

## WEEK #2 “HELLENISM & JUDAISM” (HANDOUT #1 OF 2)

History of Christianity—By Pastor Daren Erisman

### Review & More: A Series of Occupying Empires

- **Egyptians**
  - Controlled the area of Palestine many times over the centuries
  - The Hebrew people or “Israelites” emerged as a people from their bondage in Egypt.
- Surrounding smaller enemy empires
  - **Philistines** (David and Goliath)
  - **Phoenicians** (controlled the seas)
- **Assyrians**
  - Conquered the northern Kingdom of Israel and sent the members of the social elite into diaspora in 722 BCE
- **Babylonians**
  - Conquered the southern Kingdom of Judah (588 BCE), destroyed the 1<sup>st</sup> Temple in Jerusalem and sent the social elite to Babylon (called the Babylonian captivity)
- **Persians**
  - After conquering the Babylonian Empire, the Persians allowed Jews to return to Jerusalem (537 BCE) and for the temple to be rebuilt (2<sup>nd</sup> Temple).
- **Greeks**
  - After conquering the Persians, Alexander and later, his generals occupied the land, but more importantly brought Greek language and culture.
  - In revolt to decrees by a Seleucid King, an independent Jewish Kingdom arose (165 BCE to 63 BCE) called the **Hasmonean Dynasty** (also known as the **Maccabees**).
- **(Romans)**

### **ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND HELLENISM**

- **Alexander the Great** (Alexander III of Macedon) 356 BCE – 323 BCE
  - Following the unification of the city-states of mainland Greece by his Father, Philip II, Alexander set out to conquer the known world.
- Two forms of conquering: militarily and culturally
- **Militarily**, Alexander’s armies conquered much of what is now considered the Middle East except for Arabia. After Alexander’s death, this empire is fought over by his generals.



- **Culturally**, a program of bringing Greek culture into the conquered lands (**Hellenization**) had a more lasting effect, particularly with respect to Christianity.
  - **Greek language** → the language of commerce and governing
    - **Septuagint**: A Greek translation of the O.T. done in the 300s BCE
      - **Approximately 2/3 of the O.T. quotes within the N.T. are from the Septuagint**
    - Koine Greek: “Common Greek” spoken and written by the average citizen
      - **The New Testament was written in Koine Greek**
  - **Philosophy**
    - **Aristotle**
      - The tutor of Alexander the Great
      - Aristotle is perhaps the best-known philosopher of all time, second only to **Plato** who was Aristotle’s teacher.
      - Aristotle’s thought will significantly shape Christian education and philosophical thought from the beginning of the Christian Empire in the 300s CE to the 1400s!
        - Aristotle’s teaching on logic and rhetoric in particular shaped Christian students for over a millennia.
    - **Early Christian theology** would be shaped by Greek philosophy
      - Separation between the mind or spirit and the body
      - Focus on Jesus as the “logos,” the Word
      - The language of Jesus’ humanity and divinity
        - Christ as being one person with two natures (Chalcedon)
  - **Greek cities** were founded by settlers that disseminated Greek culture
    - Several of these cities became important for Christians such as Antioch and Alexandria
- **TODAY**: It is really Greek thinking that will begin to separate Jewish-Christians from Gentile-Christians and later, Christians in general from the Judaism. Not only is the key Christian scripture, the N.T., written in Greek, but Greek thinking and Greek perceptions of reality have shaped and continue to shape the way we understand ourselves and our relationship with God.
  - Example: The Hebrew people did not believe in a separation between the body and soul. Only with the influence of Greek thought was a disembodied soul conceived.

