History of the Intertestament Period

Persian Rule & The Last Jewish Governor – 445 to 332 BC

In 445 BC **Nehemiah** was appointed by the **Persian King Artaxerxes** to be Governor of Judah. But for the remainder of the Persian era and beyond, Judah was not governed by Jews. There isn't much known about Judah from this post-Biblical Persian Period, but we know that the Persian Kings appointed Persian governors over the region. Without a Jewish government, the people of Judah started to see the **Temple's High Priest** as a mediator between local politics and international politics.

Alexander the Great and Greek Kingdoms – 332 to 180 BC

In 332 BC Alexander III of Macedonia defeated the Persians in Syria, and eventually defeated the whole of the Persian empire. But in 322 BC he died suddenly and his grand empire became split between his warring generals. By 300 BC, Two major Greek kingdoms had divided the middle east: **The Seleucids** in Syria, and **The Ptolomys** in Egypt.



Judah existed at the crossroads of these two major territories. And though it was originally controlled by the Ptolemys, in 200 BC the Seleucids conquered Judah.

The Rise of the Maccabees – 180 to 142 BC

In 180 BC the Seleucid King was motivated to steal the riches from the Jewish Temple and ordered an attack on Jerusalem. **High Priest Onias III** gave intercessory prayer for the protection of the Temple. God defended the Temple and afterwards Onias prayed for the recovery of the invaders. The Temple was safe for 5 years, until the reign of **King Antiochus IV Epiphanes**. He undermined the office of High Priest, accepting bribes to make appointments. Ultimately, in 167 BC, he defiled the temple, dedicated it to Zeus, and made unclean sacrifices on the altar. His strict laws went as far as to ban the Torah and outlaw circumcision.

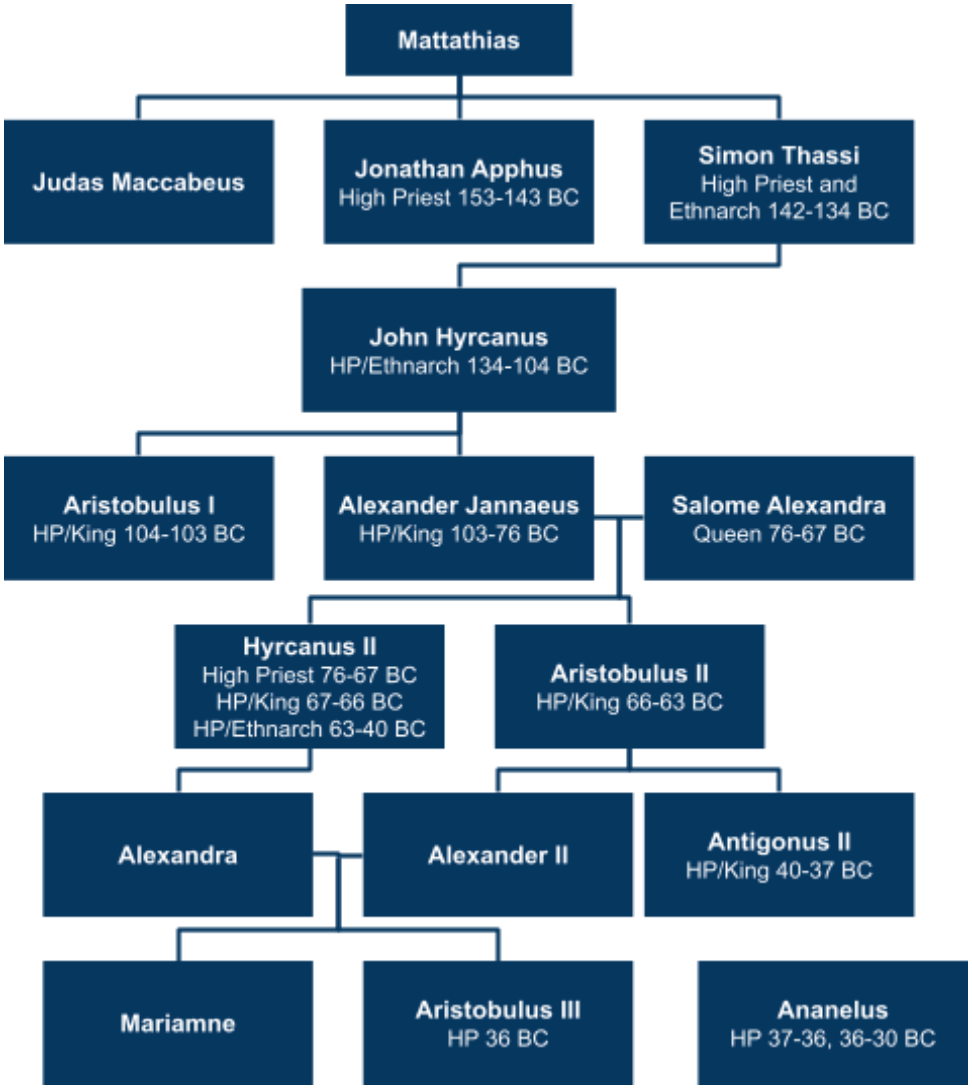
The Levite **Judas Maccabeus** became the leader of the rebellion that followed, and in 164 BC he led a rebel force to occupy Jerusalem. They rededicated the Temple, which is celebrated by Jews today in the festival of Hanukkah.

