

New Testament Survey #1

The Intertestamental Period

The period between the close of Malachi and the birth of Jesus, or intertestamental period, lasted over 400 years and is also known as the “silent period.” During that time, Israel underwent major political, social and religious changes that frame the context of the New Testament.

1. The Political World

At the close of the Old Testament, Judea was under the political government of the Persians. In the 400 years that followed, the political face of the nation changed at least six times (along with other changes within those six governments). Each of these political transitions affected, shaped, and prepared the nation for the advent of the Messiah.

- **The Persians (539-333 BC).** This period included the last 100 years of the Old Testament and about the first 100 years of the intertestamental period. When the Persians took over the Babylonians, they allowed the exiled to return to their homelands.
- **The Greeks (333-323 BC).** Alexander the Great conquered the Persians and the Egyptians around 333 BC and took over Judea.

At his sudden death at the age of 33, Alexander didn't have any son to take over, so his empire was split between 4 of his generals. Two of their dynasties were of special importance to Jewish history: the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria.

The Ptolemies (323-198 BC) controlled Judea, the Jews enjoyed certain tolerance and peace

- **The Seleucids (198-142 BC).** When the Seleucids took Palestine from the Ptolemies, they exerted a harsher rule over Judea. The almost sixty years of their control was a period of great social unrest.

The worst of their kings was Antiochus IV, whose reign had been prophesied by Daniel (Dan 11:21-35). Antiochus attacked Jerusalem and established the Temple as a place for the worship

of Zeus. This act provoked the rise of loyal Jews, who under the leadership of the Maccabee brothers conducted a military campaign against the Syrians, miraculously winning the independence for Israel in 142 BC.

- The **Maccabees**. (142-63 BC) When Judea gained independence from the Syrians, Simon Maccabee received the title of “Leader and High Priest forever”. Seven different Maccabees ruled Judea during this period.

In 67 BC, civil war broke out between two Maccabean brothers, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus. Both sides reached out to Rome for help.

- The **Romans** (63 BC-638 AD). In 63 BC, the Roman general Pompey took advantage of the civil war between Hyrcanus and Aristobulus and conquered Jerusalem. The Romans allowed a figurehead Jewish government to continue.

Through political gaming, Antipater II, an Idumean, became procurator of Judea. In 37 BC, his son Herod the Great convinced Rome to appoint him King of the Jews.

2. The Religious World

- **The Pharisees**. The term “Pharisee” comes from the Hebrew word “separatist.” Pharisees prided themselves in their high ideals, especially in their desire to live according to the laws of the Torah and the related regulations promulgated by the rabbis, later codified in the Talmud.
 - Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, angels and demons, strict ritual purity, predestination, and the “tradition of the elders.”
 - The Pharisees were more numerous than the Sadducees and members of poorer classes, therefore having more favor with common people.
- **The Sadducees**. The Sadducees were descendents of the Hellenistic Jews, who at the time of independence became a pro-monarchy movement.

The Sadducees were composed mostly of wealthy, influential families, noblemen, and businessmen. They were the dominant party in the Sanhedrin and were always at odds with the Pharisees.

- **The Essenes.** The Essenes adopted a strict, monastic, and communal lifestyle withdrawn from normal human society. Their rituals included rituals of purity and an oath of separation.
- **The Zealots.** The Zealots were an extreme **nationalistic** political party calling for the violent overthrow of Rome's control over Judea.

The historical context in which Christianity was born could be summarized as being under the political dominance of the Romans, the intellectual and linguistic influence of the Greeks, and the religious teachings of the Jews. Each one of these components played a key role in facilitating the rapid spread of the Christian faith.

The Gospels

The word *gospel* (Greek *euangelion*) means “good news.” So, when the Bible talks about the gospel of Jesus, it's referring to the good news about Jesus.

Each Gospel presents a different view of Jesus, especially his work and teachings, emphasizing his passion, death, and resurrection. **The reason or explanation for most of the differences between the four Gospels lies in the missiological purpose of each evangelist. Each writer answers the question of “who is Jesus” to a different group of people.**

The Synoptic Gospels

The first three Gospels are called synoptic because they are similar in their content, arrangement, and wording.

