throne? What does that mean? How do God's people respond to that? To what extent do I maintain my identity as God's people, as Christians, yet live out my life under Roman rule? So that will be a crucial question that will come up a number of times in the New Testament.

All right, that's, again, there's more that could be said and that could obviously be filled out in a lot more detail, but I've tried to paint with very broad brushstrokes, kind of politically, what was going on leading up to the New Testament. One thing you can see is basically that God's people experienced life under foreign oppression. God's people for whom God had promised that a son of David would rule over him, that God would give them a kingdom, that God would be their king, and the king would sit on the throne.

God would make a covenant with them. Now they find that there is no king in the throne, and there is no son of David. Remember the promise made to David from the Old Testament, the covenant with David? There is no son of David on the throne.

The temple now has been destroyed and has been looted. There's foreign influence wherever they look around, and so what does that say about God's promises? What does that say about us as God's people? And so, they're continually wrestling with that question of identity and living out their lives in the context of foreign rule and oppression and pagan influence. What does it mean to live as God's people when it seems that God's promises are not being fulfilled? In fact, God's promises appear to be contradicted by the present political situation in the first century.

And so, they're wondering, where are God's promises and what does it mean to be God's people living in this kind of situation? Any other questions? What section of Blackboard the notes and the syllabus are found under content? I put them on last night and something happened. I'm not sure what. The notes didn't show up.

I'm not sure how they didn't get there, but I just checked before coming to class and both the and the notes are on Blackboard under content.