That same year Antiochus IV died while fighting a civil war in the eastern provinces, plunging the whole kingdom into a succession crisis. Eventually a prospective Seleucid King seeking allies granted independence to the Maccabbees, in 142 BC Judas' brother **Simon** was made ruler of an independent Jewish state, beginning the **Hasmonean Dynasty**.

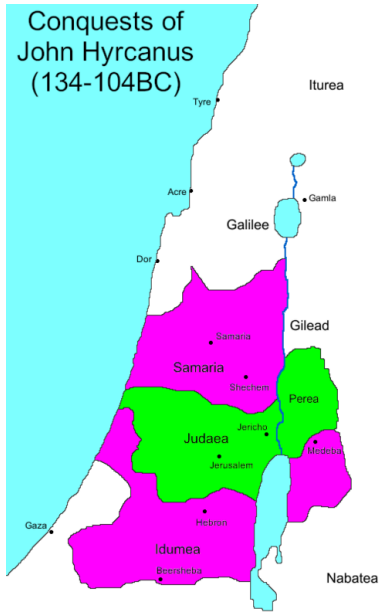
Since the office of High Priest was the highest "political" office for Jews at that time, it was natural for the Maccabees as Levites to step into that role, and then when granted independence they became official political rulers (ethnarch) as well.

That was controversial, even in the early days, because the family of Judas Maccabeus were neither Judahites or **Zadokites** (Verses like 1 Samuel 2:27–36 and Ezekiel 44:10–16 limit the office of High Priest to the subset of Levites

descended from Zadok). And this issue became a key early distinctive that separated the **Essenes** and **Pharisees** from the **Sadducees** (The Essenes were sort of Zadokite purists; the Pharisees opposed the dilution of priestly power into royal power; the Sadducees supported the Maccabees and ran the Temple).

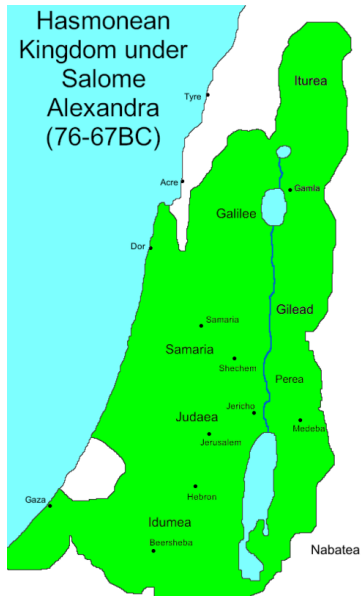


Hasmonean Dynasty–142 to 63 BC



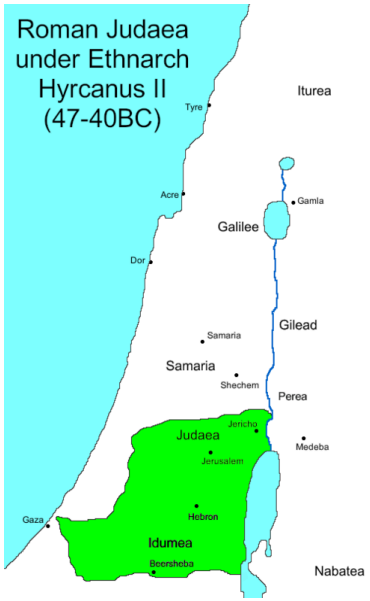
In 110 BC **King John Hyrcanus I** invaded and razed the city of Samaria, and destroyed the Samaritan Temple on Mount Gerizim. Then he would go on to invade the region of **Idumea**, and after conquering them he issued an ultimatum that the residents there must convert to Judaism (including mandatory circumcision) or be banished. The people agreed to his demands.

King Alexander Jannaeus was a violent King who triggered a civil war in 93 BC when the crowd mocked him as he was performing his role as High Priest and he responded by unleashing foreign mercenaries on the crowd. A civil war followed, in which the Pharisees (who led the insurgency) allied with a Seleucid King to try to remove the violent Hasmonean from the throne.



But the idea of allying with the Seleucids caused many Jews to go back to Alexander's side, and he eventually regained control of his kingdom and executed 800 Pharisees via crucifixion. After his death, **Queen Salome Alexandra** reintegrated the Pharisees into the political system.