The word *synoptic* means “seen together.” The content of the Synoptic Gospels is very different from that of the Gospel of John.

MATTHEW

Matthew is the first book in the New Testament, not for chronological reasons, but rather because it bridges between the Old and New Testament. Matthew recalls the promises of God in the O.T. and announces their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

1. Authorship

- Very little is known about Matthew aside from the fact that he was a tax collector from Galilee who gave a banquet to introduce his tax-collecting friends to Jesus.
The conditions surrounding tax collecting meant that extortion was practically inseparable from his way of life. Tax collectors could not hold any office of communal responsibility, nor was their testimony admissible in a Jewish law court.
- Matthew wrote his Gospel for a Jewish audience.
 - He has more than **fifty** quotations and seventy-five allusions from twenty-five Old Testament books.
 - He begins Jesus's genealogy from Abraham and David. **He carries it forward to the last genealogical list in the OT found in Ruth 4:18 which ends with David linking God's ancient promises with Jesus**
 - Christ is presented as **first** coming to the Jews and then to all of humanity.

2. Style and Structure

- Matthew's Gospel is **thematic**. He is not as concerned with an exact chronology. He groups events and teachings based on them having a thematic connection.
- Matthew's Gospel is **didactic**. He registers five major discourses from Jesus.
 - Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5-7
 - Instructions to the Twelve on their first mission – Ch. 10
 - Parables of the kingdom – Ch. 13
 - Instructions to the disciples – Ch. 18
 - Olivet Discourse – Matthew 24-25

3. Purpose and Theme

- Matthew's objective was to show that Jesus was the promised Messiah and the fulfillment of the law and the prophecies.

Matthew wrote his Gospel to persuade Jewish people that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Messianic hopes promised in the Old Testament.

- Matthew is the Gospel of Christ the King and His Kingdom. The promised kingdom had already come through the life, death,

resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus. **The word Kingdom is used over fifty times.**

MARK

1. Authorship

The author of the second Gospel is Mark (also known as John Mark), the son of Mary, a wealthy and influential leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:12).

Mark accompanied Paul and his cousin Barnabas on their first missionary journey in 47 AD, but left at Perga. Two years later there was a split between Paul and Barnabas over him. Silas joins Paul while Barnabas takes Mark back to Cyprus. Twelve years later, Mark was with Paul in Rome during Paul's house arrest. In Paul's last letter he calls for Mark because he was "useful for service."

- The early church fathers all agree that Mark was the interpreter for Peter. This suggests that the Gospel of Mark is Peter's report of the words and deeds of Jesus.
- Mark wrote sometime between **50-65 AD**. There is considerable textual evidence that his was the first Gospel written.
- Mark wrote his Gospel especially for the Romans. This is exhibited in:
 - His explanation of **Jewish** customs.

Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)
Mark 7:1-4 (ESV)

- His translation of Aramaic words.

Taking her by the hand he said to her, “Talitha cumi,” which means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” Mark 5:41 (ESV)

- His removal of topics especially relevant to Jewish audiences. **Christ’s genealogy, the Sermon on the Mount, Christ’s condemnation of the Jewish religious leaders.**

2. Style

- Mark is the Gospel of action. It is primarily narrative with a direct, simple, and concise style.
- Mark constantly affirms *that* Jesus taught, but doesn’t inform us *what* He taught.

And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching. Mark 6:6 (ESV)

- Mark uses the historical present tense of an **eyewitness**.
‘immediately’ **40 times—10 in the first chapter.**
- Mark is the Gospel of **detail**.

Even though it is the briefest of the four, Mark adds vivid and striking details about people, places, and numbers.

He brings out the feelings of his characters. He uses different words to express fear, wonder, troubled, amazement, and extreme astonishment.

- Mark is the Gospel of **candor**.
 - Failings of the disciples are vividly portrayed.