## HASMONEAN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL (165 – 37 BCE)

- Two Greek states wrestle over Israel
  - The **Seleucid** state with its capital in Syria and the **Ptolemaic** state with its capital in Egypt.
  - Between 319 and 302 BCE, Jerusalem will change hands seven times.
  - The Jews became divided over their allegiances to the two powers, and correspondingly between Hellenized and more religiously orthodox Jews
- A revolt over Seleucid control leads to the **Hasmonean Kingdom of Israel** (165 to 37 BCE)
  - Reacting to deteriorating relations between Hellenized and orthodox Jews, the Seleucid King, Antiochus IV enacted decrees limiting certain Jewish religious rites.
  - The Hasmonean family (also known as the Maccabees) leads the orthodox Jews in revolt, purifies the Temple in Jerusalem, celebrated today as **Hanukkah**, and eventually leads to a Hasmonean dynasty that lasts one hundred years.

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### 1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY “SCRIPTURE” → OLD TESTAMENT

- **Torah:** (“Teaching” or “Law”) First five books of the Christian Old Testament
  - Traditionally understood to be written by Moses, therefore, they are “The Books of Moses”
- **Tanakh:** Essentially the Old Testament
  - “Tanakh” is a Hebrew acronym from the three divisions of the text: The **T**orah (“Teaching”), the **N**evi'im (“Prophets”), and the **K**etuvim (“Writings”) → **TaNaKh**
- **Septuagint:** A Greek translation of the Tanakh done in the 300s BCE
  - Approximately 2/3 of the O.T. quotes within the N.T. are from the Septuagint

### MOVEMENTS/GROUPS WITHIN 1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY JUDAISM

- **Sadducees**
  - Priestly group that controlled the worship at the Temple in Jerusalem
  - The Sadducees claimed their authority from the high priest Tsadok (or “Zadok”) who anointed Solomon as King, but historically they arose during the Hasmonean rule in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE and basically vanished after the Roman destruction of the Temple in 70 CE
  - This lineage of high priests were the aristocracy of the Hasmonean monarchy, serving the Hasmonean Priest-Kings
  - The Sadducees **tended towards Hellenistic influences** and were rivals with another group that arose during the same time period, the Pharisees
  - **Beliefs of Sadducees:**
    - No afterlife and therefore, no resurrection from the dead
    - Used only the Torah (the first five books of the O.T.) and interpreted it in a literal fashion
    - Historian Josephus wrote in his *The Wars of the Jews*:
      - ...the Sadducees are those that compose the second order, and take away fate entirely, and suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil; and they say, that to act what is good, or what is evil, is at men's own choice, and that the one or the other belongs so to every one, that they may act as they please. They also take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards in Hades...
- **Pharisees**
  - Meaning “separated,” this movement and its participants flourished particularly during the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple and were particularly at odds with the Sadducees
  - They were **anti-Hellenistic in orientation** and would eventually be the root for **Rabbinic Judaism** (the normative expression for Judaism and its contemporary forms) after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE
  - **In opposition to the Sadducees, the Pharisees favored...**
    - ...the poor, while the Sadducees favored the wealthy class
    - ...anti-Hellenism, while the Sadducees favored Hellenism
    - ...the Tanakh (O.T.) and the successive Rabbinical interpretations, while the Sadducees favored the literal interpretation of the Torah (first 5 books of O.T.)
      - Ex: “an eye for an eye”
        - Pharisees: One should provide compensation for the transgression
        - Sadducees: Remove the eye!

- **Essenes**
  - A movement of separate groups of people in different places that practiced **asceticism** (akin to later Christian monasticism)
    - Congregating in communal living, they followed a stringent moral code that involved voluntary poverty, the abstinence of earthly pleasures including sex, and the forbidding of animal sacrifice or the owning of slaves.
  - **Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls**
    - In 1947, scrolls were found in the caves near the Dead Sea and near the ruins of a place called Qumran.
    - These “Dead Sea scrolls” are comprised of approximately 900 texts dated between 150 BCE and 70 CE and included texts from the Hebrew Bible
    - One theory is that these texts are from the Essenes and that perhaps the ruins of Qumran were where a portion of them lived. The texts may also have simply been stored there for safety during Roman incursions without the Essenes being based at Qumran.