Alexander and Salome's son **Hyrcanus II** reigned for less than a year before his brother **Aristobulus II** violently took the throne, along with the title of High Priest. This led to 3



years of civil war, culminating in the two brothers independently contacting a foreign general who had just conquered Syria. They both offered him loyalty if he would support them in their conflict. Instead, the Roman general **Pompey** marched south into Judah and conquered it, placing Hyrcanus II back on the throne but only as a puppet ruler, by 47 BC Rome had stripped away most of Judah's territories.

Indirect Roman Rule – 63 to 40 BC

After winning his siege of Jerusalem, Pompey walked through his conquest and walked directly into the Holy of Holies. Unlike previous defiliers like the Nebuchadnezzar or Antiochus IV, he did not loot the temple, but his presence in the Holy of Holies defiled it all the same. A decade later a different Roman general (Crassus) would loot the temple as well.

During this era, Hyrcanus II would prove to be a poor leader, and lost influence to the Idumean Governor **Antipater**. Antipater became the de facto ruler of the region, made official after he earned the favor of Julius Caesar by bringing a reinforcing army to aid him when he became trapped in Egypt.

Parthian Invasion – 40 to 37 BC

In 40 BC, an heir to the Hasmonean throne **Antigonus II** aligned with the Parthians and led an invasion of Judah. He had tried twice before to claim the throne during the Roman era, but both times he'd failed in part because he didn't have the support of the Jewish people, but by 40 BC the Jewish people were desperate for any relief from Roman rule. Antigonus mutilated his own uncle Hyrcanus, disqualifying him from service as High Priest, shipped him to Parthia as a war prisoner, and became High Priest and King of Judah.

In this chaos, Antipater's son **Herod**, who had been a governor of the region ever since his father's assassination, fled from Judea to Rome, then quickly returned along with a Roman army. By 37 BC, Herod had retaken Judah from Antigonus and the Parthians, and reigned as King in Judah.

Herod the Great – 37 to 4 BC



Herod married the Hasmonean princess Mariamne to legitimize his title as King. And in 36 BC he appointed (under pressure from his mother in-law) his brother in-law **Aristobulus III** as High Priest. But shortly after appointing him, Herod had Aristobulus assassinated, fearing that a well-liked Hasmonean High Priest threatened his authority, and he appointed non-Jewish High Priests for the first time.

Herod reigned for over 30 years during a time of relative peace and is known to history as a builder of great monuments, but he was also known to be a paranoid and wicked man and in the last years of his life ordered the execution of his own wife and sons.

After Herod died in 4 BC, there was a revolt led by Judas of Galilee. Though that revolt failed, he tried again 10 years later in 6 AD. Judas is called the founder of the **Zealots**, a fourth theological faction in Judah during Jesus' time.

The Rise of the Imperial Cult – 46-27 BC

The radical Roman politician **Julius Caesar** marched on Rome in 49 BC in response to his political opponents threatening to banish him from the city over crimes he had committed 10 years earlier when he was last in Rome. Caesar's opponents fled the city, but he followed them and defeated them in battle one by one. In 46 BC Caesar returned to Rome victorious, with little to stop him from amassing dictatorial power.

Caesar began taking steps to signal interest in being a god-king like the Greek kingdoms had. But Rome was incredibly anti-king and worshiped no man, living or historic. Although Caesar took strides towards his goal, his ambitions cost him his life when he was assassinated by his fellow senators in 44 BC.

Caesar had zealous followers and his death led to cries that he be deified, which the senate eventually made official. Caesar was posthumously declared a god in 42 BC.

Caesar's legal appointment to godhood made his adopted son Octavian son of god**.** And in 30 BC when Octavian defeated Marc Antony and Cleopatra in the final battle of the Roman Civil Wars, he also conquered the Egyptian Ptolemaic Kingdom. This conquest was known to Rome as a Triumph of Triumphs, and was the start of a period known as the **Pax Romana** (Roman Peace). In recognition of his triumph, Octavian was given the title Augustus, that is, "honored one."

In the eastern part of Octavian's new empire the news of his Triumph of Triumphs and Pax Romana was known to the Greek-speaking provinces as the "good news" or **evangelion** (or as we know the word today "gospel"). The declaration of evangelion was known throughout the provinces: "**Emperor Augustus** (that is, *Conquering Honored One*) is the son of god who has come to bring peace to all nations."

For many in the eastern provinces, they accepted this at face value. The practice of worshipping god-kings had been commonplace through the entire Greek era in the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms. But there was also a dread that came with that news. The Romans were the most powerful empire the world had ever seen, more powerful than the Persians or Alexander's empire 300 years earlier. The Roman senate may have only represented the people of Italy and not the whole territory, but it was still a democratic institution that insured some level of stability. With all the power of Rome now belonging to one man, the world was now dangling at the edge of chaos.

Fifty-some years later, Jesus would present a new message. A message of the real Son of God who would bring real peace.