But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask Him. Mark 9:32 (ESV)

- Most detailed account of Peter’s denial of Jesus.
- Severe rebuke of Peter in Caesarea.

3. PURPOSE

Mark wrote his Gospel to **equip** believers with the essential facts about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This would enable them to:

- Preach the Gospel to the lost with confidence and power. The brief account of Jesus’s story would give the Church content for proclaiming the Gospel to lost people and give lost people a tract to answer questions about Christ.

And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” Mark 16:15 (ESV)

- Endure the challenges of persecution and suffering.

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Mark 8:34 (ESV)

Mark was written to the church during a time of persecution. Roman believers in a hostile environment needed to hear Gospel implications for their lives and understand discipleship in light of challenges.

- Embrace the command of discipleship to “Follow Him.”

And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of me.” Mark 1:17 (ESV)

LUKE

1. Authorship

- Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14), a highly educated man.

Good Greek grammar and large vocabulary.

He sets his story in the context of imperial history. He names more Roman emperors than any other NT writer; he introduces many other Roman officials, as well as leading members of the Jewish priesthood.

- Luke was a second-generation believer. He researched different eyewitness accounts in order to write a historical approach to Jesus's life (1:1-4).
- Luke was a Gentile, the only one with an entry in the New Testament canon.
- Luke was a close friend and companion of Paul, although he was probably not one of his converts.

Luke met Paul at Troas during his second missionary journey when he went to Philippi and remained there. He rejoined Paul by the end of his third missionary journey and stayed with him throughout Acts. Luke was with Paul during his second imprisonment in a Roman jail (65 AD) when everyone else had left him.

- Luke addresses both volumes to "Theophilus" (cf. Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1). His name means "God loved" or "lover of God"
We don't know exactly who Theophilus was. Some theories about his identity are:
 - Roman governmental official. Luke calls him "most excellent" in Luke 1:3 and he uses this same title for Felix and Festus (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25).
 - A wealthy patron who helped pay for the expenses of writing, copying, and distributing Luke and Acts.
 - It is possibly a cryptic reference to Christians.

2. Purpose and Theme

- Luke wrote to Gentiles to communicate that the gospel is for all people. From the beginning to the end of his book, Luke points to the universality of the Gospel. In Luke, the Great Commission is forgiveness preached to all nations (24:47).

Luke goes beyond ethnical inclusion. Luke embraces all the socially, religiously and morally marginalized people. He gives special attention to the poor, to women, to children and the outcasts: Immoral women (Luke 7:36-50), Samaritans (Luke 9:51-56; 10:29-37), rebellious runaways (Luke 15:11-32), tax collectors (Luke 19:1-10), lepers (Luke 17:11-19), and criminals (Luke 23:39-43).

- Luke describes Jesus as one who saves. Luke uses the words save, saving, salvation, and savior at least 25 times -more often than any of the other gospel writers.
- Luke's preferred title to refer to Jesus is "Son of Man".
- Luke 19:10 summarizes the identity and mission of Jesus that Luke wants to underline:

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Luke 19:10 (ESV)

Discussion Questions:

1. How can the knowledge of the Intertestamental period help you better understand the New Testament?
2. Mark is the shortest of the Gospels; it's the one with less teachings. Mark sticks to the facts and doesn't explicitly try to make the connection between Jesus's actions and his purpose for them. Considering all these about Mark, what would we be missing from God's revelation if the Gospel of Mark was not part of the canon?

Homework: Choose ONE of the following two assignments to do as homework. You can work in groups if so desired. Be prepared to discuss your answers next week.

1. Matthew ends each of the five major discourses from Jesus with the statement: "When Jesus had finished these words..." (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). Examine the consequential phrase with which each sentence is finished. What effects did Jesus's words provoke?
2. Peter is believed to have been the main information source for Mark in writing his Gospel. Read Peter's sermon to Cornelius's household in Acts 10:34-43. Make an outline adding Scriptural references from the Gospel of Mark to each one of Peter's statements.